

Newspaper Coverage of Environmental Stories: A Content Analysis on Selected Newspapers of

Assam



Tezashree Islary

Abstract: This study seeks to find out how the newspapers cover the environmental stories. The study employed a content analysis technique and had specifically focused on environment stories between January 2020 to December 2020. It identified 482 environmental stories from the three newspapers i.e. The Assam Tribune, The Sentinel and The Telegraph. The time frame was chosen for the study based on the time when the environmental issues like flood, deforestation, poaching was at the peak. The selected newspaper dailies were the highest circulated English dailies in the region. This study used the technique of content analysis that captures the variables: magnitude and type, news priority and nature. The study concluded that some important environmental topics such as Disaster management, Wildlife conservation, and Pollution issues did not gain much importance in those newspapers. Overall the findings of the study indicate that the issues related to environmental issues are needed to be more exposed to educate the public.

Keywords: Environmental, Flood, News, Nature, Newspaper

I. INTRODUCTION

Environmental issues and problems are the main challenges for the universal population. The mainstream news organization tends to focus on issues such as politics, crime, and entertainment aspects. Therefore, instead of focusing on political, economic, and other news items, the organizations should allow maximum space to environment-related issues. The low reporting environment stories will lead people to remain ignorant and misinformed till the danger approaches them. Environmental stories are having a hard time competing with political and economic stories which are occupying the utmost space in newspapers. This is often where the role of the Print medium becomes significant. It helps us to inform and educate people regarding the varied measures for safeguarding the environment through articles, stories, columns, and editorials. Environmental problems and issues are gradually increasing around India which incorporates pollution, drought, landslide, floods, etc. Therefore, there is a growing demand from the public for more and more information or environmental issues.

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It is shown in many studies that environmental topics are the prominent topic in the elite's discussion. Hence, mass media plays a significant role in covering news, and knowledge on the environment includes issues and problems (Pompper, 2004 [10]).

A. Background of the Study

Environment issues: An Indian context: The State of India's environment (SOE) 2019 has given an exclusive data analysis of major development and environmental sectors (CSE, 2019 [9]). The analysis and statistics are put together by Down to earth magazine, Centre for science and environment (CSE) helps to publish. They have divided the environment into different variables that include air, development, water, land and agriculture, health, cities, waste, energy, climate, forests, wildlife, and employment. According to this report, Air pollution is responsible for 12.5 percent of all the deaths in the country. One of the key findings of this report is global climate change. There has been a 22 percent increase in India's greenhouse gas (GHG) emission between 2010 and 2014. India continues to in touch brunt of utmost weather events. In 2018, 11 states recorded major extreme weather events that claimed 1,425 lives. As presented in the report, in 2018, 37 species were poached or seized.

B. Assam: Fragile Environment

The environment scenario in Assam is not different from that of the whole of India. Assam is a state in the northeastern part of India. It is famous for its tea plantations, archaeological sites, and wildlife sanctuaries. There are three major rivers in Assam: the Brahmaputra, the Barak, and the Manas. The state features a heterogeneous mixture of a variety of landscapes, plants, birds, and animals. Because of its climatic conditions, location and forest reserves Assam is a favorable region for the birds, animals, and natural vegetation. Currently, there are a total of 5 National parks and 18 Wildlife Sanctuaries. Out of those National Parks, Kaziranga and Manas are the UNESCO World Heritage sites. Assam is home to several animals with the rarest species such as one-horned Rhinoceros and Golden Languar. However, Assam constitutes 2.39% of the entire geographical area within the country (2001 census). The state is said as the rich house of natural resources like water, flora, fauna soil, etc.



C. Objectives of the Study:

- To examine the relative importance of environmental news vis-a-vis other news.
- To explore the priority of the environmental stories in these newspapers in terms of news format, placement, and proximity.
- To explore the type of stories published by the newspapers as proactive, reactive, or neutral and if it changes over time.
- To examine the slant of these newspapers i.e. proenvironment, pro-development, or neutral.
- To explore how the newspapers frame environmental issues.

