

Disaster Reporting in Print Media

(Special reference to selected newspapers in Sri Lanka)

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Abstract

Environmental information that will be important in future to build the sustainable society. Environmental reporting is, regardless of its name or disclosure media, to promote communication of organizations, to fulfill its accountability regarding environmental efforts in their activities, and to provide useful information to decision making of interested parties.

Problem of the study was how print media reported one selected case in Sri Lanka in 2014. Objective is to study about disaster reporting in print media. Methodology is content analyzing. Selected three newspapers and content analyzed the newspapers in seven days. Time frame was 30th October 08th November. Selected three newspapers Rivira, Mawbima, Lakbima in seven days after the disaster. Analyzed headlines, articles, features, cartoons which related to the selected incident.

More spaces had allocated to report this incident, mostly colour photos used and victim's photos published. And most of the articles written to aroused this in reader's emotion. And selected newspapers not given proper attention in media ethics. Media wants to be more responsibility during crises or disasters.

Keywords

Environment, Communication, Disaster, Reporting

Introduction

Reporting to and providing the public with information on the environment is becoming increasingly important for governmental environmental agencies at the regional, national and international levels.

According to the business dictionary “**environment is the sum total of all surroundings of a living organism, including natural forces and other living things, which provide conditions for development and growth as well as of danger and damage**”-Business Dictionary

As environmental consciousness in entities activities has risen in recent years, the importance of environmental communication and social accountability, which promote active and voluntary disclosure of environmental information about their environmental activities and considerations for environment matters in their activities and improve their reputation for their environmental efforts and performances, has been widely recognized. Environmental information that would be considered to be necessary from the view-points of

organizations' social accountability, providing useful information to interested parties for decision making and providing information which could help readers' understanding and increase the objectivity of the contents as an environmental communication tool.

Environmental information that will be important in future to build the sustainable society. Environmental reporting is, regardless of its name or disclosure media, to promote communication of organizations, to fulfill its accountability regarding environmental efforts in their activities, and to provide useful information to decision making of interested parties.

Environmental reporting refers to systematic and holistic statements of environmental burden and environmental efforts in organizations' activities, such as environmental policies, objectives, programs and their outcomes, organizational structures and systems for the environmental activities, in accordance with general reporting principles of environmental reporting, and that is published and reported periodically to the general public.

"Environmental reporting" can be called in different names depending on its purpose and contents, such as a "sustainability reporting," which include social and economic aspects or a "social and environmental reporting," which describes activities based on corporate social responsibility. Environmental reporting can be considered as "an open-window of organizations and a significant tool for environmental communication." Interested parties outside of the organizations are able to "view" the intended organization's ideas and measures towards environmental issues through this "window." Organizations can also understand the needs and the ideas of interested parties through this "window".

When happened a natural disaster reporter or journalist had a big role to play. Some possible actions are;

- Inform the public with timely and factual information
- Advice the public about actions to be taken
- Inform on actions being taken by authorities and aid groups.
- Relay messages concerning the welfare of isolated or trapped groups.
- Facilitate communication among affected people and their relatives, friends, families in other parts of the country or worldwide.
- Highlight the needs of survivors.
- Communicate potential secondary risks to minimize further disaster or damage.

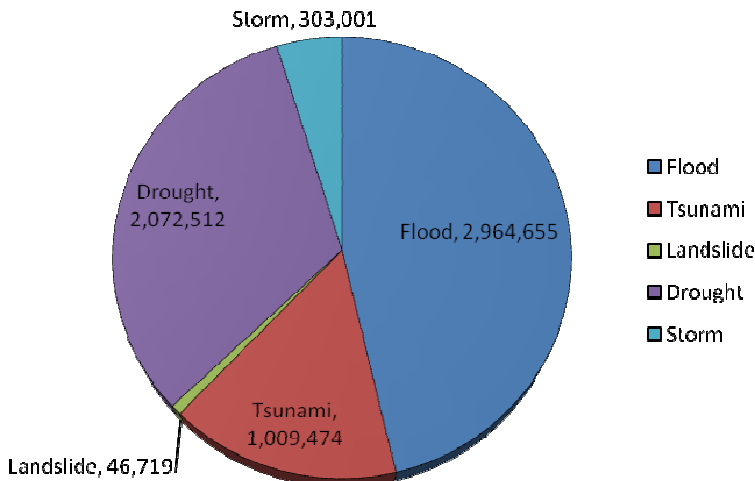
Code of Ethics help to standards require newspapers to strive for accuracy and professional integrity, and to uphold the best traditions of investigative journalism in the public interest, unfettered by distorting commercialism or by improper pressure or by narrow self-interest which conspires against press freedom. Newspapers and journalists, while free to hold and express their own strong opinions, should give due consideration to the views of others and endeavor to reflect social responsibility. But in practice we saw many more situations most journalists breach this code of ethics.

