

From the Boob Tube to YouTube: Critical Appraisal of Nigerian Media Environment and Climate Change Awareness Creation

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Abstract

This paper appraises the Nigerian media environment and the extent it can create awareness for climate change. It provides conceptual explanation of climate change globally and how it affects the country. It examines the different sides of the global debate on climate change, pointing out the consequences of climate change with particular reference to Nigeria. Its basic postulation is that Nigeria and African countries have not done enough in the climate change debate and battle. The paper lists strategies of how the media can create more effective awareness for climate change issues and subsequent mitigation of and adaptation to the adverse environmental conditions, particularly in an era of digital culture.

Keywords: Climate • Climate change • Media environment and awareness creation

Introduction

In the last three decades extreme weather conditions such as wildfires, deforestation, desertification, gas flaring, erosion, flood disasters, land degradation, land slides, ocean surges, hurricanes, sea and air pollution, drought to excessive rainfall etc. have become the new normal in the global environment. The interplay between the increased volume of carbon dioxide and other green house gases, which are released from the burning of fossil fuels, bush burning, decomposition of organic wastes and other human activities are the primary causes of these inclement conditions. This abnormality in climate has caused economic losses, population displacements, communal crises, desertification, soil erosion and threatened food security. A number of scientific studies have confirmed that human activities such as industrialization, urbanization, water pollution, deforestation and bush burning are among the highest contributory factors to climate change. Some other studies have focused on the effects of climate change on human health and ecological destabilization while few studies concentrated on mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

The impact of these conditions has become pervasive, devastating and worrisome that the international community has also organized a number of summits, conferences, conventions and declarations aimed at increasing the level of awareness and attention to the problems of climate change. The 1992 United Nations' organized 'Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), otherwise

known as the Earth Summit' is one of such platforms [1]. To what extent has the Nigerian media used the outcomes of the various scientific studies on the causes and impact of climate change, to create awareness about its devastating effects and possible amelioration. Rukevwe avers that not much has been done in the area of education on the causes and impacts of climate change. It is in this regard that Pam argues for more education and awareness on climate change. In fact this is the crux of Principle 10 of the Rio. In order to encourage many nation states to ensure the implementation of access to information, participation and justice in environmental decision-making, the United Nations has brokered a number of multilateral agreements. Some of them include. Has the Nigerian media environment taken advantage of these initiatives to create sufficient awareness on climate change? As observed by Rukevwe, the Nigerian media have not done much with their huge potentials stretching from the era of 'Boob tube' to YouTube regime. This paper therefore argues that the Nigerian media should harness its potentials, which have been accentuated by the digital culture, to create awareness on the devastating effects of climate change.

Statement of Problem

Climate change is a global issue that should bother everybody. One of the critical social institutions that should reflect this worry is the mass media. This means that the mass media have a duty to navigate through an avalanche of sources, information, influences

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Received: 06 September, 2021; Accepted: 20 September, 2021; Published: 27 September, 2021

etc. to provide news to the public. Most often, the media through framing and agenda setting carries out this social responsibility role of informing and educating the public about issues. According to Taylor, framing is important in terms of how a message is couched and shared. Agenda setting in its original formulation by contends that repetition of messages about public issues in the news day after day, along with the pervasiveness of the mass media in our daily lives, constitute a major source of mass media's influence on the audience. The incidental nature of this learning, in turn, helps issues to move rather quickly from the media agenda to the public agenda. Through frames and agenda setting, the mass media regulate how the society shapes reality. The media could through enlightenment and simplification of the technical language of climate change issues get majority of the populace involved in climate change discourse in Nigeria. In his assessment, the Nigerian media is lagging behind in awareness campaign on climate change and concludes that the media have an urgent duty to assume a leading role in creating awareness on the issues of climate change. How the Nigerian media can play this role, particularly in an era of digital culture, is the focus of this paper [2].

Objective

The broad objective of this paper is therefore to appraise mass media coverage of climate change issues in Nigeria and map out strategies with which the media can utilize to effectively create increased awareness about climate change issues aimed at mitigating the devastating environmental effects, particularly in this era of digital culture.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on the agenda setting theory frequently covering and giving prominence to issues in the media, the audience attaches importance to those issues more than others. By so doing, the mass media set agenda for public discussion. The media act as a mediator between the world outside and the picture in our head. Explains that agenda setting theory refers to the power of the media to influence public perception of the relative prominence and importance of different events and actors. This means the media have the capacity to tell us what issues are important by their treatment and placement. Note that the media do not present us with thoughts but they merely present us with what to have thoughts about such as climate change issues. Mare further states that the media are a kind of civic arena that stimulates diverse discourse of public affairs, a platform where the meanings of public issues are produced, reproduced and transformed. He concludes that "the media sector is often seen as having a special responsibility in promoting development communication, disaster warning and disseminating information to the most at risk communities in the context of climate change" [3].

