



Climate Change: A Comparative Study of The Economic Times (India) and The Wall Street Journal (United States)

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Abstract:

Climate change is one the challenges of the modern era and is often characterized by changes in the weather pattern over a period of time. The role of media in highlighting the issue is quite crucial. India and US have adopted conflicting positions on climate change and the ways to mitigate it. This study tries to compare and analyze reporting of the issue by two business newspapers; The Economic Times in India and The Wall Street Journal in the US

Keywords: *Climate Change, Valid Science, Controversial Science*

INTRODUCTION

Climate change is a global phenomenon which has gripped the attention of the whole

world. Climate change has found widespread media attention too. Discussions in the scientific community have pointed to anthropogenic activity as a major reason for climate change. Since the industrial revolution, emission of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases have been high. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has defined it as a change in the climate linked to human activity either directly or indirectly changing the contents of the atmosphere. Environmental scientists have sounded alarm on climate change. Mass media have been major influencers in the society and have often drawn the attention of the society and the political class. The perception of the problem and the way its communicated to the general public has major variance across



countries and the role of media in this is quite significant.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Media has also found itself embroiled in controversy for either downplaying or exaggerating the issue of climate change. Unlike in most of the world, US has frequently seen climate change issue downplayed especially by various pressure groups. **P Weingart et al (2000)**¹ said a group of scientists negating the effects of climate change were supposedly paid by the strong oil lobby in the US.

Andreas Schmidt (2003)² suggested the mass media is the core of the modern day society and is greatly responsible for societal discussion of climate change and for bringing it to fore in politics. For **Anderson (2011)**³ the mass media is crucial for increasing awareness in the society. And for **Kreisi (2001)** mass media discussions and debates is an important measure of importance of any issue and for the connected views of the society and its preferences.

Many case studies have appeared in the media on the topic of climate change but most of them have been either specific to a particular country or multiple countries together. There has been no comparison of

media coverage of two major democracies in the world; India and the United States. For **Andreas Schmidt** the questions explored have different analytical perspectives, media, frames and also research questions. And hence the results almost impossible to equate. **Eskjaer (2010)**⁴ termed the number of news stories on climate change in the print media shows the attention of the nation on the issue, circulation of the newspaper and its financial condition. But its impossible to conclude if the differences in the media coverage of climate change in countries across the world is due to the circulation of the newspaper or because of the importance given to the issue of climate change in the respective country. Though literature study points to numerous comparative studies involving various media sources on the topic of climate change but none in particular is on news stories in the economic newspapers.

OBJECTIVES

1. To find the extensiveness of media coverage preceding and following the Bonn Climate Change Meet.
2. To find if the media stories have different perspectives on climate change in the two countries; India and United States of America.

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METHODOLOGY

The Economic Times is the leading business newspaper in India and The Wall Street Journal in the US. Business newspapers were chosen for this study on climate change as industries and businesses are directly and indirectly impacted by this phenomenon and also considered major contributors to it. The period of study extends from September 2017 to March 2018. The time preceding and following the Bonn Climate Change Summit in November 2017 was chosen for the period of study as the media activity is expected to be maximum around the time of the event. This study is a content analysis with 4 frames chosen by extensive literature review. There is a perceptible difference in the media coverage on climate change in India and the US as is manifested in the 4 frames.

For **Esser & Hanitzsch(2012)**⁵ the usefulness of a comparative study is well established as these studies are employed to study the relationship between various social phenomena. One of the major objective of comparative study is to compare likeness and differences between social structures. **Michael Beck (2004)**⁶ stated comparative research tries to

weigh up and dissimilitude countries, institutions, societies and cultures.

This paper is a comparative study of print media and is an attempt to compare news stories that have appeared in the leading business newspaper in India and the United States specific to climate change. The Economic Times in India and The Wall Street Journal in the United States formed the source of data. Both these publications are leading economic/business newspapers in respective countries. The Economic Times is the world's second most read economic newspaper after the Wall Street Journal. The readership of The Economic Times according to the Audit Bureau of Circulation is about 400, 000. This is published from 12 cities in India and is owned by Bennet, Coleman & Company Ltd. The Wall Street Journal is American business based, English language newspaper headquartered in the city of New York. The Wall Street Journal is the largest circulated newspaper in the United States and counts almost 30, 0000 people as its subscribers.

