

Media Framing of Climate Change Contents in News Coverage in Kenya

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Abstract

Climate change is a phenomenon whose consequences affect nations across the globe, limiting the growth of various sectors. Climate change risk stories affecting Kenya can only gain public attention and become part of the public agenda if the media prominently cover them. On the other hand, the public draws most of its climate change information from the media. The media uses framing to effectively convey information on local climate change challenges, as well as mitigation and adaptation strategies. The study sought to establish the frequency of media coverage of climate change news in Kenya, and to determine the media frames used in the coverage of climate change news in Kenya. The research used mixed methodologies to acquire and analyze data. The target population for the study was $N = 8,731$. The research utilized random and purposive sampling techniques using Slovin's formula to produce reliable estimates to answer the study's research questions $N = 1,362$. The study sourced data from newspapers, broadcast media, and journalists. The researchers gathered data through content analysis and interviews. The study employed descriptive and thematic analysis to derive insights from the emerging themes, aligning them with the research question. The study aims to contribute to the improvement of the media framing of climate change in Kenya and the realization of Sustainable Development Goal 13 on climate action.

Keywords: *Climate change, Media frames, Climate action*

1.0 Introduction

The media is crucial in informing the public about pertinent societal issues, such as climate change. The media does this by framing salient issues so that the public can better understand them. Media framing plays a crucial role in shaping how the public understands and perceives climate change in Kenya. Different frames used by the media influence how the public perceives climate change, whether as a political issue, an urgent crisis, or an economic challenge. This directly shapes public opinion and influences support for climate mitigation or adaptation strategies, impacting the actions taken in response to climate change. Media frames emphasize important aspects of climate change, guiding attention toward specific issues or solutions deemed critical. This can influence the priorities of the public, policymakers, civil society, and businesses by emphasizing specific impacts, risks, or solutions; thereby, directing focus and actions. Media framing is instrumental in mobilizing or hindering action on climate change by shaping the decisions and behaviors of the public and other stakeholders. The amplified or marginalized frames illustrate the power dynamics among different interests, including corporations, governments, activists, and scientists, influencing the climate discourse. Media framing frequently gives preference to certain narratives over others, influencing the public's perception of climate change. The media utilizes frames that can highlight or obscure key justice and equity dimensions of climate change, thereby influencing which voices, experiences, and perspectives are prominent. Media framing is crucial in shaping the climate change agenda, and impels its understanding, prioritization, and response.

Media frames used in coverage of climate change news

Framing entails two concepts; namely, selection and salience. According to Entman (1993), framing entails selecting some key aspects of perceived reality and emphasizing them in the communication process. According to Di Gregorio et.al (2013), a media frame is "a broad organizing theme for selecting, emphasizing, and linking the elements of a story, such as characters, scenes, their actions, and supporting documentation". Every day, millions of people rely on the news media for information. The media shapes public opinion by framing events and issues in a specific manner for its target audience. News frames can influence how people interpret, learn about, and evaluate issues and events. The outcomes of framing can be considered at both the individual and societal levels. Frames can influence individual attitudes toward an issue or event, while shaping societal decision-making, collective actions, and political socialization.

Studies in climate change news framing in climate-related newspapers classify frames into four; namely, social context, causes, consequences, and solutions. Stecula and Merkley (2019) analyzed three news media frames: the uncertainty and risk in climate change; economic costs and benefits of mitigation; and conservative and free-market ideology. They discovered that frames that decrease people's inclination to support and participate in climate action, such as those that highlight the potential economic damages of climate mitigation policy or uncertainty, have been decreasing. In contrast, there has been an increase in frames that promote climate action among the general public, particularly those that emphasize the economic advantages of taking action on climate change. Further, they claimed that news content currently

emphasizes risk, danger, and the present tense, indicating positive progress in promoting public climate action. In their study, Stoddart and Smith (2016) employed thematic frames, issue categories, and rhetorical frames to elucidate the fluctuations in climate change coverage in two prominent Canadian national newspapers. Ford and King (2015) conducted a study on climate change coverage and the use of adaptation frames in four major North American print news outlets between 1993 and 2013. The study revealed limited research on the discussion of climate change adaptation in the media. News stories with adaptation content primarily emphasized the necessity of adapting rather than the specific actions taken for adaptation. Furthermore, news media coverage predominantly focuses on emphasizing the need to adapt, and highlights 'hard' adaptation measures rather than the promotion of "soft adaptation" to enhance resilience.