In relation to this qualitative study, the Nigerian media, through agenda setting and framing, can situate climate change issues around solutions and ways through which people, governments and communities can act to prevent activities that lead to global warming. List some of these ways to include limiting population growth to check pressure on land, curtailing the cutting down of trees, disconnecting electrical appliances when not in use to conserve energy, consuming efficient and avoiding wastage and buying less,

being more of electricity, water, fuel, etc. Other measures include reduction of greenhouse gas emission through burning of bush, coal, oil, and natural gas; infrastructure upgrade, construction of energy efficient buildings and possibilities of cleaner, alternative fuels.

Literature Review

The mass media perform the traditional functions of providing information, entertainment and education. The incidents with great significance to the environment and to the health of people take place in the society, the media expose such incident and make the public aware of them." Climate change has been found to be a relatively new subject in many African media. In a study, Tagbo found that less 30 percent of journalists interviewed have reported climate change for more than three years; while 60 percent identified lack of training and time pressure as reasons for low coverage of climate change issues. In a study of media images of environmental issues and problems in Nigeria, From South Africa to Nigeria, the editors interviewed by Tagbo agree that other issues have pushed climate change issues lower on their editorial priority list. According to Aniegbonam, climate change issues by nature are not front-page subjects except when there is a strong local, political and economic dimension to it.

The first was when newspapers covered the environment only when they are part of a disaster and the second stage was environment beats was firmly established as a result of some social, economic and cultural forces. Analyzed four selected United Kingdom newspapers from 2000 to 2006 and found majority of the newspaper reports showed emphasis on human activities as causes of climate change. Studied Southern African newspapers and found that climate change reports tended to generalize impact; the reports were not reflective of urgency, negative, event-based, and buried in the inside pages. In the analysis of television news in U.S. In their own study found out that five frames constantly recur in newspaper coverage of climate change. These are conflict frame, human-interest frame, responsibility frame, consequences frame and morality frame. In their study of the role of foreign voices in Peruvian newspapers' coverage of climate change issues found out a prevalence of an effects frame, followed by a politics frame. Generally, their study showed that Peruvian newspapers prioritize mitigation strategies and policies while providing limited attention to adaptation [4].

Understanding the Climate Change Situation

Climate change refers to the observable variations in the climate system, which is attributable to human activities. It is an adverse environmental phenomenon that is easily one of the biggest global development challenges facing nation states and international institutions today. Define climate change as any long-term change in the statistics of weather. It refers to changes in modern climate. A timeline in their own definition when they defined climate change as the synthesis of the weather in a given location over a period of at least 30 years. The scientific community has at various times studied the causes of climate change and the results showed that industrialization, urbanization, water pollution, deforestation and

transportation are among the major causes. Studies have also shown that the effects of climate change have started to impact on global human health, ecological destabilization, melting of polar ice, sea level rise, coastal flooding, desertification, aggravation of coastal and gully erosion and extreme weather conditions among others. Some research efforts have also focused on mitigation and adaptation to climate change and the results in the areas showed that while climate change is mainly caused by the activities of the developed countries, the developing nations are more likely to suffer the effects because of their high vulnerability and low adaptation measures due to poverty.

Mitigation and adaptation are two available options to reduce climate change challenge. Adaptation to climate change refers to the adjustments in ecological, social, and economic systems as well as responses to climatic conditions and their effects by nations, individuals and organizations, while mitigation means all the measures taken by various nations to reduce rate and magnitude of global climate change caused by human activities. These studies however, didn't look at the effect of awareness and its linkage to adaptation to climate change by individuals. It is obvious that mitigation alone cannot work because researches have shown global warming is already occurring and cannot be stopped. Equally, adaptation alone will not work because adaption will get costlier and less effective as global warming increases. Therefore, the world needs enough mitigation to avoid the devastating consequences of climate change, and enough adaptation to manage the unavoidable. Both mitigation and adaptation can only come through effective awareness created by the media.

Nigeria and the Climate Change Discourse

Sustainable development has been defined as a process of social and economic betterment that satisfies the needs and values of all interest groups, while conserving natural resources and diversity for use by future generation. It is a dynamic process. To continually meet the natural resource needs and still conserve for present and future generations, it means that there must be economic growth. The major resources that generate economic growth well-being and quality of human life - are shelter, air, water, energy, food, raw material and the environment. It then means that these basic resources must be exploited in such a manner that the needs of future generation are not compromised while satisfying the needs of the present generation. To effectively achieve this, knowledge and action are required. The media can adequately be a platform for the knowledge production and stimuli for action. Using effective communication methods, the media are to ensure the removing of the adverse effects of what describes as the "P-game which refers to the state of exponential growth of people, production, places and pollutants", brought about by unsustainable development practices. Unfortunately in Nigeria, like most developing countries, there are no adequate information on the location and state of these resources, their rate of exploitation and socio-economic activities and their impact on the environment. The situation has been exacerbated by climate change, which has affected the availability and quality of these resources.

