The Role of Media in Shaping Public Perception of Climate Change

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ABSTRACT

Climate change is one of the most pressing issues of our time and the media can play a vital role in shaping public perception and creating awareness to the people. This paper therefore looks at the Role of Media in Shaping Public Perception of Climate Change. This study anchored on framing theory while desk research method was adopted to obtain relevant data from journals etc. The study employed and makes use of secondary data from previously conducted research. The study observes to a very high extent that social media influences public discourse and attitudes towards climate change and can encourage people to take more action on climate change. The findings indicate that new media platforms, such as social media, online news sites, and blogs, are vital in shaping Nigerians' views on climate change and significantly influence Nigerians' perceptions of climate change. The study recommends enhancing public education and awareness of climate change through new media platforms.

Keywords: New media, Public perception, Climate change, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Climate change's environmental and social impacts are significant enough to warrant global attention (Pan et al., 2022). In recent years, the media has played an increasingly important role in raising public awareness of climate change. (Segerberg, 2017) noted that the media has the power to inform, educate, and sway public opinion. This study examines how media coverage of climate change influences public opinion. Climate change" refers to the gradual alteration of Earth's weather patterns by human activities like burning fossil fuels and cutting down trees. As a result, atmospheric quantities of greenhouse gases increase (Shivanna, 2022). Climate change is responsible for rising sea levels, extreme weather patterns, and the extinction of various flora and fauna (Shivanna, 2022). Food and water security, disease prevalence, and population displacement are significant factors that can impact individuals' health and well-being. The media plays a significant role in shaping public perception of climate change. Media coverage can shape public perceptions and concerns regarding climate change. (Matos et al., 2022) suggest that media coverage can influence public policy and efforts to mitigate the impacts of climate change. Understanding how the media influences public opinion on climate change is crucial for developing effective communication strategies to increase public awareness and promote action (Matos et al., 2022).

This study examines new media's influence on Nigerians' perceptions of climate change. The study analysed written materials about climate change, including articles, editorials, and advertising. The advent

of new media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook has significantly altered how people obtain and disseminate information on complex and polarising issues such as climate change (Tuitjer & Dirksmeier, 2021). These platforms offer diverse and innovative ways to acquire and share information, which could be a useful means of increasing awareness, understanding, and engagement with climate change. This study is significant as it will shed light on optimal strategies for utilizing new media to increase awareness and prompt action towards climate change. This study aims at identifying the variables influencing media coverage and message effectiveness to develop communication strategies that enhance public understanding and engagement. Examining how the media shapes people thinking about climate change is one of the main goals of this research. In light of the above, the following objectives will be evaluated. Examining how different forms of modern media influence how people think about climate change. The purpose is to evaluate the effect of social media efforts by environmental groups, governments, and other stakeholders on the public's understanding of climate change through various forms of modern media. The goal is to analyse how various media (photos, videos, infographics, and text) affect people's views on climate change on various websites.

RELATED LITERATURE

Scholars have looked into how the media affects the way people perceive climate change. In a study carried out by (Pearce et al., 2019) on the investigation of the impact of new media on climate change attitudes, the study looks at how individuals talk about climate change on social media. They also discuss social media's impact on future visions of a changing environment. According to the study, social media influences public discourse and attitudes towards climate change. The study examines social media platforms and their content to understand better how social media influences public discourse on climate change. However, it ignores other online sources for information about climate change, such as news websites and blogs. (Segerberg, 2017), examines online and social media initiatives for bringing attention and taking action on climate change. The study examines how businesses use websites, blogs, and social media to distribute information about climate change. According to the study, online and social media campaigns can encourage people to take action against climate change. Their success depends on the platform, audience, and message. The study discovers that social media and online initiatives can broaden audiences and boost interest in climate change. This study provides insight into online and social media campaign success and failure, which could help design future climate change campaigns. However, it does not look at individual climate change information sharing; it only looks at organization-led online and social media campaigns. Social media use and the effectiveness of combating climate change as examined in Germany, France, Italy, Poland, and Spain (Tuitjer and Dirksmeier, 2021). The use of social media is favourably correlated with perceptions of the effectiveness of climate change, particularly in Germany and France. (Tuitjer and Dirksmeier, 2021) noted that social media may make it easier for young people to engage with climate change. In Malawi, the influence of social media on African youth's opinions on climate change was carried out and the study conducted 24 interviews with young Malawians using theme analysis. The study found that social media influenced Malawian youth's opinions on climate change. It offered information about and awareness of climate change. Social media enabled youth to collaborate, share ideas, and talk about climate change. The report also mentioned the negative aspects of social media, such as false information, lack of access to technology, and the digital divide. Social media can be a fantastic tool for African adolescents to learn about and act on climate change, but more needs to be done to guarantee equal access to technology and weed out false information. Although the study only considers European nations and leaves out Nigeria, it demonstrates a positive correlation between social media use and perceived efficacy in addressing climate change.

