

Exploring the Most Effective Mass Media Tools for Creating Awareness of Climate Change: A Study

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ABSTRACT

In the twenty-first century, climate change is one of the most challenging issues for humanity, and mass communication channels, particularly radio and television, play a vital role in creating awareness of climate change among people in third-world countries. This study aimed to explore the more effective mass media tools for creating awareness of climate change. Data for the current study were collected through in-depth interviews with media experts and climate change authorities in Afghanistan. The study revealed that there are many ways to communicate with the public. Still, the most effective is through the mass media, because the mass media can communicate with millions of people at a time, everywhere. Furthermore, low literacy rates and poor socioeconomic conditions are the main reasons that most Afghans turned to radio and television. Besides, access to print media and the Internet in Afghanistan is limited. Radio and television are the best sources in the first place to create awareness of climate change.

Keywords: Mass Media, Climate Change, Public Awareness; Media in Afghanistan

INTRODUCTION

Climate change is an ‘unobtrusive’ topic compared to many other issues. This is because the climate and its past, current, or future developments are not easily observable firsthand. ‘climate’ refers to statistical averages of weather indicators, such as temperatures, precipitation, wind, etc. To speak of ‘climate,’ these indicators must be monitored and described on large scales, both in terms of space and time. The World Meteorological Organization, for example, proposes to speak of ‘climate’ when referring to average weather over at least 30 years. Spatially, ‘climates’ are usually described for entire countries, continents, hemispheres, or the whole world. Such dimensions lie far beyond most people’s life worlds and biographical horizons. In addition, the main anthropogenic causes of climate change—greenhouse gas emissions—remain invisible. A second reason for the issue’s unobtrusiveness is its complexity. The climate and its changes are observed and (re)constructed primarily by scientists, whose results are rather complex and difficult to understand for many people. This is due, among other factors, to the growing number of disciplines participating in climate science. Each comes with its kinds of data, measures, models, and heuristics, which results in climate models including more and more variables and interrelations between them. (Schafer, M. S., 2015).

Moreover, the findings of climate science, as well as those of any other science, are not unanimously agreed upon. Although a consensus seems to exist within the respective scientific community about the basic features and causes of anthropogenic climate change, dissent, and uncertainty can be found in many details. (Roosvall, Media and the Climate Crisis, 2021).

The most important strand of current climate politics involves international efforts at ‘mitigation,’ that is, a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in developed countries, in particular, constituting a political process far removed from people’s lives. As a result, the causes and consequences of climate change and its implications are not directly and easily perceivable, and what most people know about them stems from media communication. The mass media—means of communication that distribute content such as text, pictures, and sound to an anonymous and spatially diverse public via technical means such as newspapers, TV, or radio—are particularly relevant in this respect. (Schafer, M. S., 2015)

Surveys in the US, the UK, Australia, and Germany show that mass media—particularly television, followed by newspapers and, increasingly, the Internet—are the most important sources from which people

draw information about climate change. These studies also show mass media to be more important than people's interpersonal communication with family members and friends, as well as workshops and school classes. Accordingly, they are "important arenas and important agents in the production, reproduction, and transformation of the meaning" of climate change (Carvalho, 2010).

Objectives of the Study

1. To describe the role of media in climate change.
2. To explore the role of media in creating public awareness of climate change
3. To identify the most effective mass media tools for climate change awareness.

Research Questions

1. How does mass media play a role in climate change?
2. What is the role of mass media in creating public awareness of climate change?
3. What are the most effective mass media tools for raising climate change awareness?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Considering the data saturation technique and according to Shari L. Dworkin (2012): ((an extremely large number of articles, book chapters, and books recommend guidance and suggest anywhere from 5 to 50 participants as adequate)) (dworkin, 2012). The present study is based on in-depth interviews with three Media experts (media managers, field journalists, and professors of media studies) and one expert from the National Environmental Protection Agency.

To collect appropriate data, interviews were conducted in the native language (Pashto) of the interviewees and then translated into English. Due to the distance issues, all the interviews were conducted by mobile phone. The interviewees were selected due to their profession from different media outlets and media schools.