"The research found that news media is crucial for achieving social change, however, Kenya is still in the early stages of developing climate reporting evidenced by news reporters lacking knowledge of climate change"

Studies have shown divergences in media framing of climate change across developed and developing nations (Xie (2015). In developed countries, blame, action, and responsibility frames are most commonly used. Journalists adopt generic frames of responsibility, human interest, conflict, and economic consequences (Takahashi, 2011). Mitigation and adaptation are the main categories of climate action in international

climate change agreements. However, research suggests that developing countries are more affected by climate change due to a lack of resources and increased temperature fluctuations. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the Kyoto Protocol recognize the different climate needs and capabilities of developed and developing countries.

2.0 Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in Kenya with a focus on four media platforms; namely, Citizen TV, NTV, Nation, and Standard newspapers. According to the Media Council of Kenya (2024), Citizen TV is the most-watched television station in Kenya, with 35% viewership, while NTV follows with 11% viewership. Additionally, Nation is the leading newspaper in Kenya, with a daily circulation of 42%, while Standard follows with a 21% daily circulation. The study utilized a mixed research design by incorporating qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. Interviews were conducted to gather data from the journalists, while quantitative content analysis was used to collect data from the four media platforms. The research employed a combination of random sampling and purposive sampling techniques, with the sample size of $n=1,362$ calculated using Slovin's formula, to generate reliable estimates for the study's research objectives. Quantitative data from the study was analyzed using descriptive analysis, while qualitative data was analyzed thematically.

3.0 Results and Discussion

The media has employed various frames when covering climate change, which can shape public perception and discourse. The study analyzed the content of climate change news stories in popular news media newspapers and broadcast television in Kenya between 2017 and 2023, using the

search words “climate change and global warming.” Traditional media, such as broadcast and newspapers, continue to be the primary sources of climate change information. These media outlets play an essential role in shaping public perceptions and responses to climate change. Schäfer and

Painter (2021) argue that the news media play a vital role as agents in shaping, disseminating, and changing the interpretation and significance of climate change. The findings of the study indicate that there are seven frames portrayed in the media as indicated in table 1.

Table 1

Types of media frames

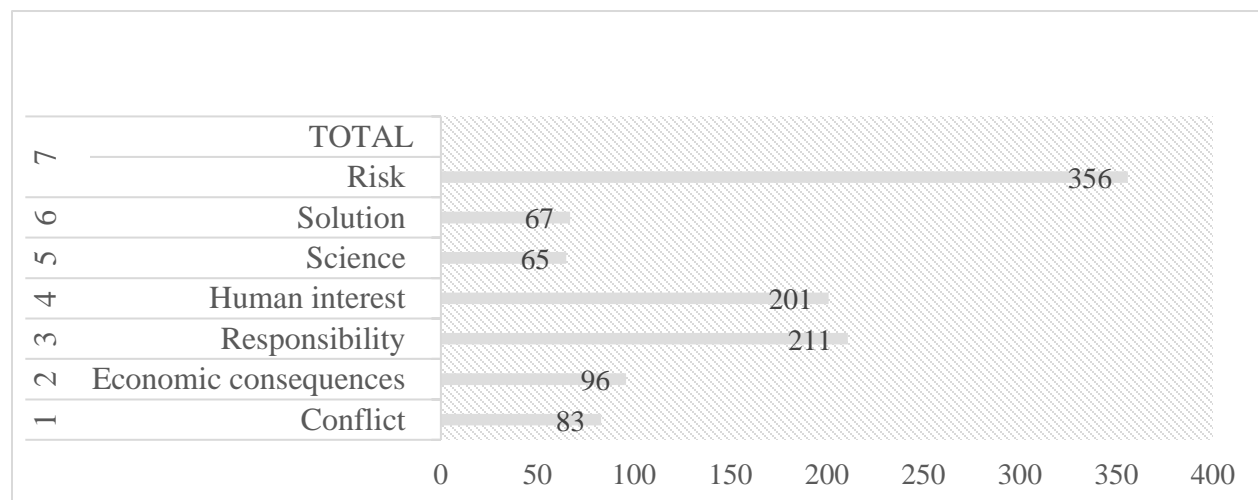
Media Framing	Nation	%	Standard	%	NTV	%	Citizen TV	%
Conflict framing	17	6%	23	9%	29	11%	14	5%
Economic consequences	29	10%	30	12%	21	8%	16	6%
Responsibility framing	55	19%	51	20%	40	15%	65	24%
Human interest	62	21%	41	16%	58	22%	40	15%
Science framing	23	8%	15	6%	16	6%	11	4%
Solution framing	12	4%	20	8%	11	4%	24	9%
Risk framing	93	32%	74	29%	89	34%	100	37%
N=	291	100	254	100	264	100	270	100

According to the findings, various frames are used by the different media platforms as news frames to highlight the impact of climate

change in Kenya. The findings revealed a total of seven frames used by the media to communicate climate change impacts.

