



Patterns of Television Coverage of the Environmental Effects of Artisanal Oil Refining in Rivers State, Nigeria

¹Emmanuel Ikechukwu Woji*, ²Hayford Kasarachi Innocent, & ³Idara Ime Ekanem

¹Department of Broadcasting, Hensard University, Toru-Orua, Bayelsa State, Nigeria

^{2&3}Department of Broadcasting, University of Port-Harcourt, Nigeria

¹<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-1714-5267>

²<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2328-1818>

³<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-6784-8872>

*Corresponding Author: emmanuelwoji4@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Background: The last decade has seen an increase in artisanal refining in parts of Port Harcourt which has affected lives and properties. Government and environmental experts through the media have embarked on campaigns to discourage the practice. However, this problem continues to exist, posing a problem to the environment. Whereas studies exist on other impacts of artisanal refining, there remains a gap on how television covers the environmental effects of artisanal refining. This study therefore, investigated patterns of television coverage of the environmental effects of artisanal oil refining in Rivers State.

Objectives: This study examined the frequency at which Nigerian Television Authority and African Independent Television in Rivers State cover the environmental effects of artisanal refining and the prominence given to the coverage of environmental effects of artisanal refining in Rivers State.

Methods: The study adopted content analysis as the research design. The population of the study was 48 episodes, while the period of study was April 1 to October 31, 2023. Coding sheet/guide served as instrument for analysis, as the purposive sampling technique was used to select only two of NTA and AIT's programmes, which focused on environment-related issues.

Results: Findings showed that the frequency of coverage of the environmental effects by NTA and AIT in Rivers State was low, however, the level of prominence placed on the coverage by the selected media was high.

Conclusions: It was concluded that although limited in frequency, the study had higher prominence, which indicated a disconnect between frequency and prominence as variables.

Unique Contribution: This study contributes to the disconnect between media, environment, and community as the frequency of coverage had no significant relationship between media representation and environmental action of artisanal refining.

Key Recommendation: The study recommends among others that, media houses should give more frequency to coverage of environmental issues and its effects.

Keywords: Oil bunkering, Frequency of coverage, Prominence, Broadcast media, Pollution



INTRODUCTION

The television has drastically revolutionised the human society and the environment. Television which can complement the outstanding reach of radio with sight and sound by its nature can also go a long way in conveying and covering of environmental issues and their effects to man and his environment (Ochogor & Cookey, 2016). This is because, since the dawn of the industrial revolution and the rise of capitalism as well as modern science and technology, the level of environmental degradation in the world has increased. One of the effects of this is the destruction of plants, animals and the pollution-air, water and land (John & Nnadozie, 2021). Among the environmental activities caused by man which were borne out of his quest for means of survival and livelihood, is the illegally refining of the natural crude oil. Man had established artisanal refining activities in order to refine this crude oil for his social, political and economic benefits. But due to government's regulation on the exploitation of this resource, he subscribed to unlawful and illegal theft of the crude oil. Man's locally-manufactured means of illegally refining the crude oil without reliance on machinery and thus non-industrial to scholars, is artisanal refining.

Artisanal refining or oil bunkering as it is locally called is an unhealthy practice of oil theft committed by man and it poses health and environmental challenges to the inhabitants that are exposed to it. Reports have shown that the varied effects of artisanal refining mostly lead to oil spillage. This was why, the United Nations Environment Programme (2011) reported that, there are frequent oil spills resulting from pipeline vandalism, and illegal oil bunkering which are a major source of environmental pollution. When crude oil or other petroleum products leak into the environment, the different compounds evaporate into the air, absorbed by the soil, or enter ground and surface water. Oil spills also often lead to fire outbreaks, which release respirable particulate matter considered as an atmospheric pollutant into the air. In Rivers State, this and other factors were responsible for the incidence of sooth. As a result, hazards to human health may result from dermal contact with soil and water; ingestion of contaminated drinking water, crops, or fish; or inhalation of vaporised product or particulate matter and partly burned hydrocarbons produced by fires. In addition, oil spills on land may have indirect health effects via damage of livelihood resources, such as diminished yields from degraded agricultural land and fishing grounds (Ite et al., 2013 cited in Orisa-Ubi & Eleberi, 2023).

