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BAYELSA RESIDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF NEWS REPORTAGE ON GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR THE STATE

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ABSTRACT
Global climate change presents urgent ecological and socio-economic challenges, particularly for low-lying, coastal regions such as Bayelsa State in Nigeria's Niger Delta. This study examined residents' perceptions of mass media reportage on climate change and its local consequences, with the aim of identifying gaps in awareness, interpretation, and adaptive response. A mixed-methods design was employed, combining a survey of 400 residents selected through multi-stage sampling across all eight Local Government Areas, with in-depth interviews involving 12 purposively chosen stakeholders, including community leaders, media professionals, and environmental advocates. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Weighted Mean Scores, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. Findings revealed high but largely incidental exposure to climate change messages across television, radio, and social media. While reportage was often detailed and emotionally engaging, it frequently lacked localization to Bayelsa-specific issues such as recurrent flooding, coastal erosion, and declining fishery resources. Perceptions of urgency and relevance were strongly influenced by education level, personal experience with environmental hazards, and trust in media credibility, whereas cultural and social factors had comparatively less impact. Although media coverage effectively raised awareness, it seldom translated into sustained adaptive behaviors, indicating a gap between knowledge and action. The study underscores the media's pivotal role in shaping public agendas and framing climate narratives but highlights the need for sustained, locally contextualized, and action-oriented communication. It recommends increased consistency in coverage, integration of indigenous knowledge, collaboration with trusted community figures, and the inclusion of practical guidance for climate adaptation. These strategies could enhance both the salience and behavioral impact of climate change reportage, thereby strengthening resilience in vulnerable regions like Bayelsa State.

***Keywords**: Climate Change, Mass Media, Environmental Awareness, Adaptive Behavior, Localized Communication*

INTRODUCTION
Global climate change is widely recognized as one of the most pressing challenges confronting humanity in the twenty-first century, with profound implications for natural ecosystems, public health, socio-economic systems, and human settlements (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2023). Scientific consensus attributes the accelerating pace of climatic disruptions to anthropogenic activities such as deforestation, fossil fuel consumption, and

unsustainable land use practices, which have triggered shifts in weather patterns, rising sea levels, and the increasing frequency of extreme weather events (Ajaero & Anorue, 2018). In developing regions, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, the impacts of climate change are often compounded by socio-economic vulnerabilities, infrastructural deficits, and limited adaptive capacities (Nwabueze & Egbra, 2016).

Nigeria, with its extensive coastline and diverse ecological zones, faces significant exposure to climate-related hazards. Bayelsa State, located in the Niger Delta region, is acutely vulnerable due to its low-lying terrain, proximity to the Atlantic coastline, and heavy dependence on climate-sensitive livelihoods such as fishing, subsistence farming, and artisanal activities. In recent decades, the State has experienced recurrent flooding, severe coastal erosion, and ecosystem degradation, all of which have had devastating consequences for local communities, infrastructure, and economic stability (National Emergency Management Agency [NEMA], 2022). These environmental pressures threaten food security, displace populations, and exacerbate poverty, making climate change not just an ecological concern but a critical socio-economic and developmental issue.

Mass media play a pivotal role in framing public understanding of climate change by selecting, emphasizing, and contextualizing information (Akpan, Anorue, & Ukonu, 2012). Media reportage can shape perceptions of risk, influence environmental attitudes, and potentially motivate adaptive behaviors (Balarabe & Hamza, 2020). However, scholars have noted that media coverage of climate change in Nigeria often lacks depth, local relevance, and sustained engagement, thereby limiting its effectiveness in fostering informed public discourse (Nwabueze & Egbra, 2016). Ajaero and Anorue (2018) further argue that when climate change reportage does not reflect local contexts and realities, audiences may perceive the issue as distant, abstract, or less urgent, reducing the likelihood of meaningful individual or collective responses.

The escalating impacts of global climate change, manifesting in Bayelsa State through intensified flooding, coastal erosion, and environmental degradation, pose severe threats to the region's ecosystems, livelihoods, and socio-economic stability. Despite the critical role of mass media in shaping public awareness and driving adaptive responses, there is a significant gap in understanding how Bayelsa residents perceive and interpret news reportage on climate change and its local consequences. Existing media coverage often lacks depth, local relevance, and consistency, potentially undermining its effectiveness in fostering informed environmental attitudes or motivating adaptive behaviors among vulnerable populations. This study addresses the critical need to explore how Bayelsa residents perceive the accessibility, relevance, and persuasiveness of climate change news, as well as the socio-cultural and media-related factors influencing their interpretations and responses. By examining these dynamics, the research seeks to inform more effective and inclusive communication strategies to enhance climate resilience in ecologically sensitive regions like Bayelsa state.

Specifically, the study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To assess the level of exposure of Bayelsa State residents to climate change reportage across different mass media platforms;
2. To examine how residents perceive the adequacy, relevance, and tone of mass media messages on global climate change and its local consequences;
3. To investigate the factors that influence residents' interpretation of and response to media coverage on climate change; and
4. To explore the extent to which media messages influence environmental awareness and adaptive behaviors in Bayelsa State.

By addressing these objectives, the study contributes to scholarly discourse on media, climate change, and public perception, while aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 13 (Climate Action), which emphasizes the role of public education, awareness, and communication in building resilience to climate-related hazards. In doing so, it responds to the urgent need for locally grounded research that can guide both media practitioners and policymakers in designing climate communication strategies that resonate with at-risk communities.

