

MEDIA FRAMING OF CLIMATE CHANGE ISSUES: A STUDY ON LEADING ENGLISH NEWSPAPER EDITORIALS BETWEEN THE PERIOD JAN – DEC 2017

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Abstract

It is quite evident from many research studies since last decade that climate change is one of the most critical issues of 21st century (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007). Hence, media communication on climate change plays a significant role in public understanding and perception of climate change issues. In this scenario, media framing of climate change is increased to become one of the core areas of the research domain of Media Communication about Climate Change (MCCC). This study made an attempt to understand how leading English newspapers frame climate change in India. For this purpose, study adopted to follow the theoretical frame work of Shanto Iyengar's operationalization of media frames (1987). There are two distinctive frames in this model of media framing including; thematic framing and episodic framing. According to this frame work, study has analyzed the editorial contents of the four leading English newspapers including; Times of India, The Hindu, The Indian Express and Hindustan Times, appeared during the period Jan – Dec 2017. The selection of editorial content was done by using climate change indicators as key words (*Temperature Rise, Unseasonal Rainfall, Ice/Glaciars Melting/ Green House Gas, Flood and Frequency of Extreme Events: used as climate change indicators according to IPCC*) from the electronic data base. Study has collected total of 47 editorials for analysis from the leading four English newspapers. This study came up with a major finding that newspapers' editorial framing of climate change is largely taken place thematically rather than episode framing.

Key Words: Climate Change, Media Framing, Media Communication about Climate Change, Newspaper Editorial, Climate Change Indicators

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Introduction

It is quite evident from many research studies that human induced climate change is a major environmental issue of 21st century. So climate change issues have become one of the most pressing and debatable academic discourse topic all over the world. In this scenario, media communication on climate change issues plays a pivotal role in shaping and formulating public opinion and understanding of climate change. Climate change is a multi layered topic, involving science, politics, economics, culture, geo politics and many other disciplines. So media representations, portrayals, framing and coverage of climate change issues are drawn an important role in the social construction of climate change among common people. Many research activities are taking place in the multidisciplinary research domain of Media Communication about Climate Change (MCCC). Indian media completely views climate change as an ‘underway’ scientific reality. Indian journalists are also agreed that climate change as a growing global threat and its happening today is unequivocal.

Media Framing

Media coverage and framing of climate change has been an area of research in the subset of environment communication, especially in the developed and developing countries since last decade. The framing research is derived from the study of Goffman (1974) wherein he examined how individuals understand their environment and interpersonal interactions. He described frames as schemata of interpretation that allow individuals to locate, perceive, identify and label issues, events and topics. Also, he states that words are triggers that help people to negotiate meaning through the lens of existing cultural beliefs and worldviews. Framing communicates how and why an issue should be seen as a problem, how it should be handled, and who is responsible for it. Likewise, media framing is a process through which an issue or phenomenon is portrayed by the news.

Review of Literature

The study titled “*The framing of climate change in New Zealand newspapers from June 2009 to June 2010*” (2015) analyzed articles on climate change published in three leading New Zealand newspapers including; The New Zealand Herald, The Dominion Post and The Press over a 12-month period between 1 June 2009 and 31 May 2010 . The study sample of 540 articles was collected through the electronic news database Factiva, using the search terms ‘climate change’

or ‘global warming’. Frames were analyzed deductively according to an experimental frame typology designed by Nisbet (Nisbet & Scheufele 2009). The results suggested that New Zealand newspapers have presented climate change in accordance with the scientific consensus position since 2009, focusing on discussion of political, social and economic responses and challenges.

In the same media framing aspect, another study titled “*Newspaper framing of climate change in Nigeria and Ghana*” (2016) investigated how climate change stories are framed in Nigerian and Ghanaian national dailies. Frames were analyzed deductively according to an experimental frame typology designed by Nisbet (Nisbet & Scheufele 2009). Content Analysis was used in carrying out the study. This study is limited to Nigerian and Ghanaian newspapers. Study found that the media in Nigeria and Ghana source their reports mainly from international media fraternity. It is recommended that the Nigerian and Ghanaian press should use more of the information and awareness frame in writing their reports.

