

PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF MEDIA'S INVOLVEMENT IN MITIGATING ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IMPACTS IN SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA

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Article Information	ABSTRACT
Received: 10th June, 2024 Accepted: 22th August, 2024 Published: 7th October, 2024 KEYWORDS: Public Perception, Media, Environmental Degradation Publisher: Empirical Studies and Communication - (A Research Center) Website: www.cescd.com.ng	The survival of organism depends greatly on the environment hence environmental issues and concerns are paramount to both plants and animals. This study on public perception of media involvement in mitigating environmental degradation impacts in South-South Nigeria becomes important to the survival of the region with regard to the environment. The objectives of this study include identifying various environmental degradation strategies, as well as ascertain public perception of media impact in the fight against environmental degradation in the South-South region of Nigeria. The work is anchored on perception theory with a sample size of 400 respondents using Taro Yamane's formula. The work equally uses questionnaire as research instrument and findings among others reveal that media in the region are able to disseminate adequately and appropriately environmental information as well as educate people on issues concerning the environment and also set agenda for the sustainability of the environment. The work concludes that media should adopt and integrate indigenous and below-the-media channels of communication in order that the entire people in the region be updated on information concerning the media.

Introduction

The environment plays an important role as far as the survival of living things, whether humans, plants or animals is concerned. James (2020), notes that the environment is classified into both physical and non-physical components. While the later deals with the psychological tranquility which is basically attached to human emotions, the physical environment comprises the air, the water and the land. Today, the world is seriously challenged by global warming occasioned by the wearing away and/or perforation of the ozone layer which provides the umbrella coverage that absorbs direct heat from the sun to planet earth. The emission of carbon monoxide into the atmosphere has been identified as a

major element that destroys the ozone. This, of course, has contributed immensely in the rising of ocean tides which causes flooding, gully erosions and other associated disasters.

The South-South region of Nigeria is a petroleum hub. It has a large deposit of natural gas and fossil crude oil both onshore and offshore which has placed the country as the 6th largest oil producing nation in the world. Besides, the country is endowed with huge gas deposits. The exploration and exploitation of these resources are done in such a way which impacts on the environment negatively. The flaring of gas, drilling of oil, pipe line vandalism, fire outbreaks, among other activities associated with oil production, have left the region's environment in a terrible state of degradation, which has impacted negatively on both the fauna and flora.

The impact of the degradation has also affected the psychological environment of the people in the geo-political zone. This perhaps explains the incessant youth restiveness, kidnappings and/or abduction of oil workers, and other crimes witnessed in the region. According to Udofia (2023) the mass media wield a strong social force. The media set agenda and influence attitude change in the society. The right application of this force and the corresponding positive responses from government and the major players in the oil and gas industry in the South-South region of Nigeria can engender positive attitudinal change towards mitigating and restoring the environment for the benefit of mankind.

Media environmental advocacy can create a pathway for a cleaner and greener environment that will support healthy living, peace, and sustainable socio-economic development in the South-South region of Nigeria in particular and the country in general. This, therefore, justifies the need for this study. This study seeks to explore the perception of the public on media's involvement in mitigating environmental degradation impacts in South-South Nigeria. It therefore premise on perception theory which portrays and justifies how the public perceive mass media in terms of content, influence and outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

The South-South region of Nigeria is blessed with natural resources such as oil, gas, fauna and flora, as well as human resources. However, the majority of residents in this region, especially those residing in the rural communities remains very poor and insecure socially, economically, and politically, while the environment is unstable, as well as highly degraded due to unwholesome practices that are going on, which are inimical and deleterious to the environment.

More worrisome is the fact that upon the warning flags raised by environmental experts through various media channels and platforms, the graph of practices that cause environment degradation in the South-South region of Nigeria remains perfectly elastic. Background checks reveal that not much study have been done on the impacts of media's involvement in influencing the impacts of environmental degradations in the South-South region of Nigeria. Hence, the concern of this study pinches on the public perception on media's involvement and influence in the mitigation of the degradation impacts in the South-South region of Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study:

The study has the following as its objectives to:

- i. identify various media strategies deployed in mitigating environmental degradations impacts in the South-South region of Nigeria;

- ii. ascertain public perception of media impacts in the fight against environmental degradation in the South-South Nigeria.
- iii. identify the media tools compatible in mitigating environmental degradation in the region;
- iv. identify media gaps in the mitigating environmental degradation in South-South Nigeria.

