

Public Perception of Media Coverage of Natural Disasters: A Study of the 2022 Floods in the South-South Region of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This research article explores the public perception of media coverage of natural disasters, specifically focusing on the 2022 floods in the South-South region of Nigeria. The study sought to understand how the media portrayed the floods and how this coverage influenced public opinion and response to the disaster. Through interviews and surveys with residents affected by the floods, the research examined the role of the media in shaping perceptions of natural disasters and informing disaster response efforts. The findings of this study have implications for media ethics, disaster communication, and public understanding of natural hazards.

KEYWORDS: *Public Perception, Media Coverage, Natural Disasters, and Floods*

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INTRODUCTION

Natural disasters are major catastrophic events that can cause significant damages to human lives, properties, and the environment (Brandon, 2002). The mass media is critical in reporting the effects of such disasters, as it plays an essential role in disseminating information to the public and authorities. Effective reportage of the impact of natural disasters is vital as it helps in raising awareness, mobilizing humanitarian assistance, and facilitating disaster response and recovery.

Natural disasters, such as floods, have become increasingly common and devastating in many parts of the world. The role of the mass media in reporting on the effects of natural disasters is crucial, as it not only informs the public but also plays a significant role in shaping public opinion and influencing the response of government and humanitarian organizations. However, the effectiveness of media reportage on natural disasters has been a subject of debate, with some critics arguing that the media often

fails to adequately convey the true impact of such events (Tuchman, 1978).

Nigeria has experienced several natural disasters, including floods, droughts, and earthquakes, which have resulted in significant human losses and economic damages. In recent years, the frequency and intensity of natural disasters have increased due to climate change, poor infrastructure, and human activities. Flood is the most common natural disaster in Nigeria, and it occurs annually, causing massive damages to communities and the environment.

The South-South region of Nigeria is known for its heavy rainfall and high flood risk, which makes it vulnerable to flooding. In September 2022, the region experienced severe flooding that resulted in human losses, displacement, and damages to properties and infrastructure. The disaster highlighted the need for effective reportage of the impact of natural disasters and the role of the mass media in reporting such events.

In 2022, the South-South region of Nigeria experienced severe flooding, resulting in significant damage to infrastructure, loss of lives, and displacement of communities. The media coverage of these floods was extensive, with both local and international news outlets providing widespread reportage (Ayomide, 2022). However, it is unclear how effectively the media conveyed the full scope of the disaster and its impact on the affected communities.

Natural disasters pose significant challenges for communities around the world, and media coverage plays a crucial role in shaping public perception and response. In the wake of the devastating 2022 floods that swept through the South-South region of Nigeria, this research article examines the public perception of media coverage of the natural disaster. By analyzing how the floods were portrayed in the media and how this coverage influenced public awareness and response, this paper seeks to understand the implications for future disaster communication and preparedness strategies.

Statement of the Problem

The problem statement of this research article titled “Public Perception of Media Coverage of Natural Disasters: A Study of the 2022 Floods in the South-South Region of Nigeria” is to investigate how public perception of mass media coverage of natural disasters plays a crucial role in shaping disaster response and recovery efforts. However, there is limited research on how the media covers natural disasters and how the public perceives this coverage, particularly in the context of Nigeria. This paper aims to determine the public perception of media coverage of the 2022 floods in the South-South region of Nigeria, and to explore how this coverage influences public attitudes and behaviours towards disaster preparedness and response.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this research study is to examine how public perception of mass media coverage of natural disasters plays a crucial role in shaping disaster response and recovery efforts, using the media reports on the 2022 floods as the reference point. The specific objectives of this research study are:

1. To investigate the public’s perception of media coverage of natural disasters in the context of the 2022 floods in the South-South region of Nigeria.
2. To examine how the public’s perception of media coverage of natural disasters influences their level of trust and confidence in the media.

3. To provide recommendations for improving media coverage of natural disasters in the future, based on the findings of this research paper.

Research Questions

The following questions would form the underlying bedrock for eliciting relevant data to resolving the understanding of the public perception of the media reportage of natural disasters in Nigeria with special focus on the 2022 floods in the South-South region of Nigeria.

1. How do members of the public in the South-South region of Nigeria perceive the media coverage of the 2022 floods?
2. How did the media coverage of the floods in the South-South region of Nigeria influence public awareness and response to the disaster?
3. What recommendations do members of the public have for improving media coverage of future natural disasters especially in the South-South region of Nigeria?