Conceptual Review

Bayelsa State, located in Nigeria's Niger Delta, is one of Africa's most climate-vulnerable regions due to its low-lying topography, proximity to the Atlantic Ocean, and socio-economic challenges. Recurrent flooding, sea-level rise, and coastal erosion profoundly shape residents' perceptions of climate change news reportage. This review critically examines Bayelsa's environmental vulnerabilities, annual climate challenges, topographical risks, and media dynamics to understand how news narratives align with residents' lived experiences and influence public awareness. By synthesizing environmental and media scholarship, this review highlights the need for localized, context-specific reporting to foster effective climate communication in Bayelsa.

Environmental and Socio-Economic Vulnerability

Bayelsa's vulnerability to climate change arises from a complex interplay of environmental, social, and economic factors, exacerbated by its location in the Niger Delta's intricate network of rivers, creeks, and wetlands. The region's susceptibility to flooding is heightened by socio-economic constraints that limit adaptive capacity. In a seminal study, Adelekan (2010) notes that coastal communities in Nigeria, including Bayelsa, face elevated flood risks due to low elevation and dense populations in flood-prone areas, compounded by poverty that restricts mitigation efforts. This underscores the structural barriers Bayelsa residents face, shaping their reliance on media for actionable climate information. Additionally, oil exploration in the Niger Delta intensifies environmental degradation, amplifying climate impacts. Adelekan (2010) further highlights that oil-related damage compounds flood risks, creating a feedback loop that heightens residents' expectations for accurate, locally relevant media coverage.

Annual Climate Challenges

The persistent threat of annual flooding defines Bayelsa's climate challenges, driven by natural and anthropogenic factors. Poor urban planning and oil-induced environmental degradation exacerbate the impacts of heavy rainfall and river overflow. Adelekan (2016) provides critical evidence that coastal cities in Nigeria, including Bayelsa, experience severe flood risks due to these combined factors, with the 2012 and 2022 floods displacing thousands and causing significant economic losses. These recurring events heighten local awareness of climate change, making residents more attentive to news that reflects their lived realities but critical of coverage that downplays the severity. The urgency of these disruptions, as Adelekan (2016) suggests, demands media narratives that prioritize local impacts to drive public engagement.

Topographical Vulnerabilities

Bayelsa's low-lying coastal plains, often below sea level, make it acutely susceptible to climate hazards such as sea-level rise, flooding, and erosion. The state's topography amplifies even minor environmental changes, threatening communities like Yenagoa and Brass. Hagenlocher et al. (2018) offer a critical perspective on deltaic systems like the Niger Delta, arguing that their low elevation and exposure to multiple hazards create unique vulnerabilities, with oil-induced subsidence further exacerbating risks. This topographical context underscores the need for media to convey the immediacy of climate threats in Bayelsa, as generalized reporting may fail to capture the region's specific challenges.

Media Framing and Public Perception

Media framing critically shapes how Bayelsa residents perceive climate change, influencing whether it is viewed as an immediate local crisis or a distant global issue. Entman (1993) provides a foundational framework, arguing that framing involves selecting aspects of reality to construct problem definitions and solutions, which in Bayelsa's context determines the urgency of climate action. Localized reporting on flooding or erosion can galvanize public concern, while globalized narratives risk disengagement. Similarly, McCombs and Shaw (1972) assert that media set the public

agenda by prioritizing issues, suggesting that frequent, prominent coverage of Bayelsa's floods could elevate climate awareness, whereas underreporting may suppress advocacy efforts.

In Bayelsa's urban centers like Yenagoa, newspapers play a significant role but often fail to localize climate narratives. Nwabueze and Egbra (2016) critically note that Nigerian and Ghanaian newspapers tend to frame climate change globally, reducing its perceived relevance to local audiences. This misalignment can erode trust among Bayelsa residents who experience climate impacts firsthand. Ajaero and Anorue (2018) further critique Nigerian newspapers for portraying floods as isolated events rather than symptoms of systemic climate change, diluting preventive messaging and highlighting the need for investigative, context-specific reporting in Bayelsa.

Broadcast media, including radio and television, are vital in Bayelsa due to varying literacy rates and access challenges. Ogwezi et al. (2022) offer a critical analysis of broadcast media in Lagos, finding a focus on immediate disasters over long-term climate education, a pattern likely applicable to Bayelsa. This short-term focus misses opportunities to build climate literacy, suggesting that tailored programming linking floods to climate trends could enhance public preparedness.

Integrating Indigenous and Local Knowledge

Incorporating Indigenous and Local Knowledge (ILK) into media narratives can bridge the gap between scientific discourse and community experiences. Fishermen's observations of shifting tidal patterns and farmers' warnings of saline incursions offer valuable insights. Reyes-García et al. (2020) argue compellingly that integrating ILK with scientific narratives validates local experiences and fosters community-driven action. In Bayelsa, media that amplify these perspectives can empower residents, enhancing the resonance and legitimacy of climate coverage.

Academic-Media Collaboration

Partnerships between academics and journalists can transform climate reporting in Bayelsa by grounding narratives in evidence and local realities. Boykoff and Oonk (2020) advocate for such collaborations, noting that academic engagement with media promotes locally relevant, data-driven stories. In Bayelsa, partnerships combining field research, local data, and community voices could recalibrate media narratives to address residents' priorities, fostering informed adaptation strategies.

