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THE ROLE OF MASS MEDIA IN SHAPING PUBLIC AWARENESS ON SUSTAINABILITY

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ABSTRACT
Mass media plays a significant role in shaping public awareness and perception of sustainability-related issues. With increasing environmental challenges and the urgent need for sustainable development, media platforms act as vital channels for information dissemination and agenda setting. This study examines the role of mass media in influencing public awareness, attitudes, and behavioural intentions toward sustainability. Adopting a mixed-method research approach that combines secondary data analysis with primary survey findings, the research explores the impact of traditional media, digital platforms, and social media on sustainability communication. The findings reveal that mass media enhances public understanding of sustainability issues and positively influences behavioural change. However, challenges such as misinformation and lack of depth in coverage highlight the need for responsible and strategic media practices. The study emphasizes the importance of credible, consistent, and solution-oriented media communication in promoting sustainable lifestyles.

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

INTRODUCTION
Mass media encompassing print, broadcast, and digital platforms plays a crucial role in informing, educating, and influencing public opinion on major societal issues. In the contemporary global context, sustainability has emerged as a critical concern due to rising environmental degradation, climate change, and depletion of natural resources. Sustainability refers to development that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Public awareness and understanding of sustainability-related issues such as climate change, waste management, renewable energy, and responsible consumption significantly influence individual behaviour as well as public support for environmental policies. Mass media acts as a bridge between scientific knowledge, policymakers, and the general public by translating complex information into accessible narratives. This research paper examines how various forms of mass media shape public awareness, attitudes, and behavioural responses toward sustainability, while also identifying challenges faced in effective sustainability communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mass Media and Sustainability Awareness
Previous studies highlight the critical role of mass media in disseminating information related to sustainability, environmental protection, and climate change. Consistent media coverage has been found to increase public concern and awareness, thereby influencing societal attitudes toward environmental responsibility.

Traditional and Digital Media Influence
Traditional media such as newspapers, television, and radio continue to serve as trusted sources of environmental information, particularly among audiences that rely on conventional news platforms. These media contribute to foundational awareness and credibility.

At the same time, digital and social media platforms have transformed sustainability communication by enabling rapid dissemination, interactivity, and audience participation. Research suggests that social media enhances engagement with sustainability campaigns by facilitating dialogue, sharing, and collective action.

Agenda-Setting and Framing
According to agenda-setting theory, mass media influences public perception by determining which issues receive prominence. When sustainability issues such as climate change or renewable energy are consistently highlighted, they gain priority in public discourse. Framing further shapes how audiences interpret these issues, influencing attitudes and behavioural intentions.

Media Influence on Behaviour

Studies indicate that exposure to sustainability-related media content not only increases awareness but also motivates individuals to adopt eco-friendly practices. Media narratives, campaigns, and storytelling techniques have been shown to encourage behavioural change and environmental responsibility.

Challenges in Sustainability Communication

Despite its influence, mass media faces challenges such as misinformation, sensationalism, oversimplification, and unequal access to information. These limitations reduce the effectiveness of sustainability messaging and underline the need for responsible reporting and improved media literacy.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the role of mass media in shaping public awareness about sustainability.
2. To compare the influence of traditional and digital media platforms on sustainability awareness.
3. To analyse how media exposure affects public attitudes and behavioural intentions toward sustainable practices.
4. To identify challenges in media-based sustainability communication.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopts a mixed-method research design, combining secondary research with primary data collection.

Secondary Data

Secondary data was collected from peer-reviewed journals, research articles, media reports, and existing studies related to mass media and sustainability.

Primary Data

Primary data was collected through a structured online questionnaire using Google Forms. A total of 81 respondents participated in the survey.

Method of Analysis

The collected data was analysed using descriptive analysis. Survey responses were interpreted using percentages and thematic analysis for open-ended responses.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Profile

Out of 81 respondents, 72.8% belonged to the 18–25 age group, indicating strong participation from young adults. 60.5% of respondents were female and 38.3% were male. The majority (67.9%) were undergraduates, followed by postgraduates and working professionals.

Media Consumption Patterns

Social media emerged as the most dominant platform, with 90.1% respondents using it regularly. Television (38.3%) and online news portals (25.9%) followed, while print media and radio had lower usage. This reflects a shift toward digital media consumption.

Exposure to Sustainability Content

A majority of respondents reported moderate to frequent exposure to sustainability-related content. 42% consumed such content sometimes, while 34.6% did so often and 17.3% very often, indicating steady engagement with environmental information.

Awareness Levels

Most respondents reported moderate to high awareness of sustainability issues. 40.7% rated their awareness as moderate, while 37% rated it as high, suggesting that media plays a key role in knowledge dissemination.

Role of Mass Media

A significant 81.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that mass media has improved their understanding of sustainability. Social media (67.9%) was perceived as the most effective medium, followed by online news platforms and television.

Behavioural Influence

The study found strong behavioural impact:

- 75.3% of respondents reported changing their behaviour after media exposure.
- 71.6% felt media campaigns motivate sustainable practices.
- 85.2% agreed that social media encourages discussions on sustainability.

These findings indicate that mass media not only informs but also influences action.

Credibility and Challenges

While most respondents found sustainability information credible, concerns were raised regarding:

- Lack of depth (43.2%)
- Misinformation (29.6%)
- Oversimplification (18.5%)

These challenges reduce the long-term effectiveness of media communication.

Qualitative Insights

Open-ended responses emphasized the need for solution-oriented content, local examples, consistent campaigns, fact-checking, and creative storytelling. Respondents also highlighted the importance of addressing systemic issues involving corporations and governments.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that mass media plays a vital role in shaping public awareness and behaviour related to sustainability. Traditional media contributes credibility, while digital and social media enhance engagement and participation. The findings demonstrate that sustained and strategic media communication can significantly influence public attitudes and encourage sustainable practices. However, challenges such as misinformation and superficial coverage must be addressed through responsible reporting and media literacy initiatives. Strengthening the quality and consistency of sustainability communication can enable mass media to act as a powerful catalyst for sustainable development.

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