

Analyzing the Framing of Climate Change Discourse in Nigerian Media: Implications for Public Engagement and Policy Development

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Abstract:- This paper aims to analyse how well the media has fared in framing climate change discourse in the Nigerian media. Some other questions that would be addressed by this paper border on the implications of this analysis of climate change discourse for public discussion and policy-making. The study may also interact in a condensed way with how previous framing of climate change discourse in the Nigerian media has impacted public opinion and policy making. This paper will serve the Nigerian community in advancing climate change discourse and influence public perspective and policy making. The goal is to furnish the readership with the knowledge necessary for constructive and productive discourse on climate change both among the governmental officials and the citizens, which would help reformulate and reconstruct policies that will attenuate the effects of climate change in the nation. The study does not merely articulate the problem but also highlights the solutions, asserting the fact that while the challenge seems insurmountable, the collective efforts of humans to address will prove useful in the end; especially as the media seeks to formulate its framing of climate change discourse in such a way as to stimulate creative thinking and generate positive public responses.

I. INTRODUCTION

¹The pervasiveness and seriousness of climate change are global phenomena, and the media is replete with articles on them. The attention that climate change has garnered from the media is overwhelming. However, the discourse of climate change in the media is almost drowned in the conflicting perspectives with which people view the issue. The attendant consequence has been the difficulty that has greeted the attempts at formulating a coherent advance towards addressing the problem. The problem is a ‘how’ problem lies at the heart of how the media has fared in formulating climate discourse and consequently framing the public’s view of the issue. Imprecise, unclear, poor and tardy framing of climate change

discourse in the media has dire consequences and the journalists, as well as those who are trusted with the duties of such discourse in whatever media outlets, will do well to take heed to their interpretive grid, especially in light of the impression it is likely to create in readers. Thus, the solution to the conflicting foci/perspectives on the issue is for media outlets to work at reformulation that ensures precision and objectivity in reporting. The question of “precision” and “objectivity” is another matter that must be addressed. How exactly can precision and/or objectivity be defined and/or embraced or employed? But that is beside the point that this paper seeks to address. ²That aside, it is imperative that some measure of scientific literacy be ensured among journalists and media professionals to divulge necessary information to the public accurately. In addition to that, multidisciplinary approach must also be incorporated, not to confuse the readership further, but to foster an effective dialogue which ensures that the public is well served and consequently mentally readied to tackle the climate change challenge. Accountability is another crucial factor that those who divulge pieces of information concerning climate change must have etched in their memory. ³Furthermore, multidisciplinary discourse enriches the flow of constructive and productive conversation, further undergird collaborative attempts among media organizations, platforms, scientific institutions and the society at large. The result of such effort is the fructification of bridging gaps, ensuring report accuracy, as well as, the stimulation of informed public engagement as well as decision-making on climate change.

II. CLIMATE CHANGE IN NIGERIA

⁴As countries globally are being affected by climate change, Nigeria has a similar experience, as the country is becoming warmer. Studies show that annual and seasonal timescales indicate a significant positive increase in temperatures in Nigeria.

The finding further indicates that mean temperatures have been consistently increasing throughout the country in the last fifty years and have been rising significantly since the 1980s. While the trend and mean annual variability of rainfall in Nigeria over the past few decades show the existence of several inter-annual fluctuations that have caused extreme droughts and floods in various parts of the country at different times, as well as wet and dry seasons.

Nigeria is ranked the 7th most susceptible nation to climate change in the world, following Verisk Maplecroft's 2016 vulnerability ranking of countries. Nevertheless, the country, in spite of its resources and population, is the 6th least prepared to adjust to climate change.⁵

⁶All aspects of Nigeria's development are vulnerable to climate-related stressors. The country's economy and other development sectors are equally very vulnerable to climate change. Climate change affects the ability of land, forests, landscapes, water and fisheries, which is the main source of income and livelihoods for the majority of Nigerians.

Extreme weather events, such as heat waves, storm surges, and floods, can put a burden on ports, power plants, drainage systems, cities, and other infrastructure. Furthermore, the nation's capacity to develop and preserve its human capital—particularly in the areas of health and education—is further threatened by climate change.⁷

To address the issue of climate change, the Nigerian government undertook some measures. These actions in the following areas include climate change institutional framework; promoting enabling climate policies; nationally determined contribution (NDC); climate change financing; and donor-supported initiatives.

In 2015, ⁸Nigeria developed its NDC towards the ratification of the Paris Agreement unconditionally to reduce its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 20% by 2030. In addition to a conditional commitment of 45% consequent upon receiving climate finance, technology transfer and capacity building from the developed countries. The NDC was updated in 2021 to provide a strategic vision for climate action that sets out further commitment to support the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

To further strengthen the position of Federal Government of Nigeria in combating climate change, ⁹the Climate Change Act was signed into law by former President Muhammadu Buhari in 2021. The Act provided a framework for achieving low greenhouse gas emissions and mainstreaming climate change actions into national plans and programmes. It also established the National Council on Climate Change (NCCC) which has the power to make policies and decisions on all matters relating to climate change in Nigeria.