In Kano, Nigeria, (Balarabe and Hamza, 2020) investigated how climate change was covered and how people felt about it. According to the survey, Kano's media coverage of climate change emphasized problems rather than solutions. The survey revealed that although most people were unaware of climate

change, they were aware of its negative effects on their lives. The study found out that better media coverage of climate change in Kano could encourage more people to learn and take action. In order to uncover communication gaps about climate change in the nation, the study evaluates media coverage and public perception of climate change in Kano, Nigeria. It however, restricted to a certain area and could not be indicative of Nigeria as a whole. Ghanaian graduate students' knowledge of climate change policies and media coverage was examined (Adjin-Tettey, 2019). According to the survey, Ghanaian graduate students are ignorant about climate change legislation. The survey also discovered a lack of coverage and inadequate analysis of climate change in Ghanaian media. The study suggests strengthening graduate student climate change education and Ghanaian media coverage. Although the study was limited to a particular group and may not be generalizable to other populations, it offers insights into Ghanaian graduate students' awareness of climate change policies and the calibre of climate change reporting in Ghanaian media, which could inform efforts to improve climate change education and communication in the nation. The impact of broadcast media on Warri Nigerians' perceptions of climate change was examined (Akpoghiran, 2013). Questionnaire was administered to 400 respondents. The study found out that media greatly impacted the respondents' beliefs about global climate change. This study only looked at Nigerians, so it might not apply to other populations. (Wang et al., 2018) investigate how climate change engagement is impacted by climatic imagery in digital media. The study examines how media sources use climate imagery, how viewers respond, and how it could influence people's opinions and actions. They also look at the challenges and possibilities of communicating with climate imagery. The study highlights the value of using visual communication to educate the public about climate change and the need to be aware of the biases and limitations of various climate changes. (Wang et al., 2018) noted that by employing various images and considering their audience's cultural, social, and political context, communicators can enhance climate communication and boost public participation. However, this study's generalizability was limited because it does not consider the variety of audiences and circumstances in which climate communication takes place. (O'Neill and Smith, 2014) examine how visual imagery influences how people perceive and comprehend climate change. The study underlines how emotionally engaging visuals can evoke feelings and aid in the public's comprehension of climate change issues. The study also highlights the need for more research on the impact of visual communication on public perceptions of climate change and how to use visual communication to influence public attitudes and conduct. The study focuses on emotional involvement in climate communication and constraints of visual representation.

(Chapman, Corner, Webster, and Markowitz, 2016) examined how people in the US, UK, and Australia perceive the climate. The study discovered that people's perceptions of the climate might greatly impact their beliefs and behaviour. They also found that people prefer climate graphics that show how humans or the environment are affected by climate change. The study underlines the importance of selecting climate images for public advocacy and communication. The survey does not consider how existing knowledge and beliefs impact on how the general public perceives climate change. (O'Neill, 2020) examined the depictions of climate change in print media from 2006 to 2016. Images related to climate change were analyzed from the New York Times and five UK publications. The study shows how complex and diversified climate change imagery has become. Images depicting the physical consequences of climate change and potential solutions have increased. The study also highlights the short-term focus and lack of representation of significant repercussions and solutions in print media's depictions of climate change. The study shows that print media's portrayal of climate change has changed and may impact people's awareness and participation. The study only looked at print media. Thus, it might not have considered climate imagery in other media. (Nerlich, Koteyko, and Brown, 2010) examined the language and theories of climate change communication. It was noted that, language affects public opinion and policy about climate change.

(Schäfer and Painter, 2021) examine the dissemination of climate change news globally. Information from the Media Cloud was utilized to assess news from 18 countries and territories. Media coverage of climate change is growing, but there are big regional differences in volume and tone. The research calls for

increased media scrutiny of climate change opinions and highlights the significance of local news channels in covering the issue. The study gave an insight into how climate journalism develops and the challenges journalists face while covering this complicated subject.

(Williams et al., 2015) found that opinions on climate change tend to be more polarised inside networks of like-minded individuals, with fewer individuals expressing less polarised views. (Williams et al., 2015) analyzed the volume and tone of online conversations about climate change in response to the IPCC's reports. Alternatively, they have expressed scepticism regarding climate change in online forums (Anderson, 2017). On the other hand, little research has been done on how bottom-up efforts are sparked by or supported by social media and how successfully they alter policy creation and implementation.

(Happer and Philo, 2016) investigated how news media coverage of climate change and sustainable energy affects audience attitudes and actions. It presents findings from several studies conducted between 2011 and 2014 that develop audience reception analyses through cutting-edge approaches that concentrate on how new information is negotiated in response to pre-existing beliefs, perceptions, and behavioural patterns, both short- and long-term. It is investigated how various audience segments react to new information. This approach investigates socio-political and personal issues while locating catalysts for informational transformation. Media accounts might have an impact on behaviour in some situations. (Pan et al., 2023) demonstrated how ideological convictions influence Chinese climate change opinions for the first time. (Pasquaré and Oppizzi, 2012) in their studies examined press reports on climate change and geohazards in Italy and polled the populace. More media coverage of climate change and geohazards increases public awareness and concern. The study also discovered that media coverage frequently focuses on thrilling and dramatic events, which may overemphasize some risks while ignoring bigger-picture problems. The study underlines the significance of fair and honest media coverage in shaping the public's perception of on hazards and climate change.