There is no doubt that Nigeria is experiencing adverse climate conditions with negative impacts on the economy. There have been persistent droughts and flooding, off-season rains and dry

altered growing seasons on a country dependent on a rain-fed agriculture. The impact has been pervasive on agriculture, power generation, air and water pollution and even social unrest occasioned by herdsman-farmers conflicts. The Sahara desert is advancing southwards at the rate of 6.0% per year. Nigeria loses about 350,000 hectares to desert encroachment. This has displaced communities in 11 states in the North and Nigeria loses 5.4 billion US dollars yearly as a result of drought and desert encroachment". Odiogor further adds that climate change in northern Nigeria poses a threat to national security. According to him, forty-two million people are affected by climate change in Adamawa, Borno, Bauchi, Gombe, Yobe and other north western states are under serious impact of harsh climatic conditions. While the rate of deforestation in Nigeria occurs at 4000km² per year, reforestation rate is a mere 10km² per year. Nigeria has 9.9% of its land area as protected forest i.e. 9.1 million km² of total protected forest area and only 4% of tropical rainforest remain untouched" [5].

These facts and statistics, no doubt show how Nigeria is involved in the global climate change discourse. The implication is that the government, the media and environmental activists have a responsibility to initiate actions to mitigate the effects of climate change in Nigeria. In this regards, the media has enormous capacity to educate and enlighten the citizenry using the numerous results of scientific researches on climate change.

The Changing Media Environment in Nigeria

The global media environment or landscape is very fluid and changes like the climate. Over the past few decades, the industry has drastically changed. It has become decentralized, specialized and segmented with the introduction of cable television, and more recently, online news outlets, blogs, and social media. The overall size of the news audience has continually shrunk, and newspaper readership and network television viewership has steadily dropped. Digital communication technologies, such as the Internet, online social networks, and mobile communication technologies, have moved decentralization and specialization to a whole new level. Digital technology has increased information affordability, thus giving individuals many more options across various media. While traditional media organizations, especially newspapers, are experiencing a declining readership and a loss of advertising revenue, organizations with a web-based business focus are seeing an increase in revenues. These global trends manifest prominently in the Nigerian environment. The Nigerian media landscape until few years ago was ruled by print, radio and television. They dominated the media landscape until the turn of the millennium when Internet started having real impact on journalism practice. The emergence of Internet and broadband technology altered the practice of journalism and disrupted the entire media dynamics in Nigeria. It has also given rise to a 24-hour news cycle thus making social media a major tool for news dissemination. This development has made newsprint to be less important in news presentation; and with it newspapers began to experience drop in sales forcing newspaper managers to begin to re-think their business model. As Kolawole puts it: "digital has become the centerpiece of Nigerian journalism, with all of print, radio and TV feeding off the massive powers and rallying numbers of the Internet". In the last decade, many newspapers and magazines have closed

shop and moved their publications to online. Some traditional newspapers have managed to withstand the disruption and today survive along with digital only newspapers. They include Punch, Thisday, The Nation, Vanguard, Daily Trust, The Sun and The Guardian; and in the digital category are Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable. These ten, roughly, are the leaders of a news industry populated by hundreds of publications.

Mass Media Strategies for Creating Awareness on Climate Change

A good number of theories and models emphasize the importance of the mass media in creating awareness in the society. One of such important theory is agenda-setting theory earlier discussed in this discourse. There is also agreement among communication scholars that awareness leads to knowledge, and knowledge leads to behavior modification or change. The precaution adoption model also recognizes the fact the media play a major role in raising awareness. According to this model, awareness is an essential element that moves an individual to action and this happens in stages. Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration underscores the importance of awareness, access to information and participation of the people in matters that affect them in relation to the environment. Also Principle 22 underlines the critical role of indigenous people and their communities, which should be mobilized to participate effectively in the achievement of sustainable development. These principles have no doubt highlighted the importance of the media in creating awareness and mobilizing the people for the sustenance of the environment.

