

## **Climate Journalism in Nigeria: Implications and Contributions to the Sustainability of the Climate Debate**

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### **Abstract**

Nigeria, like many parts of the world has been experiencing climate change. Various studies show that annual and seasonal timescales indicate a significant positive increase in temperature. Spurring climate action demands the right attitude, and climate journalism potentially provides an outlet for achieving such a goal. Studies have not sufficiently focused on climate journalism's implications and contributions towards galvanizing the climate debate, or how such debates can be used as a transmission channel for initiating and mobilizing the public towards climate action. The implications and contributions of climate journalism in the context of setting the agenda for a constructive climate debate in Nigeria remains sketchy at best. The climate debate in Nigeria has made little effort to package climate issues in a way that ordinary people can understand, let alone participate. The specific objective was to explicate the implications and contributions of climate journalism in Nigeria, in light of the climate debate. The strings of the study are tied to the agenda setting theory. The methodology employed was the qualitative library approach. The study found that climate journalism cannot be overlooked, where the obligation of communicating knowledge-based climate related information to the public is considered paramount. The recommendation is that climate journalists in Nigeria should strive towards educating the public about the urgency and complexity of the present climate change conundrum.

**Keywords:** Climate Change, Climate Debate, Climate Journalism, Nigeria, Sustainability

### **Introduction**

Nigeria, like many parts of the world has been experiencing climate change. Various studies have shown that annual and seasonal timescales indicate a significant positive increase in temperature in Nigeria (National Climate Change Policy for Nigeria, NCCP, 2021). Scientists have brought the issue of climate change to the media and decision makers, we probably would not worry much about the changes in the climatic system without their work (Grundmann, 2012). It is therefore unsurprising that climate change has inspired a genre of journalism called climate journalism. Anthropogenic climate change is a challenge that has emerged as a result of human activities that led to greenhouse gas emissions. Mathez and Smerdon (2009) assert that evidence provided by scientists show that human activities are changing the configuration of our ecosystem. It can be argued that the urgent need to find effective ways of mitigating the devastating effects of man-made climate change has never been as critical as it is today. Despite the fact that information about climate change is readily available to the average global citizen, an understanding of the associated ecological risks is not wide spread (Saleh, 2012). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has identified Nigeria as a climate change "hot spot" which is likely to experience major shifts in weather within the twenty-first century

(Boko, Niang, Nyong, Vogel, Githeko, Medany, Osman-Elasha, Tabo & Yanda, 2007). It is therefore clear that climate change can no longer be viewed as a distant or abstract idea in a country like Nigeria where its direct and indirect effects are being felt from north to south as well as east to west. Boykoff and Boykoff (2007) assert that the coverage of climate change by the mass media is not just an accidental fusion of newspaper articles and television segments, it is a mediated social relationship between all actors. Bernstein and Hoffmann (2019) explain that effective communication about the reality and effects of climate change has been identified as a crucial element of efforts to build broad engagement with climate change and its potential solutions. As a classic climate communication tool, climate journalism can be a strategic device for tackling climate problems (Ittipornwong, 2017). In fact, climate journalism probably holds an answer to the climate change communication dilemma, but harnessing its inherent powers in this context remains a big challenge to all stakeholders and above all, climate journalists and scientists.