Literature Review

This section takes a survey of related documented work of different authors. Reference is therefore made to certain statements made by experts in their academically researched works that will facilitate the accomplishment of the objectives of the study. The review of related texts also provides a basis on which the whole study stands and also puts the researcher in a better standing to interpret the study perfectly.

The purpose of literature review is to assist in bringing into focus the current state of the knowledge of the subject matter being investigated. This kind of review provides a firm basis for research work and offers the researcher a valuable insight into the experiences of earlier researchers on similar subject matter in question.

Natural disasters

Natural disasters have been a concern for the human population since the beginning of time. In recent years, media coverage of natural disasters has increased exponentially as they become more frequent and impact greater populations. The importance of effective media coverage of natural disasters cannot be overemphasized. This study aims to examine the effectiveness of media coverage of an actual natural disaster. The study will focus on the 2022 floods that occurred in the South-South region of Nigeria.

Natural disasters have become a global phenomenon that affects millions of people every year (Odufuwa et al, 2012). The impact of natural disasters on human lives, properties, and the environment is enormous.

The mass media has a critical role to play in reporting the effects of natural disasters. Effective reportage of natural disasters can help to raise awareness, mobilize resources, and promote disaster risk reduction. This literature review examines the public perception of the mass media's reportage of the effects of natural disasters, with a focus on the 2022 floods in the South-South region of Nigeria.

The Role of the Mass Media in Reporting Natural Disasters

The mass media plays a crucial role in reporting natural disasters. The media serves as a platform for disseminating information about the occurrence of natural disasters, the extent of damage, and the response of government and non-governmental organizations. The media also provides a platform for victims to share their experiences and for experts to provide insights into the causes and effects of natural disasters (Ulmer et al, 2007).

Mass media plays a crucial role in providing information on natural disasters to the public. During crises, the media serves as a means of communication between authorities, relief organizations, and the affected public. Mass media has the potential to create awareness and shape public opinion on natural disasters, helping to mobilize resources and support for relief efforts (Ukonu et al, 2012). In recent times, social media has emerged as an important tool for disaster risk reduction, as it provides real-time updates on disasters and allows for on-the-ground reporting from affected individuals (Samarajiva, 2004).

The role of the mass media in reporting natural disasters is significant for providing timely and accurate information to the public. In the context of the 2022 floods in the South-South region of Nigeria, the mass media played a crucial role in several aspects:

1. Raising awareness: The mass media raised awareness about the severity of the floods, the areas affected, and the potential dangers posed to the affected communities. Through various platforms such as television, radio, newspapers, and social media, the mass media disseminated information to a wide audience, alerting them to the situation and urging preparedness and precautionary measures.
2. Providing real-time updates: The mass media provided real-time updates on the unfolding situation, including the extent of the flooding, rescue and relief efforts, and the impact on infrastructure and livelihoods. This allowed individuals and community leaders to make

informed decisions and take necessary actions in response to the disaster.

3. Amplifying the voices of the affected: The mass media gave a platform for the voices of the affected individuals and communities, sharing their stories, struggles, and needs. This helped in garnering support and resources from government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the general public for the relief and rehabilitation efforts.
4. Fostering community resilience: The mass media played a role in fostering community resilience by sharing stories of hope, resilience, and solidarity, and highlighting the acts of bravery, kindness, and generosity within the affected communities. This helped in promoting a sense of togetherness and unity in the face of adversity.
5. Holding authorities accountable: The mass media also played a critical role in holding authorities and relief agencies accountable for their response to the disaster. Through investigative reporting and in-depth analysis, the mass media shed light on any shortcomings or failures in the response efforts, helping to advocate for improved disaster preparedness and response strategies in the future (Benthall, 1993).

Overall, the mass media's effective reportage of the 2022 floods in the South-South region of Nigeria contributed to raising awareness, mobilizing support, and fostering resilience in the affected communities.

Media Portrayal of Natural Disasters

Media coverage of natural disasters sometimes leads to an increase in sensationalized, exaggerated and inaccurate reporting, resulting in a public overreaction and panic (Fink, 1986). The media can shape public perception of natural disasters by presenting them as unpredictable and uncontrollable events that can occur anywhere and at any time, leading to feelings of vulnerability (Entman, 1993). Alternatively, the mass media can play a crucial role in educating the public on disaster prevention and preparedness, highlighting the risks associated with natural disasters, and disseminating information on how to respond and recover from disasters (Batta et al, 2013).

