

Media Coverage of Chennai-Ennore Oil Spill Disaster

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Abstract

The present research is-related to the appraisal of the media coverage of oil spill disaster and so detection of coverage, determination of the distribution of coverage and determination of the contributory factors to the overall coverage of oil spill disaster-related news and illustrations in a leading Tamil newspaper was independently carried out. The detection on the coverage of oil spill disaster-related news revealed that there was 16.5% of coverage as an average on daily basis in the newspaper. It also revealed that 21.4% of the news was well supported by suitable illustrations. The determination of distribution of coverage revealed that the oil spill disaster-related news was inappropriately distributed in news items, special articles, editorials and other integral components of newspaper. It also revealed that 56% of the oil spill disaster-related news distribution was in upper-half part on both sides of the newspaper so as to have better readability. The determination of contributory factors to coverage revealed that spread of oil spill, stick on the shore, cleanup process taken by government authorities, cleanup process taken up by volunteers and disposal of sludge mainly contributed to the overall coverage in the news items of the newspaper. It also revealed that environmental, economic and abatement measures mainly contributed to the overall coverage in the special articles and editorials of the newspaper. It could be concluded that the role of media would be optimized to ensure the provision of balanced information regarding disasters to common public.

Keywords: Oil spill disaster, Media coverage, Occurrence, Impacts, Cleanup process

Introduction

The disaster brings disturbance to society, and media is the most important source of information to society regarding disaster and its disturbance. It is reported that the oil spill disaster occurred due to collision between empty and oil tankers outside the port in Ennore near Chennai on 28th January 2017. It is also reported that the bulky volume of thick oil was spilt into the Bay of Bengal and around 30 km of Chennai's coastline was affected by the oil spill.⁵ It is pertinent to mention here that the media coverage of occurrence, immediate impact, and cleanup process of oil spill is essential to make aware and educate the common public. The researchers expose that content analysis can serve as an effective research tool to quantify and qualify the concepts within texts or set of texts in

media. The researchers also expose that content analysis on the coverage of disasters is required for decision making and policy making in connection with the prospective disaster management.⁷ By considering all these factual information, the present research was devoted (i) to detect the coverage, (ii) to determine the distribution of coverage, and (iii) to detect and determine the contributory factors to the overall coverage of oil spill disaster in a leading Tamil newspaper. The standard methodology was adopted and the generated research outcomes have been recorded in this research paper for the benefit of media people, researchers and common public.

Materials and Methods

A Tamil newspaper that has a wide circulation in Tamil Nadu was selected. As the census sampling method was

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used, the selected newspaper was methodically collected during the stipulated period of time. The qualitative and quantitative method of content analysis was undertaken on the chosen topic in all the collected newspapers.

In the present research, the oil spill disaster-related information was identified from the headlines. In case the headlines were not clear, the contents were read to identify the subjects. All the oil spill disaster-related information that included oil spill disaster-related news and illustrations were identified. They were marked and the marked contents were separated. The separated contents were analyzed.

In the present research, as mentioned earlier, the coverage of oil spill disaster-related information was detected. In addition, the distribution of oil spill disaster-related

information was determined. The contributory factors to the overall coverage of oil spill disaster-related information were detected and also determined. On the whole, the qualitative and quantitative analysis was carried out on oil spill disaster-related news and illustrations in the chosen and collected newspapers.⁶

Results and Discussion

In the present research, the coverage, distribution of coverage, and contributory factors to the overall coverage of oil spill disaster-related information were individually assessed. While the coverage has been presented in Table 1, the distributions of coverage and contributions to the overall coverage have been presented in Table 2 and Table 3 respectively.

Table 1. Coverage of Oil Spill Disaster-Related Information

Parameters	Coverage in Newspaper (No. and Space in cm ²)	
	No.	Space
Coverage of news	230	142140.18
Coverage of illustrations	69	16560.00

Table 2. Distributions of Coverage

Parameters	Distribution of Coverage (%)
News	86.9
Special articles	8.6
Editorials	0.4
Others	4.1

Table 3. Contributions to the Coverage

Factors	Contribution to Coverage (%)	Factors	Contribution to Coverage (%)
Occurrence of the disaster		Cleanup process of volunteers	
Collision of ships	1.8	Field work	8.6
Oceanographic conditions	0.2	Interview	3.8
Spread of oil spill	2.2	Discrepancy in cleanup process	
4.2			
Impacts of oil spill		Requirement of preparedness	1.8
Disturbance to shore residents	0.6	Requirement of coordination	0.2
Disturbance to tourists	0.2	Requirement of management	0.7
Impacts on fisher folk	1.6	Requirement of apparatus	1.4
Impacts on environment	19.6	Requirement of safety set ups	1.1
Impacts on economy	6.7	Requirement of disposal system	2.4
Others	0.6	Requirement of skilled workers	1.8
Activities of government authorities		Others	0.6
Visits	4.8	Sources of news	
Interview/Press release	3.4	News agencies	1.6
Activities of political leaders		Departmental officials	2.4
Visits	5.2	Environmentalists	1.2
Interview/Press releases	3.2	Rescue workers	2.6
Clean up process from government side		Others	2.3
PCB	3.4	General measures	
Coast guard	3.2	Do's and Don'ts	1.2
Departments	2.6	Suggestions and advices	1.6
Corporation	3.4	Abatement measures	0.8
Others	0.6	Others	0.6

In the present research, the coverage was detected and it was observed that the oil spill disaster-related news dominated headlines for two consecutive days in the newspaper. It was also observed that the oil spill disaster-related news was 16.5% as an average on daily basis in the newspaper during the stipulated period. In the same context of coverage, it was perceived that two tall pages in the newspaper for two alternate days were solely devoted not only to show the photographs of the collided ships, spread of oil spill, stick on the shore, cleanup process, spray of the oil dispersant chemical with the help of helicopter, accumulation of sludge in high-density polyethylene sheets and spray of bio-agents but also to show the photographs in connection with environmental effects such as dead birds, dead turtles and affected fish catch with apt captions in the newspaper. It was also perceived that 0.6% of the news items were supported by diagrams and graphs, 20.8% of news items were supported by photographs and the remaining news items were neither supported by diagrams and graphs nor supported by photographs.^{1,2}

In the present research, the distribution of coverage was determined and it was observed that the oil spill disaster-related news was inappropriately distributed in news, special articles, editorials and other integral components of the newspaper. It was also observed that the coverage had unsuitable news distribution from collision of ships to removal of sludge. In the same context of determination of distribution of coverage, it was perceived that the 20% of oil spill disaster-related information placement was in front pages and the remaining 80% was in the middle and last pages. It was also perceived that 56% of the oil spill disaster-related news placement was in upper half part on both sides of the newspaper so as to have better readability.⁴

In the present research, the contributory factors to the overall coverage were determined and it was observed that the general measures of oil spill and cleanup process of oil spill had the minimum and maximum contribution respectively to the overall coverage. It was also observed that there were oil spill disaster-related news items with unequal contribution of varied news due to non-adherence of code of ethics of reporting of disaster. In the same

context of determination of contributory factors to the overall coverage, it was perceived that spread of oil spill, stick on the shore, cleanup process taken by government authorities, cleanup process taken by volunteers and disposal of sludge mainly contributed to the overall coverage in the news items of the newspaper. It was also perceived that environmental, economic and abatement measures mainly contributed to the overall coverage in the special articles and editorials of the newspaper.³

Conclusion

It could be concluded that the role of media would be optimized to ensure the provision of balanced information regarding disasters to common public.

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