

Learning to be an Environmental Journalist

Before you Begin

Communication happens when there is an exchange of information between individuals through spoken words, gestures, or written form. It can be both verbal and non verbal. This is a natural part of the way we conduct ourselves. Communication as a discipline has evolved to include a deep understanding of using various media such as written media, audio-visual media and the emerging social media to share and exchange messages. Technical advancement including satellite technology for communication, mobile technology and revolutions in computer applications for social networking, messaging etc. have helped create a plethora of virtual media available to people.

When communication is produced and distributed with a purpose of sharing news about happenings in our social, political, economic environment in the immediate, national and international context, it is termed as Journalism. News too uses all forms of communication media from written to audio-visual. Journalists provide us with a daily update on what is happening in the world around us. Not only that, the way news are portrayed, stories formulated shape opinions of the recipients. With the advent of internet and ease of sharing the events, a new form journalism known as citizen journalism is emerging that involves the collection, dissemination, and analysis of news and information by the general public.

With the immense potential, come the challenges, and the plethora of media, information and news create an overload of messages that often can confuse or desensitize the recipient. For a communicator, it becomes a challenge to make oneself heard in this noise of messages. The challenge is to creatively engage the attention of the reader, listener, viewer and be able to communicate the key points across.

What are the different kinds of media being used/ can be used for communication as a journalist?

1. Print: written word works well with the literate community. Print media using visuals have been able to reach out to people with low literacy levels. Online published media is emerging as an important alternative to print media.
2. Audio-visual: Radio especially with the FM channels available, has huge potential and reach in the community especially in remote locations. Television programmes have a huge viewership and impact opinion in a big way.
3. Emerging social media such as the Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter have found use in mass production and consumption of information.

All of these media can also support each other owing to technological advances. For example, e-newspapers, news blogs, facebook pages, FM radio etc. are available on smart phones and it is much easier to access information and share than it was before. So while there is huge potential for outreach, the danger is of ill-informed, poorly researched, biased or subjective stories to find a way into the media. Hence, responsible and sensitive reporting becomes imperative.

Journalism Basics

Frame the issue using the questions -
Who did **What** **Where** and **When**
Then look for additional information –
How did the what occur, or how did the who do the what?
Why did the who do the what?

One of the emerging challenge of media is to be able to spot the bias and power to manipulate. Literacy for many years was associated with one's ability to read and write. The scenario has changed over time when it was primarily a print media from which one got information to a situation where we get our information from a complex interwoven system now heavily dependent on technologies. Hence, the ability to read many types of media has become an essential skill in the 21st Century. Media literacy has been defined as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media. As an outcome, media literacy helps to better understand the complex messages we receive from television, radio, Internet, newspapers, magazines, books, billboards, video games, music, social media and other forms of media. Media literacy is an effective and engaging way to apply critical thinking skills to a wide range of issues.

Media literacy skills developed through journalism can also help young people develop critical thinking skills by being able to:

- recognize what the message creator wants us to believe or do
- understand how media messages influence, shape and sustain a culture and society
- recognize bias, spin, misinformation/ lies
- decipher the information not being presented
- identify the intended target group of the media
- evaluate media messages based on own experiences, skills, beliefs, and values
- create and distribute own messages across different media

A good journalist needs to have media literacy skills. This strand looks at three key media used as a part of the YRE programme – newspaper article writing, using photographs to tell a story, and using videos for communicating about an issue.