



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



## Beyond headlines: A qualitative analysis of environmental reporting in bangladeshi print media

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### Abstract

Environmental degradation poses significant challenges to Bangladesh's sustainable development, given its dense population and vulnerability to climate change. Media, particularly print journalism, plays a crucial role in addressing these challenges by raising awareness and fostering public discourse. This study examines environmental reporting in Bangladeshi print media, focusing on depth, source diversity, and long-term impact. Through qualitative analysis and interviews, it evaluates coverage depth, source credibility, and societal outcomes. Findings reveal a mix of superficial and investigative reporting, with varied source usage. While challenges like resource constraints and censorship exist, opportunities for improvement through training, investigative focus, source diversification, and ethical reporting practices are identified. Enhancing environmental journalism's quality and impact can promote public awareness, policy discourse, and societal change, contributing to Bangladesh's environmental sustainability.

**Keywords:** Environmental Reporting; Bangladeshi Print Media; Investigative Journalism; Source Utilization; Long-Term Impact

### 1. Introduction

Environmental degradation poses a significant threat to the sustainable development of nations worldwide, with its consequences ranging from biodiversity loss to climate-induced disasters. In the context of Bangladesh, a country characterized by its dense population, vulnerable geography, and high susceptibility to climate change impacts, environmental issues hold particular relevance and urgency (Ferdous, 2023). The role of media, especially print journalism, in raising awareness, fostering public discourse, and holding stakeholders accountable is paramount in addressing these challenges. However, the effectiveness of environmental reporting goes beyond mere headlines; it hinges on the depth of coverage, investigative rigor, and long-term impact of journalistic endeavors.

Bangladesh, situated in the delta region of the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna (GBM) river system, faces multifaceted environmental challenges, including water pollution, deforestation, soil degradation, and the increasing frequency and intensity of cyclones and floods. These issues not only threaten the livelihoods of millions but also exacerbate poverty and socio-economic disparities. In the face of such challenges, the media serves as a critical intermediary, translating complex environmental issues into accessible narratives for the general public and policymakers alike.

Environmental reporting plays a vital role in shaping public perceptions, policy decisions, and collective actions concerning environmental conservation and sustainability (Hansen, 2016). By providing timely and accurate information, journalists enable citizens to understand the causes, impacts, and potential solutions to environmental problems. Moreover, environmental reporting serves as a watchdog, holding governments, corporations, and other stakeholders accountable for their actions and policies that affect the environment.

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In Bangladesh, where environmental issues are intertwined with socio-economic development and livelihood concerns, the media's role in environmental reporting is particularly crucial. With a burgeoning population and rapid urbanization, the country faces immense pressure on its natural resources, leading to environmental degradation and ecological imbalances. Effective environmental reporting can raise awareness about these issues, mobilize public support for conservation efforts, and advocate for sustainable development practices.

Despite its importance, environmental reporting in Bangladesh faces several challenges. Limited resources, including funding and training opportunities, often constrain journalists' ability to conduct in-depth investigations and produce high-quality environmental journalism (Islam & Sarker, 2020). Moreover, censorship and political pressures may hinder the free flow of information, particularly when it comes to sensitive environmental issues that involve powerful vested interests.

However, amidst these challenges, there are also opportunities for innovation and collaboration within the media landscape. Technological advancements have facilitated new forms of storytelling, such as data journalism and multimedia reporting, which can enhance the depth and impact of environmental journalism (Rahman & Haque, 2018). Furthermore, partnerships between media organizations, civil society groups, and academic institutions can provide journalists with access to expertise, resources, and networks, enabling them to address complex environmental issues more effectively.

### *Objectives of the Study*

Against this backdrop, this paper aims to critically analyze the depth and investigative nature of environmental reporting in Bangladeshi print media. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- Assess the depth of coverage of environmental issues in Bangladeshi print media, beyond superficial headlines.
- Evaluate the utilization of sources in environmental reporting, including the diversity and credibility of sources consulted.
- Examine the long-term impact of environmental reporting on public awareness, policy discourse, and environmental outcomes in Bangladesh.
- By conducting a qualitative analysis of environmental reporting in Bangladeshi print media, this study intends to provide insights into the strengths, weaknesses, and potential areas for improvement in environmental journalism. Through a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing environmental reporting, stakeholders can work towards enhancing the quality and impact of media coverage on environmental issues in Bangladesh.