III. ANALYZING CLIMATE CHANGE DISCOURSE IN NIGERIAN MEDIA

➤ *Impacts of Climate Change in Nigeria*

Nigeria has experienced an increase in extreme weather events such as floods, droughts, and heatwaves. These events have devastating effects on agriculture, infrastructure, and livelihoods, leading to loss of lives and property.

¹⁰Agriculture is a significant sector in Nigeria, employing a large portion of the population. However, climate change has led to decreased crop yields, water scarcity, and loss of arable land, posing food security challenges. In addition to that, Nigeria is home to diverse ecosystems, including forests, wetlands, and coastal areas. Climate change threatens these ecosystems, leading to habitat loss, species extinction, and disruptions in ecosystem services.

The health challenge that climate change poses is equally worth paying attention to. Changing climatic conditions contribute to the spread of diseases such as malaria, dengue fever, and cholera. Additionally, extreme weather events can lead to injuries, mental health issues, and displacement of communities.

Despite the evident impacts of climate change, Nigeria faces challenges in implementing effective adaptation measures. Limited financial resources, inadequate infrastructure, and institutional capacity constraints hinder the country's ability to cope with climate-related challenges. Moreover, Nigeria relies heavily on fossil fuels for energy generation, transportation, and industrial activities. This dependency contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, exacerbating climate change impacts both domestically and globally.

Additionally, deforestation rates in Nigeria remain high due to agricultural expansion, logging, and urbanization. This leads to loss of carbon sinks, biodiversity, and ecosystem services, further contributing to climate change. Nigeria's rapidly growing population and urbanization put pressure on natural resources and infrastructure, increasing vulnerability to climate change impacts such as floods, heatwaves, and food insecurity.¹¹

¹²Research has shown that there are several solutions to this issue. One of which is investment in renewable energy. Transitioning to renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydroelectric power can reduce Nigeria's reliance on fossil fuels and mitigate greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, enhanced climate resilience was proposed as a way forward by experts. Implementing climate-resilient agricultural practices, such as conservation agriculture, water management techniques, and crop diversification, can enhance food security and livelihoods.

Another is protecting existing forests and restoring degraded landscapes through reforestation and afforestation efforts can mitigate carbon emissions, conserve biodiversity, and improve ecosystem resilience. Additionally, strengthening institutional capacity, promoting climate education, and raising awareness about the impacts of climate change can empower communities to adapt and mitigate its effects.

Also, policy reform and international cooperation is another crucial thing. Enacting and enforcing policies that promote sustainable development, climate adaptation, and mitigation efforts is essential. Nigeria should also engage in international cooperation to access funding, technology transfer, and expertise to address climate change effectively.

Climate change poses significant challenges to Nigeria's socio-economic development, environmental sustainability, and human well-being. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from government, civil society, the private sector, and international partners. By implementing adaptation and mitigation strategies, investing in renewable energy, and fostering sustainable development practices, Nigeria can build resilience to climate change and contribute to global efforts to combat this pressing issue.¹³

➤ *Trends in Climate Change Discourse*

In recent years, Nigerian media outlets have shown a growing interest in climate change-related topics. There has been an uptick in the number of articles, news segments, and opinion pieces addressing climate change, reflecting recognition of its significance.¹⁴

Nigerian media often emphasize the impacts of climate change on local communities, ecosystems, and livelihoods. Stories about extreme weather events, agricultural challenges, and health impacts resonate with audiences and highlight the urgency of addressing climate change.

Media coverage frequently includes discussions about climate change policies and initiatives at the national, regional, and international levels. Debates around mitigation strategies, adaptation measures, and sustainable development goals provide insights into government priorities and public opinion.

Nigerian media increasingly feature stories about local climate change solutions and community-based initiatives. From renewable energy projects to sustainable agriculture practices, these stories showcase the resilience and innovation of Nigerian communities in addressing climate challenges.¹⁵

Many media organizations in Nigeria face resource constraints, limiting their capacity to produce in-depth coverage of climate change issues. Lack of funding, trained personnel, and access to reliable data can hinder journalists' ability to report effectively on this complex topic.

Also the challenge of sensationalism vs. accuracy is no little issue in the media. Some media outlets prioritize sensationalized stories over accurate and evidence-based reporting on climate change. This tendency can lead to misinformation, confusion, and public apathy towards climate action.¹⁶

Climate change discourse in Nigerian media may be influenced by political agendas, interests, and biases. Government censorship, pressure from advertisers, and corporate influence can shape the narrative on climate-related issues, impacting journalistic independence and integrity.

