

The Media's Role in Environmental Protection and Urban Life

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Abstract

This study explores the crucial role of media in promoting citizenship rights with a focus on environmental protection. Social and urban life is deeply interconnected with the environment, and citizens' environmental rights can only be fully realized when addressed collectively. This research, centered on Tehran's population, employs a researcher-developed questionnaire to measure environmental literacy across knowledge, attitude, and behavior dimensions. The study identifies significant relationships between media consumption, particularly television, and environmental awareness. Despite the challenges posed by inadequate enforcement of laws, fragmented urban management, and unchecked urban expansion, the media can play a pivotal role in fostering environmental education and awareness. By leveraging popular media networks, producing engaging content, and collaborating with planning groups, the media can enhance public understanding and proactive participation in environmental conservation. The findings underscore the importance of a well-informed, environmentally conscious society in achieving sustainable urban development.

Keywords: Media, Citizenship rights, Environmental literacy, Environmental attitude, Media influence, Urban life, Public participation.

Introduction

The media plays a crucial role in shaping public perception and awareness, making it an essential player in promoting citizenship rights, particularly concerning environmental issues. As fundamental values where other rights are born, grow, and develop, the environment's significance is gradually regaining its place in the hierarchy of legal norms. The right to a healthy environment, one of the most important third-generation human rights, is intricately linked to other human rights across generations. The fundamental right to life is inseparable from a healthy environment, and as environmental health deteriorates, human life is increasingly at risk.

In recent decades, countries and international organizations have intensified efforts to safeguard this human right by enacting numerous environmental laws and promoting education and environmental consciousness. These initiatives aim to engage citizens and leverage the capacities of non-governmental organizations active in this field. Despite these efforts, environmental degradation has continued, threatening both nature and human health. Industrialization and rural-to-urban migration have particularly exacerbated environmental damage (Fahimi & Mashhadi, 2016).

Metropolises suffer significantly from air, water, and soil pollution, which not only endangers the health of citizens but also inflicts irreparable damage on economic and social development (Shirani Bidabadi et al., 2014). The urban environment, comprising natural (plant and animal communities, weather, soil), man-made (buildings, roads, facilities, urban green spaces), and socio-economic (education and health) dimensions, is an interconnected ecosystem where each element influences the others (Haveri, 2020).

Human activities, including the transformation of raw materials into goods and services, impact the urban environment by causing pollution (water, air, sound, soil), waste, and sewage. Materials produced during the consumption cycle return to the urban system as environmental pollutants. If the environment cannot withstand, absorb, or decompose these pressures, the ecological balance of the city is disrupted, leading to various types of pollution (Rahmani & Majidi, 2021).

This article aims to explore the following questions: What are the environmental rights of citizens in the city? What are the duties of city management in this area? What is the role of the media in promoting these rights? And

what are the most important challenges for citizens and city managers? To address these questions, the article will examine the concepts of urban rights and urban management, study the various rights of citizens concerning the urban environment, and analyze the resolutions of the Tehran City Council. In developed countries, the scope of urban management or municipal duties and powers is extensive, encompassing most urban departments and institutions hierarchically. Conversely, in Iran, municipalities are one of many public institutions providing urban services, with many urban bodies subject to central decisions, limiting municipal intervention. Therefore, this article will focus on the duties and powers of the municipality and city council (as the main pillars of urban management) in the context of the urban environment, with a specific emphasis on the role of the media.

1. Research Literature

1.1 The Concept of Media's Role in Urban Law

The media plays a crucial role in informing citizens and city managers about their rights and duties, thereby enhancing the spirit of accountability and improving urban governance. The media's role can be viewed as an extension of urban law, which regulates the relationship between the city and its citizens. This branch of public law deals with the fundamental rights of citizens at local levels and their interaction with urban governance institutions, such as municipalities, city councils, and other related departments (Mozhari, 2014). Urban law encompasses urban planning, architecture, urban development, urban economy, urban policy, and urban culture (Novabakhsh, 2015).

