

Environmental Problems in Central Asian Journalism: Analysis of Approaches and Trends

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to identify the peculiarities of coverage of invasive topics as media content in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. To study the specifics of environmental issues in Central Asian journalism, the method of analysis and the case method were used. The study identified the role of journalism in shaping environmental awareness. In particular, the study determined that journalistic materials influence public opinion and environmental policymaking. The research also included an analysis of environmental issues in the journalistic genres of Central Asia. The main environmental problems of the region, such as lack of water resources, environmental pollution, land degradation, etc. were identified. The study described the different genres used to cover these issues (analytical articles, investigative journalism, blogs, documentaries, etc.). Through the analysis of Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Uzbek journalism, the study determined that media resources effectively contribute to raising environmental awareness and mobilising civil society. In addition, an overview of international initiatives and projects to support environmental journalism and address environmental issues in the region was made, based on a comparative table of international initiatives was created and differences between the media strategies of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan were presented. The study also suggested that international experience should be adapted to local realities to systematically cover environmental issues on all media resources in the region: use of digitalisation, social media, interactive platforms, educational initiatives for journalists, attracting attention through opinion leaders (bloggers), development of independent media, cooperation with international environmental organisations, and use of data journalism.

Keywords: *Invariance, media platforms, green economy concept, social networks, Central Asian journalism.*

INTRODUCTION

Central Asia is currently experiencing severe environmental problems, including water scarcity, land degradation, air pollution, and the long-term consequences of the Aral Sea crisis. These challenges are transboundary in nature and threaten sustainable development not only at the regional but also at the global level. In this context, journalism plays a key role in mediating environmental knowledge. As noted by Junsheng et al. (2019), the media serves

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as a primary source through public encounters climate science and forms an understanding of environmental risks, thereby influencing both awareness and behavioural responses.

Recent studies analysing environmental journalism in Central Asia indicate a growing scholarly interest in the topic. Researchers have focused on issues such as water shortages, environmental pollution, and climate change impacts, emphasising the role of media in shaping environmental consciousness. Jain and Meena (2024) explicitly argue that digital media have significantly transformed the role of journalism in promoting environmental awareness, while different platforms such as print, online, and broadcast demonstrate unequal levels of audience reach and engagement. This observation highlights the increasing importance of digital journalism as a tool for disseminating environmental information and mobilising public attention.

In a similar vein, Kosimova (2023) stresses that environmental public relations in Uzbekistan play a crucial role in forming the environmental image of Central Asian countries, although the author underlines the need to address systemic shortcomings in the functioning of public relation services within organisations and enterprises. These findings support the argument that media communication is not only informational but also reputational and strategic in nature.

At the national level, several studies point to structural limitations of environmental journalism. Dzhumagieva (2020) concludes that the genres of environmental journalism in Kyrgyzstan require transformation in line with both national and global cultural contexts, arguing that existing formats fail to meet the expectations of contemporary media audiences. Yogurtçu (2021) similarly notes that environmental coverage in Kyrgyzstan remains insufficiently deep and is often anthropocentric, a condition exacerbated by restricted access to information and practices of self-censorship. As a result, environmental journalism frequently reflects environmental problems descriptively rather than interpretively.

The normative dimension of environmental journalism is emphasised by Abdujabbarovna (2023), who states that the media exert a direct influence on public perception, policy-making processes, and societal attitudes towards environmental issues. According to the author, early and responsible involvement of journalism in environmental discourse can stimulate collective commitment to solving environmental problems and building a sustainable future.

At the regional level, Momosheva (2024) argues that the resolution of environmental problems and the promotion of sustainable development require coordinated interaction between local authorities, business structures, and civil society. The author proposes practical measures such as improving energy efficiency, expanding renewable energy use, and investing in environmentally responsible technologies. Complementing this view, Abduvapova (2019) emphasises the need for a continuous system of environmental education based on the principles of sustainable development, while Jakypbekova et al. (2024) underline that many environmental problems in the Kyrgyz region still lack sufficiently comprehensive scientific justification, despite the urgency of their resolution.

Despite the growing body of literature, prior research remains largely descriptive and fragmented. Most studies examine individual countries, specific environmental problems, or isolated media functions, without integrating these perspectives into a comprehensive analytical framework. In particular, insufficient attention has been paid to the interaction between journalistic strategies, digital media transformation, and the transboundary nature of environmental challenges in Central Asia. As a result, the role of journalism in facilitating

interstate environmental dialogue and shaping a shared regional environmental agenda remains underexplored.

To address this gap, the present study is grounded in environmental communication theory and media framing approaches, which conceptualise journalism as a mediator between scientific knowledge, political decision-making, and public perception. This theoretical perspective enables an assessment not only of the volume of environmental coverage but also of its framing strategies, interpretive depth, and communicative effectiveness in the digital media environment.

The selection of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan is methodologically justified by their shared environmental challenges, interconnected ecosystems, and differing media systems and levels of digital media development. Together, these countries represent a coherent regional case for examining how national media practices respond to common ecological risks while operating under distinct institutional and political conditions.