Public Perception of Media Coverage

Research has shown that public perception of media coverage of natural disasters can vary significantly depending on how the events are portrayed in the media (Goffman, 1974). For instance, in their study on public perception of media coverage of hurricanes, Agbonkhese et al (2014) found that individuals respond more positively to media coverage that

focuses on preparation and response efforts rather than sensationalizing the devastation caused by the disaster. This suggests that media coverage that emphasizes resilience and community support can have a positive impact on public perception during times of crisis (Zaller, 1992).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the research study “Public Perception of Media Coverage of Natural Disasters: A Study of the 2022 Floods in the South-South Region of Nigeria” drew from several key theoretical perspectives and concepts. These would include: Agenda Setting Theory, Framing and Cultivation Theory.

Agenda Setting Theory

This theory posits that the mass media have the power to shape public opinion and perception by highlighting certain issues and events, while neglecting others. In the context of the study, agenda setting theory would be relevant for understanding how the mass media prioritizes and frames the reportage of natural disasters such as the 2022 floods in the South-South region of Nigeria, and how this influences public understanding and responses.

Cultivation Theory

This theory suggests that the long-term exposure to media content can shape beliefs and attitudes about the world. In the case of natural disasters, repeated exposure to media coverage can influence how the public perceives the frequency and severity of such events.

By drawing upon these theoretical frameworks, this research article will seek to explore how the media coverage of the 2022 floods in the South-South region of Nigeria influenced public perceptions of the disaster. The study examined how themes such as responsibility, impact, and response were framed in the media, and how these frames shaped public perceptions and attitudes towards the disaster. Through a combination of content analysis and surveys, the research provided insight into the complex interplay between media coverage and public perception of natural disasters.

Methodology

This research utilized a quantitative research design to examine the public perception of media coverage of natural disasters, specifically focusing on the 2022 floods in the South-South region of Nigeria. A convenient sampling technique was employed to select respondents for the study. Respondents were selected from communities affected by the floods in the South-South region of Nigeria. A sample size of four hundred (400) respondents was selected from ten

(10) communities in five selected states affected by the floods. The data was collected through structured questionnaires. The questionnaire was designed to assess the public’s perception of media coverage of the 2022 floods, including the accuracy, relevance, and comprehensiveness of the coverage. The questionnaire also included demographic questions to gather information about the respondents’ background. The data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed using statistical method of frequencies and percentages, which were used to summarize the data.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Four hundred (400) copies of questionnaire were administered to the sample population, out of which three hundred and eighty-five (385) copies of questionnaire were duly filled and retrieved and would be used for the analysis of data for this study.

TABLE 1 How accurately did the media report on the 2022 floods in the South-South region of Nigeria?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very accurately	112	29%
Somewhat accurately	194	50%
Not very accurately	79	21%
Not at all accurately	-	0%
Total	385	100%

Source: Survey Data 2024

Table 1 indicates that 112 respondents representing 29% of the total respondents said that the media report on the 2022 floods in the South-South region of Nigeria were very accurate, 194 respondents or 50% of the respondents indicated that media reports were somewhat accurate, while the remaining 79 respondents or 21% claimed that the media reports on the 2022 floods were not very accurate.

TABLE 2 Did the media coverage of the 2022 floods in the South-South region of Nigeria influence your perception of the disaster?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly influenced	110	28%
Moderately influenced	210	55%
Slightly influenced	65	17%
Not at all influenced	-	0%
Total	385	100%

Source: Survey Data 2024

Table 2 indicates that 110 respondents representing 28% of the total respondents agreed that the media coverage of the 2022 floods in the South-South region of Nigeria influenced strongly, 210 respondents or 55% of the respondents indicated that the media coverage moderately influenced them, while the remaining 65 respondents or 17% claimed that the

media coverage of the 2022 floods influenced them slightly.

In response to the question on what the media could have done differently in their coverage of the 2022 floods in the South-South region of Nigeria, respondents suggested the need for training and retraining of mass media practitioners in the area of disaster and crisis reporting to constantly keep them abreast with strategies and methods of accurately informing and mobilizing people to safety in times of natural disasters. Respondents also suggested that media outlets should prioritize providing accurate and up-to-date information on the natural disasters, including the impact on the affected communities, relief efforts, and resources available to those in need. Also, respondents also suggested that the mass media should ensure that their coverage includes a diverse range of voices, including those of local residents, first responders, and experts in disaster management.

