

Original Article

AGENDA SETTING OF FOREST FIRE NEWS IN ONLINE NEWSPAPERS — A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF FOREST FIRE NEWS COVERAGE IN REGIONAL AND NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

The increasing intensity of forest fires has emerged as a major environmental concern, posing serious threats to ecosystems around the world. The study examines the coverage of forest fire news and investigates what elements were used to cover forest fire news stories in regional and national newspapers in Himachal Pradesh. To accomplish this research, the study utilized quantitative content analysis using four newspapers: The Times of India and The Tribune (English), and Dainik Jagran and Divya Himachal (Hindi). A sample of ninety news stories (N = 90) was selected from four newspapers selected based on their circulation and readership. The findings revealed that most of the news stories were focused on the impact of forest fires on the environment in all the newspapers. The study also examines the coverage of forest fire causes, article length, and the use of visual elements. The findings revealed that most of the news stories, 37 (41.1%), did not specify the causes of forest fires, showing that greater emphasis was given on reporting incidents rather than explaining their causes. Among the causes covered, natural factors, 22 (24.4%), and human negligence, 19 (21.1%), received the most attention. The study found that most of the stories were of medium (50.0%) and short (46.7%) length, with very few news stories in the longer category. Overall, the findings revealed that most news stories had not covered the underlying causes of forest fires. Similarly, among different categories, policy-related news stories received relatively less prominence in all newspapers' coverage. Therefore, the study recommends that greater emphasis be given to policy-oriented news and the underlying causes of forest fires to support effective forest management.

Keywords: Forest Fires, Online Newspapers, Content Analysis, Himachal Pradesh

INTRODUCTION

Every year, forest fires cause extensive damage to ecosystems around the globe, destroying biodiversity, killing various species of wildlife, and affecting people's lives (Driscoll et al., 2024). Himachal Pradesh, known for its green cover and beautiful environment, is not immune to this serious concern either. In fact, forest fire issues in the state have escalated over the past few years. According to the reports given by the Forest Survey of India (FSI), Himachal Pradesh experienced a surge in forest fire issues, with up to 857 fires in 2022–2023 and 685 fire incidents recorded in 2023–2024, 2613 in 2024–2025, 570 in 2025–2026, and 637 in 2026–2027. Authorities and government officials attributed this surge to increasing heat waves and unregulated human activities, such as burning cigarettes and intentional fires for various personal purposes Lavana (2024). Media plays a significant role in influencing how the public perceives and understands issues and events—not only by covering what has happened, but by framing these events

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in such a way that the public can narrate them easily [Entman \(1993\)](#). In recent years, the frequency of forest fires has increased significantly for various reasons. Various media studies explain the role of different framing patterns used for forest fire coverage, which helps shed more light on this issue within broader environmental and policy contexts [Groff \(2021\)](#) and governance contexts. The framing of forest-fire coverage under policy initiatives like “climate change adaptation and resilience” and “risk mitigation and government initiatives,” as well as technological advancements, helps to understand the different narratives of media coverage [Aggestam \(2024\)](#). This explains how forest fires are not covered as disaster events, but are also used as narrative devices to justify the role of policymaking, actions, reforms, and government response. However, the media often become an instrument that can be used to blame groups, society, and political actors, thereby influencing public understanding in ways that may complicate environmental concerns [Karyotakis and Lo \(2024\)](#).

Although newspaper coverage is important for understanding media narratives of forest-fire issues, there is little research that explores quantitative analyses of online newspapers’ coverage. Existing studies have demonstrated how forest fire issues are framed in news coverage and how these frames influence public discourse [Paveglio et al. \(2011\)](#), [Fabra-Crespo and Rojas-Briales \(2015\)](#), analysing newspaper coverage is essential for understanding the role of government, such as preparedness actions, evacuation compliance, or support for fire-management policies. There is a need to integrate newspaper analysis with quantitative methods to enhance large-scale forest fire communication research. In addition, despite increasing scholarly attention to online newspapers and digital news platforms, there is a notable lack of comparative research that systematically evaluates differences between print and online editions, regional and national outlets, and digital platforms [Olynk Widmar et al. \(2022\)](#), [Rodríguez-Teijeiro and Román-Masedo \(2023\)](#). Existing research indicates that climate change discussions about wildfires remain inconsistent and inadequately represented in news narratives. There remains a significant research gap concerning why and how climate change is marginalized in wildfire reporting in newspaper coverage. Furthermore, to examine the factors that can help to understand how improved news coverage could increase climate change understanding, awareness, and informed public engagement [Davidson et al. \(2019\)](#). The current study aims to contribute in the existing knowledge about how media coverage can help raise awareness of environmental crises like forest fires in Himachal Pradesh. This is important because online platforms, notably newspapers, play a major role in shaping public opinion, setting social and cultural trends, and improving global communication. In today’s technology-driven world, the role of media as a primary source of information is more critical than ever [Seipp et al. \(2023\)](#). The sections below review relevant literature from various studies to provide a foundation and guide the direction of the current study.

