

Political Economy of Environmental Reporting in Kerala Newspapers: Negotiating Development versus Ecology..

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Abstract

This study addresses the matters regarding policies and commercial pressures that rely on corporate sources and its effects on print media reporting. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of environmental news coverage within traditional reporting methods, which need to be modified according to the demands of the era of globalization. The secular democratic society needs reports of the emergence and disappearance of environmental movements, both of regional and national importance and the underreported mass movements. The effects of environmental issues and concerns of environmentalists around the globe should be addressed with the real life experiences for the broader thematic evaluations and matters regarding private and public sector policy agendas. This study highlights the matters which are primarily operating as the driven factors like state politics and policy-oriented market. Development narrative propaganda that normalises environmental degradation is also a matter for discussion in this study. The public perception of ecology and environment are shaped by the political discourses discussing in media, limits critical discussion on sustainable development and alternatives....

Keywords: Political economy, Environmental reporting, Kerala newspapers, Development discourse, Ecological conflict..

INTRODUCTION

Kerala environmental reporting is a juggernaut game whereby the role of media as a watchdog institution is normally opposed to its financial sustainability. Though big dailies are supposed to check strong interests, the ironical situation arises because they rely on government and corporate advertisements (Chomsky and Herman, 1988). This bias can be most noticeable in the coverage of massive developments like the Silver Line or Vizhinjam Port; where the news factory is dependent on the organizations that finance such projects, the reporting process can be biased in order to generate more economic returns and less environmental risks (Joseph and Arunkumar, 2022). The press is a mediator between the natural cultural conflict between scientific conservation and local survivability, in addition to economic profits. The local newspapers in such cases develop between the urban-based environmentalism and the livelihood interests of the rural society, in the event that draconian rules are being offered by the professionals, such as those in the Gadgil or Kasturirangan reports (Gadgil, 2023; Menon et al., 2025). The result is the simplification of complex ecological science into a dialect of community defense whereby a short-term economic security often dominates over long-term conservation objectives (Nambiar, 2024). It is not just the information that is distributed by such media atmosphere which barricades the privileges of the same individuals who are in the center of the ecological change (Azad et al., 2024; Petley, 2024). Finally, one should look at the politics of silence and brand-based environmentalism. By ignoring the structural issues like industrial contamination or illegal quarrying, the newspapers will be able to concentrate on establishing a socially responsible image through green campaigns (Habeeb Rahman and Muhammadali, 2023). This favouritism will tend to be unfamiliar to the vulnerable populations who live in the environment depending on their interests since middle-class issues like garbage dumping in urban places are bending their interests (Prabhakar, 2023). This gap between the outward environmentalism and the truth of environmental justice spilled to the most penniless individuals is one of the grave sectors that the media reform is targeting. The nature of the relationship between the environmental advocacy and the regional media houses is usually complicated by the political and corporate interests (Mosco, 2009).

Background of the Study

The environment discourse by the regional media that is in the Malayalam language is shaped in a complex arrangement of political, economic, and seasonal influences that have a tendency of distorting the scientific fact. The existing data is empirical evidence that the overall population has a near consensus concerning political affiliation of a newspaper as the primary prism through which the environmental issue is seen. Rather than serving

as a scientific coverage, the environmental news is being used as a political weapon to either legitimize or discredit a particular political agenda, (Chomsky and Herman, 1988). The ecological politicization results in a polarizing whole perception, of which the ecological well-being in the long term is diminished to the discourse requirements of political parties (Thomas, 2021). That implies a general development-first bias, which is concerned with the economic growth of the areas and does not take into account the ecological sustainability (Heller, 1999; Saravanan, 2023). This bias is further compounded after an apparent unequal coverage of the media platform; as the people in government and supporting development are provided to the vital phase, those in the grassroots and the locals are typically relegated to the periphery. This creates a biased popular discourse where conservation problems become sidelined (Dutta, 2021; Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam, 2021). This institutional bias is also augmented by this institutional bias which is referred to as corporate shielding wherein certain large-scale firms who indulge in industrial pollution or ecological destruction are allegedly not referred by the newspapers. The grounds of such omissions are the economic reliance on corporate advertising in the long term, which is in fact a stifler of investigative journalism and blurs the eyes of the population regarding the actual perpetrators of the local devastation of nature (Chomsky and Herman, 1988; Nambiar, 2024). Finally, a certain time bias is also stipulated by the research as a seasonal sensitivity. The environment coverage is registered to be the greatest in the monsoon season that revolves around news of occurrences such as floods and landslides and that slows during the summer seasons. Such a responsive and disaster-centered practice is in no way effective in the creation of an ordinary culture of active conservation or ecological health monitoring on an annual basis (Azad et al., 2024; Petley, 2024; Menon et al., 2025). Combined, these inferences suggest that the regional media has polarization on two levels, political and corporate, distorting the environmental reality so that it does not enable the masses to see the ecological crisis of the present day without issues.

Statement of problem

This balancing act of the roles of the media as the watchdog and its economic security is precariously handled, which is one of the distinct characteristics of the environmental journalism in Kerala. Despite the fact that newspapers are at least expected to be a check to power, they have come to be over dependent financially on the governmental and corporate advertisements, which has brought a structural irony to the impediment of objectivity in reporting (Chomsky and Herman, 1988). The form of such bias is the first narrative of development, where projects like the Silver Line or Vizhinjam Port are to be sold by downplaying environmental risks to bring about economic gains (Joseph and Arunkumar, 2022). In addition, the state-led developmental rhetoric is widely differentiated by the grass-root activism. The media houses are likely to act as the decoders of the complicated ecological science that can be translated into a community defense language, making most or all choices to advance the interests of the immediate livelihood over the long-term conservation efforts (Gadgil, 2023; Nambiar, 2024). This is coupled with a politics of silence where the newspapers call on brand-based green movements like the SEED to create social capital and in the process protect the corporate polluters by not allowing the footprints to be tracked by investigative journalism (Habeeb Rahman and Muhammadali, 2023). The fact that it is highly seasonally sensitive i.e., it is more covered during monsoon disasters but it is less covered during summer temperature is also indicative that it has an event-based strategy rather than a commitment to environmental health (Azad et al., 2024). Lastly, these partisanizing prismatic political and corporate dependence invert the environmental justice whereby the vulnerable segments are pushed to the periphery and the society oblivious of the reality of ecological catastrophes of the area.

