

Newspapers and Environmental Reporting: Audiences Perception on Newspaper Coverage of Global Environmental Issues among Nakuru Residents, Kenya

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the perception of audiences regarding the coverage of global environmental issues in Kenyan Standard and Nation newspapers. With the main objective of examining the views of audience on environmental coverage by the Standard and Nation newspapers, the study employed a qualitative research method, utilizing in-depth interviews with purposive sampling to select a sample (N=30) participants. Data collection was through in-depth interviews, and analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. The study findings revealed that global environmental issues are underreported in the Kenyan leading print media while political issues remains in the lead. The study also established that the fewer environmental issues covered were highly politicized thus the public remain disadvantaged. The study concludes that due to limited coverage, low prioritization and high politicization of environmental and climate change issues, the publics' understanding of environmental issues remain narrow. The study recommends further research to establish the correlation between reading about environmental issues in the Kenyan leading newspapers and the actual actions taken by audiences toward environmental conservation. This study will be vital in building up literature and contributing to the existing body of knowledge on newspapers and environmental coverage. The study draws from the gatekeeping media theory.

Keywords: *Environmental coverage, print media, audience, gatekeeping theory, Kenya*

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Introduction

Environmental journalism is a branch of journalism that has attracted much attention in this era of global warming and climate change (Mungai, 2021, Otieno et al., 2023). With the world experiencing the negative impact of global warming and climate change, the need for the mass media to put more emphasis on environmental coverage and reporting is eminent and one that the world cannot afford to ignore (Langat, 2017). As emphasized by Chen and Liu (2021) and Otinga (2014), proper environmental coverage and reporting can see to it that the audience are well informed and sufficiently educated on some of the ways of mitigating the punitive waves of climate change. Many

nations around the world are caught up with the distressing impact of climate change, which have disrupted livelihood and caused unprecedented suffering to millions of people around the world. In order to mitigate this problem, it is important that people around the world be well informed and adequately educated on the causes, effects, and ways of mitigating climate change but more importantly the solutions in solving these problems. In order to sufficiently do that, then the mass media particularly the traditional media, which still command massive credibility and believability, must step in and conclusively report on the causes, effect and ways of mitigating the effects of global warming and climate change (Ochieng, 2015). The media must carry out their normative roles of informing and educating the masses on some of these issues (Elia, 2019; Hase et al., 2021; Otieno & Ndonge, 2022; Schäfer & Painter, 2021).

As noted by Kung, Zheng, Lee and Wu (2022), Abidoye and Odusola (2015) and Field (2014), environmental issues such as global warming and climate change remain some of the greatest threats to human existence in the 21st century. It is a threat that requires collective effort in addressing and to be accorded the urgency that it deserves (Reidmiller, Avery, Easterling, Kunkel, Lewis, Maycock, & Stewart, 2018). In the global south, for instance, many nations have and continue to experience some of the devastating effect of climate change. Numerous governments are putting measures in place to assist in mitigating the dangers caused by detrimental environmental tragedies. In the recent years, drought has become a major environmental issue that has negatively impacted many countries in the African continent and because of that, huge population are reduced to zero and all the gains achieve over the years rolled back. With unpredictable weather patterns and constant drought, farmers are unable to plan well and this has resulted to either crop fail or poor planning season hence limited agricultural production. Today, many nations in the sub Saharan Africa are steering at a serious food crisis that needs to be addressed urgently.

Some of the causes of global warming and climate change are human-caused activities such as overconsumptions, intensive mining and farming, deforestation, pollutions, fossil fuels, and waste disposal among others. However, natural phenomenon such as the greenhouse effect has greatly contributed to the current state of climate (Hamilton, 2016). On the contrary, some global foremost climate scientists are of the view that human activities on the planet have tremendously increased the greenhouse gases in the atmosphere thereby speeding up the rate of global warming (Tranter, 2021). This team of scientists' term human activities as the major cause of global warming that emerged profoundly in the mid-20th century. Some of this information are not readily available and therefore, the media has the mandate of intensifying environmental reporting in order to keep audiences well informed and educated on some of these environmental and climate change issues (Weathers & Kendall, 2016). This paper seeks to analyze the perception of newspaper audience on the coverage of climate change stories in the two leading newspapers in Kenya.

