

A Comparative Study of Environmental Issues Coverage in Two English Dailies

Sneha Singh

BA(Hons) Journalism with Research , Maharaja Agrasen College , Delhi University

Abstract - This research compares environmental reporting in two of India's largest English newspapers – The Times of India (TOI) and Hindustan Times (HT) during the winter pollution crisis of 2025-2026. I analysed 129 articles from TOI and 121 articles from HT, and measured the print space given to environmental content over two months (1 December 2025 to 31 January 2026). The findings show that environmental coverage occupied only 1.03% of TOI's total space and 1.12% of HT's total space. Air pollution was the most covered issue (68% in TOI, 65% in HT). The dominant frame in both newspapers was “policy failure” blaming the government (TOI 52%, HT 44%). Solutions were mentioned in only 38-41% of articles, and most were policy or technology based. Industry and corporate actors were blamed in only 6-8% of articles. The study concludes that commercial pressure from advertising severely limits the quantity and depth of environmental journalism.

Keywords: Environmental journalism; Delhi air pollution; media framing; Times of India; Hindustan Times; AQI coverage; environmental governance.

INTRODUCTION

Delhi-NCR has been facing a severe air pollution crisis for many years. During the winter of 2025-2026, the Air Quality Index (AQI) went above 450 “severe+” on several days. Schools were closed, flights were cancelled, and hospitals saw more patients with breathing problems. Both The Times of India and Hindustan Times, two of the largest English newspapers in India, gave a lot of coverage to these events. But how much space did they actually give to the environment? What kind of stories did they write? Who did they blame? And did they offer real solutions?

Existing research on Indian environmental journalism has looked at framing (Das, 2020) or at the business side of news (Kumar, 2021), but very few studies have combined both. Also, no study has actually measured, day by day, how much of the newspaper is environmental content and how much is advertisements. This study fills that gap by focusing on a two-month period from 1 December 2025 to 31 January 2026, which covers the peak of the winter smog crisis.

Research Questions

1. Which environmental issues receive the most coverage in each newspaper?
2. How much environmental news did the two English dailies publish?
3. How did each paper explain who is responsible for Delhi's environmental problems?

Objectives

1. To analyze the environmental coverage in major English dailies.
2. To identify issues of importance covered in English dailies.
3. To find the major narratives and temperament of the stories covered.

Hypothesis

H1: English newspapers rely on government orders and policy frameworks.

H2: Issues of importance is divided by local challenges.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Framing theory, first developed by Entman (1993), argues that media select certain parts of reality and make them more important. In environmental communication, common frames include “crisis”, “policy failure”, “technological fix”, and “human interest” (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007). These frames shape how readers understand the causes and solutions of environmental problems.

In India, print media plays a big role in shaping public opinion on environmental issues. Patil (2011) noted that print media leaves a lasting impression on readers because of its detailed coverage and analysis. Roba (2012) emphasised that media is crucial for educating society, especially about the environment.

However, Indian environmental journalism faces many challenges. Das (2020) found that newspapers often blame the government for pollution but avoid criticising industries. Singh (2019) observed that coverage is mostly episodic – it increases only during visible crises like smog – rather than deep or investigative. This means issues like groundwater depletion, waste management, and biodiversity loss get very little attention.

Another important idea is the political economy of news. Newspapers in India get 70-80% of their money from advertisements (Kumar, 2021). This dependence can lead to self censorship: stories that might upset big advertisers (car companies, real estate, energy firms) are written in a soft way or avoided. This study tests whether such commercial pressure affects environmental reporting in TOI and HT.

The National Institute of Mass Communication & Journalism (2025) notes that journalists help bring attention to ignored environmental issues and can spark legislative changes. Yet, how well mainstream English newspapers perform this role has not been studied in detail. This research fills that gap by comparing two leading newspapers during a severe pollution crisis.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a mix of counting (quantitative) and understanding (qualitative) methods. I chose the two most circulated English newspapers in Delhi according to the 2025 ABC report – The Times of India and Hindustan Times. I studied the period from 1 December 2025 to 31 January 2026 – two full months that cover the worst winter smog.