II. RESEARCH OUESTIONS

- R.Q.1. What is the amount of comparative space given to environmental stories in these newspapers in relative terms vis a vis other stories?
- R.Q.2. Which subject categories or environmental topics do the newspapers cover prominently?
- R.Q.3. How much level of prominence does environmental news enjoy in the newspapers i.e. front page, inside page, or last page?
- R.Q.4. What level of proximity do they follow in their newspaper in terms of environmental news?
- R.Q.5. What type of news format does the newspaper follow in terms of environmental news?
- R.Q.6. What type of stories do the newspaper publishes i.e. proactive, reactive, or neutral?
- R.Q.7. How do newspapers use the slant in these stories i.e. pro-environment, pro-development, or neutral?
- R.Q.8. How do they frame the environment-related news item?

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Rachel Carson published a book named "Silent Spring" in 1962 which challenged the United States of America to start concerning the issues on the ecological destruction. After the book was published Americans mass media began to report the environmental issues for the first time (Marukatat, 1991, [18]). There have been studies on media and environmental issues which proliferated since the 1980s (Campbell, 1999, [11][23]). According to Hansen (1991, [2][19][20][21]), from the 1960s the western media began its journey in environmental reporting. By the end of the 1980s, the environmental journalism began to arouse as a definite topic. Meanwhile, in the Indian context, the harmonious relationship between humans and nature was a part of the traditional culture of Indians. Thapar (1995, [16][17]) in her journal "Forests and Settlements", traced back the environmental issues from the Pre-Colonial period. To review the problems of the environment, the historical study of the ecology in the Indus and Gujarat region was extremely important. It had been propounded due to lack to see the degradation of their environment.

Environmental issues have been growing in salience over the past few decades and have acquired the status of a global news agenda (Anderson, 1997, [1][22]). Partwarsadhan (2000, [6]) in his study, characterized the climate change issues involving three ramifications. In his first ramification, he demonstrated that India did not possess

any obligations under the convention to scale back its greenhouse gas emissions, international pressure will keep increasing in this regard". Secondly, it must develop a transparent and well-articulated position on each of the essential questions indicated earliest. Thirdly, we need to recognize that even if countries do undertake immediate and rapid action to reduce their emissions, some degree of climate change is inevitable.

Tairo (2011, [7]) studied the print media awareness campaign on Climate change in Tanzania, Africa. Print media in Africa was still a dominant one, and had played a leading role in educating and informing the public about climate change. However, in her study, she found that the Climate-change impacts on agriculture, common-pool resources such as forests and pastures, and human health were the foremost most threatening ones.

Langat (2011, [3]) in his study of print media coverage of environmental sustainability issues in Kenya analyzed two newspapers. Through his research, he investigates what social issues influenced coverage of environmental sustainability issues. The study found the purpose that politics influenced the coverage of environmental sustainability. The issues of environmental sustainability were only given priority if they featured a political personality. Dutt, Garg, and Bhatta (2013, [8]) studied 31 prominent English language Indian newspapers on the environment coverage. This study showed that the problems associated with climate change and global warming were the most focused article altogether in all the selected newspapers. The researcher had scrutinized the topics into its thematic concept where they found that the negative impact of global warming and climate change were the main quorum of those newspapers. Raut and Kakade (2016) in their research investigated that the Kannada newspaper covers the maximum number of other news beats however, making the climate change issues negligible in these newspapers. The Post- editorials and the expert articles were more powerful, stronger than those reports covered by the staffs of the daily (Islam, 2014). Suresh (2016, [15]) in the article "Role of Media in Conserving environment" examines the Health of the environment has not been in good shape and recklessness towards it would lead to serious and irreparable repercussions putting future generations in great jeopardy. Media can play an important role in creating awareness among the people on healthy habits that will boost environmental health. This article suggests, media should come out of their TRP centric coverage. They ought to become more responsible by making comprehensive coverage of environmental issues consistently which would reform the attitude of the people towards nature. On the other hand, the study on sustainability showed that respondents agreed to a great extent or control measure instituted or get to be instituted Lagos state to enhance sustainability (Ajayi, Sofoluwe & Shitu, 2016, [14]). This is an agreement with Fashola (2011) observation that two options were available in Lagos state, the first is mitigation and the other is adoption in combating consequences of climate change.