The aim of the study is to examine the specific features of environmental journalism in Central Asia in the context of digital transformation and transboundary environmental challenges. The study pursues three objectives: (1) to identify dominant journalistic approaches and framing strategies used in covering environmental issues in regional media; (2) to assess the role of digital technologies and social media in disseminating and interpreting environmental information; and (3) to formulate recommendations for improving the effectiveness of journalism in shaping environmental awareness and supporting sustainable development agendas.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodological design of this study is based on a qualitative comparative approach aimed at ensuring analytical consistency and cross-country comparability in the examination of environmental journalism in Central Asia. The research focuses on journalistic materials produced in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, selected due to their shared transboundary environmental challenges and simultaneously differentiated media environments. This combination allows the identification of both common regional patterns and nationally specific journalistic strategies.

The empirical corpus consists of journalistic texts, multimedia projects, documentaries, blogs, and social media publications addressing environmental issues and published between 2016 and 2025. The material for the coverage of environmental issues in the regional media of Central Asia was provided by:

- Kyrgyz publications Kloop (Erkebaeva, 2022; Irgebai, 2021; Motinov, 2017; Kloop, 2023; Balkybekova, 2022)
- Blogs Tabigat Media (2025) and MoveGreen (2025); Uzbek Gazeta.uz (2024a; 2024b; 2024c; 2024d);
- Radio Ozodlik (Trotsenko, 2024; Radio Ozodlik, 2024)
- Telegram channel Ekolog.uz (2024); Kazakh 24.kg (Podolskaya, 2023; Osmonalieva, 2021; Kudryavtseva and Orlova, 2022; Bengard, 2021); Azattyk (Tynaeva, 2024); Kazpravda.kz (Kazpravda.kz, 2025; Amenova, 2025; Kunapiya, 2025)
- YouTube film "Tomorrow's sea" (Artdocfest, 2016); the Central Asian MediaCAMP program (2018).

The selection of materials followed a purposive sampling logic, guided by thematic relevance to key environmental problems such as water resources, pollution, climate change, and environmental governance, as well as by the institutional significance of the media outlets involved. Only materials available in open access and produced by nationally recognised or specialised environmental platforms were included, ensuring both transparency and relevance. The final corpus represents a balanced combination of traditional media, digital-native journalism, and alternative environmental communication initiatives, which makes it possible to analyse differences in narrative depth, framing, and the use of digital tools across media types.

The analytical procedure relied on a systematic qualitative content analysis. At the initial stage, materials were examined to identify recurring thematic patterns and dominant narrative elements related to problem definition, attribution of responsibility, representation of actors, reliance on expert knowledge, and the presence or absence of proposed solutions. At the subsequent stage, these recurring elements were conceptually grouped to reveal broader framing strategies, including anthropocentric and ecocentric perspectives, episodic versus thematic reporting, and nationally bounded versus transboundary interpretations of environmental issues. The final analytical stage involved comparative interpretation across the three countries, applying identical analytical criteria to all national subsamples to ensure methodological consistency and reduce interpretive bias.

In parallel, the case study method was employed to conduct an in-depth examination of selected journalistic projects that illustrate distinct approaches to covering environmental issues in the Central Asian media landscape S. Manzoor and A. Khan (2019), M. Alam et al. (2023), N. Kosimova (2020), N. Dzhumagieva (2020), G. Yogurtçu (2021), H. Junsheng et al. (2019). These cases were selected on the basis of their thematic significance, narrative complexity, and demonstrable engagement with digital storytelling formats. Each case was analysed using a unified analytical logic that examined journalistic genre, narrative structure, use of visual and audiovisual elements, integration of expert and public voices, and positioning of environmental problems within national and regional contexts. This approach enabled the identification of recurring strategies and limitations in environmental reporting while situating individual cases within a broader comparative framework, thereby avoiding anecdotal interpretation.

To contextualise journalistic practices, the study also incorporated an analysis of policy documents related to the development of the green economy and environmental governance in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan: United Nations Environment Programme (2025), BBC Earth (2017) educational projects, Earth Journalism Network (2025), Plastic Pollution Coalition (2025), Climate Action Tracker (2025), National Geographic documentary *Years of living dangerously* (National Geographic, 2016), *The Polluters* (The Guardian, 2019), Mongabay (2025), United Nations Development Programme (2025), Asian Development Bank (2025). This contextual analysis made it possible to assess the extent to which media narratives align with or diverge from official environmental agendas and to identify discursive gaps between policy priorities and journalistic representation. The interpretation of findings was guided by a systematic perspective that conceptualises environmental journalism as a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by professional standards, digital transformation, and socio-political conditions.

Although the study does not aim to provide a quantitative assessment of publication frequency or audience reach, its qualitative design ensures analytical depth through transparent selection procedures, consistent application of analytical categories, and

triangulation between content analysis, case studies, and policy context. This methodological approach enhances the reliability of the findings and provides a robust foundation for formulating evidence-based recommendations aimed at improving the effectiveness of environmental journalism in Central Asia.