In the Indian media context, the research paper titled “*News media framing on Doha climate change conference*” (2013) was to explore articles on Doha Climate Change Conference from three online news media appeared between November 1st 2012 to December 9th 2012, in The Hindu, The Times of India, and New Delhi Television (NDTV). The study found that Doha Climate Change had a least coverage compared to the previous years. The Hindu and The NDTV had majority of the articles captured from the attribution of responsibility frame (according to the media theoretical frame work of Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000). The Hindu and The Times of India had equal frequency of articles in the human interest and conflict frame. Mortality frame did not occur in any of the articles.

Another study in the Indian media environment titled “*Framing of climate change issues in Indian television news channels*” (2016) analyzed six years of coverage of climate change issues in two Indian national television news channels, Cable News Network-Indian Broadcasting Network(CNN-IBN) and New Delhi Television Limited (NDTV24X7). Study adopted Robert M Entman’s (1993) theoretical media frame work. The results of the study revealed that policy makers and NGOs were strongly associated with the ‘judgment’ frame; while the news bureaus and scientists were strongly associated with the ‘problem’ frame. TV channels could adopt the

model of *NDTV24X7* in collaborating with an institution working on climate change to offer quality coverage.

The study titled “*Framing Global Warming: An International Comparison of the Influence of Climate Contrarians on News Media Coverage*” (2014) examine the extent of their influence in creating a news frame of global climate change, using a combination of content analysis, frame analysis and ordinal regression. The study has adopted Shanto Iyengar’s operationalization of media frames (1987). Data from English-language print media from news sources from nine countries were analyzed. The study finds that inclusion of climate contrarians in news stories about global warming has a significant impact on the framing of the issue, and that scientist promoting the consensus view on climate change need to employ linguistic devices such as metaphors to counter the climate contrarian frame.

Theoretical Frame Work

Media framing is the process through which an issue or phenomenon is portrayed by the news media. The media frame provides the boundaries that determine what is important and newsworthy about an issue or phenomenon. The research of Shanto Iyengar has developed two basic media frames, which he has labeled episodic frame, and thematic frame (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Episodic news frames, as the label suggests, focus on particularities of time and place, and decontextualize an issue or phenomenon, rendering the event an individualistic, discreet episode, devoid of any connection to social, political, or economic systems. Thematic news frames, by contrast, focus more on the broader social context of an event or phenomenon, reporting on the conditions and consequences of the event/phenomenon, and convey its connection to social, political, economic and environmental systems.

Objectives

1. To understand the editorial framing of climate change by leading English newspapers in India.
2. To what extent are episodic and thematic frames prominent in the editorials of climate change issues?
3. To understand the prospects of newspaper as a prime source of climate change communication.

Methodology

Study has taken the content analysis of editorials of four leading English newspapers during the period January – December 2017 and adopted the content analysis measure for frames according to the theoretical frame work of Shanto Iyengar’s operationalization of media frames (1987). According to this theoretical frame work, media frames have been classified into episodic framing and thematic framing.

Discussion & Result

Table:I

<i>Sl.No</i>	<i>Name of the Paper</i>	<i>Period of Study</i>	<i>Number of Editorials</i>
1.	Times of India	Jan – Dec 2017	17
2.	The Hindu	Jan – Dec 2017	14
3.	The Indian Express	Jan – Dec 2017	8
4.	Hindustan Times	Jan – Dec 2017	8
	Total		47

Out of the total 47 editorials analyzed, ‘Times of India’ has published 17 editorials based on the key themes discussed towards climate change issues during the period Jan – Dec 2017(see table: I). ‘The Hindu’ has published 14 climate change associated editorials. Both the newspapers ‘The Indian Express’ and ‘Hindustan Times’ were published just 8 editorials respectively.

