

3. ASSESSMENT OF THE *HOPE'S* REPORTS ON CLIMATE CHANGE IN ONDO STATE (JANUARY 2022 AND DECEMBER 2024)

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Abstract

Climate change is a pressing global issue that continues to attract attention across various fields of study, including the media. This analysis aims to evaluate the media coverage of climate change, particularly in Ondo State. The study examined the content of The Hope Newspaper, the only state-based newspaper, using content analysis to assess climate change reporting in Ondo State. News articles, features, and editorials were examined to comprehensively understand the coverage and discourse on climate change. Findings revealed that the state-based newspaper's coverage of climate change in Ondo State was very low, even though the outlet tried to raise public awareness. The importance of comprehensive and accurate reporting to effectively convey the impacts of climate change on vulnerable sectors, such as agriculture, was missing. The study therefore recommended that the outlet play a crucial role in highlighting the challenges smallholder farmers may encounter and in spreading vital information on adaptation measures.

Keywords: Climate change, Media, Local Impact, Call for Action

Introduction

Climate change has become a substantial global issue, affecting nations, organizations, and individuals on various levels. The severity of this environmental issue has resulted in extensive national, regional, and international discussions over the years (Ogwezi *et al.*, 2022). According to Sayne (2011), depleted resources, such as land and water, may become scarce due to neglect of climate challenges. This emphasizes the pressing need to tackle the effects of climate change to prevent further resource depletion (Sayne, 2011).

Thus, Ifeanyi-obi *et al.* (2012) define climate change as any variation in climate, whether due to human activities or natural fluctuations. Coastal and marine resources, as well as their current or potential connection to climate, have received significant attention at both the national and international levels (Trégarot *et al.*, 2024). The coastal zone's vulnerability to climate change has consistently dominated headlines, seminar discussions, and conference themes. This underscores the need for immediate measures to address this crucial issue. News headlines frequently highlight concerns such as rising sea levels, destructive storms, powerful El Niño events, declining marine fish populations, and extensive coral reef mortality associated with rising sea surface temperatures.

Numerous coastal towns worldwide are currently considered susceptible to persistent temperature fluctuations, and it is widely expected that global climate change will affect them (Broom, 2021). Climate models indicate that changes in societal weather patterns will lead to rising sea levels. Many coastal communities expect that this change will have severe consequences (USGCRP, 2014).

Climate change significantly impacts agriculture, making it one of the sectors most affected. This poses

substantial challenges for farmers, especially in areas such as Ondo State (Ige *et al.*, 2021). Because it relies on rain-fed agriculture and limited socioeconomic advancement, Nigeria is highly susceptible to the adverse impacts of climate change. Smallholder farmers in Ondo State face a primary obstacle to adapting to climatic challenges, which impacts agricultural productivity due to insufficient meteorological information (Ige *et al.*, 2021). This underscores the crucial need for the media to disseminate information about climate change, especially in areas that heavily rely on agriculture, such as Ondo State.

Notably, smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa will face immense hardship as a consequence of climate change, which is about to have devastating effects on the agricultural sector (Ige *et al.*, 2021). Consequently, food prices are expected to soar. New market opportunities that mainly benefit the rural poor are essential for agriculture to realize its potential to foster a more pro-poor growth process (Culas & Hanjra, 2011). Reasons for this include the fact that climate change affects two essential inputs for agricultural production—precipitation and rainfall—and has knock-on effects on other factors like the spread of crop pests and livestock diseases, the availability of water for irrigation, the intensity of soil erosion, and unfavourable weather (United Nations, 2024).

By gaining a thorough understanding of the challenges posed by climate change and learning to adapt to its effects, farmers can successfully achieve their objectives in food production, income generation, and livelihood sustainability. This includes effectively dealing with climate variability, extreme weather events such as droughts and floods, and unpredictable market dynamics (Goodess *et al.*, 2012). Consequently, producers might mitigate the risk of harm by devising strategic responses to these changes.