RESULTS

Environmental Issues in the Journalistic Genres of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan and Their Role in Shaping Environmental Awareness

Journalism plays a pivotal role in shaping environmental awareness and influencing policy. First, journalistic materials, such as articles, reports, and analytical assessments, introduce a broad audience to environmental issues, their causes, and consequences. Second, the emotional tone of publications can evoke concern, outrage, or empathy in readers, motivating them to take action for the environment. Additionally, journalism exerts pressure on policymakers, urging them to prioritize ecological challenges. Journalism encompasses the coverage of socio-political events, opinion expression, and analysis of current issues. It is also regarded as a creative endeavour that interprets contemporary societal phenomena. This can take the form of artistic or journalistic storytelling across diverse platforms, including television, radio, internet, public statements, and mass actions.

In Central Asia, environmental problems (environmentalism) are essential, and their solution and mitigation of the water crisis involve further development of the region, which is limited to a simple statement of facts, its transformation into a 'new environmental paradigm' with its characteristic environmental awareness. Notably, in the twenty-first century, environmental culture is viewed as a phenomenon of human culture and civilisation (Babayeva et al., 2024). The formation of environmental education is a complex multilevel task designed to cover the life of a modern person throughout its history.

Environmental education changes and greens education by modifying its content (Toneva & Robinson, 2025). National Environmental Education Foundation, Common Ground Relief, Seeds to Trees, and Eco-Schools shape worldwide environmental awareness. Their tools and methods support education, public involvement, and sustainable ecosystems. National Environmental Education Foundation (2025) promotes environmental education for all Americans. The charity funds biodiversity, water, and energy efficiency projects. Common Ground Relief (2025) restores degraded land and promotes sustainable agriculture worldwide. Reforestation and green space are provided by Seeds to Trees (2025). The initiative promotes tree planting and forest care. Eco-Schools (2025) promotes wastepaper collecting, composting, energy reduction, etc. In modern times, classical science-based education is no longer effective for globe discovery. In this framework, conceptual environmental education is crucial. The biosphere's logic can be understood by studying nature's operations historically and systematically (Toneva & Dimitrova, 2024). Thus, environmental education helps people become more responsible for their needs by raising their environmental consciousness and considering the planet's resources.

Environmental topics in Central Asian journalism are one of the most important components of the media space, as the region faces numerous environmental challenges. From climate change, and water scarcity, to pollution and land degradation, these issues require systematic coverage, so journalists and publicists use a variety of genres to draw attention to environmental issues, but the specific characteristics of the region affect their effectiveness. Since 1991, Central Asian countries have been implementing environmental

policies to address global environmental issues, including climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss (Gulomov and Rasulova, 2024). According to a study by Nurullaeyvic (2021), the environmental problems of Central Asia require an integration system between states to ensure a stable environmental situation and overcome socio-political consequences. Promoting pro-environmental behaviour and ensuring the transition to sustainable energy sources requires targeted interventions and communication strategies (Hamelin and Bhatti, 2023).

Journalism is crucial to raising awareness and influencing public and government action. Analytical approaches to environmental issues stand out. Analytical environmental articles are popular. They can analyse problems and explain their causes and remedies. In Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, investigative media often covers water problems and the Aral Sea. The Uzbek newspaper *Gazeta.uz* regularly publishes articles about the tree planting investment program (*Gazeta.uz*, 2024a), polarises ecotourism (*Gazeta.uz*, 2024d), discusses urban greening and artificial reservoirs (*Gazeta.uz*, 2024b), and fights dust storms and cleans the air. Sustainable tourism in Uzbekistan relies on social media to influence tourist behaviour, encourage eco-friendly activities, and shape destination views (Kumar and Shalki, 2022).

Modern society is becoming more environmentally conscious. International and national legislation declare it (European Commission, 2025; OECD, 2025). Policy documents and national concepts like the green economy, sustainable development, and ecological modernisation demonstrate public opinion-influenced innovation. Since everything on Earth is interconnected, the Resolution of the Zhogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 2532-VI "Concept of Green Economy in the Kyrgyz Republic 'Kyrgyzstan – A Country of Green Economy'" (2018), states that it is impossible to continuously expand human activity in Earth's space and demand that needs to be met in the face of limited Earth resources. The notion combines green thinking, upbringing, and education. Having a green attitude helps businesses and society take environmental responsibility. The next generation must also learn about honouring nature's laws. In Uzbekistan, the 2030 green economy program aims to develop financial incentives for technological modernisation, introduce green technologies, set energy efficiency targets, and manage energy in economic sectors (Resolution of the President, 2022).

Socio-political and economic realities, changes in media legislation, and the intensive development of multimedia technologies have led to the transformation of the established communication system. New media practices have led to a change in the forms and means of journalism and a mix of different genres. Digital media have a significant impact on the role of journalism in promoting environmental awareness, with print, online and broadcast media demonstrating different audience reach and engagement (Tang, 2023). Environmental issues are actively raised in environmental blogs in Kyrgyzstan. These include *Tabigat Media* (2025) and *MoveGreen* (2025).

