

The Medium is the Message: Audio-Visual Communication Over Textual Communication - A Matter Of 'Effectiveness' In Communicating Conservation

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Abstract

The Earth is often referred to as a blue planet and it has been accommodating different species including homo sapiens for more than 3,00,000 years. With increasing population and the unsustainable attitude towards the planet and its species are making it a black planet. So, it is high time to start conserving resources and act wisely to help the next generation to survive. People need to be educated on the topic of conservation. But the question is what to conserve? and how to conserve. Many stakeholders including government organizations and NGOs have developed multimedia tools to communicate conservation to people having settlements near the habitats of forests, and mangroves to make them understand the significance of the issue.

This study encompasses an ethnographical approach that leads to investigating the power of audio-visual communication over verbal communication (with dialects of Odia language) in a comparative setting to know the effectiveness of the message of conservation. The sample population is drawn at the grassroots level consisting of the two sets of village communities surrounding *Bhitarkanika National Park* (one of the world's largest mangrove forests, located in the northeast part of the country), Kendrapara district in Odisha, India. These people are vulnerable because they are the population that either saves the forest or destroys it with their acts and presence.

The result of the study indicates that audio-visual communication tools can have a positive and long-term effect on the inhabitants and it is effective. On the other hand, the textual information does not make a significant impact on conservation instruction compared to audio-visual communication, because of the disadvantage of substantial text. Further, the audio-visual

medium showcases better real-life situations in a simpler and easy-to-understand format. The outcome of the study provides insights to policymakers and wildlife enthusiasts on creating audio-visual media for effective communication on conservation the of wildlife resources.

Keywords: Conservation, Effective Communication Tools, Audio-Visual Communication, Nature, Wildlife National Park, India.

Introduction

Nature is a precious and intricate web of life that sustains all living organisms on the planet. It includes the forests, oceans, wildlife, and ecosystems that provide humans with clean air, water, and a variety of resources. Nature not only sustains life but also offers countless benefits, from regulating the climate to providing food, medicine, and recreation. It is essential for maintaining biodiversity, which, in turn, supports the stability and resilience of the ecosystem. Regrettably, due to human actions, many species are on the brink of extinction, and the environment is facing unprecedented challenges like climate change, and habitat loss; in today's fast-paced world, many people may not be fully aware of the importance of conserving nature.

Odisha, situated on the east coast of India is heavily covered with forest and indigenous communities residing in and around the forest. It is home to a rich biodiversity, including several endangered species. “Odisha's forests are well-stocked, diverse, multi-storied and dense. The recorded forest area is 61,204 sq km of which 36,049 sq km is reserved forest, 25,133 sq km is protected forest and 22 sq km is unclassed forests, including two National Parks and 19 Wildlife Sanctuaries” (Odisha - India State of Forest Report, 2019). Conservation of wildlife in Odisha involves various initiatives and strategies aimed at protecting the diverse flora and fauna in the region. The people and their culture display the respect and values they have for the natural resources around them (Mishra, 2013), they even worship lakes, trees, birds, mammals, forests, etc.

“Efforts are made to address threats such as habitat loss, poaching, illegal wildlife trade, and human-wildlife conflict” (Odisha - India State of Forest Report, 2019). These are major factors of rapid depletion in forests and natural habitats. Each of these issues significantly

points towards a lack of awareness and education for the people residing in and around the habitat. The human settlements near the forest and surroundings have a strong impact on it. The local people living near national parks are the populace who cherish and depend on the habitat the most and this research aims to target such populations present near the *Bhitarkanika National Park*, these people are 'local warriors' who conserve the rich habitat existing around them. They often face human-animal conflicts but fail to understand the reason behind such tragic incidents.

Communicating Conservation

The word conservation means reservation or protection which was initially used in Environmental Science (Wikelski & Cooke, 2006), depending upon the assumption of nature being damaged by natural disasters, including human-influenced factors upon being healthy and vibrant for future generations. It involves taking responsible actions to mitigate the negative impacts of human activities, such as deforestation, pollution, overfishing, and habitat destruction, on the natural world. "It has been researched and discussed for centuries that human beings are ambitious by nature, and it is under this ambition to build a socio-economic area by replacing the function of agricultural land with houses, industries, business centres, tourist spots, and others that have the potential to destroy the nature" (Harrop, 2013). The human settlements at the mangroves and forest adjunct areas are a threat to wildlife and humans, they damage the animal habitats, such as the eradication of plants, trees or forest ecosystem that once acted as heat- and water-retention systems, which can upset the natural equilibrium (Busari *et. al.*, 2015).

Hansen (1991) stated the imperative role of mass media in environmental conservation. He believes the media as a communicating agenda can intensify the urge for environmental protection and suitability. Pacoma (2019), specified the urgency of awareness of communication academics and scholars' intervention in studying the media involvement in the conservation process. On these lines, Happer and Philo (2013) found that the mass media majorly covers capitalist intentions-based human-interest stories. So, the importance of struggling Mother Earth can only be measured through the awareness of people who are willing to work towards its conservation. For that conservation communication is becoming a vigorous phenomenon. Hungerford and Volk (1990) stated that the solution for effective communication for conservation is not only to learn about the issues but to have responsible environmental

behaviour; the information or medium of passing the information is very much necessary to create responsible people to protect and conserve nature (Kellstedt *et. al.*, 2008).