As a result, it is not unexpected that stakeholders, policymakers, and the public are highly interested in climate variability and the possible consequences of future climate change. The interest in this matter stems from the possibility that climate change will impose additional stress on coastal and marine resources. The escalating effects of climate change in Nigeria and other developing nations are expected to intensify, surpassing the capacity of local and traditional knowledge and technologies. This leaves many people with insufficient information and limited means to address these challenges (NEST, 2011).

People recognize the mass media as a key influencer in shaping public understanding and perceptions of climate change issues (Balarabe & Hamza, 2020). Scholarly research has demonstrated that individuals acquire diverse knowledge and perspectives on science through their consumption of news content (Strömbäck *et al.*, 2020; Schulz *et al.*, 2022). In nations such as Nigeria, the media serves as a means of disseminating diverse information through various channels. It aims to reach audiences far and wide and offers perspectives and updates on the global climate change conversation. Alzubi (2023) asserts that the media serves as a crucial conduit of information and viewpoints for numerous readers and viewers across platforms such as newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and the Internet. In the same vein, studies have shown that television and daily newspapers in Nigeria are the primary sources for the public's understanding of scientific concepts (Guanah *et al.*, 2024; Agboola *et al.*, 2016).

From the foregoing, this paper analyses how the Hope newspaper in Ondo State reported on climate change between January 2022 and December 2024. This time frame is important, as there was extensive discussion of climate change nationally and subnationally during this period, as evidenced by increased flooding, coastal erosion, deforestation, and disruptions to local livelihoods related to climate change in Nigeria (Akatah, 2025; Etim, 2024; Stromsta, 2024). Meanwhile, Ondo State is selected as a study site due to its distinct environmental, ecological, and socioeconomic traits, which position it among the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Ondo State is located in Nigeria's coastal belt and has experienced frequent flooding, coastal erosion, large-scale

deforestation, environmental devastation associated with oil exploration and logging, and adverse environmental effects from unsustainable land-use practices. Meanwhile, there have been few empirical studies on the media's representation of Climate Change in the state. This assessment allows for a detailed examination of trends, the development of a framework for strategy development, and the emphasis on themes of climate-related reporting in relation to Ondo State.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the global urgency of climate change, Nigeria has yet to take a strong stance in shaping the ongoing debate. The Nigerian media, in particular, appear to be relatively silent and indifferent towards climate change issues (Nwabueze, 2006; Nwabueze & Nnaemeka, 2015). As Tagbo (2010) notes, despite the clear dangers posed by climate change, the Nigerian media seem to lag behind, leaving the responsibility for raising awareness to individual efforts. This apathy leaves the country vulnerable to severe impacts from the inevitable effects of climate change.

There is a significant lack of Nigeria-based studies on the sources of information available to the Nigerian audience regarding climate change and the public's understanding of the issue. Effective public action on climate change hinges on a clear understanding of the problem and the role individuals and authorities must play in addressing it. Responsible citizenship, as Khatibi *et al.* (2021) point out, requires a specific knowledge of causes; until, for example, the public knows what causes climate change, it cannot be expected to take voluntary action to lessen its impacts.

Research (Umejei, 2009; Batta *et al.*, 2013; Adeyanju & Mohammed, 2017) warns that Nigeria faces the worst consequences of global climate change if its mass media continues to ignore the fundamental issues and challenges posed by climate change. They emphasize that media coverage should not only highlight the impacts of climate change but also address crucial adaptation measures.

Most existing studies have focused on national cultures of interpretation, establishing specific frameworks of meaning within nationally defined societies (Brand & Brunnengraber, 2012). This study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse by examining the local coverage of climate change in Ondo State, southwest Nigeria. By doing so, it aims to provide a localised understanding of how climate change is perceived and presented in the media, and of its potential to shape public perceptions and attitudes towards this critical issue. Therefore, the following research questions guide this paper:

To what extent does *The Hope Newspaper* cover climate change stories in its environmental reports in Ondo State?

What are the predominant themes and narratives in *The Hope Newspaper's* reports about climate change in Ondo State?

To what extent does *The Hope Newspaper* report the local challenges of climate change in Ondo State more or less than the national and global impacts?