CONCLUSION

Bayelsa State's acute vulnerability to climate change, driven by its low-lying topography, annual flooding, and socio-economic constraints, underscores the critical role of localized media narratives. Residents' lived experiences of floods, erosion, and livelihood disruptions shape their demand for news that reflects their realities. Current media framing often falls short, prioritizing global or event-based narratives over systemic, local perspectives. By integrating Indigenous and Local Knowledge and fostering academic-media collaborations, news reportage can enhance public awareness, trust, and engagement with climate adaptation in Bayelsa. This review highlights the need for media to align with the region's unique challenges to support effective climate communication and resilience.

Theoretical Framework

This study is theoretically grounded in established media effects and communication theories. This framework will be built upon two foundational theories that are highly relevant to understanding how media messages about a complex issue like climate change are processed by a specific audience.

Agenda-Setting Theory

Agenda-setting theory, as originally proposed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972), posits that the news media's prominence and repetition of certain issues can significantly influence what the public considers to be the most important issues of the day. The theory states that the

media may not tell people *what to think*, but it is highly successful in telling them *what to think about*. The media's agenda, or the salience it gives to certain topics, becomes the public's agenda.

In the context of this study, the theory is relevant because it provides a mechanism for understanding how the amount and frequency of news coverage on climate change can affect its perceived importance among Bayelsa residents. If local and national news outlets give significant airtime and column inches to stories about global climate change and its specific effects on Bayelsa, residents are likely to place a higher priority on the issue. This perceived importance can then influence their concern and behavior. The theory helps explain the first-level effect, which is the transfer of issue salience from the media agenda to the public agenda.

Framing Theory

Framing theory builds upon the foundation of agenda-setting by exploring *how* the media presents an issue, not just whether it is presented (Entman, 1993). Framing is the process by which communicators select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text, thereby promoting a particular definition of a problem, a causal interpretation, a moral evaluation, and/or a treatment recommendation. The way a news story is framed can profoundly influence how an audience understands and reacts to the issue.

This theory is critical to this study because it moves beyond simply counting news stories to analyzing their content. For Bayelsa residents, news reports on climate change could be framed in various ways. For example, a report might frame climate change as a scientific problem, a political failure, an economic burden, a local disaster (e.g., flooding), or a public health crisis. Each of these frames would likely shape the residents' perception of the problem and their belief in who is responsible for it and what solutions are needed. By analyzing the frames used in news reportage, we can understand how residents' perceptions of climate change and its consequences are structured and influenced. The combined use of agenda-setting and framing theories provides a comprehensive lens for examining both the quantity and the quality of news reportage and its subsequent effect on the audience's perception.

Empirical Review

Previous empirical studies have explored the intricate relationships between media exposure, public perceptions of climate change, and behavioral responses, providing a foundation for understanding how news reportage influences awareness and adaptation in vulnerable regions like Bayelsa State, Nigeria. These investigations often highlight the role of media in shaping risk judgments, policy support, and pro-environmental actions, while identifying gaps in coverage adequacy and relevance.

One seminal study by Brulle et al. (2012), titled "Shifting public opinion on climate change: An empirical assessment of factors influencing concern over climate change in the U.S., 2002–2010," aimed to evaluate the drivers of U.S. public concern about climate change, including media coverage as a key variable. Grounded in theories of agenda-setting and elite cueing, the researchers employed a time-series analysis of quarterly aggregate opinion data from 74 surveys spanning nine years, utilizing Stimson's method to construct public concern measures. Key findings revealed that elite cues and structural economic factors exerted the largest influence on concern levels, while media coverage played a significant but secondary role, often mediated by elite signals and economic conditions; extreme weather events and scientific information dissemination had negligible effects. The authors concluded that information-based advocacy yields minimal shifts in public concern, emphasizing the dominance of political mobilization. Recommendations included prioritizing elite-driven advocacy and countermovement strategies to enhance public engagement. This study shares similarities with the current research in investigating factors influencing interpretation and response to climate change media and its links to awareness and adaptive behaviors, as well as exposure across platforms and perceptions of message tone and relevance. However, it differs in its U.S. focus on national aggregate trends versus the localized, state-level perceptions in Bayelsa, where

socioeconomic vulnerabilities may amplify media's role in shaping adaptive responses amid direct environmental consequences like flooding and oil spills.

Another relevant investigation by Zhao (2009), titled "Media use and global warming perceptions: A snapshot of the reinforcing spirals," sought to explore the mutual influences between media consumption and perceptions of global warming in the U.S. Drawing on the reinforcing spirals model, which posits reciprocal reinforcement between selective media use and attitudinal outcomes, the study analyzed data from the 2006 General Social Survey science module using structural equation modeling on a sample of respondents. Results indicated that media use mediated the effects of demographics (e.g., age, race, education) on perceived knowledge of global warming, with perceived knowledge and concern predicting future information-seeking behaviors about climate-impacted regions like the polar areas. The conclusion supported the model's predictions, highlighting media's educational potential in fostering sustained engagement. Key recommendations urged leveraging media's reinforcing dynamics for targeted climate education campaigns. This work aligns closely with the current study by addressing exposure to climate reportage across mass media, perceptions of adequacy and relevance in messages, factors like demographics influencing interpretation, and media's influence on environmental awareness and behaviors. Differences arise in its broad U.S. national scope compared to Bayelsa's regional focus, where traditional and social media may interplay differently due to lower literacy rates and higher reliance on oral and visual communication, potentially altering reinforcement patterns.