According to Code of Professional Practice (Code of Ethics) of The Editors Guild of Sri Lanka adopted by the Press Complaints Commission of Sri Lanka journalists need to obey these ethics.

Some ethics in editorial guide are;

- Accurate reporting
- Corrections and apologies
- Opportunity to reply
- Confidential sources
- Privacy
- Harassment and subterfuge.

Based on information available on the people affected by natural disasters during the period 1974-2004 is given in the figure above which clearly identifies floods, drought, tsunami, storm and landslides as the most common natural disasters in Sri Lanka.



People affected by different disasters in Sri Lanka (1974-2004)

Torrential monsoon rain across parts of southern India and Sri Lanka during the last 4 or 5 days of October 2014, led to flooding and several landslides in Sri Lanka. Over 120 mm of rain fell in 24 hours between 28 and 29 October 2014 in Ratnapura, Sabaragamuwa Province. A severe landslide occurred in Meeriyabedda area in Kotabathma Grama Niladhari division in Haldumulla Divisional Secretariat Division in Badulla District on 29th October 2014 at around 7.30 am. The impact of landslide affected around 330 people of 57 families in Ampitikanda tea estate.

In this research studied selected case about disaster and analyzed selected newspaper contents related to this incident.

Research Design

Problem of the study was how print media reported one selected case in Sri Lanka in 2014. Objective is to study about disaster reporting in print media. Methodology is content analyzing. Selected three newspapers and content analyzed the newspapers in seven days. Time frame was 30th October 08th November. Selected seven days after the disaster. Analyzed headlines, articles, features, cartoons which related to the selected incident.

Disaster Reporting in Print Media

Media plays a significant role in increasing awareness for disasters. The Media coverage of major disasters such as the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami and the 2010 Haiti Earthquake showed that media can have both positive and negative effects. Media broadcasts first-hand information from the area of the disaster. Immediately after the disaster occurs, media could be invaluable during the initial assessments, search and rescue.

Media coverage of disasters in 2005, and before, have varied considerably, with some disasters getting almost no coverage and others receiving a lot. The media is criticized for this by humanitarian organizations as well because of this, and yet these organizations also need the media to try and get their message out.

The Red Cross noted a number of these issues in its *World Disasters Report 2005*:

“Media coverage of the 26 December tsunami dominated headlines worldwide well into January – much longer than any other disaster in modern history. After the tsunami came a metaphorical tidal wave of donations. Aid workers worried that the tsunami would divert donor money and media attention away from the world’s “hidden disasters.”

Many aid agencies regard media coverage of the world’s crises as selective and stereotyped. But they still crave publicity, hoping it will generate more funding and attention for disaster relief. (*Humanitarian media coverage in the digital age*, World Disasters Report 2005, Chapter 6, International Red Cross)

When reporting a disaster journalists need to clarify the accuracy of data. If not it will be a great problem. In selected case was a thoughtful natural disaster to Sri Lanka. Most of the families suffered a lot. I selected three newspapers and analyzed the contents.

The environment affects everyday life. People, sensitive about it, demand the due coverage of environment and the factors causing pollution, etc. Therefore the environment reporting can become a human service reporting. But in selected incident headlines, features, photos used create stories.

Major Findings were in three selected newspapers (Lakbima Newspaper, Mawbima Newspaper, Rivira Newspaper)

- Miriyabadda land slide incident was reported as their main head line, further it highlighted the death toll also.
- More spaces had allocated to report this incident.
- Mostly colour photos used and victim’s photos published.
- Most of the articles written to aroused this in reader’s emotion.
- More focused on grievances of the suffered people.
- Sensitive and emotional photos published.
- Exaggeratedly reported this incident.
- Not focused in media ethics properly.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In this research identified selected newspapers not reported this incident in responsible manner. And articles mainly written to arouse this in reader’s emotion. Not focused in media ethics properly. Media wants to be more responsibility during crises or disasters. Reporters should confirm that the information being provided

is accurate. That the media can play a critical role before, during and after such incidents. Media have to be monitored and handled with care because it is media reports that distort what happens in a disaster and lead to Misunderstandings. Failure by media reporting may be result of myths created by the media.

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