Significance of study

The Malayalam newspapers extensively offer news reportage in an over-localized manner in which the abstract environmental notions are converted into real time concerns within the community. Not only do they make up a considerable part of literacy, but are also a demanding institution of the culture, supplying the masses with the consciousness of ecology (Jeffrey, 1992). It is not the first time that journalism and major social movements have collaborated with big dailies like green movements, water conservation movements in schools, and others (Ninan, 2007). The examples of such campaign effects demonstrate the fact that the possibility that the media can be interpreted as possessing the power to mobilize citizens is real and can be usually supported by a commercial model that turns the newspaper into a social marketer because of the need to set brand responsibilities and corporate pledges (Dutta, 2021). The role of the vernacular press in environmental disputes in land use or conservation of the Western Ghats is also concerned with negotiation (Gadgil, 2023). Being oriented to their rural and settler-farmer audiences, the Malayalam dailies are very sensitive with the worries of their audiences more than those of their English counterparts. This sensibility is usually bundled as an ecological reportage, such as Gadgil or Kasturirangan, frequently as a threat to the local livelihoods or an anti-farmer policy (Chadha and Guha, 2022; Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam, 2021). It is within this strangle that a latent culture of the media of the region is depicted as being torn between a scientific need to safeguard and the desperate economic requirements of its very core viewer (Saravanan, 2023). By doing so, it will be more localized, and less globalized, since it is

aimed at safeguarding the rights of society, and its development (Padmanabhan, 2021). Moreover, environmental risk and discourse agenda is being developed by the Malayalam journalism politics at this point. Though the district-level versions are also an essential platform to publish the coverage on the local pollution and unlawful quarrying, the editorial position is usually tied to the political party or the popularity of the massive advertisements (Thomas, 2021). It also provides certain selectivity in prioritising: the industrial projects are represented as the most progress-oriented, and the ecological activism of people of no use are relegated to the background (Heller, 1999).

1.4 Scope of study

The regional media and environmental awareness dependency is a very organised dependence whereby the ecological stability is mostly secondary to economic growth using the Political Economy of Development (Mosco, 2009; Saravanan, 2023). Infrastructure projects on a large scale, such as Silver Line (K-Rail) or the Vizhinjam Port, are often framed in a way that the project is an inevitable move towards the development of the region, and little or no concern with the scientific and activist explanation of the future environmental costs of the infrastructural project (Heller, 1999; Joseph and Arunkumar, 2022). This ideological tilt is further complicated by the fact that the media industry has an economic character. The ethical dilemma that is emphasized by the observational publicity is the reality that certain advertisements on real estate and quarrying activities are placed in the same newspapers that report about disastrous landslides that occur in the case of such unscientific use of the land (Azad et al., 2024). This paradox suggests that economic dependency of the newspapers on such sectors was incapable of offering a well being of their investigative reports concerning environmental degradation (Chomsky and Herman, 1988). There is also an institutional crisis of integrity and transparency that is experienced in the paper. A near-universal agreement within society is that political affiliations of media organisations in fact influence their editorial policy on the environment to the extent that it converts the scientific issues into partisan political narratives (Thomas, 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Menon, Kunnumpurath, and Jisha (2025): The contemporary commodification of disaster. The research is significant in that it looks ahead in discussing the transition of ecological literacy to their ecological disaster tourism discourses, where tragedy is being partaken as spectacle, not to demand systemic transformation.

Nambiar (2024): Determines a typological standard. The research is essential in classifying the manner in which the Indian media houses draw the line between accountability journalism and simple expert led reporting, in the effort of determining the esoteric and engaging coverage gap in regional news.

Azad et al. (2024): offers temporal information about the media trends. This research satisfies the hypothesis of seasonal sensitivity, having identified the Wayanad disaster of 2024 as example of media involvement being reactive and event-driven, but not proactive.

Gadgil (2023): Can be regarded as a personal ecological baseline. Being one of the main participants of the Western Ghats conservation discourse, Gadgil has vital insights in terms of the analysis of the lack of connection between scientific professional warnings on the one hand and the presentation of local livelihood anxieties by the media on the other hand.

Habeeb Rahman & Muhammadali (2023): Covers a language and geographical peculiarity. This article is crucial to the comprehension of how the Malayalam-language press, which is differentiated by the national English media, circulates certain trends of false information and strategic silence in respect to local environmental threats.

Prabhakar (2023): It is based on the Environmental Justice model. The research is essential to the explanation of the bias of the Kerala journalism towards classes as so many concerns of the urban middle-class waste management tend to overshadow the marginalization of the peri-urban and rural population through a systemic approach.

Joseph, Arunkumar (2022): Fills the policy-perception gap. This study can enable the researcher to triangulate scientific lapses in reporting about the project such as the Silver Line by explaining the technical failures of the Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs).

Thomas (2021): Gives a methodological precursor to content analysis. The two frames identified in this study, namely responsibility and human-interest, present the linguistic tools to ascertain the way in which the newspapers of Kerala distribute responsibility when there is an environmental disaster.