Newspaper plays an important role in sensitizing the society (Parveen, 2016, [13]). Parveen (2016) had carried out a study on the coverage of environment and sustainable development in the Indian English daily Times of India. The researcher had divided the environmental factors into several themes. Her study revealed that environment and sustainable development issues were given a small space in the selected newspaper.

The Hindu and Times of India is the highest and oldest circulated newspaper in India. In India, Global warming issues gained coverage but only depicts the hub of country Delhi (Meda, 2016, [5]). Meda (2016) had studied the coverage of environmental issues in two dailies where she reflected the two oldest and highest circulated newspaper. Being the highest circulated among all, there were only a few articles related to environmental issues and did not present any follow-up stories in both the newspapers. Through her analysis, she found that The Hindu gives more coverage to environmental news compared to the Times of India (Meda, 2016, [5]). Consistent with the results of the other studies, Lucas (2013, [4]) presents similar findings on the environmental coverage on two Indian dailies The Hindu and The Times of India. He used the content analysis technique which ends up also indicated that the Hindu newspaper gave more coverage to environmental issues than The Times of India.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Content analysis is the technique used in this study. The two theories employed in this study are the Framing and Agenda Setting theory. Moreover, Semetko & Valkenburg (2000, [12]) framing theory has been undertaken in this study. This theory helps us to understand some forces of environmental issues. The English dailies circulated in Assam are the universe of the study.

Sample: The researcher selected the top three English dailies circulated in Assam. The select newspapers are The Assam Tribune, The Sentinel, and The Telegraph. . By circulation, The Assam Tribune (84,215 copies), The Sentinel (90,435 copies) and The Telegraph (Guwahati edition 61,889 copies) are the top three English dailies circulated in Assam. Those newspapers are selected because

they possess the most influential position to reflect the public opinion of the concerned issue.

Sampling Technique: The sampling technique is purposive in terms of choice of the newspapers as these are the most widely circulated English dailies of Assam. The researcher has selected The Assam Tribune, The Sentinel, and The Telegraph also because of their credibility. It has been found in many types of research that these newspapers, especially in Assam exhibit a better deal to environmental issues. The researcher proposes to analyze three newspapers over one year which means 52 weeks. Newspaper is chosen from any day of the week randomly after the study period begins. Each week provided one day for selection of newspapers making it a Random Systematic Sampling technique. Each sample newspaper is analyzed for one day in a week starting with Monday and once seven days are covered, the researcher had revered back to Monday in the eighth week. This process had undertaken different days of the week which ensured importance to all day in a week in the time of conflict and normal time. Since one day in a week is considered, 52 issues of each newspaper are likely to be selected for each newspaper making the total sample size 156 or less.

Sample Size: The total sample size consists of 156 issues, based on the quantification of issues on the environment which publishes from 1st January 2018 to 31st December 2018. The study period has a duration of one year (52 weeks= 1 year, 52 issues from The Assam Tribune, 52 issues from The Sentinel, and 52 issues from The Telegraph= 156 issues).

Variables: The environmental stories published in all the three newspapers during the study period of the study are the variables. The items that described the environmental stories are considered as variables in the study. The variables are Space, Subject category, News Format, Placement, Proximity, Types of story, Slant, and Framing.

Findings A.

Space Occupied by the Environmental and Other a. News Items.

The page size counts 55cm with 8column which are identified as having the same column and length.

