Building Strong Partnership with the Media: A Study of How Print Media in Nigeria Cover Environmental Issues

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Abstract - This study examined how two newspapers- the Punch and the Guardian portrayed environmental issues from October 1, 2011 to February 29, 2012. The objective of the study was to find out the extent to which the print media is raising public awareness and to find out the extent of coverage of environmental issues in Nigeria. Content analysis was adopted as the methodology while coding sheet- comprising variables in the research was used to gather data from the newspapers. A total of 304 issues, 152 for the Punch and 152 for the Guardian newspapers were studied.

From the findings, it was concluded that the media did not give due prominence to environment issues in that the space given to reports were not much and also there were more straight news than features or editorials meaning that the reporters did not do extensive research on the matter and reports only originated from events on environment issues. It was also discovered that the major actors in these reports were like non-governmental organisations which could mean that environment issues matter more to them than even the leaders of the country.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that reports on environment should be proactive rather than reactive. This means that the media should report issues looking at preventive angles so that people can take precautions rather than waiting for an outbreak for them to do extensive reports. The media should also give enough space to coverage of environment issues and accord it more prominence.

Keywords- coverage, environmental issues, partnership, print media, and prominence

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INTRODUCTION

Prior to 1970, agriculture and oil were the economic mainstay. With financial resources available from oil and no development policy, unguided urbanization and industrialization took place. Uncontrolled population growth, desertification, and deforestation led to degradation and devastation of the environment.

Nigeria, a country bountifully endowed with rich mineral, natural, biological and energy resources has a total area of 923, 773 square kilometers. The environment provides all life support total life support in the air, on water and land as well. Incidentally, the same environment which provides conducive support is also faced with many challenges resulting from the adverse effect of human activities and natural phenomenon beyond human control.

Amokaye (2002) noted that 'environmental pollution has being in existence since man began to live in settlements. In the earlier days of nomadic hunting communities, the tribal group moved on when food in their current location became depleted and the area around their camp became polluted or soiled.'

Daramola & Ibem (2010) stated that "Nigerian cities are witnessing high rate of environmental deterioration and are rated among urban areas with the lowest liveability index in the world".

Grillo et al, (2008) posit that

> *Developed countries increasingly reflects a growing interest in environmental health, leading many to consider more ecologic products. In this condition, firms are developing various methods and products amenable to environmental demands and mandates. According to these developments in consumers' product choice and lifestyles, firms started to communicate environmental messages in advertising tools into business opportunities.*

The Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) of 2003 estimated that 20% of children less than five years had diarrhoea in the two weeks preceding the survey. It has also been estimated that over 200,000 deaths occur annually among children due to diarrheal diseases in Nigeria or more graphically, a child dies every 3 minutes in the country largely due to poor sanitary conditions.

Environmental issues can be on environmental sanitation, waste management, flood, forestry climate change, among others.

Statement of the problem

Environment issues in Nigeria do not seem to receive enough public attention. The first step to improving the environmental situation in Nigeria is public awareness and education. This study therefore seeks to find out newspapers contribution to public awareness and sensitization and to find out their level of reportage of environmental concerns.

Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1

H_0: Print media in Nigeria do not devote enough attention to the news coverage of environmental issues.

H_1: Print media in Nigeria devote enough attention to the news coverage of environmental issues.

Hypothesis 2

H_0:   Print media in Nigeria did not give prominence in its reporting to environmental issues.

H_1:   Print media in Nigeria give prominence in its reporting of environmental issues.

Hypothesis 3

H_0:   Print media in Nigeria did not give much space to the coverage of environmental issues.

H_1:   Print media in Nigeria give much space to the coverage of environmental issues.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
Agenda-Setting Function

To further explain the role of the media is the agenda-setting function by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw. Zhu and Blood, (1997) in Miller, (2002:259), define Agenda-Setting as 'the process whereby the news media lead the public in assigning relative importance to various public issues." The media does this by giving more prominence to an issue in terms of time for broadcast and space for print.

Agenda setting looks at salience transfer. That is transferring importance to news items from becoming the media agenda to public agenda.

Lattimore et al (2009) states the power of agenda-setting as "the fact that some news items get published, aired, and talked about while others do not."