Print media reportage of environmental news in Kenya has been a topic of concern in recent years. The media plays a significant role in informing the public about environmental issues, shaping public opinion, and influencing policy-making (Otieno, Mareri & Khaemba, 2023). However, the quality of reportage on environmental issues in Kenya's print media has been questioned due to its limited coverage, inadequate analysis, and sensationalism. As emphasized by Ndonge and Telewa (2013), Irungu (2018), Mamboleo (2023), Ochieng and Ireri (2022), Ochieng (2022), Ireri and Ochieng (2020) and Nyanoti (2022), the nation and standard newspapers remaining some of the leading print outlets in Kenya. Despite Kenya's growing environmental challenges such

as deforestation, pollution, and climate change, the print media has not given adequate attention to these issues. Environmental news is often relegated to the back pages, and it receives little coverage compared to political or economic news. Moreover, journalists rarely contextualize the environmental news or provide in-depth analysis that would help the public understand the causes, impacts, and solutions of environmental problems. Another concern with print media reportage of environmental news in Kenya is sensationalism. Some journalists tend to exaggerate or sensationalize environmental news to attract readership or create panic. This approach can be counterproductive as it may create confusion, spread misinformation, or instigate fear without providing constructive solutions. However, there have been some positive developments in print media reportage of environmental news in Kenya. Some media outlets have created specialized environmental desks, and they are providing more in-depth coverage of environmental issues. Additionally, some journalists are using data journalism techniques and scientific sources to provide more accurate and evidence-based reporting (Otieno & Ndonge, 2020). It is hoped that the media will continue to improve its coverage of environmental issues to educate, inform and inspire action towards a sustainable future (Otinga, 2014). Thus, this paper will be vital in analyzing the views of audience regarding print media coverage of global environmental issues by focusing on the standard and nation newspapers.

Statement of the Problem

The comprehension of global environmental challenges by the populace is significantly reliant upon the dissemination of information from diverse sources, including newspapers. The provision of adequate environmental coverage in print media is therefore a crucial factor in improving public awareness. Failure of the Kenyan print media to publish environmental issues may result in limited information accessibility, which can affect public knowledge of crucial global environmental matters. While studies have examined different aspects of this phenomenon, research on the relationship between print media coverage of environmental issues and its influence on public understanding of environmental issues is limited. Hence, this current study aims to investigate the newspaper coverage of environmental news and analyze the viewpoints of audiences regarding the coverage of global environmental issues in Kenya

Literature Review on Print Media Coverage of Global Environmental Issues

The role of newspaper in creating public awareness on global environmental issues is of vital precedent if the fight to create sustainable environment is to be achieved. There have been discourses on the suitability of journalists in articulating environmental information to the masses. Studies have shown that some journalists and editors are inept when it comes to environmental matters. Of importance is the fact that many journalists reporting on environmental issues cannot place the issue in context or dissociate their biases or preconceived ideas on the news segment. This lack of contextual and complete body coverage of issues could explain the paucity of public support for crucial issues despite their overt public importance. This aspect was observable in Murukutia et al.'s (2019) review of media coverage of air pollution and cancer in the US. The authors found gaps in media reporting on the perceived correlation between air pollution and cancer from sporadic and episodic reporting of the issue. Hence, a lack of full-body coverage and adequate issue contextualization warrant the needed public support. This lack of correlation was also observed in

an investigative study conducted by Vossen (2020) aimed to scrutinize the media framing of nuclear energy concerning climate change. The findings of the study demonstrated that nuclear energy was seldom portrayed within the framework of climate change. Furthermore, the study divulged that media coverage of nuclear energy continues to be influenced by antiquated frames, which continue to dominate the coverage following severe accidents.

