

Role of Mass Media in creating Environmental Awareness among the residents of Poonch District of J&K India

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Abstract

Environmental degradation is one of the major threats being faced by the world today. Pollution, unsustainable development and overexploitation of natural resources have resulted in ruthless deterioration of the environment. In order to fulfil the need of the growing population large scale exploitation of environment and its resources has taken place. Therefore there is a need for the awareness of the public about environment and related issues [1]. Mass media act as an exquisite source of information and awareness for the people as well as society. The present study was made to assess the role played by mass media in creating environmental awareness among the residents of Poonch District of J&K.

Keywords: *Environmental awareness, mass media, information, environmental issues.*

1 Introduction

Environment is fundamental for all the living organisms. The growing population and its consequent demand for food, energy and housing have considerably altered the environment resulting in loss of biodiversity, pressure on land and forests, rising demand for energy, global warming, climate change, water scarcity and pollution etc. Many countries of the world have experienced a serious degradation of the environment and its resources. In developing countries like India overuse of natural resources for the production of basic needs such as food, fibre, energy, building materials and transport has led to ruthless environmental degradation [2]. One of the causes of the inappropriate utilization of environmental resources and deep rooted environmental problems in India is the lack of

awareness [3]. Thus there is the need to spread environmental awareness for successfully addressing environmental problems. Environmental awareness means to gain a variety of experiences to acquire a basic understanding of environment and its associated problems [4]. The main tool for creating environmental awareness at macro level is by far, the mass media. Media with respect to communication is the name given to any form of conversation, whether written, broadcast or spoken that reaches massive audiences. The most common type of media is the Print media, electronic media and the social media [5]. This consists of News papers, magazines, radio, television, films, internet and various social networking sites etc.

The role of mass media is one of the most important factors underlying the knowledge of environmental problems due to its wide accessibility to large proportions of the population. Mass media act as an important enlightening medium for the masses irrespective of geographical, sociological and economical diversities[6][7] Media provides a great deal of information from widespread sources and also plays an important role as an agent of change and facilitator of development. The media can play a big role in breaking the silence and making people aware of the different environmental issues so that they can change their attitude toward it. Moreover with the advancement in science and technology internet and social media has emerged as a new and fastest information tool used by large number of people [8]. With internet people today are very much connected with each other while discussing different global/local issues.

All people need to have a common understanding of the role played by human beings in reducing environmental deterioration. The environmental protection, awareness and the sustainable use of

finite resources are matters that directly concern each citizen [9][10]. Media has a big role to play in making people aware of environmental issues and taking actions to protect the environment as it tries to suggest alternatives to people and policy-makers. Media plays a vital role in sensitizing the people about environmental issues. But, on the other hand environmental issues are not yet being treated as media's prime agenda as media fails to give sufficient attention to such crucial issues and the coverage is only event based [11]. Widespread environmental awareness is instantly required to obtain public support for government action in environmental policy and management, which is not possible without the help of the mass media [12][13]. Therefore the present study was conducted to assess the role played by mass media in creating environmental awareness among the residents of Poonch district of J&K.

2 Materials And Methods

Study Area

The present study was conducted in Poonch District of J&K India, located in the Pir Panjal range of the Western Himalayas. Poonch district has an area 1674km² and geographically lies within 33° 77' 0" N Latitude and 74.1' 0" E Longitude. Climate of area ranges from sub tropical to temperate with an average temperature of 19-34 °C in summer to 6-17 °C in winter. The area harbours rich biodiversity.

Methodology

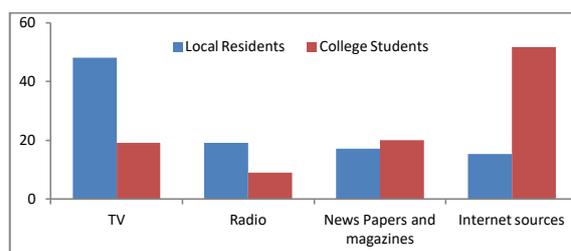
The present study is based on fieldwork which includes household survey and interviews. The survey was conducted in 100 households of the Poonch district to assess the knowledge and awareness of people regarding different environmental issues. For interviews 220 people were randomly chosen as respondents which includes 110 local residents from the surveyed households of the area in the age group of 25-60 and 100 college students from three degree colleges of the district in the age group of 18-25. The interviews were based on the knowledge of the respondents on different environmental issues such as climate change, conservation of natural resources, deforestation, soil erosion, pollution and global warming etc and the mass media tools through which they came to know all about these issues. The aim of the Interviews was to test the effectiveness of the mass media (radio, television, news paper and internet) in creating environmental awareness.

3 Results and Discussion

To assess the role played by mass media in creating environmental awareness among the masses of Poonch district, 220 people were selected as respondent which includes 110 local residents from surveyed households and 110 college students from

three degree colleges of the area. A questionnaire was used during the study for the collection of information and the results of the responses were summarised in the form of percentage. During general interaction with the respondents it was observed that 60% of them were aware of the different aspects of the environment. During household survey and interview with the local residents 48.18% of the respondents stated that they got information about different environmental related issues through TV, 19.09 % of them stated that for them Radio act as an important information medium, 17.27 % of the respondents stated that they got information on different environmental related issues by going through news papers/Magazines, 15.45 % of the respondents stated that internet serve as a source of information for them on different environmental issues. It was also stated by the local people of the area that Television was the most preferred information tool used by them due to its audio-visual nature and also it act an ease and powerful medium for disseminating information on different issues (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Responses of respondents regarding Mass media tools in creating Environmental Awareness.



As far the college students are concerned 19.09 % of them stated that they got information about environmental related issues by watching TV, 9.09% stated that they got information on environmental issues from radio, 20% of them stated that they got information on environmental related issues from news papers and magazines, 51.81% of the student respondents stated that they keep themselves aware of the different environmental related issues by browsing internet. According to student respondents internet was the most preferred source of information used by them as it is easily for them to browse internet tools on mobiles, laptops etc. About 85% of the students stated that due to the efforts of the mass media they became environmental friendly and were taking every possible step to protect and improve the environment by following certain do,s and don,ts. They further stated that they actively took part in various environmental related activities organized by their respective institutes.

4 Conclusion

It is clear from the study that media plays an important role in creating environmental awareness and in framing positive attitude toward the environment among the people of the Poonch district. As stated by local people and college students TV and internet are the most preferred information tools which help them to keep aware of the environmental issues. Therefore the role of media in sensitizing the public about environmental issues and its struggle against the cause of environmental problems is crucial.

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