

Assessment of Issues Related to Environmental Degradation in the Niger Delta Region by Selected Nigerian Newspapers

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Abstract

This study focused on assessment of issues related to environmental degradation in the Niger Delta Region by selected Nigerian newspapers. The Region is faced with the problem of oil-related environmental degradation; the press is the watchdog of society which is supposed to draw the attention of all and sundry to environmental issues. In this vein, the study had a sample of 324 in a population of 2,193 issues of Nigerian newspapers. The research design used for this study was a content analysis of the coverage patterns of oil-related environmental degradation issues in the Niger Delta Region by Nigerian newspapers: The Guardian, Daily Sun and The Nation. The objective was to identify issues of oil-related environmental degradation reports in the newspapers across the years (2020-2021). The trends of their reports showed that oil-related environmental degradation stories were on the increase from 2020 to 2021. The study recommended that journalists and other media organizations should be trained and assigned special reporters to cover oil-related environmental degradation issues in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.

Keywords: Degradation, Environmental, Niger Delta, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Globally, newspapers and other media portrayals of environmental degradation are serious issues that are gaining momentous interest from different stakeholders. Also, the communication of environmental degradation information and discussions on the issues and trends are receiving global attention [2]. Environmental degradation from crude oil pollution in some parts of the world is either underreported or not reported in print media. Because of this, it has become imperative to examine reports on

issues in the coverage patterns of oil-related environmental degradation in different parts of the world to promote environmental sustainability practices free from negative influence on man, flora and fauna species [2].

Suffice it to say that the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria has ecosystems occupied by the mangrove rainforest full of sensitive flora and fauna species [3]. The network of water channels in the drainage basin and the

terrain characteristics have identified the zone as sensitive coastal ecosystems, seriously under the influence of environmental degradation [4]. The multinational oil and gas companies and their subsidiaries have been accused of polluting the environments, thus degrading the value of humans and the available resources [5] [6]. The Region has attracted an influx of people from different parts of the world due to the economic potential of the place, hence accelerating the rate of urbanization, industrialization, overpopulation of cities and resultantly creating more degradation to the environment [6].

Consequently, within the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria are found some newspaper houses that convey information on oil-related environmental degradation issues. These newspaper report issues of human health affected by the degradation, including the state of features of the environment. However, some of the newspaper houses are often seen to be limited in performance regarding the reportage of issues and trends in oil-related environmental degradation [7]. What and how these newspapers report degradation of the environment affect the public perception of oil exploration in the Region. There is, therefore the need to understand the newspaper reportage of environmental degradation issues in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria, specifically to know the coverage pattern of oil-related environmental degradation.

Till date, there have been increased oil and gas explosions due to the illegal refineries in the Niger Delta Region which

are underreported by the newspapers and the entire media are not given adequate attention by the government. For instance, on April 24, 2022, there was a large explosion of illegal oil facility in an area of Abaezi community of Ohaji-Egbema Local Government Area of Imo State which claimed over 120 lives with an undeniable huge quantity of crude oil lost at the site of operation [8]. But because of the incompetent and inadequate reporting of Nigeria's oil resources, oil thieves roam the oilfields unchecked, and Nigeria is losing over 150,000 barrels of oil per day or \$4bn annually [9]. These illegal oil thieves and spills are causing huge devastation of the environment in the Niger Delta Region sometimes undetected by the Nigeria newspapers. Even, where detected, the approach and pattern of reportage do not follow international best practices in environmental sustainable journalism. In spite of improvement in environmental reporting in the Region by Nigerian newspapers, it is generally believed that reporting the environment is still very scanty.

Proper management of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta could have a corresponding impact on the way people perceive the trends of newspapers reporting of the issues over the years in Nigeria. [10] regrets that the negative influence of the extent newspapers coverage aimed at drawing government's attention to the environmental degradation in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria could be political and lying in the hands of few journalists and correspondents. Also, some scholars have examined the coverage pattern of

Assessment of Issues Related to Environmental Degradation in the Niger Delta Region by Selected Nigerian Newspapers

environmental degradation issues generally, but those of the Niger Delta Region orchestrated by oil exploration are still very scanty [11]. Therefore, this study is to assess issues related to environmental degradation in the Niger Delta Region by selected Nigerian newspapers.