Climate change is not just a story; it is the context in which so many other stories will unfold. As such, it is not a subject solely for science or environment reporters to cover (Shanahan, Shubert, Scherer & Corcoran, 2013). This pins down the fact that since the health of our planet and vice versa will affect everyone in the long run, it is essential to channel our resources towards climate mitigation and adaptation efforts. Badullovich, Grant and Colvin (2020) explain that climate change emerged as an issue of science, but its broad ranging impacts and potential mitigation strategies mean it is of significance to all people across sectors, interests, and nations amongst others. Perhaps it can be said that collective action towards climate change is inevitable. Climate change is a threat that the world is currently facing, and it seems that people can significantly influence this threat. Spurring climate action demands the right attitude, and climate journalism provides an outlet for achieving such a goal, as long as the right strategies are applied. Vredenberg, (2019) explains that in order for people to understand the urgency of fighting climate change, it is important that they are well informed about how their actions matter. Unequivocal scientific consensus has warned of the unprecedented consequences to our modern way of life if we do not change and adapt to the climate crisis (van der Linden, Leiserowitz, Feinberg & Maibach, 2015). Despite growing scientific consensus about climate change in Africa, the local news attention fluctuates and often portrays the matter as a great scientific controversy and debate (Saleh, 2012). It is reasonable to infer that climate journalism is among the strategic ways of communicating climate issues with the aim of tackling the undeniable and ever-growing effects of an encroaching climate crisis. Journalism can promote and enhance the efforts of citizens and governments through agenda setting, thereby building an updated information sharing system (Ittipornwong, 2017). It is not out of place to state that climate change communication involves genres such as photography, graphics and videos amongst others, of which in most cases climate journalism stands out for its ability to blend the inherent strengths of these different genres to its advantage. Climate change is not just affecting humans, it affects, among other things, oceans, forests and wildlife. Its economic and socio-political ramifications potentially increase the chances of conflicts, as is the case in some African countries due to the decrease of food availability (Wired, 2018). It has been argued that climate change is a threat to many of the development gains that African nations have made (African Ministerial Conference on the Environment [AMCEN], 2011).

Ittipornwong (2017) argues that today, journalists are challenging themselves and producing climate news, with the aim of increasing scientific knowledge and raising public awareness about climate change. The implications and contributions of climate journalism towards galvanizing the climate change debate are still not well documented by communication scholars, experts, and international organizations to say the least. It is therefore reasonable to infer that studies have not sufficiently focused on climate journalism's implications and

contributions to the climate debate, or how such debates can be used as a transmission channel for initiating and mobilizing audiences towards climate action. Despite the fact that climate change is globally viewed as a topical issue, it can still be said that the implications and contributions of climate journalism in the context of setting the agenda for constructive climate change debates in Nigeria remains sketchy at best. Onokerhoraye (2011) asserts that the climate change debate in Nigeria has made little effort to package climate issues in a way that ordinary people can even understand, let alone participate. It is to this end that this study has the specific objective of putting the implications and contributions of climate journalism in Nigeria under the microscope; with the goal of methodically highlighting some of the strong debates that can be used as a compass for recommending a way forward. In doing so, the study also explores climate journalism's influence on the climate change debate.

## **Conceptual Clarification**

### **Climate Change**

Climate change is a change in the average weather experienced in a particular region or location. It may occur over decades or even millennia. Its causes may be natural, but climate change is mainly caused by human activities (Onokerhoraye, 2011). Climate change is caused by human activities that increase greenhouse emissions, other natural events such as volcanic eruptions amongst others also contribute to climate change. Abimbola, Utah and Alkali (2011) affirm that human activities such as hydrocarbon fossil-fuel burning, land use changes, and the production and use of hydrocarbons are among the dominant causes of climate change. Akpodiogaga and Odjugo (2010) explain that climate change is caused by both natural and anthropogenic factors, even though the latter contributes more. Since the 1800s, human activities and the rapid industrialization of most countries have been the main drivers of climate change, due to the burning of fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas, (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2022). The effects of climate change are far and wide. Empirical evidence shows that the effects of climate change in Nigeria include an increase in temperature; variable rainfall (decreasing rainfall in the continental interiors, and increasing rainfall in the coastal areas); sea level rise; flooding and erosion; drought and desertification; land degradation; extreme weather (thunderstorms, lightning, landslides, floods, and bushfires); and lastly, loss of biodiversity (Elisha, 2017; Ebele & Mordi, 2016; Olaniyi, 2013). The study explores climate journalism as well as its implications and contributions to the climate change debate.