Unfortunately, the Nigerian media have not played this role effectively. The media in Nigeria are relatively aloof in creating awareness on climate change. Umeje's position is that most Nigerians are not well informed on climate change and therefore there is urgent need for the media to assume a responsibility of creating awareness on climate change issues. Similarly study of climate change framing by national dailies in Nigeria and Ghana found that the media in these two countries have been indifferent in coverage of climate change issues. This, points to a critical information gap in reporting on this issue. There is imbalance in the scanty reporting carried out by the media. The imbalance, according to Shanahan is because coverage of science is no longer the basis for interest on climate change issues while politics, economics and international relations are. Can be very helpful to newspaper audiences from avoiding impacts to initiating actions in mitigation or adaptation. Research and experience have shown that all development communication projects, of which climate change is prime, media mix has become imperative. This involves careful and cost effective integration of the traditional, interpersonal, group and mass media modes of communication for greater results. Against this backdrop, it has become clear that mass media can effectively create awareness on climate change and subsequent mitigation or adaptation.

Adoption of development communication approach

Communication and development play complementary roles in the social change process. As puts it there can be no development

without communication. Defines development communication as a holistic communication approach or effort "designed at mobilizing a people towards active participation in programmes aimed at achieving improved physical environment, socio-cultural, political and economic environments for the benefit of man in society". It therefore follows that communication holds the key to sustainable human development. The emphasis here is that members of the society should participate in the design and implementation of the messages on climate change.

Adoption of traditional and interpersonal communication modes

For long development partners have place undue emphasis on the use of modern mass media channels for social change campaigns without considering their limitations. Greater efficacy of some traditional modes of communication like folk media, churches, mosques, market places, village square meetings, age-grade and similar fora in some development communication situations such as climate change have been reported in the African developmental research literature. The recommendation of the use of traditional media for climate change social campaign is based on the consideration of availability. As noted by Nwosu and Wilson and Nwosu, Alied and Nsude, availability and accessibility are not one and the same.

Adoption of development advertising principles and methods

Advertising communication has been described as "communication-mediated presentation of a person, idea, product, service, institution, nation, innovation, movement or project, openly sponsored or paid for by an identified person or institution for the purpose of positively influencing acceptance, adoption, sales, votes, development, age or eliciting other favorable responses". Advertising has a number of advantages over other modes of communication and thus suited for social change campaign such as climate change. Among the advantages is the ability of the sponsor to say exactly what he wants to the target audience in the space or time he has paid for in any channel of choice. The decision to disseminate and choice of channel and time does not lie on the whims of media practitioners.

Leveraging the power of social media

Early discourse on climate change communication had focused on traditional media but increasingly scholars are shifting their gaze on the role of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube etc. According to www.statista.com, a total of 57.7 million Nigerians are Internet users as at 2014. This figure has been projected to grow to 84.3 million in 2018. This means that the social media holds great opportunities for social change campaigns. Social media platforms provide space for three important activities: information sharing, discussion and mobilization. Social media usually presents news and information about social issues in a social context and this provides a personal context for individuals. Information on social media is filtered through friends. Social media use is also in visual form, with half of social media users sharing or reposting news stories, images, or videos, and climate change is effectively communicated visually. Social media is therefore an obvious space for the kinds of local and relatable language and

visuals that can be effective in activating individuals on climate change. In sum, there is ample evidence that social media is productive in encouraging more environmentally friendly behaviors that will mitigate climate change and in sparking activism around the issue of climate change. Scholars are optimistic that new media provide opportunities to increase information sharing, participation, and engagement with climate change. While there is reason to be optimistic about the potentials of social media to positively influence opinion, knowledge, and behavior around climate change, some scholars caution on use as social media also have capacity to reinforce existing perceptions of climate change rather than reaching new individuals or changing opinions.

Conclusion

The increasing threat of climate change on the environment and economic life of Nigeria and other developing countries are enormous. Developing countries because of their level of development stand at a greater risk of the impact of climate change. Consequently, the Nigerian media should urgently scale up their coverage as well as engage meaningfully in framing of climate change issues more in terms of the communities can do. In doing so White (2010) suggests that Nigerian media should consider being honest and forthright about the probable impacts of climate change and the magnitude of the challenges. In their use of language, the Nigerian media should avoid use of catch phrases and slogans and concentrate on what describe as deep frames i.e. forging a connection between a stated position and a set of deeper values or principles such as preserving the integrity of natural areas as of right. Climate change has become a complex scientific phenomenon and requires specialized knowledge to report on. Lack of this knowledge

has made it difficult for most local journalists to report on consistent basis climate change issues particularly within the deadline culture of newsroom. Media organizations should therefore organize periodic trainings and take advantage of many international workshops and conferences for their journalists. Nigerian media would have helped in mitigating the effects of climate change through appropriate framing, increased volume of coverage and active participation of the citizens if they consider some of the strategies this paper has proposed.

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How to cite this article: Nwabueze Chinenye, Onyima Anthony. "From the Boob Tube to YouTube: Critical Appraisal of Nigerian Media Environment and Climate Change Awareness Creation." *J Mass Communicat Journalism* 11 (2021) : 439