DAMPAK SUMBER BERITA TERHADAP PEMBERITAAN PADA PERS DI NIGERIA

NEWS AUTHORSHIP AND NEWS SOURCES: IMPACTS ON ENVIRONMENTAL COVERAGE IN THE NIGERIAN PRESS

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Abstrak

Studi ini mengkaji dampak sumber berita bagi pemberitaan untuk menjelaskan peranan Pers di Nigeria dalam mengkonstruksi berita. Studi ini menemukan bahwa wartawan juga dapat sebagai pembuat kebijakan yang merupakan katalisator informasi, sedangkan warga negara sangat penting dalam menciptakan opini publik yang relevan mengenai isu yang diberitakan meskipun hal tersebut masih dirasa kurang. Studi ini juga mengungkapkan bahwa pelaporan berita investigasi kurang mendalam, karena sebagian besar liputan merupakan kejadian yang dilaporkan sebagai berita langsung dan para jurnalis sangat bergantung pada sumber berita yang resmi daripada sumber berita tambahan. Studi ini memberikan saran bahwa untuk mencapai liputan yang tepat, wartawan harus memilih sumber berita utama dan sumber pelengkap dan harus kembali ke pelaporan proaktif, investigatif dan interpretatif sehingga membuat pemberitaan yang sesuai dengan audiens yang dituju.
Kata Kunci: *Liputan, Sumber Berita, Pemberitaan, Pers di Nigeria*

Abstract

This study examines the impacts of news authorship and news sources on environmental coverage in the Nigerian press to shed light on the roles they play in news construction. The study finds that journalists in conjunction with policy makers are the catalyst for environmental information, whereas citizens who are pivotal in creating relevant public opinion on environmental issues are left behind. The study reveals that investigative reporting lacks in environmental coverage because most coverage are events driven which explains why environmental news is reported as straight news and as such journalists rely heavily on official sources rather than subsidiary sources. The study opines that for proper environmental coverage, journalists must choose sources from both main and subsidiary actors and revert to proactive, investigative and interpretive reporting so as to make environmental stories relatable to the intended audiences.
Keywords: *Environmental Coverage, News Sources, News Authorship, Nigerian Press*

Introduction

Selection of news sources plays a vital role in the news production process. News sources are essential in the construction of news stories given that journalists in most cases are not able to gather information firsthand as witnesses of news events. They have therefore to rely on people who witnessed the events for relevant information to build their stories (Hasan, 2007).

In other cases, the nature of the stories in terms of how complex or how scientific they are will compel the journalists to seek for help in getting explanations of such complex issues. Based on this, environmental journalists capitalize on credible news sources to be able to produce reliable and trustworthy news for the public. The complexity and the scientific nature of environmental issues make it more prone to use of expert information in writing readable, understandable and relatable

environmental stories (Gerhards and Schafer, 2009).

This explains why journalists and news organizations seem to be in an endless symbiotic relationship with sources which enables them to explain facts to their audiences. Erickson et al. (1989) in Hasan (2007: 37) believe that the relationship that exists between sources and the press 'leads to a sharing of the core values in the dominant culture as news orientates towards society's governing political and social structures.'

If the above assertion holds true, it then implies that news sourcing is bureaucratically structured as journalists, as it were, have, in what Fishman (1980: 51) calls a 'map of relevant knowers' for newsworthy topics. Thus the nature of event or issue covered by journalists will determine the relevant sources needed to be contacted for information given that the journalists are guided by bureaucratic knowers compass. But how true does this map of relevant knowers compass apply in environmental news sources? Does the complexity and scientific nature of environmental news imply that subsidiary news actors should not be sought as news sources?

In gathering, selecting and packaging news stories for public consumption, news sources play an immense role as the information they provide makes or mars the news (Hasan, 2007). The impact of news source's information is underscored by its power to shape the news. In most cases emphasis on news production is usually centered on the journalists as the news agenda setter by the mere fact that they select, news. Little or no attention has been paid to the news sources in regard to the prominent role they play in providing journalists with relevant information which informs what the journalists purveys. Thus it could be said that news contents are not in most cases shaped by journalists, but rather by news sources who provide journalists with

information in the first place (Manheim 1998; Soley 1992) This study intends to bring to the fore the power the news source wields in setting agenda for the agenda setter - the journalist.