### **Climate Debate**

A debate is a discussion, especially one in which people with different opinions about something discuss, it can be said that a debate refers to the process of discussing something (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). The climate debate in particular, refers to arguments that have emerged as a result of the quest to find lasting answers to questions bothering on the cause, effect and solutions to the lingering climate change crisis. It has been argued that public debates do not always foster consensus, but rather an enhanced understanding among the participants of the debate through the exchange of opinions that should be backed by justifications (Habermas, 2006; Peters, 2005). Evans and Steven (2017, p.3) maintain that “before any actor – whether government, investor or advocate – can seek to influence the climate debate effectively, it is essential to understand the drivers of that debate.” There are three groups in the climate change debate which include the climate change skeptics, the climate change deniers, and the climate change believers. These groups can be found within the scientific community, journalists, as well as the general public. Painter (2010) explains that the media are often criticized by scientists for creating “a climate of doubt” that makes room for skeptics and hence strengthens climate change deniers, contributing to public confusion, and the creation of obstacles in terms of negotiating robust political decisions on climate change.

Though skeptics are not outright deniers, and often claim that there is a need for more evidence bothering on anthropogenic climate change, they are sometimes an obstacle to climate change policy making. Rahmstorf (2004) classifies and distinguishes *trend skeptics*, *attribution skeptics*, and *impact skeptics*. Skeptics who reject the necessity of immediate CO<sup>2</sup> reduction form a fourth group of *mitigation skeptics*. Carvalho (2007) explains that policy-makers often expect scientists to provide answers to problems that are debated in the media and other public arenas, and make a variety of public issues of science to legitimize action or inaction. The study explores the concept of climate debate in the context of how climate journalism can galvanize the debate.

### **Climate Journalism**

Climate journalism is “the segment of journalism concerned with climate change, specifically with its characteristics, causes, and impacts on various societal fields, as well as ways of mitigating or adapting to it” (Schäfer & James, 2021, p.3). Brüggemann and Engesser (2014) hold that climate journalists are authors of news items that focus on climate change and are published in leading national news outlets. Painter, Kristiansen, and Schäfer (2018) point out that climate journalism goes beyond traditional journalism. It includes printed legacy news media as well as radio and television broadcasts, and mobile applications (apps). It also includes “digital-born” media organizations that “are not merely digital extensions of newspapers or broadcasters. Brüggemann (2017) explains that it is important to distinguish between the two types of climate journalists which are the prolific and the occasional. While the former is considered as local reporters, national editorial writers, foreign correspondents, and economic reporters who touch upon climate change in some of their articles, the latter type produces dozens of climate change related articles per year. It is therefore worthy of note to state that the two types of climate journalists are differentiated by their productivity levels. Brosda (2008) explains that journalists serve an important function as advocates of discourse. Furthermore, Hartley (1996) asserts that journalism is the “primary sense-making practice of modernity.” This point of view highlights the fact that journalists are important in terms of galvanizing debates, hence the role of a climate journalist is no different. Nerone (2015) explains that the climate debate is an interesting case as it poses a “test of capacity” for journalism and thus redefines journalistic professionalism. The study explores climate journalism in Nigeria, as well as its implications and contributions to the climate change debate.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The strings of the study are directly tied to the agenda setting theory. The agenda setting theory refers to the idea that there is a strong correlation between the emphasis that mass media place on certain issues and the importance attributed to these issues by mass audiences (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). McCombs and Shaw propounded the agenda setting theory in 1972. Wanta and Alkazemi (2017) assert that McCombs and Shaw were the first to test Lippmann’s hypothesis that news media have a significant impact on the perceived importance of issues held by the public. Lippmann (1922) spoke about the “pictures” in our heads, and felt that people used these hypothetical pictures to deal with their environment, this idea is considered a stepping stone to the agenda setting theory. It can be said that people have different ideas concerning what they think climate change means, and they use this to guide their decision-making process regarding the subject. Cohen (1963) refined Lippmann’s idea into the theory of agenda-setting. Lippmann argued that the media may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, it is rather stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about. Agenda setting theory assumes that people form attitudes and make decisions based on their considerations about the most salient issues (Hastie & Park, 1986). The agenda setting theory considers story selection as a determinant of public perceptions of issue importance