Tabigat Media (2025) is a blog that focuses on the conservation of biodiversity and natural ecosystems in Kyrgyzstan. The authors share research and recommendations on environmental protection. This is a typical collection of data on the state of the environment and natural resources, an automated information system for collecting, systematising, storing, processing and disseminating environmental information to ensure public access to environmental information. The blog's interactive map of natural resources visualises data on the state of the environment and natural resources on a geographical map. Up-to-date spatial

data on the ecology, forest resources, fauna, fisheries, water resources, infrastructure and tourism are available.

MoveGreen (2025) is a civil society organisation that blogs about air quality in Kyrgyz cities, particularly Bishkek. They publish monitoring data and analytical materials on the impact of pollution on public health. The goal is to create a society with conscious environmental behaviour, living in a safe ecological environment in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia. To this end, the organisation influences government decisions on environmental issues based on scientific data, research, analysis and expertise.

Investigative journalism is effective in highlighting large-scale environmental problems. For instance, Kyrgyz journalists have repeatedly covered the consequences of gold mining at the Kumtor mine, which leads to water pollution. Investigative reports by the Kyrgyz media outlet Kloop have raised the issue of the responsibility of the state and corporations towards local communities. Central Asian journalists often adapt global environmental issues to local realities. For example, the fight against smog (Erkebaeva, 2022), the opening of a centre for the ecological rehabilitation of wild animals (Balkybekova, 2022), the problem of garbage collection (Irgebai, 2021), etc.

In addition to informing, environmental journalism often has an educational function. Journalists explain complex scientific concepts in simple terms and raise public awareness of the need to sort waste, save water and other environmental practices. International examples of successful environmental initiatives are also featured in Central Asian journalism. Journalists compare the experience of other countries in fighting droughts, preserving biodiversity and transitioning to clean energy. International media organisations (Earth Journalism Network, United Nations Environment Programme) actively support Central Asian journalists by providing them with access to resources, training programmes and grants. Thanks to this support, journalists can conduct high-quality investigations and create content that meets international standards.

Interviews with experts, environmental activists and government officials are an important genre in Central Asian journalism. They provide competent opinions and forecasts about possible scenarios to the audience. For example, in an interview on the Kazakh platform 24.kg, environmental activist Vlad Ushakov spoke about the ecocide of the Chui Valley (Osmonalieva, 2021). Documentaries and series have become another powerful tool for highlighting environmental issues. Environmental activists Taalaybek Aseyinov and Kanyshay Ryspekov emphasised the importance of waste sorting (Podolskaya, 2023). In addition, the Kazakh online platform 24.kg is engaged in several investigative journalism projects. Special projects deal with the shadow energy market (Kudryavtseva and Orlova 2022), the problems of the oil slick in Issyk-Kul (Bengard, 2021). Also, a Kazakh documentary project on the consequences of the drying up of the Aral Sea (Artdocfest, 2016) received a wide response and was shown at international festivals.

Another important resource for covering environmental issues in Kazakhstan is Kazpravda.kz. The publication covers a wide range of environmental issues, from air and water pollution to climate change and land degradation. The newspaper focuses on local environmental issues, which allows it to engage the general public in discussions. For example, the problem of illegal tree felling in Almaty (Kazpravda.kz, 2025), pollution of the Kapshagai reservoir (Amenova, 2025). Environmental journalism in Central Asia plays an important role in covering environmental issues that have both local and global dimensions. On the one hand, journalists seek to highlight the catastrophic consequences of irresponsible

environmental management, and they also form a responsible attitude towards nature among citizens.

An important platform for such publications is the Uzbek edition of Radio Ozodlik and the Kazakh edition of Azattyk. These publications systematically publish materials on the state of water resources, the causes of their depletion, and possible technological innovations to solve the problem, including water pollution (Tynaeva, 2024), the ecological state of the Syr Darya River (Trotsenko, 2024). These projects not only raise awareness but also influence political decisions. Disclosures of environmental problems and abuses can trigger investigations by law enforcement agencies or contribute to the development of appropriate measures to address these problems. However, the effectiveness of such investigations depends on the systematic nature of publications, the combined efforts of journalists, environmentalists, civic activists, and public pressure. Although Kazakhstani journalism has been marked by an improvement in environmental awareness since 1990, low environmental literacy and activism remain the reasons for low environmental awareness (Kumar and Shalki, 2022).

Environmental journalism in Central Asia is growing but faces numerous challenges. One of the main problems is censorship and limited access to information. Many environmental topics are linked to the interests of large corporations or government agencies, making independent investigation difficult. In addition, insufficient funding for environmental journalism often prevents in-depth research. Many media platforms depend on state funding, which limits their editorial independence (Gojaeva et al., 2024).

Environmental journalism in Central Asia is experiencing a dynamic development under the influence of digitalisation, growing civic activism and increased international cooperation. Journalists and media organisations in the region are increasingly using digital platforms to disseminate environmental information, draw attention to pressing issues and mobilise the public to act. These processes are occurring while traditional challenges remain, such as restrictions on freedom of speech, pressure on independent media and insufficient funding for journalistic initiatives.