NEWSPAPERS’ COVERAGE OF FOREST FIRE NEWS

Media coverage primarily emphasizes some aspects like emergency response, damage, and measures, but not much attention to environmental and natural resources and preventive management strategies [Paveglio et al. \(2011\)](#). Previous studies have examined media coverage and concluded that news media fails to advocate for a scientific viewpoint on forest fire issues, either by not highlighting the causes of forest fires or by overlooking the impact of climate change in exacerbating fire issues [Anderson et al. \(2018\)](#), [Cordner and Schwartz \(2019\)](#), [Hovardas \(2014\)](#). Likewise, other research studies explain that media coverage lacks a scientific perspective or approach to forest fire coverage and often emphasizes its negative elements [Ingalsbee \(2017\)](#). In the study by [Fabra-Crespo and Rojas-Briales \(2015\)](#), mass media coverage of forest fire issues reveals that forest fire issues are covered in newspaper reporting. Sometimes the emphasis given to forest fires ignores the coverage of other forest issues, including biodiversity protection and sustainable forest management.

[Silva et al. \(2019\)](#) state that newspapers represent different viewpoints on forest fire threats among people, government, and scientific institutes. The study focused on regional newspapers and found that media coverage usually deviates from scientific risk assessments and reflects local concerns and political conflicts. [Groff \(2021\)](#) in their study, found that approximately 30% of news stories attributed fires to climate change; this means that media coverage connects the causes of forest fire issues to increasing global warming and environmental degradation. [Davidson et al. \(2019\)](#) investigated Alberta’s major newspapers—the Edmonton Journal and Calgary Herald—and discovered that, regardless of the frequent coverage of forest fires, connections to climate change were barely acknowledged while covering news stories. Most of the news stories focused solely on the risks and economic impacts of forest fires while neglecting coverage related to climate causes.

The changing patterns of print to digital media usage have significantly increased online newspaper-based research. [Olynk Widmar et al. \(2022\)](#) analysed the online news coverage of forest fire issues and concluded that online newspapers enhance public understanding of covered events and capture attention immediately during environmental crises. Internet news coverage significantly increases public understanding, highlighting its role in real-time risk warning communication. Online platforms, particularly newspapers, play a major role in developing public perception, developing social and cultural trends, and improving global communication. In this digital world, the role of media as the main channel of information is more vital than ever [Seipp et al. \(2023\)](#).

[Hopke \(2020\)](#) analysed 37 English-language newspapers across five countries from 2013 to 2018 and found an increase in discussions related to climate change reports on heat waves and wildfires. Although mainstream media sometimes overlook the correct connections, specific news organizations, like Climate Wire, regularly address climate change and extreme weather topics

that are intricately linked to one another. [Terracina-Hartman \(2020\)](#) analysed U.S. newspaper coverage of ten major wildfires and found that the reports focused on economic and institutional frameworks rather than social impact. [Rodríguez-Teijeiro and Román-Masedo \(2023\)](#) examined digital newspaper coverage of two famous forest fires in Spain—Galicia (2017) and Gran Canaria (2019)—to understand media clarity of the topic and coverage of risk communication. The study revealed that even though online newspapers report news stories about forest fires, they usually fail to provide extensive coverage, highlighting a lack of communication, imperfections, and the risk of aggravating anxiety among readers rather than providing clear, reliable information.