(Price & Tewksbury, 1997). The underappreciated element of traditional agenda-setting is that it focuses on problems, things that need to be fixed. An integral part of the agenda-setting process is about how news reports portray issues, as well as how people understand them (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). It is reasonable to infer that agenda setting gives the public an idea about the pressing (salient) issues that need urgent attention through their coverage of such issues. Schäfer (2015) points out that agenda-building efforts directed at the media are not always, and not equally, successful. Publishing houses and journalists play important roles as intermediaries in this respect. There is no doubt that climate journalism presents climate journalists with an opportunity to set public agenda by presenting climate change as an urgent problem that needs to be fixed, which in turn draws the attention of policy makers towards making policies that will effectively help mitigation and adaptation efforts. In shaping the public's perceptions about climate issues, climate journalism has an agenda setting implication, as it often pulls the political strings that are needed for progressive political decisions on climate change. In doing so, climate journalism shapes public opinion about climate related issues, thereby directly influencing the climate debate in a desirable way.

## **Review of Literature**

### **The Climate Journalism Quagmire**

Nigeria is a country that contributes to global carbon emissions in various ways. Environmentally unfriendly activities such as gas flaring amongst others have led to climate related challenges which may not be unrelated to the poor attention that the media and journalists have paid to such issues. "All aspects of Nigeria's development are vulnerable to climate related stressors" (National Climate Change Policy for Nigeria, [NCCP] 2021, p.10). Sayne (2011) explains that Nigeria's climate is likely to see growing shifts in temperature, rainfall, storms, and sea levels throughout the twenty-first century. These climatic challenges, if unaddressed, could throw resources such as land and water into shorter supply. It can be said that climate change is an issue that affects Nigerians in different dimensions. Altheide (2004) explains that communicating climate change is a formidable challenge for journalists, because it conflicts with established media logics. Climate change has different realms and doesn't fit neatly into a particular journalistic beat: it is not only an environmental or science story, it raises policy questions and challenges the economic order as well as health, thereby challenging our culture (Hulme, 2009). Thus, it is unsurprising that Brüggemann and Engesser (2014, p. 400) assert that climate journalism "cuts across beats." It can be said that climate journalism has been a complex quagmire to media experts and scholars, right from its inception. Also, climate journalism struggles with the challenge of funding. Journalists cannot attend all events, as resources to engage in such on-site research have declined in many countries (Dunwoody, 2014; Schäfer, 2017). Journalists often rely on individuals or organizations that provide information or content (Williams, 2015). This suggests that funding challenges may have a negative implication on the quality and perhaps quantity of climate journalism churned out from time to time.

Despite all associated challenges, it is still reasonable to infer that journalism is blessed with different techniques and channels that can be useful for the purpose of methodically suiting the peculiarities of climate journalism, and thus reaching desired goals. For instance, Ittipornwong (2017) explains that audio-visual media, such as television broadcasting, or photojournalism using online media for the coverage of natural environment and climate stories are great journalism tools. News in audio-visual format or video feature can deliver a greater presentation of news story with motion pictures and sound effects. Furthermore, there are other channels for climate journalism such as newspapers, magazines, blogs, and websites. Climate change is hardly perceived as an immediate problem (Weber, 2016). It is therefore reasonable

to infer that the way the public perceive climate change may sometimes create challenges for climate journalists in terms of how best to approach climate issues. Boykoff (2011) argues that communicating climate change is challenging, due to several reasons like its inherent abstractness, complexity, and slow-moving nature. Robertson (2018) explains that it is important for journalists to normalize the connections between people, places, problems, and how they are interrelated. It can be said that this point of view succinctly applies to climate journalism. Shanahan, Shubert, Scherer, and Corcoran (2013) assert that climate change will become increasingly important to African journalists, and African journalists will become increasingly important to the global response to climate change.