Audio-Visuals Communication for Conservation

Norwegian playwright and the father of realism Henrik Johan Ibsen said "*A picture is worth a thousand words.*" According to scientific reports, the human brain has the capability of processing visuals 60,000 times faster than text materials. A significant amount of people prefer to be educated through the visual medium rather than the traditional textual way, which leads to video representation of everything, including information, education, entertainment, and product descriptions (Marlow & Miller, 2011). Humans use their five senses namely, sight, smell, taste, sound, and touch to observe and absorb information. But still, it has been noticed that people perceive videos or audio-visuals much better than just textual content (Heimlich, 2010). The following are a few reasons, 1. Easy to consume, 2. Emotional connection and 3. Engage viewers. Seibert (2022) stated that a minute video is equivalent to 1.8 million words. In addition to his statement, videos are an excellent medium for storytelling, because the human brain relishes tales. Friesem (2016) ascent a point that in the digital age moving images attract consumers, which motivates them to like, share, and comment, thus the audio and video information engage the viewer emotionally and is arguably the main factor in its success.

Nature-based audio-visuals cover themes surrounding the biotic and abiotic factors that humans see and interact with, like plants, mountains, animals, rivers, etc. Research indicates that viewing nature-based documentaries and non-fictional audio-visual productions might impact the attitudes and knowledge of the viewer. Although many other popular genres, like feature films, children's movies, green advertising, or other attractive styles of films prominently use nature, nature documentaries specifically, bear the most striking similarities to zoo experiences that have been majorly studied in prior environmental psychological works (Horak, 2006; Cabeza San Deogracias & Mateos-Perez, 2013). Audio-visual communication provides pedagogical implications, Fortner (1985) investigated whether exposure to a nature-based film or classroom teaching had differing knowledge impacts about marine creatures. The research found that both presenting styles significantly increased understanding of their audience. Interestingly, only those who were exposed to the nature-based films showed signs of a shift in positive attitude compared to those who heard the identical material from a scientific instructor in a classroom setting.

Nolan (2010) showcased a documentary to the participants in two studies. After watching it, the participants had adequate knowledge about climate change, felt more responsible and were very enthusiastic about creating a sustainable eco-system. The documentary made an ever-lasting impact on the participants. A person who is not familiar with linguistics can understand the audio-visual easily. A film or any audio-visual will always have a significant impact on the audience. Jacobsen's (2011) study examined the success of a documentary on the change in the behaviour of people and he found out that just in two months the purchase of voluntary carbon offsets increased by 50% in a 10-mile radius where the documentary screening was done. Effective communication for conservation is educating, informing, participating, and practising for a better world to live in.

According to Weston (2019), the most effective way to communicate the topic of conservation would be audio-visuals. Films gaining acceptance, especially “wildlife documentaries such as BBC’s Planet Earth II and Blue Planet II have more than a billion viewers” (Jones *et. al.*, 2019). The above is not only an example that wildlife documentaries are reaching a vast audience but also if looked closely, 7 out of 30 top television shows ranked under IMBd are wildlife documentaries (Aitchison *et. al.*, 2021). Further, due to the advent of modern information communication technology like streaming platforms and video-on-demand service providers, the rarity of wildlife is understood by a huge chunk of the audience, which leads to people falling into a positive habit of caring and developing the behaviour to conserve whatever is possible for them to do. There will be no second chances that will help nature except for changing humans’ attitudes now. Murphy's (1993) work reinstates and supports the idea of visual media being a major driving force in bringing about environmental conservation. Films and audio-visual media productions are found to be better mediums for spreading awareness than anything else.

The Medium, Human Mind and Emotions

‘The medium is the message’ is a notion proposed by communication theorist Marshall McLuhan in his book *‘Understanding Media; The Extensions of Man’* which was originally published in 1964. McLuhan (1994) argues that the form or medium of communication shapes and influences human perception and experience more profoundly than the specific content being communicated. Many communication scholars emphasized that different media, such as

print, television, or the internet, have unique characteristics that impact how people think, feel, and interact. The medium itself, according to McLuhan, is an influential force in shaping culture and society. In other words, the way (medium) information is transmitted is a crucial factor in shaping individuals and societies. Each medium has its own inherent qualities that extend beyond the explicit message it conveys. McLuhan encourages readers to look beyond the surface content of messages and to consider the broader effects of the medium itself on the way people perceive the world and relate to one another.

Considering wildlife conservation, McLuhan's concept may be comprehended in the following manner. The selection of a communication medium is crucial in wildlife conservation activities as it significantly impacts the transmission of information and its ability to effectively engage the public. Various forms of media contain the capacity to transmit information, elicit emotions, and engage a wide range of audiences, ultimately leaving a lasting impact on their memory. The presentation and distribution of media utilized for animal conservation messaging may greatly impact perception and their degree of participation in conservation concerns. For instance, an engaging documentary portraying endangered animals and their ecosystems may build a visual appeal and emotional connection. Likewise, a well-crafted social media campaign including graphics and tales can attract younger generations who are more technologically oriented and use digital media regularly. The media used may also impact the tone and depiction of the message. For example, a video may capture the spirit and beauty of nature in a way that a written report would not be able to convey. However, it is vital to pick the correct media and messaging approach carefully to guarantee that the desired message is successfully transmitted considering the target group or audience.

