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# The Coverage of the 2022 Flood Disasters by Three Nigerian Daily Newspapers.

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## ABSTRACT

The researcher selected three national dailies, namely, The Punch, The Leadership and The Vanguard, to examine their coverage of the 2022 flood disasters in Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to know how often the selected dailies covered the 2022 flood stories/items in Nigeria, to find out how the selected dailies generated stories on the 2022 flood, to ascertain the directions of their coverage on the flood and examine the type of coverage given to the 2022 flood in the selected dailies. The content analysis method of research was used and the instruments for data collection were the three national dailies. The researcher covered 252 issues and got 41 items on flood during his study. The findings show that 19 of them were straight news, 11 were features, 4 were letter/opinion articles, and seven were editorial. This shows that the coverage was insufficient, and most of the coverage was carried out in the straight news format. Therefore, the researcher recommends greater coverage of the climate stories in a manner other than straight news format for more detailed insights.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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## Introduction

Akinyemi Akinyugha (2022) cited IPCC as defining flood as “the overflowing of the normal confines of a stream or other body of water, or the accumulation of water over areas that are not normally submerged”. He opined that a flood occurs when excess water inundates a particular watershed. This means an increase or expansion of the water body above its channel. It leads to submerging areas according to their nearness to the overflowed channel(s).

Meanwhile, flood in Nigeria is attributed, according to public opinion, which is buttressed by The Vanguard and The Nation, to two major factors, namely, successive excessive rainfalls and the release of water from Langdon Dan in Northern Cameroon. But *The Guardian* (Mon. 19 September 2022) quoted a climate Analyst, Akintude Babatunde saying that poor infrastructure of roads, drainage and waste disposal constitute the major problem of flood in Nigeria every year. Therefore, a combination of the views about the causes of the flood crisis in Nigeria involves natural and artificial factors. Again, flooding in Nigeria is more of an artificially induced problem; hence, it emerges due to the negligence of suggested measures. The government, in addition to not being caring, has equally contributed to the promotion of this case through the careless allocation of land, which negates the drainage system. This is often the cause of flash floods in easily saturated areas after days of successive heavy rainfall in Nigeria.

Flood is true, a disaster as *The Guardian* (Jan 24, 2023) cited The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) as saying that 662 persons lost their lives, 3,174 suffered injuries and the flood disaster in Nigeria displaced 2, 4-30,445 individuals. That did not include hectares of farmland and buildings which housed property and perhaps money inundated during the occurrence. The inference is that flood is an unfortunate situation since it leads to infection of diseases, death, food scarcity, insecurity, injuries, and halting of economic, political, religious, social and cultural activities in the areas of inundation. The interdependence of communities for existence extends the hash effects of flood to communities that are not directly inundated.

### ***Statement of the Problem***

Flood in Nigeria in 2022 was only akin to that of 2012 in recent times according to reports from various media. It started in September and subsided in November of the same year. During that period, economic, political, religious, social and cultural activities were disrupted. And there were struggles for survival by masses engulfed by the menace. Still, there were cases of reported deaths, property loss, injuries, insecurity, and inundation of farmlands by the flood. Evacuation of the masses in the affected areas to the highlands for safety appeared as the best bate in the period. The early compliance to the process recorded success, whereas late attempts by some individuals led to unfortunate situations, as there were cases of capsized ships that claimed lives. Almost in the same fashion were people who stayed put in their houses to guard their property in the hope that the flood would not be severe, as warned by various weather agents or without ideas of where to run to for safety. Some of them were submerged in their abode areas, which contributed to the poll of casualties in the situation.

Meanwhile, the mass media are often engrossed in occurrences like floods hence, it involves a human-interest angle. They normally heighten their reportage of such situations to draw attention from government, individuals, and non-governmental organisations to provide succour to the affected and offer awareness that serves as an escape route to the stranded. People turn to various media for updates of the event and to gain insight into the position of the situation.

Therefore, in light of this heavy reliance of the audience on the journalists through their various media outlets, the researcher attempts to measure the newspaper coverage of the incidence within the specified period under study to know how they perform their duty. And it is in light of this heavy reliance of the audience on the journalists through their various media outlets that this work attempts to study the three national dailies to find out how they covered the 2022 flood disaster in Nigeria.