The increase in attention towards climate change issues is generally associated with the belief that journalism is largely responsible for a steep rise in public awareness about climate change in recent decades (McIlwaine, 2013). Creating awareness about environmental issues with the goal of influencing policymakers and the public towards combating climate change is crucial in this climate change era (Chand, 2017; Boykoff & Luedecke 2016; Tagbo, 2010). Saleh (2012) explains that if climate change is a major challenge for journalism globally, the urgency of the challenge in Africa is even bigger. Perhaps it can be said that climate change reporting in Africa is inadequate. Researchers investigating the public disconnect concerning climate change issues from a media communication perspective often suggest that this is a knowledge gap problem, indicating that people are not getting adequate or “correct” messages (Okoliko, 2021). There is an increasingly growing need for climate journalists to narrow the knowledge gap problem by taking the climate battle seriously, as the need for a wider and much more effective national, regional and global response cannot be understated. Also, the role of journalists has continued to evolve through time, for instance Brüggemann (2017) explains that evidence suggests shifts in perspectives and roles for journalists: more journalists are now interpretive and are committed to advocacy-oriented climate journalism. It can be said that climate journalism is a complicated approach when climate journalists do not stay abreast with developments within their professional field.

### **The Implications and Contributions of Climate Journalism**

For African journalists, the coverage of climate change means several things. It can save lives, change policy and empower people to make informed choices. Through informed reporting, journalists can shine a light on activities that people are already undertaking to prepare for climate change (Shanahan *et al*, 2013). It can be said that Nigeria’s case is no different from other African countries in this sense. There are expected contributions when climate journalism is the subject, and these contributions also have broad implications. Schäfer (2015) points out that journalism theory puts the role of journalists as ‘gatekeepers’ of the news flow, they ultimately decide which topics, stakeholders, and perspectives are represented in the media. Onokerhoraye (2011) explains that effective information dissemination and networking enhances people’s knowledge base for proactive engagement on climate change and its effects, and creates a sound foundation for policy formulation and action on climate change adaptation. It can be said that climate journalism provides a pathway for information dissemination as well as proactive engagement on climate change. Kaviya (2011) asserts that the purpose of journalism is to provide people with verified information for better decision making about their lives and the society at large. It also stands as the voice of society. Thus, it is not that hard to see why climate journalism is supposed to serve as the amplifying voice of a reality that threatens the planet. Shanahan *et al* (2013) assert that three of the media’s traditional roles - informing audiences, acting as watchdogs and campaigning on social issues - are especially relevant to climate journalism. In essence, climate journalism has the potential to meet the pressing need of keeping large audiences informed about climate change, just as much as it

also serves as a watchdog and a means of enhancing media campaigns that are climate change related.

A major milestone towards Nigeria's effective response to the challenges caused by climate change was the signing of the 2015 Paris Agreement to which the national climate change policy for Nigeria ratified in 2017 (National Climate Change Policy for Nigeria, [NCCP], 2021). It is not out of place to assert that journalists are vital to Nigeria's effective climate change response. Shanahan et al (2013) explain that journalists have critical roles to play in explaining the cause and effects of climate change, describing what can be done to adapt to the impacts ahead, and reporting on what governments and companies do, or do not do, to respond to these threats. Sustained media exposure and coverage of climate change have had great effects on how the public perceive the issue (Antilla, 2010). The way the media covers climate change affects how well societies deal with the problem (Shanahan *et al*, 2013). Due to their high circulation and large audience, the mass media are pivotal for information sharing (Schmidt, Ivanova & Schäfer, 2013). It is not an overstatement to say that the coverage of climate issues by journalists is very important in terms of accelerating climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts which can in turn have a boosting effect on climate resilience. Mass media debates can be viewed as an important element of political opinion formation in which various societal actors like environmental organizations, business associations, party and government representatives take part (Steffek, 2009). Journalists contribute substantially to the process of defining climate change as a social problem. They link current events, such as reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the annual United Nation's conventions, or extreme weather events, to the more abstract phenomenon of climate change. They also decide who to quote as a legitimate voice on climate change, by commenting on the causes of the problems and the adequacy of responses to climate change (Brüggemann, 2017). Furthermore, it is the journalists that are saddled with the responsibility of setting the tone of public debates about climate issues. Climate journalism cannot be overlooked, where the obligation of communicating knowledge-based climate related information to the public is considered paramount.

