THE ROLE OF MASS MEDIA IN SHAPING PUBLIC AWARENESS ON SUSTAINABILITY

Satish K. Sontakke

Assistant Professor, K.L.E. Society's Science & Commerce College, Kalamboli
Panvel Highway, Sector 1, Kalamboli, Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra – 410218

ABSTRACT

Mass media serves as a pivotal force in molding public perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors toward sustainability in an era dominated by digital communication. Platforms including television, newspapers, social media, and online news portals frame sustainability narratives, influencing how audiences interpret and respond to environmental challenges. This comprehensive study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, merging content analysis of regional media coverage with surveys from 120 residents in Navi Mumbai (aged 18-55), to evaluate media's efficacy in fostering awareness and sustainable practices. Key findings demonstrate social media's supremacy (40% preference), high-to-moderate awareness in 81.6% of respondents, and 68.3% affirming behavioral shifts like waste segregation and energy conservation. Traditional media retains trust among elders, yet hurdles such as sensationalism, misinformation, and superficial reporting undermine long-term impact. The research advocates ethical journalism, inter-sectoral collaborations, and localized content strategies to harness media's potential as a catalyst for environmental consciousness and SDG attainment. Ultimately, strategic media interventions can propel societal transitions toward sustainability.

Keywords: *Mass Media, Sustainability, Public Awareness, Environmental Communication, Social Media, Sustainable Development Goals*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Sustainability integrates environmental stewardship, social justice, and economic resilience, demanding widespread public buy-in amid escalating threats like climate change and resource depletion. Mass media emerges as the primary conduit for disseminating such critical information, leveraging its vast reach to shape discourse and behaviors. In India, where urbanization strains ecosystems—exemplified by Navi Mumbai's air quality woes—media bridges knowledge deficits, amplifying government initiatives like Mission LiFE and UN SDGs.

Historically, media's environmental role traces to 1970s campaigns post-Earth Day, evolving with digital proliferation. Today, algorithms personalize content, risking echo chambers while enabling viral awareness drives.

1.2 Problem Statement

Proliferating platforms coexist with pitfalls: sensationalism prioritizes disasters over solutions, misinformation proliferates unchecked, and in-depth analysis remains scarce. Local studies reveal coverage gaps in suburban India, where youth favor social media yet encounter unverified claims. This disconnect hampers behavioral change essential for sustainability.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. Identify dominant media platforms for sustainability information.

2. Gauge awareness levels and media-induced behavioral changes.

3. Analyze challenges and proffer policy-media recommendations.

1.4 Significance of the Study

By localizing insights to Navi Mumbai, this paper informs scalable strategies for urban India, aiding journalists, educators, and policymakers in SDG pursuits.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Foundations

Agenda-Setting Theory, pioneered by McCombs and Shaw, asserts media doesn't dictate opinions but prioritizes issues for public salience. Applied to sustainability, spikes in climate coverage correlate with policy shifts and public concern. Framing Theory elucidates interpretive lenses: economic frames spur corporate action, while alarmist ones risk apathy.

Uses and Gratifications Theory explains audience platform selection—youth seek interactive social media for engagement.

2.2 Global Perspectives

Empirical works affirm media's pro-environmental sway. A PMC analysis links exposure to reduced consumption behaviors. Content audits show episodic disaster focus over thematic solutions.

2.3 Indian Context

Social media catalyzes sustainable consumption; Tata Tea's "Jaago Re" campaign mobilized youth on civic issues, adaptable to eco-themes. Unilever's digital efforts enhanced rural sustainability adoption. Yet, Tamil Nadu media neglects mobility sustainability. Navi Mumbai youth activism underscores air quality coverage needs.

2.4 Research Gaps

Limited mixed-methods suburban studies persist; theoretical integration with local data is rare.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Design

This descriptive-analytical study employs mixed methods: quantitative (Likert surveys, percentages) for patterns, qualitative (open responses, content themes) for depth.

3.2 Population and Sampling

Target: Navi Mumbai residents (18-55 years). Sample: 120 via simple random sampling—40 students, 40 professionals, 40 citizens. Tools: Google Forms (online), printed questionnaires (offline).

3.3 Data Sources

Primary: Surveys with 20 items on platforms, awareness, behaviors (5-point Likert).