Research Questions

- i. What are the various media strategies deployed in mitigating environmental degradations impacts in the South-South region of Nigeria?
- ii. How is the public perception of media impacts in the fight against environmental degradation in the South-South Nigeria?
- iii. What are the media tools compatible in mitigating environmental degradation in the region?
- iv. Are they identified media gaps in the mitigating environmental degradation in South-South Nigeria?

Literature Review

Environment

The survival of living things (whether humans, animals or plants), and the performance and/or execution of any activity are done within the environment (James, 2019). This assertion conveys the importance of the environment for the survival of mankind. The term environment is derived from the French word "*Environia*" which means to surround. In unveiling it further, it has to do with both the abiotic (physical or non-living) and biotic (living) environment. Accordingly, many scholars have come up with possible definitions of the environment. James (ibid) notes that "the environment is the sum total of all the living and non-living elements and their effects that influence human life." Consequently, while all living or biotic elements of the environment are animals, plants and humans, non-living or abiotic elements of the environment include water, land, sunlight, rocks and air.

Josh (2016) asserts that the word "environment" simply means surroundings in which organisms live. The environment refers to the materials and forces that surround the living organism. Maler (1998) cited in James (2011) defines the environment as the condition, circumstance and influence surrounding and affecting the development of an organism or a group of organisms. This, of course, alludes to the fact that organisms cannot exist in the absence of environment. Ayantayo (2004) sees the environment as a collection of natural and artificial arrangements in which humanity is completely dependent on for survival and subsistence through food, water and shelter. Therefore man depends solely on the environment for the provisions of materials for his survival. Olatunyi (2002) as quoted by Nwebueze & Chinyere (2007) posit s that environment is an all-embracing concept involving all the factors that comprise the planet earth and its surroundings. Accordingly to him, "man's environment includes the land into which he is born, lives and dies, including the air he breathes. Therefore man is both a product and a shaper of his environment". Putting all the concepts together, it is clear that man and environment are the different sides of the same coin. While the environment provides the space or surrounding for man to live and also provides the necessities for his survival, man in turn, recreates and reshapes the environment for the perpetuation of his survival.

Media

Media are the platforms or means of communication. Sometimes the term "media" is associated with the press. Consequently, one cannot divorce the press with communication.

Hence, the mass media are seen as a conglomeration of various media of mass communication. According to Enahoro (2002), no society survives without communication and/or mass media. Enahoro, citing UNESCO (1981) puts it thus: Communication maintains and animates life. It is also the motor and expression of social activity and civilisation; it leads people and peoples from instinct to inspiration, through variegated processes and systems of enquiry; command and control. It creates a common pool of ideas, strengthens the feeling of togetherness through exchange of messages and translates thought into action, inflecting every emotion and need from the humblest task of human survival to supreme manifestation of creativity or destruction. Communication integrates knowledge, organisation and power and runs as a thread linking the earliest memory of man to his noblest aspirations through constant striving for a better life. However, unless some basic structural changes are introduced, the potential benefits of technological and communication development will hardly be put at the disposal of the majority of mankind.

The media have been credited with so much power such that it appears perhaps without the media, the society is doomed (Udofia, 2022). McLuhan (1964) as cited in Enahoro (2002) put it that: McLuhan's arguments of media of communication are vast social metaphors that not only transmit information but determine what is knowledge that not only orient us to be world, but tells us what kind of world exist, that not only excite and delight our sense, but by altering the ratio of sensory equipment which we use to actually exchange our character. All men for instance stand symbiotically related to all media. The media in fact extend the sensory capacities to man. Furthermore, the media by extending man's perceptual sensibilities influence his picture of reality (p.15). The media, basically are divided into indigenous, traditional (print and electronic) and social media. Hence, the functions of the media include information, education, entertainment and transmission of values. Other functions of media include enlightenment and surveillance of the environment.

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), having have a clear understanding of the functions of the media assigns it with the role of holding government to account. in Section 22, which provides "the press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of Government to the people".