2. Methodology

This study adopted content analysis research design to achieve its objectives. Content analysis allows a researcher to examine the manifest content document materials like newspapers, magazine, etc. Through content analysis, the researcher was able to examine newspaper manifest contents on the issue of interest. The decision to make use of content analysis was because it assisted the researcher to examine documented content on environmental degradation in Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.

Furthermore, the researcher utilized quantitative content analysis to answer the research questions. The decision to make use of quantitative content analysis was because it assisted the researcher to quantitatively examine documented stories on oil-related environmental degradation in Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. Finally, the choice to use quantitative content analysis as the research design was predicated on the fact that it is systematic, objective and quantitative in nature such that it is unbiased and heuristic in describing quantitative manifest contents of print mass media communication.

The population of this study comprised all the issues of the three newspapers (*The*

Guardian, *Daily Sun*, and *The Nation*) studied from June 2022 to November 2022.

The three newspapers were daily newspapers and there were 366 days in 2020 and 365 days in 2021, meaning that there were total 731 days for the two years. When 731 days were multiplied by 3, it gave 2,193 days, meaning that the population of this study was made up of 2,193 issues of the selected newspapers.

The sample size for the study was determined using [12] [13] which gave a sample size of 324 with each newspaper contributing of 108 to the total sample size. The Krejcie and Mogan; and the Bukhari calculator formula for sample size calculation is a universal formula that was originally published by the National Education Association in the United States to advance professionalism in global public education. It is an efficient scientific method of determining the sample size needed to be representative of a given population in research cum study.

The researcher utilized purposive sampling technique to select the issues of the newspapers with a focus on stories related to the subject of the study. This means only the newspaper found to have reports on oil-related environmental degradation were selected. The purposive sampling method enabled the researcher to generate dependable and reliable data targeting the newspaper stories on the coverage of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta Region. Therefore, using purposive sampling technique enabled the researcher to select the newspapers that contain oil-related environmental

degradation reports, since environmental reports on Niger Delta in the newspapers may not be common.

The unit of analysis for this study was news stories and features. News stories are content of newspapers written in straight line approach containing important information arranged in order of importance, beginning with most important while feature articles are approaches for news written in details and analytical form of human interest and highlighting on one or two news elements of an event. The researchers read the contents of the newspapers carefully to understand its meaning before coding. The items were evaluated based on the content categories.

Content Categories

The focus here was to determine reports that constitute oil-related environmental degradation in the Niger Delta. Therefore, the following were the content categories used:

1. **Causes:** These are stories that focus attention on the causes of oil-related environmental degradation in the Niger Delta.
2. **Solutions:** These are stories that pay attention on the solutions related to combating environmental degradation in the Niger Delta.
3. **Impact:** These are the type of stories that pay attention to the consequences of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta.
4. **Attribution of reason:** These are stories that explain why oil-related

environmental degradation has continued to persist in the Niger Delta.

5. **Past efforts:** These are stories that pay attention on the previous efforts aimed at combating oil-related environmental degradation in the Niger Delta.

Coding Scheme

Coding scheme describes the coding patterns of the coverage of oil-related environmental degradation in the Niger Delta by the selected Nigeria Newspapers issues.

Issues in environmental degradation

These are the issues that arise from the reports of environmental degradation that portray why degradation persists such as:

Sabotage by host community or people in the environment: This is issue attributed to the act whereby people of the oil-bearing communities degrade their own environment by destroying pipelines and facilities in the process of crude oil theft, thereupon seeking compensation, 1.

Improper safety practices. This is issue attributed to oil and gas companies that comprise safety practices thereby degrade the environment, 2.

Artisan refining of crude oil: This is the issue of illegal domestic and industrial fractional distillation by individual in heating crude oil on naked fire which occurs when there is high velocity during the burning that cause tar to form soot to flow on surface of things in specific physical surrounding terrain that cause oil related environmental degradation, 3.