In terms of environmental health problems, direct contact with crude oil, or indirect contact through, for example, inhalation of vapours or consumption of tainted seafood can cause deleterious health effects ranging from dizziness and nausea to certain types of cancers and issues with the central nervous system. Although long-term hydrocarbon toxicity effects on humans are less understood (Orisa-Ubi & Eleberi, 2023, Nsude & Nwafor, 2016), they have been linked, in addition with volatile organic compounds, with causing severe DNA degradation, cancers, birth and reproductive defects, irreversible neurological and endocrine damage, and impaired cellular immunity (Major & Wang, 2012). This, in turn leads to increased demand for mental health and rehabilitation programmes. The mental health problems of artisanal refining were more psychologically stressful than natural disasters. Threatened livelihoods coupled with new flows of recovery money into the community have been associated with various forms of



stress, high rates of alcohol and drug use were associated with recovery jobs, and there were higher rates of domestic violence and crime more broadly (Orisa-Ubi & Eleberi, 2023) which were all detrimental to the mental health of individuals. When artisanal refining activities are done in a location very close to residential area, the effect could be more on those in the surroundings and also on the soil. Orisa-Ubi and Eleberi (2023) stated that artisanal refining done on-shore causes oil spills which reduced soil fertility, smothered economic trees and food crops, out rightly killing them or reducing their yield. Even those done off-shore are also detrimental to aquatic lives and the mangroves which is the source of livelihood for many, including both old and young.

In Nigeria, Channels Television in conjunction with DW Television launched a joint production of an environmental programme called *Eco@Africa*. Also, *Go Wild*, a weekly docuseries showing on ARISE News, are all environment programmes which focus on the preservation of biological diversities, utilisation of natural resources and the sustainability of the environment. Despite the lively media scene and plethora of news sources, the issue perhaps is still different in the Nigerian context where the majority of the media houses pay less attention to issues of the environment unless on emergency situations (Dagogo, 2022). According to the Assistant Director of Programmes, Mrs Christie Badung, Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) has a national network programme titled *Environment Matters*, which is aired Wednesdays, 11am, repeated on Thursdays. Also, according to the producer and presenter, Mrs Nkoli Omhoudu, *Environment Today* airs on Wednesdays, 4:30pm on Africa Independent Television (AIT).

Channels Television among other television stations' productions on artisanal refining had in 2023 produced an hour-long special documentary on the effects of oil theft and artisanal refining in Nigeria. Also, the School of Oriental and African Studies' Anti-Corruption Evidence Programme (ACE), and SDN Nigeria in February, 18th, 2022 carried out an onsite documentary to explore the impacts of artisanal refining on the environment, health and corruption in order to reduce the activities in the area. Despite the numerous efforts of governmental and non-governmental agencies, media organisations (through coverage) as well as other notable campaigns and sensitisations from environmental experts and government to stop this in Rivers State, artisanal oil refining activities continue. However, the impact is particularly significant because those engaged in artisanal oil refining suffer dire consequences, including loss of life, severe burns, and enduring physical disabilities.

For this reason, one is not sure if the media houses are particularly interested in environmental issues of artisanal refining as part of their surveillance and advocacy function and the right of the people to know as the media are saddled with the responsibility of bringing awareness to the public through their programmes. It is on this note that the researchers sought to find out patterns of television coverage of the environmental effects of artisanal refining in Rivers State. Although many researchers such as Orisa-Ubi and Eleberi (2023), Dagogo (2022), and Misra (2021) have studied other impacts of artisanal refining, none to the best knowledge of the researchers has focused on patterns of television coverage of environmental effects of artisanal refining in Rivers State and thus, this study sought to fill this gap. With the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA's) *Environment Matters* and Africa Independent Television (AIT's) *Environment Today* as case



studies. These stations were chosen because they are based in the study area and to strike a balance in terms of ownership. Rivers State was chosen for this study because residents of the state engage in artisanal refining activities coupled with the interest of the researchers to study their region. The period of study was April 1 to October 31, 2023 (6 months). This was because the period marked a heavy clampdown by government and relevant enforcement agencies against artisanal refining activities in the area coupled with the series of artisanal refining explosions that killed scores of lives of Rivers State residents at illegal oil dumpsites.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study was guided by the following objectives which included to:

