

Motives of Environmental Coverages by North European Mass Media: The Role of Three Nordic Countries on Combating Plastic Waste

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Abstract

For the three Nordic countries (Norway, Denmark and Sweden), forming public perceptions about the importance of environmental issues needs to be done. The role of the media function as a government policies controlling system is needed to influence the public/masses toward a better policy in environment. The purpose of this study is to find out why the media in Northern Europe are more concerned about environmental issues, especially in EU and the problem of plastic waste. The method used here is qualitative-descriptive with a comparative approach. The results show that the main reason for the three Nordic countries in voicing environmental criticism through the media is because their country's territory is directly adjacent to the sea zone, it is their main industrial base so that plastic waste pollution becomes a big threat to them. Mass media in Nordic countries can have a stronger role in influencing government policies related to plastic waste and often urge the government to implement more sustainable measures in plastic waste management. Mass media in can also act as a powerful information disseminator in addressing the urgency of plastic waste management to the public.

Keywords *mass media, nordic, plastic waste, role, environment*

INTRODUCTION

In 2018, the European Union (EU), through the European Commission (EC), introduced its first strategy for tackling plastic waste as part of its transition towards a sustainable economy. This strategy aimed to address the issue of plastic waste by implementing significant changes in the production, usage, and recycling of plastic within the EU. The new plan set targets such as ensuring that all plastic packaging circulating in the EU market is recyclable by 2030, reducing the consumption of single-use plastics, and limiting the intentional use of microplastics. (European Commission, 2018).

The EC considered the European region as the ideal place to lead this transition, presenting opportunities for innovation, competitiveness, and job creation. To monitor progress towards a sustainable economy at the EU and national levels, the EC adopted a Monitoring Framework consisting of ten key indicators covering each phase of the cycle. The primary focus was on climate change, addressing human behavior changes, depletion of the ozone layer, and other harmful impacts that negatively affect ecosystem dynamics and could have tragic consequences for future human civilization. (European Commission, 2018).

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On the other hand, Norway is also one of the European countries that has taken significant steps in formulating policies regarding plastic waste management. Norway seeks to play a leading role as one of the pioneering countries in Europe and the world in adhering to the approved provisions of the Basel Convention to combat plastic waste, which threatens human well-being in the coming years (Les på norsk, 2021). In an official statement by the Norwegian Ministry of Climate and Environment through the program titled the Norwegian Plastic Strategy in 2021, they envision creating a sustainable plastic usage strategy at the national, regional, and global levels. The Norwegian government claims that this strategy can implement the UN Environment Assembly's 2017 goal of eliminating the habit of dumping plastic waste into the oceans in the long term.

Furthermore, at the regional level, Norway considers it essential to support the EU's efforts in emphasizing a policy framework that can be implemented domestically. This is because Norway is a member of the European Economic Area (EEA) and an integral part of the EU Single Market, leading the Norwegian government to view collaborative policymaking on plastic waste management with the EU as necessary. In pursuit of this vision, the Norwegian Environmental Agency has designed a funding scheme to support plastic waste management in the oceans. In 2021, the Norwegian government allocated 70 million NOK (Norwegian Krona) for large-scale plastic cleanup campaigns (Norwegian Ministry of Climate and Environment, 2022). Norway's parallel actions with EU policies seem to indicate a specific trend in the Nordic or Northern European region, recognizing plastic waste pollution as a highly serious environmental issue.

The governments of Denmark and Sweden have formulated action plans to support a circular economy and address plastic waste management. Denmark's action plan, titled "Handlingsplan for cirkulær økonomi," focuses on three significant environmental and climate impact areas: biomass, construction, and plastic. Denmark is committed to achieving the EU targets of increasing recycling rates for municipal waste to 55% by 2025, 60% by 2030, and 65% by 2035. The Danish Environmental Protection Agency predicts that Denmark will be close to reaching these targets through previously announced policy initiatives. Denmark aims to reduce waste and improve resource utilization (Ministry of Environment Denmark, 2021).

Similarly, the Swedish government, through the official governmental agency Swedish Environment Protection Agency (EPA), has launched a roadmap for sustainable plastic use. It serves as a general overview and guide for Sweden's direction in the coming years (Swedish Environment Protection Agency, 2021).

This research observed a consistent policy formulation and perspective among these three Northern European countries regarding environmental issues. This aligns with the media coverage emphasizing the importance of addressing plastic waste, particularly in developing countries. The government institutions and mass media in these countries can be defined as pro-environmental behavior, which serves as the foundation for research conducted through the pro-environmental behavior theory.

Therefore, this research will focus on mainstream media in three Northern European countries consistently advocating for the importance of tackling plastic waste. It will examine how the mass media in three countries are shaping their readers' opinions and emphasize that Northern European countries, along with the European Union, are leading actors in addressing plastic waste issues.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pro-Environmental Behaviour (PEB)

Pro-Environmental Behavior (PEB) Theory refers to the study of individual or group behavior that aims to protect and preserve the environment. This theory emphasizes that pro-environmental behavior is influenced by complex social, psychological, and contextual factors. In the context of research on the contribution of the mass media in Northern European countries in fighting plastic waste, this theory can be used to understand how the mass media can influence people's pro-environmental behavior (Olsen, 2020).