### ***Research Objectives***

This research work is set to assess the newspaper coverage of the 2022 flood disaster in Nigeria. The study will attempt to measure the level of commitment by the dailies during the time in question to know how they were deployed to attend to the said problem based on the manner of their coverage. The four research objectives are:

- (1) To ascertain how often the selected dailies covered the 2022 flood stories/items in Nigeria.
- (2) To examine how the selected dailies generated stories on the 2022 flood in Nigeria.
- (3) To ascertain the directions of coverage of the 2022 flood by the three selected dailies.
- (4) To determine the type of coverage given to the 2022 flood by the selected dailies.

### ***Significance of the Study***

The mass media sets agenda for society. McLuhan (1968: 204) maintained that “the press can colour events by using them in particular ways or refusing to use them at all”. The manners with which mass media treat issues at hand in their domain and beyond matter greatly in the event's overall significance or negligence. To a great extent, people depend on what they entertain from the media to form their judgment about a given situation or circumstance. They create awareness and carry out crusade missions on issues of great importance in their domain.

Therefore, this work is significant to readers who wish to know how national Dailies performed during the flood crisis of 2022 in Nigeria. This work reveals the coverage of the three National Dailies during the event. The Dailies have a wide spectrum of coverage, and that appealed the researcher's judgment to select them for the study. This research work also adds to the existing literature on floods in Nigeria. It can stand as a springboard for further research on flood incidence.

## Literature Review

This passage reviews the following literature related to flood incidence and the perception of people over journalists' reportage of the situation. Flood occurs when excess water inundates a particular watershed. This implies that the height of the water body is higher than that of the channel through which it drills. The flow of water in this regard becomes unorganized and it moves to areas where it did not hitherto cover.

It is also noted that flooding is induced by two major factors in Nigeria: successive excessive rainfall and significant release of water from an upstream dam in Cameroon. This connotes that flood is more a natural occurrence. Even the discharge of water from the dam in Cameroon becomes imperative when water accumulated through rainfall reaches a particular level.

Meanwhile, some floods last longer than others, which is informed by the nature or type of the flood; hence, we have at least five types of floods, according to Eric Holderman (October 17, 2022). They are river flow, coastal flood, storm surge, inland flood and flash flood. However, a flood in any way is not a nice event, irrespective of its type, and the longer it lasts, the more it wreaks havoc in the area it occurs. *The Premium Times* (October 12, 2022) notes that the effects of floods in Nigeria appear to be more devastating than the previous since 2012. It maintains that it is like this because the government made no attempt to forestall the menace insofar as it does not affect their revenue collection from the affected areas. This suggests that even though a flood is a natural event, the government can still put in some measures to control it and cushion its effects on the environment. The opinion of *The Premium Times* is that flood in Nigeria is a natural occurrence which is aided by government negligence. *The Vanguard* (October 31, 2022) states that the 2022 flood in Nigeria could be the worst in scope and severity. This assertion bodes well with the view of *The Premium Times*, which states that each flood in Nigeria since 2012 appeared more serious than the previous. *The Guardian* (19 September 2022) quotes Manzo Ezekiel, a spokesperson for the National Disaster Management Agency, as saying that the 2022 flood is the worst since that of 2012 in Nigeria. As cited above, his observation was in sync with *The Premium Times* and *The Vanguard*.

*The Guardian* (January 24, 2023) cited The National Emergency Management Agency as saying that 662 persons lost their lives, 3,174 suffered injuries and 2,430,445 individuals were displaced by the 2022 flood in Nigeria. The devastation of the flood increased as days passed by *The Leadership* reported earlier than January 24, 2023, that at least 605 persons had been killed and 1.3 people displaced from their communities. According to *The Leadership*, the deaths occurred in six states, namely Kogi, Anambra, Kebbi, Delta, Bayelsa and Jigawa, out of the 31 states that experienced a flood.

The above figures point to the fact that flood is a serious disaster in Nigeria since it leads to deaths, throws people off their houses, and, by extension, brings about hunger, economic crisis, security unrest, etc. Ipso facto, government, well-meaning individuals, as well as non-governmental organisations should lend their helping hand respectively in whichever ways, they deem fit in a bid to curtail the menace. This call is necessitated by the opinion of a public affairs analyst, Akintunde Babatunde cited by *The Guardian* (January 24, 2022) as blaming the occurrence on poor infrastructure of road, drainage and waste disposal.