The agenda-setting theory share a concentration on explaining public opinion and the processes through which

the media shape our view of the world: what the world is like, what is important enough to pay attention to, and how to deal with societal issues (Miller, 2002:257)

The agenda-setting function has multiple components:

- Media agenda: which are issues discussed in the media, such as newspapers, television, and radio.
- Public agenda: these are issues members of the public believe is important.
- Policy agenda: these are issues that policy makers (such as legislators and those who influence the legislative process) consider important.

Looking at environment issue in Nigeria, the media can give maximum coverage to the different issues to keep them fresh in the public's mind and let the citizens' know how they can contribute to sustaining their immediate environment. This shows that there is a correlation between media coverage of an issue and the perceived importance of that issue among the general public.

In sum, agenda-setting is a process of media influence where the media chooses and emphasize certain topics which in turn cause the public to perceive them as important.

Development Media Theory

This study can also be hinged on the development media theory as propounded by Dennis McQuail in 1987. In fine-tuning McQuail's postulations, Folarin (1998) situated the postulations to suit developing countries. The first postulation according to Folarin (1998) is that "The media should accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy (or in line with national ideology) without prejudice to their traditional functions of information, education and entertainment."

In relation to this work, if the media incorporates the awareness of environmental issues and makes it a priority in their reports, it could go a long way in discouraging certain things that are harmful to the environment.

This brings to view the need for development journalism by the Nigerian media. Development journalism goes beyond informing to motivating and mobilising the citizenry; it also highlights development problems and helps readers realise how serious the development problem is and opens their eyes to possible solutions. If citizens do not contribute to sustaining the environment, the millennium development goal 1 which is to eradicate poverty and hunger will be defeated. With the constant oil spillage at the Niger Delta region and erosions everywhere in the country, people can

hardly make a living especially those who are involved in farming and fishing.

Millennium development goal 7 aims to ensure environmental sustainability. It looks at integrating the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes, reverse loss of environmental resources, reduce bio-diversity loss, reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water, achieve a significant improvement in lives of at least, 100 million slum dwellers by 2020.

This means that environmental issues can affect every sphere of human life including what we eat and drink. When safe drinking water is hampered by environmental disorders it could lead to water borne diseases which defeats the essence of the MDGs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Environment Issues: An Overview

Mba *et al* (eds) (2004) as cited in Adedeji (2010) identified several types of environmental problems classified as ecological, poaching and habitat loss, increasing desertification and soil erosion. These are further subdivided into pollution, deforestation, global warming and slum development, etc. Nigeria's coastal regions are currently experiencing widespread contamination from petroleum exploration (gas flaring, oil spillage) while the general poor living conditions in urban areas in the country constitutes an affront to human dignity.

He added that 'Nigeria's coastal regions are currently experiencing widespread contamination from petroleum exploration (gas flaring, oil spillage) while the general poor living conditions in urban areas in the country constitutes an affront to human dignity.'

Adedayo (2000) highlighted the Vision 2010 report on environmental sanitation by bringing out the following

a. Severe gully erosion in the eastern and northern states of the country.
b. Uncontrolled logging with inherent problems of destruction of the nation's bio-diversity
c. Inappropriate agricultural practices.
d. Coastal and marine erosion and land subsidence in coastal and riverine states
e. Oil pollution arising from spillage and gas flaring related issues.
f. Flooding in low-lying belts of mangrove and fresh water swamps along the coast, the plain of large rivers and short-lived flash floods in inland rivers.
g. Industrial pollution, municipal waste generation, and rural/urban decay.

He stressed that aside the deleterious health effects, these wastes ooze out purgent odour and also disfigure the image of the environment.

Climate change is one of the greatest global threats facing the world now and this affects various aspects of human existence. The issue of climate change also will limit the ability of developing countries to meet the millennium development goals (MDGs). While agricultural production will increase in industrialised societies, there will be a decrease in developing countries especially in agricultural land and food security. Climate change would bring about environmental degradation, resources scarcity and extreme weather events.

Stock (2010) observed that "since the demise of the second republic in 1983, environmental sanitation has become a prominent issue in Nigeria. Countless sanitation edicts have been promulgated by the governments. Many of these edicts have at least temporarily had considerable impact on the lives of citizens dwelling in the major cities."