Frijda's cognitive theory of the emotions articulated by psychologists posits that our emotional experiences are deeply intertwined with cognitive processes. Unlike earlier theories that viewed emotions as direct responses to external stimuli, this perspective emphasizes the crucial role of appraisal in emotional reactions. This theory not only underscores the subjectivity of emotional experiences but also recognizes the active role of individuals in constructing their emotional responses through cognitive processes, thus offering a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between thoughts and emotions. Frijda's cognitive theory of emotions advocates that the emotions of the audience or target group are often stimulated through cognitive processes (Frijda, 1987) when they are exposed to audio-visuals. For example, a film on how the population of tigers has been declining over the years would

create a strong sense of concern about these rare species. “The audience may not seem emotional (cry or weep) but would connect to the concerning issue. Thus, the emotion and action responses are not fixed responses to emotional stimuli, but the result of appraisals of what they mean for a person’s concerns considering the situational context. Lively simulation provides the contextual frame for the complex appraisal of the apparent realism of film events” (Frijda, 1993).

In the world of communication, the phrase "*a picture is worth a thousand words*" bears a deep reality, reflecting the unique potential of pictures to make a lasting impact on the human mind. The cognitive rationale behind why pictures tend to linger in the mind more efficiently than text is that the human brain is natively equipped to handle visual information with extraordinary efficiency. According to cognitive psychology, a large percentage of the brain is devoted to visual processing, showing the evolutionary relevance of visual inputs. When presented with a picture, the brain instantly decodes and comprehends it, allowing for fast and simple interpretation. In contrast, reading and understanding text involves greater cognitive work, since the brain must systematically analyze and grasp each word. Moreover, pictures contain the potential to express complicated information concisely. A well-crafted picture may capture a plethora of facts, emotions, and thoughts, delivering a comprehensive and quick comprehension that would endure for a longer duration. This quickness in information transmission is vital in a fast-paced environment when attention spans are restricted. Text, on the other hand, frequently takes a more extended and sequential engagement to transmit the same degree of information, leaving it prone to being neglected or forgotten.

Purpose and Objectives

This research aims to identify communication strategies and tools that can maximize the impact of conservation initiatives. By studying the effectiveness of two different communication approaches, the research seeks to contribute to better conservation communication outcomes, such as decreasing human-animal conflicts, changing policies, and successful habitat and species conservation. The study would deal with humans and the communication tool that helps the residents understand the earnestness of conservation near a national park. Understanding the inhabitants is crucial for tailoring communication strategies that resonate with and influence different groups near the national park so that it motivates individuals and communities to

change their behaviours in ways that benefit conservation and save the people, as well as animals from death.

The objective of the research is to assess the effectiveness of mediums of communication in wildlife conservation. This includes measuring changes in public awareness, attitudes, and behaviours resulting from these mediums of communication. Understanding the different audience and their values, beliefs, and preferences related to conservation is the foremost step before deciding on the content of conservation. In India, the locals in and around national parks, tend to have a lot of beliefs and myths related to forest and conservation. It is very important to understand their insights before expecting a change in their behaviour and attitude. So, deciding on a medium of communication is strongly based on their eagerness and interest to know something related to conservation. The target audience has been under various scenarios where they have lost their family members, relatives peers and friends in human-animal conflicts. While addressing them, it is quite important to understand their experiences with wildlife. Thus, the following research questions are framed.

RQ1- Is the medium of communication an effective part of wildlife conservation?

RQ2- Is audio-visual communication more effective than textual communication?