Environmental Degradation

Environmental degradation is the continuous devaluing or harming of the environment naturally or through human activities. James (2022) highlights various ways through which the environment is degraded. These include; desert encroachment, earthquake, landslide, flood, gully etc. Also, molten lavas from the earthquake can degrade the environment. More so, unfavourable weather conditions can cause drought which can also adversely impact on the environment.

Ayantayo (2004) on the other hand, opines that human activities such as mining, exploration and drilling of oil, felling of trees (deforestation), indiscriminate disposal of refuse, open defecation, unhealthy agricultural practices such as over grazing, bush burning – are all potential means of environmental degradation. Degradation of the environment affects the air, land and waters. It also has far-reaching negative impacts on human health and survival (Akpan, 2014).

Methodology

The study will be carried out in South-South region of Nigeria. The study area provides the dendrites and deltas through which rivers from the upper regions of Nigeria are emptied in the Atlantic Ocean. Hence, the region has a large span of forests, mangroves, swamps, water and land. The study area is clustered into three clusters based on common

history and peculiarities. From each cluster, an area is adopted for study thus: Akwa Ibom/Cross River (Ibeno), Rivers/Bayelsa (Bori) and Edo/Delta (Warri West).

IBENO is a local government in Akwa Ibom State. It has a relative population density of 95,500 compared to its landmass. It is location along the Atlantic coastline and sandwiched between Oron and Eket in the east and west respectively. It hosts the flaring site of Exxon Mobile and other multinational companies. The land, surface and underground water are polluted with oil spillages. The air is polluted with hydrocarbon and other toxic elements. Flooding, gully erosion and death of terrestrial and aquatic lives have been reported. Mangroves and green vegetation have gone extinct. This has affected farming and fishing which are the major occupations of the people of the area.

BORI is a local government in Rivers East. It is a major community of the Ogoni land. Like the Ibeno, it is surrounded by water. It has a large deposit of fossil crude. It hosts avalanche of multinational companies. It has a thick population of about 173,000. There are cases of oil spillages, flooding, gully erosion, pollution of the surface and underground water and air pollution which is the reason why the federal government wants to embark on the cleanup of the environment in Ogoni land.

WARRI WEST is located in Delta state Nigeria. It is densely populated with about 159,700 people. Like other communities in the South South Nigeria, the air is polluted as a result of gas flaring and associated activities. There are cases of surface and underground water pollution reported. The area has a considerable span of forest and has experienced continuous deforestation by timber dealers.

The sample size of the study is derived from the Taro Yamane formula thus:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

where n = sample size sought

N = Population (428,200)

1= Constant

e = level of confidence (0.05)

$$\begin{aligned} n &= \frac{428,200}{1+428,200 (0.05)^2} \\ &= \frac{428,200}{428,201 \times 0.0025} \\ &= \frac{428,200}{1,070.50} \\ &= 400 \end{aligned}$$

Cluster	Study Site	Population	% of sample size	Sample size
Akwa Ibom/ Cross River	Ibeno	95,500	23	92
Rivers/Bayelsa	Bori	173,000	40	160
Edo/ Delta	Warri West	159,700	37	148
Total		428,200	100	400

Source: Field survey, 2023

The instrument adopted for data collection would be the questionnaire, using purposive sampling technique. The questionnaire shall be administered on key stakeholders in the region such as farmers, fishers, environmental experts, social groups, traditional institutions among others

Two research assistants shall be deployed in each of the clusters to assist in administering and retrieving the questionnaire, in synergy with the researchers. Consequently, data collated shall be processed and presented on tables and bar charts for analysis. Options with the highest frequency and bars with highest responses shall be considered to be the opinion of majority of the respondents. This shall be followed by in-depth analysis.

Data Presentation

Out of 400 copies of questionnaire issued, 384 were found appropriate for the study while 26 suffered fatality. Therefore the study used 384 as sample.

Table 1**Educational Levels of Respondents**

Options	Respondents	%
Primary	86	22.4
Secondary	120	31.4
Tertiary	178	46.4
Total	384	. 100

Source: Field survey, 2024

The table above shows that 86 (22.4%) of respondents were educated to the primary school level. 120 (31.4%) respondents had their secondary level of education while 178 (46.4%) respondent had their education at the tertiary level. This clearly showed that a greater number of locals are basically literates and were able to understand and articulate environmental issues.