THE CURRENT STUDY

Agenda-setting theory offers a foundational framework for explaining how news coverage shapes public perceptions of important topics that receive heightened media coverage and why. The theory was given by [McCombs and Shaw \(1972\)](#). According to this theory, the media do not tell its audiences what to think; rather, they are told what to think about, with greater responsibility. Through regular and consistent coverage of important topics, media organizations give priority to and promote specific issues, thereby shaping the public agenda and influencing policy priorities for social concerns [McCombs and Shaw \(1972\)](#). In the digital era, agenda-setting processes have become a bit more complicated and complex due to different social media, their algorithms, and content distribution across different platforms, resulting in collaboration of traditional media and digital audiences to maintain the central role of news coverage in shaping issue salience [Meraz \(2011\)](#). Entman explains the concept and defines framing as the process of selecting certain important elements of information that have a huge impact on public opinion and understanding. In news reporting, framing refers to the process of selecting content [Entman \(1993\)](#), and helps the media simplify the content by using various categories to assess and interpret events for their audiences. [Chong and Druckman \(2007\)](#) stated that frames are the major instruments used by journalists and media organizations to highlight the meaning and interpretation of news narratives to build public discourse on specific issues. Despite extensive contributions from existing newspaper-based studies on forest fire issues, there remain several critical research gaps. Previous research has mainly focused on how forest fire coverage shapes public discourse [Fabra-Crespo and Rojas-Briales \(2015\)](#), [Silva et al. \(2019\)](#), yet limited attention has been given to how media narratives impact public awareness of forest fire governance, including preparedness and fire management policies. Although some longitudinal studies track changes in wildfire coverage over time [Sachdeva and McCaffrey \(2022\)](#), they rarely link media trends with policy outcomes or fire management strategies. There is a clear need to integrate newspaper analysis with quantitative approaches to strengthen large-scale forest fire communication research. There is limited research on how forest fire coverage varies across different types of media platforms. Whether the newspapers covering the causes of forest fires? How much it is affecting the state ecology? Few studies compare local newspapers with national or international newspapers to examine whether they offer different perspectives. These gaps highlight the need for comparative analysis examining how different newspapers cover forest fire news stories. Although research on online news platforms has increased significantly [Rodríguez-Teijeiro and Román-Masedo \(2023\)](#), comparative analysis across different media platforms, regional and national outlets, is still not explored. Notably, links to climate change are barely represented in forest fire coverage, highlighting a significant gap in understanding the factors that lack coverage and the narratives surrounding climate change [Davidson et al. \(2019\)](#). Collectively, these gaps indicate the need for research to comprehensively understand the role of online newspapers in forest fire awareness, policy, and preventive measures strategies. Addressing these gaps, the study is guided by the following research questions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) What is the frequency of coverage of forest fire news stories in four newspapers?
- 2) Are there any differences in the news coverage of forest fire news stories across four online newspapers?
- 3) Which causes of forest fires receive the greatest attention in newspaper coverage?
- 4) What is the distribution of article length in newspaper coverage of forest fires?
- 5) What types of visual elements are used in newspaper coverage of forest fires?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

- **H11:** There is a significant difference in the coverage of forest fire news across four newspapers in Himachal Pradesh.
- **H12:** There is a significant difference between the newspaper and the reported causes of forest fires.
- **H13:** There is a significant difference in the distribution of article lengths on forest fire coverage across the selected newspapers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

Quantitative content analysis helps in the detailed and precise analysis of patterns and themes in observations of media messages [Riffe et al. \(2019\)](#). The research used a quantitative content analysis approach to investigate the coverage of news stories of forest fire topic. Four newspapers were selected to accomplish this study: two national newspapers, The Times of India and Dainik Jagran, and two regional newspapers, Divya Himachal and The Tribune. Each newspaper was chosen because of its high print and online readership, circulation, and the ready availability of archival content.

SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

The multi-stage sampling was used to perform the content analysis. In the first stage, a stratified sampling technique was used to select the newspapers. First, the newspapers were divided into two strata: regional and national. Then, from these strata, newspapers were selected based on their circulation and readership. News stories within each stratum were then selected for detailed analysis.

S. No	Newspaper	Circulation
1	The Times of India	1,872,442 copies, 2019
2	Dainik Jagran	1,277,605 copies (ABC) / up to 3.6 million (est.), 2019
3	The Tribune	~700,000–800,000 (estimated), 2019
4	Divya Himachal	~2.5 million (estimated), 2019.

