

How does the Indian television cover climate change?

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Climate change has become an important environmental issue of the 21st century. The media plays a major role in disseminating scientific information to the people and acts as a catalyst in creating awareness about climate change. We have studied the role of two television news channels, NDTV 24x7 and CNN-IBN, in covering climate change stories. Climate change is a serious issue that affects the lives and livelihood of people, but the level of interest is poor from all stakeholders such as governments, civil society, politicians, journalists and the general public. The level of attention is poor because the impact of climate change will be seen over a long period and hence it does not interest the media.

As mentioned above, the media plays an important role in disseminating scientific information to the public. The media may not be an explicit player in climate change, but it can trigger other agencies to work on this issue^{1,2}. Reporting on climate change can shape the spectrum of climate mitigation and adaptation actions³. The success of future climate mitigation policies may depend significantly on how the media educates the public about climate change⁴.

Public support for climate mitigation policies will interest people if the impact of climate change stories is described in thematic frame rather than episodic⁵. ‘Thematic framing’ is a more general representation supported by statistics, historical trends, and collective outcomes. ‘Episodic framing’ is a concrete instance or events that involve individuals located at specific places at specific

times⁶. Adhering to the journalistic norms of balance has led to the biased coverage of both anthropogenic contribution to global warming and the resultant action⁷. Increased visibility of climate science information will increase the public understanding of science and engagement with scientific issues⁸. Increase in newspaper coverage had a positive correlation with increase in public concern on global warming⁹.

Here we look at the coverage of climate change in two Indian national television news channels, namely CNN-IBN and NDTV 24x7, from 2006 to 2012. The videos were retrieved from the respective archives.

As many as 257 news clips were collected, 59 in CNN-IBN and 198 in NDTV 24x7 (Figure 1). NDTV 24x7 had more coverage compared to CNN-IBN. A collaborative initiative between The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) and NDTV 24x7 made the increase in climate change news coverage possible.

From Figure 2, it is evident that NDTV 24x7 has given more importance to the coverage of climate change. The coverage was very low in 2006, and it increased after the release of the fourth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The media tried to highlight the direct impact of climate change in India, correlating it

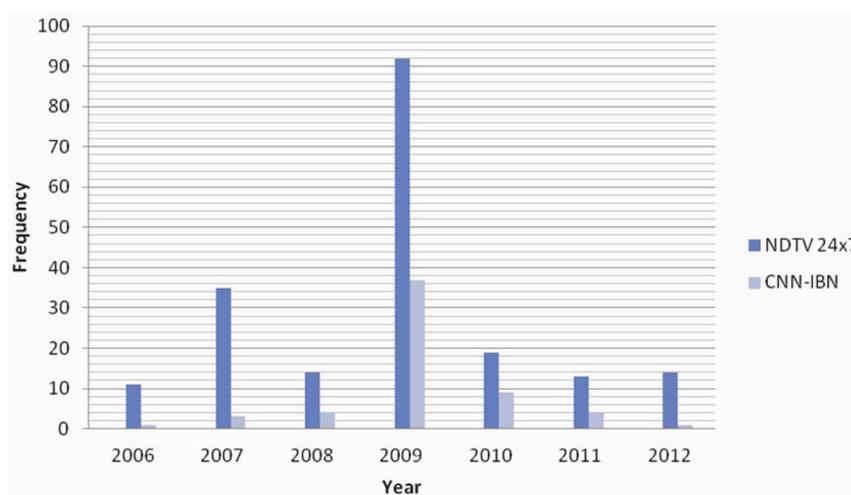


Figure 2. Total number of episodes on NDTV 24x7 and CNN-IBN covering climate change.

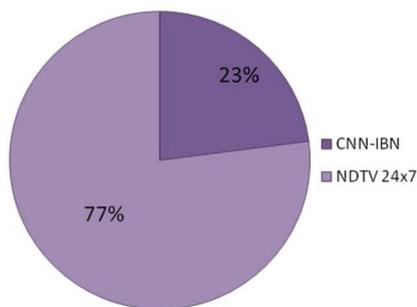


Figure 1. Climate change news coverage on CNN-IBN and NDTV 24x7 during 2006–2012.