Pro-Environmental Attitude reflects individuals' evaluation of environmental issues and their beliefs in the importance of environmental protection actions. In this study, it is important to identify pro-environmental attitudes generated by mass media exposure in Norway regarding the issue of plastic waste (Andersen, 2015).

Mass media plays a crucial role in providing pro-environmental information and education to the public. This research can explore how mass media in Norway delivers information and education about the impacts of plastic waste and solutions that can be adopted by individuals and society.

In this research, this multidisciplinary perspective allows for a comprehensive analysis of the contribution of mass media in combating plastic waste in Northern European countries. By utilizing this theory, this research can provide a deeper understanding of the role of mass media in combating plastic waste from a pro-environmental perspective.

The Role of Media Theory

The principles of this theory can provide guidance on how mass media can play a role in combating plastic waste and promoting pro-environmental behavior. If adopted, this rationality will determine the priorities of policies that will be addressed by the government. Traditionally, Francke (1995) stated that the role of mass media in people's daily lives is significant. This also relates to the traditional role of media as a gauge of government policies in a particular country.

The reason for using the role of media theory in this research is to discuss how mass media influences society and plays a role in shaping perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors (Gilboa, 2005). In this study, media role theory allows for an in-depth analysis of the contribution of mass media in Norway to combating plastic waste from a pro-environment perspective.

Mass media has the power to shape public opinion on environmental issues. This research can use this theory to analyze how mass media in Northern European countries influences public perceptions and attitudes regarding plastic waste and directs pro-environmental actions. In this study, the role of media theory helps to understand how mass media in Norway delivers information about plastic waste, educates the public about environmental consequences, and promotes actions aimed at reducing plastic waste.

Mass media often engages in environmental campaigns and initiatives to combat plastic waste. This theory would be helpful for analyzing the communication strategies used by mass media in Northern European countries, as well as the effectiveness of their campaigns and initiatives in influencing pro-environmental behavior (Gilboa, 2005).

The role of media theory can also help establish causal relationships or correlations between the contribution of mass media in combating plastic waste and changes in pro-environmental behavior in society. This research can identify the relationship between exposure to mass media and increased awareness, attitudes, and pro-environmental actions related to plastic waste (Tuitjer, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

Research Method

In this study, the role of Northern European media coverage in its influence on public policy formulation in the media coverage countries concerned is analyzed based on a qualitative-descriptive method with a comparative approach to compare media coverage of three different countries in Northern Europe (Nordic) are Norway, Denmark and Sweden.

Data sources include primary and secondary data sources. Primary data sources were obtained from official press releases and mass media reports regarding plastic waste management policies from the countries studied. While the secondary data sources used consist of scientific journals, research reports, reference books, scientific articles, and official documents from institutions that issue related policies.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Media outlets in Northern Europe are known for their sharp reporting on environmental issues in the region. This is due to the fact that Northern Europe is geographically directly bordered by the sea, making it more vulnerable to industrial waste pollution from other European countries. Unlike other parts of Europe, such as Western Germany, which is known as the largest producer of plastic waste in 2019, Northern European countries are more cautious and proactive in addressing environmental issues, as it can directly affect their well-being.

As a result, Nordic countries contribute significantly less greenhouse gas emissions. Infographic data published by UNFCCC in 2019 showed a stark comparison between Western European countries like Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, and the Netherlands, and Nordic countries such as Finland, Denmark, Sweden, and Latvia. Germany was the largest emitter of greenhouse gases in Europe in 2019, followed by the United Kingdom and France, which are also Western European countries known for their industrial manufacturing centers.

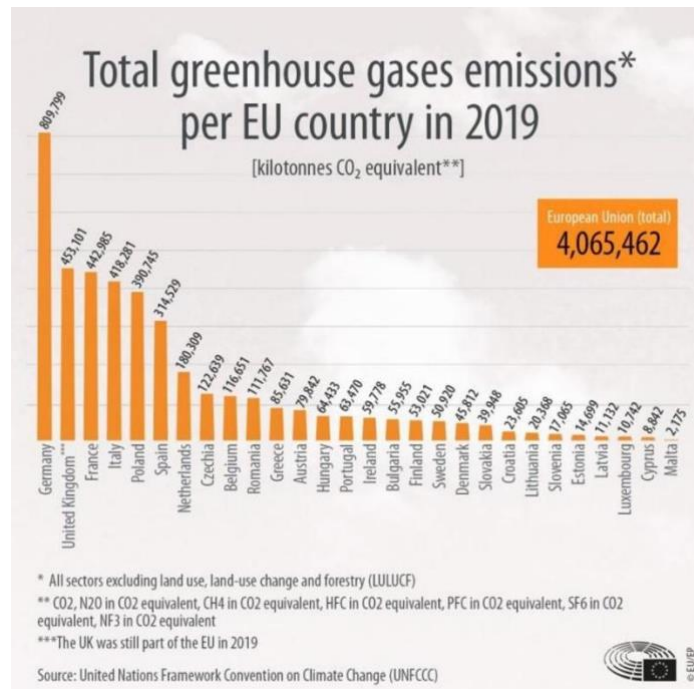


Figure 1. Total green house gases emmissions per EU country in 2019

Based on the infographic data shown above, it can be seen that Northern European countries make minimal contributions to greenhouse gas emissions. With this situation, they can serve as pioneers for other European Union countries in formulating sustainable environmental policies. Therefore, the voices of Northern European media should be heard by governments, both at the national level in each respective country and by the European Union as a representative institution.