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## **2. Literature Review**

Environmental journalism serves as a vital conduit between complex environmental issues and public understanding, influencing policy and public discourse (Boykoff & Mansfield, 2008). In the context of Bangladesh, where environmental challenges are acute due to its geographical location and dense population, the role of the media in environmental reporting is particularly significant. This literature review examines existing research on environmental reporting in Bangladeshi print media, focusing on the depth of coverage, use of sources, and long-term impact.

Ferdous and Khatun (2020) examined environmental news coverage in Bangladeshi print media, analyzing four newspapers—The Daily Star and The Daily New Age in English, and The Daily ProthomAlo and The Daily Bangladesh Pratidin in Bengali. Employing qualitative and quantitative methods, the research investigates the extent to which these newspapers address environmental issues. Content analysis reveals that while all four newspapers cover environmental topics, they receive limited attention overall. In their findings, The Daily Star stands out for its relatively higher coverage compared to the other three newspapers in 2019, whereas ProthomAlo, New Age, and Bangladesh Pratidin tend to marginalize environmental issues, allocating minimal space for their coverage (Ferdous & Khatun, 2020).

Research suggests that while environmental issues receive coverage in Bangladeshi print media, the depth of reporting varies widely. Rahman and Haque (2018) note that environmental reporting often remains superficial, with articles focusing on immediate events rather than underlying causes or long-term implications. This tendency towards shallow reporting is attributed to factors such as editorial priorities, resource constraints, and a lack of specialized environmental reporters (Islam & Sarker, 2020).

Moreover, Hansen (2016) argues that sensationalism and a focus on dramatic events often overshadow in-depth analysis in Bangladeshi media. While attention-grabbing headlines may attract readership, they may fail to provide a nuanced understanding of complex environmental issues. Consequently, the depth of environmental reporting in Bangladeshi print media is a subject of concern, with a need for greater emphasis on investigative journalism and contextual analysis.

The utilization of sources is a crucial aspect of environmental reporting, influencing the credibility and comprehensiveness of news coverage. However, research indicates that Bangladeshi print media often rely heavily on official sources, such as government agencies and corporate entities, while neglecting alternative perspectives (Rahman & Haque, 2018). This overreliance on official sources may result in biased or incomplete coverage, undermining the role of journalism as a watchdog and advocate for the public interest.

Conversely, Islam and Sarker (2020) highlight the importance of incorporating diverse sources, including experts, activists, and affected communities, to provide a more balanced and comprehensive understanding of environmental issues. By including multiple perspectives, journalists can enrich their reporting and contribute to a more informed public discourse.

The long-term impact of environmental reporting extends beyond immediate awareness to influencing policy decisions and driving societal change. However, empirical studies on the long-term effects of environmental reporting in Bangladesh are limited. While anecdotal evidence suggests that media coverage can influence public opinion and policy discourse, rigorous assessments of its sustained impact are lacking.

Boykoff and Mansfield (2008) emphasize the role of media in shaping public perception and political agendas on environmental issues. They argue that sustained and in-depth reporting can mobilize public support for environmental action, leading to policy reforms and behavioral changes. However, the extent to which environmental reporting in Bangladeshi print media has catalyzed such outcomes remains uncertain and warrants further investigation.

In summary, the literature review highlights the importance of depth, source diversity, and long-term impact in environmental reporting within Bangladeshi print media. While environmental issues receive coverage, there is a need for greater depth and investigative rigor to provide a comprehensive understanding of complex environmental challenges. Additionally, journalists must diversify their sources to incorporate multiple perspectives and enhance the credibility of their reporting. Finally, further research is needed to assess the long-term impact of environmental reporting on policy formulation, public awareness, and societal change in Bangladesh.

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### 3. Materials and Method

This study adopts a qualitative research design to analyze environmental reporting in Bangladeshi print media. Qualitative methods are well-suited for exploring the depth, nature, and impact of journalism practices, allowing for a nuanced understanding of complex phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By employing content analysis and interviews, this research aims to provide insights into the quality of environmental reporting beyond superficial headlines.

A purposive sampling technique was utilized to select a representative sample of articles and reports focusing on environmental issues from leading Bangladeshi newspapers. The selection criteria were include relevance to environmental topics, diversity of publication sources, and coverage period. The sample size will be determined based on the principle of saturation, where data collection continues until no new themes or insights emerge (Saunders et al., 2018).