How I measured space for environmental news:

I collected daily data from the newspapers jackets (1 to 8), news pages (1 to 30), and supplement pages. For each day, I added up all the column inches of “Envi” (environmental content) and divided by the total column inches of the newspaper. This gave me the percentage of space given to the environment. And I also calculated Advertisement column inches.

How I analysed the articles:

I collected all environment-related articles – news reports, features, editorials, and briefs. In TOI, I found 129 articles. In HT, I found 121 articles. For each article, I noted:

- **Primary issue:** air pollution, water pollution, waste management, or biodiversity.
- **Frame type:** how the story was told – policy failure/accountability, informative/weather update, crisis/emergency, solution-oriented/success, judicial/legal, human interest/health, or political/legislative.
- **Primary source:** who was quoted government official, expert, ordinary citizen, court/NGT, NGO/activist, or political party.
- **Blame:** who was held responsible – state government, central government, previous government (AAP), weather, citizens/lifestyle, or industry/corporate.
- **Solution mentioned:** yes or no. If yes, what kind policy, technology, infrastructure, enforcement, behavioural change, or nature-based.
- **Temperament (tone):** I used a 5-point Likert scale: 1 = completely neutral, 2 = slightly concerned, 3 = concerned, 4 = frustrated, 5 = very angry. I gave a score to each article based on its language, word choice, and emotional intensity.

I recorded all this in Excel sheets and then calculated percentages and averages.

Findings and Analysis

3.1 How much environmental news did the two English dailies publish?

Times of India

Period	Total Column Inches	Environmental inches	Percentage
December	446,287	6,526	1.46%
January	466,930	2,847	0.61%
Total (two months)	913,217	9,373	1.03%

Hindustan Times

Period	Total column inches	Environmental inches	Percentage
December	460,973	6,793	1.47%
January	412,937	3,007	0.73%
Total (two months)	873,910	9,800	1.12%

Interpretation: Both newspapers gave only about 1% of their total space to environmental issues. This is extremely low given the severity of the pollution crisis. Even in December, when AQI crossed 450 on multiple days, TOI gave only 1.46% (Dec) and HT gave 1.12%. In January, the share dropped further. This shows that environmental reporting is a very small priority. This answers Research Question 2.

3.1.2 Advertising space compared to environmental space

Times of India

Period	Total inches	Ads inches	Envi inches	Ads %	Envi %
Dec	446,287	229,708	6,526	51.5%	1.46%
January	466,930	147,207	2,847	31.5%	0.61%
Total(two months)	913,217	376,915	9,373	41.3%	1.03%

Hindustan Times

Period	Total inches	Ads inches	Envi inches	Ads %	Envi %
December	460,973	131,846	6,793	28.6%	1.47%
January	412,937	118,046	3,007	28.6%	0.73%
Total(twomonths)	873,910	249,892	9,800	28.6%	1.12%

Interpretation:

In TOI, advertisements occupied 41.3% of total space over two months and in December, ads alone took 51.5% of the newspaper. In HT, ads consistently took 28.6% each month. In contrast, environmental content remained at only about 1% in both newspapers. This shows that commercial advertising dominates print space, leaving very little room for environmental reporting. Even during the peak pollution crisis, ads occupied more than half of TOI's pages.

3.2 Which environmental issues receive the most coverage?

Based on coding of 129 TOI articles and 121 HT articles:

Primary Issue	TOI (%)	HT (%)
Air pollution	68%	65%
Water pollution	18%	20%
Waste management	8%	7%
Biodiversity / forest	6%	8%

Interpretation: Air pollution dominates coverage in both newspapers – more than two-thirds of all environment articles. This is understandable given the severe smog, but other important issues like water contamination (ammonia in Yamuna, sewage) and waste management (landfills, garbage burning) get much less attention. This answers Research Question 1 and supports Hypothesis H2.