Table No. 1. Space and Percentage Occupied by Environmental News in the Three Selected Newspapers

Name of the Newspaper	Space Occupied by Environmental News Items in Print and Photographs (Frequency and Percentage)	Space Occupied by Weather Forecast. (Frequency and Percentage)	Space Occupied by other News, Articles, Photographs and Advertisements (Frequency and Percentage)	Total Print Area and Advertisements
The Assam	8,311colcm (2.29%)	1,040 col.cm	3,53,225 col.cm	3,61,536col.cm
Tribune		(0.28%)	(97.70%)	(38.53%)
The Sentinel	7,111colcm (2.63%)	Nil	2,63,185col.cm (97.36%)	2,70,296col.cm (28.81%)
The Telegraph	3,575colcm (1.16%)	552col.cm (0.18%)	3,02,793col.cm (98.83%)	3,06,368col.cm. (32.65%)
Total	18,997col.cm (2.02%)	1,592colcm (0.16%)	9,19,203col.cm (97.97%)	9,38,200col.cm (100%)

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Overall, the table shows that the total print and advertisement area of the three dailies are 9,38,200col.cm. (100%) where The Assam Tribune, The Sentinel, and The covers 38.53%, Telegraph 28.81%, and 32.65% respectively. Out of the total print area 18,997col.cm (2.02%) is occupied by the environment news and 1,592 col.cm (0.16%) in weather forecast. The other news, articles, photographs, and ads include different news beats

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concerning politics, crime, entertainment, business, etc. which occupied a total of 9,19,203col.cm with the maximum percentage of 97.97%. Hence, the above data and figures show the negligence of the three dailies in covering up the environmental issues. The spaces given for them are limited in comparison to the other news beats,

^{*}Rounding error

Thus the table reveals that *The Assam Tribune* gives maximum space to environmental news in terms of space. *The Sentinel* comes second and *The Telegraph* stands in third.

b. Number of Environmental Stories in Three Newspapers

This presents the number of environmental stories in *The Assam Tribune, The Sentinel, and The Telegraph*, a duration of 1 year.

Table no 2: Frequency and Percentage of Environmental Stories in Three Newspapers

Newspaper	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
The Assam Tribune	214	44.39%
The Sentinel	168	34.85%
The Telegraph	100	20.74%
Total	482	100%

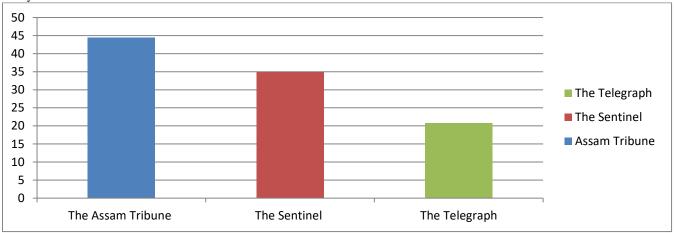


Figure 1: Graphical Representation of Table 2 (Percentage)

Figure no 1 indicates *The Assam Tribune* newspaper has significantly more coverage on the environmental news than *The Sentinel* and *The Telegraph. The Assam Tribune* apart from being one of the second-highest readerships and circulation in Assam not only reaches more people but also educates their readers about the issues related to the environment.

V. SUBJECT CATEGORIES

This section discusses the relevant topics related to environmental news stories in the study. There are a total of 482 stories, where each of the subject categories is scrutinized on 17 relevant environmental topics. The topics are Natural Hazards, Environment Sustainability, Cleanliness drive, Wildlife Conservation, Agriculture, Biodiversity, Man-Animal Conflict, Disaster Management, Man-Made Disasters, Eco-Tourism, Pollution Issues, Water Conservation, Forest Conservation, Weather, Climate change, World Environment Day and Marine Life Conservation.

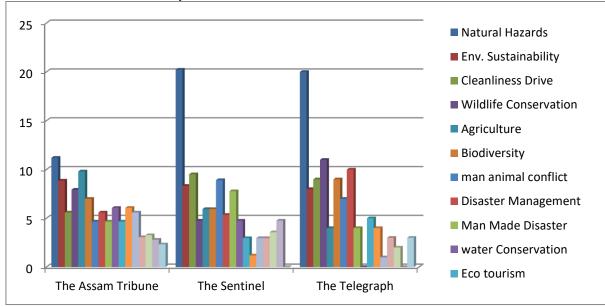


Figure 2: Graph of Coverage on Subject Categories in the three Newspapers



The graph shows that all the three newspapers covered a maximum amount of stories on Natural Disaster that constitutes of 16.18%. Similarly, the story on environment sustainability ranked the second most prominent ones with 8.50% followed by cleanliness drive (7.67%). Similarly, stories on other environmental topics mentioned in the study includes Agriculture 7.26%, Biodiversity 7.05%, Man Animal conflict 6.63%, Disaster management 6.45%, Manmade disasters 5.60%, Ecotourism 4.14%, Pollution issues 3.94%, Water conservation 4.35%, Forest conservation 3.73%., Weather 3.31%, and Climate change 3.11%. News stories like World environment day (2.90%) and Marine life conservation (1.65%) gained the least of all.