For instance, Abidullah Ehsas, head of Maoug News Agency in Afghanistan, Ghulam Jailani Zwak, former head of Kabul News TV; Noor Habib Habibzai, former head of the journalism school at Al-Falah University; Ikram Shinwari, a reporter for Voice of America Radio; and Abdul Hadi Zhman, former director of the press at the National Environmental Protection Agency.

RESULTS

The role of mass media in the climate change issue

Zhman, Habibzai, and Zwak recognized that mass media has played a vital role in climate change. They believe that in the current era of information and technology, mass media has become an operating force at national and international levels. If the operators of mass media pay attention to climate change issues by publishing news, reports features, and so on, the government of a country and its residents will be aware of climate change calamities and their threats. Besides these, by disseminating evidence about climate pollution, the media also has the efficiency to put pressure on the government to take action against them. Besides these, the other two respondents (Ihsas and Shinwari) mentioned that in third-world countries like; Afghanistan, only Radio and Television have a core role in climate change issues.

The role of mass media in creating public awareness of climate change

Currently, mass media is the backbone of every aspect of social-economic life in society. With easy access, it attracts the attention of a huge number of audiences. Almost all of the respondents noted that mass media is the best, easiest, and cheapest way to raise public awareness. Ehsas and Shinwari of them believed that looking at circumstances and facilities, every context has its own media outlets to stay in touch with the audience. If they disseminate real and meaningful content about climate change, it should be more beneficial than others because mass media is the trustworthy address in each community that influences audience behaviors. In addition to this, (Ehsas, Zhman, and Zwak) of the respondents said that unfortunately, people in Afghanistan do not have much knowledge about the climate change phenomenon. If the media operators publish comprehensive information about climate change threats and explain the harm that has a direct effect on their lives, jobs, and society, they will pay attention to reducing it. Besides these, the responsible authorities will also

take action to solve such problems. So looking at this, most of the interviews accepted that mass media plays a key role in creating public awareness of climate change.

The most effective mass media tools for raising awareness about climate change

The study received the same answers from the respondents that currently, all four forms of mass media (print, radio, television, and online) operate their coverage about climate change awareness all over the country. All of the respondents believed that low-cost and easy access to mass media, particularly radio and television, were the most suitable tools for creating awareness of climate change in third-world countries, including Afghanistan. Because of the four decades of civil wars in Afghanistan, the residents are suffering from bad conditions in social and economic life. Therefore, other types of mass media, like the Internet, newspapers, etc., are expensive and not accessible everywhere. Besides these, lack of literacy is the other reason that most Afghans turn to radio and television. However, looking at the responses of all interviewees (Ihsas, Zwak, Habibzai, Shinwari, and Zhman), radio and television are the most effective tools for climate change awareness.

DISCUSSION

The current study accepted the findings of Mike S. Schafer's (2025) research that mass media are important and trusted sources for climate change information. The four forms of mass media (print, radio, television, and the internet) are important sources of people's awareness of and knowledge about climate change (Schafer, M. S., 2015). This study also illustrated that mass media portrayals of climate change have strongly influenced personal and global efforts to mitigate it through news, reports, features, and other information sources (Swain, 2011). Furthermore, the study revealed the same results as Nazari & Hasbullah (2010): a low literacy rate is caused by most people listening to the radio, which means that radio is the most effective tool in rural areas of third-world countries (Hasbullah, 2010). Moreover, the outcome of this research is also the same as that of Nwagbara et al. (2018), in which most people do not have much knowledge of climate change (Nwagbara, 2018).

CONCLUSION

In the current era of information and technology, the issue of climate change has become a global phenomenon, and the media has a main role in disseminating its threats at the national and international levels. In a democratic country, media is a fourth pillar of democracy due to its social responsibilities. The media in Afghanistan also disseminates information to aware people to mitigate its threats. Currently, all four types of mass media (print, radio, television, and the Internet) operate these programs to create awareness of climate change. Due to a lack of literacy and socioeconomic conditions, most Afghans are using radio and TV as their main tools for awareness. So looking at this, the current research has concluded that mass media is a critical agent in the way that climate change issues are framed in public opinion. The media's role in preventing climate change is at the forefront of the problem 'because the media can reach everyone 'and most people believe in it. There are many ways to communicate with the public, but the most effective is through the mass media because the mass media can communicate with millions of people at a time. As access to print media and the Internet in Afghanistan is limited, radio and television are the best addresses in the first place to create awareness of climate change.

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