Given that news sources' selection is guided by a map of relevant knowers, (Erickson et al., 1989) journalists have always identified these knowers as mostly government officials and experts, this study intends to question this status quo given that environmental news sources extends beyond government officials and experts to ordinary citizens who in most cases bear the brunt environmental adversity. Thus this study aims to investigate how environmental news is constructed in relation to use of variety of sources especially those that occupy the lower strata in society who could be said to be the real source of information. This becomes necessary as there is only little research that has been conducted in this area.

Studies on environmental coverage have also not properly addressed the impact of environmental news authorship. Studies have rather focused only on the sources of environmental news as either written by the staff writer or subscribed from wire services or publicity releases from government entities. No attempt has been made to explain how this impacts on coverage. This is the lacuna that this study intends to fill.

Therefore, the main objectives of this paper are to investigate the variety of sources in Nigeria newspaper environmental news reporting and to explore if there was a balance in the inclusion of both main and subsidiary actors in environmental news.

Meanwhile, this study adopted Muckraking models in order to help conceptualize and understand news sources in environmental news construction. The use of these models is underscored by the fact that they provide a roadmap for understanding the role played

by sources, the public, and investigative journalists in reporting news (Hasan, 2007).

Muckraking describes journalism that focuses on adversarial or alternative tradition, with the purpose of advocating for reform and change.Investigative journalists view the muckrakers as early influences and a continuation of watchdog journalism (Lapsansky-Werner, 2011).

The first model is called the catalyst model which provides a linear explanation in which media investigation acts like a catalyst that stimulates changes in public opinion, which invariably leads to reforms in public policy. This policy, as Protess et al.,(1991) argues works well when the media functions as watch dog.

The second model called the dummy model explains that public policy reform may take place without reaction to the issue being investigated. In this case Protess et al., (1991) assert that reforms take place not by a stimulated public, but rather by the media in conjunction withpolicy making entities. Thus it is argued that in this case the media is seen to speak for a public that is passive.

The third model which applies more to the present study is ventriloquist model. This model explains how sources contribute in setting the investigative agenda. In this model the news source is seen as playing a central role in what is reported given that the news process is initiated by the source and not the news reporter. The real catalyst for change becomes the source. What is of concern in this model is that sources that have regular and frequent contact with journalists are the only ones that initiate the process. Common citizens or subsidiary actors do not seem to belong here.This could be the reason why most of the news sources are government officials or experts. These officials and experts become news shapers (Manheim, 1998; Soley, 1992) by dictating what journalists should cover by furnishing them with press releases, press conferences, and often times planting or leaking the story. Tuchman (1972) believes that it is necessary to have contact with all relevant news sources so as to create a balance of reality.
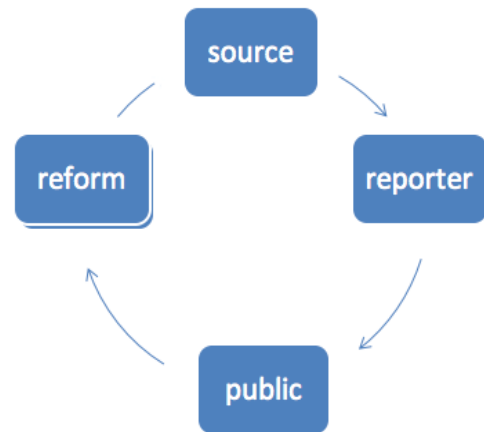

Figure 1. Ventriloquist Model

Literature Review:

It has often been said that most of environmental coverage are driven by crisis or events. Bendix and Liebler (1996). This according to Greenberg et al. (1989) is an approach influenced by traditional news values which fails to explain the underlying issues that caused the crisis. The apparent lack of explanation of what causes environmental degradation implies that information that would help the public to react positively to environmental problems is not mobilized. (Liebler and Bendix, 1996) for environmental stories to be meaningful, journalists must mobilize relevant information from sources. Therefore the selection of and portrayal of news sources, as Liebler and Bendix (1996) assert, is central to writing a good environmental story.