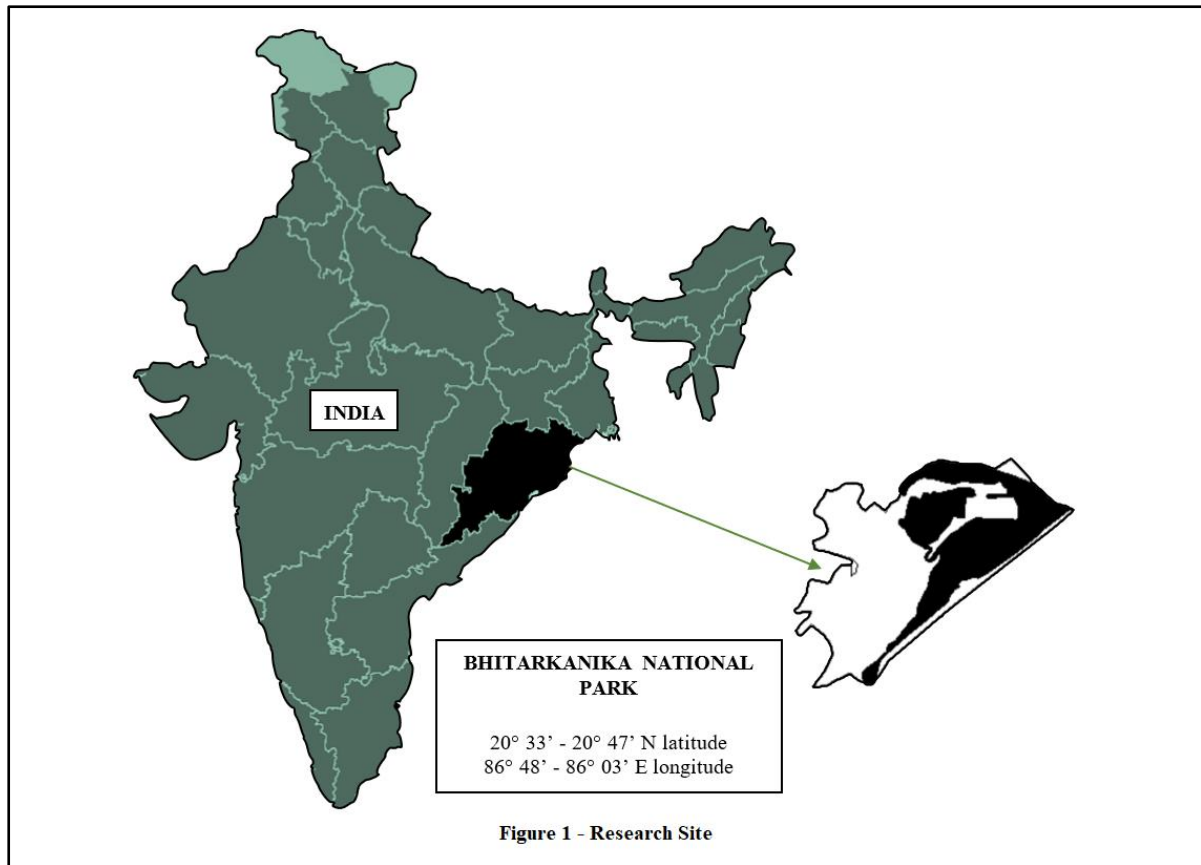
Method and Materials

Ethnographic fieldwork was selected as a methodology for this study to understand the beliefs, conservation practices and societal perspectives on wildlife conservation. The field-level intervention required time and trust to understand the indigenous people and their lifestyles. The people worship forests and have a wide set of beliefs and traditions related to forests and animals. To successfully complete the study, the researchers actively participated in community activities and being a part of the community for a longer time helped in understanding the key issues prevailing in the forest habitat.

Study Area: *Bhitarkanika National Park* is a 145 Sq. Km. large national park located in Kendrapara district in Odisha, eastern India. It obtained the status of a Ramsar site of international importance in 2002. It is surrounded by Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary, “one of the world's largest mangrove forests located between 20° 33’ - 20° 47’ N latitude and 86° 48’ - 86° 03’ E longitude spreading over 672 Sq. Km.” (Odisha - India State of Forest Report,

2019; Shrestha *et. al.*, 2019). Dhamra, Baitarani, Brahmin and Pathsala rivers create an estuarine resulting in a beautiful and vast mangrove patch. The sanctuary is covered with more than 70 species of mangroves and is home to thousands of species of Fauna and Flora. The conservation started by Robert Bustard in 1974, helped the national park stabilize the species' presence and later helped it to grow (Sridhar, 2005). The national park has many villages on the periphery and it will not be wrong to state that these people are the protector of the forest. The reason for not being able to conserve the forest is because of the unavailability of information and conservation-related communication at the grassroots level. The villages located near the forestry depend on the forest for daily requirements such as firewood, fishing, water and many more. While these people try to collect resources for their existence leads to confrontation with wild animals and results in human-animal conflicts.

The human settlements around Bhitarkanika National Park are mainly migrants from Bangladesh and some parts of West Bengal. This community depends on fishing, farming, live stocks (such as goats, sheep, and farm birds) and tourism for their livelihood. Currently as per the records they are categorized as Dalits and tribes living in Odisha. For the study, it took time for community engagement and to understand the forest and wildlife conservation was noticed after a few meetings and made it easy for the community to believe information circulated by the forest department and researchers regarding conservation. After 4 months of being a part of the community (on a regular interval), they were invited for the discussion and were comfortable enough to share sensitive information or beliefs about the forest and the people. Multiple insights from different groups formulated among the villages gave perspectives to visualize the importance of conservation in Bhitarkanika National Park. After 6 months, the textual and first audio-visual-based studies were conducted with the communities.



The Setting & Data Collection Process: Fifty participants were selected using a systematic sampling method from two villages namely 1. Bagapatia and 2. Gupti, near *Bhitarkanika National Park* with an ethnographical approach. Every fifth house was selected to be part of the study and their experience with wildlife and various other information were recorded. For more than ten years, the first author has been in the national park for various documentation projects, assignments, and surveys, so the people, the surroundings, and habitats are quite familiar with a strong connection that led to an authentic examination. This study involved around two hundred and thirty-four hours of interaction (in Odia language) and discussion within thirty days in October 2022 to understand the core issue of communication in connection with wildlife conservation.

The aim was to understand, what kind of communication tool is mostly accepted by the local community and why conservation as a concept was necessary for them to understand. The locals are mostly involved in fishing, farming, and scouting wild products for sale. These people can be listed under the category of school drop-outs, underprivileged and vulnerable, the community trust their Sarpanch (head of the village) or people around and nearby villages;

government notices/notifications or information for a better lifestyle, but do not accept information from outsiders. So, finding an appropriate communication tool for them is vital.



In the first village (Bagapatia) – twenty-five people were selected and were given information about conservation through audio-visuals such as a documentary and digital images (photographs and audio-visual clippings). Showed an Odia dubbed version of the award-winning short wildlife documentary *The Fishing Spy* (2018, 8 Minutes, English, India). A film about a fishing cat ([*Prionailurus viverrinus*] is a medium-sized wild cat of South and Southeast Asia. Since 2016, it has been listed as Vulnerable on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List). An elusive species which is found in the wetlands – near their locality. While showing them the documentary the researchers asked them to keep in mind the creature and its details as much as possible. Most of them did not doubt the contained and could understand the issue and recognize the species to the fullest.