Digitalising environmental journalism is a major trend. Social networks, blogs, YouTube channels, and messengers are key environmental information platforms. Uzbek Telegram channels and Kyrgyz websites provide real-time updates on environmental disasters, unlawful resource extraction, and deforestation. Social media is popularising environmental communication through short movies, articles, and infographics to convey complicated themes. Ekolog.uz (2024), an Uzbek Telegram channel, addresses water and air pollution and proposes population-specific solutions. Kloop and Azattyk, Kyrgyz's independent media platforms, use written articles, video reports, and infographics to better information perception. Environmental journalism is renowned for revealing personal, regional, national, and global aspects of human-environment relations.

Environmental journalism in Central Asia has embraced citizen journalism. Ordinary residents and activists use smartphones to document environmental infractions and share on social media. In Kyrgyzstan, activists broadcast videos about deforestation and unlawful resource extraction on Instagram and Facebook. Such actions often prompt official enquiries and highlight local issues. International organisations (Table 1) also support regional environmental journalism. UN, EU, and USAID projects subsidise independent media and journalist training. The Central Asian MediaCAMP (2018) program trains Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan journalists in environmental reporting. The USAID-funded effort seeks to balance information in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. International

organisations supply current research and statistics, improving journalism. The initiative aims to strengthen the media's ability to generate balanced, information-rich, and unbiased materials on significant political and social themes, raise media and information literacy among youth and adults, and improve media law. Global programs like Climate Action Tracker (2025), UNDP, and ADB operate in Central Asia.

Table 1: Comparative table of international environmental initiatives in Central Asia

Name of the Initiative	Main Goal	Countries of Central Asia	Primary Areas of Activities	Impact on Region
Central Asian MediaCAMP Program	Developing media literacy and supporting independent media	Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan	Training for journalists, supporting investigative journalism, promoting media literacy	Improves journalism quality, enhances environmental coverage, strengthens civil society
Climate Action Tracker	Support for young journalists writing about climate change	Global (including Central Asia)	Grants for young journalists, organizing training, creating a network of climate journalists	Increases youth engagement in climate issues, broadens environmental journalism audience
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	Supporting sustainable development in various sectors	All Central Asian countries	Projects on energy efficiency, renewable energy, water management, climate change adaptation	Promotes eco-friendly technologies and strengthens government capacity in environmental protection
Asian Development Bank	Financing infrastructure and supporting economic development	All Central Asian countries	Financing projects in wastewater treatment, energy sector modernization, water development	Addresses environmental challenges through infrastructure investment but may negatively impact the environment without proper assessment

Source: Compiled by the authors

The analysis of Table 1 shows that international initiatives play a significant role in addressing environmental issues in Central Asia. Programmes such as Central Asian MediaCAMP program, Climate Action Tracker and UN initiatives address various aspects of environmental issues, from raising public awareness and supporting independent media to financing environmental projects and introducing new technologies. The international community recognises the importance of Central Asia's environmental problems and actively supports the region in addressing them. However, closer cooperation between international organisations, governments, civil society organisations and businesses is needed to achieve sustainable results. It is also necessary to ensure continuous financial support for environmental projects and create favourable conditions for their implementation.

Central Asian environmental journalism is changing with new technologies, civic involvement, and international cooperation. It also faces censorship, finance, and government transparency issues. However, journalists continue to cover environmental concerns, employing new methods and media forms to engage audiences and mobilise communities to safeguard the environment. This analysis of Central Asian journalism shows that analytical articles, expert interviews, investigative journalism, films, and blogs tackle environmental issues. Specificity, emotionality (emotionality highlights the problem and

motivates people to act), interactivity (interactive formats allow the audience to discuss and participate), and accessibility make these genres effective.

In modern Central Asian journalism, environmental issues are covered differently. The analytical approach comprises in-depth research on environmental disaster causes and effects with expert perspectives. Reportage focuses on genuine stories of affected people and shows how environmental issues influence the community. Journalists also organise campaigns, demand for prompt action, and share information on social media to draw attention. In conclusion, Central Asian environmental journalism is addressing current issues through analysis, reporting, and personal experiences. Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan employ media to raise environmental awareness and mobilise civil society. Freedom of speech, independent media, and international environmental education cooperation are needed to advance this field.

Overview of the Latest Approaches to Covering Environmental Issues and Recommendations for Mainstreaming This Topic in Central Asia

Modern environmental journalism and publicism cover environmental issues in many ways. Green journalism and environmental journalism raise environmental awareness and disaster management, encouraging society to conserve the environment (Chakraborty & Basu, 2022). Digital technologies, social media, and international cooperation are making global environmental issues more accessible. One of the leading environmental publications, The Guardian, has a fresh strategy. Robbins (2023) found that BBC and The Guardian digital environmental journalism has used digital media, blogs, user comments, digital video, and online campaigns in four stages. The 'Environment' special area covers climate change, biodiversity, renewable energy, and pollution. The Polluters project (The Guardian, 2019) exposes multinational firms that cause environmental crises.

