



EVALUATION OF SELECTED NEWSPAPERS COVERAGE ON SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

*Information is power and the Role of the Media in promoting, informing, and educating society about the importance of a Sustainable Environment cannot be overstressed since society depends on the information from the media on environmental issues, etc. The media on this issue play an important part by providing information about events in society and helping in the development of a country. This study focused on Newspaper coverage of Environmental Sustainability issues in Nigeria from February 2023 to July 2023. Vanguard and Guardian newspaper were selected for this study. The study adopted Content analysis as a research design. The population for the study comprises of all the issues in the two newspapers. Simple Random Sampling was used for the selections of the newspapers to allow for equal opportunity while purposive sampling was adopted for the selection of 139 needed editions covered for six months. Agenda Setting was used as theoretical framework. Findings revealed that both newspapers gave attention to issues of environmental news though Vanguard Newspapers reported more stories than the Guardian within the six month under study. It was also found that the media did not show significant importance based on the placement of environmental issues on the newspapers and the media was biased in their coverage as most of the issues covered focused more on climate change than other issues. It was recommended that the media should **pay full** attention to all environmental issues and should give prominence to environmental issues in their coverage.*

Keywords: Newspaper Coverage, Communication, Sustainable Environment, Agenda Setting theory

Introduction

Communication plays a vital role in every aspect of life. It is a pathway to mobilize support and upsurge public awareness. The media provides the masses with information in less time by gathering a wide range of information concerning whatever is happening in the society. Communication is about participation, sharing of knowledge and information among people. Media as the fourth estate of the realm no doubt has a prominent part to play in the society by providing necessary information for the people as it also affects environmental sustainability issues in Nigeria (Adelekan, 2019). The need to unravel the role of the media in environmental sustainability issues cannot be considered an exercise in futility because the research literature and field reports on this subject matter prove to the point that the media can positively play an indispensable role in making our natural environment friendly for habitation purposes.

The environment in line with (Herbert, Ashong, & Abdullahi, 2013) is everything that surrounds or affects an organism throughout its lifetime. Simply put, the environment is everything encompassing living organisms like people; place and things represent its environment which may be either natural or man-made. The environment is collection of water, air and land inter-relationships among themselves and additionally with the human being, alternative living organisms and material goods". It includes all the physical and biological surrounding and their connections. In a like manner, According to (Fenkwe, 2012), the environment is an all-embracing concept, involving all the facets that comprise the planet earth and it surrounding. Man's environment includes the land unto which he is born, lives and dies, the air he breathes, the hydrographic, and all aquatic lives. Man, therefore, is both a product and a shape of his environment.

Environmental sustainability can be said to be the maintenance of the factors and practices that contribute to the quality of the environment on a long-term basis. It is the long-term maintenance of ecosystem components and functions for future generations. Environmental sustainability is about maintaining the quality of an environment in a positive way and within the limits of acceptability. This is related to meeting the environmental need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs (Galadima, 2016).



According to (Nwabueze, 2005), the awareness regarding the integration of environmental issues calls for concerns in a way of promoting sustainable development Nigeria. This was a result of the discovery that sustainable development is being threatened by an accumulation of environmental problems including land degradation, pollution, flood and erosion, decertification, insufficient use of energy resources, loss of biodiversity, environmental disasters, and deforestation.

From the foregoing, it could be deduced that the problem of environmental sustainability is a development problem. Therefore, without environmental sustainability, sustainable development remains a mirage. The media stand between environmental sustainability and the mission of development. In this sense, media and communication are indispensable tools of development that environmental sustainability is all about. (Ityavyar, & Thomas, 2012), noted that: “Communication is central to the process of development, to the extent that the dependence of one another has virtually been taken for granted.” With these facts that speak volumes for themselves, it becomes imperative to say that communication, which houses the media, is the pivot upon which all development efforts revolve.

The major role being played by the media in the coverage of issues that relates to the development of the society at all times cannot be ignored. The media overtime has been recognized as the major determinant in dissemination of information to the public. The reason is not far-fetched as various topical issues have been raised on environmental topics in Africa, especially in Nigeria ranging from food scarcity, extreme weather condition, floods and prolonged rain. Even the issue of climate change globally has even let to the use of media as a vehicle through which issues on environmental awareness are brought to the general public (Talabi, Tokunbo, & Bernice, 2019).

This study therefore seeks to define the role of Nigerian newspapers in media coverage of issues related to environmental sustainability in Nigeria and how they play this role in relation to environmental issues in Nigeria as regards the prominence given to the issues. To find out the nature of environmental news coverage of the newspapers and the direction of coverage among the issues published on the two newspapers.