3.3 How did each paper explain responsibility (blame)?

I coded blame attribution in each article. Multiple answers were allowed because some articles blamed more than one entity.

Blamed Entity	TOI (%)	HT (%)
State / local government	65%	58%
Central government	38%	42%
Previous government(AAP)	31%	22%
Weather	24%	28%

Citizens / lifestyle	9%	12%
Industry / corporate	6%	8%

Interpretation: The state government is blamed the most in both newspapers 65% in TOI, 58% in HT. TOI blames the previous AAP government (31%) more than HT does (22%). Weather is blamed in about one-quarter of the articles 24% in TOI, 28% in HT which shifts responsibility away from human actions and makes pollution seem like a natural problem. Most importantly, industry and corporate actors are blamed in only 6-8% of articles, even though vehicles, construction, and thermal power plants are major pollution sources. This answers Research Question 3 and supports Hypothesis H1 that newspapers rely on government frameworks and avoid blaming corporate interests.

3.4 Major narratives (frames)

I classified each article into one of seven frame types.

Frame Type	TOI (%)	HT (%)
Policy failure/ accountability	52%	44%
Informative / weather update	18%	25%
Crisis / emergency	14%	12%
Solution-oriented / success	6%	8%
Judicial / legal	6%	5%
Human interest / health	3%	4%
Political / legislative	1%	2%

Interpretation: The “policy failure” frame dominates in both newspapers – 52% in TOI, 44% in HT. This means most stories are about how the government is not doing enough. The “crisis” frame appears in 12-14% of articles, mostly during days when AQI was very high. The “solution-oriented” frame is very rare only 6-8% of articles. This shows that newspapers are good at pointing out failures but not at giving space to success stories or practical solutions.

3.5 Temperament (tone) of the stories

I used a 5-point Likert scale:

- 1 = completely neutral (just facts, no emotion)
- 2 = slightly concerned (mild worry)
- 3 = concerned (clear worry but not angry)
- 4 = frustrated (anger at systems or people)
- 5 = very angry (extreme language, outrage)

Results:

Newspaper	Average temperament score
TOI	2.9
HT	2.6

Breakdown of TOI articles:

- 1 (neutral): 12%
- 2 (slightly concerned): 28%
- 3 (concerned): 35%
- 4 (frustrated): 18%
- 5 (very angry): 7%

Breakdown of HT articles:

- 1 (neutral): 18%
- 2 (slightly concerned): 32%
- 3 (concerned): 30%
- 4 (frustrated): 15%
- 5 (very angry): 5%

Interpretation: TOI articles are slightly more frustrated than HT articles, with an average score of 2.9 compared to HT's 2.6. This matches the observation that TOI gives more space to citizen voices and court orders, which often express anger and frustration. HT stays more neutral and expert-driven. However, both newspapers stay within a safe range they do not reach extreme anger (score 5 is only 5-7%). This suggests that even when criticising, the newspapers avoid language that might upset advertisers or powerful interests.

3.6 Who is quoted as a source?

I counted every source quoted in the articles. One article could have multiple sources.

Source Type	TOI (%)	HT (%)
Government	39%	48%
Expert	15%	22%
Citizen	18%	12%
Court / NGT	14%	8%
NGO / Activist	8%	6%
Political party	6%	4%

Interpretation: HT relies more on government officials (48%) and experts (22%). TOI gives more space to ordinary citizens (18%) and court orders (14%). This shows a difference in editorial style – HT is more formal, top-down, and analytical; TOI is more populist, bottom-up, and emotional. However, both newspapers depend heavily on official sources (government + experts + court = 68% in TOI, 78% in HT). This supports Hypothesis H1 that English newspapers rely on government orders and policy frameworks.

3.7 Are solutions mentioned, and what kind?

Only 41% of TOI articles and 38% of HT articles mentioned solution. This means in more than half of the stories, there was no suggestion of what to do or how to fix the problem.