On the other hand, research shows that journalists' reportage of issues is approached with negative perceptions by people. According to Afolabi (2010), the mass media have not been timely reporting conflicts and insurgencies. This is in sync with the views of other researchers who think that the Nigerian Mass Media have not been effective in their surveillance function in the reportage of conflicts and insurgencies and did not show a high level of objectivity in their reports (Okpara, 2010, Oputa, 2011, Lawrence, 2011, Hamida & Baba, 2014). This low performance may be rooted in the fact that state governments and individuals own a vast majority of the media organisations in the country. As a result, they are primarily devoted to satisfying the interest of their owners. Similarly, it has been indicated that the Nigerian mass media do not give adequate information or coverage of the climate change situation. Their reportage lacks the needed bites for effective awareness of environmental issues (Batta, Ashong, & Bashir, 2013; Moeti, Maraisane, & Marou, 2008). Their view is supported by the fact that most of the media coverage of flood incidences in Nigeria was carried out in straight news format, which lacked flesh to provide the populace with knowledge on the causes and risks associated with floods.

Meanwhile, it is important to understand the perception of flood risks by population based on mass media reportage. This, no doubt, will help to reduce the impacts of future disasters. On this

ground, the study selected three Nigerian Dailies.

*Theoretical Framework*

Theories help in no small measure in understanding the work as they place a study in its proper Context. Ohaja (2003), in her bid to highlight the importance of theories, states that “knowledge does not exist in a vacuum. In every discipline, there is a body of theories that provides the explanation for observable phenomenon in that field”. Folarin (1998: 4) plays up the place of theories in a study by saying that “we study theories because they help us manage reality and put things in the right perspective”.

This study was explained under the context of the Agenda-Setting Theory propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972. The theory was built and rested on the belief that the mass media set the agenda for what people should care about.

The core assumptions of Agenda Setting Theory are that the media filters and shapes what we see rather than just reflecting stories to the audience and that the more attention the media give to an issue, the more likely the public will consider that issue to be important. “Therefore, when the media fail to address a particular issue, it becomes marginalised in the minds of the public (Hanson, 2009). Meanwhile, agenda-setting theory is apt to this work as the study tries to discover how the national dailies covered stories on the 2022 flood disaster in Nigeria.

Even though the flood is a natural disaster, man has devised ways of managing it to reduce its effects on his environment. Therefore, the media have a role to play through their reportage, which should carry educational, motivational, sensitizational, etc. force that is capable of attuning the society’s mind to cogitate for a solution.

*Research Method of Data Collection and Analysis*

The research design adopted for this study by the researcher is the content analysis method. This method is employed for the study because of the nature of the work, which focuses on the content of the publications of three Nigerian Newspapers on the 2022 flood in Nigeria. It is used to determine the level of prominence given to the reportage through the nature of the coverage – straight news, editorial, analysis and the frequency of such coverage.

Ohaja (2003:75) notes that “sampling is the selection of some members or elements from the population for actual investigation or study”. She reasoned that the essence of sampling is due to the impracticability of carrying out the study on the entire population in most cases. Meanwhile, the sample size for this study is three Nigerian dailies, namely *The Punch*, *The Vanguard* and *The Leadership*.

The data analysis was done through simple percentages and cross-tabulations. Here, data were converted into figures to facilitate ease of classifications. The research adopted a purposive sampling technique to select *The Punch*, *The Vanguard*, and *The Leadership* out of the national dailies since it is impossible to include all of them in his study. Their selection is informed by the fact that they have nationwide coverage and circulation.

*Research Findings*

**Research Question 1:** How often did the selected dailies cover the 2022 flood in Nigeria?

**Table 1: Oftenness of Coverage**

Dailies	News	Features	Letter/Opinion Articles	Editorial	Total
<i>Punch</i>	6	3	1	2	12(29%)
<i>Leadership</i>	8	4	2	2	16 (39%)
<i>Vanguard</i>	5	4	1	3	13(32%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>19(46%)</b>	<b>11(27%)</b>	<b>4(10%)</b>	<b>7(17%)</b>	<b>41(100%)</b>

Table one shows that out of 252 editions or issues studied within the specified period, only 41 issues covered flood incidence. In the 41 issues with flood items, 19 (46%) were straight news, 11 (27%) were feature stories 4 (10%) were opinion articles, and 7 (17%) were editorials.