In a context more akin to developing regions, Wang (2017), in "Understanding climate change risk perceptions in China: Media use, personal experience, and cultural worldviews," investigated how media consumption, direct experiences, and cultural factors shape risk perceptions and policy support among Chinese consumers. Anchored in cultural theory of risk, which posits that worldviews mediate risk assessments, the study surveyed 516 participants and applied regression analysis to model relationships. Findings showed that climate- and environment-related media use positively predicted policy support, while perceptions of risks to the nonhuman environment (but not humans) drove supportive behaviors; personal experiences influenced both risk types. The authors concluded that media and experiential factors exert differential effects on cognitive and behavioral outcomes. Recommendations focused on tailoring media messages to cultural worldviews to enhance efficacy and action. This study mirrors the current research in examining media exposure, perceptions of message adequacy and tone, influencing factors like culture and experience, and impacts on awareness and adaptive behaviors, particularly in a non-Western setting. Yet, it differs from the Bayelsa context by emphasizing China's urban consumer perspectives versus Bayelsa's rural, oil-dependent communities, where indigenous worldviews and direct flood impacts may heighten relevance but complicate media access and interpretation.

Shifting to an African perspective, Elia (2018), in "Media coverage of climate change information by the Tanzania Guardian and Daily News in 2015," aimed to assess the extent and themes of climate change reportage in two leading Tanzanian newspapers. Informed by agenda-setting theory, the study conducted a content analysis of 338 articles from 728 issues over one year, quantifying themes and coverage frequencies. Key findings highlighted predominant themes of impacts and adaptation (49%), conferences and policy (various percentages), with increased attention to international and local news driven by journalists' access to reliable online sources. The conclusion noted that coverage adequacy improved with digital resources but remained limited in depth. Recommendations included enhancing journalists' training and access to credible sources for more relevant local framing. This aligns with the current study by evaluating exposure across media platforms, adequacy, relevance, and tone of messages, factors like source access influencing coverage, and indirect influences on awareness. Similarities include the East African focus, proximate to Nigeria's challenges, but differences lie in Tanzania's print media emphasis versus Bayelsa's potential blend of radio and digital due to infrastructure variances.

Finally, Nwafor et al. (2024), in "Investigating the effectiveness of TikTok in promoting public awareness and engagement on climate change adaptation and mitigation measures in Nigeria,"

examined TikTok's role in fostering awareness and action on climate issues. Based on uses and gratifications theory, the library-based study systematically reviewed literature on TikTok videos related to Nigerian climate change, analyzing content for engagement and limitations. Findings demonstrated TikTok's efficacy in inspiring awareness and action through short-form videos, despite challenges like misinformation and limited access. The conclusion affirmed its potential for behavioral influence. Recommendations urged confirmation of image generation if needed and addressing barriers like digital divides. This study directly relates to the current research in a Nigerian context by addressing exposure via modern platforms, perceptions of adequacy and relevance, factors like platform affordances, and influence on awareness and behaviors. It is highly similar to the current Bayelsa-focused research but differs in its national digital media scope versus localized perceptions across diverse platforms, including traditional ones.

Collectively, these studies underscore media's pivotal role in climate discourse, yet reveal gaps in localized, developing-world contexts like Bayelsa, where vulnerability heightens the need for tailored, action-oriented coverage. The current study builds on these by integrating resident perceptions in a high-risk Nigerian state, emphasizing adaptation amid oil-related consequences.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-method research design, combining a quantitative survey with qualitative in-depth interviews to examine residents' perceptions of mass media reportage on global climate change and its implications for Bayelsa State's local ecosystem. The quantitative approach facilitated the collection of standardized data from a wide cross-section of residents, while the qualitative component provided deeper insights into personal interpretations, trust, and perceived urgency of climate change messages.

The target population comprised the adult residents of Bayelsa State, projected at 2,527,496 in 2025, based on the 2006 National Population Commission (NPC) census figure of 1,704,515 and applying the United Nations–estimated national annual growth rate for Nigeria of 2.1%. The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's (1967) formula, n=N/[1+N(e)2], with a 5% margin of error, yielding approximately 400 respondents.

A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted to ensure representativeness across the state. In the first stage, all eight Local Government Areas (LGAs) were included to reflect geographical diversity. In the second stage, two communities from each LGA were purposively selected based on documented vulnerability to climate change impacts—particularly flooding—as reported by the Bayelsa State Ministry of Environment (2023). In the final stage, 25 respondents per community were selected using simple random sampling, targeting individuals who had prior exposure to media coverage of climate change and awareness of its local consequences.

For the qualitative strand, 12 participants—including community leaders, environmental advocates, media professionals, and residents directly affected by climate change—were purposively selected to capture diverse perspectives.

Data collection employed two instruments:

1. A structured questionnaire comprising sections on demographic characteristics, media exposure, and perceptions of climate change reportage.
2. A semi-structured interview guide exploring interpretation of media messages, trust in reportage, perceived urgency, and expectations from media coverage.

Both instruments underwent expert validation by scholars in communication and environmental studies. Face and content validity were confirmed, and a pilot test with 30 respondents from two Bayelsa communities informed revisions for clarity and relevance. Reliability of the questionnaire was established through a test–retest procedure, yielding a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.82, indicating high stability. Internal consistency was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics—frequency distributions, percentages, and Weighted Mean Scores (WMS). For interpretative purposes, WMS values were

categorized as follows: 0–2.00 (very low), 2.01–2.49 (low), 2.50–3.00 (high), and 3.01–4.00 (very high). A threshold of 2.5 or above was considered indicative of agreement or positive perception.