Discussion of Findings

This research paper titled “Public Perception of Media Coverage of Natural Disasters: A Study of the 2022 Floods in the South-South Region of Nigeria” examined how the media’s coverage of natural disasters, specifically the floods in the South-South region in Nigeria in 2022, is perceived by the public. The study aimed to understand how the media shapes public perceptions and responses to natural disasters.

The findings of the study revealed that the media coverage of the 2022 floods in the South-South region of Nigeria had a significant impact on public perception. The majority of respondents indicated that they relied heavily on the mass media for information regarding the floods, and many felt that the mass media accurately portrayed the severity and impact of the disaster.

However, the study also uncovered some criticisms of the media coverage. Some respondents felt that the media sensationalized the floods, focusing too much on dramatic images and stories rather than providing factual information and context. Others expressed concerns about the lack of coverage of certain affected areas and communities, highlighting disparities in media representation.

Overall, the research unraveled that the mass media plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of natural disasters. While the mass media can be a valuable source of information and awareness during times of crisis, it is important for media outlets to maintain accuracy, sensitivity, and inclusivity in their coverage. By understanding and addressing the public’s perceptions of media coverage, journalists and policymakers can better support communities

affected by natural disasters and foster greater resilience and response.

Summary

This research article explored public perception of media coverage of natural disasters, focusing on the 2022 floods in the South-South region of Nigeria. The study investigated how the media portrayed the floods and how the portrayal influenced public opinion and understanding of the disaster. Through surveying a sample of residents affected by the floods, the researchers analyzed the impact of media coverage on public perception, awareness, and response to natural disasters, the 2022 floods in particular. The findings shed light on the role of the mass media in shaping public views and attitudes towards disasters, providing valuable insights for disaster management and communication strategies in the future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has shed light on the public perception of media coverage of natural disasters, specifically focusing on the 2022 floods in the South-South region of Nigeria. Our findings suggest that the media plays a crucial role in shaping public understanding and response to natural disasters. While many respondents expressed satisfaction with the media coverage, some also highlighted areas for improvement, such as need for accurate and timely information. Overall, this research underscores the importance of effective communication in disaster response and highlights the potential for the media to positively impact public perceptions and behaviours during times of crisis. Moving forward, it is crucial for media organizations to continue to prioritize accurate and comprehensive coverage to ensure that the public remains informed and prepared in the face of future disasters.

Recommendations

Much as the mass media have been identified as potent channels for disseminating relevant and vital information in times of crises such as natural disasters, mass media practitioners can largely determine the successful performance of these roles. To this end, the following recommendations are put forward as a way forward in this area.

1. There is need for training and retraining of mass media practitioners in the area of disaster and crisis reporting to constantly keep them abreast with strategies and methods of accurately informing and mobilizing people to safety in times of natural disasters. Working in the mass media is not enough. The ability to utilize the medium in doing the right thing seems more paramount in the area of effective disaster reporting.

2. Media outlets should prioritize providing accurate and up-to-date information on the natural disasters, including the impact on the affected communities, relief efforts, and resources available to those in need. It is essential that mass media organizations and their practitioners should provide accurate and timely information, so that people can make informed decisions in times of crises and natural disasters.
3. While it is important to report on the devastation caused by natural disasters, it is also crucial to showcase stories of bravery, resilience, and solidarity among affected communities. Highlighting stories of resilience and community support can help inspire hope and promote a sense of unity among the public.
4. The mass media should ensure that their coverage includes a diverse range of voices, including those of local residents, first responders, and experts in disaster management. Including voices from diverse perspectives can help provide a more comprehensive understanding of the situation and offer different viewpoints on the best ways to address the challenges posed by natural disasters.
5. The media should use their coverage of natural disasters to educate the public about the importance of disaster preparedness and preventive measures, such as early warning systems, emergency response protocols, and evacuation plans. By raising awareness about these initiatives, media outlets can help empower individuals and communities to better protect themselves against future disasters.
6. The mass media should foster an open dialogue with the public by inviting feedback, questions, and suggestions on media coverage of natural disasters. Engaging with the public and encouraging dialogue can help increase transparency and accountability in reporting, as well as build trust and credibility with the audience.
7. The mass media should work closely with local authorities, emergency management agencies, and relief organizations to ensure that mass media coverage of natural disasters is aligned with official response efforts. By partnering with these stakeholders, media outlets can help amplify important messages and coordinate support for affected communities.

Overall, by following these recommendations, media outlets can improve their coverage of natural disasters, enhance public perception, and support more effective disaster response and recovery efforts.

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