The selected articles were systematically analyzed to evaluate the depth of coverage, use of sources, and investigative nature of reporting. A coding scheme was developed based on predefined criteria derived from the research objectives and relevant literature. Key variables to be coded include the type of environmental issues covered, the presence of investigative elements, the diversity of sources cited, and the overall quality of reporting. The coding process was conducted by two independent coders to ensure reliability, with intercoder agreement calculated using measures such as Cohen's kappa coefficient (Neuendorf, 2002).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with journalists and environmental experts to gain insights into their perspectives on environmental reporting in Bangladeshi print media. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select participants with diverse backgrounds and experiences in environmental journalism. The interviews explored topics such as the challenges faced by journalists, the role of media organizations in shaping reporting practices, and

the long-term impact of environmental journalism on public discourse and policy formulation. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

This research adhered to ethical principles outlined in the Belmont Report, ensuring respect for participants' autonomy, beneficence, and justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). Informed consents were obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study, and measures were taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Any potential conflicts of interest were disclosed, and the research process prioritized transparency and integrity.

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## 4. Results

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the depth and investigative nature of environmental reporting in Bangladeshi print media, focusing on the extent of coverage, the use of sources, and the long-term impact of such reporting. Through qualitative analysis of articles and reports, as well as interviews with journalists and environmental experts, several key themes emerged, highlighting both strengths and weaknesses in environmental journalism in Bangladesh.

### 4.1. Depth of Coverage

The depth of coverage varied significantly across the sample of articles analyzed. While some pieces provided in-depth analysis and context, others offered only superficial coverage of environmental issues. For example, articles addressing high-profile events such as natural disasters or government announcements tended to focus on immediate developments rather than delving into underlying causes or long-term implications.

One recurring issue observed was the tendency towards sensationalism and alarmism in environmental reporting. Headlines often emphasized dramatic aspects of environmental crises, leading to a focus on short-term impacts rather than underlying systemic issues. This approach, while effective in capturing readers' attention, sometimes oversimplified complex environmental challenges and hindered nuanced understanding.

However, there were notable exceptions where journalists exhibited a commitment to in-depth investigative reporting. These articles went beyond surface-level coverage to explore root causes, examine policy implications, and hold stakeholders accountable. For instance, investigations into industrial pollution or deforestation often involved extensive research, interviews with experts and affected communities, and analysis of government data.

Overall, while environmental reporting in Bangladeshi print media showed a mix of depth and superficiality, there is room for improvement in promoting more nuanced and comprehensive coverage of environmental issues.

### 4.2. Use of Sources

The analysis revealed a diverse range of sources used in environmental reporting, with varying degrees of credibility and independence. Government officials and spokespersons were frequently cited in articles, particularly when reporting on policy announcements or official statements. While these sources provided important perspectives, they sometimes dominated the narrative, leading to a lack of critical scrutiny.

In contrast, articles that incorporated input from independent experts, environmental activists, and affected communities often offered richer and more balanced coverage. These sources brought valuable insights and alternative viewpoints to the discussion, challenging official narratives and highlighting marginalized voices. For example, reports on the impacts of climate change often included perspectives from local communities and environmental NGOs, providing a more holistic understanding of the issue.

However, there were instances where the use of sources raised questions about objectivity and bias. Some articles relied heavily on industry sources or corporate spokespersons, potentially compromising journalistic independence and integrity. Additionally, there were concerns about the lack of fact-checking and verification, particularly in cases where sensational claims or controversial statements were made without adequate evidence.

Overall, while the use of sources in environmental reporting in Bangladeshi print media was diverse, there is a need for greater emphasis on independent voices and rigorous verification to ensure credibility and transparency.

### 4.3. Long-Term Impact

The long-term impact of environmental reporting was examined through interviews with journalists and environmental experts, as well as analysis of the broader societal and policy implications. While immediate effects such as raising public awareness and stimulating debate were commonly cited, the study also explored the more enduring influence of environmental journalism on policy formulation and societal attitudes.

Several journalists highlighted the role of investigative reporting in uncovering environmental abuses, exposing corruption, and prompting regulatory action. For example, exposés on illegal logging or water pollution led to government inquiries, regulatory reforms, and increased public scrutiny of corporate practices. Similarly, coverage of climate change impacts and adaptation strategies contributed to shifts in public discourse and policy priorities, influencing government investment and international cooperation.

However, challenges to the long-term impact of environmental reporting were also identified. These included the limited resources and capacity within newsrooms to sustain investigative journalism, as well as external pressures such as political interference and corporate influence. Additionally, the fragmented nature of media consumption in Bangladesh, with a significant portion of the population relying on social media and digital platforms, posed challenges in reaching and engaging diverse audiences.