Qualitative data from interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and nuanced interpretations of climate change reportage. Data collection was conducted in person by trained research assistants and interpreters, ensuring linguistic and geographical inclusivity across all LGAs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Presentation of Data

For the quantitative component of this study, 400 respondents were drawn from the 8 local government areas of Bayelsa State. The data collection instruments (questionnaire) were disseminated and retrieved immediately after completion. The response rate distribution is illustrated in the table below:

Table 1: Questionnaire Administration and Response Rate

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Responded	324	81
Not Responded	76	19
Total	400	100

The table suggests a strong level of participation, with most recipients completing and returning the questionnaire, indicating reliable data collection.

Table 2: Demography of Respondents

s/No	Item		Frequency	Percentage
1	Age:	18-28 years	75	23.1
		29-39 years	70	21.6
		40-50 years	85	26.2
		51-61 years	66	20.4
		61 and above	28	8.7
		Total	324	100
2	Gender:	Female	131	40.4
		Male	193	59.6
		Total	324	100
3	Highest Educational Qualification:			
		Primary	75	23.1
		Secondary	122	37.7
		Tertiary	104	32.1
		Others	23	7.1
		Total	324	100
4	Occupation:			
		Self employed	81	25
		Unemployed	66	20.4
		Employed	177	54.6
		Total	324	100
5	Local Government Area:			
		Brass	38	11.7
		Ekeremor	44	13.6
		Kolga	41	12.6
		Nembe	32	9.9
		Ogbia	42	13
		Sagbama	43	13.3
		Southern Ijaw	39	12
		Yenagoa	45	13.9

Source: Field Survey (2025)

The table suggests that the respondents were diverse in terms of age, gender, education, occupation, and local government distribution. A relatively balanced age spread indicates perspectives from both younger and older residents, while males slightly outnumber females. Most respondents have at least secondary education, with a notable proportion attaining tertiary qualifications, suggesting a generally literate sample. The majority are employed, which may influence their access to and interpretation of news on climate change. The representation across all eight Bayelsa local government areas also indicates broad geographic coverage, strengthening the representativeness of the findings.

Research Question One:

Table 3: Level of Exposure to Climate Change Reportage across Media Platforms

Item	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	TOTAL	WM	Remark
6. I regularly come across news or reports about climate change on television.	98 30.25 392	159 49.07 477	59 18.21 118	8 2.47 8	324 100% 995	3.07	ACCEPTED
7. I frequently see or read climate change updates on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, or TikTok.	65 20.06 260	166 51.24 498	87 26.85 174	6 1.85 6	324 100% 938	2.89	ACCEPTED
8. Radio programmes in my area often discuss issues related to climate change.	43 13.27 172	166 51.24 498	109 33.64 218	6 1.85 6	324 100% 894	2.75	ACCEPTED
9. I actively seek out information about climate change from news-papers, blogs, or online news sources.	26 8.03 104	159 49.07 477	109 33.64 218	30 9.26 30	324 100% 829	2.55	ACCEPTED
10. I am exposed to climate change messages at least once a week through any form of mass media.	42 12.96 168	110 33.95 330	114 35.19 228	58 17.90 58	324 100% 814	2.41	REJECTED
			GRAND WEIGHTED MEAN			2.73	HIGH LEVEL

Source: Field Survey (2025)

The table suggests that respondents generally have a high level of exposure to climate change information through mass media, with most agreeing that they encounter such content on television, social media, radio, and other news sources. However, while they acknowledge frequent incidental exposure, regular weekly exposure across all media channels appears less consistent, as indicated by the rejection of the last item. This implies that although climate change messages are present in the media space, their frequency and consistency may not be uniform across platforms.

Research Question Two:

Table 4: Perception of Media Messages on Climate Change

Item	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	TOTAL	WM	Remark
11. Media reports on climate change are detailed and informative.	48 14.81 192	221 68.21 663	52 16.05 104	3 0.93 3	324 100% 962	2.96	ACCEPTED

12. The stories I see about climate change are relevant to Bayelsa's situation.	33 10.18 132	69 21.30 207	176 54.32 352	46 14.20 46	324 100% 737	2.27	REJECTED
13. Climate change messages in the media sound serious and urgent.	45 13.89 180	108 33.33 324	119 36.73 238	52 16.05 52	324 100% 794	2.45	REJECTED
14. The media clearly explains how global climate change affects Bayelsa communities.	37 11.42 148	90 27.78 270	171 52.78 342	26 8.02 26	324 100% 786	242	REJECTED
15. The language and images used in climate change stories make me feel concerned.	61 18.83 244	102 31.48 306	151 46.60 302	10 3.09 10	324 100% 862	2.66	ACCEPTED

Source: Field Survey (2025)

The table suggests that respondents generally agree that media reports on climate change are detailed and informative, and that the language and images used evoke concern—both earning "accepted" remarks. However, they tend to disagree that such reports are relevant to Bayelsa's specific situation, convey urgency, or clearly explain local impacts—these items were "rejected." This indicates a perception gap: while presentation quality is appreciated, the content may lack local relevance, urgency, and clear contextualization for Bayelsa communities.