According to the Indian Readership Survey Data Report 2019, the top ten newspapers with online versions were selected to extract standard, reliable information on forest fire issues using Google and the official websites of four online newspapers.

SAMPLE SIZE

The study analyzed the news stories published between 2023 and 2024. A total of 120 news stories were collected using different keywords related to forest fires, out of which 90 stories were found suitable for further analysis.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

- **Time Frame:** The websites of the selected newspapers were the source of data collection for the study. The study analysed news coverage within a defined and selected time frame, i.e., from January 1, 2023, to December 30, 2024. News searched using keywords such as “forest fires”, “wildfires”, “fires”, and “forest” terms were included.
- **Coding Categories:** To collect the articles from the four newspapers, this study used the terms “forest fires” and “wildfires” during the timeline under study, which showed a total of 120 news stories. After searching, duplicate news was excluded, and a total of 90 stories were found suitable for further analysis. From the newspapers, Times of India had 9 stories ($n = 9$) and The Tribune had 25 ($n = 25$), Dainik Jagran had 15 ($n = 15$), and Divya Himachal had 41 ($n = 41$). For further analysis of news stories collected from four newspapers, the researcher classified them into eight categories based on previous research conducted using content analysis. These categories were: accountability and responsibility news, human impact news, economic impact news, environmental impact news, climate change news, policy and regulation news, prevention and preparedness, and government response news. To analyze the causes of forest fires reported in the news stories, the researcher classified them into five categories: natural causes, human negligence, deliberate burning, climate factors, and not specified. To examine the length of each news story, three categories were used: short (<400 words), medium (401-700 words), and long (> 700 words). To analyze the visual elements accompanying the news stories, they were analysed using four categories: no visual, photograph, cartoons, and maps/infographics.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Krippendorff's Alpha (α) is a reliable measure used to calculate reliability in content analysis [Hayes and Krippendorff \(2007\)](#). Therefore, the researcher used Krippendorff's Alpha to check the reliability of each news genre with the help of a specific SPSS macro (kappa.sps). The minimum value for reliability using Krippendorff's Alpha is $\alpha \geq .75$. Before the final analysis, a pilot test was

conducted that selected 18 news stories (20 percent) from the entire dataset. The mean value of the alpha (α) coefficient calculated for each category examined in this study was 0.89, which was acceptable.

S. No	News Genra	Krippendorff's Alpha α
1	Accountability and Responsibility News	0.86
2	Human Impact News	0.90
3	Economic Impact News	0.89
4	Environmental Impact News	0.90
5	Climate Change News	1.00
6	Policy and Regulation News	0.80
7	Prevention and Preparedness News	0.80
8	Government Response News	1.00
	Total (Mean)	0.89

RESULTS

R.Q. 1. What is the frequency of coverage of the main topics in forest fires in four newspapers?

Table 1 presents the frequency and difference of forest fire-related news coverage across four newspapers (H1): TOI – The Times of India, DJ – Dainik Jagran, TT – The Tribune, and DH – Divya Himachal. A total of 90 forest fire news stories were analysed. Among the selected newspapers, Divya Himachal (DH) published the highest number of stories, contributing 41 reports (45%), followed by The Tribune (TT) with 25 stories (28%), Dainik Jagran (DJ) with 15 stories (17%), and The Times of India (TOI) with 9 stories (10%).

It is clear from the table that news stories on the environmental impacts of forest fires received the maximum coverage, appearing in 37 stories (41%) across all newspapers. Among the four newspapers, the regional Hindi newspaper Divya Himachal (DH) gave the maximum coverage to this category, followed by prevention and preparedness, the second most prominent category, with 18 stories (20%), highlighting coverage on efforts and strategies meant for reducing forest fire risks. The Human interest news category had 14 news stories (16%), and again, Divya Himachal (DH) provided the highest coverage. News related to attribution of responsibility and economic consequences each appeared in 7 stories (8%), followed by government response, which was covered in only 4 stories (4%). Despite the widely acknowledged connection between climate change and the increasing frequency and intensity of forest fires, Climate change news appeared in only 2 stories (2%). Similarly, policy and regulation-related news was least covered in all the newspapers. This limited coverage of this category highlights a gap in policy-oriented reporting. Overall, the findings revealed that all the newspapers mostly focused on the environmental impacts of forest fire news category while other aspects—such as the connection of climate change and forest fires, governance response news, and policy-related coverage—received comparatively less attention.