News Format: The news format has been quantitatively analyzed and is categorized into five different formats such as News story, Feature story, Editorials, Letters to the editor, and Opinion pieces. The news stories include both the hard

and soft news story that follows the inverted pyramid style employing the 5Ws and 1H in the story. Features are the special writing piece on any particular topic or an issue. It called also be called Human interest stories which involve the individual triumph stories, disaster, and adventure. However, the editorial is regarded as the most important part of any newspaper. An editorial piece is written by the editor where he expresses the view or stand in any particular issue or event. The format categorized in this study is Letters to the editor, it is the newspaper special piece written by the public to the newspaper organization on any issue. The last format is an opinion piece, written by the public/ readers where they express their ideas on any event and gives feedback to the concerned newspaper. It is regarded as the most important part of the newspaper; it serves as the feedback from the readers.

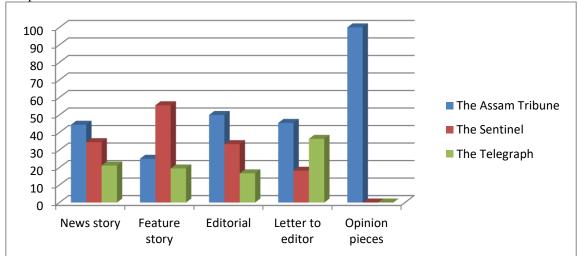


Figure: 3. Graph of News Format in three Newspapers

The graph shows that *The Assam Tribune* publishes the maximum number of news stories followed by *The Sentinel* and *The Telegraph*. In feature story format, *The Sentinel* featured the maximum number of stories followed by *The Assam Tribune* and *The Telegraph*. *The Assam Tribune* in Editorial format publishes the maximum number of stories followed by *The Sentinel* and *The Telegraph*. In terms of Letters to the Editor, *The Assam Tribune* publishes more stories followed by *The Telegraph* and *The Sentinel*. *The*

Assam Tribune is the only newspaper which featured the Opinion pieces of the readers.

A. Placement of the Story

The placement of the news item plays a vital role in setting an agenda for the readers. This section analyses the placement of an environmental story which is certainly divided into three pages i.e. Front Page, inside page, and back page.

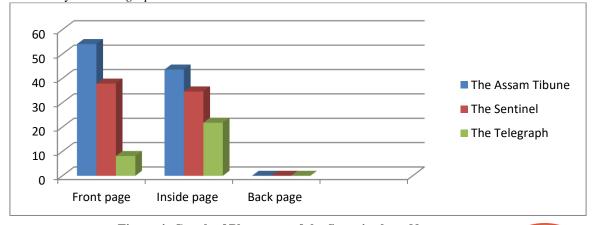


Figure 4: Graph of Placement of the Story in three Newspapers



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It shows that *The Assam Tribune* publishes the maximum number of front-page story followed by *The Sentinel* and *The Telegraph*. Similarly, in terms of Inside page placement, *The Assam Tribune* again publishes the maximum number of stories in their Inside page followed by *The Sentinel* and *The Telegraph*.

Proximity of the Newspaper: This section discusses about the proximity of the newspaper where the

geographical variation is divided into the State, Northeast, National and International. As state is considered, all the selected newspapers are published from Guwahati. The newspaper selected in this study is the highest circulated English dailies in the north eastern part of India also known as eight sisters of India consisting of eight different states i.e. Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura.