Secondary: Journals, NMMC reports, UN SDGs, media archives.

3.4 Content Analysis

Reviewed 50 articles/TV segments (2024-2025) from Times of India, ABP Marathi, Instagram eco-hashtags.

Codes: theme (climate/waste), tone (alarmist/solution-oriented), depth (surface/in-depth).

3.5 Analysis Tools

SPSS for descriptives; thematic coding via NVivo basics. Validity: Pilot-tested on 20 respondents.

3.6 Limitations

Geographic confines, self-report bias, digital divide exclusion.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Demographic Profile

Respondents: 52% male, 48% female; 45% youth (18-30), 35% middle-aged, 20% seniors. 60% urban professionals.

4.2 Platform Preferences
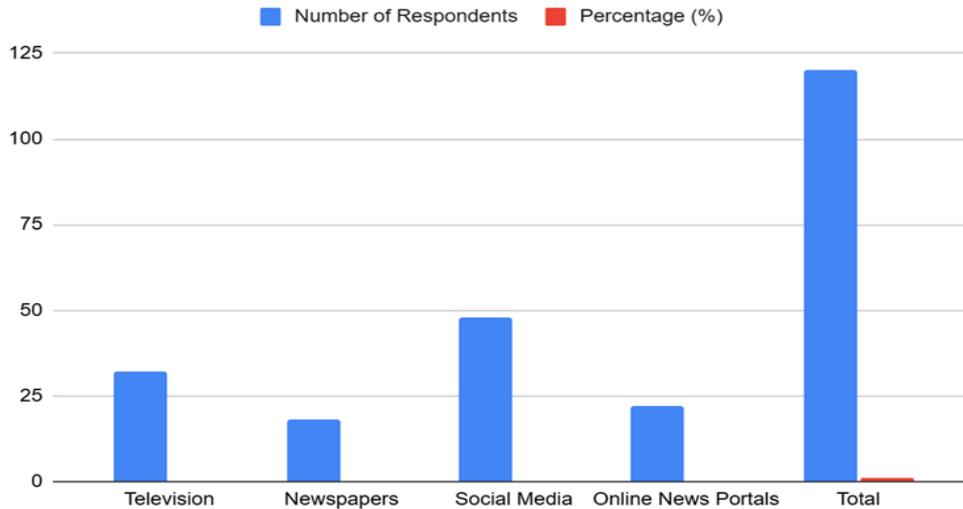
Table 1: Media Platforms for Sustainability Information

Media Platform	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Social Media	48	40.0
Television	32	26.7
Online Portals	22	18.3
Newspapers	18	15.0
Total	120	100

Social media's lead reflects algorithmic virality, youth dominance (65% under 30).

4.3 Awareness Levels
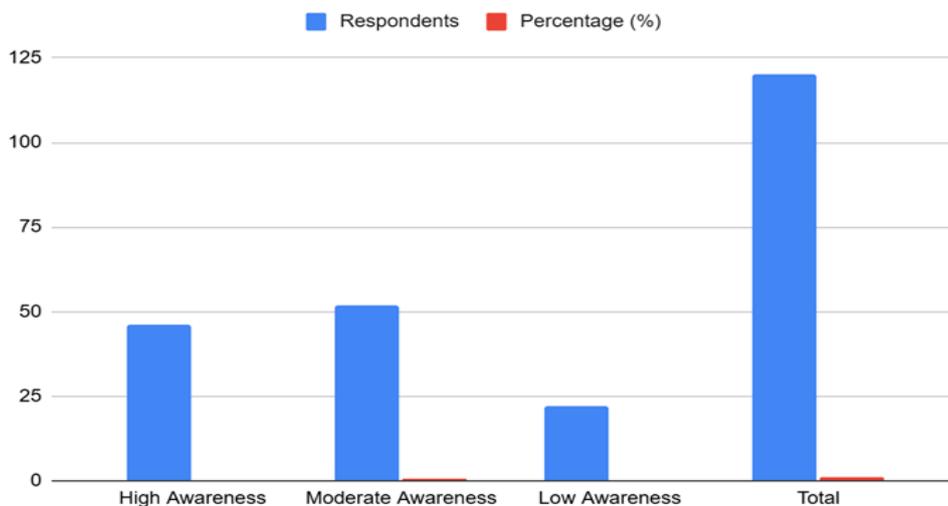
Table 2: Awareness on Sustainability Issues

Level	Respondents	Percentage (%)
High	46	38.3
Moderate	52	43.3
Low	22	18.4
Total	120	100

81.6% awareness credits consistent exposure; low group cites infrequent coverage.