Table 1

Table 1 Frequency of coverage of Frames in four Newspapers

S. No	News Genra	National Newspapers		Regional Newspapers		Total	
		Times of India	Dainik Jagran	The Tribune	Divya Himachal	N	%
1	Accountability and Responsibility News	2	0	4	1	7	8%
2	Human Impact News	0	1	4	9	14	16%
3	Economic Impact News	0	3	2	2	7	8%
4	Environmental Impact News	4	7	4	22	37	41%
5	Climate Change News	2	0	0	0	2	2%
6	Policy and Regulation News	0	0	1	0	1	1%
7	Prevention and Preparedness News	1	4	7	6	18	20%

8	Government response News	0	0	3	1	4	4%
	Total	9	15	25	41	90	100%
	%	10%	17%	28%	45%		

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	47.395 ^a	21	.001
Likelihood Ratio	41.482	21	.005
N of Valid Cases	90		

The hypothesis H1 states that there is a significant difference in the coverage of forest fire news stories in the four newspapers of Himachal Pradesh. The data given in the above table revealed that the calculated chi-square χ^2 value is 47.395. The table value is 32.67 when df = 21 at the 0.05 level of significance, respectively. It means that the calculated chi-square value is greater than the table value at the 0.05 level of significance. Hence, it is clear that there is a statistically significant difference ($P < 0.05$) in the forest fire news coverage among different categories in four newspapers in Himachal Pradesh.

Q. 2. Which cause of forest fires receives the greatest attention in newspaper coverage?

The cross-tabulation explains the coverage of different causes of forest fires across four newspapers—DH, DJ, TOI, and TT—based on a total of 90 news articles. The data show that the "Not specified" category received the maximum number, accounting for 37 news stories (41.1%), which did not mention or discuss the cause behind the forest fire while reporting. The high percentage shows that the cause of forest fires remains uncovered in most of the stories. Among the news stories that which given coverage of the cause of forest fire, natural causes received the highest attention, with 22 news stories (24.4%), mentioning the cause of forest fires in the news stories. The second cause was human negligence, which was covered in 19 news stories (21.1%). The category of deliberate burning and climate factors responsible for forest fires received comparatively limited coverage, with 6 articles (6.7%) each.

Table 2

Table 2 Causes of Forest Fires Receive the Greatest Attention in Newspaper Coverage.						
Different Cause * Types_Newspaper Cross tabulation						
Count						
Different Cause		Types_Newspaper				Total
		DH	DJ	TOI	TT	
	Natural causes	6	2	6	8	22
	Human negligence	6	5	0	8	19
	Deliberate burning	2	1	2	1	6
	Climate factors	6	0	0	0	6
	Not specified	21	7	1	8	37
	Total	41	15	9	25	90

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	29.207 ^a	12	.004
Likelihood Ratio	30.955	12	.002

N of Valid Cases

90

To test the hypothesis H12, if there is a significant difference between the newspaper and the reported causes of forest fires, a Pearson chi-square test of independence was performed to determine whether a statistically significant association between the type of newspaper and the reported causes of forest fires exists or not. The result showed that $\chi^2 (12, N = 90) = 29.207, p = .004$. The calculated chi-square value (29.207) exceeded the critical value at the 0.05 significance level ($\chi^2_{0.05,12} = 21.026$), and the null hypothesis was rejected. Hence, the findings support the evidence that there is a significant difference in the coverage of reported causes of forest fires across the four newspapers. Overall, the findings demonstrate that the maximum proportion of news stories did not identify/cover or reported the underlying cause of forest fires. This highlights two aspects: one, the news stories covered without a cause shows that even the journalists had no information about what exactly caused the forest fire. Second, if the cause is not clear, then it would be very difficult to make strategies to stop such incidents in the future. However, in some stories, human negligence, deliberate burning, and climate change causes were mentioned, which are helpful for the policy makers. Also, a significant difference in the coverage of the causes of fires shows that there are different causes of forest fires which need to be discussed so that strong strategies can be made to avoid future incidents of forest fires in the state.