Theoretical Framework

This study is premised on Agenda setting theory. The agenda setting theory was propounded by McCombs and Shaw in 1972, the theory focuses on the ability of the mass media to direct attention to certain issues, to make them inevitable for public discussion. McCombs and Shaw pointed out that, in choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play an important part in shaping audience reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position. This implies that, the issues put on the front burner of Newspapers are considered the issues of the day and that the media cannot tell people what to think, but only what to think about (McQuail, 2010). This theory is relevant to this study based on the principle of this theory which stated that media are charged with the responsibility of dictating what should be disseminated to the audience at large which can be discussions, debates, problems that pertain to the development of a Nation, alarming issues and so on. The issue of environmental sustainability is a fundamental issue and a problem that needs to be addressed in the nation which is in the hands of the media in terms of the dissemination of information to the public.

Methodology

The method adopted for this study was content analysis. The study focused on two National Newspapers such as Vanguard and The Guardian from February 2023 to July, 2023. These covers all the environmental news stories captured in the two newspapers within the six months of study. The Newspapers were randomly selected from the population based on circulation, coverage, ownership, audience like and frequency of publication. The articles from the two Newspapers form the unit of analysis while the coding sheet was used as instrument for data collection. The categories of analysis include frequency of the issues reported, placement or prominence of environmental issues and content categories. The data collected was presented in tables and the analysis done in percentages.



Results

The following were the findings obtained from the study:

Table 1: Frequency of the Newspapers coverage of environmental issues

S/N	Newspapers	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Vanguard	72	52%
2.	Guardian	67	48%
Total		139	100%

Source: Content analysis, 2023

Table 2: Prominence given to environmental news reportage for the period of six months

Placement	Vanguard	Guardian	Total
Front	24	15	39 (28%)
Inside	48	52	100 (72%)
Back	Nil	Nil	0%
Total	72	67	139

Source: Content analysis, 2023

Table 3: nature of environmental news coverage of the newspapers for the six months period

S/N	Content Categories	Vanguard	Guardian	Total	Percentage
1.	Health	13	5	18	13 %
2.	Renewable Energy	7	1	8	6%
3.	Climate Change	23	12	35	25%
4.	Agric & Biotech	7	11	18	13%
5.	Human Settlement	8	9	17	12%
6.	Sustainable Development	2	19	21	16%
7.	Water & Sanitation	6	4	10	7%
8	Pollution & Waste Management	6	6	12	8%
Total		72	67	139	100%

Source: Content analysis, 2023

Discussion

The data as presented and analysed in table 1 above shows that from the 139 published stories on environmental news, Vanguard Newspapers published 72 (52%) stories while Guardian published 67 (48%). The implication of this is that both newspapers gave attention to issues of environmental news though the finding revealed that Vanguard Newspapers reported more stories than the Guardian within the six month under study.

Based on the data as presented in table 2 above, the prominence given to news coverage of environmental issues based on front page of the Newspapers was 28% while inside page took a whole lot with 72%. The implication of this is that, the media has not shown significant commitment in setting the agenda and mobilizing the masses towards environmental issues.

Also, the data as presented and analysed in table 3 above shows that 25% of the stories being the highest were reported on climate change. The findings of this study is in line with a study carried by (Batta, Abdulahi, and



Ashong, 2013) whose data revealed that 2007-2009 the three years study period of the four newspapers: The Punch, Daily Trust, Thisday and The Guardian about 134 issues were published and mainly on climate change. The implication of this is that climate change issues were given wider coverage than any other environmental issues. The finding of this study was also in agreement with a study carried out by Ayodeji and Awoniyi (2012) on Newspaper Reportage and Its Effect towards Enhancing Agricultural and Environmental Sustainability in Nigeria using content analysis of environmental reportage of three newspapers. In this study, the findings revealed that issues reported on the selected newspapers were not balanced hence the need for the media to give adequate attention in reporting all environmental issues.

Conclusion

Based on the findings as clearly stated above the Newspapers provide little coverage of environmental issues. The data also shows that the volume of coverage of environmental issues by Nigerian newspapers is insufficient to set the agenda for public debate on the topic, raise awareness of the issue, and therefore achieve the desired goal. The media can still do more in the area of coverage of the entire environmental news stories considering its importance and the need to have quality environment in our society.

Recommendation

The Nigerian press needs to pay full attention to environmental issues and should cut across board. Based on the low prominence given to environmental reportage on the front page of the Newspapers, the media should show substantial commitment in setting the agenda in mobilizing the masses towards environmental issues. Considering the bias reportage on the selected newspapers, the media should always balance their news coverage and ensure they give adequate attention to all environmental issues as this may help to reduce environmental challenges.

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***Proceedings of the 4th International Conference, The Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro, Nigeria
in Collaboration with Takoradi Technical University, Takoradi, Ghana
3rd – 7th September, 2023. University Auditorium, Takoradi Technical University, Takoradi***



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