1. examine the frequency at which Nigerian Television Authority and African Independent Television in Rivers State cover the environmental effects of artisanal refining and;
2. ascertain the prominence given to the coverage of the environmental effects of artisanal refining in Rivers State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Environmental effects of artisanal refining

It is imperative to note that the environmental degradation generated from artisanal crude refining is worse than that generated from legal oil exploration activities and the environmental crisis is actually what led to the loss of the sources of livelihood of the people in the first place. Ikanone et al., (2014) asserted that though the Niger Delta environment may have already been polluted as a result of the recklessness of major oil companies operating in the area, artisanal refineries, which are unregulated, have exacerbated the pollution with their crude technology. Goodnews and Wordu (2019) posited that the illegal and makeshift refineries that are built to refine crude oil to finished products through artisanal refining have all affected the air, water and land around the illegal refineries. Shrinking vegetables and asphyxiation of plants in different parts of the region as well as diminishing arable lands for farming and polluted waters for fishing have all been attributed to artisanal refining.

Scholars have agreed that the entire processes involved in artisanal crude refining endanger the environment, especially the heating and boiling stage and the emptying of the waste. According to Obenade and Amangbara (2014) as in Orisa-Ubi & Eleber (2023), the refining process generates a significant amount of waste being dumped in rivers and creeks and on land, while evaporated low fractions pollute the air shed. The major problem as observed by Ogri (2013) is that all known principles of environmental protection in refining crude petroleum are ignored as the illegal refiners empty the residue after boiling the crude into the nearby rivers, creeks, and other water bodies. The high level of fire damage around artisanal refining sites is evidence enough of how highly explosive the practice can be. Analysing the impact of artisanal crude refining on the environment, Ogri (2013) pointed out that the activities of illegal refineries severely impacted biodiversity, aesthetic scenery of the forest, regeneration of plant species and destruction of wildlife habitat, disruption of the water cycle, and loss of medicinal plant species.



From the scientific research carried out by Nwankwoala et al., (2017) on the effect of artisanal refining on water bodies and soil in Okrika and Ogu-Bolo in Rivers, the water analysis showed a high concentration of Fe and Zn which made the water in such areas unsuitable for drinking.

Also, the soil samples recorded high levels of crude content from 1m, with concentration reducing with depth up to 3m. Most of the physical and chemical qualities of the soil in the Niger Delta are contaminated by petroleum hydrocarbons and heavy metals. From the report of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) in 2011, it was gathered that the surface water throughout the creeks where artisanal refineries were situated contained hydrocarbons, floating layers of oil that vary from thick black oil to thin oil layers. According to Bebetidoh et al., (2020), the activities of the local crude oil refiners in the Niger Delta region have left the mangrove vegetation, rivers, swamps and estuaries heavily polluted. Speaking on the health risk involved SDN report that the handling and heating of the crude oil pollute the air. The camps have a toxic feel and the health impacts of those working there are unknown. Communities are constantly exposed to inhalation of poisonous gasses, causing coughing and breathing problems. Naanen and Tolani (2014) submit that flares from the local oil refining sites are a major source of air pollution in the Niger Delta region.

One of the effects is that it generates acid rain; it stunts the growth of crops and kills both aquatic and terrestrial animals. It has long been known to constitute a serious threat to the livelihoods of the people of host oil communities who are predominantly fishing, farming and trades-people (Ikanone et al., 2014). Considering the environmental and health hazards that artisanal crude refineries generate, it is highly lugubrious that this phenomenon has come to stay. The reason for this is that artisanal crude refining enterprise is extremely lucrative and is a necessary evil in the South-South region. Obenade and Amangbara (2014) cited in Orisa-Ubi & Eleber (2023) explained that artisanal refining is no longer a community all-comers affairs as intending refiners and investors are required to register with unions at prohibitive prices. Youths engaged in the business have become community overlords; rival gangs have sprung up to challenge their structures leading to arms proliferation. Research showed that the demand for products such as kerosene and petrol from local refineries is extremely high and some marketers from Lagos and other parts of the country many times patronise these products.