"Environmental Sanitation is used to mean the handling by the community of water supply and the disposal of sewage and refuse. It is also used to denote the control of elements in the environment that affect, or may affect, human health. It is also defined as the adjustment of the environment for the prevention of disease" (http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/a38153_%28ch21%29.pdf).

1985 birth the era of 'War against Indiscipline', an environmental sanitation programme that was launched in Kano on the 29th of July under the administration of Major-General Idiagbon; he added that the cleanest capital would be given the total sum of a million naira.

This effort is to underscore the importance of cleanliness to the environnment because of the prevalent environmental damage that has plagued the nation.

Stock (2010) noted that the frensic pace of the fifth phase of WAI was slowed down following the demise of the Buhari government on 27th August, 1985. The new head of State did not cancel the WAI programme, however, he deemphasised it and crevoked the one million naira award to the cleanest capital and the federal announcement on sanitation became infrequent again. Also, at

the state level, environmental sanitation was deemphasized, although various issues linked to sanitation was raised periodically.

Longoria (1997:48) stated

> by 1986 the upland brush of deep South Texas was becoming almost as endangered as the whooping crane. Attempts were by then under way to save the unique riparian habitats lining the Rio Grande from Falcon Dam southeast to Brownsville, but creating a wildlife corridor along the river has not been an easy task. Damming and urbanization have already destroyed so much of the woodland buttressing the river that the future of the corridor looks bleak.

Agberemi (2008) stated that 'governments have always placed more emphasis on provision of water supply without adequate attention to sanitation and hygiene, regarding it as household affair. The situation is further compounded by low priority being accorded to sanitation and hygiene at community and household levels. Poor sanitation and hygiene negate any gain that could be realized from provision of safe water supply alone and has adverse effects on the health, economy, education and governance.'

The WAI advertisement focused more on individual as the source of the problem rather than the government. However, Adedayo (2002) observed that "the emphasis on individual culpability for environment filth was rather unfair because of the long-standing failure of the Nigerian state to provide adequate infrastructures to enable people to maintain a healthy environment. He further expatiated that it was the government and not individual Nigerian citizens that is responsible for the poor sanitation in the country.

Amokaye (2012) maintained that

> The efforts of the federal, state and local governments in Nigeria at ensuring sustainable development through numerous environmental legislation, fiscal incentives and grants to environmental ministries and agencies remain elusive as Nigeria continues to experience complex environmental problems of atmospheric, noise and water pollution, oil pollution, climatic change including flooding, coastal erosion2 and perennial oceanic surge and municipal solid waste management.

Nwabueze (2007) as cited in Amokaye (2012) added that 'the exercise of public safety and public order power is wide enough to accommodate legislative measures to control any activity that endangers the safety of a community either arising naturally or from any human activity, including earthquake, drought, oil spillage, natural disaster and emergency'

It is important to note that many regulatory frameworks fail because government lacks necessary information and data to regulate environmental pollution.

Amokaye (2012) concluded that the solution to the environmental challenges experienced in Nigeria is to complement the carrot and stick approach is the infusion of public confidence in environmental management through continuous environmental education and training. This will require a change in approach in environmental governance. Government must promote, implement and enforce environmental policies in a transparent manner. This calls for accountability and transparency in the environmental law making process, environmental policing and environmental prosecution.

Ogbodo (2009) opined that, the chief beneficiary of environmental law is mankind since the law is designed to "improve mankind's living conditions.'

The Role of the Media

Lattimore et al (2009) states the power of agenda-setting as "the fact that some news items get published, aired, and talked about while others do not." The media is charged with the responsibility of informing, educating and entertaining the public on issues in the community.

Carvalho (2005) states that the ability of the public to understand environmental issues depends largely upon how such issues are constricted by media verbiage, and without public understanding there can be no public debate or resolution.

Whereas news magazines have the ability to give more in-depth coverage on an issue, providing interpretation for the reader, newspapers do not have this luxury. Newspapers are more inclined to quote both sides of the story to provide interpretation (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989).

Daramola (2005) asserted that "all over the world, public enlightenment is regarded as a major function of the mass media". Invariably, environmental issues should be given utmost coverage because of its negative effect on the society.