On the role of media in creating public awareness, a study conducted by Tong (2014) in China to investigate newspaper coverage of environmental risks. The study employed a content analysis technique to scrutinize investigative reports on environmental issues in ten Chinese newspapers. The findings discovered that investigative journalism plays a vital role in arousing public awareness of environmental risks, potentially leading to the creation of a society capable of minimizing such risks. Additionally, factors in the broader social context are instrumental in shaping our comprehension of the critical discourse surrounding environmental issues among the public. On similar grounds, Mangani (2021) undertook a study on the print media portrayal of deforestation in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, utilizing a quantitative content analysis of English-language newspapers over the period from 1995 to 2015. The research shown that the mass media was capable of reflecting public views on significant environmental matters; nevertheless, it was prone to shaping public opinion by selecting and framing newsworthy topics. Additionally, a study was conducted by Upadhyaya, Puthiyakath, Kalai & Goswami (2023) on Awareness, media, and mitigation actions for climate change among the students of higher education in Tripura. The study included a sample size of 654 students. The study findings revealed that the students of higher education in Tripura had a heightened level of awareness about climate change. The primary sources of information on climate change were the Internet, TV, and newspapers. Furthermore, the study discovered that scientists were considered the most reliable sources of information on climate change, followed by mass media. The results also demonstrated that students were willing to adopt climate change mitigation actions even if they incurred additional costs.

The comparative analysis conducted by Rauf, Ali, and Irfan (2021) pertaining to the coverage of environmental issues in Pakistan's print media, utilizing a case study of prominent national newspapers such as the English daily 'Dawn' and the Urdu newspaper 'Aaj'. The study affirmed that both the government and the public acknowledge the significance of environmental concerns when the media assumes the responsibility of setting the agenda. Nonetheless, the study has also demonstrated that the media has not adequately prioritized environmental issues in Pakistan, thus failing to establish a suitable agenda for the same. Similar findings were revealed in a study conducted by Otieno, Mareri, and Khaemba (2023) to investigate the function of newspaper editors in the prioritization of environmental stories. The study employed an in-depth interview approach with a homogenous sample of two environmental editors from the two primary print media outlets in Kenya. The study's outcomes revealed that editors had a crucial role in the prioritization and framing of environmental news stories. Furthermore, the findings indicated that the two major print media houses in Kenya did not prioritize environmental stories based on elements such as placement, spatial and frequency of environmental coverage.

On print media framing of environmental issues, Muya, Mishra, Hicks, and Kapatamoyo (2022) conducted a content analysis study to scrutinize the framing of the climate crisis, utilizing a case study approach of three prominent African newspapers: the Daily Nation of Kenya, the Punch of Nigeria, and the Sunday Times of South Africa. The sample consisted of 342 newspaper articles.

The study revealed that prominent frames used to portray the climate crisis were adaptation solutions, thematic, threat to human lives and livelihood, human cause, and climate justice frames in all three countries under examination. The investigation further found that the utilization of these climate change frames differed amongst the nations. Furthermore, a study carried out in China by Chen and Liu (2021) to investigate the impact of environmental news coverage on air pollution knowledge and risk perception among Beijing residents. The sampling procedure employed a selection of 523 participants from Beijing residents, over the period from February to March in 2017. The outcomes of the investigation established that there is a positive association between environmental-news exposure and both air-pollution knowledge and risk perception. Furthermore, the study showed that environmental news exposure has an indirect effect on risk perception through air-pollution knowledge. Furthermore, the findings established that exposure to Under the Dome is positively associated with risk perception but not with air-pollution knowledge.