Figure 3 - Fishing Cat (*Prionailurus Viverrinus*)

Note: The first author is the director, graphic artiste, and did visual packaging for the documentary *The Fishing Spy*; the second author is the creative producer, head of productions and the project guide for the same.¹

In the second village (Gupti) - twenty-five sample respondents were selected and were given information about conservation through textual materials more specifically about fishing cats such as – 1. articles, 2. printed news clips, 3. Reports (with a few printed visuals/images in it), 4. posters and 5. scripts of the documentary *The Fishing Spy*. Further, the story of the documentary was verbally narrated. They were also asked to reminisce about the animal, but most of the respondents were questioned about the colour, look, size and many other attributes of the species.

After twenty days, all the fifty participants of both the villages were reached out separately and they were asked five basic questions with multiple options about the fishing cat. The following are the questions.

Q1 - What is something unique about fishing cats?

Q2 - When does a fishing cat hunt for food?

¹To watch the documentary *The Fishing Spy*, kindly access the link – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sKXFekDORos>

Q3 - Which state has a fishing cat as their state animal?

Q4 - When fishing cats will attack humans?

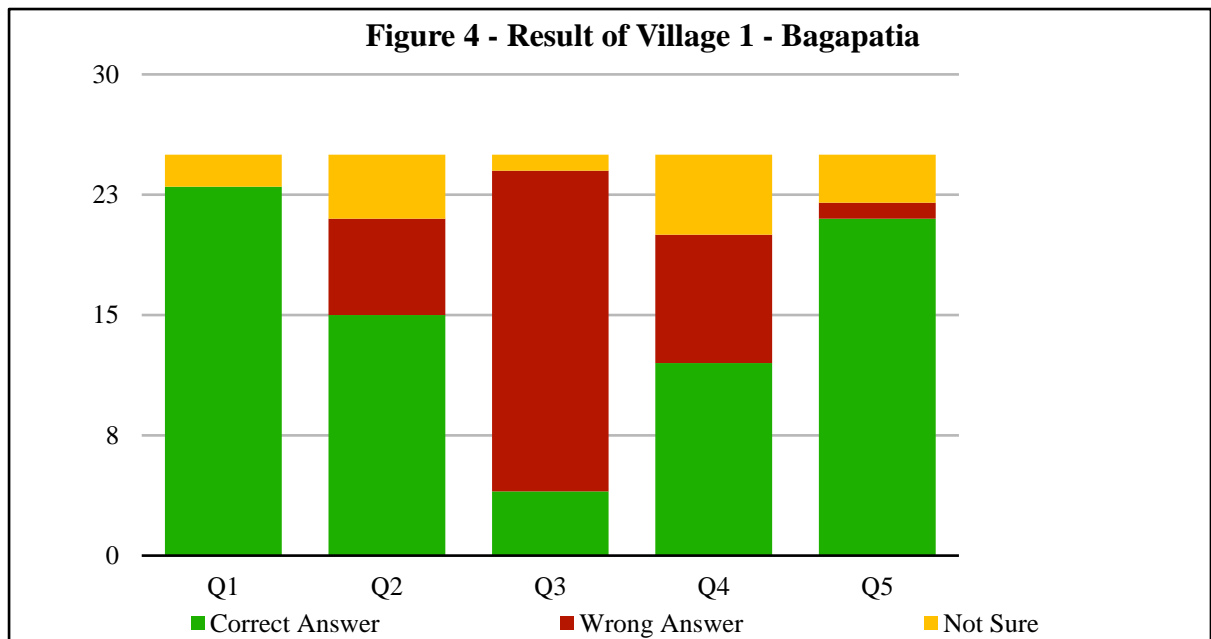
Q5 - Why we should protect fishing cats?

Results

With the first level of discussion, it was found that the first village (Bagapatia) was much more interested and engaged while watching the documentary and they completely connected to the details in the film. On the other hand, in the second village (Gupti), the textual content was not very engaging and few people were not interested in listening to the story of a cat, which for them is quite common. The people relapsed with queries as to how these cats could not be dangerous and started talking about their experience with other wild creatures that have caused harm. The primary experience was that the first village had an exact idea about what was being said and the communication was very much clear and short. While for the second village, reading and narrating the same story (because many of them could not read), took a long time and raised a lot of doubts and misconceptions about the creature.

The responses to the questions from the first village (Bagapatia) are as follows.

Q1- 23 answered correctly and 2 participants were not sure, Q2- 15 answered correctly, 6 participants answered wrong and 4 participants were not sure, Q3- 4 answered correctly, 20 participants answered wrong and 1 participant was not sure, Q4- 2 answered correctly, 8 participants answered wrong and 5 participants were not sure, Q5- 21 answered correctly, 1 participant answered wrong and 3 participants were not sure. Figure 4 depicts the same.



On the other hand, the second village (Gupti) response to the questions is as follows.
 Q1- 12 answered correctly, 11 participants answered wrong and 2 participants were not sure,
 Q2- 4 answered correctly, 17 participants answered wrong and 4 participants were not sure,
 Q3- 6 answered correctly, 13 participants answered wrong and 6 participants were not sure,
 Q4- 16 answered correctly, 8 participants answered wrong and 1 participant was not sure, Q5-
 12 answered correctly, 5 participants answered wrong and 8 participants were not sure.