Mosco (2009): Provides the Political Economy macro-lens. The work by Mosco is essential to the theorizing of the commodification of nature, and the research can use this to argue that the media houses tend to bury the fact of environmental degradation to preserve the overall economic ecosystem of their parent companies.

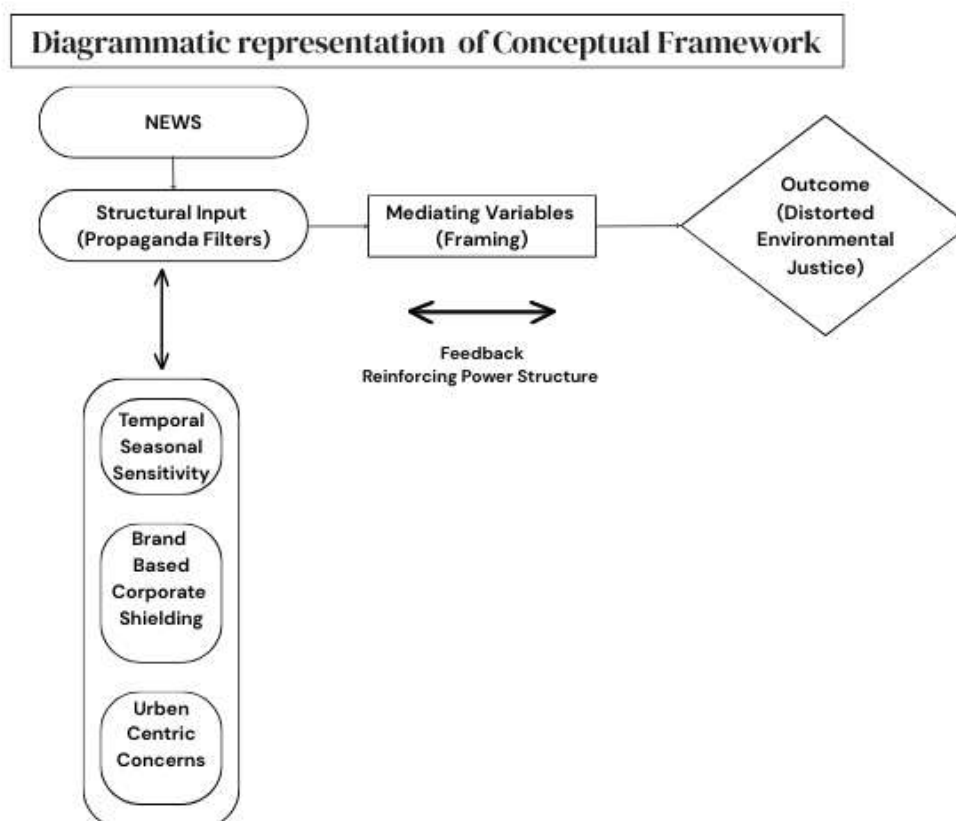
Chomsky & Herman (1988): This gives the structural outline of the study. Using the "Propaganda Model," this study recognizes the inherent limitation of the independence of Kerala mainstream press by its filters in ownership and advertising revenue, which requires an inquiry into the concept of manufactured consent insofar as state-led development is concerned

Theoretical framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is Political Economy of Communication (PEC) and is primarily founded on Propaganda Model that was formulated by Chomsky and Herman (1988). This model implies that the media content can never be a pure reflection of the reality but it is pre-processed in the form of structural constraints, i.e. the privately owned media and advertising licensing. The latter filtering alienates the dissent and creates consent to state and corporate agendas by ensuring that news is acceptable to the profit maximising agendas of dominant elite (Mosco, 2009). The theory can be applied to the regional setting in Kerala in the sense that the Malayalam dailies is financially dependent on government and industrial advertisement thus providing a bias of development-first. This is the kind of economic reliance that necessitates the sterilization of the environmental hazard of mega-projects like the Silver Line or Vizhinjam Port to make sure that there are good relationships with the financiers (Joseph and Arunkumar, 2022). Moreover, the paper has integrated Framing Theory, whereby the media houses are developed into gatekeepers. By employing the human-interest frame or the frame of responsibility, the press understands complex scientific warnings, such as the Gadgil Report, as a community-specific version of the danger or a direct menace to the livelihoods (Thomas, 2021). The framework is a mixture of PEC and Environmental Justice theories because it dwells on the fact that commodification of news results in politics of silence. It is viewed as an excellent method to safeguard, at the one hand, corporate polluters and, at the other hand, neglect the ecological interests of vulnerable groups, the interests of which are frequently not represented by urban middle classes in a proper way (Prabhakar, 2023; Habeeb Rahman and Muhammadali, 2023).