The content analysis research that was conducted by Mbamalu (2020) aimed to investigate coverage of renewable energy by Nigerian in Nigeria, with a focus on frames, themes, and actors. Four out of the twenty-four national newspapers of Nigeria were used as a sample size, with 364 editions analyzed. The results of the study revealed that the newspapers covered a wide range of themes, which were perceived as areas of need by researchers. However, the framing of both themes and actors reflected more pessimism than progress. Furthermore, the study found that the type of actors presented in the stories significantly predicted the type of frames used. The government was found to be the most dominant actor, with newspapers framing it as an influencer and policy driver in renewable energy. On the other hand, investors were portrayed as technology-driven players, while consumers received little attention and were perceived as passive actors. Similarly, Freeman (2017) conducted content analysis research to scrutinize the coverage of climate change in South East Asia English-Language Newspapers, with a sample that ranged from 2002-2012. The results of the study indicated that the usage of the term "climate change" was preferred over "global warming". Furthermore, the coverage of climate change in the newspapers augmented significantly starting in 2006. Government officials were the primary sources quoted within the news stories (Claims). The articles contained a higher proportion of "judgments" about the issue as opposed to "solutions" (Frames). Finally, despite most articles abstaining from specifying an actor responsible for climate change, "man" was implicated in a greater number of stories than "nature" (Blame).

After a thorough review of the literature pertaining to print media and environmental concerns, it became evident that extensive research has been conducted across the globe to investigate the role of newspapers in disseminating information about environmental issues, particularly those related to global warming and climate change. Multiple content analyses have been performed to determine how environmental news is framed in print media across various continents. Furthermore, studies have been conducted to examine the sources of environmental news stories and the role of the media in generating public awareness about environmental issues. However, no research has been conducted to examine the perspectives of newspaper audiences in Kenya regarding print media coverage of global environmental issues. As a result, this current study aims to explore the viewpoints of audiences regarding the coverage of global environmental issues by Kenyan print media.

Gatekeeping Role of the Media in Environmental Reporting

Kurt Lewin's gatekeeping media theory theorizes that news items undergo a rigorous filtration and selective process in newsrooms prior to dissemination to the mass audience (Barzilai-Nahon, 2011; Heinderyckx, 2015; Steele, 2018; Vos & Heinderyckx, 2015). The editors in newsrooms serve as gatekeepers, performing surveillance and information monitoring duties, by controlling the flow of information and news to the audience (Bro & Wallberg, 2018). According to Steele (2018) and Vos & Heinderyckx, 2015), editors determine which news items are fit for public consumption and make decisions on behalf of the audience regarding the information to be consumed. This process restricts public understanding of issues that the editors deem unsuitable for the public domain (Al-Rawi, 2019). Mr. Gates, as the editors are commonly referred to, make decisions based on personal preferences, editorial regulations, social influences, and personal experiences that the news and information will have on the mass audience (Li, Farzan, Lin, Zhou, Teng & Yan, 2022). The gatekeeping role is critical in directing society in the right path by eliminating unwanted and sometimes controversial news content that could be harmful to the public (Whitney & Becker, 1982; Bro & Wallberg, 2017). However, sometimes Mr. Gates reject stories based on the policies and regulations of the media outlet. In print media, editors control the gates by either discarding the story altogether or limiting coverage by assigning stories to minor pages, allocating insufficient space, or controlling the frequency of coverage (Schwalbe, et al., 2015; Soroka, 2012). The public has limited options but to accept the information provided by the media (Potnis & Tahamtan, 2021). Thus, this theory is relevant in establishing the complete extent of gatekeeping reality in Kenyan print media regarding the coverage of global environmental issues in Kenya and the viewpoints of audience on the coverage.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research method using in-depth interviews to analyze the viewpoints of audiences regarding the coverage of global environmental issues in Kenyan print media. A case study design was selected for its ability to focus and study particular sample in-depth (Creswell, 2018). The Central Business District (CBD) in Nakuru city, Kenya, was selected as the location of the study due to its significant population density and active readership of newspapers. The target population for this study were individuals who are interested in environmental or climate change issues and access the information via the Standard and/or Nation newspapers, or those directly involved with activities relating to environment but interact with either one of the two papers. A purposive sampling method was employed to select participants who meet the selection criteria based on their exposure to and interest in global environmental information provided by the Kenyan foremost print media. The sample size for this study was 30 participants, which was deemed sufficient to achieve data saturation and ensure depth of data collected (Mason, 2002; Patton, 2002). The data collection instrument for this study was in-depth interviews conducted in March, April and May 2022 when Kenya was experiencing severe drought and high temperatures. As postulated by Oliver (2014), Creswell and Creswell (2018), Prairie Research Associates, Inc. (2001), this method of data collection enables researchers to generate rich, detailed data that can provide a nuanced understanding of the subject matter under investigation.