Figure 5 - Result Analysis of Village 1- Bagapatia

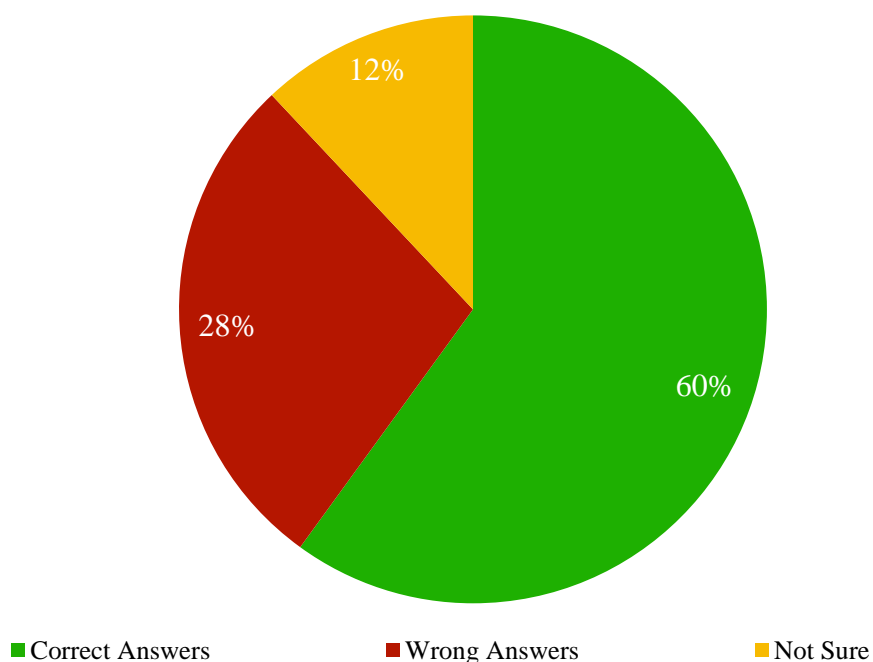
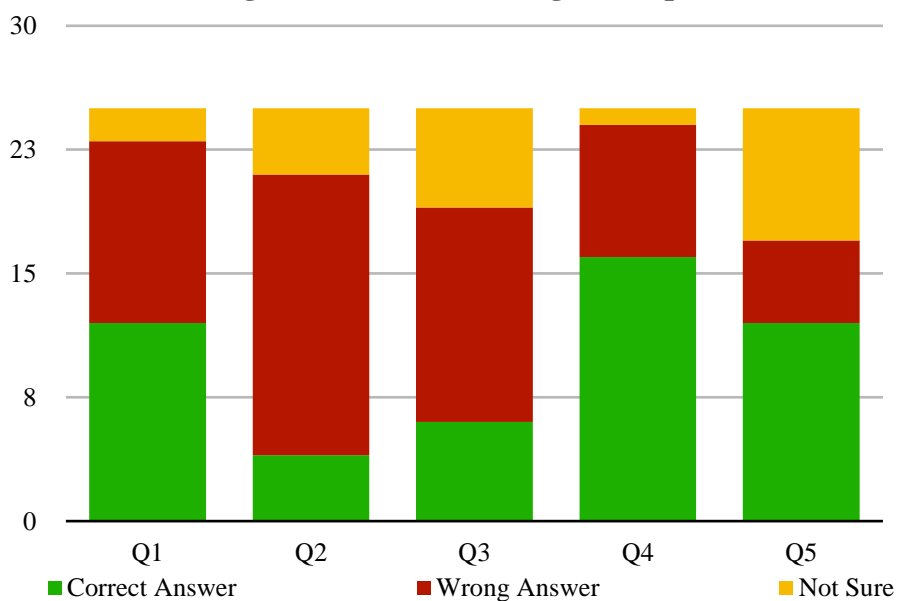
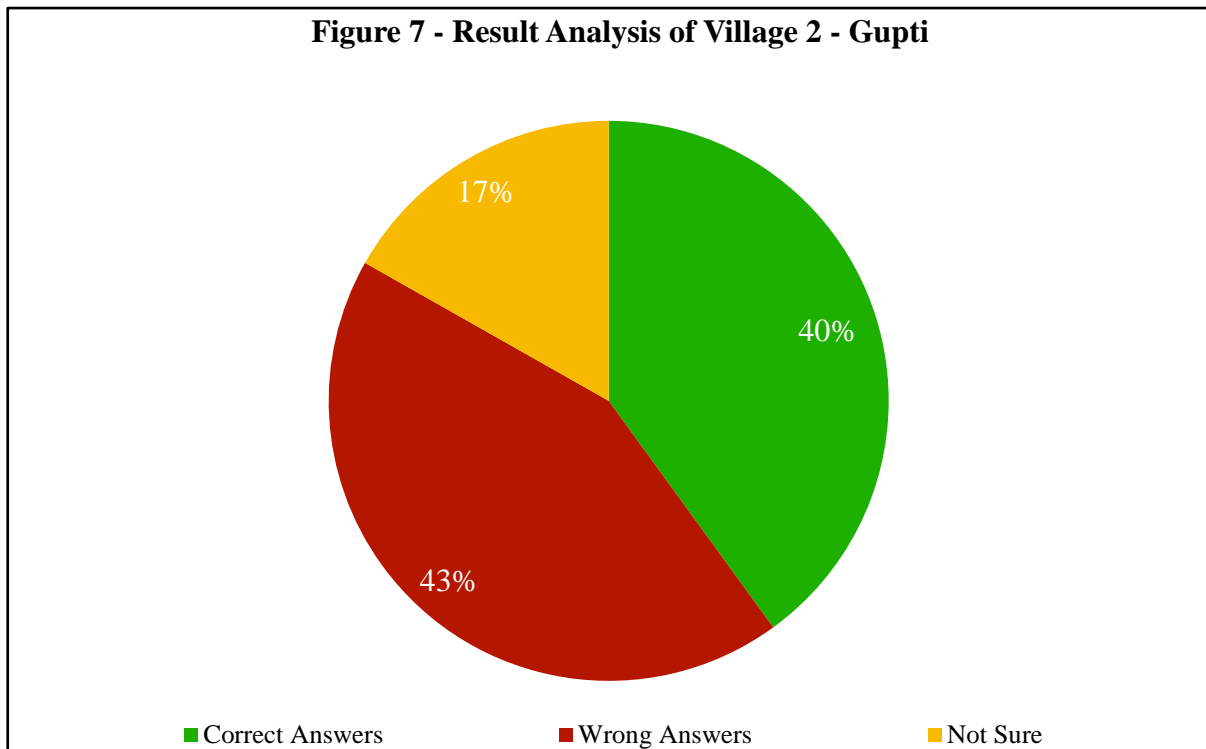