Table:II

According to Shanto Iyengars’s Episodic Frame Wise Analysis of Newspaper Editorials

<i>Sl.No</i>	<i>Name of the Newspapers</i>	<i>Number of Editorials in</i>	<i>Major Episodic Frames</i>	<i>Key Issues/Discussions</i>

		<i>Episodic Frame</i>		
1.	The Times of India	5 Editorials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>COP 23 Bonn climate change summit</i> • <i>Paris agreement</i> • <i>Unseasonal rainfall</i> • <i>G20 Summit</i> 	<i>US withdrawal of Paris agreement, Human induced climate change, Scientific evidences in climate change</i>
2.	The Hindu	4 Editorials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>UNFCC COP 23</i> • <i>Flood in eastern and western India</i> • <i>US policy on Paris agreement</i> • <i>Arrival of monsoon</i> 	<i>Paris agreement, Extreme frequency of events, Unseasonal rainfall, Scientific evidences in climate change</i>
3.	The Indian Express	1 Editorial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>G20 Summit</i> 	<i>Paris climate pact, US withdrawal from Paris agreement</i>
4.	Hindustan Times	1 Editorial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>G20 Summit</i> 	<i>US policy on climate change, Paris agreement</i>

Out of the total 17 editorials on climate change issues, ‘Times of India’ newspaper just framed 5 editorials in according to the episodic framing (see table: II). Editorials framed in ‘episodic

framing' were based on the major events including; COP 23 Bonn climate change summit, Paris agreement, and G20 Summit. 'Times of India' discussed various key issues in their 'episodic framing' including; US withdrawal of Paris agreement, Human induced climate change and Scientific evidences in climate change.

'The Hindu' newspaper published four editorials in the 'episodic framing' according to the Shanto Iyengars's model of media framing (see table: II). Editorials framed in 'episodic framing' were based on the major events including; COP 23 Bonn climate change summit, Flood in eastern and western India and US policy on Paris agreement. 'The Hindu' discussed various key issues in their 'episodic framing' including; Paris agreement, Extreme frequency of events, Unseasonal rainfall and Scientific evidences in climate change.

'The Indian Express' and 'Hindustan Times' newspapers were published just one editorial each, According to the 'episodic framing'. Both the newspapers were published the 'episodic framing' of editorials based on the same event that as G20 summit.

Table:III

According to Shanto Iyengars's Thematic Frame Wise Analysis of Newspaper Editorials

<i>Sl.No</i>	<i>Name of the Newspapers</i>	<i>Number of Editorials in Thematic Frame</i>	<i>Major Thematic Frames</i>	<i>Key Issues/Discussions</i>
1.	The Times of India	12 Editorials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Unseasonal rainfall</i> • <i>Rise in temperature</i> • <i>Flood management</i> • <i>COP 23, Bonn</i> • <i>Climate change as global challenge</i> 	<i>Adaptation and mitigation of climate change, Green House Gas emission, US policy on climate change, Health issues, Flood management, Chennai flood, El Nino</i>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>National action policy on climate change</i> • <i>Climate change mitigation</i> • <i>Carbon emission</i> • <i>Assam flood situation</i> 	<i>phenomenon, Indian policy on climate change</i>
2.	The Hindu	10 Editorials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Climate change policy of developed countries</i> • <i>Assam's flood situation</i> • <i>Flood management</i> • <i>Ice/Glaciers melting in Antarctica</i> • <i>Use of Hydrochlorofluorocarbon (HCFC)</i> • <i>Scepticism about climate change</i> • <i>Rise in temperature</i> • <i>Arrival of monsoon</i> • <i>Drought as climate change indicator</i> 	<i>Paris agreement, Green House Gas emission, US Policy on climate change, Climate change as a global challenge, Unseasonal rainfall, Disaster management, Chennai flood, Human induced climate change, El Nino phenomenon, Mitigation and adaptation of climate change</i>
3.	The Indian Express	7 Editorials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>COP 23, Bonn</i> • <i>Impact of cyclones</i> • <i>National action policy on climate change</i> • <i>US withdrawal of Paris agreement</i> • <i>Unpredictable monsoon</i> • <i>Flood free Guwahati</i> 	<i>Flood mitigation, Assam government policy, Health issues, Unseasonal rainfall, Changes in weather patterns, Greenhouse Gas, US policy on climate change, climate change as global challenge, trade</i>