1.2 Environmental Rights of Citizens in the City

The right to a healthy environment is a fundamental human right and a key component of citizenship rights. Today, environmental protection is a primary concern for citizens and governments globally. Many constitutions, including Iran's, have incorporated provisions to safeguard the environment at the highest legal levels (Mozhari, 2014). Every individual has the right to a healthy and balanced environment that supports economic, social, and cultural development. Environmental protection is essential to prevent harm to human health (Qadeer, 2014). Activists regard the right to a suitable environment as an independent human right (Molaei, 2016).

Emphasizing this right, Article 50 of the Iranian Constitution states: "In the Islamic Republic, the protection of the environment in which today's and future generations should have a growing social life is considered a public duty. Therefore, economic and other activities that cause environmental pollution or irreparable destruction are prohibited." This principle highlights that a healthy environment is crucial for human rights, including economic, social, and cultural rights, and the fundamental right to life. Many physical and mental diseases today are rooted in environmental pollution, and their treatment requires a healthy environment.

1.3 The Right to Access Environmental Information

Access to environmental information is a critical right for maintaining a healthy life. Having such information enables individuals to plan for their health and well-being (Vijeh, 2015). Free access to information is a hallmark of democratic societies and includes access to environmental information, which has significant practical and theoretical implications for society (Kirimi & Kamyar, 2016). According to the Law on Publication and Free Access to Information, public institutions, including municipalities, must provide information to the public promptly and without discrimination.

The "Third Five-Year Program for the Development of the City of Tehran" emphasizes transparency and public access to urban management information, environmental information, and related laws. It mandates the municipality to compile a comprehensive information document to enhance communication with citizens, raise awareness, and increase citizen participation in city administration.

1.4 The Right to Participate in Environmental Planning

Effective urban management requires the active participation of citizens, as their involvement is crucial for the success of city initiatives. City councils were established to facilitate this participation, ensuring citizens have a platform to contribute to urban governance. Citizen participation is a fundamental right and a pillar of development, defined as the active, voluntary, and organized involvement of individuals, households, groups, and

institutions in economic, social, and cultural activities (Kazhemian et al., 2012; Najati Hosseini, 1379). This participation enhances accountability and responsibility in urban affairs (Sharapour et al., 2015).

Citizens have the right to engage in environmental decision-making, which is rooted in the principle of public participation. This involvement increases the acceptability and legitimacy of decisions and reduces conflicts between managers and citizens (Qadir, 2014). The Iranian Constitution's 100th principle emphasizes the importance of public cooperation in advancing social, economic, and welfare programs. Clause 5, Article 80 of the Law of Councils highlights the city council's duty to plan for citizen participation in various services. The Tehran City Council, through its "Third Five-Year Development Plan," has mandated the municipality to create necessary platforms for citizen involvement in solving urban problems.

1.5 The Right to Form and Join Environmental NGOs

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have become vital channels for citizen participation, enabling individuals to influence urban governance within the framework of national laws. Environmental NGOs promote public education and environmental ethics, contributing to the preservation of the environment (Jelaei et al., 2014). According to the Tehran City Council's resolution, NGOs are defined as independent, non-political, and non-profit organizations formed under relevant laws to achieve specific goals.

Article 50 of the Iranian Constitution asserts that environmental protection is a public duty, allowing citizens and NGOs to express concerns about environmentally harmful decisions and projects. Article 66 of the Criminal Procedure Law permits NGOs focused on environmental protection, natural resources, cultural heritage, public health, and citizen rights to report crimes related to these areas.

1.6 The Right to Environmental Education

The right to education, including environmental education, is a fundamental human right that supports the realization of other rights, such as environmental rights (Tajarlou, 2013). Environmental issues are deeply intertwined with social and cultural aspects, and a lack of education and awareness is a primary cause of environmental pollution (Adhami & Akbarzadeh, 2010). Environmental education fosters an "environmentally friendly" culture, promotes protective practices, and instills a sense of responsibility in citizens, thereby reducing environmental destruction and pollution (Ramazani Qawamabadi, 2011).

According to the Environmental Protection and Improvement Law and development plans, the environmental organization is responsible for organizing educational programs to raise public awareness and guide environmental protection efforts. While government agencies play a crucial role, the media, educational institutions, and local urban management entities, such as city councils, are also instrumental in promoting environmental education and culture (Piri & Ghasemi, 2018).