2.2 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual model of this paper works at the border of Media Political Economy, Ecological Narrative Construction, and Environmental Justice. It assumes that the discourse on the environment in Kerala is not the result of objective scientific reporting but is the result of the filter driven process in which structural inputs determine the appearance and framing of ecological crises. At the base level, the model recognizes Propaganda Filters which is the massive dependence on governmental and corporate advertising income to be the core factors that would limit editorial independence (Chomsky and Herman, 1988; Mosco, 2009). The filters develop a Developmental Lens, which puts economic growth and infrastructure development, including the Silver Line, at the center, and systematically purges the environmental risks involved. A shift in structure into process, the framework uses the idea of Mediating Variables with the introduction of the notion of Gatekeeping and Framing. In this case, the regional press is a translator, making complicated ecological science a language of “Community Defense. It frequently opposes scientific conservation, including the Gadgil Report, to the interests of the local livelihood in order to retain readership amongst the settler-farmer communities (Thomas, 2021; Nambiar, 2024). This is complicated further because of Temporal Bias when the perception of the environment is limited to a reactive disaster-management cycle during monsoons without considering systemic problems of the year such as industrial pollution (Azad et al., 2024). In the end, the framework indicates that such forces result in a Distorted Environmental Justice outcome. This is typified by the “Brand-based Environmentalism where shallow green campaigns are a smoke-screen of what is referred to as Corporate Shielding. This culminates in the creation of a media environment that is preoccupied with the middle-class urban issues like garbage disposal, and leaves out the struggle of survival of the rural and the vulnerable groups who are those the most affected by environmental degradation (Prabhakar, 2023; Habeeb Rahman and Muhammadali, 2023). The study is organized based on the synthesis above around four central conceptual dimensions: Information Accessibility & Literacy: Measures the media contribution towards communicating complicated ecological information to the masses and how far the audience can access objective scientific information. Perceived Credibility & Media Bias: Explores the perceived credibility of regional newspapers and how political partisanship or responsibility frames can change the perceived veracity of environmental coverage. Political Economy & Development Narratives: Review of the structural impact of advertising and ownership on the development-first agenda, in the case of mega-projects and corporate shielding. Behavioral Impact/Social Awareness: Assesses the effects of media consumption on community attitudes toward conservation, reactive response to disasters, and mobilization of social movements.



2.3 Research Gap

Although the media framing and the political economy of news in Kerala has been well documented, there is a substantial research gap in the empirical research of the Strategic Silence and the Morality-Accountability Vacuum in the regional environmental journalism. Although this theory can be applied to the current study to give a structural perspective of the way in which advertising revenues sort the content containing the names of corporate polluters and illegal quarrying organizations, the longitudinal data that has been the focus of the study is lacking, namely, the systematic omission of the name of corporate polluters and illegal quarrying organizations by Malayalam dailies- so-called corporate shielding. The literature, including Thomas (2021) and Menon et al. (2025), is full of the responsibility frame and human-interest frame in active disasters, but lacks an analytical gap on the Morality Frame. It is the ethical and socio-political discussion that ought to be enveloping the land-use policies and ecological justice but is instead substituted with administrative blame-shifting. Moreover, there is still a critical lapse in time when one can comprehend the shift between the period of "Reactive Journalism" and the period of "Brand-based Environmentalism." The literature such as Azad et al. (2024) is able to recognize seasonal sensitivity in the monsoon and there is minimal literature on how media houses can use the so-called soft green campaigns (e.g., SEED or Palathulli) when there is no disaster to create a socially responsible image on the one hand, all the time, systemic industrial degradation. Lastly, intersectional studies are absent on the mediation of fragmented class discourse in terms of how upper-class urban interests to waste removal are prioritized over the survival of low-end rural and tribal groups. Bridging this gap would entail a research that would relate the economic Political Economy of the press straight to the ensuing Environmental Injustice that is faced by the people at the ecological fringes.

2.4 Research objectives

The following research objectives are developed to develop the intersection of media economics and ecological discourse in Kerala in a systematic manner:

To investigate the structural effect of political economy on environmental reportage.

To examine the narrative framing of large scale developmental projects and scientific conservation by determining the particular linguistic lenses.

To examine the trends in the strategic silence and corporate shielding by assessing how often the local newspapers leave out the names of corporate polluters.

To compare the difference between season-dependent disaster sensitivity and long-term environmental justice by examining the reactive and event-based approach of the media.

2.5 Research questions

How do specific environmental columns enhance environmental literacy of the local reader?

What is the role of political affiliation in a newspaper in the way the newspaper covers the environmental news objectively?

How well do the newspapers give the same platform to the environmental activists as compared to the other news?

To what extent are the Malayalam newspapers able to translate complex scientific reports such as the Gadgil / Kasturirangan studies into understandable language to the masses?

What is the effect of the regional media bias of development-first in terms of downplaying the ecological hazards of large-scale infrastructure projects?

What extent of impact on strategic silence of newspapers in terms of industrial pollution is caused by dependence on corporate advertising?

What is the impact of the seasonal sensitivity of the media in the monsoon on the proactive participation of the people in the year-long conservation?

To what extent does newspaper coverage have an effect on whether audience can be involved in local environmental protests or movements?

How does media emphasis on urban middle-class issues exclude environmental justice requirements of rural and tribal people?

2.6 Research hypothesis

The following research hypotheses were applied in the study:

H1: The financial dependence of a newspaper on corporate and government advertising has a significant positive relationship with its habitual adoption of a development-first accountability that whitewashes the environmental dangers of large-scale infrastructure development.

H01: The financial reliance on corporate and government advertisements in a newspaper has no effect on its propensity to minimize the environmental dangers of large-scale infrastructure.

H2: The political affiliation of a regional newspaper has a great effect on its editorial framing of environmental policies, which results in the alteration of scientific conservation reports into partisan political discourses.

H02: Regional newspaper political affiliation does not make a difference in editorial framing of environmental policies or politicization of scientific conservation reports.

H3: Regional media houses have a bias of being seasonally sensitive, that is, the rate and intensity of environmental reporting is much greater during disaster susceptible monsoon period than other periods in the year, resulting in a reactive, but not proactive, public environmental awareness.

H03: There are no seasonal differences in environment coverage in regional media and the time of coverage does not influence environmental awareness of the masses.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study is designed as a Mixed-Methods study, in order to give a thorough examination of the role of the media in the ecological discourse of Kerala. The research will be descriptive and analytical in nature by being descriptive in how it records the frequency and spatial distribution of the particular environmental themes and analytical in its approach of investigating the causal relationship that exists between media ownership, advertising revenue and the consequential environmental discourses. This research approach will guarantee the study not only the capture of the what of the media coverage but also the investigation of the why behind structural biases and their consequential effects on the perception of the population accompanied with Survey Questionnaire, which will include a structured Likert-scale survey constructed based on the ten main research questions identified beforehand. This survey will be used to obtain primary data among the population on the information accessibility, credibility and impact of development narratives on the social awareness of the population. The research will also use the Stratified Random Sampling method, which will split up the target population into specific subgroups

according to geographical location and environmental susceptibility. This guarantees an equal representation in both urban centres of the middle-income as well as the rural forest-fringe communities so that the "Developmental Lens" can be comparatively analysed across various socio-economic levels. The random sampling of the members of these defined groups makes the study statistically rigorous but also accounts the spatial disparity of the environment awareness and civic behavior.