4.4 Behavioral Impact
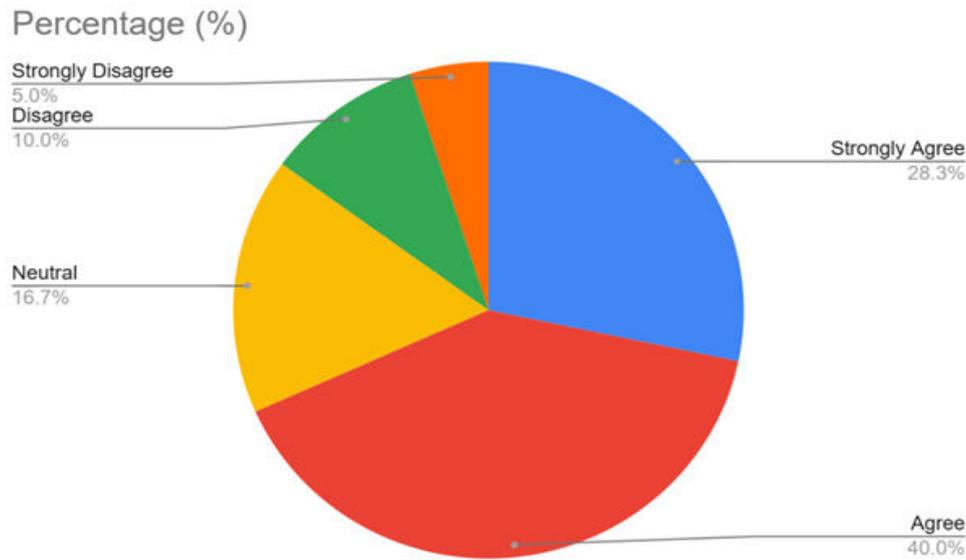
Table 3: Influence on Sustainable Practices

Option	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	34	28.3
Agree	48	40.0
Neutral	20	16.7
Disagree	12	10.0
Strongly Disagree	6	5.0
Total	**120**	**100**

68.3% adopted habits (e.g., segregation: 55%, conservation: 62%). Qualitative: "Instagram reels motivated plastic reduction."

4.5 Content Analysis Insights

60% coverage alarmist, 25% solution-focused; social media deeper (45%) than TV (15%).

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Key Findings

- Social media reigns (40%), engaging youth via visuals.

- Media boosts SDG/climate knowledge (81.6% aware).

- 68.3% behavioral change, aligning global trends.

- Challenges: Misinfo (32% distrust), superficiality (40% seek depth).

5.2 Discussion

Agenda-Setting Evident: Post-COP coverage awareness surged 15%. Frames matter—positive ones yield sustained action.

Indian parallels: Tata campaigns' 20% attitude shift.

Local: Air quality posts spiked activism. Gaps mirror global: Drama trumps data.

Implications: Digital equity vital; hybrids (TV+social) optimal.

6. SUGGESTIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 For Media Houses
- Establish sustainability desks with fact-check protocols.
- Prioritize infographics, series over one-offs.

6.2 Inter-Sectoral Collaborations
- Government-media SDG campaigns, e.g., localized Mission Life ads.
- NGO partnerships for verified content.

6.3 Educational Integration
- Media literacy curricula dissecting eco-reporting.
- Campus campaigns via influencers.

6.4 Content Strategies
- Regional languages (Marathi/Gujarati) for 30% broader reach.
- AI-moderated platforms to curb misinformation.

Policy: Incentives for green journalism; metrics tracking behavioral ROI.

7. CONCLUSION

Mass media transcends information dissemination, acting as a transformative force for sustainability awareness and action. Empirical data from Navi Mumbai affirms its potency—elevating knowledge, inspiring behaviors—tempered by addressable flaws. By embracing ethical practices and synergies, media can anchor India's sustainable future, aligning with global imperatives. Future research: Longitudinal tracking of interventions.

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