

SOURCES AND DEPTHS OF CLIMATE CHANGE INFORMATION IN NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS

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Abstract

The study examined the sources and depth of climate change information published in selected Nigerian newspapers over a ten-year period (1996-2005). Published information on climate change issues were analyzed. The information depths were in form of technical scientific reports and non-technical reports. Data were analyzed using descriptive percentages and the chi-square test. chi-square analysis results revealed significant differences ($X^2 = 126.20$; $P < 0.005$) between the two sources of information commonly used by different newspapers. Specifically, non-official sources were predominant and were as high as 71.1% in the Nations newspaper (which is privately-owned) and 51.2% in Nigeria Herald (Government owned). The depth of the publication showed that technical-scientific climate change reports dominated the newspapers contents. The study therefore recommends the need for government agencies and media to broadcast developments on climate change and its mitigation strategies. Efforts should be focused at clarifying some intricacies to understanding climate change, so that these issues can be appreciated by a wider audience

Key words: climate change: depth: newspaper: reportage: sources: vulnerability

Introduction

Man's activities have highly devastating effect on the forest vegetation. This has threatened the survival of some useful animals and plants and species while others species have become extinct. Other major effects include disruption of micro-climate, carbon loading and land degradation (Dickinson *et al.*, 2015). Human activities from industries and intensive livestock production has also led to the pollution of

biosphere and the production of green-house gases like carbon dioxide, methane and ammonia, which have the ability to absorb the spectrum of infrared light thereby contributing to the warming of our

atmosphere. This causes climate change (Wingqvist *et al.*, 2012). Hence the sustainable management of our vulnerable forest natural resources and the enforcement

of appropriate environmental laws could therefore contribute significantly to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

According to Nnaji (2012) climate change is a reality that has global effect. These effects are perceived as largely negative with serious repercussion for human beings, their source of livelihood and environment. Climate change is the single biggest environmental issue facing the world today. Nigeria is one of the most vulnerable country in Africa due to its varied climatic zones, coastal locations and more importantly, her increasing population living and working in climate change prone areas. In their report Anslem and Taofeek (2010), noted that with increasing rate of erratic rainfall pattern, the use of drought resistant, short duration, high yielding crops should be developed through research effort and made available to farmers. These will mitigate the effect of climate change. Africa is a continent that is very vulnerable to the impact of climate change due to widespread poverty and low level of technical development. This in effect limits adaptation capabilities of her people to efficiently manage their resources (Akinagbe and Irohibe, 2014).

Access to climate change information and warning signals will improve Africa's food security situation. Such facilities, when accomplished, should be communicated to the farmers in plain and unambiguous language that the farmers will be able to decode as appropriate. Brian (2006) reported that the amount of information published and made available is doubling every five years. This is a pointer to the strategic role of the press in the quest to attain a high level of climate change

reportage in newspapers. Expectedly, this "advocate" function of the press could be brought to bear on the coverage of climate change phenomenon on the populace. Tologbonse *et al.* (2006) and Adekunle (2007) corroborates the earlier report of Kemp (1990) that a small percentage of the general public are in a position to read original scientific reports which address issues and the larger part of the public must depend upon an intermediary to satisfy their interests in the contemporary African society. These intermediaries are the press and climate change experts whose opinions help to shape populace perception about the effect of climate change.

Communication is an essential ingredient for sustainable development. This is due to its efficient role in the development of human capacity to disseminate, absorb and protect knowledge, and exploit it as a powerful tool for social transformation. Communication and information source becomes paramount due to the inability of various research findings on climate change seeing the light of the day. Thus a challenge is placed at the feet of scientists, environmentalists and climate change experts-that of getting information to the ultimate users (GOI, 2001). The dilemma facing the populace on the effect of climate change resolves round the issue of lack of information about the climate change phenomenon and its effect on the populace. However, the "gate-keeping" function of the newspapers can be viewed from where they do scout for information. This study therefore seeks to probe the source and depth of relevant information on climate change phenomenon to the Nigerian populace.

Statement of the Problem

There is a global call to formulate policies that will mitigate the effect of climate change. One of the potent instruments for responding to this challenge is the content analyses of newspaper publications. There is a dire need to analyze this phenomenon, to determine the depth of climate change information published in the Nigerian newspapers, to determine the sources of such information, and the effect of newspaper propriety on the publication patterns.

Objectives of the study:

The general objective of this study was to analyze the contents of selected newspaper reports on climate change phenomenon in Nigeria. Specifically the study::

- examined the depth of information on climate change published in selected Nigerian newspapers;
- established the source of published information on climate change in Nigerian newspapers;
- determined if there is any relationship in publication patterns due to newspapers ownership structure.

Methodology

The study carried out a content analysis 90 editions of selected Nigerian newspapers for the periods between 1996 and 2005. The selected newspapers comprised a government-owned newspapers-*Nigerian Herald* and a privately owned newspaper-*The Nation*. Secondary data was also used in this study, similar to the work of Kuria (2014).

Data collected were collated according to their respective categories, using appropriate constructive exhaustive code guides to elucidate information (Nnaji, 2012) and the depth of agricultural information published; as either technical or non-technical (Deviant, 2010).

Results and Discussion

For the purpose of clarity, the results including the information sources to the publishers were divided into two broad groups: Government or official sources which included proceedings such as international Climate Change conferences, Nigerian Meteorological Society publications, press releases by government agencies and press conferences by government officials. Non-official sources, included background briefings, leaks of official information, non-governmental organization briefs, proceedings from environmentalist group, climate change experts and other pressure groups focusing on effect of climate change on the populace. Interviews with scientists, expert opinions, spontaneous events, independent research, or previous media reports and views from members of the public were also considered.