Research Question Three:

Table 5: Factors Influencing Interpretation and Response to Media Coverage

Item	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	TOTAL	WM	Remark
16. My level of education influences how I understand media reports on climate change.	118 36.42 472	177 54.63 531	26 8.02 52	3 0.93 3	324 100% 1058	3.26	ACCEPTED
17. My experience with flooding or erosion shapes how I respond to climate change news.	113 34.88 452	136 41.98 408	64 19.75 128	11 3.39 11	324 100% 999	3.08	ACCEPTED
18. I trust media sources more when they are known and credible.	93 28.71 372	182 56.17 546	44 13.58 88	5 1.54 5	324 100% 1011	3.12	ACCEPTED
19. I talk about climate change news with others, which influences my views.	34 10.49 136	96 29.63 288	143 44.14 286	51 15.74 51	324 100% 761	2.34	REJECTED
20. My religious or cultural beliefs affect how I perceive climate change stories.	22 6.79 88	45 13.89 135	205 63.27 410	52 16.05 52	324 100% 685	2.11	REJECTED

Source: Field Survey (2025)

From the results, respondents generally agree that their level of education, personal experience with flooding or erosion, and the credibility of media sources significantly influence how they understand and respond to climate change reports, as all these items were accepted. However, discussions with others about climate change and the influence of religious or cultural beliefs on perceptions were rejected, suggesting these factors have relatively little impact on their views

compared to education, personal experience, and trust in credible media. This implies that cognitive and experiential factors play a stronger role in shaping perceptions than social or cultural influences.

Research Question Four:

Table 6: Extent of Influence of Media Messages on Environmental Awareness and Adaptive Behaviors

Item	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	TOTAL	WM	Remark
21. I am more aware of climate change issues because of media reports.	74 22.84 296	181 55.87 543	57 17.59 114	12 3.70 12	324 100% 965	2.97	ACCEPTED
22. The media has taught me how to protect my environment better.	74 22.84 296	107 33.02 321	98 30.25 196	45 13.89 45	324 100% 858	2.64	ACCEPTED
23. I have adjusted my lifestyle (e.g., tree planting, proper waste disposal) because of climate change messages.	40 12.35 160	107 33.02 321	148 30.25 296	29 13.89 29	324 100% 806	2.48	REJECTED
24. Media reports have encouraged me to participate in local environmental activities.	45 13.89 180	97 29.94 291	156 48.15 312	26 8.02 26	324 100% 809	2.49	REJECTED
24. I now take environmental warnings more seriously due to information from the media.	74 22.84 296	132 40.74 396	68 20.99 136	50 15.43 50	324 100% 878	2.70	ACCEPTED
			GRAND WEIGHTED MEAN			2.65	HIGH EXTENT

Source: Field Survey (2025)

The table suggests that media coverage of climate change has had a generally positive influence on respondents' awareness and attitudes, though not all intended behavioral changes have been achieved. Specifically, respondents agree that media reports have increased their awareness of climate change issues, improved their understanding of how to protect the environment, and made them take environmental warnings more seriously. However, there is weaker evidence that such media exposure has significantly motivated lifestyle adjustments (e.g., tree planting, waste management) or encouraged participation in local environmental activities—both of which were rejected. Overall, with a grand weighted mean of 2.65 (high extent), the data indicates that while media reports are effective in shaping awareness and concern, they are less successful in driving consistent, tangible environmental action among the audience.

Thematic Analysis of In-depth Interviews

This study conducted in-depth interviews with twelve (12) participants identified as Interviewees 001 to 012. The interviewees include traditional rulers, community leaders, media professionals, environmental scientists, and residents who have experienced the effects of climate change firsthand. The goal was to extract perspectives and deeper meanings through a thematic analysis of their responses, addressing the research objectives.

Theme 1: Media Exposure and Access to Climate Change Information Participants widely acknowledged social media (especially Facebook and X), radio (e.g., Wazobia FM, Rythm FM), and

selected print and television platforms (e.g., Channels, Arise, and The Nation) as major sources of climate change information. Interviewee 001 remarked, "Social media is the major platform where we access news... Especially Facebook, X, and the rest."

While most interviewees encountered climate change stories frequently, especially via NGO advocacy and environmental campaigns, others (e.g., Interviewee 003) indicated limited structured programming, stating, "There's no program that is running particularly in this state." Nonetheless, general awareness was high across respondents.

Theme 2: Perceptions of Adequacy, Relevance, and Tone of Climate Change Reporting

Several respondents believed that while climate change reportage exists, it lacks sufficient depth and consistency. Interviewee 001 criticized the political bias in local reportage: "In Bayelsa, the media organizations are not doing very well... our attention is more on politics."

However, others saw a rise in media relevance. Interviewee 002 noted that "the media had built a lot of in-depth knowledge and documentations about the issues of rising sea levels, flooding, oil spills..." Participants generally agreed that reportage was impactful when it focused on specific communities or events. Interviewee 004 emphasized, "It is very, very relevant because it is very, very relevant." This repetition underscores the personal resonance and urgency of the topic.

Theme 3: Influences on Interpretation and Public Response Interviewees acknowledged that interpretation of media content was shaped by factors such as education, experience, and trust in media sources. For example, Interviewee 002 credited the media for "educating and sensitizing stakeholders to understand the impact of climate change."

Interviewee 005, a media professional, pointed out that many local outlets lack environment desks, noting: "It is only when NGOs go to them to do advocacy that you really get coverage... They hardly pick up issues on their own." This indicates that third-party influence plays a role in determining media content.

Cultural framing was also evident. Interviewee 001 described climate change metaphorically as "a cancer eating up society today," while Interviewee 004 reflected a communal interpretation: "Everything in my community is changing... the water, the crops, the fishes."

Theme 4: Impact on Environmental Awareness and Adaptive Behaviour A majority of participants stated that media reports have influenced their environmental awareness and action. Interviewee 001 mentioned grassroots activism as a response: "We're going down to our communities to give awareness to people."