Implications of effective media coverage of the environment

The Nigeria mass media play their basic roles of information, education, and entertainment in the society. The information role includes information on environmental or green issues in the nation and in the global scene. When incidents with great significance to the environment and to the health of people take place in the society, the media expose such incidents and make the public aware of them. Nwabueze (2015); Okoro and Nwafor (2015) raised basic questions about the media's strategy on this – and thus queried the nature of media coverage of environmental issues in Nigeria. The scholar further enquired if the media give adequate coverage to the environment in view of its vital place in human existence and even when the media cover environmental issues, what approach is adopted in treating environmental news or what is the nature of message content of the coverage. Lastly, he questioned if the coverage can be said to be purposeful and capable of achieving societal change towards ensuring environmentally sustainable nation. The



fact is that the mass media have not been giving adequate coverage to green issues in Nigeria. Mass media attention to the environment has been described as a relatively recent development in Nigeria, with such other issues as business, finance, information technology, and politics receiving more priority (Nwabueze, 2015). The mass media give haphazard coverage to environmental issues with mainly sport news reports. The Koko waste dump issue which took place in 1988 was said to have contributed immensely in awakening the attention of the media to the environment (Nwabueze, 2015).

Nwabueze (2015) further lamented that empirical data showed that the Nigeria mass media have not been doing well in the coverage of the environment. With specific reference to environmental pollution in the Niger Delta regions which seems to dominate environmental agenda in Nigeria. He observed that the media have not done well in the coverage of pollution in the region especially in the area of empathising with and expressing the views of local communities hit by the pollution. Nwabueze (2005) found out in a study, that the Nigerian press do not give adequate coverage to erosion problems in the South East region, unarguably the most hit by erosion in the nation. After a study of selected national newspapers in 2004, it was discovered that one of the newspapers did not carry a single story on erosion in the South-East zone throughout the year that was studied. This was when some buildings in some communities in Anambra State were being submerged by erosion. In another study specifically premised on print media coverage of World Environment Day (WED) activities, Nwabueze (2015) citing Olatunji (2004) observed that from 2000-2004, dominant issues which often receive attention were environmental awareness, water pollution and sea/ocean pollution. However, “little or no attention was paid to other equally critical environmental problems such as unsustainable practices of natural resources exploitation, conservation, air pollution, flooding/erosion, deforestation/ desertification, and urban waste management” (Nwabueze, 2015, p. 17).

After studying media images of environmental issues and problems in Nigeria, Nwabueze (2015) discovered that the media gave poor quality coverage to environmental issues they handled within the period of study. In another study, Egbra (2014) found that newspapers in Nigeria and Ghana did not give attention to climate change issues despite the seriousness of the issue across the globe. Ukaegbu, Berezi and Kuro-Berezi (2023) conducted a study to find out the role community radio plays in evoking attitudinal change towards combating oil theft and vandalism. Findings from the study showed that state and privately-owned radio stations do not have programmes dedicated to discussing issues about oil theft. Further findings indicated that programmes are not aired in the native language of the respondents on state and privately-owned radio as the respondents find it difficult to understand the language used in broadcasting by the radio stations. These empirical studies and the current study focused on the environmental effects of crude oil activities. They had similar aims but based on the location of the studies, the empirical studies were situated in different areas. Also, the media scope was different. The findings of these studies were at variance as the current study showed that contrary to the findings of the earlier works, there are programmes dedicated to issues of oil theft and its effects in the government and privately-owned broadcast media in Rivers State. These studies also were underpinned using different theories of the mass media.