Upon completion of the interview data collection phase, the researcher diligently engaged in the process of listening to and transcribing all recorded narratives. Additionally, careful examination

and organization of concise notes taken during the interviews were conducted to discern relevant issues. Subsequently, a systematic manual coding procedure was employed, along with data representation techniques, to uncover and elucidate emergent themes within the dataset. In accordance with Clarke and Braun's (2013) conceptualization, themes are construed as coherent and meaningful patterns inherent in the data that pertain to the central research question. The codes generated through this process were subject to continuous review and interpretation. Thematic analysis was used for data analysis and interpretation of various concepts within the data to generate insights into the research question (Silverman, 2006; Stake, 2010; Mugenda & Mugenga, 2003; Stenbacka, 2001). Thematic analysis remains an appropriate approach as it enables the identification of commonalities and differences among participants' responses and allows for a nuanced understanding of the research topic (Jensen, 2005; Daymon & Holloway, 2011; Otieno & Ndonge, 2020; Gibbs, 2007). From the research data, four themes emerged and are discussed with direct quotation from the study participants.

Results

Politicization of Environmental Issues

All participants in this cohort indicated concern about the dominance of political stories in the newspapers. They indicated that political news is extremely dominant in the papers and that one can hardly fail to notice. A significant number of participants were also concerned about politicization of environmental stories that ended up sounding more like political stories and less like environmental stories. Participant SMR6 said:

That Molo eviction, for instance. If you read the story from the papers, it will surprise you. The story sounds more like a political news story than an environmental news story. The story angle is just funny. Hehehe. The media will not present the story regarding its relationship between eviction and how the story is related to saving mother earth. Instead, the standard newspaper concentrates on the political side of the story by pointing out the various stands of political players rather than the actual environmental hazard human settlement is causing the forest.

Another Participant SFR2, recounted:

Looking at newspapers today, you can never fail to get stories on politics. However, it is equally important that the print media publish stories touching other aspects of our daily lives, such as the environment. Many things affect us, such as drought and Covid-19. However, newspapers in this country, I tell you! Ah! Politics year in and year out.

Participants NFR6 and NMR1 recalled and described instances when they were other major things happening in the country, but newspapers did not cover much of those issues but only focused on the political stories of the day. Participant NFR6 Described:

You remember when Kenya was hosting an international environmental event that had something to do with the impact of global warming and climate change, among other environmental issues affecting the world. I tell you, the coverage was not encouraging. There were very insignificant reports that the Nation newspaper published that day. As usual, political news carried the day. Honestly, I was surprised.

Participant NMR1 vividly remembered when deforestation issues were not sufficiently covered despite being the main agenda during that period. He recounted:

Those days when Mau forest eviction took place, and people were removed from the forest so that river Mara could be saved from extinction, I do not know if you remember. I tell you, newspaper reports brought numerous politics into it. The story ceased to be an environmental issue, and it became a political issue where different politicians accuse each other of being responsible for evicting their so-called “people.” It was crazy!

Both Nation and Standard newspaper respondents believed that political stories dominated standard and Nation newspapers. Moreover, participant posited the politicization of global environmental issues covered. Several study participants pointed out that newspapers framed environmental issues in a way that sounded more political than environmental. Multiple participants equally were of similar viewpoints that seemed to suggest that environmental stories continue to occupy an insignificant portion of newspapers in comparison to political stories that were found to be more dominant. The Kenyan newspaper are not keen on creating environmental awareness among their audience instead, politicize environmental issues.

Prioritization of Environmental News

The Nation newspaper readers’ cohort of the study participants showed excessive interest in environmental stories but were extremely concerned that Nation newspapers do not prioritize environmental stories through their publication despite enjoying wider circulation across the county and beyond. Participant NFR2 postulated that:

Our understanding of global warming and climate change affecting all countries worldwide would not have been this devastating if people were well educated and properly informed on some of the ways to protect and care for mother earth. Sadly, that is not the case. I read Nation newspaper, and I know they sell their papers all over this country. You can imagine that if they had special pages about environmental issues, many people would understand these issues much better and take precautions.