1.7 The Role of the Media in Protecting Citizenship Rights in the Environment

The media, encompassing radio, television, cinema, press, magazines, mobile phones, and computers, was initially created for various purposes. However, it has an undeniable educational impact on people's behavioral patterns and significantly contributes to the growth and development of public culture. This effect, though indirect, informal, and often unconscious, plays a crucial role in shaping societal attitudes towards the environment.

Media researchers highlight several ways through which media can protect citizenship rights concerning the environment:

- **Information Dissemination:**

- Media outlets can inform the public about governmental environmental programs and policies, raise awareness about national environmental issues, and critique government and official performances in handling these issues. By providing information on environmental destruction and its consequences, the media can educate and mobilize citizens from a young age, fostering a culture of environmental responsibility.

▪ **Investigative Journalism:**

- Environmental expert journalists play a pivotal role in uncovering and reporting environmental issues. Their work includes investigating and highlighting cases of environmental degradation, holding authorities accountable, and pressing for necessary policy changes. However, a lack of environmental specialist reporters and independent news departments dedicated to environmental information are significant shortcomings.

▪ **Challenges and Limitations:**

- Traditional media often face challenges such as censorship, lack of independence, and dependency on commercial and governmental interests. These factors can hinder accurate and unbiased reporting on environmental issues. Additionally, there is often a lack of trust in official and traditional media, coupled with an event-oriented approach that fails to address ongoing environmental concerns comprehensively.

▪ **Modern Media Dynamics:**

- New media, with its emphasis on multimedia content and innovative production styles, offers more freedom and less censorship in discussing environmental issues. Platforms like social media can cater to audience preferences, providing engaging and relatable content. The virtual space allows for broader dissemination of environmental information without the constraints faced by traditional media.

▪ **Educational Role:**

- By educating the public about the importance of environmental protection, the media can instill a sense of responsibility in citizens. This includes promoting environmental literacy, understanding the impact of personal and collective actions on the environment, and advocating for sustainable practices. Media freedom and the ability to express environmental concerns openly are essential for this educational role.

▪ **Collaborative Efforts:**

- Effective environmental advocacy requires collaboration between the media, governance bodies, non-governmental organizations, citizens, and academic institutions. Together, these entities can facilitate sustainable development by providing the necessary conditions and information for informed decision-making and active participation in environmental conservation.

To improve media performance in the environmental sector, several strategies are recommended:

- Establishing dedicated media outlets for environmental issues.
- Ensuring media independence and fostering a cognitive dimension in environmental planning.
- Training environmental expert journalists and promoting development journalism.
- Enhancing trust in the media and utilizing expertise to deliver accurate and impactful environmental reporting.

In conclusion, the media's role in protecting citizenship rights concerning the environment is multifaceted, involving education, information dissemination, investigative journalism, and fostering public participation. By addressing existing challenges and leveraging modern media dynamics, the media can significantly contribute to environmental protection and the promotion of citizenship rights.

2. Methodology

In this research, the statistical population was determined by selecting the most populated city, Tehran, due to its extensive and diverse population distribution across its 22 districts. The survey method was employed to measure the environmental awareness of Tehrani citizens during the third quarter of 2024. This research is field-based in terms of its purpose, application, and data collection method.

The primary data collection tool was a researcher-developed questionnaire. The first part of the questionnaire measured environmental literacy based on research hypotheses concerning the use of information resources. Environmental literacy was assessed in the dimensions of knowledge, attitude, and behavior, and demographic characteristics were also included, totaling 45 items measured on a six-level Likert scale ranging from "not at all" (1) to "very much" (6).

The validity of the questionnaire was confirmed through feedback from faculty members and researchers in the fields of media and environment, followed by necessary modifications and revisions. To determine the reliability of the questionnaire, a preliminary review involved completing 35 questionnaires from the statistical population. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for knowledge (0.91), attitude (0.84), and behavior (0.78), indicating high reliability for measuring the environmental literacy of Tehrani citizens via television.