The importance of news sources in environmental news reporting is staggering. Berkowitz and Beach (1993) argue that news sources serve to influence or set reporting agenda as journalists depend on them for story topics and contents. Selecting news sources has become so critical that Liebler and Bendix (1996) believe that the sources selected

determine how the news organizations frame environmental issues. In regard to what influences source selection, Anderson, Petersen, and David (2005: 192) contend that such factors as 'professional and pragmatic demands, existing knowledge of an issue, the existence of contacts in the field, and commercial pressures' play decisive role. Libler and Bendix (1996: 54) categorized factors that influence source selection into two – namely 'journalist judgment and organizational factors.' Journalist's judgment could be influenced by what Fishman (1980) calls 'commonsensical understanding' which build on the fact that every society is bureaucratically structured. Thus journalists select sources based on their status and credibility. This has made it possible for news men to exclude ordinary people as news sources, given, as Hasan (2007: 37) aptly puts it, that the 'higher ranked group is believed to have more knowledge and authority thus their words could legitimize the news as compared to lower groups whose information could be partial and distorted.' The dominance of any one type of source according to Libler and Bendix (1996) affects how news is constructed or framed. It is worrying that the common people, the lower group who most of the times bear the brunt of environmental hazards are excluded from participating in environmental discourse.

The selection of news sources is also influenced by journalists who, as Fishman (1980) argues, take part in establishing the normative order of authorized knowers, or journalists who choose sources as a matter of convenience. This happens when sources are chosen because of availability. This has remained the bane of good reporting as journalists depend on available, already packaged information in form of publicity releases from the government and other influential organizations. This confirms the positions of Erickson et al. (1989); that news

information from authoritative sources is always accepted as credible and true without further investigation. Hall et al. (1978) call these authoritative sources primary definers of news who have huge influence in determining news contents.

Over dominance of authoritative sources in news reporting does not seem to be in the interest of a well balanced news coverage, hence Schlesinger and Tumber (1994) call for a balance in news sources selection by including common people or non-official, the lower groups in defining and determining the news contents. It is of the view that rather than accepting marginal stories which are already packaged and available, journalists should go for news-worthier stories that need to be researched and written form the ground up as should be the case in environmental stories.

Metodologi

This study employed content analysisto audit and determine how frequently journalists used news sources in their stories as well as how frequently they used variety of sources in both main actors and subsidiary actors. It is also used to determine the frequency of news authorship. The usefulness of content analysis in auditing media contents have been variously discussed by media scholars like Berelson (1952); Holsti (1969); and Sachsman (1999).

Four Newspapers were selected for content analysis based on their being the leading newspapers in Nigeria in terms of quality content and circulation. They are The Guardian, Daily Trust, This Day, and Business Day.

The coding scheme focused on categories of analysis with their respective units of analysis. The categories and their units analyzed included: Main Actors (government officials, experts, activists, NGOs); Subsidiary Actors (citizens, victims of disasters); News Authors (staff writers,

wire services, press releases).

Result and Discussion

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Staff	702	93.1	93.2	93.2
	Wire Service	23	3.1	3.1	96.3
	Press Release	25	3.3	3.3	99.6
	Government	2	.3	.3	99.9
	Readers' Letters	1	.1	.1	100.0
	Total	753	99.9	100	
Missing	System	1	.1		
Total		754	100		

Table 1. Author/Source of News Stories Covered

The study sought to find out how environmental newsstories are authored and what are the implications? This category is analyzed to find out the extent to which indigenous or local journalists were active in reporting about environmental issues in the Nigerian press. Data indicated, as shown in table 1, that 702 stories, representing about 91 per cent were by-line stories. These byline stories totaling 723 (96 percent) of story types were straight news. It would be expected that straight news would only be written by staff (by-line) of the newspapers. Press releases, wire services ranked second and third with 25 and 23 stories respectively. Newspapers may not have engaged the services of freelancers or even subscribed heavily to wire services due to financial handicap; therefore they solely depended on their reporters to cover and report environmental news. The reporters admitted that they made use of every resource at their disposal to report environmental news including using published stories as news sources. This could be the reason why most of the international news stories were also by-lined rather than subscription from wire services hence most stories dealt more on international issues like climate change rather than the pressing local issues.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Government Officials	264	33.2	33.5	33.5
	Industry	21	2.6	2.7	36.2
	Expert	425	53.6	54.1	90.2
	Activist	35	4.4	4.4	94.7
	Politicians	2	.2	.2	94.8
	Citizen	25	3.1	3.2	98.0
	Union	7	.9	.9	98.9
	Victim of disaster	9	1.1	1.1	100.0
	Total	788	99.2	100	
Missing	System	6	.8		
Total		794	100		