Figure 1

Media frames



Findings in figure 1 indicate that risk framing was Kenya's most commonly used media frame to communicate climate change impacts, with 356 news items using this approach. This framing emphasizes the urgency and severity of climate change, causing fear or fatalism. It can also motivate individuals, communities, and governments to take action. Increased climate change awareness can drive meaningful policy decisions and changes, and influence attitudes towards mitigation and adaptation strategies. Responsibility and human-interest framing were the second and third frame types used in Kenya's climate change news stories. Responsibility framing assigns responsibility for the causes or solutions of climate change to various actors, such as governments, corporations, or individuals. Human interest framing emphasizes individual stories and narratives, and demonstrates the effects climate change on individuals, communities, or vulnerable populations. Solutions and science framing were the least used media frames in Kenya's climate change news. Science framing is the process of presenting and contextualizing scientific information or issues in communication, with the aim of making complex scientific concepts more accessible, relevant, and meaningful to diverse audiences. By empowering individuals to take action, the media can advocate for various stakeholders to work together toward achieving local climate change solutions for a more sustainable future. Effective science framing aims to make complex scientific concepts and findings more accessible, relevant, and meaningful to a diverse audience. However, findings show that the

media used this framing the least, even though climate change is considered a science topic. Journalist A stated;

The best way to write climate change stories scientifically is by interviewing sources who are experts in climate change issues. But this at times becomes difficult. Reaching out to these experts, especially when working on a story that has a deadline, is not easy. It means sometimes we go to the internet to understand some concepts. This too is time-consuming, and many journalists cannot do that; therefore, we end up doing stories with the little knowledge we have on climate change. This is why most of the climate stories do not touch on real climate change issues; we just report on climate change effects such as floods, and drought, without giving details of the climate change aspect. Short trainings offered to journalists are not enough.

The study found that solutions framing was the least used method in reporting climate change, with 67 news stories. Solutions framing focuses on potential solutions rather than addressing the problem. It shifts the focus from reporting climate change as a threat to adapting to the risks. This approach could incorporate best practices, case studies, and innovative ideas. Kenyan media houses and journalists can adopt solutions journalism for more comprehensive reporting on climate change news items.

Framing, as the study reveals, exerts significant power over governance and policy outcomes in social systems. Climate frames, in particular, serve as a potent advocacy tool

for actors seeking to influence political agendas. By influencing how policymakers and the public perceive issues or by preventing certain topics from being discussed, diverse frames can empower the Kenyan media to effectively address climate change, even at the grassroots level, making them feel influential and impactful (McHugh et al., 2021).

The study also aimed to determine the frequency of media coverage of climate change. The findings of the study imply that particular events had a significant influence on climate change news stories in both print and broadcast media. The different frequencies of media framing of climate change news stories are specified in Table 2

Table 2

Frequency of media coverage of climate change news

No	Frequency of Media framing	Media	N	%
	Daily	Nation newspaper	4	57%
		Standard newspaper	3	43%
		Citizen TV	1	14%
		Nation TV	2	29%
	Event- driven	Nation newspaper	166	57%
		Standard newspaper	128	50%
		Citizen TV	90	33%
		Nation TV	108	41%

The findings in table 2 reveal that the majority of climate change news stories aired by Kenyan media houses were event-driven (54%), indicating that climate change news affecting the tourism industry is only given airtime as a result of a climate change event such as floods, droughts, international conferences, and summits.

In print newspapers, climate change news was mostly covered as feature stories, on dedicated special pages or special pullouts that specifically addressed climate change as an issue. This was also the case in broadcast media where climate change was aired as a feature story during a news bulleting or an interview with climate change experts.

A media editor stated the following about the frequency of media coverage of climate change:

“Climate change stories are only run when something big happens, something relevant such as a summit on climate change, floods having killed people, people having been displaced because of a specific climate disaster, too much heat, among others.”

“Editor B” from another media house also stated that;

“Running stories on climate change, especially big and well researched stories is very expensive, so most of the time, we just run stories in regard to what has occurred.”