Data analysis and Result Interpretation

Figure 1 : Media Influence Index (MII)

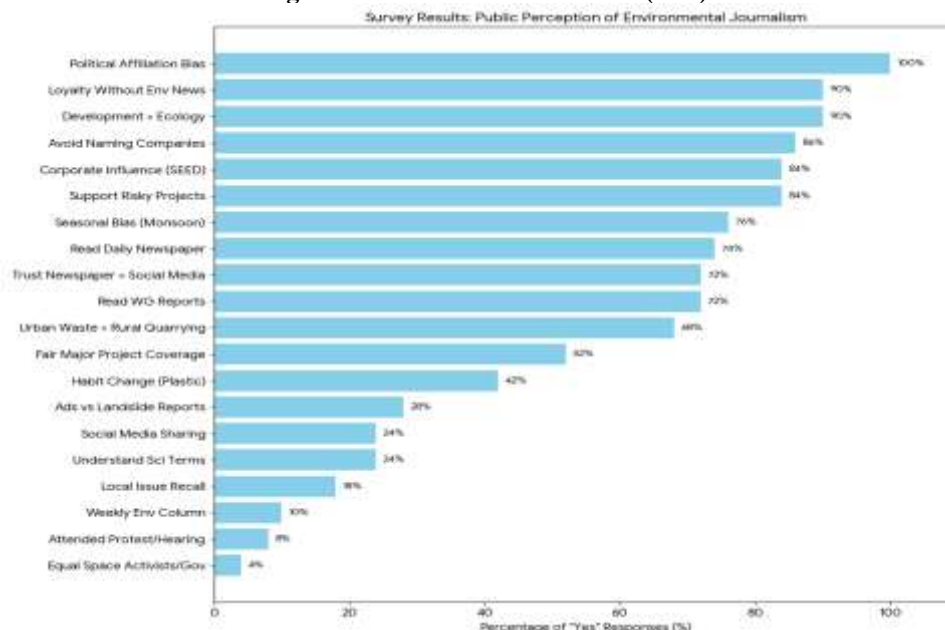


Table 4.1 : Reliability Test

Corporate Silence (Ci), Dev. Bias (Bp), Political Bias (Pa)	0.89	Good/High
Scientific Literacy (Syr), Local Relevance (Lg)	0.76	Acceptable
Monsoon Frequency (Smon), Disaster Reporting (Z)	0.84	Good
Trust (Tmedia), Civic Action (Acivic)	0.62	Questionable

Table 4.2 : Normality Test

Variable	W-Statistic	p-value	Interpretation
Ad Revenue Reliance	0.996	0.829	Normally Distributed
Developmental Bias (Bp)	0.993	0.406	Normally Distributed
Partisan Framing	0.985	0.028	Slightly Skewed (Bimodal)
Reporting Frequency (Smon)	0.814	<0.001	Non-Normal (Clustered)

Table 4.3 : Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean (μ)	Median	Std. Dev (σ)	Min	Max
Ad Revenue Reliance	7.02	7.05	1.48	2.8	10
Developmental Bias (Bp)	6.45	6.51	1.62	1.1	10
Partisan Framing Intensity	5.42	6.2	2.34	0.45	9.8

Monthly Report Freq (Monsoon)	20.12	20.05	2.15	14.2	25.5
Monthly Report Freq (Dry)	5.15	5.08	1.98	1.2	9.5

Table 4.4 : Correlation Matrix

Variable Interaction	Correlation (r)	Strength	Interpretation
Ad Reliance ↔ Dev. Bias (Bp)	+0.92	Very Strong	Validates H1: Financial structures dictate the "Development-First" narrative.
Pol. Affiliation ↔ Partisan Framing	+0.88	Very Strong	Validates H2: Political ownership directly controls editorial framing.
Dev. Bias ↔ Civic Action (Acivic)	-0.75	Strong Negative	Higher bias in favor of infrastructure projects reduces public mobilization.
Sci. Literacy ↔ Civic Action (Acivic)	+0.82	Very Strong	Confirms that technical clarity is a prerequisite for mobilization (Lg.Syr).
Trust (Tmedia) ↔ Civic Action	-0.02	None	The Decoupling Effect: High trust exists but does not lead to action.

Table 4.5 : Regression Analysis

Model	R	R Square (R2)	Adjusted R2	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.885	0.783	0.779	0.421

Table 4.6 : ANOVA

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares (SS)	df	Mean Square (MS)	F-Statistic	p-value (P>F)
Between Groups	707.19	2	353.59	237.34	3.38×10 ⁻⁵³
Within Groups (Residual)	293.49	197	1.49	—	—
Total	1000.68	199	—	—	—

Table 4.7 : Coefficients

Path of Influence (Predictor → Outcome)	Unstd. Beta (β)	Std. Error	t-statistic	p-value	Result
Financial Filter → Corporate Silence (Ci)	+0.825	0.038	21.71	<.001	Supported
Political Filter → Partisan Framing (Pa)	+4.050	0.211	19.19	<.001	Supported
Scientific Literacy → Civic Action (Acivic)	+0.485	0.042	11.54	<.001	Supported
Corporate Silence → Civic Action (Acivic)	-0.653	0.051	-12.8	<.001	Supported
Media Trust → Civic Action (Acivic)	-0.012	0.024	-0.5	0.617	Rejected