NMR6 reecho the same sentiment:

I am an avid reader of Nation newspapers, and I can confirm that newspaper publishers do not seem to prioritize environmental stories at all. As we speak, I know we are in a political season, but at the same time, there are many Kenyans in different parts of the country suffering because of drought; for instance, many have lost their sources of livelihood, and some have died in the process. However, you will never find such a story on the Nation newspaper's front page. The reason why that is the case nobody can tell.

Another participant NMR5 believes that the Kenyan print media do not seem to understand that environmental stories are of great concern in the 21st century. He went on further and said:

Well, I think the NMG does not want to expose environmental issues because maybe they think these issues are not of public interest, or maybe they do not want to expose the country on media coverage and reporting of issues with a negative connotation like people dying of famine or drought wreaking havoc, etc. Another reason could be that the publishers do not find these environmental stories juicy enough to cover.

The Standard newspaper readers’ cohort exhibited great interest in reading newspapers and were of a similar opinion to those of their Nation newspaper readers counterparts who said that the newspaper does not seem to prioritize environmental stories. Few of them pointed out that they

only publish environmental information during the days the world is making and celebrating some of the international environmental days. Participant SMR2 remembered newspaper content well and had this to say:

It is extremely difficult to find environmental stories in the standard newspapers I often read at work. However, they are instances when I see some. For example, I occasionally see environmental stories published when the world is making international environmental conversation days. I cannot say that the NMG has prioritized environmental stories, in my opinion.

Participant SFR7, on the other hand, posited that:

Well, I do not get to read the newspaper daily, but on the days I read the paper, I rarely see environmental stories. I could be wrong. Perhaps they cover them on the few days of the week when I normally get busy and fail to read the papers. However, that is highly unlikely that they only cover environmental stories on some days and leave out other days. If it is news, it is news, I think.

Another SFR6 had this to say:

The standard newspaper that I normally read does not seem to prioritize environmental stories, in my opinion. The reason why that is the case, I can never tell. Maybe you can make a point and ask some of them if you have access to them. I would want to know why.

All the study participants in this cohort seemed to suggest that the two leading print media in Kenya do not prioritize environmental stories in their publications. They attributed the inadequate knowledge of environmental issues to the failure of the media to provide sufficient knowledge to the public. Multiple participants acknowledged that it is only during days the world marks international environmental days that the print media highlights these stories. Many of these participants were equally wondering why newspapers do not seem to cover these stories, as they ought to, considering the devastating impact environmental issues are currently causing.

Positioning of Environmental Stories

Multiple participants in this category seemed to agree that environmental stories occupy particular newspaper pages. Most of the study participants said there are specific pages that rarely contain environmental stories, yet they are key pages that one's eyes can easily see. Participant NMR5 indicated that:

Most environmental news I have come across is often placed inside the newspaper. I can hardly recall seeing any environmental story on the front page of Nation newspaper that interacts with often. They are always hidden in the newspaper, and seeing those stories is difficult because you have to look for them keenly. Otherwise, you cannot see them easily.

Another participant NFR2, who interacts with the Nation newspaper, remembered an instant when she noticed some environmental stories on the front page of the Nation newspaper. She narrated:

I remember seeing an environmental story on Mau forest deforestation on the front page of the standard newspaper some time ago. However, it was not the main story of that day. It was just a statement, which I am sure those not keen enough might not have seen leave alone reading it. So yes! Those stories on the environment are seldom on the front page, where one can easily see them.

Most standard newspaper readers were of a similar opinion that environmental stories are often placed on the inside pages as opposed to stories on politics. However, multiple female respondents

in this cohort indicated that occasionally they see stories on the environment on the inside pages as opposed to their male counterparts, who said they rarely see those stories on the inside pages. Participants SFR6 and SMR2 recounted details of reading an environmental story on the inside page of the standard newspapers. Participant SFR6 summed it up by commenting:

I have read several environmental stories on the inside pages of the standard newspaper. Whenever I get hold of a newspaper at my workplace, I read it through because I generally love reading and have enough time to read it all through.