Conceptual Review

Climate Change in Nigeria

To educate the public about important scientific issues, such as climate change, the media plays a crucial role. Guanah *et al.* (2024) assert that the mass media disseminates substantial scientific information to the public. The effects of climate change in Africa are becoming increasingly apparent, but there is still much confusion about how to slow the process. Agboola *et al.* (2016) highlight the media's critical role in sharing valuable climate information, facilitating public discourse, and improving understanding of weather, climate, and climate change. For farmers, who frequently experience the direct consequences of shifting climate patterns, having timely knowledge of adaptation measures is crucial.

Although there is an increasing recognition of climate change, Nigerians have a limited grasp of its

consequences. Multiple studies, including one reported in The Guardian (2009), highlight the knowledge gap regarding the detrimental impacts of climate change on individuals' lives in Nigeria. Consequently, there is an increasing need for the media to expand their coverage of climate change matters to enhance awareness and promote preventive measures. Agboola *et al.* (2016) emphasize the importance of effective and precise communication about climate change to develop adaptation strategies in Africa.

The media exerts a substantial influence on public perception by determining the importance of various problems. Cohen (1963), as referenced in Ausat (2023), argues that although the press may not directly influence people's thoughts, it significantly shapes the topics people focus on. This idea highlights the media's role in shaping public agendas and perceptions by emphasizing significant events. Presently, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, as well as blogs, play a crucial role in this procedure. Zarella (2010) stresses that a considerable proportion of people actively participate in these platforms, indicating that the media's depiction of social movements and changes has a big impact on their effectiveness.

Nigeria widely recognizes climate change as a major environmental challenge. Sayne (2011) predicts significant changes in temperature, rainfall, storms, and sea levels in Nigeria's climate over the 21st century. These shifts have the potential to worsen the already-strained resources, such as land and water. In northeast Nigeria, a prevailing pattern of low rainfall and high temperatures prevails. Conversely, in the southwest, severe flooding harms agriculture.

Unfortunately, people often downplay the seriousness of climate change's impact on Nigeria. Many Nigerians know very little, if anything, about climate change, according to research by Olaniyi *et al.* (2013). People often talk about environmental problems in their communities and notice shifts in the weather and environment, but they rarely connect these changes to the broader global phenomenon of climate change. In light of this information vacuum, there is an immediate need to increase climate change education and media coverage to foster a more knowledgeable and engaged populace.

When it comes to climate change awareness, the media is indispensable. Clear and persistent communication can spark public discourse and the creation of efficient coping mechanisms, despite the visible consequences of climate change in places like Ondo State. Improving media coverage of the issue could potentially better prepare Nigerian communities to confront and overcome the challenges posed by climate change.

Theoretical Framework

Social Responsibility Theory

The Social Responsibility Theory of the Media, as proposed by Siebert *et al.* (1956), emphasizes the media's obligation to serve the public interest. With its significant influence and near-monopolistic position, this theory posits that the media must fairly represent all viewpoints and provide the public with sufficient information to make informed decisions. Essentially, social responsibility is an ethical framework wherein individuals and institutions are accountable for actions that benefit society. This necessitates a balance among economic growth, people's welfare, and environmental sustainability. Achieving this equilibrium fulfils social responsibility (Uzuegbunam, 2013).

According to this theory, ethical validation is a prerequisite for decision-making and action. If an action or decision negatively impacts society or the environment, it is deemed socially irresponsible. Despite the normative ideal of social fairness, society's inherent moral values help distinguish between right and wrong. Every individual and institution, including the media, bears a responsibility to act in ways that benefit society rather than serve purely individual interests (Ganti, 2024). This balance involves providing truthful, comprehensive, and accurate accounts of events, ensuring that the public is well-

informed without external influences that compromise ethical standards (Obagwu & Idris, 2019). In Nigeria, political and economic pressures often lead to media practices that prioritize self-serving interests over social responsibility

Framing Theory

Framing theory is an essential concept for understanding how the media can influence public opinion by presenting and defining issues in specific ways. Originating in sociology in the mid-1960s, framing has since developed into a multidisciplinary paradigm that enables a comprehensive examination of the effects of media on individuals and audiences (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015).