Table 2

On various media strategies deployed in mitigating environmental impact on SS of Nigeria

Option	Respondents	%
Town hall meeting	56	14.6
Print medium	80	20.8
Radio/TV	188	49
Indigenous language	60	15.6
Total	384	100

Field survey 2024

on various media strategies used in mitigating environmental impacts in South-South Nigeria, 56(14.6%) respondents identified town hall meeting with the media entities. 80 (20.8%) respondents averred that print media were mostly used. 188 (49%) said it was rather Radio and television that were mostly deployed by the media to educate locals on environmental issues. 60 (15.6%) said the use of an indigenous language was what media was deployed but more investigation on this point showed that respondents did not get better understanding in this regard. At a glance, it is clear that media had deployed various tools in communicating environmental issues in the region and deployment of news was found very convenient.

Table 3

on public perception of media impacts in mitigating environmental degradation impacts in South-South Nigeria.

Option	Respondents	%
Undecided	15	4
Not quite good	52	13.5
Good	89	23
Very Good	156	40.6
Total	384	100

Field survey 2024

on the public perception of media impacts in mitigating environmental degradation in the South-South Nigeria, 15 (4%) respondents were undecided, probably they could not figure out the essence of media involvement and impacts on environmental issues in the region. 52 (13.5%) respondents said the perception was not quite good. Further, findings revealed that the public see media as not doing enough to hold government to account for environmental safety. 89(23%) respondents said the public perception were good while 156 (40.6%) respondents said the public perception were very good. Further findings revealed that the locals appreciated the roles media played in the mitigation of environmental degradation

particularly in educating and informing the public of such dangers posed by degradation menace.

Table 4

On the various media tools deployed to mitigate environmental degradation impacts in South-South

Option	Respondents	%
Public relations	68	17.7
Advertorial	79	20.6
News	92	24
Documentations	78	20.3
Total	384	100

Field survey 2024

On the media tools deployed to mitigate environmental degradation impacts in South-South Nigeria, 68 (17.7%) respondents spotted public relations tools, 79(20.6%) respondents identified advertorials particularly print such as bill boards, newspaper and literatures as well as broadcast such as radio and television. Few also identified the use of social media platforms. 92 (24%) said news on environmental degradation top the charts. 78 (20.3%) said documentaries on environmental education was key while 67 (17.4%) said it was media tour.

From the results obtained, news is the highest frequency but further investigation revealed that most news items were done with English language leaving the locals who do not understand environmental jargons in the dark.

Table 5

On identification of gaps in mitigating environmental degradation impacts in South-South Nigeria

Option	Respondents	%
Lack of deploying indigenous language	205	53.4
Lack of deploying local media	95	24.7
Lack of maintain media tempo	54	14
Lack of involving indigenous in content production	30	7.8
Total	384	100

Source: field survey 2024

On the identification of gaps in mitigating environmental degradation impacts in South South Nigeria, 205 respondents representing 53.4% alluded the lack of deploying indigenous language in communicating environmental issues with the locals. 95 (24.7%) respondents identified the lack of deploying local media such as town crier, colours and signs to achieve environmental education, information and enlightenment. 54 (14%) respondents pointed the non sustainability of media tempo on environmental issues. Lastly, 30(7.8%) respondents were cleared on the lack of involvement of locals in media content development. A cursory glance at the table shows that media have more grounds to cover and more media innovations to deploy to bring about environment management intelligence.

Summary

The work basically is on the public perception of media's involvement in the mitigating of environmental impacts in the south-South Nigeria. The objectives were to explore the use of media and the perception of the media in mitigating environmental degradation in South-South region of Nigeria. Various literatures were reviewed; population for study covered the entire region. 400 sample sizes were selected but 384 respondents were used. Respondents with highest frequency formed the majority opinion. The overall outlook of perception of media involvement in the mitigation impacts was fairly good.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the work, concludes that media can do more to improve public perception in media involvement in the mitigation of environmental degradation impacts in South-South Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

- i. media should go beyond conventional means of communicating using English but should be creative enough to deploy local language for effective communication
- ii. more public relations models such as below-the-line media tools should be deployed to communicate environmental challenges.

- iii. The use of pseudo media channels could go a long way in forming a critical media mass to deal with environmental degradation impacts in the region
- iv. Media should sustain the tempo in order to hold government to prevent environmental degradation account for environmental degradation and maintain environmental health.

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