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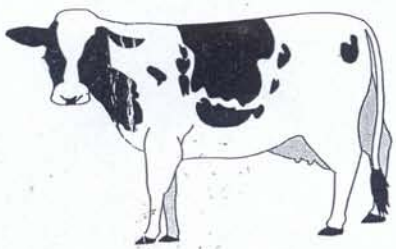

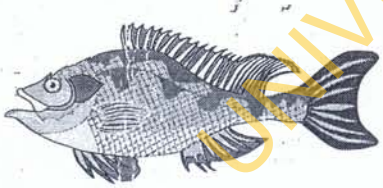

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FRAMING OF ENVIRONMENTAL STORIES IN TWO NIGERIAN DAILY NEWSPAPERS

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ABSTRACT

The environment has major impact on the economic, social, cultural and ecological activities of man. Through framing analysis (Inter-coder Reliability Coefficient=.95), this study examined 36 stories each from the Punch and Nigerian Tribune daily newspapers from January 1 through December 31, 2008, to uncover how environmental issues were framed. This was done by investigating what these newspapers emphasized, information sources relied upon, and the slant and frames used in reporting environmental stories. Results indicated that majority (52.8%) of the headlines were presented from the negative perspective. Victims/eye-witness (Nigerian Tribune=59.5%, Punch=40.5%) were relied upon more than government officials (Punch=60%, Nigerian Tribune=40%) as information sources. The disaster frame (33%) was the most frequently used frame in reported environmental stories as posing high risk to agriculture and humans among the five frames (awareness/campaign = 27.7%, assistance =18.0%, warning/blame = 13.9%, responsibility = 9.7%) that emerged from this study. Overall, environmental issues were presented from the negative perspective, and capable of causing uncertainty and fear among lay public and farmers. The reading audience will continue to lack accurate knowledge and understanding of environment as it relates to agriculture and other economic activities, if journalists continue to cover environmental news that is problematic or associated with risk factors.

Keywords: Environment, Newspapers, Framing, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Prior to 1987, the Nigerian media had mainly concerned itself with issues of local environmental sanitation. A few opinion features, especially at the occurrence of disaster or on issues of soil, marine and forest resources management also appear in the print media. Various ecological zones in Nigeria suffer from one form of environmental problem particularly land degradation due to erosion, deforestation, bush burning, oil pollution, toxic waste, municipal waste, agrochemicals, urban infrastructure, and use of expired hazardous chemicals (Adegoroye, 1997) which have serious implications for food production and biodiversity of the nations forest resources (Ogunkunle, 2004). Environmental issues are newsworthy, and have gained increased press attention because of the major impact it has had agriculturally, geographically, economically, culturally and socially on the different communities in Nigeria. The most likely source of information on such issues for the lay public is the mass media (Ten Eyck, 2000; Bruhn and Schutz, 1999). There is therefore a need to investigate media coverage of environmental issues in daily newspapers in Nigeria, to reveal the public understanding of the impact of environment on the agro–economic and socio-cultural activities of the people and it Immediate and future effects.

This study investigated the framing of environmental news in Nigerian daily newspapers. It is expected that what the newspapers emphasized, information sources and frames used for reporting environmental news will reveal how and why decisions are made about environmental issues by key players charged with environmental issues in the country.

Framing of environmental stories within daily newspapers has implications for future coverage of environmental and related issues. Government regulatory actions are also possible outcomes. Moreover, public perception of environmental issues and what actions may be taken with similar situations in the future may depend on how the issues are framed in the media (Amanda *et al*, 2005).

Theoretical framework

Most regions in Africa suffer several forms of environmental degradation leading to desertification and with detrimental impact on food production, agricultural productivity and loss of biodiversity (ECA/FAO, 1998). Land degradation is the gradual depletion of soil fertility and alteration of soil structure (Ogunkunle, 2004) due to inappropriate use of agricultural practices, desertification, increase in world population, and other non-agricultural uses requiring land space , consequently

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making less land available for food production(Muir, 2008). It is on this basis that this study investigated media coverage of environmental issues in Nigerian daily newspapers. The potential impact of the environment on agriculture and forest resources is immense. The agricultural industry contributes significantly to the national economy. It employs over 70% of Nigeria's population and produces the bulk of food consumed in the country and raw materials for local industries.

There is limited material that investigates the media coverage of environmental issues. Nonetheless, there have been various studies conducted on media coverage of other related agricultural risk or food safety issues such as crop production biotechnology (McInerney *et al*, 2004), framing of mad cow coverage (Amanda *et al*, 2005), coverage of HIV/AIDS (Tiamiyu, 2008) and food safety communication (Kristina *et al*,2004).