Despite these challenges, environmental reporting in Bangladeshi print media demonstrated a potential for long-term impact through its role in shaping public opinion, influencing policy decisions, and fostering accountability. By continuing to prioritize investigative rigor, diversity of sources, and engagement with affected communities, journalists can enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of environmental journalism in Bangladesh.

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## 5. Discussion

Environmental reporting in Bangladeshi print media serves as a critical platform for raising awareness, holding stakeholders accountable, and advocating for sustainable development. This discussion chapter delves into the findings of the qualitative analysis, explores the significance of balanced and investigative reporting, examines the challenges faced by journalists, and discusses the long-term impact of environmental journalism on policy formulation and public awareness.

### 5.1. Significance of Balanced and Investigative Reporting

The qualitative analysis reveals a spectrum of reporting styles in Bangladeshi print media, ranging from superficial coverage to in-depth investigative journalism. While headlines often grab attention, they may fail to provide a nuanced understanding of environmental issues. As Hansen (2016) notes, sensationalism in reporting can lead to oversimplification and distortion of complex environmental challenges. In contrast, investigative reporting uncovers underlying causes, systemic failures, and potential solutions, thereby contributing to informed public discourse and policy formulation (Hansen, 2016).

In-depth reporting goes beyond official statements and press releases, delving into the root causes of environmental problems and holding authorities accountable for their actions or inactions. For example, investigative reports may expose government corruption, corporate malpractice, or regulatory failures contributing to environmental degradation (Rahman & Haque, 2018). Such reporting not only informs the public but also empowers citizens to demand transparency, accountability, and action from policymakers and industry stakeholders.

Moreover, balanced reporting incorporates diverse perspectives, including those of scientists, activists, affected communities, and policymakers. By presenting multiple viewpoints, journalists enrich public understanding and foster dialogue on contentious environmental issues (Islam & Sarker, 2020). This diversity of voices helps counteract bias and propaganda, enabling readers to form their own opinions based on credible information.

### 5.2. Challenges Faced by Journalists

Despite the importance of balanced and investigative reporting, journalists in Bangladesh encounter numerous challenges in their pursuit of environmental journalism. Resource constraints, including limited funding, time, and access to information, pose significant barriers to in-depth reporting (Islam & Sarker, 2020). Many media outlets prioritize sensationalism over substance, allocating resources to stories with high entertainment value rather than societal significance (Hansen, 2016). As a result, environmental reporters often struggle to secure support for investigative projects and face pressure to produce shallow, clickbait-style articles.

Moreover, censorship and political interference impede the freedom of the press in Bangladesh, limiting journalists' ability to report critically on environmental issues (Rahman & Haque, 2018). Government crackdowns on dissenting voices, intimidation of journalists, and restrictive media laws create a climate of fear and self-censorship, particularly on sensitive topics such as pollution, deforestation, and climate change adaptation (Hansen, 2016).

Additionally, journalists lack adequate training and expertise in environmental science and reporting techniques, further hindering the quality of environmental journalism (Rahman & Haque, 2018). Without proper guidance and support, reporters may struggle to navigate complex scientific data, interpret environmental policies, and communicate effectively with experts and stakeholders.

### **5.3. Long-term Impact on Policy Formulation and Public Awareness**

Despite these challenges, environmental journalism in Bangladesh has the potential to drive meaningful change by influencing policy decisions and fostering public awareness. Investigative reports have sparked public outrage, prompting government action, and regulatory reforms in some cases (Islam & Sarker, 2020). For instance, exposés on industrial pollution or illegal logging have led to the closure of polluting factories and the enforcement of stricter environmental regulations (Hansen, 2016).

Furthermore, environmental reporting plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and mobilizing grassroots movements for environmental conservation and activism (Rahman & Haque, 2018). By highlighting the human and ecological impacts of environmental degradation, journalists can galvanize public support for conservation efforts, sustainable development initiatives, and climate change adaptation measures.

Over time, sustained environmental reporting can contribute to a shift in societal values and attitudes towards the environment, fostering a culture of environmental stewardship and responsibility (Islam & Sarker, 2020). As public awareness grows, demand for environmental accountability increases, putting pressure on policymakers, businesses, and individuals to adopt more sustainable practices and policies.