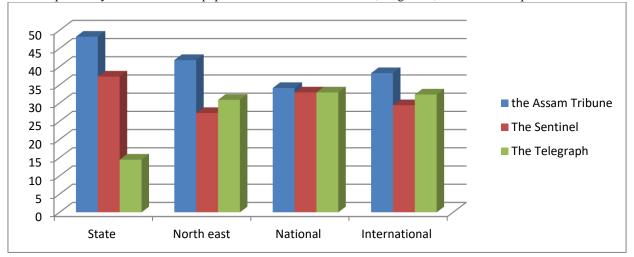


Figure: 5. Graph of Proxmity of the Story in three Newspapers

In terms of proximity the Graph 5.5. shows that *The Assam Tribune* publishes the maximum number of State, Northeast, National, and international stories.

B. Types of Story

This presents the frequency and percentage of nature based on the types of environmental stories. The type of story is categorized under three categories such as proactive, reactive, and neutral. Firstly, the pro-active contents deal with the hard story, advocacy, and awareness. Secondly, the reactive story contents deal with the follow-up stories, aftermath, and the causes of the event. Thirdly, the neutral contents deal with the government announcement stories, reports of government and related schemes.

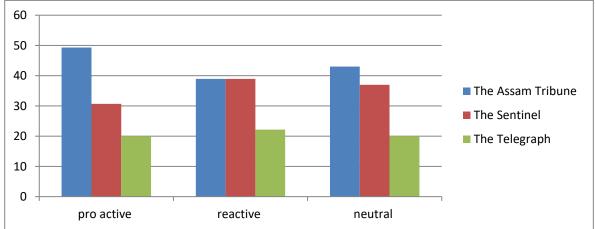


Figure: 6: Graph of Types of the Story in three Newspapers

As shown in the graph, *The Assam Tribune* publishes the maximum percentage of pro-active story followed by *The Sentinel* and *The Telegraph*. Secondly, *The Assam Tribune* and *The Sentinel* publish the same amount of re-active story followed by *The Telegraph*. Thirdly, the Neutral stories in *The Assam Tribune* marks the highest followed by *The Sentinel* and *The Telegraph*.

C. Slant of the Newspaper

This section presents the frequency and percentage of nature based on the slant used in environmental stories. As referred to environmental issues, the Slant of the newspaper is categorized under three categories such as proenvironment, pro-development, and neutral. Mostly, proenvironment slant stories deal with sustainability, conservations, protection related to environmental issues. The stories that deal with the developmental issues of the environment are determined under this category. Neither story that do not reflect Pro-environment nor prodevelopment stories are the neutral stories.





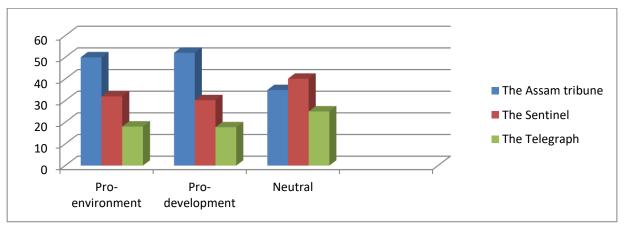


Figure: 7: Graph of Slant of the Story in three Newspapers

As shown in the graph, *The Assam Tribune* publishes the maximum percentage of Pro-environment story followed by *The Sentinel* and *The Telegraph*. Similarly, in the Prodevelopment story, *The Assam Tribune* publishes the maximum percentage followed by *The Sentinel* and *The Telegraph*. In Neutral stories, *The Sentinel* possesses the maximum of all followed by *The Assam Tribune* and *The Telegraph*.

D. Framing in the Selected Newspapers

As earlier discussed in methodology (chapter 3), the theory used in this study is the framing theory given by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) "generic frames". The generic frame is categorized into five different frames Attribution of Responsibility, Human interest, Conflict, Morality and Consequences/ Economic frame.