(Carmichael and Brulle, 2017) looked at elite cues, media coverage, and climate change concern in the US. The researchers utilized integrated path analysis to examine how these variables changed public perception of climate change over time. Political party affiliation and scientific consensus were the most accurate elite predictors for predicting public climate change concerns. The study found that media coverage enhanced elite cues and changed general sentiment. Finally, the effects of media coverage on public concern did not persist over time, indicating that media coverage might be more effective when political climate change is being discussed. The analysis highlights the interplay between media coverage, elite cues, and US climate change opinions.

(Akpan, Anorue, and Ukonu, 2012) looked at the impact of Nigerian media on climate change awareness. Three Nigerian cities each had 400 randomly selected respondents and the responses were polled and statistically examined. The study concluded that television, in particular, affected climate change awareness in Nigerian mainstream media. The study also revealed needed great respondents had a limited understanding of climate change and its consequences. According to the report, Nigerian media should inform the populace about climate change and its repercussions. According to (Akpan, et al.,, 2012) noted that Nigerian newspapers' coverage of climate change in 2009–2010 was analysed and six national newspapers' 1,505 stories were subjected to content analysis. During the study, only 0.1% of media articles in Nigeria focused on climate change. The survey also showed that coverage of climate change was frequently limited to isolated, quick items without in-depth analysis. The study finds that Nigeria needs more information about climate change and media coverage. (Mavrodieva et al., 2019) examined Social Media as a Soft Power Tool in Climate Change Awareness and Engagement. The study found out that Internet search patterns associated with those events and discovers that social media can alter popular views and affect political judgement.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The framing hypothesis posits that the media substantially impacts individuals' perceptions and understanding of specific circumstances (Yousa et al., 2022). The media significantly influences the public's perception and understanding of climate change. The media's reporting frameworks on climate change can impact public perception of the issue's severity and urgency. Certain media sources may utilize a "disaster frame" approach in their climate change coverage, highlighting the phenomenon's catastrophic outcomes, including but not limited to natural disasters and widespread extinctions (Nisbet & Huge, 2006). This may create a perception among the public that climate change is a pressing issue that demands prompt action. Certain media sources may adopt a "balance frame" approach in their coverage of climate change, presenting both perspectives as equally legitimate and enabling the audience to form their viewpoint (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004). This may convey an impression of instability or uncertainty. Media portrayal of climate change can influence public understanding and perception. Media outlets must carefully consider the frames they use when reporting climate change to communicate the issue's severity to the public effectively.

METHODOLOGY

This researcher made used of desk research method in obtaining the necessary data for this study. As a result, the study employed the use of secondary data drawn from previously conducted research and published works. The research relied on this source of data to arrive at the conclusions made because this is the core of the library research method which according to Arijeniwa et al., (2022) prioritized the accumulation of in-depth knowledge over the accumulation of a large amount of information that is only surface-level. The findings drawn were the result of an exhaustive search for relevant information from journals publication and other online resources.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS FROM THE EXPLORATION

The emergence of new media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook has changed the way people receive and disseminate information about different issues as noted by (Tuitjer & Dirksmeier, 2021). These platforms also offer diverse and advanced ways to capture and share information that can help increase awareness, understanding, and engagement with climate change. New media no doubt has significantly influence on how Nigerians perceive climate change. Information sources about climate change increasingly rely on new media platforms like social media, blogs, and websites as internet access and mobile phone use rise throughout the nation. New media platforms provide opportunities for citizen engagement and participation; they allow people to influence public debate and climate change policies. More individuals may become aware of and understand the issue due to this. Disseminating inaccurate information, misinformation, and fake news via new media platforms can lead to misunderstanding and uncertainty about climate change-related concerns. This is another challenge new media presents for public perception of climate change. This might result in the spread of inaccurate information, eventually harming attempts to fight climate change. Even while digital media has fundamentally changed how individuals receive and distribute information, traditional media outlets like newspapers, radio, and television continue to impact how Nigerians perceive climate change significantly. These channels are recognized as trustworthy information sources and, in some cases, can reach a greater audience than new media platforms. In Nigeria, persuasive communication strategies customized to certain target audiences are crucial for changing public perceptions about climate change.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study sheds light on the impact of new media on Nigerians' perceptions of climate change, highlighting the role of digital media in shaping attitudes and ideas on this critical issue. The findings indicate that new media platforms, such as social media, online news sites, and blogs, significantly influence Nigerians' perceptions of climate change. The study's findings indicate that new media platforms are vital in shaping Nigerians' views on climate change. Harnessing the potential of these platforms is crucial for promoting public education and awareness, as well as individual and organizational climate action.

The study recommends enhancing public education and awareness of climate change through new media platforms. Utilizing social media platforms and collaborating with online news sources and influencers can effectively facilitate public campaigns. It is recommended that the Nigerian government implement legislation and policies that promote environmentally sustainable practices, facilitate the expansion of renewable energy, and prioritize climate change in national development agendas. Mitigating climate change would enhance public confidence and incentivize individuals and entities to engage in climate action.

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