Interviewee 002 highlighted behavioural change due to media: "It has broadened my knowledge and given me the capacity to engage stakeholders." Similarly, Interviewee 004 indicated that residents now "adapt by the way media gives us the information."

However, some participants felt they were the ones pushing the media. Interviewee 005 explained, "We are the ones who push the conversations... Even the media people come to us to help them drive the narratives."

Thematic analysis revealed a high level of awareness of climate change among Bayelsa residents, driven largely by mass media and NGO initiatives. Respondents recognized the relevance of media content but demanded greater consistency, localization, and urgency in reporting. The interplay between media exposure, local interpretation, and community-driven response underscores the importance of inclusive and participatory communication models for addressing environmental issues in Bayelsa State.

Discussion of Findings

Objective 1: Assessing the Level of Exposure to Climate Change Reportage Across Mass Media Platforms

The survey findings indicate a high overall level of exposure to climate change information among Bayelsa residents, with respondents frequently encountering content on television, social media, radio, and other news sources. However, exposure is often incidental rather than consistent, as weekly engagement across platforms was less uniform, leading to the rejection of items on regular structured access. This suggests that while climate change messages permeate the media landscape, their frequency varies, potentially limiting sustained attention.

Qualitative data from interviews corroborate this, with participants identifying social media (e.g., Facebook and X), radio (e.g., Wazobia FM, Rhythm FM), and television (e.g., Channels, Arise) as primary sources. Interviewees like 001 and 003 noted frequent encounters through NGO campaigns but highlighted a lack of dedicated programming in local media, emphasizing opportunistic rather than routine exposure.

These findings align with agenda-setting theory, which posits that media prominence and repetition influence public salience of issues. The high incidental exposure supports the theory's first-level effect, where media transfers issue salience to the public agenda, proving its applicability in Bayelsa by demonstrating how media presence elevates climate change awareness despite inconsistencies. However, the uneven frequency challenges the theory's assumption of uniform influence, suggesting that in resource-constrained settings, agenda-setting may be moderated by platform accessibility.

Comparatively, the results corroborate Elia (2018), who found limited but increasing coverage in Tanzanian newspapers driven by online sources and NGO advocacy, mirroring Bayelsa's reliance on external initiatives for exposure. They also align with Nwafor et al. (2024), highlighting TikTok and social media's role in Nigerian awareness, though the current study's emphasis on incidental access contrasts with Nwafor's focus on digital efficacy, indicating platform-specific variations in developing contexts. In contrast to Brulle et al. (2012), where U.S. media coverage played a secondary role amid elite cues, Bayelsa's findings elevate media's direct exposure function, possibly due to higher vulnerability amplifying local salience. Zhao (2009) and Wang (2017) similarly note media's reinforcing role in exposure, but their national scopes overlook Bayelsa's localized inconsistencies, which the current study addresses.

Objective 2: Examining Perceptions of Adequacy, Relevance, and Tone of Mass Media Messages

Survey respondents perceived media reports on climate change as detailed and informative, with evocative language and images fostering concern, leading to acceptance of these items. However, they rejected notions of relevance to Bayelsa's specific context, conveyed urgency, or clear explanations of local impacts, revealing a gap between presentation quality and contextual applicability.

Interviews reinforce this duality: participants like Interviewee 001 criticized local media's political bias and lack of depth, while Interviewee 002 praised in-depth documentation on issues like flooding and oil spills. Interviewee 004's emphatic repetition of relevance ("very, very relevant") highlights personal resonance when content localizes events, yet overall, demands for consistency and localization emerged.

Framing theory is substantiated here, as it explains how media selects and saliences aspects of reality, influencing audience understanding. The positive perceptions of detail and evocation support framing's role in promoting problem definitions and moral evaluations, proving the theory by showing how frames evoke concern. However, the rejection of relevance and urgency disproves assumptions of uniform framing efficacy, indicating that in Bayelsa, frames often fail to incorporate local causal interpretations (e.g., oil spills) or treatment recommendations, thus limiting impact.

These perceptions corroborate Wang (2017), where Chinese media use predicted policy support but required cultural tailoring for relevance, akin to Bayelsa's need for localized framing amid indigenous

vulnerabilities. They align with Elia (2018), noting Tanzanian coverage's thematic focus on impacts but limited depth, paralleling Bayelsa's adequacy gaps. In contrast, Zhao (2009) found U.S. media reinforcing knowledge through perceived relevance, differing from Bayelsa's contextual disconnect, possibly due to socioeconomic factors. Brulle et al. (2012) downplayed media's direct role, mediated by elites, which contrasts with Bayelsa's emphasis on tone's evocative power, suggesting media's standalone influence in high-risk areas. Nwafor et al. (2024) supports the potential of platforms like TikTok for urgency, but Bayelsa's findings highlight barriers like bias, extending this to traditional media.

Objective 3: Investigating Factors Influencing Interpretation and Response to Media Coverage

The survey accepted education, personal experiences with flooding or erosion, and media credibility as key influencers on understanding and response, while rejecting discussions with others and religious/cultural beliefs, underscoring cognitive and experiential dominance over social or cultural factors.

Interviews expand this: Interviewee 002 linked education to stakeholder sensitization, and Interviewee 004 tied personal experiences to communal changes in water, crops, and fish. Interviewee 005 highlighted NGO-driven content shaping interpretation due to media's lack of initiative, with cultural metaphors (e.g., climate change as "cancer" by Interviewee 001) emerging sporadically but not dominantly.