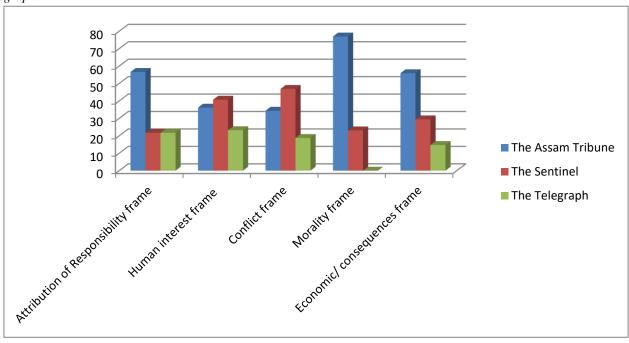


Figure: 8: Graph of Framing of the Story in three Newspapers

The graph shows that *The Assam Tribune* publishes the maximum number of Attribution of Responsibility frame followed by *The Sentinel* and *The Telegraph* with the same percentage. In the Human Interest frame and Conflict frame, *The Sentinel* featured the maximum number of stories followed by *The Assam Tribune* and *The Telegraph. The Assam Tribune* in Morality frame publishes the maximum number of stories followed by *The Sentinel* and *The Telegraph* with no stories. In terms of the Economic/Consequences frame, *The Assam Tribune* publishes more stories followed by *The Telegraph* and *The Sentinel*.

VI. CONCLUSION

In this study, the findings seem to prove that the coverage of environmental news is not very significant in

these newspapers. Although *The Assam Tribune* compared to *The Sentinel* and *The Telegraph* provided more space to environmental news, but the total space devoted to the environmental news is very low in these newspapers.

In terms of magnitude and type, news priority (placement, news format, and proximity) and nature (types of story, slant, and framing); *The Assam Tribune* has given a significant representation to the environmental items. Moreover, in terms of environmental topics, it is concluded that the top 10 most prominent environmental topics of the three newspapers are different.



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It is found that some important environmental topics such as Disaster management, Wildlife conservation, and Pollution issues do not gain *much* importance in those newspapers. Therefore, the findings of the study indicate that the issues related to environmental issues are needed to be more exposed to educate the public.

Meanwhile, in terms of news format, the news stories gained a prominent position in all the newspapers. In comparison with The Sentinel and The Telegraph, The Assam Tribune has published a good number of opinion pieces which is indeed remarkably a positive characteristic of an organization. The two newspapers do not publish a single opinion piece related to the environment which determined that the news organization does not provide any importance to the voice of the readers. Editorial gained a low level of coverage which reveals that the editor does not seem to create an awareness or information about the environmental issues happening in and around the globe or the region. The findings of news format also indicates that the newspaper has more or less succeeded in disseminating the news but failed in receiving the feedback from the readers.

Moreover, in terms of placement of the newspapers, it is shown that these newspapers mostly allotted the majority of their stories on the inside page. The front page is determined as the *most* important part of the newspapers. But in this study, few stories are allocated on the front page of the selected newspapers. The findings of placement also indicate that the issues on the environment were not an important issue to be highlighted. Thus, we can conclude that these newspapers do not consider the environmental items as prominent; therefore less coverage is allocated on the front page. However, in terms of geographic coverage, it reveals that the prominence of the newspaper edition affects the environment stories. Therefore, the findings of prominence reveals that the newspapers paid more attention to environmental stories at the state level (i.e. Assam) followed by the national level and providing less space to international and northeast stories.

Nevertheless, in terms of the type of story, a proactive story has been found the most dominant in all the newspapers. There is not much difference in the percentage of proactive, reactive, and neutral. To make readers aware and educate, the *newspapers* mostly reported the reactive and proactive stories. The analysis further investigates that the slant of the newspaper is mostly pro-environment followed by neutral and pro-development as the least. The findings suggest that the Pro development stories must be reported frequently to create awareness about the development in the environment.

The study also shows that the framing analysis demonstrated the Human- Interest frame as the most prominent frame followed by Attribution of Responsibility, Economic/ consequences, Conflict, and Morality frame. The investigation showed that the morality frame did not gain much importance. *Therefore*, the findings suggest that the Attribution of Responsibility frame shall become to the forefront alongside the Human interest frame to make the readers more accommodating. From this study, it appears that the reporters lacked an investigative spirit of various environmental issues.

DECLARATION STATEMENT

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Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate	No, the article does not require ethical approval and consent to participate with evidence.	
Availability of Data and Material	Not relevant.	
Authors Contributions	I am only the sole author of the article.	

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