**Research Question 2:** How did the selected dailies generate stories on the 2022 flood in Nigeria?

**Table 2: Generators of Stories**

Unit of Analysis Newspapers	<i>The Punch</i>	<i>The Leadership</i>	<i>The Vanguard</i>	Total	Percentage (%)
Content Category	Generators of Stories				
Reporters	7	6	4	17	41
Government Officials	3	2	3	8	20
News Agencies	4	4	3	11	27
NGO's	2	2	1	5	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>100</b>

Table two shows that 17 stories (41%) came from reporters, 8 (20%) came from government officials, 11 (27%) were provided by news agencies and 5 (12%) were generated by NGOs.

**Research Question 3:** What were the directions of coverage of the 2022 flood by the selected dailies?

**Table3: Directions of Coverage**

Unit of Analysis Newspapers	<i>The Punch</i>	<i>The Leadership</i>	<i>The Vanguard</i>	Total	Percentage (%)
Content Category	Direction news coverage				
Environmental Coverage	2	2	3	7	17
Political Coverage	1	2	1	4	10
Human Impact Coverage	3	4	3	10	24
Economic Coverage	1	2	1	4	10
Action Coverage	5	6	5	16	39
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>100</b>

The above data in table 3 captured the directions of news coverage of the 2022 flood in Nigeria. The table portrays action coverage to be 16, which is (39%); human impact coverage was 10 (24%), Economic and Political coverage were 4 each, which accounted for (10%) each, respectively, while environmental coverage was 7, which is (17%), as indicated in the table.

**Research Question 4:** What types of coverage were given to the 2022 flood in Nigeria by the selected dailies?

**Table 4: Types of Coverage**

Newspapers	News	Features	Letters/Opinion articles	Editorial	Total
<i>The Punch</i>	6	3	1	2	12(29%)
<i>The Leadership</i>	8	4	2	2	16 (39%)
<i>The Vanguard</i>	5	4	1	3	13(32%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>19(46%)</b>	<b>11(27%)</b>	<b>4(10%)</b>	<b>7(17%)</b>	<b>41(100%)</b>

The data in table four indicates that out of 252 issues studied in the said period, only 41 issues had flood items. And 19(46%) of the 41(100%) stories were straight news, with *The Punch* 6, *The Leadership* 8 and *The Vanguard* 5. On the other hand, out of the 41 items obtained, 11(27%) were features, with 3 of which coming from Punch, 4 from *The Leadership* and 4 from *The Vanguard*. Of the 41 items, 4(10%) were letters/opinion articles, with *The Punch* providing 1, *The Leadership* 2 and *The Vanguard* 1. Then, out of the 41 items, the editorial was 7 (17%), of which 2 were gotten from *The Punch*, *The Leadership* 2 and *The Vanguard* 3.

## Discussion

The finding which addressed the first research objectives showed that insignificant coverage was given to the 2022 flood disaster in Nigeria by the selected dailies. This is in assonance with the assertion of Akpara et. al., (2010) that mass media have not been effective in their surveillance

function in the reportage of conflicts and insurgencies. Their perception is malleable with the views of Batta et. al., (2013) and Moeti et. al., (2008) that the Nigerian mass media do not give adequate information or coverage of the climate change situation. The data in the table indicated that 41 stories were obtained from the 252 newspapers studied given the fact that flood is one of the most common climate phenomena and, as a result, deserve heavy coverage by the mass media for awareness creation, orientation and suggestion of palliative measures to forestall or reduce its occurrences and effects on the affected areas.

The flood started in September and was abated in November of that same year under study. Still, the research took his study back to January and stretched it to December to find out the proactive, active and aftermath calls by the dailies through their coverage to attend to the disaster. The overwhelming percentage of the coverage of the 41 stories on flood was obtained between September and November, which was when the flood was fully invoked. This suggests that pre and post flood coverage by the dailies accounted for the small number of items on the flood. This does not sit well with the dailies, given the media's importance in such a situation.

Finding from research objective number two showed that reporters generated the greatest number of news (17), Government officials 8, News agencies 11 and non-governmental organisations 5. The contributions of the various stakeholders were underwhelming. The 17 and 11 items from reporters and News agencies portray a lack of diligence on their part to stimulate the society especially the government about the disaster. The agenda-setting skill of the media was not at play with the above dearth of information on flood for the whole year. One of the notions of Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972) on their Agenda-Setting Theory is that the media filter and shape what we see rather than just reflecting stories to the audience. But the 41 items on flood were dominated with straight news which was a mere reflection of the incidence to the audience. This as well portrayed the weakness of the mass media in the situation.