Agenda-setting and framing theories are partially proven: agenda-setting's salience transfer is influenced by credibility and experience, supporting its mechanism but revealing moderators like education that enhance public agenda adoption. Framing's interpretive role is corroborated through experiential lenses shaping causal and moral evaluations, yet the minimal cultural impact contrasts with theory expectations, disproving universal applicability in contexts where direct vulnerability overrides cultural filters.

Findings corroborate Wang (2017), emphasizing personal experiences and cultural worldviews in Chinese risk perceptions, though Bayelsa's weaker cultural role contrasts, highlighting experiential primacy in flood-prone areas. They align with Zhao (2009), where demographics like education mediated U.S. interpretations via reinforcing spirals, mirroring Bayelsa's cognitive factors. In contrast to Brulle et al. (2012), which prioritized elite cues over experiences, Bayelsa's results elevate personal factors, possibly due to direct environmental threats. Elia (2018) noted journalist access influencing coverage, akin to NGO roles here, but lacked audience interpretation focus. Nwafor et al. (2024) supports platform affordances as influencers, extending to Bayelsa's credibility emphasis, but the current rejection of social discussions contrasts with Nwafor's engagement focus.

Objective 4: Exploring the Influence of Media Messages on Environmental Awareness and Adaptive Behaviors

Survey data show media's positive impact on awareness, environmental understanding, and seriousness toward warnings, with a grand weighted mean of 2.65 indicating high extent overall. However, motivations for lifestyle changes (e.g., tree planting, waste management) or local activity participation were rejected, suggesting media excels in cognitive shifts but falters in behavioral activation.

Interviews affirm this: Interviewee 001 described media-inspired grassroots awareness, Interviewee 002 noted broadened knowledge for stakeholder engagement, and Interviewee 004 linked adaptation to media information. Yet, Interviewee 005 revealed community-driven narratives pushing media, indicating bidirectional influence rather than media-led action.

The theories are supported in awareness domains: agenda-setting proves effective in elevating issue priority, leading to concern, while framing influences behavioral precursors through problem definitions. However, the limited behavioral change disproves theories' full extension to action, as

salience and frames do not consistently translate to recommendations or causal attributions prompting adaptation in Bayelsa.

These outcomes corroborate Zhao (2009), where U.S. media fostered knowledge and concern but reinforced spirals for future seeking, similar to Bayelsa's awareness gains without uniform action. They align with Brulle et al. (2012), emphasizing media's secondary role in concern amid minimal behavioral shifts, though Bayelsa's vulnerability amplifies awareness. Wang (2017) matches in media predicting policy support but differential experiential effects on behavior, paralleling Bayelsa's gaps. Elia (2018) indirectly supports through coverage's adaptation themes, but lacked behavioral linkage. Nwafor et al. (2024) corroborates digital media's awareness potential in Nigeria, yet Bayelsa's weaker action contrasts, highlighting needs for localized calls-to-action across platforms.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined Bayelsa State residents' perceptions of climate change reportage and its implications for local engagement. The findings indicate that while residents encounter climate change messages across television, radio, and social media with relatively high frequency, much of this exposure is incidental rather than deliberate, limiting sustained attention. Media content is often detailed and emotionally engaging but insufficiently localized to Bayelsa's environmental realities—such as flooding, coastal erosion, and declining fishery resources—thereby weakening perceived urgency. Education level, personal experiences with environmental hazards, and trust in media credibility strongly shape interpretation of climate narratives, whereas cultural and social factors exert comparatively less influence. Although reportage has effectively raised awareness and concern, it has not consistently translated into adaptive behaviors such as lifestyle adjustments or participation in community-led environmental initiatives.

These findings reinforce the media's central role in agenda-setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) and demonstrate the framing effects (Entman, 1993) that shape how climate change is understood at a local level. However, they also highlight a critical gap between awareness and action, underscoring the need for content that is both locally relevant and behaviorally instructive. As previous studies in similar contexts have shown (Wang & Kim, 2018; Elia et al., 2018; Adelekan, 2015), localized narratives and sustained thematic coverage are essential for moving audiences from concern to meaningful engagement.

In light of these insights, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Increase Consistency and Frequency of Climate Change Coverage**
   Media outlets should adopt editorial policies ensuring regular, sustained coverage of climate change. Integrating brief climate segments into daily newscasts and producing dedicated weekly features will help maintain audience attention and build long-term salience.
2. **Localize Climate Communication for Bayelsa's Realities**
   Journalists should contextualize climate change stories with specific references to Bayelsa's environmental conditions, supported by local data and eyewitness accounts. Incorporating indigenous knowledge alongside scientific evidence can enhance both relevance and urgency.
3. **Enhance Credibility through Collaborative Storytelling**
   Partnerships between media organizations, environmental scientists, and trusted community leaders should be prioritized. Such collaborations will ensure that reportage is both accurate and culturally resonant, improving public trust and message retention.
4. **Embed Action-Oriented Messaging**
   Coverage should move beyond problem description to include practical, step-by-step guidance on adaptive behaviors—such as flood preparedness measures, coastal conservation practices, and community clean-up activities. Highlighting local success stories can inspire replication and foster a sense of collective agency.

By aligning climate communication strategies with these recommendations, Bayelsa's media can more effectively bridge the gap between awareness and action, thereby strengthening public resilience and fostering a more proactive response to the state's environmental challenges.

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