Uwejamomere O.O.(1992) identified the challenges faced by the media in carrying out their responsibility as 'lack of proper training for specialized journalists in the language of the environment (technicalities and terms), leading to errors which further alienate the few available sources from disclosing information'. He added that 'the tendency for authorities, leaders of communities, and or journalist to connive with polluting bodies and therefore conceal information has not helped in curtailing these environmental challenges Nigeria is faced with.'

Another challenge is 'the media's tendency to satisfy its commercial interest at the expense of social and scientific interest.

Akingbade (1991) added that 'the problem of editing to optimize space, and the urgency to meet deadlines which sometimes reduces the media houses' ability to sustain public interest and spur the community to action has led to the media's oversimplification of complex and important issues such as the environmental challenges the country is undergoing.'

McQuail, (2005:378) suggested that 'verbiage is an important part of the framing process. Once certain terms become accepted, the language itself has power over audience interpretations. The use of "certain words or phrases" can be used to convey specific meanings.'

METHODOLOGY

The research design used in this study is content analysis and the population for the study comprised all Nigerian newspapers.

Sample

Environment is an issue of national interest and we need papers on a national scale. Newspapers were divided into three categories: Category 1 are papers on a national scale; Category 2 are regional papers and Category 3 are local or rural newspapers. Out of about 60 newspapers in Nigeria, research has shown that only 20% have national coverage.

The study took a sample of 5 papers that have national reach and ended in the **Punch** and the **Guardian** newspapers. The study also picked 5 months- **October 1, 2011 to February 29, 2012** to bridge into two seasons to see if seasons affect coverage. A total of 304 issues, 152 for the Punch and 152 for the Guardian newspapers were studied.

Content Categories

Environment issue is a complex one comprising so many areas. Some environmental issues are: climate change, conservation, energy, environmental degradation, environmental health, ozone depletion, pollution (water, air), resource depletion, deforestation, waste management among   others (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_environmental_issues). For the purpose of this study we concentrate on climate change, sanitation, waste management, flood, forestry.

The units of analysis are news, editorial, features and opinion.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Table 1: Name of paper

Newspaper	Frequency	Percent
THE PUNCH	55	46.2
THE GUARDIAN	64	53.8
Total	119	100.0

From table 1 above, it shows that both papers published a total of 119 reports on environment issues within the period of study.

Table 2: Year

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
2011	62	52.1	52.1
2012	57	47.9	47.9
	119	100.0	100.0

Table 2 shows the number of reports in the two sampled years. It shows that in 2011 which comprised the months of October, November and December, there were 62 reports while in 2012 which comprised the months of January and February there were 57 reports.

Table 3: Source

The Punch and The Guardian	
Coverage/occurrence	31(26.1%)
Press release/statement	6(5%)
Press conference	9(7.6%)
Interview	16(13.4%)
Reporters analysis	11(9.2%)
Research findings	12(10.1%)
News agency	11(9.2%)
No source indicated	21(17.6%)
Others	1(0.8%)
Total	119(100%)

The source of the reports looks at how the media got the environment reports they published. 31 (26.1%) reports were got through on the spot coverage that is as the event unfolded. Such events could be workshops, symposia, street walks, seminars, or other public presentations. 21 (17.6%) reports did not have the sources indicated in the reports; 16 (13.4%) reports were got through interviews; 12 (10.1%) reports were through research findings from research organisations and other professional bodies; 11 (9.2%) reports were from the reporter's analysis and investigations. Other reports were got through press conferences, releases, and news agencies, foreign and local.

Table 4: Main Speaker/Point of View

The Punch and The Guardian	
Ministry of Environment	10(8.4%)
Sponsoring Org.	39(32.8%)
NESREA	3(2.5%)
Other Govt Officials	19(16%)
Others (citizens/individual)	28(23.5%)
LASEPA	4(3.4%)
United Nations	7(5.9%)
National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA)	6(5%)
Not Specified	3(2.5%)
Total	119(100%)

Table 6 looks at the major actors or speakers in the reports. From the analysis, it was observed that the major actor in the reports is Sponsoring Organisations with 32.8%. Sponsoring organisations comprise Non-Governmental Organisations, advocacy groups. The next group are in the Others category comprising citizens or individuals, professionals, academics. The other actors were the Ministry of Environment, United Nations, government officials not belonging to the Ministry of Environment, government agencies like NEMA (National Environment Management Agency), LASEPA (Lagos State Environmental Protection Agency), NESREA (National Environmental Standards and Regulatory Enforcement Agency).