The contribution from the government agencies was another case in point. The various climate agencies in the society were not at their best in the situation, with only eight items directly coming from them and other government officials for the whole year. This coheres with the postulation of The Premium Times (October 12, 2022) which noted that the government negligence to address the situation is informed by the fact that it does not affect their revenue collection from the affected areas. Government officials are supposed to be on the alert always and serve as the major outlet through which information pertaining to climate conditions is obtained on a constant basis. NGOs, though not overwhelming in their contributions of five items, were not at the same time wretched if their contribution were weighed in relation to that of government officials.

Findings on research objective three, which seeks to ascertain the directions of coverage, show that there were environmental, political, human impact, economic and action coverage. The directions of coverage are commendable. It took care of all the necessary angles to be covered in the occurrence. The overwhelming frequency given to action coverage was expected, given the fact that most of the coverage was taken when the flood started, followed by this was human interest or impact coverage. Flood is a natural disaster and certainly invokes heavy interest. This informed the reason why it is second when it comes to the number of items of coverage. The seven items on the environmental front were apt, as the four items apiece for political and economic coverage make for interesting reading when it comes to balance. Meanwhile, it is fair to infer that the manner in which the coverage was spread across different angles of importance in society is indeed commendable.

Finally, finding on research objective number four, which is interested in the types of coverage, shows that the coverage was made up of – straight news, features, letter/opinion articles and editorials. The straight news was the highest in number with 19(46%), and is rightly so, since most of the coverage took place when the flood started. The primary target of the media at that time was to maintain the update of the occurrence before the audience. Similarly, the 11 (eleven) items on features out of the total 41 coverage were not bad, and it is not too far behind the straight news items on the coverage. Though not enough for the entire study period, it is only enough when the 41 items on flood for the period are taken into cognisance. The 7(17%) editorials out of the 41 coverage were not heart-warming. The editorial contains broad perspectives of explanation on the subject of discussion to aid proper and deep understanding of such a thing. Even before the event, it is pertinent to equip the people on the necessary steps to take to address such situations. Opinion article items were equally not encouraging, with only 4(%) out of the 41 coverage. But the whole thing is down to the fact that most of the coverage was taken when the flood started. It shows that the dailies did not



give pre-flood coverage adequate attention and, by extension, contributed to the lapses that encouraged flood events in Nigeria.

### Conclusion

Flood is indeed a great disaster as it wreaks havoc on community or communities once it occurs. This assertion bodes well with a series of literature on global flood events. It drew the attention of the masses and government as soon as it started. The mass media normally troop in to portray the scale of the occurrence to the populace and draw the attention of government, non-governmental organisations and individuals in the affected communities. And this makes the mass media a veritable tool in such a situation. The manner in which they carry out their coverage goes a long way to determine how people, especially in unaffected communities, will perceive the disaster.

Meanwhile, the coverage of the flood disaster by the selected dailies mainly captured flood events as natural occurrences, with particular attention given to the scale of the disaster and humanitarian responses to attend to the issue. The coverage was dominated by straight news that portrayed the flood the way it occurred, thereby leaving thin the other aspects of the coverage that would have stressed densely the underlying causes of floods, long-term implications on the affected communities, and policy responses needed to forestall its future occurrence. It was also noted that proactive and post-flood coverage was insignificant in number in the selected period of the study. This does not make for interesting reading since climate reports are important at all times.

The coverage also showed that government and non-governmental organizations' responses, especially before and after the flood, were insufficient. This could be as a result of the fact that the mass media did not set it as an agenda during those periods, hence the observation of Hansan (2009) that when the media fail to address a particular issue, it becomes marginalized in the minds of the public. This is in line with the tenet of agenda-setting theory that the mass media set the agenda for what people should think about.

In spite of the low coverage, the media have been able to exploit various angles of interest like; environmental, political, human impact, economic and action stories in their reportage. The coverage shared meaning into how the flood has affected some states in particular and Nigeria in general during the inundation. The coverage could form the basis to address future occurrence of flood in Nigeria. The researcher recommends that coverage that guides long-term policy responses to floods should be prominent in the publications of the national dailies. Reporters should be able to identify some signs that preceded floods and convey the reports early enough to prepare society for action before the actual occurrence. Relevant stakeholders in Nigeria should remain steadfast in their duties to provide all the necessary aids to avoid frequent cases of flood in the society.

### Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

### Ethics Approval

The research was conducted with the consent of all the participants included in the study.

### Notes on Contributors


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