Tiamiyu (2008) conducted a study on HIV/AIDS media coverage in two Nigeria newspapers. She reported that from 2000 to 2005 the newspapers coverage tend towards the negative side, potentially causing uncertainty and fear in the country. She also said that, the two newspapers primarily reported issues concerning the HIV/AIDS disease just to create public awareness. Not much work was done in the area of educating the public about the cause of the diseases and possible preventive measures.

Most of the framing literatures on health issues indicate that the media cover them as posing a threat to human. In addition, many of the research findings revealed that media coverage of issues is presented in such a way that the audience may perceive that the only people who can solve the problem associated with health issues are experts, mainly government official and scientists (Amanda *et al*, 2005).

To understand the print media coverage of environmental issues in Nigerian newspapers, this current study investigates how two Nigerian newspapers framed environmental stories and the implications associated with those stories. It is expected that this study will reveal the media context for the understanding of environmental issues in the Nigerian communities, using framing theory and associated methods of analysis, which focus on the presentation and sourcing of the environmental stories.

Framing theory is frequently used to explain media's reportage of events and individuals perception of such events the social, behavioural, and cognitive sciences (McLeod *et al*, 1994). Similarly, Bridget and Nelson, 1999 iterated that framing theories suggest that the ways issues are presented (framed) in media can affect the public perception of the issues.

The way issues are packaged by the media is called framing and it depicts how people come to understand such issues. The assumption is that frames allow interpretations which enables individuals to locate, perceive, identify, and label information" coming from a source (Mcleod *et al*, 1994). According to Bales (2001) incoming messages are quickly and efficiently processed by the media and audience through the use mental short cuts, which implies that they rely cues from incoming messages which help them to connect the new information with their preconceived notions about the world.

One of the functions of news is to explain and shape public perception of events and this is the basis of the concept of framing (Gitlin, 1980). He explains further that while the media uses frames to achieve this function, frames are basically principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation consisting of theories about what exists. In conclusion, he said that frames, though discreet helps visualization of the world in an identifiable/understandable form for journalists and users of the information. Thus Entman (1991), found framing analysis as a useful research tool for uncovering elements such as keywords, sources of information, symbols, metaphors, messengers, visuals, messages, stories, numbers, or context that people use to understand the world. Finally, he stated repetition reinforces words and visual images that emphasize some ideas, make some more salient and others almost invisible.

According to Hallahan (1999), framing provides context within which information presented and processed enables framing to be applied across a wide range of situations. In Nigeria, environmental problems manifest in various forms. Various ecological zones suffer from one form of environmental degradation or the other. The North "blows" away erosion wind due drought, and desertification while costal South "washes" away in the oceans. Gully erosion ravages the middle belt and most Southern states especially in the East. There are also problems of flood sewage, deforestation, agrochemicals, bush burning, oil pollution, vehicular pollution, noise pollution, toxic wastes, burned expired hazardous chemicals, municipal wastes and general urban infrastructure (Goke, 1997). This study was conducted on the assumption that environmental issues are becoming topical particularly as the debate on climate change is

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ongoing. The media discourse plays a significant role in developing knowledge and understanding in this area.

This study thus focussed on the following objectives:

(1) How has the environmental news is been framed in the two selected daily newspapers and which of these frames dominate?
(2) What sources do these news papers rely upon and what frames are they associated with?
(3) What is the slant of reported environmental stories in the selected daily newspapers?

METHODOLOGY

January 1, through December 31 2008, was chosen as the study's time frame. The selection of newspapers for this study was based on percentage readership amongst the ten largest newspapers in Nigeria (Media Reach OMD Nigeria, 2005). Complete sports and Today's sport newspapers were jettisoned as they are not likely to cover environmental news. Two daily newspapers The Nigerian Tribune, and The Punch were randomly selected from the remaining newspapers. Method used by Amanda *et al* (2005) for selecting newspaper editions and articles was adopted.

Articles for this study were gathered from the Kenneth Dike Library University of Ibadan (Research library data base) using key words "Environmental stories". Articles selected from the search included, news articles feature articles, and culled articles. Letters to the editor was omitted. Articles under 100 words in length were also dropped from the study because they did not provide enough material to conduct proper framing analysis. This produced 188 stories 36 from the Nigerian Tribune and 82 from The Punch newspapers. All the 36 articles from The Tribune was analysed for the study. However, 82 articles were obtained from the Punch. For an equal number (36 articles) were randomly selected from The Punch newspaper to make the sample balanced. A total of 72, articles represent coverage of environmental stories from the Nigerian Tribune and The Punch newspapers were coded (Inter coder Reliability Coefficient= .95) for this study. The unit of analysis for this study was individual article reporting environmental issues in the two selected newspapers (the Punch and the Nigerian Tribune).