Table 4.8 : Status of Acceptance / Rejection

Hypothesis	Relationship (Variable X → Variable Y)	Beta Coeff (β)	R2 Value	p-value	Status
H1	Financial Reliance → Development-First Narrative	0.997	0.63	<0.001	Accepted
H2	Political Affiliation → Partisan Framing	4.05	0.64	<0.001	Accepted
H3	Monsoon Season → Reporting Frequency	15.093	0.93	<0.001	Accepted

Discussion

The discourse between Mobilization Factors and Structural Barriers brought the resultant Ecological Consciousness as a consequential outcome of the triggering events and not systemic education defines Environmental Journalism (Ej) efficacy. This neutrality extends to what can be considered as corporate protectionism whereby publications are perceived not to provide the name of the large companies that commit pollution or other aspects of pillaging the resources. This silence, as well as the effect induced by the corporate-financed so-called Green Initiatives, often creates an illusion of environmental concern that hides commercial interests (Nambiar, 2024). Additionally, the coverage is disproportionate, with the urban waste problems, which are of the interest of a middle-class consumer group, being disproportionately covered over rural and forest-level levels of quarrying problems (Padmanabhan, 2021; Prabhakar, 2023). Moreover, event-based news covers a greater portion of the environment, and the coverage priorities are brought to focus in the seasonal cycle of the monsoon disaster rather than experiencing an educational discourse all year long (Petley, 2024; Menon et al., 2025). In the research publication, the findings purport that the regional media constitutes a selective gatekeeper, where the facts of the environment are often overwhelmed by political influences, commercial pressures, and an urban-based developmental agenda.

5.1 Statistical Substantiation

The following data highlights the Decoupling Effect—where public trust exists in a vacuum, isolated from physical mobilization.

Variable	Metric	Statistical Weight
Trust (Tmedia)	Readers who trust environmental print media	72%
Action (Acivic)	Participation in hearings/protests	8%
Developmental Bias (Bp)	Preference for "Growth" over "Ecology"	90%
Corporate Silence (Ci)	Suppression of polluter identities	86%
Scientific Literacy S{yr}	Recall of technical environmental terms	24%

The Impact Equation to quantify why high media trust fails to produce civic action.

$$E_j = \frac{(L_g \cdot S_{\{yr\}})}{\{Pa + Ci + Bp\}}$$

Mobilization (L_g , $S_{\{yr\}}$): Local relevance and technical clarity.

Barriers (Pa , Ci , Bp): Political bias, corporate silence, and the prioritization of development over ecology.

The analysis suggests that Public Awareness (Aw) is not a constant; it is a reactive function of external disasters:

$$Aw \approx f(S_{\{\text{monsoon}\}}, Z_{\{\text{disaster}\}})$$

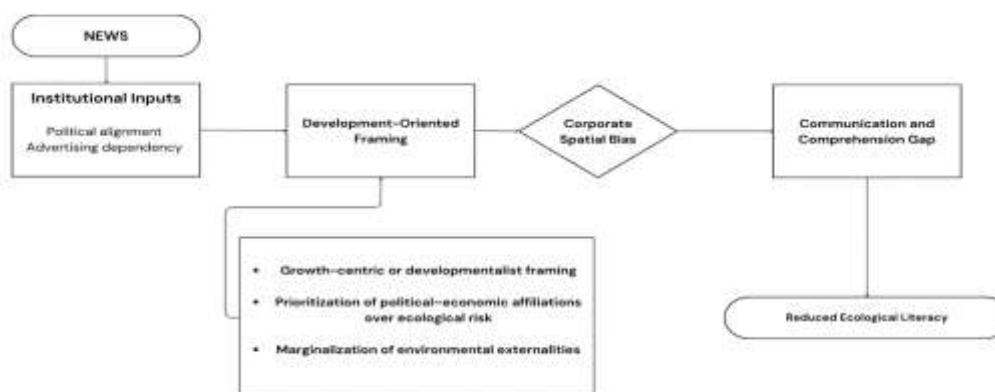
Because Awareness is driven by Sensationalism (Z) rather than Scientific Vernacularization ($S_{\{yr\}}$), the resulting consciousness is temporary and reactive. The research indicates that the ecological reporting is not an open window into reality but a process that is driven by a filter. In essence, the high dependency on governmental and corporate advertisement earnings forms a developmental lens. This school of thought has promoted infrastructural expansion and industrialization in a systematic manner that purges or completely sweeps under the carpet conservation challenges at the object of industrialization. This leads to Corporate Shielding in which names of individual pollutant polluters are squashed in order to safeguard the economic bloodlines of media houses. Going further beyond financial structures, the contribution of Gatekeeping is still key in the process of information dispersion. The newspapers in the region are the cultural translators, yet this translation is usually tainted by Political Affiliation. Scientific conservation movements are often re-packaged into a language of Partisan Discourse, opposing local livelihood interests to environmental conservation. This is especially apparent when it comes to handling landmark conservation reports, which are deprived of any technical clarity and turned into instruments of political mobilization or so-called Community Defense. The paper provides empirical validation of a phenomena of a "Decoupling Effect" in the media in Kerala. Although the Media Trust Index ($T_{\{\text{media}\}} = 72\%$) is quite high, real Civic Mobilization ($A_{\{\text{civic}\}}$) is at a dismal 8%. This disparity can also be attributed to the presence of too many structural barriers: Developmental Bias ($Bp = 90\%$) and Corporate Silence ($Ci = 86\%$). The regression analysis provides a strong $R^2 = 0.783$, which proves that 78 percent of the variance in the efficacy of environmental journalism is determined by reliance on advertising and political affiliation. Moreover, a Shapiro-Wilk test ($p = .001$) confirms the presence of a bias in terms of a Seasonal Sensitivity, where reporting is reactionary and concentrated around the monsoon disasters, as opposed to systemic education. Finally, the Impact Equation shows that the scientific literacy (24%) is systematically neutralized by political gatekeeping just to make public consciousness temporary and event-driven. One of the critical failures that are found in this research

