



MSc Degree in Environmental Science

ATTRIBUTE AGENDA BUILDING IN AN ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS: NEWS
COVERAGE OF MV X-PRESS PEARL SHIP INCIDENT IN SRI LANKA

A dissertation submitted

by

P. C. P. KUMARA

to

The Centre for Environmental Studies and Sustainable Development

in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Science in Environmental Science

of

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA NAWALA, NUGEGODA

June 2024



076014

K.P.K.

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the building of the attribute agenda of an environmental crisis, taking the MV X-Press Pearl shipwreck incident as a case study. This incident had received attention not only from the local media, but also from overseas. English weekend newspapers for a year since the incident were used for a content analysis to identify the information subsidies and their respective attribute agendas. An analysis framework was developed based on information subsidies and their respective attribute agendas. The results indicated that the governmental bodies unrelated to the environment were the most frequently cited sources, followed by experts and local nongovernmental organisations/industries. In contrast, the public was the least cited source of information. Environmental damage was the attribute most often highlighted, followed by law, agreements, and prevention. However, policy was the least reported attribute. Considering the correlation between information sources and attributes, the Marine Environmental Protection Authority highlighted the mitigation agenda, while non-environmental related governmental bodies emphasised the prevention agenda. Policymakers focused on getting compensation, while governmental bodies emphasised law and agreements and experts prioritised on environmental damage. Evidence for attribute agenda building was found, further strengthening the agenda building hypothesis, and information subsidies had their own attributes highlighted in media reports. The study delves into the practical implications of agenda building, which can influence media outlets. It suggests strategic communication planning, aligning coverage with objectives, and collaborating with environmental advocacy groups. This understanding informs decision making, promotes balanced coverage, and enhances public participation. It is important to additionally take into account the process used to establish the agenda in future research.

News Reporting, Attribute Agenda Building, Information Subsidies, Environmental Risk Communication, Mv Xpress Pearl