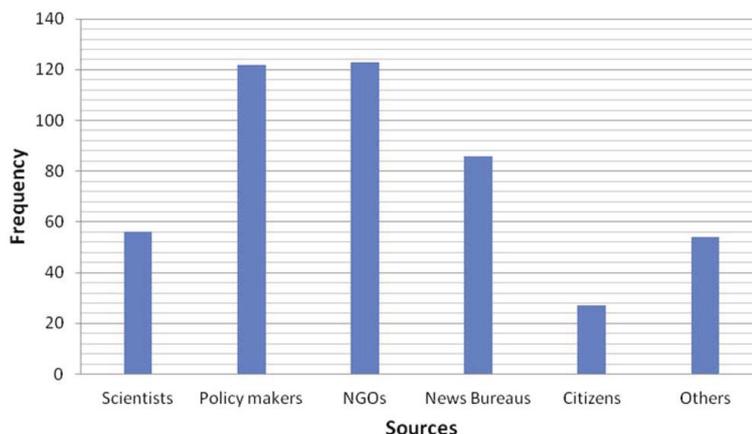


Figure 3. Sources used by NDTV 24x7 and CNN-IBN during 2006–2012.

with the IPCC report. However, the report was confusing because all the Indian water, food security, fisheries and biodiversity problems were attributed to climate change. The projections of temperature rising up to 5.8°C by 2100 and sea level rise were framed as ‘The planet is doomed’ by the NDTV 24×7 coverage on 13 February 2007. At the same time, the media also covered a lot of awareness campaigns by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like switching off lights for an hour. The highest coverage in both CNN-IBN and NDTV 24×7 was in the year 2009. This happened because of the Conference of the Parties (COP) meeting in Copenhagen in 2009, which was considered important for both the developed and developing countries to control carbon emissions so that the temperature rise does not reach beyond 2°C by 2050. This summit discussed about the mandatory emission cuts for individual countries. The debate over who should cut how much emission was a serious issue as the developed countries wanted to ignore their past emissions and instead forced the developing countries to cut their emissions, thus affecting these growing economies. The developing countries disagreed with that view and argued for a proper agreement which would make the developed countries accountable for their past emissions and

which would prescribe transfer of funds and technology from the developed countries to solve the problem. India’s stand was not to have a legally binding cut in emissions, as it is a growing economy and several areas in the country still do not have access to electricity.

From Figure 3, it is evident that policy makers and NGOs were the dominant sources used by NDTV 24×7 and CNN-IBN. A 2009 video from NDTV 24×7 titled ‘Legally binding cuts out of question’ carried the lead statement of the then Indian Environment Minister, Jairam Ramesh¹⁰. Another statement from the then Minister explains how the US climate change drafts are completely unacceptable in the case of India. A programme by NDTV 24×7 titled ‘Chaos in Copenhagen’ clearly showed how the developed countries were blocking the efforts of the developing countries to have an equitable agreement¹¹.

More public engagement will happen only if there is more climate change news from the media. Since it is difficult for the media to give exclusive stories on climate change, a joint collaboration among Government, NGOs and the media is needed to keep the issue alive. Only when the issue is discussed more in the public arena, will there be a chance of action at the policy level. With proper implementations of policies, India will

be able to tackle this global problem and minimize the impact of climate change on the people and protect their livelihoods.

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Growth of water purification technologies in the era of ‘regulatory vacuum’ in India

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Privatization and commodification of drinking water provisioning is a key phenomenon of ‘post-liberalization’ India¹. A rapid and sustained growth in bottled water consumption and a matching increase in home purification technologies have largely been the backbone of this process. During the last decade and a half, the consumption of bottled water saw a rapid growth.

According to some market reports the industry was pegged at USD 1454 million by 2011 and supposed to reach USD 3925 million by 2017 (ref. 2). Similarly,

home purification technology is expected to increase from USD 522.40 in 2012 to USD 1142.75 in 2015 (refs 3, 4). Rapid, and uneven urbanization and inadequacy of the existing institutional mechanisms to ensure good quality drinking water to the ever-increasing urban population remain crucial for growth of these ‘alternatives’⁵. Along with the different aspects of ‘access’-related issues with drinking water, in fact, the popular perception of ‘quality’ has also undergone a sea change in the last two decades. For drinking water, the publication of a re-

port by the Centre for Science and Environment showing presence of pesticides in bottled water of some established brands has also been a game changer⁶. This report created unprecedented media coverage on the issue, and led to formation of the First Joint Parliamentary Committee on public health in independent India. This episode not only influenced the public perception about water quality, but also altered the business landscape for water purification technologies in India. The next few years witnessed extraordinary growth of water