Based on these findings, it has been ascertained that “environmental reporting or environmental journalism is yet to be seen as a specialised aspect of journalism profession worth giving priority attention. This observation has invariably weakened the agenda-setting role of the media on environmental concerns” (Nwabueze, 2015, p. 117). He further stated that it is a worrisome development because the mass media shape social norms and value systems and also influence people's decision-making in ways that foster a more environmentally sustainable and acceptable society. They greatly influence the culture of a people which invariably means that an environmentally friendly culture could be imparted or inculcated into a people's culture. With this pattern of media coverage as observed from studies, environmental management efforts in Nigeria are found to continue to experience retarded growth except the media change their approach to coverage of green issues (Innocent, 2016).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on agenda setting theory. The theory was introduced by McCombs and Shaw as a media function with the 1972 study in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. This idea began much earlier with *Public Opinion* in 1922, as Walter Lippman proposed that people are not able to deal effectively with the variety and subtlety of their environments. The need for effective media coverage of environmental issues is better appreciated from the perspective of the general functions of the media, particularly their agenda-setting function in the society. The mass media in any society function basically to inform educate, and entertain the audience (Ndimele & Innocent, 2016). The information function could be described as a very critical and pivotal role because other roles are basically extensions of this role and the power of the media lies in it. The information function of the mass media is all embracing and indispensable for the meaningful existence of members of the society. Through their various contents, the mass media collect, store, process and disseminate news, data, pictures, facts, messages, opinions and comments which members of the public require in order to react knowledgeably to personal, environmental, national and international conditions as well as to be in a position to take appropriate decisions. Through continuous surveillance of the society, the mass media keep members of the public informed with regards to issues which will place them in a better position to react to trends in the society (Orlu Orlu, 2013). People are made aware of trends in the environment, how they can better their interactional and interdependent relationship with the environment. Effective media coverage of environmental issues is a manifestation of this surveillance role which is very essential in purposeful environmental.

The implication of effective media coverage of green concerns is largely reflected in the agenda-setting role of the media. By setting agenda, the press through emphasis on coverage of certain issues, provide for the public, issues to discuss or reflect on i.e. they set agenda for public discussion (Ndimele & Innocent, 2016). Nwabueze (2015) observed that the audience not only learn about public issues through the media, they also learn how much importance to attach to an issue or topic from the emphasis the media place upon it. The importance attached to an issue and the desire to discuss it as part of public agenda is stressed through “the quantity and frequency of reporting, prominence given the reports through headline displays, pictures and newspapers, magazine, films, graphics or timing on radio and television programmes” (p.10).



The media as communication units have an important role to play in environmental education, conservation and sustainable development. Similarly, the mass media are of crucial importance in any society based on the fact that our understanding of the society and the various issues and problems that confront us come largely from the media. In playing their development-oriented roles in the society, the mass media assume the position of fourth Estate of the realm, from where they watchdog the society and keep the public abreast of trends in the environment. Reaffirming the suggestion by Nwabueze (2015) that the “media are called upon to occupy the driver’s seat regarding agenda-setting and awareness generation on issues on the environment” (p. 18).

METHODS

The research design used in this study was the content analysis. This method availed the researchers the opportunity to analyse the contents of the television programmes on artisanal refining for the study. The population of study was 48 episodes which were the total episodes of the selected environment programmes from the two stations that were content analysed within the study period. To arrive at this, two episodes were selected per week from both stations. This amounted to eight episodes in a month for both television stations, and then eight multiplied by six months of study gave 48 episodes. This number was divided by the two television stations and the division produced 24 episodes for each of the two television stations under study. The study day was Wednesdays since the environment programmes on both stations air the same day. The study used a census method, which is the method of statistical enumeration where all members of the population are studied. As such, the inclusion of a constructed calendar in this study was not necessary, because the population of the study was small. Also, the use of a census sampling was meant to eliminate partial or biased analysis in which only those elements in the content that fit the researchers’ study were selected, hence, both stations’ programmes episodes were equally sampled as this resulted in homogeneity and helped in reducing sampling errors.

The sampling technique used for this research was the purposive sampling technique. The researchers purposively chose 48 episodes on only environment issues from both stations in order to analyse the frequency and prominence of the coverage. This sampling technique also enabled the researchers to limit the study day(s) to only the day the programmes air (Wednesdays). The criteria for choosing *Environment Today* and *Environment Matters* programmes that focus on the environment were that, the programmes’ content supports the study’s goals, such as identifying knowledge gaps, exploring case studies, and informing recommendations. Also, the programmes provided in-depth analysis, thorough explanations, and nuanced discussions of the environment and the programmes effectively use visuals, graphics, interview and footage to illustrate complex environmental concepts.