The statistical population consisted of Tehrani citizens aged 18 and above, totaling 7,177,154 individuals according to the latest data from the Iran Statistics Center in 2015. Given the large size of the population and the need for representative sampling across the 22 districts, a "two-stage cluster" sampling method was employed. Cochran's formula, with a 95% confidence level, was used to estimate the sample size, resulting in a target of 384 respondents. To ensure a safe margin, 400 questionnaires were distributed and completed by literate citizens aged 18 and older.

Upon completion of the questionnaires, they were reviewed and coded using SPSS software version 22. Both descriptive (mean) and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation test) were utilized to analyze the data, aiming to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses.

3. Findings and results

According to the results of descriptive statistics, 49% of the respondents were male, and 51% were female. The average environmental literacy score was 0.39 for men and 2.28 for women. In terms of age, the majority of respondents were between 35-39 years old, with an average environmental literacy score of 2.97 in this group. Educationally, 12.7% of respondents had sub-diploma and diploma levels, 26.8% had post-diploma, 44.5% had a bachelor's degree, and 16% had a master's degree. The average environmental literacy scores for these educational levels were 2.78, 2.60, 2.53, and 2.60, respectively.

Regarding information sources and the audience's use of environmental content, it was found that 62% of respondents obtained their environmental knowledge from television. Following this, 54% of respondents used social media, and 50% referred to news and scientific websites for environmental information. The research findings indicated that the highest audiences were for Channel Three (82%), Channel One and Khabar (each 74%), and Nasim Network (72%).

3.1- Environmental knowledge

The overall average score of 2.41 indicates that the transmission of environmental knowledge to citizens through television is at a low level. The hypothesis test results in the knowledge dimension, as shown in Table (1), reveal that individuals gained environmental knowledge by watching TV programs. In other words, there is a significant correlation between watching environmental programs and acquiring knowledge.

The Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = 0.648$) confirms a relationship between watching environmental programs and gaining knowledge at a 95% confidence level. The positive correlation value signifies a direct relationship between the two variables: the more people watch TV, the higher their level of environmental knowledge. Consequently, the hypothesis that watching TV programs is related to the environmental knowledge of Tehrani citizens is supported at a 5% significance level.

Table (1) watching TV environmental programs and environmental knowledge of Tehrani citizens

Correlation	N	sig	R	Variable
+	400	0.000	0.648	knowledge

3-2-Environmental attitude

The overall average score of 2.97 indicates that the general impact of television on creating environmental attitudes among citizens is at an average level. The hypothesis test results in Table (2) show that individuals developed environmental attitudes through watching TV programs. In other words, there is a significant correlation between watching environmental programs and the formation of environmental attitudes.

The Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = 0.679$) confirms a relationship between watching environmental programs and strengthening attitudes at a 95% confidence level. The positive correlation value signifies a direct relationship between the two variables: the more people watch TV, the stronger their environmental attitudes become. Consequently, the hypothesis that watching TV programs is related to the environmental attitudes of Tehran citizens is supported at a 5% significance level.

Table (2) Watching TV environmental programs and the environmental attitude of Tehran citizens

Correlation	N	sig	R	Variable
+	400	0.000	0.679	Environmental attitude

3-3-Environmental behavior

The overall average score of 2.78 indicates that television has a low impact on promoting or creating environmental behavior among citizens. The hypothesis test results in Table (3) show that individuals exhibited environmental behavior through watching TV programs.

In other words, there is a significant correlation between watching environmental programs and environmental behavior. The Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = 0.599$) confirms a relationship between watching environmental programs and strengthening environmental behavior at a 95% confidence level. The positive correlation value signifies a direct relationship between the two variables: the more people watch TV, the higher their level of environmental behavior. Consequently, the hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between watching TV programs and the environmental behavior of Tehran citizens is supported at a 5% significance level.