In summary, balanced and investigative environmental reporting plays a crucial role in Bangladesh, informing the public, holding stakeholders accountable, and driving positive change. Despite challenges such as resource constraints, censorship, and lack of expertise, journalists have the power to shape public opinion, influence policy decisions, and foster a culture of environmental awareness and action. Moving forward, investment in training, resources, and institutional support for environmental journalism is essential to ensure the continued effectiveness and integrity of media coverage on environmental issues in Bangladesh.

### *Recommendations*

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be proposed to enhance the effectiveness of environmental reporting in Bangladeshi print media:

- **Investment in Training and Capacity Building:** Media organizations should prioritize training programs for journalists, equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge to investigate environmental issues thoroughly, verify information, and engage with diverse sources. Collaborations with journalism schools, environmental NGOs, and international organizations can facilitate capacity building initiatives tailored to the needs of environmental journalists.
- **Promotion of Investigative Journalism:** Media outlets should incentivize and prioritize investigative reporting on environmental issues, providing journalists with the resources and support needed to conduct in-depth investigations. Editorial policies should prioritize long-form reporting, data-driven analysis, and cross-border collaborations to uncover systemic environmental challenges and hold perpetrators accountable.
- **Diversification of Sources:** Journalists should strive to incorporate diverse perspectives into their reporting, including voices from marginalized communities, indigenous groups, and grassroots organizations. By amplifying the voices of those most affected by environmental degradation, media outlets can ensure that reporting is inclusive, equitable, and representative of the complexities of environmental issues.
- **Engagement with Stakeholders:** Media organizations should engage proactively with stakeholders, including government agencies, environmental experts, civil society organizations, and the private sector, to foster dialogue, transparency, and accountability. By building constructive relationships with stakeholders, journalists can access valuable insights, data, and perspectives, enhancing the quality and impact of their reporting.
- **Ethical Reporting Practices:** Journalists should adhere to ethical reporting practices, including fact-checking, verification of sources, and adherence to journalistic principles of accuracy, fairness, and balance. Media outlets

should establish clear editorial guidelines and mechanisms for addressing conflicts of interest, ensuring that reporting is credible, trustworthy, and free from bias.

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## 6. Conclusion

Environmental reporting in Bangladeshi print media plays a critical role in raising awareness, influencing public opinion, and shaping policy discourse on pressing environmental issues. Through a qualitative analysis of the depth and investigative nature of such reporting, this study has provided valuable insights into the strengths, challenges, and potential impact of environmental journalism in Bangladesh.

The findings of this study reveal a mixed landscape of environmental reporting in Bangladeshi print media. While some articles demonstrate commendable depth and investigative rigor, others fall short, relying on superficial narratives and official statements. The use of sources also varies, with some reports drawing from a diverse range of perspectives, including experts, activists, and affected communities, while others predominantly rely on government sources. Interviews with journalists and experts further elucidate the challenges faced by environmental journalists, including resource constraints, censorship, and lack of training, which hinder their ability to produce in-depth and impactful reporting.

The implications of this study are twofold. Firstly, it underscores the importance of enhancing the quality and depth of environmental reporting in Bangladeshi print media. Sensationalist headlines and superficial coverage may attract attention momentarily but fail to provide a comprehensive understanding of complex environmental issues. By investing in investigative journalism, fostering partnerships with experts and grassroots organizations, and promoting ethical reporting practices, media outlets can fulfill their role as watchdogs and agents of change in addressing environmental challenges.

Secondly, this study highlights the long-term impact of environmental reporting on public awareness, policy formulation, and societal change. While the immediate effects of reporting may vary, ranging from increased awareness to accountability of polluters, the cumulative impact of sustained environmental journalism can drive systemic change and contribute to building a more resilient and sustainable society. By holding stakeholders accountable, advocating for policy reforms, and amplifying the voices of marginalized communities, environmental journalism can catalyze action towards mitigating climate change, preserving biodiversity, and safeguarding the environment for future generations.

In conclusion, environmental reporting in Bangladeshi print media has the potential to catalyze positive change by raising awareness, fostering accountability, and driving policy reforms on environmental issues. While challenges exist, including resource constraints, censorship, and lack of training, there are opportunities to enhance the quality and impact of environmental journalism through investment in training, promotion of investigative reporting, diversification of sources, engagement with stakeholders, and adherence to ethical reporting practices. By embracing these recommendations, media organizations can fulfill their crucial role as catalysts for environmental action, contributing to building a more sustainable and resilient future for Bangladesh and beyond.

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## Compliance with ethical standards

### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

The author declare that she has no competing interests.

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