RESULTS

Table 1. Slant of reported environmental news

Direction	Newspapers		
	Nigerian Tribune	The Punch	Total
Positive	3 (8.3)	6 (16.7)	9 (12.5)
Negative	12 (33.3)	13 (36.1)	25 (34.7)
Neutral	21 (58.4)	17 (47.2)	38 (52.8)
Total	36(100.0)	36(100.0)	72(100)

*figures in parenthesis are percentages

Results on Table 1 show the slant of reported environmental stories in the newspapers investigated. The majority (52.8%) of the headlines were presented from the neutral perspective. This probably may be due to the journalists' consciousness of not wanting to create an alarm. Negative headlines were predominantly used for the disaster frame. Positive headlines were however the least used in reporting environmental issues while, it ought to be the most dominant as, it will help give assurance to the lay public about efforts aimed at ameliorating environmental problems. Positive headlines were probably least used because they won't attract attention and might

Several headlines (34.7%) portrayed environmental stories in a negative fashion. Only 12.5% of the reported stories had positive headlines. Thirty-six news stories were reviewed for the two newspapers respectively. The Tribune reported more news article with neutral (58.4%) headlines, while the Punch presented more news article with negative (36.1%) and positive (16.7%) headlines.

Table 2. Frequency of dominant frames within newspaper coverage of environmental news

Direction	Newspapers		
	Nigerian Tribune	The Punch	Total
Disaster	12(33.3)	12(33.3)	24(33.3)
Awareness/campaign	12(33.4)	6(16.7)	18(27.7)
Assistance	7(19.4)	6(16.7)	13(18.0)
Warning/blame	4(11.2)	6(16.7)	10(13.9)
Responsibility	1(2.8)	(16.7)	7(9.7)
Total	36(100.0)	36(100.0)	72(100)

*figures in parenthesis are percentages

Five major frames (Table 2) which emerged from the analysis of the reported environmental news stories in the newspapers investigated are disaster, awareness/campaign, assistance, responsibility, and warning/blame.

'Disaster' was the commonly used frame in the environmental stories reviewed. This frame presented negative impacts of the environment on plants, livestock and humans, using key phrases such as 'rainstorm wreaks havoc', 'landslide swallowed our farmland', 'flood sacks

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communities', 'flood kills 58', 'and wind storm wreak havoc'. This frame was constantly depicted impact of environmental hazards, which portrayed a negative slant all through the news stories. For instance, a Punch news story reported an environmental story and used words like 'death', 'kills', 'horror' 'swallow' and 'residents live in fear as floods ravage 57 communities.' This frame is likely to cause fear among the reading audience as most of the key phrases in this frame are constantly linked with negative impact of the environment on plants, livestock, and humans. The ways these frames presented can cause fear among the public, particularly farmers who practice rain fed – agriculture. If journalists continue to cover environmental news that is problematic or associated with disaster, it is expected that the public will continue to lack accurate knowledge and understanding of the environment as it relates to agriculture, related and non agricultural issues.

The awareness and campaign frame focused on acts of environmental abuse, protection and activities to promote friendly environmental activities. It conveyed environmental research findings, negative impact of human activities on the environment and how these activities can be minimized. Headlines like 'Man a crucial factor in climate change reduction', 'Warming can cause extreme rains', 'Toxic waste found in Lagos, Ibadan and Jos', 'Nigeria is vulnerable to climate change, and Green countries: profile of nations environmental cleanness', are associated with public awareness; and 'Residents urged to embrace tree planting', is related to campaign. Entam (1991) explained that news frames help create the public understanding of an event. Thus, these headlines may bring about changes in the attitudes, knowledge of people and lead to adoption of friendly environmental activities.

The assistance frame expressed formal demand for help from individuals and relevant authorities to establish programmes that alleviate environmental problems. 'Erosion menace: monarch seeks government assistance' is an example of headline of a news story reviewed for this frame. Evidently, individuals alone cannot muster the resources to tackle the problem of erosion a major cause of land degradation, particularly among farmers. This finding further highlights the problem of land degradation and decease in agricultural production.

The responsibility frame was characterized by roles of government, institutions and persons charged with environmental issues relating to rescue operations, policy formulation, legislation, funding, general maintenance and protection of the environment. Phrases associated with this frame included 'Federal Government awards N411.5 billion contract to fight erosion', N3 billion budgetary allocations for environmental problem, 'Green countries: profile of nations on environmental cleanness', 'Dreaming of a zero carbon economy', 'Kano's agenda for a clean Sabongari. The huge amount of money allocated to erosion control by government, may be linked to the over 70% of the Nigerian population who are employed in the agricultural sector of the Nigerian, and depend on land for food production.