The units of analysis for this study were the episodes on the danger of environmental effects in the programmes within the stated study period. The content categories for this study were advocacy and activism, economic aspects, health implications, and environmental impacts in the episodes of NTA and AIT television stations’ programmes. To ensure reliability of the instrument used for this study, as well as non-bias, and also to reduce the margin of error, a



professional coders were employed to assist in coding the content categories. This was followed by an inter-coder reliability test. The categories independently recorded (coded) by the two coders were compared. Wimmer and Dominick (2013) recommended that between 10 to 25% of the body of content should be tested. Therefore, the inter-coder reliability for this study was carried out by randomly selecting 10% of the programmes items using Holsti's formula, as shown below:

$$R = \frac{2M}{N1 + N2}$$

Where:

M = The number of coding decisions which two coders agree.

N1 & N2 = The number of coding decisions by the first and second coder respectively. The calculation yielded inter-coder reliability of 0.85, an indication of high reliability. The coding sheet/guide was designed in a manner as to capture the content categories which were at the nucleus of the content analysis and determined by the subject matter under investigation. The coding guide/sheet was used as a primary source of data collection. The secondary sources of data were textbooks, journals, articles, websites and other related materials. The data analysis method used was statistically descriptive. Thus, to analyse the raw data, simple frequency, number, percentage and tables were used for presentation of data.

RESULTS

Table 1: Frequency of coverage of the environmental effects of artisanal refining in selected programmes' episodes by NTA and AIT

S/N	Variables	Total No. of Episodes	Frequency of coverage (Episodes)
1.	NTA	8 (44%)	1 (6%)
2.	AIT	10 (56%)	2 (11%)
	Total	18 (100%)	3 (17%)

Frequency of coverage was measured in terms of episodes of the issue of artisanal refining in the programmes' episodes. From a sample of 48 episodes, it was found that the researchers were able to retrieve 18 episodes. This was because of the inaccessibility of the episodes as the stations prohibit retrieval of archived materials coupled with heavy repetition of some episodes at certain (weekly/monthly) intervals. Of the 18 episodes retrieved, AIT had higher episodes as the data above further showed that issues of the environmental effects of artisanal refining in Rivers State had a low frequency of coverage, only 3 episodes (17%) on both stations' programmes had coverage of environmental effects of artisanal refining for the 6 months reviewed.



Table 2: Prominence given to the coverage of environmental effects of artisanal refining in selected programmes' episodes by NTA and AIT

S/N	Variable	NTA N (%)	AIT N (%)	Total N (%)
1.	Advocacy and activism			
	a. Call for intervention	3(50)	6(66.7)	9(60)
	b. Encourage community to desist	3(50)	3(33.3)	6(40)
	c. Inform the public about the causes	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
	Total	6(100)	9(100)	15(100)
2.	Economic aspects			
	a. Losses of oil revenues	1(20)	3(33.3)	4(28.6)
	b. Increased poverty and debts	2(40)	3(33.3)	5(35.7)
	c. Withdrawal of foreign companies and investors	2(40)	1(11.1)	3(21.4)
	d. Created jobs	0(0)	2(22.2)	2(14.3)
	Total	5(100)	9(100)	14(100)
3.	Health implications			
	a. Cancer and skin itching	1(25)	2(28.6)	3(27.3)
	b. Respiratory and lungs diseases	1(25)	3(42.9)	4(36.4)
	c. Coughing and breathing problems	2(50)	2(28.6)	4(36.4)
	Total	4(100)	7(100)	11(100)
4.	Environmental impacts			
	a. Pollution	2(28.6)	4(36.4)	6(33.3)
	b. Destruction of habitats	1(14.3)	3(27.3)	4(22.2)
	c. Loss of biodiversity	3(42.9)	2(18.2)	5(27.8)
	d. Depletion of ecosystem	1(14.3)	2(18.2)	3(16.7)
	Total	7(100)	11(100)	18(100)

Prominence given to the coverage was measured in terms of advocacy and activism and the visual elements (if they had inserts of economic, environmental and health implications) of the issue of artisanal refining in the programmes' episodes. The analysis in the coding of the data showed that in terms of prominence given to the coverage, issues of environmental effects of artisanal refining in Rivers State in the selected programmes' episodes contained advocacy and activism. As it relates to visual elements, they were predominant in the 3 episodes as environmental, economic and health. The table also indicated that the issues of pollution, loss of biodiversity, increased poverty and debt, as well as respiratory and lungs diseases were the most covered among others.