The period of the study extends from September 2017 to March 2018. This time period was chosen keeping in view the Bonn Climate Change Meet that happened between November 6th 2017 and November

17th 2017. As the meeting happened in November 2017, months preceding and following it were chosen as the frequency of the news story is generally high around any event.

DATA AND ANALYSIS

Global warming and climate change is an issue concerning both the developing and the developed world, a comparative study of the news stories appearing in countries on different side of the spectrum will help us understand if the perspective of the media is same on both side of the world. The perception of the US Government and its stance on climate change is different from that of the Indian Govt. The media is often known for its agenda setting function and the tilt of the news stories might often reflect on the governmental actions.

Extensive literature review helped deduce frames to basically 4 categories. This study has primarily 4 frames; media attention, valid science, ambiguous cause and effect and the controversial science.

MEDIA ATTENTION OR CLIMATE CHANGE NEWS IN THE TWO NEWSPAPERS

This forms the first frame for analysis. The newspaper analysis showed various topics

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connected to climate change, consequence of climate change on certain geographical areas, habitation, prediction of weather changes and threats, and various suggestions related to reducing the threat. There are 23 lists in all for The Economic Times and 19 lists for The Wall Street Journal.

Figure 1
The Economic Times: Frequency of Articles on Climate Change

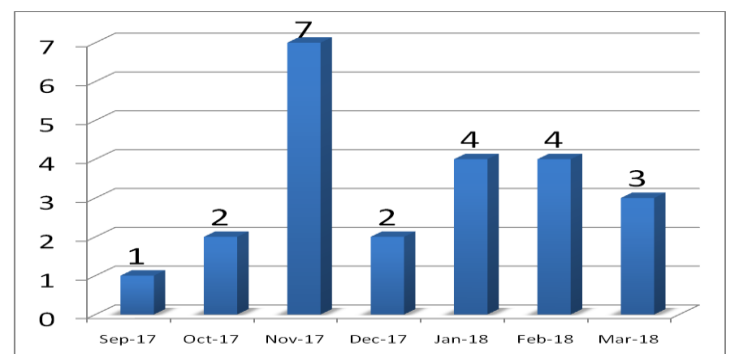
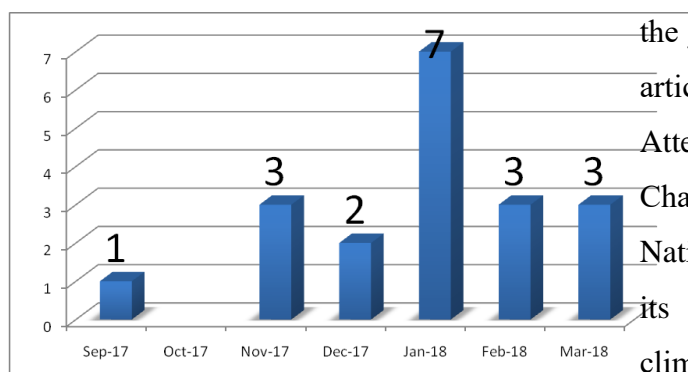


Figure 2
The Wall Street Journal: Frequency of Articles on climate change



the journal ‘National Communications. The article titled ‘ LMDC’s Call for Greater Attention on Efforts to Tackle Climate Change’ quoted data released by the United Nations Environment Program in support of its demand for greater efforts to control climate change. The article titled ‘India

VALID SCIENCE

The Economic Times

The newspaper stories framed as valid science were categorical statements or facts based on scientific study. There was no ambiguity, uncertainty or doubt of the research on climate change or the definers of climate change. Among the stories that suit the frame of ‘valid science’ is the article titled ‘Is Climate Change the Culprit Behind Floods and Farming Woes’ contains data collected by the research team of the IIT. There are many stories that followed. Story titled ‘Businesses in Country Step Up Efforts Towards A Greener Environment’ is a commentary on proactive measures by businesses as appeared in a report by Carbon Disclosure Project India. ‘Climate Change Might Be Worse Than Believed: Study’ gives an alarming account of climate change while quoting research of ‘Swiss Federal Institute of Technology’, ‘French National Centre for Scientific Research’ and Papers in **11th National Conference on Nature, Culture, Language and Literature: Narratives and Critical Practices** can be accessed from <https://edupediapublications.org/journals/index.php/IJR/issue/archive>