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

Where:

$\sum$	=	Summation
O	=	Frequency observed
E	=	Frequency expected

H0: Print media in Nigeria did not devote attention to the coverage of environmental issues.

GENRE

The obtained value for X^2 = 109.69

The X^2 tabulated is 7.81 at 5% level of significant on the degree of freedom of 3.

From this test the value of X^2- calculated is greater than the X^2 – tabulated. Since the calculated value is greater than the tabulated at degree of freedom of 3 and at 5% level of significant the H_0 was rejected and H_1 that Print media in Nigeria did devote attention to the coverage of environmental issues was accepted. From the analysis, it also shows that there were more straight news reports than editorial and features, by implication it means that the print media did not do extensive reports covering environment issues; rather they just reported what happened at events.

Hypothesis Two

H0: Print media in Nigeria did not give prominence in its reporting to environmental issues.

Prominence is measured by the placement the story gets in the paper. When a story is placed on the front page as the major story, it is considered most important than other pages of the newspaper. It is against this backdrop that hypothesis 2 will be tested.

	O	E	O-E	$(O-E)^2$	$\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$
Front page (lead)	5	19.7	-14.7	216.09	10.97
Other front page	9	19.7	-10.7	114.49	5.81
Op-Ed page	5	19.7	-14.7	216.09	10.97
Inside pages	55	19.7	35.3	1246.09	63.25
Dedicated environment page	43	19.7	23.3	542.89	27.56
Back page	2	19.7	-18.7	349.69	17.75
Total	119				136.31

The obtained value for X^2 = 136.31

The X^2 tabulated is 11.1 at 5% level of significant on the degree of freedom of 5.

From this test the value of X^2- calculated is greater than the X^2 – tabulated. Since X^2 calculated value is greater than X^2 tabulated at degree of freedom of 5 and at 5% level of significance, H_0 was rejected and H_1 which says Print

media in Nigeria did give prominence in its reporting to environmental issues was accepted. From the analysis,

more stories were on the inside pages of the newspaper and next was the page devoted to environmental coverage. There were less reports on the front page which is the first

	O	E	O-E	$(O-E)^2$	$\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$
NEWS	72	29.8	42.2	1780.84	59.76
EDITORIAL	3	29.8	-26.8	718.24	24.10
FEATURES	40	29.8	10.2	104.04	3.49
OPINION	4	29.8	-25.8	665.64	22.34
Total	119				109.69

page that attracts a reader to the publication.

Hypothesis Three

H0: Print media in Nigeria did not give much space to the coverage of environmental issues.

SPACE

	O	E	O-E	$(O-E)^2$	$\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$
Full page	18	23.6	-5.6	31.36	1.33
Half page	32	23.6	8.4	70.56	2.21
Combined two pages	6	23.6	-17.6	309.76	13.13
Less than half page	51	23.6	27.4	750.76	31.81
More than half page	12	23.6	-12.6	158.76	6.72
Total	119				55.2

The obtained value for X^2 = 55.2

The X^2 tabulated is 9.49 at 5% level of significant on the degree of freedom of 4. From this test the value of X^2- calculated is greater than the X^2 – tabulated. Since X^2 calculated value is greater than X^2 tabulated at degree of freedom of 5 and at 5% level of significance, H_0 was

rejected and H1 that print media in Nigeria did give much space to the coverage of environmental issues was accepted.

CONCLUSION

This research sought to find out the role of the media in covering environment issues with a focus on newspapers. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the media did not give enough prominence to environment issues. It was also discovered that there were more straight news reports than editorial or features. Other findings of this research also are that most environment reports were got through on-the-spot-coverage and the main point of view in the reports were sponsoring organisations like non-governmental organisations interested in environment problems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations suffice:

1. The environment is a specialist area this means that Nigerian newspapers should afford journalists the necessary training in this area in order to report extensively and comprehensibly.
2. Reports on environment issues should be proactive rather than reactive. This means that the media should report issues looking at preventive angles so that people can take precautions rather than waiting for an outbreak for them to do extensive reports.
3. The media should also give enough space to coverage of environment issues and accord it more prominence.

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