The warning and blame frame cautioned against unfriendly environmental activities, identified authorities/individuals responsible and consequences. Here, common phrases included 'FERMA warns against dumping of refuse into drainage', 'don warns of imminent desert encroachment', 'Experts, resident blame Oyo State Government for poor waste management', 'Traders cautioned against display of goods on drainage channels', and refuse heaps threaten Ogunpa channelization'. Health risks, economic losses and death are some outcomes of unfriendly environmental practices highlighted in this frame. Typical headlines depicting this include 'bush burning,' 'deforestation, contributing to food crisis,' 'More vehicles expose Lagosians to health problems', The rainstorm that crumbled socio-economic life in Epe', and 'How flood washed away five children in Minna after a downpour'. These news phrases are framed as having devastating consequences on all sectors- agriculture, health and the socio-economic activities of the Nigerian population.

Table 3. Sources cited within reported stories

Direction	Newspapers		
	Nigerian Tribune	The Punch	Total
Victims/eye-witness	22(59.5)	15 (40.5)	37(51.3)
Government officials	6(40.0)	9(60.0)	15(20.8)
NGOs/CDAs/Aid agents	4(50.0)	4(50.0)	8(11.1)
Scientists	2(40.0)	3(60.0)	5(6.9)
Workshop/conference	1(33.3)	2(66.7)	3(4.2)
Total	36(50.0)	36(50.0)	72(100)

Percentage in parentheses

Table 3 shows the sources of reported environmental news. Sources within the reported stories were in 5 categories. Victims and residents included persons who have suffered or witnessed any form of environmental mishap. Victims and eye-witnesses were mostly relied upon for environmental related information particularly environmental mishaps or problems. These

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were also the sources frequently associated with the victim/eye-witness frame. Both The Nigerian Tribune (59.5%) and Punch (40.5%) newspapers coverage of environment stories used victim/eye-witness sources for majority of the sources of related information.

Government officials included government employees and appointees. NGOs/CDAs/Aid agents are non-governmental organization, and community development association government parastatal (National Emergency Management Agency –NEMA), whose interest is in the development of comprised people, community and rescue operations. Scientists consisted of researchers from tertiary institutions and environmentalists. Workshop/Conferences included seminars and training programmes on environmental issues. Government officials (Punch- 60%, and Tribune- 40%), were also a major information source in several environment related stories. This finding deviates from previous report which stated that the lay public trusts expert, scientist and family/friends most for information regarding environmental issues, as opposed to news reports and government officials (Smith *et al*, 1998). Headlines commonly associated with were 'Refuge heaps threaten Ogunpa channelization', and 'Traders cautioned against display of goods on drainage channel'. The use of government officials as information source on environmental issues is probably because of the role government agencies play after the occurrence of an environmental disaster. For example, after flood disasters, governments at various levels usually come in to provide aids for the households and the communities affected. The frequency of the use of government as a source of information could be an attempt by journalists to get facts and establish credibility for their stories.

Both newspapers reported equal amount (50.0%) of environmental stories using NGOs /CDAs/Aid agent as information sources. However, these sources were not as frequently used as victims/eye-witness and government official sources.

The use of scientists and Conferences/workshops as sources of environmental stories were rather low in both newspapers. However, they were used to present communiqués and outcomes of scientists research works, which were usually associated with warning/blame frame using headlines such as 'Don warns of imminent desert encroachment', 'Experts, residents blame Oyo state government for poor waste management', 'Nobel laureate, experts brainstorm on deforestation' and 'Experts deliberate on waste management'.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results that emanated from this study, the following conclusions were made. Many of the frames used to report environmental stories, had more neutral than negative and positive headlines. The Nigerian Tribune reported more stories with neutral headlines than The Punch that reported more negative and positive headlines. The major sources of information on the environmental news are victims and eye-witnesses that experienced environmental mishaps and government officials. These sources were most frequently used to report information environmental stories than NGOs, CDAs, Aids agents, scientist, seminars, conferences, and workshops. Five frames which include disaster, awareness/campaign, assistance, responsibility and warning/blame, framed the environmental stories within the time frame of this study by selected newspapers. Predominant among these frames are disaster which appears to impact more on agricultural activities and awareness/campaign. Information on how the Nigerian print media frame environmental is scanty. Framing has the potential of affecting perceptions of the environmental with respect to agricultural, socio-cultural, and economic issues and how they understand them. There is a need to constantly examine the frames the print media coverage of environmental issues to uncover what changes there are in the frames used in reporting environmental issues and the types of environmental stories reported.

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