Table 2. Sources-Main Actors

Journalists depend on credible sources to a lager extent in reporting and legitimizing their stories. Hasan (2007: 37) contends that 'commonsensical understanding' that 'society is bureaucratically structured' helps journalists to find news events. Citing Fishman (1980), Hasan argues that this understanding 'provides the journalists with a 'map of knowers' for newsworthy topics'. Sources of information are therefore selected by journalists through bureaucratic consciousness based on hierarchy of credibility. It is widely believed that sources high on the rank know better because of their knowledge and position. This is not to say that those low on the rank are not to be used as

sources. Over dependence or reliance on government/official/expert sources more than any other source at most times, creates imbalance in the news reports as views, opinions and perspectives from ordinary people are not sought. The story on pollution for example, is not complete if the reporter interviews a pollution expert or an official from the Ministry of Environment, without getting the perspective of the common citizen who lives in the locality that is polluted.

Table 2, shows that information from experts (425 representing 56.6) were used more than the other sources. It has to be pointed out that these experts are mostly from inter-governmental bodies like UN, UNEP. Official government sources quoted were 265, representing 35 per cent, while people from the industry, and activists quoted were 21 and 35 respectively. Overall it could be said that journalists depended heavily on official sources otherwise called main actors. The over dependence on official sources by reporters has been described as general authority orientation. Thus, over reliance on official sources or authoritative sources in news reporting is a common feature in the Nigerian Press. This may be because journalists find it so easy and reliable to use the 'packaged' and authoritative information from government as this makes their stories more credible and helps to beat deadline. This is in agreement with Fishman (1980: 96) who contends that 'journalists participate in upholding a normative order of authorized knowers in society…'. As with Fishman, Hall et al. (1978: 258) opine that journalists tend to use accredited sources especially those with 'institutional power, representative standing, or claims to exert knowledge'. It is perplexing that politicians who should 'wield enough power' and be at the forefront of the war against environmental degradation were found wanting with a dismal two featuring as main actors/sources. This indicates that

environment is a no go area for politicians in Nigeria. Little wonder then that environmental issues are not prominent in political party manifestos in Nigeria. If politicians were not interested in issues relating to the environment, that invariably explains the reason for the dearth of environmental reports. Environmental issues will attract the right type of coverage if politicians were to include them in their agenda. The more politicians, whose views are always sought by the press, talked about environmental issues, the more such issues are reported in the press.

Over reliance on official sources is further explained by Ginneken's (1998) and Dunwoody and Griffin's (1993) assertions that news is not just selected based on the experience and articulation of the journalists but from other sources that have the power in commanding journalists' attention on the stories that they (sources) want the public to read. Overdependence on these established sources like government sources, officials, experts, politicians etc. have a huge influence in shaping news contents (Berkowitz, 1997; Gans, 1990; Sigal, 1986). Unfortunately politicians in Nigeria do not contribute meaningfully to environmental discussions.

Conclusively, the frequency of sources quoted (788) as compared to the number of stories analyzed (754) indicates that the reporters did not include much multiple sources in their stories.This leaves much to be desired in the news stories as more sources make the stories balanced, stronger and more credible.
Subsidiary Actors:

		Freque ncy	Perc ent	Va- lid Perc ent	Cumula tive Percent
Va- lid	Citi- zen	25	3.3	61.0	61.0

Uni-on	7	.9	17.1	78.0
Vic-tim of Di-sas-ter	9	1.2	22.0	100.0
To-tal	41	5.4	100	
Miss ing	Syst em	713	94.6	
Total		754	100	

Table 3. Subsidiary Actors

Given that majority of news sources usually come from a defined section whose intent is to influence news contents to their advantage (Berkowitz, 1997), it then behooves on the journalists to provide balancein their news coverage by using other sources like common people who are relevant to the news as sources (Friedman et al., 1986; Gans, 1990).

Of the dismal 41 subsidiary actors featured in the 754 stories analyzed, 25 were citizens, followed by nine victims of disasters, while union members were seven. This again points to the fact that journalists do not depend on these subsidiary actors or common people for news information. It justifies the claim earlier that there is an over reliance on main actors–experts, officials or government sources as news sources. This finding is timely to emphasize Hannigan's (2006) assumption that it is the (common) people, and not just the social structures or institutions or those that wield power that ought to construct environmental news.