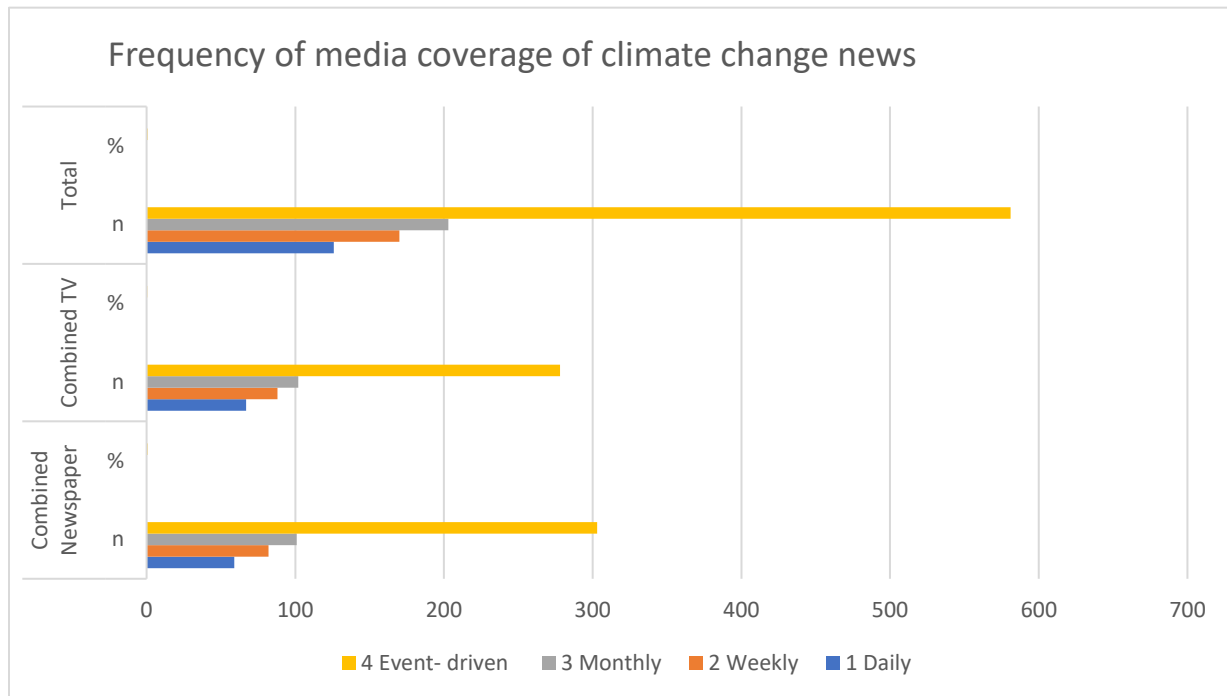
Journalist B stated the following:

“Some of these climate change stories are complicated and therefore many

journalists just ignore them. This calls for media houses to train journalists on climate journalism.”

Figure 2

Frequency of media coverage of climate change news in Kenya between 2017 and 2023



Discussion

This study aimed to determine the frames employed in the media coverage of climate change news in Kenya by The Daily Nation, The Standard, Citizen TV, and NTV. The study identified seven frames that the media use to report on climate change; namely, conflict, economics, consequences, responsibility, human interest, science, solutions, and risk frames.

The study revealed that Kenyan media houses tend to react to climate change news stories, often focusing on the urgent and devastating effects of climate change portrayed as risks and threats. Risk frames were more prevalent than other frames in covering climate change news items affecting Kenya. The high number of news items, 356 out of 1,362

sampled, underscores the urgency of the climate change situation in Kenya.

The media often fails to link climate change to the disasters and threats it causes, leading to a fragmented understanding of the risks and threats. This results in delays in addressing the urgent need for action on climate change. The media should improve on its coverage of climate change by emphasizing the link between extreme weather events and disasters, as well as the human activities that drive it. This will mobilize communities to take action in combating climate change. Climate change has become a contentious subject in the media, with various actors framing it using various frames, such as threats to economic growth, morality and ethics, and scientific uncertainty. This lack of awareness and

understanding contributes to delays in addressing the urgent need for action on climate change. Different media framings of climate change result in different solutions (Chen et al., 2023). Climate change is often presented in various ways, leading to different approaches to its consequences. Media conflicts over framing are common, as it is a crucial arena for climate change voices, including experts, governments, and organizations, influencing public opinion and climate policy (Ylä-Anttila et al., 2022).