Assessment of Issues Related to Environmental Degradation in the Niger Delta Region by Selected Nigerian Newspapers

Government actions affecting degradation: Physical activities of government on policies, choices, and decisions towards scientific and social solution to oil -related environmental degradation, 4.

Other: Any other issues apart from the aforementioned, 5.

The data for this study were collected from the sampled newspaper editions. This included sorting out of the stories from the selected newspapers. The instrument that was used to collect data for this study was the code sheet. The code sheet was used in the study because it is usually the most appropriate instrument for studies that utilize content analysis.

The data generated through the code sheet were categorized and represented in tables, charts and graphs for trends in time analysis. They were later analyzed using simple percentages and numerical representations based on the unity of analysis. The analysis of the data was based on the four objectives and research questions of the study. The test for the body of the newspapers selected contents was done

using Wimmer and Dominick recommendation for random selection of content samples for inter-coder reliability. While the inter-coder reliability of 0.75, was calculated using the Holsti's formula.

3. Results

Coverage patterns of oil -related environmental degradation issues in the Niger Delta Region by the selected Nigerian newspapers was drawn from three (3) newspapers of *The Guardian*, *The Nation*, and *Daily Sun*. The data for this study were collected from the sampled newspaper stories. The instrument that was used to collect the data for this study was the code sheet. The data generated were presented in tables, histogram chart graph for trend in time analysis and percentages for numerical representations as follows:

Table 1 shows that the majority of the environmental stories are on degradation. Out of the degradation stories, a majority were on oil-related. This is telling of the devastation of the environment from oil exploration. Oil-related degradation stories were more in the *Daily Sun*, followed by *the Guardian* and least by *The Nation*.

Table 1: Preliminary Content Data:

Variables S/N Descriptions	Newspapers			Number of Editions
	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Daily Sun</i>	<i>The Nation</i>	Total
1. Stories on oil-related environmental degradation in the Niger Delta.	42(17.4%)	56(23.1%)	26(10.7%)	124(51.2%)
2. Stories on non-oil-related environmental degradation.	30(12.4%)	15(6.2%)	13(5.4%)	58(24%)
3. Other environmental stories not on degradation.	33(13.6%)	17 (7%)	10(4.1%)	60(24.8%)
Total Coding Item	105(43.4%)	88(36.4%)	49(20.3%)	242(100%)

Source: Content analysis 2020/2021

Table 2 shows that there are more feature stories in oil-related environmental degradation stories than news stories. *The*

Daily Sun had more feature stories, followed by *The Guardian* while *The Nation* had more news stories than feature stories.

Table 2: Environmental Degradation Stories According to the Unit of Analysis of the Newspapers Coded:

S/N	Unit of Analysis	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Daily Sun</i>	<i>The Nation</i>	Total
1.	News Stories	14(11%)	22(18%)	15(12%)	51(41%)
2.	Feature Stories	28(23%)	34(27%)	11(9%)	73(59%)
	Grand Total	42(34%)	56(45%)	26(21%)	124(100%)

Source: Content Analysis 2020/2021

Table 3 indicates the content categories or subject matters with regard to oil -related environmental degradation. The bulk of the

stories were on the attribution of reasons which runs on each of the newspapers.

Table 3: Subject Matter and Content Categories of Oil-related Environmental Degradation in the Niger Delta among the Newspapers:

SN	Subject Matter	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Daily Sun</i>	<i>The Nation</i>	Total
1.	Causes	9(7%)	13(11%)	4(3%)	26(21%)
2.	Solutions	5(4%)	10(8%)	3(2%)	18(15%)
3.	Impact	10(8%)	7(6%)	5(4%)	22(18%)
4.	Attribution of Reason	13(11%)	23(18%)	7(6%)	43(35%)
5.	Past Efforts	5(4%)	3(2%)	7(6%)	15(11%)
	Grand Total	42(33.9%)	56(45.2%)	26(21%)	124(100)

Source : Content Analysis 2020/2021

Table 4 indicates that issues portrayed in the oil-related environmental degradation stories are that oil companies do not indulge in proper safety practices which lead to

environmental degradation. This is what is portrayed in all the newspapers studied.