Regarding use of multiple sources, the frequency of sources quoted (788) as compared to the number of stories analyzed (754) indicates that the reporters did not include a lot of multiple sources in their stories, otherwise the number of sources quoted would by far outweigh the number of stories. Single sources may have been used mostly because most of the news stories analyzed were event driven – straight news stories where the reporters may have been constrained by the nature of events, and in a bid to beat deadlines, had to use single sources. The other cogent reason for using single source could be because the journalists were not ready to move out from their comfort zone to look for relevant people to furnish them with relevant and or alternative information. They rather will rely and depend on packaged publicity releases from their 'accredited' sources. It is therefore deductible that the use of multiple sources that bring in different shades of opinion that create balance in a news report, is not the norm in environmental news reporting in Nigeria.

Meanwhile, from data analysis from content analysis this study finds that journalists: heavily depend on main actors as news sources; employ traditional news writing style in reporting the environment; do not make use of multiple sources in their reports; report environmental stories mainly from an international perspective rather from the expected local perspective; and environmental stories are mostly event driven with little or no in-depth coverage and analysis.

Given that environmental journalism is complex and technical like other science beats, scholars like Greenberg et al (1989) have strongly criticized environmental journalists that employ the same usual traditional news values used in writing other news stories. This is a lesson for environmental journalists who should know that given the nature of environmental stories, they should not be treated the same way as other simple stories in relation to the values used in selecting and writing them. Otherwise we will continue to witness the same straight news reports on environmental issues. A policy change that allows investigative, interpretive and proactive reporting and environmental advocacy is direly needed in this direction.

On the issue of journalists' dependence on breaking news and subscription to or resorting to wire services/agencies as news sources, it goes to show that the Nigerian press advances the environmental agenda setting of the West and the western media where most of the breaking news come from, and who purportedly own most of the global wire services. It may not be perplexing then why environmental issues are tackled from global angle rather than from a local angle. The issue of proximity as a news value does not seem to play here. Thus major local environmental issues like waste management, desertification, poor urbanization, pollution, public sanitation that are relatable to the local audience, may be denied space in the newspapers in preference to probably climate change issue which is on the western media global agenda. The over reliance on wire reports, despite the fact that it has helped to advance environmental coverage in the press, has meant or resulted in the denial of reporting original local stories with strong Nigerian context and human interest angles. Environmental reporting thus sounds utopic as such reports from wire services are mere amplifications of the western media agenda on the environment rather than a local agenda that would promote needed debates and discussions. In this case the Nigerian press can be said to have failed in setting substantial, proper, people oriented media agenda on the environment. This idea of not reporting the environment from a pressing local or national angle, may have prompted researchers like Rogers (1999) and Weigold (2001) to sound a warning, as it were, that environmental reporters must understand the needs of their audiences and feed them with such needs. Rather than blaming audiences as not having interest in environmental stories, reporters should focus more on local (relatable) environmental issues that make sense to their audiences rather than jumping on the popular international bandwagon to report global environmental events that may not have any relevance to their home audience.

The study also finds that environmental news stories were not sourced from columnists or experts who could do detailed or in-depth analysis on environmental stories. Rather most of the stories were straight news stories, and therefore byline stories. The implication is that environmental issues coverage was only reported based on answering the 5Ws and H news questions. This could be because most of the journalists covering the environment are general reporters and may not have the relevant skills, tools, expertise and exposure to understand and explain issues relating to the environment. It is one thing to report the environment, and another thing to explain the environment. The latter is the core of environmental reporting given its complexity.

Conclusion

Given that there was official/government source dominance in reporting environmental news, this study recommends that this should not be the norm. Environmental journalists should diversify their sources to authenticate and balance their stories and give them different angles and perspectives other than those of government officials. Common or ordinary people should also have a say in the news of the day. That news is about famous and elite people does not strictly apply in environmental beat. In Nigeria most of the environmental woes are borne by common people. They should therefore be part of the environmental news construct. This is the only way to make environmental stories relatable to the people. The non-inclusion of multiple sources in environmental coverage, and the over reliance on main actors as environmental news sources could be blamed more on lack of enterprise on the part of the journalists, and not just bias.

The journalists have therefore to rise above the present norm and etiquette of mainly selecting main actors as news sources so as to engage multiple, dissent, and subsidiary actors as news sources. This is the only way to bring about investigative and interpretive reporting to environmental beat.

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