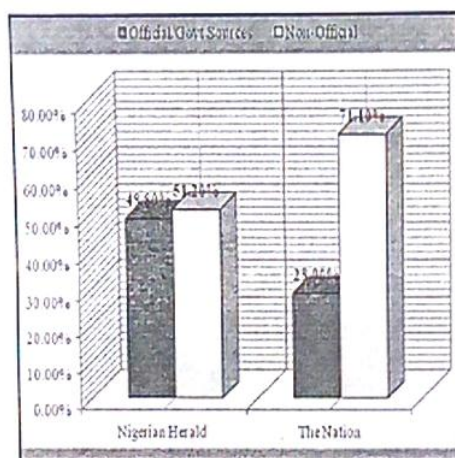


Figure 1: Frequency distribution of Official and Non-official sources of information on climate change published in the selected newspapers.

Source: Field survey (2017).

Results in Figure 1 revealed that non-official information sources had predominance over the official sources counterparts and was as high (71.1%) in *The Nations* newspaper which is privately-owned. Non-official sources were relatively higher in the other newspapers used for the study (51.2%) in the *Nigerian Herald*. The essence of this observation could be that the Nigerian government, with the resources at her disposal, is not only under-funding and de-emphasizing the effect of climate change on the populace but limiting the generation of climate change information by the public sector. On the contrary, some third world countries have made giant strides in relation to climate change information generation by the public sector. Kisner (2008) reported Thailand's mitigation and adaptation efforts, such as the action plan to reduce greenhouse

gas emissions, the flood wall to protect Bangkok, and the king's technology to create artificial rain. The report of Simane *et al.* (2012) underscored the importance of information dissemination and adaptation studies. Furthermore, chi-square analysis results revealed significant differences ($X^2 = 126.20$; $P < 0.005$) between the two sources of information commonly used by different newspapers (Table 1).

Determining the depth of agricultural information published by the selected newspapers from the conceptual to contextual point of views will be the placement of information in the proper context for facilitating proper understanding of the effect of climate change. In this vein, climate change information were classified as technical or non-technical reports. Technical reports refer to discussion that addressed specific issues in a specialized language of its own field and the usage of scientific terminologies. They are usually coded, scientific and deep while non-technical refers to report rendered in the ordinary English language devoid of climatologically terms that can be classified as generic or specific.

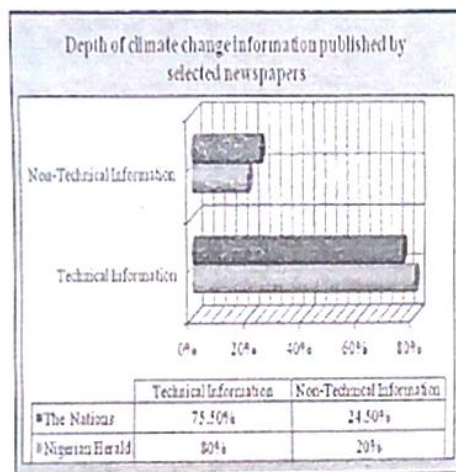


Figure. 2: Depth of climate change phenomenon Information Published in the Selected Newspapers

Sources: Field survey (2017)

Reports in Figure 2 revealed that technical reports dominate the manifest content of the newspaper publications while non-technical reports were few and not allotted a sizeable level of importance. Though variations exist in the depth of agricultural information published, technical issues still constituted the majority of points across the reports. This is despite the fact that non-technical write-ups helps the populace to easily comprehend issues communicated to them. Non-technical presentations encourage the majority stake-holders participate in ensuing debates and dialogue on how to find practical remedies to climate change challenges. It is also worth noting that technical reports/issues could serve as deterrents to better understanding of the basics of climate change. This is more so considering the low formal educational experience of the Nigerian populace (Eberendu and Eleanor 2015)

Table 1: Chi-Square Test on Publication pattern among the selected newspapers based on ownership structure

Variables	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance
Pearson			0.00
Chi-Square	126.20	89	0.001
No. of Valid Cases	90		

Sources: Field survey (2017)

This finding differs from the observation of Peer and Nesbit (2004) in their analysis of 52 US daily newspapers, which revealed that the most common writing approach was in the form of straight news with simple readable English. Nnaji (2001) and Meera *et al* (2004) suggested that the depth of reporting environmental news in newspapers should be simple. It should match the readability level of the newspaper audience due to the generally low level of understanding science by society member. Babalola (2002) emphasized the need to build in organisational and design features into the newspapers head-lines as Nigerians, whether young or old love to read newspapers.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings from this study show that the non-official information sources gave far more coverage on climate change than the official sources. The low reportage in the non-official/government owned newspaper appear to be the result of less concerns on

the part of government to disseminate climate change information to the society. In most of the reports, experts adhered strictly to technical, scientific diction, professional jargons, allusion and references without explanations and that placed the reports outside the comprehension of the general reader.

This study therefore suggests the need for government agencies and media to broadcast developments on climate change and its mitigation strategies. Efforts should be focused at clarifying some intricacies to understanding climate change, so that these issues can be appreciated by a wider audience. Thus, newspapers both government or privately owned should interpret and explain issues in the layman's language, with the usage of plain, simple and straight English.

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