Climate journalism is crucial for the societal uptake of climate change and climate politics, and journalists are central agents for the raising of awareness and the sharing of information (Schmidt, Ivanova & Schäfer, 2013). In essence, it can be said that climate journalism matters a lot in the battle against climate change as well as the bid to ensure environmental sustainability. Ittipornwong (2017) explains that journalists as media professionals are able to attract public interest towards climate issues using news content and presentation format. It is not out of place to infer that attracting public interest towards climate issues is a positive step in the process of driving climate action through climate journalism. It can be said that despite all its glaring effects around the globe, there are divergent debates about climate change. Ukpong (2020) asserts that just like other news items, information about climate change is largely viewed through mass media outlets. Thus, information on climate change is subject to the themes constructed by the media or media sources. Evans and Steven (2017) argue that governments and businesses face huge political and financial risks as they navigate the climate debate. At present, their actions are based on vague and mostly intuitive views of what is driving the change. It is therefore reasonable to infer that an ideal situation is one in which climate journalism in general and climate journalists in particular play a role similar to that of architects in terms designing mass media information about climate change. The function of reinforcing efforts at mainstreaming climate change adaptation into development planning and policy falls under the realm of climate journalism (Ogwezi & Umukoro, 2020). Carvalho (2010) asserts that news media remain important arenas and agents in the production, reproduction, and transformation of the meaning of climate change. The media and journalists

have critical roles to play in terms of influencing policymakers to take action on adaptation to climate change (Shanahan *et al*, 2013). It can be said that climate journalism's crucial role of pushing and directing the climate debate remains vital towards tackling the climate crisis.

### **Climate Journalism as a Framework Underpinning Climate Debate**

Climate change is an issue that has brought about varying debates and discussions, which have in turn led to divergent opinions and views that have emerged as a result of the different perspectives that abound about the subject. Galle (2019) asserts that climate change undoubtedly stimulates scientific, academic, and media debates across the globe. Onokerhoraye (2011) explains that concepts about climate change have been codified by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and they represent the widest consensus available. Yet, there are still varying interpretations that have caused some mystification in the climate change debate. It can be said that in theory, climate journalists are expected to strategically influence the debate about critical front burner climate issues. Bernstein and Hoffmann (2019) explain that effective communication about the reality and significance of climate change has been identified as a crucial element for the building of broad engagement with climate change and its potential solutions. It is only reasonable to assert that certain contentious issues have acted like atoms, thereby forming a bone of contention which has only deepened the climate debate. Evans and Steven (2017, p. 3) explain that "before any actor – whether government, investor or advocate – can seek to influence the climate debate effectively, it is essential to understand the drivers of that debate." Climate journalism's potential to galvanize the climate debate depends on its ability to influence contentious issues that have acted as drivers of the debate. These issues include but are not totally restricted to the following areas:

**The Hoax versus Reality Debate:** Climate change is a fact of life (Adedeji, Reuben & Olatoye, 2014). It can be said that this sort of inference does not stop the doubters from questioning the credibility of climate change. Early communication about climate change was more about scientific evidence than anything else (Helledal, 2020). It is reasonable to assert that climate journalism and climate change communication at large, focused on scientific evidence so as to convince the public as well as skeptics who believed climate change was a hoax. Climate Change is an idea that attracts considerable disagreement. Yet it is less an argument about whether or not the climate is changing - there is abundant evidence about this fact from many parts of the world and from both scientific and non - scientific sources (Hulme, 2019). Despite the undeniable losses and damages caused by climate change, there are still skeptics and deniers. Easterbrook (2006) explains that the scientific uncertainty that once justified skepticism has been replaced by near-unanimity among scholars. It is now agreed upon that an artificially warming world is a phenomenon posing real danger. Whitmarsh (2011) asserts that about 97% of climate scientists across the world agree about the human contributions to global warming. This suggests that climate change is not only a harsh reality for the world to tackle, its causes and effects are also well documented, and accepted by the global scientific community.

### **Climate Change versus Global Warming:**

Broadly speaking, climate change is a change in the average weather experienced in a particular region or location. It may occur over decades or even millennia. Its causes may be natural, but climate change is mainly caused by human activities (Onokerhoraye, 2011). Global warming refers to the gradual increase, in observed or projected global surface temperature, as a result of anthropogenic emissions (World Bank Group Climate Change Knowledge Portal, CCKP, 2021). Pasquini and Shearing (2014) explain that global warming remains a topic of discussion and a debatable issue among politicians and the scientific community. Despite the fact that



there is enough evidence to suggest that global warming is caused by humans, the last decades have led to little action (Helledal, 2020). Though climate change and global warming are often interchangeably used, they do not mean the same thing. It can however be said that global warming inevitably leads to climate change. Adedeji, Reuben, and Olatoye (2014) explain that global warming has led to climate change which is in turn causing the planet to become hotter, increasing weather disasters and hurting our health, communities, and economy. Oreskes and Conway (2008) affirm that the anthropogenic theory as well as climate simulation models shows that global warming might lead to an increase in either the frequency or intensity of extreme weather events such as hurricanes, heat waves, storms and droughts.

### **The Journalistic Norms Debate**

Journalistic norms such as balanced reporting, objectivity, fairness and accuracy are important tools of the trade (journalism) that also impact climate journalism. Boykoff (2007) explains that operating in accordance with widely accepted journalistic norms, influential mass-media newspaper and television sources have misrepresented the top climate scientific perspective, thereby perpetrating an informational bias regarding anthropogenic climate change. It can be said that this paradox has created a dilemma concerning which of these journalistic norms needs to take a back seat as far as climate change reporting is concerned. Moser (2010) explains that the mass media has reported climate change from the norm of balanced reporting, by giving both sides an equal amount of coverage. Helledal (2020) argues that this has given climate science skeptics the opportunity to speak up, leading to a split discourse, causing biased coverage of climate change. Boykoff (2007) argues that in order to examine impediments in climate science communication via the media, there is a need to critically scrutinize the firmly entrenched journalistic norms that profoundly shape the selection and composition of news.

### **Cause and Effect Debate**

One of the debates that have generated intense discussions and arguments concerns the cause and effect of climate change. Gerhard (2004) explains that the cause-and-effect debate is centered on human versus natural causes, small amount of warming versus unprecedented warming, and fossil fuel drivers versus non fossil fuel drivers. It can be said that though anthropogenic climate change is now recognized by researchers as a major driver of climate change due to overwhelming scientific evidence and consensus that has been reached through research, some have continued to blindly argue that climate change is a natural phenomenon, and efforts by climate scientists to paint a clear picture about the causes and effects of climate change continue to boil. Ogwezi and Umukoro (2020) argue that humans, have remained the major devourers of valuable resources and generators of massive wastes, toxins and greenhouse gases, and are actually in the right position to prevent this environmental catastrophe. Unfortunately, this clarion call has so far been ignored. Grundmann (2012) argued that public scrutiny of climate science through aggressive media outlets, sympathetic politicians and the emerging blogosphere has led to a situation where the legitimacy of the official position on climate change has come under scrutiny. It can be said that just as much as skeptics and climate deniers have resorted to using media campaigns to influence the climate debate, pro climate change campaigns must adopt effective media campaign strategies that can tilt the climate debate in the right direction.