Figure 6 - Result of Village 2- Gupti



The data collected from Bagapatia (village 1), displays that more people were clear about the particulars of the fishing cat and they were able to recall the message they consumed twenty days before without much trouble. A total of 60% of the participants were able to answer correctly, 28% answered incorrectly and 12% were not sure of the question and failed to answer.

Figure 7 - Result Analysis of Village 2 - Gupti



The data of Gupti (village 2), indicates 40% of the participants were able to answer the questions correctly, 43% answered incorrectly and 17% were not sure of the question and failed to answer. It is confirmed that the people had a lot of doubt and lack of clarity regarding the content they came across 20 days before.

The responses of the participants belonging to both villages are dissimilar. Village 1 (where audio-visuals were used) was able to remember the data for a longer time without much of a muddle or doubt. There 60% of the participants were aware of the content and understood wildlife communication in a better way. When compared to village 2 (Gupti, where text was used over audio-visuals) only 40% of the participants were able to give the correct answer and 17% could not be able to understand the communication or were unsure about their understanding.

Discussion

The study shows that some of the answers given by the communities were incorrect when text was presented to them. As an example, the Q2 about fishing cat hunt for food. The answers were correct with the people who watched an audio-visual as they could see the visuals of a cat hunting a fish at night in the water body. Whereas, the community with textual information

failed to remember the hunting pattern of the fishing cat and was unclear with the material circulated. The data clearly states that in Figure 4 for Q 2, 15 participants answered correctly, 6 participants' answers were incorrect and 4 participants were not sure, on the other hand when the textual content as a method of communication was implemented, in contradictory, figure 6 shows for Q2, 4 participants answered correctly, 17 participants answered wrongly and 4 participants were not sure.

The participants in the study can recall audio-visual communication better because of the captivating visuals they saw during the documentary screening and recollected the information through visual memory and answered better than the participants who tend to not remember the textual information circulated to them. This research indicates audio-visual communication for conservation is one of the most successful communication strategies and should be utilized by multiple entities (including government and NGOs) for improved comprehension and memory. In wildlife conservation, imagery, such as pictures and movies depicting endangered animals and their habitats, has a tremendous influence on increasing awareness. Visuals may elicit an emotional connection, making the audience more willing to support conservation initiatives. The sight of an elusive animal or a pristine mangrove region like Bhitarkanika National Park might encourage people to get engaged. Wildlife documentaries, nature-based documentaries about elusive animals in their natural habitats, or conservation initiatives, may evoke empathy and a desire to safeguard these species and their ecosystem. This emotional connection is a motivating reason behind many effective conservation projects. (Friesem, 2016)

Instead of only giving the audience information on a piece of paper or in a written format, showing them the serious changes that the ecosystem is going through, assists in spreading awareness in a lot more efficient as well as effective method. Studies have demonstrated that change in people's conduct and attitude has been documented upon witnessing nature documentaries or movies rather than when they are exposed to the same knowledge via textbooks or textual forms. Seeing the impact that their acts are having on the environment and how it is degrading to the point of toxicity for future generations, is making them emotional towards the cause and bringing about a change. It has become important that the communication methods for spreading awareness be altered with the changing times as well.

The images cannot be deceptive, even though in the artificial intelligence era, and it was quite intriguing for the researchers to see that people still have faith in television as they believe that it communicates correct information. When the participants viewed the video footage of certain animal behaviours, they were thrilled and startled. This suggests that they are oriented towards audio-visuals. The sole motive was to learn how the knowledge might be communicated for the people to trust and accept.

Visuals are an important aspect of the narrative. They may assist in chronicling the journey of diverse creatures, illustrate conservation success stories, and explain the issues encountered by endangered species. Visual storytelling is appealing and helps people connect with the subject on a personal level. Visuals may portray the beauty and wonder of the natural environment, which can be a strong incentive for conservation. By demonstrating the majesty of animals and their habitats, visual communication reminds people of what is at risk and what they stand to lose without conservation efforts. Audio-visual mode of communication helps simplify complicated ecological and scientific facts. Even charts, graphs, and infographics may visually depict data, making it more accessible and understood. Additionally, wildlife movies and instructional DVDs may educate people about the significance of how to maintain contact with wildlife, without facing human-animal conflicts and the issues animals confront. While we witness the growth in social media and online information sharing, these animal conservation items are extremely shareable and engaging on social media platforms. Conservation groups may exploit the visual attraction of animals and their habitats to engage a larger audience, generate support and raise cash.