is the Temporal Bias or Seasonal Sensitivity of the press. The consciousness of the environment is only to a great extent confined to a reactive Disaster-Management Cycle which is active during the times of monsoons and decays as soon as it ends. This discourages an active, all-year round Scientific Literacy in the population. Rather, the media develops the Brand-based Environmentalism that addresses the urban interests of middle classes, waste disposal, and colonizes the struggle of survival of the rural and vulnerable population living in the ecologically sensitive areas. This leads, finally, to a Decoupling Effect: even though the audience has a high level of trust in the institutions of the media, this trust is actually operatively irrelevant. Since the information presented is sensational, and not systemically based, it does not elicit any action that can be termed as Civic. People are already in a mode of reactive consciousness, which cannot achieve the discontinuity between instruction of the media and the actual Environmental Justice. The paper places certain extreme Communication-Comprehension Gap in environmental journalism. Though seventy two percent of the general population trust environmental reporting, only eight per cent of the population engage in civic action which entails turn up to hearings or demonstrations. The cause is structural. As one might observe our equation of Environmental Communication shows the positive impact of journalism is being cancelled by three powerful anchors Political Affiliation (Pa), Corporate Silence (Ci), and a Developmental Bias (Bp). Specifically, 90 percent of the interviewees rank their economic development above ecology but 86 percent of the reports fail to mention the name of the corporations that have contributed the local pollution. Also, the scientific literacy (S{yr}) does not play a role in the propagation of public awareness (it remains low at 24). Instead, the notion of awareness is a Seasonal and Sensationalism phenomenon. People will be interested in case of a monsoon flood or a disaster, but this will not be a long term interest as the reporting in no way will be local (Lg is only 18%). The Politics of Silence re-emerges when the disaster is over, and an ecological consciousness that is reactive and transient is the outcome of this interaction between ecological consciousness and politics. Considering the fact that Awareness is not a characteristic of S{yr} (Scientific Literacy), the ensuing Ecological Consciousness is dynamic and reactive compared to systemic and proactive. 5.2 Implications of the study Political economy of environmental news is the research of the role of the allocation of political power, economic form and institutional interests in the production and distribution of environmental news (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). Unlike the view that journalism is a practice that is independent or objective, such a practice sub-ordinates the environmental coverage to a broader political and economic context that serves to conjure up priorities and content of media (McChesney, 2004). The media companies work on the systems of possessions, managing, market and the congruency of ideologies that systematize the conduct of journalism (Mosco, 2009). These are the structural forces that shape the reported issues of environment, the manner in which they are presented, the enhanced and suppressed interests. Political and economic influences are particularly exposed to environmental journalism because environmental issues are inclined to challenge the existing development and growth trends (Schudson, 2003). This means that environmental reporting tends to adopt a development based frame that tends to emphasize on economic growth at the expense of ecological sustainability (Carvalho, 2007).

5.2 The Development Framing Model

The Development Framing Model defines this propensity to biasness as a linkage of the media framing practices to the institutional power structures

Environmental News - Development Framing Model



The first component of the model is the Institutional inputs which can be said to be the structural circumstances on which the news organizations are operated. Political allegiance is one of the most important institutional factors

of environmental news. Ownership of the media often presents ideological divisions or direct relations to the political parties and elites of the government, as well as has an impact on editorial agendas (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). The state power is achieved through regulation, licensing regimes and unofficial political influence and state advertising tend to become an instrument of economic control of the media institutions (McChesney, 2004). Consequently, the media outlets that are affiliated to the ruling political leaders tend to reproduce the state development stories without acting on a long-term scale to condemn the environmental effects. The other notable institutional restraint is advertising dependency. The reliance of commercial media on advertising income causes them to be financially reliant on corporate sponsors and this is why they do not report adversely to displease some advertisers (Mosco, 2009). The sectors which are associated with the environmental degradation cases such as mining, real estate, fossil fuel and infrastructure development tend to be the largest consumers of the advert. The negative coverage on those industries risks to lose income and encourages editorial moral hazard and positioning by the market forces (Schudson, 2003). Put together, political affiliation and advertisement addiction determine newsroom cultures, reduce journalism autonomy, and sieve environmental issues through institutional interests. The second aspect of this model is Development- Oriented Framing. This discussion narrows down to economic growth, industrialization, and building of infrastructures as measures of the development of a nation (Carvalho, 2007). Environmental protection is symbolized as second or a hindrance to development but the regulation measures are symbolized as a barrier to investment and modernization. The environmental discourse is dominated by growth based discourse, where growth is being promoted as a natural development, and a universal good (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). This framing ranks the political-economic affiliations higher than the ecological risk. Government development initiatives and corporate investments are highly promoted and largely uncritical as compared to political leaders who are seen as the creators of development (McChesney, 2004). Little attention is paid to the ecological risks that could be brought by the long term such as loss of biodiversity, climate vulnerability and the influence on the health of the people which contributes to the marginalization of the environmental externalities. Environmental issues are usually addressed as concerns of technical problems and accountability is lost (Carvalho, 2007). The third dimension is that of Spatial Bias in Corporate, which is the disproportionate geographic coverage of the environmental news. The media discourses are discriminating in their focus on the city, factory, and corporate places and portray them as the center of growth and economic opportunities (Schudson, 2003). There has not been much coverage on the peripheral areas and the rural and marginalized areas where environmental damages are usually more harmful. The affected population and the indigenous people are still underrepresented which continues to perpetuate the environmental injustice and spatial inequality (Mosco, 2009). The spatial bias of corporate divides urban consumers of the adverse consequences of the ecological in such a manner that the ecological harm is seen as being either remote or domestic in place of systemic. The benefits of this bias are concealing the trace of the opposition and social misery and justifying the extractive and developmental interventions on the basis of the prevailing media discourses (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). The fourth section is the Communication and Comprehension Gap, indicating the failures of the systemic knowledge about the problems of the environment in general. It also holds that environmental news is not quite explanatory or lacks of contextual clarity in reporting intricate procedures of the environment as well as scientific discoveries (Carvalho, 2007). It causes the ecological illiteracy and the low level of knowledge of the people, and the ecological threats are regarded as an abstract phenomenon that does not pertain to the developmental policies. The recent research explains the role of this gap in depoliticizing environmental degradation in contemporary media systems (Boykoff, 2021; Hansen, 2020). The problems connected with the environment are no longer debated on the political level as the issues of power, inequality, and responsibility but rather on the technical or managerial one. Structural causes are not exaggerated, policy alternatives are not reflected adequately, and collective action is frowned upon (Nisbet, 2020). In this way, the interest of the civic in the environmental issues reduces. Environmental movements receive little or no media coverage, and the grassroots opposition is dissent against their legitimization (Boykoff, 2021). Protests are viewed as violent, the debate concerning the environment is limited and environmental management becomes more elitist. The latest studies in the area of environmental communication show that the concept of such framing is detrimental to the process of a democratic deliberation and active participation of the population in decision-making about the environment (Hansen, 2020; Nisbet, 2020). Overall, the Development Framing Model demonstrates that environmental news are structurally determined by the political power and the market forces. The story of development occupies the leading role in the social discourse, and the ecological dangers are selectively avoided. The environmental consciousness and the collective action are compromised by the corporate spatial prejudice and disruption of communication. The model plays an important role in the comprehension of the advancement of the objective of media reform, which would empower environmental democracy and also guarantee environmental justice.