R. Q. 3. What is the distribution of article length in newspaper coverage of forest fires?

The cross-tabulation of the distribution of the length of forest fire news stories across four newspapers shows that medium-length (401–700 words) news stories—45 news stories (50.0%)—were the most common used length in most stories in all the newspapers, followed closely by short news stories (less than 400 words), which include 42 news stories (46.7%). However, the long articles (more than 700 words) received less coverage, with only 3 news stories (3.3%) of the total sample.

A newspaper-wise analysis reveals notable differences in article length. DH published 41 articles, with a relatively balanced distribution between short articles (24) and medium-length articles (17), while it did not publish any long articles. DJ published 15 articles, of which 14 were short articles and only 1 was a medium-length article, indicating a strong preference for brief reporting. TOI published 9 articles, with 6 medium-length articles, 2 long articles, and only 1 short article, suggesting a greater emphasis on more detailed coverage. TT published 25 articles, primarily consisting of medium-length articles (21), followed by 3 short articles and 1 long article.

Table 3

Table 3 Distribution of Article Length in Newspaper Coverage of forest fires?						
Length * Types_Newspaper Cross tabulation						
Count						
Length		Types_Newspaper				Total
		DH	DJ	TOI	TT	
Length	Short (<400 words)	24	14	1	3	42
	Medium (401-700 words)	17	1	6	21	45
	Long (> 700 words)	0	0	2	1	3
Total		41	15	9	25	90

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	41.158 ^a	6	.000
Likelihood Ratio	42.067	6	.000
N of Valid Cases	90		

A Pearson chi-square test of independence was performed to determine whether there exists a statistically significant difference in the distribution of article lengths on forest fire coverage across the selected newspapers, $\chi^2(6, N = 90) = 41.158, p < .001$. The calculated chi-square value exceeded the critical value at the 0.05 significance level ($\chi^2_{0.05,6} = 12.592$) and rejected the null

hypothesis. This finding shows that the four newspapers differed significantly in their use of short, medium, and long news stories for covering forest fires.

R.Q. 4. What types of visual elements are used in newspaper coverage of forest fires?

It is clear from the table that photographs were the only visual element used in four newspapers (100%). No other elements were identified.

Table 4

Table 4 What types of visual elements are used in newspaper coverage of forest fires?			
S.No.	Visual elements	Frequency	%age
1	No Visual	0	0
2	Photograph	90	100%
3	Cartoons	0	0
4	Maps / Infographics	0	0
	Total	90	100

The descriptive results answer the above question, as photographs were used in 100% of the articles. This explains that a photograph was used as the primary visual medium while covering forest fire news stories in four newspapers. This shows that the newspapers used real and authentic images over illustrative or data-driven visuals, likely to enhance credibility and attract audience attention.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of the study state that Divya Himachal covered the highest number of stories (45%), followed by The Tribune (28%), Dainik Jagran (17%), and The Times of India (10%). News related to the environmental impacts of forest fires was the most dominant category, accounting for 41% of the total coverage, followed by prevention and preparedness (20%) and human-interest stories (16%). Coverage of attribution of responsibility and economic consequences was relatively limited, with each category covering 8% of stories. Government response received only 4% coverage, while climate change (2%) and policy and regulation (1%) were the least reported categories. These findings suggest that newspapers mainly focused on the environmental impacts of forest fires, while broader issues such as climate change, policy interventions, and governance received comparatively less attention. The present study found that the environmental impact news, the prevention and preparedness news, and the human-interest news stories were the most covered topics in all the newspapers. These results were similar to [Terracina-Hartman \(2020\)](#), who, in his study, found that maximum importance was given to the environmental impact frame as compared with focusing on local concerns due to forest fires. There is a need for both extensive and diverse coverage of fire-related issues [Sachdeva and McCaffrey \(2022\)](#). The regional Hindi newspaper placed greater emphasis on covering forest fire news than the national newspaper. Similarly, the regional English newspaper placed greater emphasis on covering forest fires than the national newspaper. The study found variability in coverage among national and regional newspapers. The study found that regional newspapers covered more news stories than national newspapers. Similar insights were gained from the study by [Rodríguez-Teijeiro and Román-Masedo \(2023\)](#), which examined the digital editions of national and regional newspapers in Spain.