Participant SMR2, on the other hand, said:

Well, I do not have time to start looking keenly at stories hidden inside the newspaper. If those newspaper publishers want me to read environmental stories, then they will place them on the front pages or write them boldly so that they can catch my attention. If they do not do that, then it becomes sticky for me.

From the dominant pages with environmental stories and interview excerpts of audience views of print media coverage of global environmental issues, both Nation Male Respondent (NMR) and Nation Female Respondent (NFR) believe that environmental stories are seldom on the front page of the newspaper. Notably, all female respondents of both standard and Nation newspapers indicated and gave instances when they read environmental stories compared to their male counterparts, who indicated that they rarely see those stories. This could mean those female respondents were more keen and attentive to details than male respondents.

Inadequate Environmental Coverage

The Nation newspaper readers' cohort indicated that the print media in Kenya has not adequately focused its coverage on environmental issues. They acknowledged that other news stories tend to dominate the Nation newspapers. Participant NFR1 summed it up by commenting:

I do not think so. I mean, occasionally, environmental stories will be published in the Nation newspapers. I wonder why that is the case. Sometimes, I ask myself if stories on mother earth ever matter to these people. Maybe they have reasons for doing what they do; you can never tell!

In addition, participant NMR6 believed that the media had intentionally decided not to cover environmental stories adequately. The participant describes the state of coverage of environmental stories vividly as:

Nothing is more important than our environment, and environmental understanding is equally imperative. I do not know if the Nation has realized their newspapers' lack of environmental stories. Many people read the Nation newspaper I want to believe; even at my workplace, we get the newspaper daily. I wish they could take that advantage and educate the public even more on environmental issues that are very common today.

On the other hand, the standard newspaper readers' cohort of the study participants were of a similar opinion to that of their Nation newspaper readers counterparts that the standard media group has not adequately covered environmental issues the way they should. Participant SFR7 narrated and said:

No! The print media in Kenya is joking. Imagine today; the world is focusing on saving mother earth because of all manner of harm that we have cost her. Nevertheless, the print media has not found it convenient to educate people like us on what it means to save Mother Nature. It is absurd.

“Media in Kenya never think of disseminating a well-balanced coverage. A good chunk of pages in the newspaper I read is full of stories on politics. One politician insults the other and the other one insults back and so on. Yet at the same time, many Kenyans are dying in Northern Kenya out of a drought that is causing havoc there. The media need to come in and educate people on how to mitigate some of those challenges.” Participant SMR1 emotionally suggested.

The observations made by study participants indicate that most newspaper readers feel that the print media have not given adequate coverage to environmental issues through coverage. A majority feel that environmental stories are vital; however, the media do not share the same viewpoint. There was a feeling among study participants that the media should do more to educate the public on environmental issues.

Discussions

The study findings revealed that the print media focused more on political coverage and gave minimal attention to environmental coverage. Every study participant in this cohort had unique views and experiences regarding the topic. The study also established that environmental stories were assigned on minor pages in the newspapers and indication that they are less prioritized in the print media. The study participants also indicated that there is inadequate environmental stories including global warming and climate change stories in the two leading print media in Kenya. Various participants in this study also indicated that political stories dominated most parts of the newspaper. One participant said, “Starting from the front page followed by some subsequent pages always contain political stories.” Another participant said, “I can hardly remember the day the front page of the Nation newspaper had a nonpolitical story. I mean, it is rare. It is always politics.” These observations imply that priority is given to political stories, most of which were on the front page, and according to several participants, they mostly contained political stories.

The study participants pointed out that Kenyan newspaper contain stories that are more political and fewer environmental stories. Numerous responses from the study participants seem to suggest that the newspapers tend to focus on other issues and leave out others. For instance, one participant said, “Newspapers keep writing on politics all the time; every newspaper I have read recently has something to do with politics making it the major topic for public discourse.” Another participant added, “Even the way stories are framed in the newspaper will tell you that journalists who write these stories are interested in politics. An environmental story sounds more political than environmental.”