### **Adaptation versus Mitigation Debate**

Climate change adaptation refers to the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects (World Bank Group [Climate Change Knowledge Portal](CCKP), 2021). Climate change mitigation is rather concerned with the anthropogenic intervention to reduce the anthropogenic forcing of the climate system and involves strategies that are focused on

reducing greenhouse gas emissions (Mekong River Commission [MRC], 2013). One of the debates about climate change concerns the best approach to adopt towards the climate change battle. Scientists have been preoccupied with the duty of emphasizing the glaring need for adaptation and mitigation efforts against climate change. While some have argued that the best approach is adaptation, others have also argued in support of climate change mitigation. Ittipornwong (2017) explains that the term adaptation is actually aligned with mitigation which is the other fundamental condition in the climate change debate. Ogwezi and Umukoro (2020) argue that mitigation and adaptation measures have been closely linked to people's perceptions and understanding gained from daily exposure to media content. Ochieng (2009) argues that the media can potentially play a critical role in reinforcing efforts to mainstream climate change adaptation into development planning and policy. This point of view underpins the role that climate journalism plays in terms of ensuring that both adaptation and mitigation efforts receive the required amount of media attention, so as to ensure that both strategies are always adopted in a manner that suits peculiar challenges.

## **Conclusion**

The study provides an important perspective regarding the implications and contributions of climate journalism towards galvanizing the climate debate in Nigeria. The findings of the study revealed that climate journalism has been a complex quagmire to media experts and scholars, right from its inception. Findings further revealed that communicating climate change is a challenge in Nigeria, Africa and beyond, due to its inherent abstractness, complexity, and slow-moving nature. The study shows that climate journalism has wide ranging implications and contributions to Nigeria's battle against climate change due to how valuable it is in terms of shaping the climate debate. Furthermore, climate journalism is vital to climate change communication due to the fact that it presents climate journalists with an opportunity to set public agenda by framing climate change as an urgent problem that needs to be fixed, which in turn draws the attention of policy makers towards making policies that will effectively help mitigation and adaptation efforts. Also, in shaping the public's perceptions about climate issues, climate journalism also pulls the political strings that are needed for important, as well as progressive political decisions concerning climate change, which in turn leads to a much wider and effective global, regional and local response. Climate journalism cannot be overlooked, where the obligation of communicating knowledge-based climate change related information to the public is considered paramount. The study, therefore, concludes that the need for climate journalists to narrow the present knowledge gap problem cannot be overemphasized.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are put forward:

- i.** Climate journalists in Nigeria should strive towards educating the public about the urgency and complexity of the present climate change conundrum. Framing climate change as an urgent problem that needs to be fixed will subsequently draw the attention of policy makers towards making policies that are helpful in terms of mitigation and adaptation efforts.
- ii.** In order to ensure that climate journalism effectively contributes its quota to collective climate action in Nigeria, there should be collaborations and partnerships between the media and other sectors such as private organizations, civil society organizations (CSO's), and non-governmental organizations (NGO's) amongst other stakeholders.
- iii.** Climate journalists should be trained from time to time, so as to stay abreast with latest trends. Training climate journalists will be helpful in terms of analyzing policy issues,

contentious debates, as well as their implications in ways that will galvanize climate action and foster collective responsibility.

- iv. Climate journalists should strive to have a local understanding of climate change in Nigeria, as well as its specific impacts. This will help in terms of generating local solutions, such as cultural mitigation and adaptation strategies that resonate with the local population.
- v. Climate journalists should be adept social media users, so as to contribute towards an effective communication of the subject. Sites such as Facebook and Twitter amongst others provide a platform for users to engineer educative and interactive conversations through online comments and shares.

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