Digital media narratives about wildfires frequently focus on immediate impacts and human interest, thereby side-lining major causes, e.g., policy, regulation, and climate change impacts news. This demands a broader need for inclusive, sustained, and diversified media coverage [Walker et al. \(2020\)](#). The findings revealed that even though the scientific consensus is strong, the climate change frame remains underrepresented in news reporting [Paveglio et al. \(2011\)](#), [Morehouse and Sonnett \(2010\)](#). Among the other news genres, the prevention and preparedness news was the second highest in coverage. This distribution suggests that regional newspapers at the local level cover more stories and communicate effectively, highlighting the role of regional newspapers in making people aware of preventive measures and adopting forest management strategies [Paveglio et al. \(2011\)](#), [McCaffrey et al. \(2013\)](#). The findings reveal that the policy and regulation news stories and the climate change news stories emerged as the most underrepresented in newspaper coverage of forest fires. The limited media coverage of forest fire news related to policy and regulation frames weakens public participation in forest fire management and the long-term implementation of fire management strategies [McCaffrey et al. \(2013\)](#). The role of online newspapers is vital in increasing public participation and awareness. These platforms not only engage the public but also enable government officials and authorities to efficiently communicate timely warnings and promote community participation. The effective use of online news media contributes significantly to disaster management while also creating awareness of prevention measures meant to control forest fires [Rodríguez-Teijeiro and Román-Masedo \(2023\)](#).

The analysis of causes covered reveals that "Not specified" was the most frequently reported category, accounting for 37 articles (41.1%). This category represents news reports that covered forest fire incidents without explicitly identifying or discussing their causes. The high proportion of such reports suggests that newspapers often focused on reporting the occurrence and impact of forest fires rather than explaining their underlying causes. Among the news stories that identified a cause, natural causes received the greatest attention, appearing in 22 articles (24.4%), followed by human negligence, which was reported in 19 articles (21.1%). In contrast, deliberate burning and climate factors received comparatively limited coverage, with 6 articles (6.7%) each. It is clear from the findings that medium-length news stories (401–700 words) were the most commonly used out of the total sample of 45 news stories (50.0%). Medium-length stories followed closely by short articles (less than 400 words), which included 42 news stories (46.7%). However, long articles (more than 700 words) were rare, representing only 3 news stories (3.3%) of the total sample. It can also be concluded that photographs were used in 100% of the news stories covered by the four newspapers. The absence of other visual formats recommends that the newspapers preferred real and authentic imagery over illustrative or data-driven visuals to enhance audience attention.

CONCLUSION

This study highlighted the critical research problem of the forest fire crisis and revealed how these news stories are covered in regional and national newspaper coverage. The findings reveal differences in the coverage patterns used across language-based media, highlighting how media choices can influence discussions on forest fire issues. Overall, the study sheds light on the different causes of forest fires, primarily emphasizing natural factors and human negligence as the leading causes, while comparatively overlooking deliberate burning and climate change. Taken together, these findings suggest that while newspapers play a significant role in informing the public about forest fires, there remains considerable scope for more balanced, in-depth, and comprehensive coverage that incorporates a wider range of causes, consequences, and visual communication strategies to foster greater public understanding of forest fire issues.

The implications of this study provide important insights for both policymakers and media professionals. Journalists can use these insights to improve the coverage of forest fire news stories so that more details can be covered while incidents are happening. For example, once the causes of forest fires are clearly identified, they can be prevented from recurring with the same frequency each year. Therefore, while reporting every incident of a forest fire, its underlying cause should also be thoroughly examined and documented. This would help policymakers formulate effective strategies and preventive measures for forest fires in Himachal Pradesh, regardless of whether the cause is natural, human-induced, or deliberate. Policymakers, in turn, can use the study's insights to encourage local community engagement in forest fire management. However, the study also acknowledges certain limitations, including its main focus on online newspapers. Future research can be conducted through comparative analysis of print, broadcast, and digital platforms, as well as audience perception, to better understand the topic. Further research on region-specific reporting practices and the effectiveness of policy news could also strengthen media strategies and reporting practices. In Himachal Pradesh, balanced and accurate media coverage of forest fires is needed to increase public understanding and promote sustainable forest management in the face of growing environmental challenges.

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