One powerful way the media influences public perception is by framing events and issues. According to De Vreese (2005), the process of framing begins with the communication source introducing and clarifying the subject at hand, simplifying the message to mobilize support and demobilize antagonists, and increasing their visibility (Amis, 2022). The structural characteristics of news frames are influenced by the process of frame-building. D'Angelo and Shaw (2018) state that the framing of topics is greatly affected by internal elements within journalism, such as the strategies and objectives of news organisations and journalists.

It is possible to view a problem from different angles and see it as affecting more than one set of values or factors, as noted by Dalhatu and Shehu (2020). Therefore, framing is defined as the process by which individuals either develop a specific conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about it. In support of this approach, Tuckman (1978), as cited in Ardèvol-Abreu (2015), proposes a communication frame as anything that gives meaning to an unfolding sequence of occurrences, thus organizing everyday reality. Framing also encourages certain understandings and assessments of political topics, as Shulman and Sweitzer (2018) highlight.

In conclusion, Social Responsibility Theory and Framing Theory provide a comprehensive understanding of how the mass media contribute to the creation and reception of messages about climate change by utilizing normative expectations of the media and by establishing the scheme through which societal views of climate change are framed.

Methodology

This study employs a content analysis method as it is the most suitable approach to analyse *The Hope Newspaper* reports on climate change in Ondo State and also to examine the occurrence, interpretations, and relationships of particular words, themes, or concepts in qualitative data, such as text (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2015). Drisko and Maschi (2016) state that content analysis is the scientific study of communication content. The method is appropriate because it provides a means to examine and interpret the patterns, themes, and messages in news articles (media content). The major advantage of this method is the ability to identify trends or changes over time.

The sampling frame for the study included all environmental publications from *The Hope Newspaper* published between January 2022 and December 2024. In total, through a systematic search of *The Hope Newspaper's* archives, 252 environmental publications were identified. The environmental publications comprised news stories, editorials, and feature articles that addressed broadly defined environmental and ecological problems.

From this larger pool, 35 environmental publications were selected based on explicit mention of geographic locations (e.g., "the great ocean") or specific government policy discussions or events in Ondo State. Following this, purposive sampling was employed to identify environmental publications in Ondo State with an explicit focus on climate change and its related impacts, including the impacts of weather/climate events such as flooding and heat waves, mitigation, the degradation of

environmental resources, and the state's adaptation strategies. This sampling led to 14 final environmental articles.

Purposive sampling was selected due to the study's focus on in-depth understanding of climate change environmental publications, rather than just general environmental publications; thus, ensuring that only environmental text resources that contain significant detail directly relevant to the study objectives are included, enhancing contextual relevance and therefore analysis of climate change environmental publications in Ondo State.

Data Sources

The study investigated the contents of the only state-based newspaper: *The Hope*. *The Hope Newspaper* is the only newspaper established and operated in Ondo State. It is a community newspaper established to serve the information needs of Ondo State residents. To ensure comprehensive coverage of media coverage of climate change in Ondo State, this newspaper was chosen for its wider circulation (EduBirdie, 2022; Aithor, 2024).

The content analysis involved several stages: data collection, coding, and analysis. Within the designated timeframe, articles from the selected newspaper were accumulated using a coding sheet. These data were analyzed for specific terms, themes, and concepts related to climate change. To ensure continued consistency and improve analytical clarity, all reports in the Climate Change category were reviewed and classified by theme. All Climate Change-related documents were divided into mutually exclusive thematic frames based on the documents' dominant emphasis. Each article was considered to belong exclusively to a single primary theme based on the document's predominant theme and the author's interpretative lens.

A Call for Action: This thematic frame includes Climate Change-related reports that predominantly address calls, advocates, or proposals for government, institutional, or community action to reduce the impact of Climate Change or to mitigate or adapt to its impacts.

Global Warming: This thematic frame includes Climate Change-related reports that predominantly focus on the scientific explanations, causes, and dynamics of rising global and/or regional temperatures, as well as the broader implications of that warming.

Health and Environmental Impact of Climate Change: This thematic frame includes Climate Change-related reports that predominantly deal with the impact of Climate Change on human health and the environment, including disease trends, environmental degradation, and ecological disruption.