Table (3) Watching TV environmental programs and the environmental behavior of Tehran citizens

Correlation	N	sig	R	Variable
+	400	0.000	0.599	Environmental behavior

3-4-Environmental literacy

The total average (2.66) shows that the general state of environmental literacy in dimensions (knowledge, attitude and behavior) through television to citizens is at a low level. Main hypothesis: It seems that there is a significant relationship between watching TV programs and the environmental literacy of Tehran citizens in the dimensions (knowledge, attitude and behavior). The results obtained in table (4) show that according to the value of Pearson's correlation coefficient, people gained environmental literacy in dimensions (knowledge, attitude and behavior) through watching TV programs. In other words, there is a correlation between watching environmental programs and environmental literacy; Therefore, according to the value of Pearson's correlation coefficient ($r = 0.694$), there is a relationship between watching environmental programs and acquiring literacy at the 95% confidence level. A positive correlation value indicates a direct relationship between two variables; In this way, the more people watch TV, the higher their level of environmental literacy; As a result of the hypothesis, the significant relationship between watching TV programs and environmental knowledge of Tehran citizens is confirmed at a significance level of 5%.

Table (4) Watching TV environmental programs and the environmental literacy of Tehran citizens

Correlation	N	sig	R	Variable
+	400	0.000	0.694	Environmental literacy

Conclusion

Social and urban life is inherently intertwined with the environment and the environmental rights of citizens. These rights can only be fully realized when all their components are addressed collectively. Each element of citizens' environmental rights is interlinked, and the effective realization of one component often depends on the realization of others. For instance, access to environmental information empowers citizens to achieve their environmental goals only when they have received adequate training to analyze this information and make informed decisions. Similarly, participation in environmental planning is unthinkable without proper education and access to relevant environmental information. Having clean air, while essential, is insufficient without access to clean water to ensure the overall health of citizens.

By examining each component studied in this article, it is evident that each right is akin to a part of a healthy urban environment. These rights can only be achieved through the cooperation and assistance of all relevant governing and local institutions, non-governmental organizations, and individual citizens. Together, these components form a cohesive whole that brings about the realization of a healthy urban environment, enabling citizens to achieve a desirable and livable urban society.

However, the path to achieving these environmental rights is fraught with challenges. Citizens and city managers face numerous obstacles, including a plethora of laws and regulations without adequate enforcement mechanisms, the lack of unified urban management, and the unchecked expansion of cities, all of which complicate the achievement of these rights. Despite admirable efforts, urban management still has a long way to go to fulfill all the environmental rights of citizens.

Environmental education and the adaptation of society's consumption patterns to rational and logical standards aligned with national interests are essential. These efforts should not be confined to official institutions; mass communication tools can also play a complementary role to official educational institutions. Given the country's environmental situation, it is crucial to convey information transparently and effectively to enhance public understanding of the importance of environmental protection. Increased awareness among the populace about the significance of protecting the environment will foster a sense of responsibility and positively influence their behavior towards the environment.

The media needs to provide detailed expert analyses on environmental issues and produce engaging content to capture the audience's attention. Researchers should contribute to spreading environmental literacy with practical goals by exploring various research areas in this field. To achieve this, the following detailed actions are suggested:

- **Utilize the Capacity of Popular Networks:** Leverage popular media networks to reach a broad audience and disseminate information about environmental issues effectively.
- **Produce Programs to Strengthen Environmental Attitudes:** Develop programs that focus on enhancing environmental attitudes, fostering a deep understanding of environmental subjects among viewers.
- **Raise Awareness Before Environmental Crises:** Strengthen the media's role in raising awareness during the early stages of potential environmental crises, enabling proactive measures.
- **Support Planning Groups for Environmental Projects:** Collaborate with planning groups to approve projects that address environmental issues, ensuring they meet environmental standards.
- **Conduct Research on Environmental Program Content:** Encourage researchers in the fields of environment and media to examine the content of environmental programs in terms of knowledge, attitude, and behavior.
- **Evaluate Environmental News and Journalist Skills:** Assess the quality of environmental news coverage and the skills of journalists specializing in environmental issues.

- **Establish Environmental Strategies for National Media:** Develop and implement environmental strategies within national media organizations through collaboration with environmental experts and media managers.

By implementing these actions, the media can significantly enhance its role in protecting citizenship rights concerning the environment, fostering a well-informed and environmentally conscious society.

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