United Nations Environment Programme (2025) actively supports international media projects and publications on sustainable development and climate change. United Nations Environment Programme creates global reports that often become the basis for journalistic materials. For instance, the global campaign 'Beat Plastic Pollution' is actively disseminated through social media and international media. Using social media as a tool for environmental education. Social media has become important for promoting environmental ideas. Campaigns on Instagram, TikTok and Facebook, such as #FridaysForFuture and #ClimateStrike, unite millions of people around the world. Videos and posts with clear calls to action allow important environmental messages to spread quickly.

Modern environmental coverage uses digital tools, global campaigns, and civil society interaction. International efforts like The Polluters (The Guardian, 2019), Climate Action Tracker, and Earth Journalism Network show how environmental journalism affects society and politics. Social media speeds up information delivery and involves millions in discussion. Central Asian media can learn from these new methods for covering environmental issues. Social media and new technology enable responsible, multitasking environmental journalism while upholding deontological norms (Abbati, 2019). The drying of the fourth-largest lake in the world, the Aral Sea, is a major issue in Central Asia. Regional water shortages are another major issue. Climate change, Tien Shan glacier melting, and inadequate water management are depleting drinking, agricultural, and industrial water supplies. Agriculture and food security in the region are threatened by land degradation, including salinisation, erosion, and desertification. Kazpravda.kz covers Aral Sea issues, drying, and restoration (Kunapiya, 2025). Uzbek media outlet Radio Ozodlik covers climate change and water pollution (2024;

Trotsenko, 2024). Desertification, glacier melting, and clean water are Kyrgyzstan's primary issues (Kloop, 2023; Motinov, 2017). These issues are not covered consistently and should be disclosed on all media resources.

International expertise can improve environmental journalism in Central Asia, but it must be tailored to the region's needs. Investigative reporting (The Polluters projects) can be applied to Central Asian mining, river pollution, and other issues. Mongabay's interactive maps, movies, and infographics show environmental issues' scope and draw a large audience. Climate Action Tracker shows that journalists must work with scientists to assure data accuracy and analysis and engage youth in environmental journalism. The GreenUz platform raises Central Asian environmental awareness. This platform can use international experience by expanding geographical coverage (not just Uzbekistan but also other Central Asian countries), creating a network of environmental bloggers (engaging young authors to create diverse content), developing training programs (training journalists and civil society activists on environmental journalism), and cooperating with business.

Based on the characteristics of environmental topics in Central Asian journalistic genres (on the example of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan) and an overview of the latest approaches to covering environmental issues in the region, Table 2 presents the differences between the media strategies of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

Table 2: Differences between the media strategies of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan

Characteristic	Uzbekistan	Kyrgyzstan	Kazakhstan
Main Media Platforms	Gazeta.uz, Ozodlik Radio, Telegram (Ekolog.uz)	Kloop, Azattyk, blogs (Tabigat Media, MoveGreen)	24.kg, Kazpravda.kz, Azattyk
Leading Genres	Analytical articles, investigative journalism, social media posts	Investigative journalism, blogs, documentaries, expert interviews	Analytical articles, investigative journalism, documentaries
Key Topics	Water shortages, urban greening, dust storms, ecotourism	Mining, air pollution, deforestation, waste, biodiversity	Air/water pollution, climate change, land degradation, illegal logging
Influence of International Organisations	Active with ADB, MediaCAMP, UNDP in green economy, energy projects	Supported by ADB, Earth Journalism Network, UNDP, journalist training	Active with ADB, USAID, Climate Action Tracker, MediaCAMP
Key Challenges	Censorship, limited access to info, state funding	Media pressure, limited funding, censorship	Limited access to info, lack of transparency, censorship
Trends	Digital transition, social media use	Digital platforms, citizen journalism	Multimedia formats, mix of traditional and digital media
Effectiveness of Media Strategy	Analytical to reportage, activist approaches	Effective in raising environmental awareness	Combines analytical, reporting, and human-interest stories

Source: Compiled by the authors

An analysis of Table 2 shows that although the countries represented (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan) face similar environmental challenges, their media strategies differ depending on the political and social context. Kyrgyzstan is notable for its active citizen journalism and high use of digital platforms, while Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have a greater role in state media and analytical genres.

Thus, the examination of the above worldwide approaches to raise environmental awareness indicated creative ways to promote environmental issues in the region at the local and international levels. These include using analytical materials based on open data to create more convincing reports and creating more independent media focused only on environmental issues. Platforms like GreenUz publish analytical articles and expert interviews on water shortages and soil degradation. The media's freedom will provide objective coverage without political interference. Another option is to teach Central Asian journalists about the Climate Action Tracker (2025). This idea is popular among young Uzbek and Kyrgyz journalists. Thus, more educational activities will boost journalistic quality and scientific validity. Incorporating foreign projects into regional media and including opinion leaders (bloggers, politicians, and celebrities) can also raise environmental awareness. For instance, Central Asian journalists attending international seminars on regional issues like Aral Sea drying or urban pollution. Opinion leaders can raise environmental awareness among numerous people.