Impact on Agriculture and Food Production: This thematic frame includes Climate Change-related reports that predominantly address how Climate Change is impacting agricultural practices, crop yields, food security, and farmer livelihoods.

Research Question 1: To what extent does *The Hope Newspaper* cover climate change stories in its environmental reports in Ondo State?

Table 1: Frequency of *The Hope Newspaper's* Reportage of Climate Change in Ondo State

Reports	Frequency	%
Climate Change	14	28.57
Other Environmental Issues	35	71.43

Total	49	100%
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According to Table 1, there were 49 environmental reports in the Hope Newspaper. Of the 14 reports (28.57%), only 4 addressed climate change, which is lower than for the other environmental issues presented in the newspaper. The newspaper recognises the importance of climate change, but it does not prioritise it in its environmental reporting. In contrast, the newspaper emphasises the immediate and regional concerns of local populations that have physical impacts on the community. This disparity may undermine the media's effectiveness in advancing actions to mitigate and adapt to climate change in Ondo State.

Research Question 2: What are the predominant themes and narratives in *The Hope Newspaper's* reports about climate change in Ondo State?

Table 2: Ondo State Climate Change Predominant Theme in The Hope Newspaper

Themes	No of Reports	%
Call for action	8	57.14
Global warming	1	7.14
Health and environmental impact of climate change	3	21.43
Effects on agriculture and food production	2	14.29
Total	14	100%

Table 2 shows that The Hope newspaper's prevailing view on climate change is advocacy, accounting for 57.14% of the articles analyzed. The dominant message of these reports indicates that The Hope does not simply report on the events of climate change, but instead emphasizes urgency, responsibility, and the need to respond collectively or through institutions. Thus, through its emphasis on calls to action, The Hope frames climate change as an environmental issue that requires immediate action by government agencies, community leaders, and the public, but also as a policy and developmental issue.

Research Question 3: To what extent does *The Hope Newspaper* report the local challenges of climate change in Ondo State more or less than the national and global impacts?

Table 3: Frequency of The Hope Newspaper Coverage of Local Challenges of Climate Change in Ondo State

Reports	Frequency	%
Local	9	64.29
National	4	28.57
Global	1	7.14
Total	14	100%

Table 3 shows the frequency of The Hope Newspaper's coverage of local, national, and global climate change challenges in Ondo State. Out of the 14 climate change reports analysed, 9 (64.29%) focused on local issues. This indicates that The Hope Newspaper places greater emphasis on local climate change challenges, such as flooding, drought, and agricultural impacts affecting communities within Ondo State. The pattern reveals that the newspaper's coverage is largely localised, reflecting the community newspaper's effort to connect climate change discourse to the immediate environment and realities of its audience.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined The Hope Newspaper's reporting on climate change in Ondo State. The findings reveal significant insights into how climate change is represented, thematically framed, and localised in the newspaper's coverage, shedding light on the media's role in shaping public perception and environmental awareness in the state.

Predominant Themes, Narratives, and Media Perception of Climate Change

The thematic analysis of The Hope Newspaper identified four major narratives: call for action, health and environmental impact, effects on agriculture and food production, and global warming. The "call for action" emerged as the most dominant theme, accounting for 57.14% of the reports. This demonstrates the newspaper's emphasis on urging the public and relevant authorities to take proactive steps against climate change. This focus on advocacy aligns with Zarella's (2010) view that media platforms can be powerful tools for mobilising public engagement and promoting environmental responsibility.

The health and environmental impact theme (21.43%) also featured prominently, underscoring The Hope Newspaper's recognition of the adverse effects of climate change on human well-being and ecosystems. This aligns with Boykoff and Rajan's (2007) observation that media outlets often emphasise the severe repercussions of climate change to raise public concern and stimulate action. Furthermore, reports on agriculture and food production (14.29%) highlight the newspaper's awareness of the relationship between climate change and food security, particularly in agrarian states like Ondo. However, the limited coverage of global warming (7.14%) suggests that The Hope Newspaper pays little attention to the scientific dimensions of climate change, focusing instead on its immediate and practical implications.

