## 3. AN ASSESSMENT OF *THE HOPE*'S REPORTS ON CLIMATE CHANGE IN ONDO STATE (JANUARY 2022 AND DECEMBER 2024) Christiana Ade-Johnson

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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 evaluates 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. The study examined news articles, features, and editorials to gain a comprehensive understanding of climate change coverage and discourse. Findings revealed that the state-based newspaper's coverage of climate change in Ondo State was very limited, despite the outlet's efforts to raise public awareness. The study found that comprehensive and accurate reporting to effectively convey the impacts of climate change on vulnerable sectors, such as agriculture, was lacking. The study therefore recommended that the outlet play a crucial role in highlighting the challenges smallholder farmers may encounter and spreading vital information on adaptation measures.

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

### Introduction
Climate change has become a major global issue, affecting nations, organisations, and individuals at multiple 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), 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, and their current or potential connections to climate, have received significant attention at both 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 widespread coral reef mortality linked to rising sea surface temperatures.
Numerous coastal towns worldwide are currently considered susceptible to persistent temperature fluctuations, and global climate change is widely expected to 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 most affected sectors. 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: insufficient meteorological information, which impacts agricultural productivity (Ige et al*.,* 2021). This underscores the crucial need for the media to disseminate climate change information, especially in areas that heavily rely on agriculture, such as Ondo State.

Notably, smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa will face immense hardship as climate change 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 primarily benefit the rural poor are essential for agriculture to realise its potential to foster more pro-poor growth (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 adapting 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. This interest 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 shown that individuals acquire diverse knowledge and perspectives on science through news consumption (Strömbäck *et al.,* 2020; Schulz *et al.*, 2022). In nations such as Nigeria, the media disseminates 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. Similarly, studies have shown that television and daily newspapers in Nigeria are the primary sources of the public's understanding of scientific concepts (Agboola et al*.*, 2016; Guanah et al., 2024).

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 because climate change was extensively discussed nationally and subnationally during this period, as evidenced by increased flooding, coastal erosion, deforestation, and disruptions to local livelihoods in Nigeria (Akatah, 2025; Etim, 2024; Stromsta, 2024). Meanwhile, Ondo State was selected as a study site because its distinct

environmental, ecological, and socioeconomic traits make 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, few empirical studies have examined the media's representation of Climate Change in the state. This assessment allows for a detailed examination of trends, the development of a strategic framework, and an 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 relatively silent and indifferent to 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 the severe impacts of climate change.

Nigeria lacks significant studies on the sources of information available to the Nigerian audience about 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 (Adeyanju & Mohammed, 2017; Batta et al., 2013; Umejei, 2009) warns that Nigeria faces the worst consequences of global climate change if its mass media continue to ignore the fundamental issues and challenges it poses. 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 contributes to the ongoing discourse by examining 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 research:

- 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 disseminate substantial scientific information to the public. The effects of climate change in Africa are becoming increasingly apparent, but much confusion remains 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 recognition of climate change is increasing, 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, the media increasingly need to expand their coverage of climate change to raise 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 process. 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 recognises 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 could worsen 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. According to research by Olaniyi et al. (2013), many Nigerians know very little, if anything, about climate change. 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. Given this information gap, 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, persistent communication can spark public discourse and help develop effective 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), emphasises 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 fulfills 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 demobilise antagonists, and increasing their visibility (Amis, 2022). The structural characteristics of news frames are shaped by the frame-building process. 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.

As Dalhatu and Shehu (2020) note, a problem can be viewed from different angles and seen as affecting more than one set of values or factors. Therefore, framing is the process by which individuals develop a specific conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about it. Supporting 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 employed 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. Through a systematic search of *The Hope*

*Newspaper*'s archives, 252 environmental publications were identified. These publications included news stories, editorials, and feature articles addressing 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. Next, purposive sampling was used to identify environmental publications in Ondo State that explicitly focus on climate change and its related impacts, including 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 climate change in Ondo State, this newspaper was chosen for its wide circulation (Aithor, 2024; EduBirdie, 2022).

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 analysed 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 assigned 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 primarily address the impacts 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 affects agricultural practices, crop yields, food security, and farmers' 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% |

According to Table 1, The Hope Newspaper published 49 environmental reports. 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 immediate, regional concerns that directly affect local communities. 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 Themes 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 analysed. The dominant message of these reports indicates that *The Hope* does not simply report on the events of climate change, but instead emphasises 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 requiring immediate action by government agencies, community leaders, and the public, as well as a policy and development 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" theme emerged as the most dominant, accounting for 57.14% of the reports. This demonstrates the newspaper's emphasis on urging the public and relevant authorities to take proactive measures to address 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 climate change's adverse effects 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 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. Of the 14 reports, 9 (64.29%) focused on local issues in Ondo State, such as flooding, drought, and agricultural challenges. 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 media framing 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.

## Recommendations

*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 climate literacy training 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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