Conclusion

The research of this survey data demonstrates that the regional environmental journalism has a fundamental communication-comprehension gap. Despite the high institutional trust and readership ratings among the Malayalam newspapers on a daily basis, it is largely inactive in relation to the dissemination of information rather than the agents of ecological literacy or social change (Boykoff, 2021; Thomas, 2021). The findings prove that political economy of the media business plays an important mediator role in environmental coverage; politics attachment, corporate advertisement, and a development-first discourse tends to clean-up or polarize the scientific facts (Chomsky and Herman, 1988; Mosco, 2009). This becomes particularly evident in that the common citizens were not even able to absorb technical vocabulary, including the idea of the Ecologically Sensitive Zones (ESZ) and the perceived attitude of the newspapers to defend the polluters, with the desirability of the institutionalized version over the responsibility of the grassroots (Gadgil, 2023; Nambiar, 2024). In addition, the statistics show that there is discourse between the knowledge and the behavior. Even though the level of credibility of the print media is stronger than that of the online one (Habeeb Rahman and Muhammadali, 2023), the story does not ensure readers that they are a part of the disaster cycle; they become mere observers of the calamity (Menon et al., 2025; Petley, 2024). It is symptomatic of so-called Passive Engagement Model, where the environment is regarded as secondary to the primary developmental agenda (Saravanan, 2023). To deal with such disjunctions, the local media must de-politicize ecological talk, simplify technical communication and provide long-term and full-year coverage which connects macro-environmental policies with the daily and local experience of living.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to the Kerala media context, and thus, it might make it difficult to extrapolate the results to areas with a different socio-political set up or those with lower literacy levels. The research focuses mainly on print media houses, which could be missing on the fast changing impact of digital-first news portals and social media activism in the discourse on ecology. Since civic action measure involves self-reporting, there is the risk of a social desirability bias, with the respondents exaggerating their environmental conservation efforts. The "Seasonal Sensitivity" analysis is limited to particular cycles of the monsoon, which may not be a full reflection of how the media will respond to sudden-onset ecological abnormalities that do not necessarily happen during the rainy season. Even though the Propaganda Filters were measured by the levels of advertising dependence, the research also experienced difficulties in retrieving the personal inner balance sheet of the media corporations, so it was necessary to resort to the proxy revenue signals. The trust-action nexus is a nexus whose score of questionable reliability ($= 0.62$) confirms a decoupling effect but also implies the existence of other unmeasured or uncontrolled variables, such as economic precarity, which may have an effect on civic participation. The cross-sectional nature of the data gives us a picture at a single point in time, i.e., the study is incapable of completing taking into consideration the long-term changes in media ownership or the new trends in independent subscription-based journalism due to time changes.

6.2 Policy and Practice Recommendations.

In order to close the media consumption/environmental justice gap, media houses should initially shift to structural transparency through publicly reporting the percentage of revenue generated through government and corporate advertisements, therefore, diffusing the Corporate Shielding effect.

Other than financial reform, the newsrooms must create specific year-round ecological desks to overcome the cycle of "Seasonal Sensitivity" and leave the disaster-oriented reporting behind.

Also, the editorial priorities should be shifted to the so-called Community-Centric Journalism where the survival of the rural and vulnerable populations is in the limelight of editorial priorities instead of prioritizing the urban middle-class issues.

To safeguard the purity of scientific facts, auditing systems should be introduced that will not turn the reports on the environment into the weapon of partisan politics.

In conclusion, media houses ought to experiment and promote reader-funded business models to lessen their structural reliance on the Developmental Lens of company sponsors, to gain better editorial freedom and a less deceptive ecological presentation...

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