These findings indicate that while The Hope Newspaper plays an active role in advocating for climate action and raising public awareness, it offers limited scientific or technical explanations of the phenomenon. This aligns with Goffman's (1974) framing theory, which holds that the media shape public perception by emphasising certain aspects of reality. In this case, the newspaper's frame prioritises community action and awareness over scientific discourse.

Local vs. Global Impact

The analysis revealed a strong emphasis on local impacts of climate change. Out of 14 reports, 9 (64.29%) focused on local issues such as flooding, drought, and agricultural challenges in Ondo State. National challenges accounted for 28.57%, while global impacts received only 7.14% coverage. This pattern shows that The Hope Newspaper heavily localises climate change reporting, making it more relatable to its audience.

This finding aligns with Tuckman's (1978) framing theory, which suggests that media framing helps audiences interpret complex issues by highlighting specific contexts. By focusing on local stories, The Hope Newspaper effectively contextualises climate change within the immediate realities of Ondo communities. This localised emphasis mirrors the findings of Umejei (2009) and Adeyanju and Mohammed (2017), who observed that Nigerian media tend to highlight local environmental challenges to enhance community engagement and understanding.

However, limited attention to national and global perspectives may lead to a narrow understanding of climate change as primarily a local phenomenon. This supports de Vreese's (2005) argument that the way media frame issues can shape public perception and restrict the scope of understanding. Thus, while the newspaper's localised approach is effective in fostering community awareness, it may fall short of connecting local experiences to the broader global climate discourse and policy frameworks.

Role of The Hope Newspaper in Climate Communication

The findings demonstrate that The Hope Newspaper plays a meaningful role in shaping public awareness and discourse on climate change in Ondo State. Its dominant focus on calls for action and local impacts aligns with the principles of social responsibility theory, which emphasise the media's duty to serve the public interest (Ganti, 2024, citing Siebert *et al.*). Prioritising issues that directly affect the community helps the newspaper bridge the gap between complex global climate change discussions and their relevance to local realities.

Nevertheless, the study shows that The Hope Newspaper's climate change coverage remains limited in frequency (28.57% of all environmental reports). This limited reportage, although rich in advocacy tone, suggests that the newspaper could enhance its agenda-setting role by providing more consistent, in-depth, and scientifically grounded coverage. As Ardèvol-Abreu (2015) notes, sustained and well-framed media reporting is essential for mobilising informed public action on climate issues.

The emphasis on local impacts, health consequences, and calls for action underscores The Hope Newspaper's contribution to public discourse on climate change. This role is supported by Goffman's (1974) framing theory, which suggests that media outlets can influence public perception by emphasising particular frames or narratives. However, its limited coverage frequency and limited global perspective highlight the need for broader, multi-level reporting that connects local experiences to national and international climate efforts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, The Hope Newspaper's coverage of climate change in Ondo State demonstrates the media's vital role in shaping public understanding, awareness, and responses to environmental challenges. The findings reveal that while the newspaper reports on climate change, its coverage remains relatively limited compared to other environmental issues. Nonetheless, The Hope has contributed meaningfully by framing climate change stories around advocacy and calls for action, particularly within the local context. While The Hope Newspaper plays an important role in promoting awareness and mobilisation on climate issues, there is still a need for more comprehensive, frequent, and balanced reporting to ensure that the public is both informed and empowered to take action.

Recommendation

The Hope Newspaper and other local media organisations in Ondo State and across Nigeria should increase the frequency and depth of climate change reportage. Consistent and investigative reporting on local impacts, such as agricultural vulnerability, deforestation, and flooding. This will help communities better understand and respond to climate risks. Local journalists should also receive training in climate literacy to ensure accurate, contextually relevant reporting.

Secondly, *The Hope* Newspaper and other media outlets should go beyond highlighting the problems of climate change to report on success stories, innovations, and policy interventions that promote adaptation and mitigation. Integrating solution journalism into climate reporting can inspire practical action among citizens and policymakers while strengthening hope and agency in the face of environmental challenges.

International media should collaborate with local media to amplify underreported climate stories from the Global South, while local media should contextualise global climate policies and agreements to reflect their community relevance. Such partnerships can bridge the gap between global climate debates and local realities.

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