Framing is key in shaping public understanding and attitudes towards climate change. The public can discern the motivations and biases behind different framings by critically evaluating media information. This understanding empowers individuals to make informed decisions and take action to address the urgent challenges of climate change. By questioning the media's framing, individuals can expose hidden agendas and misinformation, facilitating the distinction between fact and fiction. This knowledge can lead to evidence-based policies and initiatives that effectively mitigate climate change impacts. A more informed approach to climate change framing can pave the way for a sustainable future for all. Adequate media coverage can enable collaboration between the public, private sector, and policymakers to develop effective climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies. However, media coverage must be grounded in reality, making climate change stories relevant to local communities and marginalized voices.

Carmichael et al. (2017) and Dumitrescu and Mughan (2010) have demonstrated that the frequency and prominence of media coverage on climate change significantly shape public opinion. The frequency, prominence, and framing of climate change exhibit significant variation, primarily due to the partisan nature of modern media. Media houses should

implement effective communication strategies that can cut through the partisan divide and present accurate information on the urgency and severity of climate change. This will foster widespread support from various stakeholders for meaningful action on climate change.

The Kenyan news coverage of climate change exhibits a pattern of alternating periods of high and low coverage, accompanied by a general upward trend in overall coverage. The extent of media coverage is predominantly influenced by national and international events, rather than by alterations in national or global carbon emissions, or by other ecological factors. The study established that media coverage of climate change in Kenya largely depends on climate change events happening globally and nationally. Between 2017 and 2023, the study found that the Nation newspaper led with 57% coverage, the Standard newspaper 54%, citizen TV 53%, and NTV 51%. In comparison, the newspaper framed more climate change stories at 56% compared to broadcast TV at 52%. This, therefore, calls for Kenyan media houses to increase their frequency of media framing by not only airing climate change news as a result of a particular climate change event, whether globally or nationally but also comprehensively covering climate change in the Kenyan context. This entails Kenyan media platforms developing effective climate change policies and increasing journalists' capacity and knowledge to treat climate change with the seriousness it deserves.

The increasing frequency of climate change news coverage in Kenyan media can significantly increase public concern and highlight the societal impact of climate change issue. This can help illustrate how Kenyans are aware of, affected by, and how they combat, or cause climate change. Bødker and Neverla (2012) argue that climate

change is remote and requires specific events like summits or extreme weather events to gain media attention, and direct public attention. However, news media remains a central arena for increasing climate change awareness, and frequency of media coverage, and climate change risks facing various sectors. The amount of media attention given to one issue in comparison to the amount of attention given to other issues simultaneously results from competing news media coverage of issues and, thus, an indicator of a social problem construction.

Despite its significant impact on society, climate change challenges the general public regarding perception and comprehension. Through the lens of news media, the general public often sees climate change as an intricate and inconspicuous matter (Newman et al., 2021). Kenyan media outlets can shape public awareness on climate change by amplifying their coverage of the risks it poses to the country. Chomsky and Herman's Propaganda Model highlights mass media ownership's influence on Kenyan climate change coverage. The concentration of media ownership among a few individuals and large organizations can homogenize news and information, prioritizing the views of powerful economic and political actors while marginalizing alternative viewpoints. This is reflected in Kenyan media scenarios, where large media houses cover climate change news more frequently, and thereby increasing public awareness. Public attention, political agendas, and economic and political factors influence the frequency of climate change news reporting frequency. Recent extreme weather events have also influenced the tone and focus of climate change coverage.

4.0 Conclusion

Kenya focuses on climate change news in its mass media, particularly broadcast TV and newspapers. News media is crucial for

achieving social change, especially when dealing with economic, social, and political challenges like climate change. However, Kenya is still in the early stages of developing climate reporting, with many young, well-educated, and experienced journalists lacking knowledge of climate change. Lack of climate change knowledge by journalists can lead to minimal coverage and an incomplete understanding of climate change. Accessing credible climate change experts and researchers is also challenging, thereby preventing accurate reporting and causing misinformation. To bridge the gap between climate change science and public understanding, editors and journalists can encourage informed discussions, shape public opinion, and advocate for policy changes. Current climate coverage adopts a global perspective, which may not resonate with local audiences who are more interested in understanding climate change's impacts on their communities.

5.0 Recommendations

Kenyan media should train journalists on climate reporting to effectively report on impacts of climate change. They should frame climate change locally, highlighting economic, environmental, and social impacts in different parts of the country. The media should also give prominence to communities grappling with climate change, such as farmers, fishermen, and pastoralists, to humanize its impacts on mankind. They should scrutinize government policies, evaluate their alignment with climate goals and community engagement, and hold the government accountable for mitigating climate change effects. Ultimately, the media should foster dialogues between stakeholders, featuring joint projects and sharing success stories, highlighting positive examples of climate adaptation, mitigation, and resilience-building measures.

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