DISCUSSION

Findings for the objective which aimed to address the frequency to which NTA and AIT cover the environmental effects of artisanal refining in Rivers State, indicated that, from the code sheet of the content analysis, frequency of coverage was measured in terms of episodes that covered the issue of artisanal refining in the programme episodes. The data revealed that issues of the environmental effects of artisanal refining in Rivers State had an insignificantly low frequency of 3 episodes on both stations' programmes for the six months reviewed. These findings align with those of Okoro and Nnaji (2012), that environmental pollution in the region by the media received low coverage. Also, it was established that the government-owned television media (NTA) had a lower frequency of coverage than the privately-owned media (AIT) on issues of global and national/public concerns, thus, abandoning their functions as government's instrument for achieving economic, political and cultural development and nation-building in the agenda-setting theory of the mass media. This implies that the media did not adequately use their services and programming to canvas for a human-friendly environment that leads to sustainable development in the state. The inability of NTA and AIT stations in the state to carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy and giving priority to high frequency of coverage of programme, news and information of the environmental effects of artisanal refining in Rivers State to link with other developing countries that are close geographically, culturally and politically contradicts this theory with the findings of this study.

For the objective which aimed to ascertain the extent to which NTA and AIT give prominence to coverage of environmental effects of artisanal refining in Rivers State, data in Table 2 showed the extent of prominence given to the coverage of environmental effects of artisanal refining in the selected programmes by the stations. The analysis showed that in terms of prominence given to the coverage, issues of environmental effects of artisanal refining in Rivers State in the selected programmes' episodes advocated for intervention and encouraged the community residents to desist from such activities as in the episodes. As it relates to visual elements, they were predominantly heavy in the 3 episodes as environmental, economic and health, which indicated that the issues of pollution, loss of biodiversity, increased poverty and debt, as well as respiratory and lungs diseases among others were covered. These figures showed that the prominence placed on the environmental effects of artisanal refining in both stations' selected programmes' episodes was significant and thus, high. This finding contradict those of Ukaegbu, Berezi and Kuro-Berezi (2023) that state and privately-owned media do not have programmes dedicated to discussing issues about oil theft and that programmes are not aired in the native language of the respondents on state and privately-owned radio hence respondents find it difficult to understand the language used in broadcasting by the media stations. The findings also seem to negate the claims by Oredipe, Omego and Ochonogor (2019) that Nigerian mass media have not given adequate coverage to environmental rights issues facing the people. It also disagreed with the findings of Okoro and Nnaji (2012) that environmental issues are largely confined to the inside pages of the newspapers, thus, not given adequate prominence.



CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study is that, there is a disconnect between frequency and prominence as variables. As the analysis of the study showed that the two television stations did not give adequate frequency to coverage of the environmental issues of artisanal refining confronting Rivers State. However, the low frequency of coverage was in-depth. Thus, the low frequency of coverage given to the issues is a concern as it may not lead to behavioural change which triggers development. In the wake of this, the two television stations failed to propagate any serious developmental strides in the minds of the people. This is because, the higher the frequency of coverage, the more awareness is created, opinions changed and behaviours modified, thus, development birthed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made by the researchers that, media houses in general and government-owned media houses particularly should increase the frequency of coverage of the environmental effects of artisanal refining and other issues of human concern to increase awareness and consumption levels. Also, television stations should continue to give more importance and prominence to issues of global/national interest and public concerns such as the effects of artisanal refining activities.

Ethical clearance

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the television stations used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions

Emmanuel Ikechukwu Woji conceived the study, including the design, and handled the analysis and interpretation, Hayford Kasarachi Innocent, supervised the work and Idara Ime Ekanem collated the data. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final draft, and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.



Availability of data and materials

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

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