Ian Baley (2022) shows that intensive media coverage has encouraged greater public participation on the issue of plastic, but some aspects of media reporting raise questions about the coherence and sustainability of public pressure for change. Meanwhile, Hase (2021) found that media outlets in the northern hemisphere cover the issue more frequently compared to mainstream media in the southern hemisphere.

Criticism of environmental policies regarding plastic waste has emerged in the Northern European's mass media in recent years and has continued to grow over time. This criticism reached its peak in recent years as the impact of single-use plastic on the environment gained global attention. These media outlets consistently publish articles and reports criticizing EU policies and advocating for more comprehensive solutions to address the issue of plastic waste.

One example of a European media outlet that has criticized EU policies is Aftenposten. This media outlet has criticized EU environmental policies, including the issue of plastic waste. Some criticisms that Aftenposten may have raised against the EU include the mismatch between promises and actions. They highlight that some EU member states have not fully complied with the environmental rules and targets, reducing the effectiveness of EU environmental policies in addressing the issue of plastic waste.



Figure 2. Aftenposten's critics on European Union Environment Policy.

Aftenposten's perspective is that the EU's policies regarding plastic waste are too focused on restricting the use of single-use plastics without considering more comprehensive solutions for plastic waste management as a whole. They emphasize the importance of involving the entire value chain in efforts to reduce and recycle plastic waste, including manufacturers, suppliers, and consumers. Aftenposten also criticizes the lack of international cooperation by the EU in addressing the issue of plastic waste. They highlight the importance of collaborating with countries outside the EU, including Norway, to achieve more effective solutions in reducing the global environmental impact of plastic waste.

In the context of Denmark, the media outlet Politiken focuses on EU environmental policies. They have criticized the EU's policies, particularly in the issue of plastic waste. The criticisms raised by Politiken against the EU include limitations in reducing single-use plastics. Politiken criticizes the EU for not taking enough measures to reduce the use of single-use plastics. They highlight that the EU's policies are still not sufficient to address the significant amount of plastic waste generated. Politiken may urge the EU to adopt a more stringent and integrated approach in reducing the use of single-use plastics.



Figure 3. Politiken's coverage on EU plastic waste policy

Politiken also raises concerns about the regulations for the EU plastic industry. The media outlet highlights the need for stricter rules and stronger oversight of plastic manufacturers to reduce the use of hazardous and non-degradable plastic materials. They urge the EU to adopt policies that promote innovation and the development of more environmentally friendly plastic materials.

Dagens Nyheter, a Swedish media outlet, has also voiced criticism of the European Union's environmental policies, particularly regarding the issue of plastic waste. Dagens Nyheter criticizes the EU for adopting policies that are not strong enough in reducing the use of single-use plastics. They argue that the existing measures are not ambitious enough to address the significant problem of plastic waste. Dagens Nyheter urges the EU to adopt stronger policies, including stricter bans or limitations on single-use plastic products, and to incentivize the use of environmentally friendly alternatives (Dagens Nyheter, 2023).



Figure 4. Dagens Nyheter's news coverage on climate issues.

The role of companies and consumers, which has not been fully optimized in tackling the issue of plastic waste, is highlighted by Dagens Nyheter. They criticize the lack of strong incentives for companies to adopt sustainable business practices and reduce the use of plastic in product packaging. Dagens Nyheter also emphasizes the importance of increasing consumer awareness of the negative impact of plastic on the environment and encourages them to make more environmentally friendly choices.

Dagens Nyheter also criticizes the inadequate international cooperation in addressing the problem of plastic waste. They state that tackling the issue of plastic waste requires close collaboration among countries worldwide. Dagens Nyheter urges the EU to play a more active role in strengthening international cooperation, including knowledge and technology exchange, as well as coordination in addressing the global impact of plastic pollution.

CONCLUSIONS & FURTHER RESEARCH

The role of the media in Northern European countries in fighting plastic waste arises from the dissatisfaction of the green behavior represented by the local media. The criticism given by the North European media in particular came from the three pioneer countries that most often voiced their opinions regarding the environmental issue of plastic waste in the European plans, namely Norway, Denmark and Sweden. They have carried out forms of environmental communication to influence public perception or opinion, including in influencing the formulation of EU environmental policies to make them more pro-environmental in line with the perspective of Pro-Environmental Behavior. The main reason why the three of them are very aggressive in voicing environmental criticism is given the fact that their country's territory is directly adjacent to the sea zone, it is their main industrial base so that plastic waste pollution is the biggest threat to them. future research might find different results if extending the scope to other countries in northern Europe as a suggestion.

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