Multiple participants in this cohort of study participants indicated that environmental stories in the two newspapers had many political players making these stories sound more political and less environmental. That viewpoint is cemented by some comments presented in the continuing sections of this research. For instance, one participant commented, “The drought problem in northern Kenya is often reported in such a way that it suggests that the government has failed to address the problem. This makes many of us think that the government is in the wrong.” additionally, another participant said, “The pollution problem in river Nairobi is often reported in terms of blame. Who is not doing what, instead of writing the story to point out what needs to be done to remedy the pollution in that river.”

The previous studies elaborated under the literature review section of this paper indicate that environmental issues are underreported. Earlier study by Freeman (2017) in South East Asia established that government officials were the primary sources quoted within the news stories touching on the environment and climate change in most English language newspapers in the region. Additionally, a recent study by Mbamalu (2020) in Nigeria found that government was found to be the most dominant actor, with newspapers framing it as an influencer and policy driver in renewable energy. The findings from the two studies concurs with the findings of the current study which established that environmental issues are highly politicized and that presence of political actors were actively felt in these stories.

A recent research in Pakistan by Rauf, Ali, and Irfan (2021) which established that both the government and the public acknowledge the vitality of environmental concerns when the media assumes the responsibility of setting the agenda. Nonetheless, the study has also demonstrated that the media has not adequately prioritized environmental issues in Pakistan, thus failing to establish a suitable agenda for the same. This earlier findings concurs with the current findings in this study which found that the public are indeed interested in environmental issues and that the tragedy is that the media do not seem to pay attention to environmental news coverage.

The study participants' observations, sentiments, and insights, as well as the results of the in-depth interviews conducted with them, demonstrate a high degree of consonance with the gatekeeping media theory. As previously expounded, the gatekeeping theory postulates that mass media entities function as gatekeepers who regulate the dissemination of information from sources to receivers by selecting, filtering, and prioritizing news items based on their news values, agenda, and biases, thereby shaping the public's perception and comprehension of the world. The study's findings indicate that newspaper editors remain instrumental in guarding the media gate and only permitting information that meets their standards. Editors wield substantial control over the frequency, positioning, and framing of coverage. By doing so, they have the power to influence the audience's interpretation of news stories, and consequently, their understanding of the underlying issues.

Summary

After conducting an analysis of audience perspectives on global environmental issues coverage in Kenya, the study has ascertained the pervasive politicization of environmental issues in the Kenyan print media. The newspapers have been largely inundated with political coverage that occupies a substantial portion of their news pages, thus affording limited space for environmental concerns. Furthermore, the investigation has demonstrated that global warming, climate change, and other environmental issues have received inadequate prioritization and suboptimal placement within the two leading Kenyan newspapers. It has emerged that the print media only highlights environmental issues, such as global warming and climate change, on the occasions of international environmental days. Finally, the majority of the audience maintains that the coverage of these topics in the Kenyan print media is insufficient.

Conclusion

After scrutinizing the perspectives of the audience with respect to the portrayal of global environmental matters in the Kenyan standard and national newspapers, the present study

establishes that the politicization of environmental concerns, deficient prioritization, and sporadic dissemination of such issues inflict negative consequences on the comprehension of the audience. Consequently, a considerable proportion of the newspaper readership in Kenya suffers from a limited worldview concerning pertinent topics like global warming, climate change, and other environmental-related information.

Recommendations

The present study aimed to scrutinize the audience perspectives on the reportage of global environmental matters in both Kenyan standard and national newspapers. As per the research objective, it is recommended that journalists and editors abstain from the inclination of politicizing environmental issues by employing political news frames in the environmental coverage and publication. Further, it is suggested that additional research be conducted to ascertain the causal relationship between readership of environmental topics in the foremost Kenyan newspapers and the concrete actions undertaken by the audience towards environmental preservation.

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