The analysis of journalistic materials from Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan demonstrates that environmental journalism in Central Asia exhibits structurally distinct yet comparable patterns shaped by national media systems, levels of media autonomy, and digital development. Although the three countries address similar environmental challenges - water scarcity, pollution, land degradation, and climate-related risks, the framing and communicative functions of environmental issues vary systematically across national contexts.

Empirically, environmental coverage in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan is dominated by analytical articles and investigative reporting that frame environmental problems primarily through policy, governance, and technological solutions. In Uzbekistan, environmental issues are often embedded in narratives highlighting state programmes, investment initiatives, and urban greening strategies, reflecting a predominantly top-down communication model. In contrast, Kyrgyzstan shows a stronger reliance on independent digital platforms, blogs, and citizen journalism, where environmental issues are framed through local impacts, civic activism, and accountability claims. Kazakhstan occupies an intermediate position, combining policy-orientated analytical formats with documentary storytelling and expert interviews, particularly in relation to air pollution, water contamination, and the Aral Sea legacy.

Comparative interpretation reveals three dominant framing logics in Central Asian environmental journalism: policy-orientated framing, activist framing, and problem-exposure framing. The prevalence of these logics is closely linked to differences in media regulation, access to information, and the strength of civil society. Where media autonomy and civic engagement are higher, journalism tends to function as a watchdog and mobilisation mechanism; where media systems are more closely aligned with state institutions, environmental journalism primarily performs an informational and legitimising role.

Digitalisation emerges as a cross-cutting factor reshaping environmental journalism across the region. Digital platforms enable the use of multimedia formats, interactive visualisation, and rapid dissemination of environmental information, particularly in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. However, the findings indicate that increased digital visibility does not automatically translate into greater analytical depth. Environmental issues are frequently communicated through fragmented and emotionally charged messages that prioritise immediacy over contextual explanation, reflecting a structural tension between speed and depth in digital environmental communication.

Despite frequent references to global environmental agendas and international initiatives, environmental journalism in Central Asia remains largely nationally framed. Transboundary environmental problems are rarely analysed from a regional or interstate perspective, resulting in parallel national narratives rather than a shared environmental discourse. This limitation can be explained by institutional constraints, weak cross-border media cooperation, and reliance on nationally bounded policy frameworks.

Genre-based analysis further shows that investigative journalism and documentaries provide the strongest explanatory potential by linking environmental degradation to governance failures, economic interests, and social consequences. Analytical articles offer contextualisation but often remain constrained by official data sources, while blogs and citizen journalism are effective in raising awareness yet lack systematic verification and continuity. Consequently, environmental journalism in the region succeeds in attracting public attention but is less effective in sustaining informed, causally grounded debate.

The findings suggest that environmental journalism in Central Asia plays an important role in shaping environmental awareness but remains limited in its capacity to provide systematic explanation and regional integration. Strengthening its analytical function requires greater media independence, institutionalised cooperation between journalists and environmental experts, and the development of cross-border journalistic initiatives capable of addressing the transboundary nature of environmental challenges. Practically, it highlights the need to move beyond episodic and nationally confined reporting toward analytically grounded, regionally integrated environmental journalism capable of addressing the scale and complexity of Central Asia's ecological challenges.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that environmental journalism in Central Asia is undergoing an active transformation but remains structurally constrained by censorship, limited access to information, insufficient funding, and political pressure. These constraints directly affect not only the volume of environmental coverage but also its analytical depth and continuity. Similar structural limitations have been identified in earlier studies of Central Asian media systems, which note that self-censorship and institutional dependency significantly restrict investigative and explanatory journalism, particularly in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and neighbouring states (Freedman, 2014; Kosimova, 2020). However, the present study extends this argument by demonstrating that such constraints shape not only what environmental issues are covered, but also how they are framed and interpreted across different journalistic genres.

From an environmental communication perspective, the results show that Central Asian journalism predominantly operates within policy-oriented and event-driven framing models. Environmental issues are frequently presented as technical or administrative problems requiring state intervention, rather than as complex socio-ecological processes involving multiple actors and long-term consequences (Nurekeshov et al., 2018; Umbetbayeva et al., 2022; 2024). This pattern aligns with observations that environmental journalism in semi-restricted media environments tends to privilege official narratives and episodic reporting over sustained analytical discourse (Kosimova, 2020). At the same time, the comparative analysis conducted in this study reveals notable national differences, while Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan rely more heavily on analytical articles aligned with state policy

agendas, Kyrgyzstan demonstrates a stronger presence of watchdog journalism and activist framing, albeit often in fragmented or crisis-driven forms.

Digitalisation emerges as a central factor reshaping environmental journalism across the region (Issayeva et al., 2024). The findings confirm that the transition to digital formats enhances visibility, immediacy, and audience engagement through multimedia storytelling, interactive maps, and social media dissemination. This supports broader conclusions that digital environmental journalism can strengthen environmental monitoring and public engagement when supported by appropriate professional training and technological infrastructure (Skorokhod et al., 2023; Tang, 2023). However, the present study also shows that digitalisation does not automatically lead to deeper environmental understanding. Instead, it often amplifies fragmented communication and emotionally charged narratives, reflecting a tension between speed and analytical coherence that has been identified in other studies of digital environmental communication (Han et al., 2018).