Assessment of Issues Related to Environmental Degradation in the Niger Delta Region by Selected Nigerian Newspapers

Table 4: Issues that are portrayed on Environmental Degradation in the Newspapers under study:

S/N	Issues	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Daily Sun</i>	<i>The Nation</i>	Total
1.	Sabotage	13(65%)	14(11%)	8(2%)	35(28%)
2.	Improper safety Practice	20(16%)	18(15%)	11(9%)	49(40%)
3.	Artisan Refining	7(6%)	10(8%)	3(2%)	20(16%)
4.	Government Action	2(2%)	11(9%)	3(2%)	16(13%)
5.	Other	-	3(2%)	1(1%)	4(3%)
	Grand Total	42(34%)	56(45%)	26(21%)	124(100%)

Source : Content Analyses 2020/2021

4. Discussion

A cursory examination of the data obtained showed that the newspapers portrayed that oil companies were responsible and liable for the environmental degradation through the act of improper safety practices which had a percentage of 40. It was followed by reports that portrayed the act of degradation coming from sabotage from members of the host communities who seek for compensation by polluting their environment. This stood at 35 percent. Another portrayal is that artisan refining is one of the issues that crop up with stories of environmental degradation. It had 20 percent. *The Guardian* had the highest portrayal of the issue on improper safety practices which had 16 percent, followed by the *Daily Sun* that had 15 percent and lastly, *The Nation* with 11 percent.

This is in tandem with the findings of [14] that economic activities are responsible for degradation issues as published in South

America and African newspapers compared to Europe, North America and Asian newspapers. This finding showed that there was critical information in reporting environmental degradation issues as fallout of the negligence of oil companies of their environmental causes and less concern in managing the fragile ecosystem of the Niger Delta Region. It means that in South America and Africa the increased rate of environmental degradation is as a result of the ugly attitude of multinational international oil companies to extract oil and neglect the environment and the oil bearing community stakeholders to get quick rich through crude oil theft and export pipeline vandalism thereby neglecting the devastating impact of the practice to the environment. The newspapers in Europe, North America and Asia have it that economic gain is not the only purpose of extracting crude oil in the continents as they consider the effects of crude oil activities to

the human environment. The newspapers emphasize that environmental sustainability should be the overall goal of oil exploration and exploitation than the economic gain mentality of both the multinational oil companies and the community stakeholders as practiced in the developed countries.

The selected newspapers had stories with multiple dimensions of environmental degradation issues in the Niger Delta Region. The newspapers portrayed the issues as coming from the oil companies. They also portrayed the issue of sabotage of members of the host community and the activities of artisanal refining which was published in July 13, 2020 and August 3, 2020 as featured in *The Guardian* newspaper with the headline “Government plans Niger Delta restoration project” – another headline with a story with high activities of sabotage and artisanal refining in the region leading to pollution and soot in the atmosphere.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to determine the contents on coverage patterns of oil-related environmental degradation issues in the Niger Delta Region by selected Nigerian newspapers. The study was successful by extensive literature review on factors that bring about coverage pattern of environmental degradation in the selected newspapers in Nigeria; data were used as resource application, conclusion, and recommendations, thereby contributing to knowledge necessary for researchers and the general public. As for the constraints, it was noticeable that newspapers on environmental degradation of the Niger

Delta were few in Nigeria. The coverage patterns of oil-related environmental degradation issues in the Niger Delta Region by the selected Nigerian newspapers across Nigeria as done in the advanced society were also very scanty.

Niger Delta Region is an endangered area; threatened by environmental degradation caused by oil exploration and related activities whose remediation cost run into billions of naira and would run for over 30 years. However, the examination of the various oil-related environmental degradation issues portrayed by the selected newspapers in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria shows that improper safety practices by multinational international oil and gas companies were the most important portrayal. It has become imperative that journalists and other media organizations should be trained and assigned special reporters to cover oil-related environmental degradation issues in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.

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Assessment of Issues Related to Environmental Degradation in the Niger Delta Region by Selected Nigerian Newspapers

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