Documentation of conservation challenges may be an effective instrument for influencing policy and decision-makers. Shocking photographs of habitat devastation or animal poaching may motivate public and political support for protective measures. Audio-visual communication may overcome language boundaries, promoting cooperation and information exchange among conservation groups, scientists, and communities globally. One of the main findings that must be highlighted is the myths about forest, worship and animals that persisted in the community were a part of their existence and this study did not aim to attempt to construct or shatter their '*belief*.'

Conclusion

Protecting the important biodiversity sites helps greatly to the worldwide persistence of biological variety. It is crucial for a sustainable present and a green future. These areas provide invaluable ecological products and services. For instance, forests offer people with wood, food, fuel, and bio-products. In addition to fulfilling ecological duties including storing carbon, controlling water flow, maintaining soil, and cycling nutrients. Water is cleansed and restored by wetlands, which also give food and fibre and mitigate the impacts of drought and flood. The key to protecting these areas is to put in place appropriate mitigating measures. This is where conservation at the grassroots level makes its entry.

Effective communication is integral to conservation efforts, playing a pivotal role in the preservation of biodiversity and natural ecosystems. Firstly, communication raises awareness and educates the public about the significance of conserving wildlife and the environment. Through various channels, such as campaigns, educational materials, and outreach programs, people are informed about the value of conservation, the interconnectedness of ecosystems, and the threats posed to wildlife. This awareness serves as the foundation for understanding the urgency of conservation.

Secondly, communication is essential for mobilizing local support. Conservation success hinges on public engagement and commitment. By employing compelling narratives, visuals, and messages, conservation organizations can emotionally engage the locals, inspiring individuals to contribute their resources, time, and advocacy to the cause. This mobilization of local support is often a determining factor in the success of conservation initiatives.

Thirdly, communication is a catalyst for influencing policy decisions and advocating for conservation-friendly legislation. It serves to convey research findings, highlight the need for protective measures, and inform policymakers at various levels about the importance of conservation. This research conducted in *Bhitarkanika National Park* shows that well-structured communication mediums can effectively influence local people and decision-makers and may lead to policy changes that benefit conservation. In summary, audio-visual communication is the cornerstone of conservation, serving as an effective medium for awareness, engagement, and advocacy, ultimately contributing to the conservation of our planet's biodiversity and natural heritage.

Conservation is not only a choice; it is a need for the future of our planet and the existence of all living creatures. In the area of wildlife conservation, the notion of 'the medium is the message' argues that the medium in which the information is communicated is a critical aspect in shaping public perception and participation in conservation efforts. The audio-visuals possess a strong emotional appeal, long-term memory and target the audience to realize the severity of the message and generate a long-lasting influence on the audience. Conservation groups, NGOs and governments need to carefully assess the media they choose to guarantee that their message is not only heard but also comprehended, remembered, and emotionally related to be acted upon by their target audiences.

End Notes:

1. During the study, the first author found four new species of birds, which were not recorded earlier.
2. Through this study, the researchers understood the human perception supporting the audio-visuals over textual content. The population residing near the national park is well aware of the species that surround them, they need to be sensitized and provide support to nurture it.
3. The mangrove patch holds a lot of secrets and if not protected by the natives, who are a part of the national park, may lead to rapid destruction.
4. The state of Odisha is pleased with the *Bhitarkanika National Park* - one of the largest mangrove patches in the world and wishes to preserve the same for the future to experience.
5. A work-in-progress version of this article was presented at the International Conference - Reflections on Research Beyond Discipline, organized by St. Xavier's University, Kolkata on the 3rd and 4th of March 2023.

Authors Profile:

Saswat Pati is a doctoral research scholar (early stage) at the School of Communications, XIM University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India. He has been dedicated to working towards conservation and documentation for more than a decade. He has completed his graduation at XIM University (erst-while Xavier University, Bhubaneswar) followed by post-graduation in wildlife conservation at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, United Kingdom. He produces

films and audio-visual content for numerous international and nationally acclaimed organizations such as France 24, Coca-Cola, Save the Children and Pradan. He has authored a book “*Vivid Quills*” - *A Tale of 100 Tails* (2021), launched by the Shri Naveen Patnaik, Chief Minister of Odisha. He is a part of various government-based conservation and documentation projects and initiatives; and a recipient of the prestigious *Biju Patnaik Award for Wildlife Conservation* at the age of 20. He strongly believes that communication is the only way to get the planet Earth conserved and he works towards it.

Dr. V. Vijay Kumar is an Associate Professor and Dean of the School of Communications, at XIM University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India. He has a blend of more than two decades of industry and academic experience as his strengths, he is a seasoned mass communication professional and a media educator, with more than a decade of industrial experience in audio-visual content development, supervision, and management. Right from television reality shows to non-fiction live broadcasts, from television commercials to feature films, he worked on various projects in different capacities. He worked with Sun TV Network, Chennai; Shop CJ TV Network, Mumbai; Frames Entertainment, Chennai, India, in senior roles and he was the creative head and show director of an award-winning Tamil reality talent hunt show ‘*Naalaya Iyakunar*’ (Future Director) and South India’s first reality television show for identical twins ‘*Iruvar*’ (Twins). He has completed his PhD at Anna University, Chennai, India. His doctoral research is on the topic of ‘*Interactive Reality Television.*’ He specializes in audio-visual content development, entertainment television programmes, digital filmmaking, documentary films, and educational media design. His research interests are television programming, television studies, film studies, social media, interactive digital communication, positive psychology, public relations, and educational media. Apart from teaching, he is actively involved in audio-visual content development in the forms of documentaries, music videos, television shows and educational video modules in the capacity of executive producer, head of creatives and production.

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