In addition, despite increased media coverage, climate change discourse in Nigerian media often fails to engage a broad spectrum of the population. Language barriers, low literacy rates, and limited access to information technologies can exclude marginalized communities from participating in the conversation.¹⁷

"There are, nevertheless, opportunities for improvement. One of such is Journalistic Training. Investing in training programs for journalists on climate change reporting can enhance their capacity to cover this complex issue accurately and comprehensively. Workshops, fellowships, and partnerships with climate experts can provide journalists with the necessary skills and knowledge.

Also, media organizations can collaborate with climate-focused NGOs, research institutions, and international agencies to access resources, expertise, and data for climate change reporting. Networks such as the Climate Change Media Partnership can facilitate information sharing and collaboration among journalists.

Additionally, utilizing diverse media platforms, including social media, radio, television, and print, can reach a wider audience and foster meaningful engagement on climate change issues. Interactive features, multimedia content, and community forums can encourage audience participation and dialogue. There are also ethical dimensions to this matter. Thus, upholding ethical standards of journalism, including accuracy, balance, and impartiality, is essential for credible climate change reporting. Media organizations should adhere to codes of conduct and guidelines for responsible reporting on scientific topics.

Nigerian media play a crucial role in shaping public discourse and awareness on climate change. While there have been positive trends in increased coverage and focus on local solutions, challenges such as limited resources, sensationalism, and political interference persist. By addressing these challenges and seizing opportunities for improvement, Nigerian media can contribute to informed public debate, policy action, and collective efforts to address the impacts of climate change in Nigeria and beyond.¹⁹

IV. ANALYSIS

Climate change discourse in the media plays a vital role in shaping public perceptions, attitudes, and policy responses to this global challenge. In Nigeria, where the impacts of climate change are increasingly felt, understanding how the media frame climate-related issues is crucial for effective public engagement and policy development. Media framing refers to the way in which news stories are constructed and presented to influence audience perceptions and interpretations of an issue. Framing involves selecting specific aspects of a complex issue, emphasizing certain themes or perspectives, and downplaying others. In the context of climate change, media framing shapes how the public understands the causes, impacts, solutions, and responsibilities related to this phenomenon.

Nigerian media often frame climate change stories around its impacts on local communities, ecosystems, and livelihoods. Stories about floods, droughts, crop failures, and displacement highlight the tangible consequences of climate change, fostering empathy and urgency among audiences.²⁰

Media coverage in Nigeria sometimes emphasizes adaptation measures over mitigation efforts in addressing climate change. Stories about resilient farming practices, water conservation, and disaster preparedness highlight local adaptation strategies, while discussions about reducing greenhouse gas emissions and transitioning to renewable energy receive less attention.

Nigerian media frequently frame climate change discourse around government policies, initiatives, and international agreements. Coverage of climate summits, legislative debates, and government statements provides insights into policy priorities and accountability mechanisms related to climate change.

Media framing of climate change in Nigeria often reflects scientific uncertainties and controversies surrounding the issue. Stories may include debates about the validity of climate science, conflicting predictions about future impacts, and skepticism about the human role in driving climate change.²¹

Media framing influences public awareness and understanding of climate change issues in Nigeria. By highlighting local impacts, adaptation strategies, and policy debates, the media can increase public knowledge and concern about climate change, motivating individuals to take action and engage in dialogue.

The place of mobilization and advocacy is also central to this issue.¹³ Climate change discourse in Nigerian media can mobilize public support for climate action and advocacy campaigns. Stories about community-led initiatives, environmental activism, and success stories in climate resilience can inspire collective action and pressure policymakers to prioritize climate-related policies and investments. Media framing can influence individual behaviors and lifestyle choices related to climate change mitigation and adaptation. By promoting sustainable practices, renewable energy alternatives, and eco-friendly solutions, the media can encourage behavioral change among audiences, leading to reduced carbon footprints and increased resilience.²²

V. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT

²³Media framing shapes the public agenda and influences policymakers' perceptions of climate change priorities. By amplifying certain issues and perspectives, the media can draw attention to climate-related challenges, frame policy debates, and set the agenda for legislative action and government intervention.

Also, effective media coverage of climate change can hold policymakers accountable for their commitments and actions. By scrutinizing government policies, monitoring implementation progress, and exposing gaps in climate adaptation and mitigation efforts, the media can ensure transparency, accountability, and public participation in policy processes. Media framing of climate change can stimulate policy innovation and experimentation at the local, national, and regional levels.²⁴By showcasing successful case studies, best practices, and lessons learned from other contexts, the media can inspire policymakers to adopt innovative approaches, invest in sustainable development, and collaborate with stakeholders to address climate-related challenges.²⁵

VI. CONCLUSION

The framing of climate change discourse in Nigerian media has significant implications for public engagement and policy development. By analyzing media framing patterns and understanding their effects on audience perceptions and policy responses, stakeholders can leverage the media's role as a catalyst for climate action, social change, and sustainable development. Moving forward, efforts to enhance media coverage, promote diverse perspectives, and foster constructive dialogue on climate change issues can contribute to informed decision-making, effective governance, and collective efforts to address the impacts of climate change in Nigeria and beyond.

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