The role of social media in raising environmental awareness appears ambivalent. On one hand, the empirical material demonstrates that platforms such as Instagram, Telegram, and YouTube enable rapid dissemination of information about local environmental risks and facilitate citizen participation in environmental discourse. This finding is consistent with research showing that social media campaigns can activate pro-environmental norms and foster online communities oriented toward sustainable behaviour (Manzoor and Khan, 2019; Fanini et al., 2021; Alam et al., 2023). On the other hand, the study also corroborates critical perspectives that question the long-term educational effectiveness of social media, particularly among younger audiences, where high engagement does not necessarily translate into sustained environmental awareness or behavioural change (Ozdemir and Alkabbanie, 2017). Thus, the impact of social media should be understood as contingent on content quality, campaign structure, and integration with broader journalistic strategies.

An important finding of this research concerns the limited regionalisation of environmental discourse. Despite the transboundary nature of environmental challenges in Central Asia, journalistic coverage remains predominantly nationally framed (Altayeva et al., 2017; Umbetbayeva et al., 2023). Environmental problems such as water scarcity, pollution, and climate risks are addressed within national policy contexts rather than through regional or interstate perspectives. This fragmentation mirrors broader governance challenges in addressing shared environmental risks and confirms that effective environmental communication requires coordinated international and regional cooperation (Elvan et al., 2026; Sharma, 2024). The absence of sustained cross-border journalistic narratives suggests that environmental journalism has yet to develop a regional public sphere capable of addressing common ecological challenges.

The discussion of green economy and sustainable development narratives further illustrates this tension between visibility and critical engagement. Media coverage increasingly highlights government initiatives related to energy efficiency, clean technologies, and sustainable growth (Narzullaeva et al., 2025; Smoilov et al., 2015; Stankova & Toneva, 2021). While this reflects a shift toward implementation-oriented environmental discourse, it also risks narrowing journalistic critique by prioritising institutional success stories over questions of accountability, social equity, and uneven environmental impacts. Similar dynamics have been observed in studies of green economy communication in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, where media play a key role in legitimising policy agendas while offering limited critical evaluation (Sangirova et al., 2024; Abdrasulova and Abdrasulova, 2024).

The study demonstrates that environmental journalism in Central Asia occupies an intermediate position between awareness-raising and systematic environmental communication. Its development is shaped by structural media constraints, uneven digital transformation, and limited regional integration. At the same time, the findings suggest that strengthening environmental journalism requires not only technological innovation but also greater media independence, improved access to environmental data, professional training, and institutionalised cooperation with international initiatives. These conclusions contribute to environmental communication research by illustrating how framing practices and communicative effectiveness are conditioned by political and institutional contexts in transitional media systems.

CONCLUSIONS

The study showed that digital technology, civic activity, and international cooperation are transforming Central Asian environmental journalism. The study also found considerable obstacles (censorship, finance, and government agency transparency). Journalists cover environmental concerns utilising innovative media formats to reach the audience and increase awareness despite the challenges. The study found that environmental journalism develops alongside socioeconomic improvement. Environmental journalism, which treats humans and nature equally, was prioritised. The study showed that environmental issues span several journalistic genres and methodologies. From analytical pieces to reports, interviews, and digital formats, Central Asian journalists and media shape environmental culture, disseminate knowledge, and foster public discourse about the region's future. The examination of environmentalism shows numerous important ways to covering environmental challenges. These include analytical, reporting, and activist approaches.

Environmental journalism from Kyrgyz Internet resources (Kloop, Tabigat Media, MoveGreen blogs), Uzbek platforms (Gazeta.uz, Ozodlik Radio, Ekolog.uz), Kazakh sources (Azattyk, Kazpravda.kz), 24.kg, the YouTube project 'Tomorrow's sea', and the Central Asian MediaCAMP program was examined. Journalistic materials raise environmental awareness and mobilise civil society, according to media platform analysis. To study the latest environmental information coverage methods, international initiatives (UN Environment Programme, BBC Earth, Earth Journalism Network, Plastic Pollution Coalition, Climate Action Tracker, Years of living dangerously, The Polluters, Mongabay, UNDP, Asian Development Bank) were examined. The development of environmental journalism in Central Asia will depend on free speech, autonomous media, and worldwide environmental education cooperation. This study recommended active use of digital technologies, social networks, interactive platforms, educational programs for journalists, involvement of opinion leaders (bloggers), independent media, cooperation with international environmental organisations, and data journalism to improve environmental coverage in the region.

The process of studying Central Asian environmental journalism was complicated by the limited number of scientific studies on approaches and strategies to covering this topic, as well as the difficulty in finding specific journalistic examples, which is determined by the public coverage and research of this topic is not complete. The prospect of further research is to expand the range of analysis of the peculiarities of environmental coverage in this region by studying a larger sample of journalistic materials. Also, a comparative analysis of the coverage of this topic in Central Asian countries and an empirical study to collect data on the statistics of popularisation of environmental issues will help to actualise interest in this topic.

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