Emerging as a Climate Performer quotes figures published in ‘Nature Climate Change’ as part of the Global Carbon Budget. On December 20th 2017, an article titled ‘2017 May Be Top Hottest Years on Record: Study’ appeared in The Economic Times and quoted data from World Meteorological Department and NASA while Gujarat Ecology Commission was quoted for the story ‘ Scientists Warn of More Cyclones in the Arabian Sea’. ‘Climate Change Linked to More Flowery Forests’ quoted the journal ‘Global Change Biology’. ‘Climate Change to Impact Agricultural Income by Upto 25%’, according to a economic survey. ‘Climate Change Diet: Arctic Sea Ice Thins So Do Polar Bears’ that appeared on February 3 2018 discusses research of US Geological Survey. ‘Global Sea Level Surging at Faster Rate: Study’ quotes researches at University of Colorado. ‘Wacky Weather Makes Arctic Warmer Than Europe’ and quotes Danish



Meteorological Institute. ‘Warming Climate Will Displace Millions in Coming Decades: World Bank’ appeared on March 19th 2018 and quotes data from the World Bank. ‘India Most Vulnerable Country to Climate Change’ appeared on March 20th 2018. This article posted data from the research of HSBC.

Wall Street Journal

The stories titled ‘How Companies Are Pushing Ahead on Climate Change Targets’ and ‘Federal Climate Expert Rank Last Year Among Three Warmest in Modern Times’ was based on NASA report on warmer than usual summers in many parts of the world and also necessitating action from the industries. ‘Germany Falling Short of Emission Targets’ news report quoted data from the EU. ‘A Big Sky Plan to Cool The Planet’ describe new strategies planned to reduce the effect of global warming as suggested in research papers published in the journal ‘Earth’s Future’. ‘Parched South Africa Struggles to Avoid Day Zero: Water Shutdown’. This article clearly backs the theory of climate change leading to water shortage.

AMBIGUOUS CAUSE AND EFFECTS

The Economic Times

These stories don’t have solid scientific data or a research to conclusively deduce happenings to climate change. The story titled ‘Nations May Focus on Human and Economic Losses at Climate Talks’ that appeared on November 6th 2017, while discussing human and economic losses doesn’t back its story with any scientific research. ‘Climate Change Time is Running Out’ that appeared on November 16th 2017 in the Economic Times though mentions the names of few environmental scientists and their opinion but doesn’t mention any particular study to back its claims.. ‘Climate Change Pushing Weather Extremes Off the Scale, Says Global Cities Group’ doesn’t give statistical data to prove its case. March 15th 2018, ‘Weathering Trump’s Skepticism, US officials Still Fighting Global Warming’.

Wall Street Journal

‘Cuomo Calls for More Wind Power’, appeared on January 2nd 2018 doesn’t give any scientific facts in favour of wind power. Article that appeared on January 25th 2018 titled, ‘Regulation is Largest Barrier to Solar Power’ doesn’t back any scientific study to support its story. ‘Climate Change Might Swamp Your Multi Bond Portfolio’ appeared on February 2 2018.

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CONTROVERSIAL SCIENCE

The Economic Times

This story titled 'Its Super Cold in US, Is Global Warming For Real' questioned the basic issue of climate change.

Wall Street Journal

'Climate Change Hype Doesn't Help' appeared on September 17 2017. This is an article by a scientist who downplays role of climate change in the increase in hurricanes and their devastating consequences on the US mainland.

'Bad Weather Is No Reason For Climate Alarm' and 'Doomsday Climate Scenarios Are A Joke' clearly negates the science of climate change.

CONCLUSION

Climate change is a pertinent topic in the media in both India and the United States of America. There is increased media attention around the time of the summit in Bonn in The Economic Times while in the Wall Street Journal, climate change attracted more attention when some part of the country was under unprecedented extreme cold spell in January/February. So though there has been considerable media attention, the reason for this increased column space is different in both the countries. India's The Economic Times has most of the stories

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under 'valid science' and a few under 'ambiguous cause and effect and just one under 'controversial science'. This is basically reflective of the governmental policy on climate change. Successive governments in India have recognised and accepted dangerous repercussions of climate change. India has also been advocating green energy on various platforms. The United States on the other hand has questioned the science behind climate change and has even dropped out of climate change agreement. The large number of stories in the 'controversial science' category in tune with their governmental policy and reflects general apprehension in the society. Future research could take up intensive analysis of mass media discussions that affect perceptions in the society and also elicit governmental action instead being restricted just to the issue of attention.

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