				<i>liberalization and climate change, Green energy, Unseasonal rainfall, Warnings issued about cyclone, Cyclone communication, Climate change in eastern Antarctica, Global temperature rise, UNFCC, Paris climate change treaty</i>
4.	Hindustan Times	7 Editorials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>COP 23 Bonn</i> • <i>Unpredictable monsoon</i> • <i>Paris climate change agreement</i> • <i>Displacement due to disasters</i> • <i>Tropical Cyclone 'Irma'</i> • <i>Flood in Bangaluru</i> • <i>Urban flooding</i> 	<i>Flood management, climate change challenge, Sea level rise, Increased cyclone threats in India, Climate change threats, natural disasters, Unseasonal rainfall, Climate change as a threat, COP 21, Indian policy on climate change, US withdrawal of Paris agreement</i>

Out of the total 17 editorials associated with climate change issues, 'Times of India' published majority of 12 editorials in respective of 'thematic framing' (see table:III). Editorials published in 'thematic framing' were based on the major themes including; Unseasonal rainfall, Rise in temperature, Flood management, COP 23 conference, National action policy on climate change, Climate change mitigation, Carbon emission and Assam flood situation.

‘The Hindu’ newspaper published 10 editorials in ‘thematic framing’, according to Shanto Iyengar’s model of media framing (see table: III). Editorials published in ‘thematic framing’ were based on the major themes including; Climate change policy of developed countries, Assam’s flood situation, Flood management, Ice/Glaciers melting in Antarctica, Use of Hydrochlorofluorocarbon (HCFC), Scepticism about climate change, Rise in temperature, Arrival of monsoon and Drought as climate change indicator.

Both the newspapers ‘The Indian Express’ and ‘Hindustan Times’ were published 7 editorials each in respective of ‘thematic framing’ (see table: III). Editorials published in ‘thematic framing’ were based on the major themes including; COP 23 conference, Impact of cyclones, National action policy on climate change, US withdrawal of Paris agreement, Unpredictable monsoon, Paris climate change agreement, Flood in Bangaluru and Urban flooding.

Findings:

1. English language newspapers were not given adequate attention to write editorials on climate change issues according to its global significance.
2. Newspaper editorials’ were tending to portray climate change as a global threat and a challenge.
3. Most of the editorials were focused on thematic frame (focused on consequences of an issue or an event).
4. International conferences and global policy agreements were the important news source of most of the climate change editorial content.
5. Editorial contents agree with the scientific consensus of climate change as human induced phenomenon.
6. Editorial contents had given larger attention to focus (both episode and thematic framing) flood as an important climate change indicator.
7. Editorials were hardly represented the remedial or problem solving aspect of climate change issues.

Suggestion and Conclusion

The study was to investigate how climate change had been framed in the editorial contents of leading English language newspapers in India. It is also very important to understand how would

climate change issues were represented in the newspapers, which are considered to be the prime source of information, concerning climate change for common people. Editorial contents of all the given newspapers were agreed with the scientific consensus towards climate change, but unfortunately not giving adequate attention to its global significance. So, the findings of this research may provoke to do further research work in the coverage and framing of climate change in respect of various mediums including television news, news websites, blogs and social media. Study also suggests carrying forward further research works to understand the professional journalistic practice, organizational policy, media agenda, journalistic perspective and source pattern of media communication on climate change news framing. More research work in the domain of Media Communication about Climate Change (MCCC) will pave the way to understand the prospects and challenges of media, especially newspapers in the changing dimensions of occurring frames in climate change news stories. Also public impact on the climate change issue through the news stories needs to be specifically studied and explored to understand what effect the news framing can create or produce.

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