Solution Type	TOI (%)	HT (%)
Policy / regulation	52%	48%
Technology (EVs, air purifiers, etc.)	28%	32%
Infrastructure (drains, roads, metro, etc.)	10%	12%

Enforcement / fines	7%	8%
Behavioral change(carpool, WFH, reduce car use, etc.)	3%	5%
Nature-based(tree planting , wetland restoration, etc.)	1%	2%

Interpretation: Policy and technology together make up 80% of all solutions mentioned. Behavioural change like using fewer private cars or working from home is only 3-5%. Nature based solutions which are often cheap, effective, and sustainable are almost invisible (only 1-2%). This shows that both newspapers prefer “techno-managerial” solutions that do not challenge the existing economic system or require people and companies to change their lifestyle. Blaming industry (6-8%) and offering behavioural or nature-based solutions (1-5%) are both very rare which suggests that newspapers avoid solutions that might upset advertisers or readers.

DISCUSSION

The findings clearly show that environmental coverage in both newspapers is quantitatively very small only about 1% of total print space. Even during the worst smog days, space for the environment never crossed 1.5%. This indicates that newspapers prioritise advertising revenue over public health reporting. The environment is a leftover, not a priority.

Why is the space so small? Newspapers are commercial businesses. Advertisements bring most of their income. Environmental stories do not sell as many ads as real estate, automobile, or entertainment sections. So the environment gets squeezed into whatever space is left after ads are placed. Even when AQI is over 450, the share of environmental space does not increase significantly.

Why does “policy failure” dominate? Blaming the government is safe. Governments change, and criticising them does not upset major advertisers like car companies, real estate developers, or energy firms. The near-absence of industry blame (only 6-8%) is the strongest evidence of self-censorship driven by advertising pressure. Blaming the weather (24-28%) also depoliticises the issue it makes pollution seem natural and uncontrollable.

Why are solutions so rare and narrow? Only 38-41% of articles mention any solution. When they do, it is mostly policy and technology. Behavioural change would require newspapers to question their own advertisers (e.g., car ads) and to ask readers to change habits which might reduce readership. Nature based solutions do not fit the “crisis” news frame they are not dramatic or urgent. So they get ignored.

Differences between TOI and HT: TOI is more populist, citizen-focused, slightly more frustrated (temperament 2.9 vs 2.6), and more likely to quote courts and citizens. HT is more expert-driven, neutral, and reliant on government sources. Both share the same fundamental limitation: dependence on advertising.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that environmental coverage in The Times of India and Hindustan Times is both very small (about 1% of total space) and shallow dominated by policy-failure framing, avoidance of corporate blame, rare mention of solutions, and narrow solution types (policy & technology only). The commercial pressure of advertising is the most likely explanation.

The research questions have been answered:

- **RQ1:** Air pollution is the most covered issue (65-68%), followed by water (18-20%), waste (7-8%), and biodiversity (6-8%).
- **RQ2:** Environmental news occupied only 1.03% (TOI) and 1.12% (HT) of total print space.
- **RQ3:** Responsibility is placed mostly on state/local government (58-65%), while industry is ignored (6-8%).

The hypotheses are supported:

- **H1:** English newspapers rely on government orders and policy frameworks (government is the primary source and blame target).
- **H2:** Issues of importance are divided by local challenges – air pollution dominates because it is the most visible crisis.

Recommendations for better environmental journalism:

- Newspapers should create independent environmental desks funded by foundations or reader subscriptions not dependent on advertising.
- Journalists should consciously include behavioural and nature based solutions in their stories.
- Media literacy campaigns can teach readers to notice when corporate polluters are missing from the blame.

Final reflection: As a journalism student, I started this research believing that newspapers do their best to cover the environment. The numbers tell a different story. The environment is a tiny, squeezed part of the newspaper, and even that tiny part avoids blaming the real polluters. This is a hard truth, but it is important to face it if we want better environmental journalism.

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