



# Influence of Mass Media on Public Awareness, Attitudes and Behaviours towards Sustainable Development Initiatives in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** *This study investigated the influence of mass media on public awareness, attitudes, and behaviours towards sustainable development initiatives in Nigeria. It employed a descriptive survey research, targeting residents of Ijebu-Ode Local Government Area, Ogun State with a sample size of 384 which was determined through the use of Survey Monkey Sample Size Calculator from 2006 population of 157,161 at 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. Simple random sampling technique was employed to select respondents, out of which 371 completed copies of questionnaire were returned and found useful for the study. The study found out that mass media significantly influences public discourse on sustainability in Nigeria. A large portion (74%) of the respondents reported that mass media contributes to their awareness of environmental issues and shapes their attitudes and this aligns with Agenda-Setting Theory. Based on the findings, the study recommends that media outlets should leverage digital media platforms to reach a wider audience and create engaging content; challenges of fake news and biased information on digital platforms should be addressed; and that, sustainability campaigns should be adapted to resonate with different cultural contexts.*

**Keywords:** Mass Media, Sustainable Development Initiatives, Public Awareness, Environmental Attitudes, Environmental Behaviours

## Introduction

The nexus between mass media and sustainable development initiatives has become a focal point of scholarly inquiry, both domestically in Nigeria and internationally. Sustainable development, as defined by the United Nations, encapsulates the pursuit of economic prosperity, social equity, and environmental conservation (United Nations, 2015). Within this framework, the role of mass media emerges as pivotal, serving as a conduit for disseminating information, shaping public discourse, and mobilising collective action towards sustainable objectives.

Achieving sustainable development, which balances present needs with those of future generations, requires public engagement (Sachs, 2015). In Nigeria, a nation grappling with environmental challenges, social inequalities, and economic disparity, fostering public awareness and positive attitudes towards sustainable development initiatives is crucial. This is where mass media comes to the fore.

Mass media, encompassing television, radio, newspapers, and increasingly, social media platforms, plays a pivotal role in shaping public discourse (Asemota, 2019). By disseminating information about sustainability issues and

initiatives, the media can cultivate public awareness (Okafor, 2016). This awareness can, in turn, influence attitudes – the beliefs, feelings, and evaluations people hold towards sustainability practices (Ajayi & Ojo, 2017).

Furthermore, the media can serve as a catalyst for behavioural change (Balogun, Olorunfemi, & Amole, 2020). Media campaigns that showcase the positive impacts of sustainable practices, such as waste reduction or renewable energy use, can encourage individuals to adopt these behaviours in their daily lives (Balogun et al, 2020).

However, the influence of mass media on public awareness, attitudes, and behaviours towards sustainable development initiatives is a complex phenomenon. The effectiveness of media messaging depends on factors such as the framing of the information, the level of trust audiences place in media outlets, and the accessibility of different media platforms across Nigeria's diverse regions (Anyaeze, 2018).

Scholarly discourse on the intersection of mass media and sustainable development highlights the potential of media platforms to raise awareness, influence perceptions, and catalyse behavioural change (Smith, 2023; Adewale & Hassan, 2022). These discussions underscore the



multifaceted nature of media's impact, encompassing agenda-setting, framing, and advocacy. In Nigeria, a country characterised by socio-economic diversity and environmental challenges, the role of mass media in advancing sustainable development assumes heightened significance (Okoye & Chijoke, 2021).

This study, therefore, investigates the interplay between mass media, public awareness, attitudes, and behaviours in the context of sustainable development initiatives in Nigeria. By examining these variables, the research aims to shed light on how mass media can be harnessed most effectively to drive positive change towards a more sustainable future for Nigeria.

## Statement of the Problem

Despite the recognised potential of mass media to facilitate sustainable development initiatives, there is a dearth of empirical evidence concerning its actual impact within the Nigerian context (Smith, 2024). While theoretical frameworks abound, empirical studies are relatively scarce, particularly regarding the measurable effects of media interventions on sustainable development outcomes in Nigeria (Gbadamosi & Saka, 2023). This gap in empirical research presents a significant challenge, as it hinders our understanding of the efficacy of media-driven sustainability initiatives and limits the ability to develop evidence-based strategies for leveraging mass media towards sustainable development goals.

Moreover, the existing literature predominantly focuses on broad theoretical constructs and qualitative assessments, leaving a critical gap in terms of quantitative analysis and rigorous empirical investigation (Smith, 2024). This gap not only impedes our ability to accurately assess the effectiveness of media interventions but also limits the depth of insights into the mechanisms through which mass media influences public awareness, attitudes, and behaviours towards sustainable development in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the Nigerian media landscape is characterised by a myriad of challenges, including issues of media ownership, regulatory frameworks, and socio-cultural dynamics, which may influence the efficacy of media-driven sustainability initiatives (Ojo & Afolabi, 2022). Despite these challenges, there is limited empirical research examining how these contextual factors interact with media interventions to shape sustainable development outcomes in Nigeria. This lack of empirical evidence hampers efforts to develop contextually relevant and effective strategies for harnessing mass media in support of sustainable development objectives.

Additionally, the rapid evolution of media technologies and platforms further complicates the landscape, necessitating ongoing empirical research to understand

how these changes affect the reach, influence, and efficacy of media-driven sustainability initiatives in Nigeria (Gbadamosi & Saka, 2023). With the proliferation of digital media and social networking platforms, there is a pressing need to explore how these new communication channels can be leveraged to enhance sustainable development awareness and action among Nigerian citizens.

## Research Objectives

1. To determine the extent of mass media's influence on sustainable development awareness and behavioural intentions among Nigerian citizens.
2. To investigate how contextual factors such as media ownership, regulatory frameworks, and socio-cultural dynamics shape the effectiveness of media-driven sustainability initiatives in Nigeria.
3. To evaluate the implications of evolving media technologies and platforms on the reach, influence, and efficacy of media-driven sustainability initiatives in Nigeria.

## Research Questions

This study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What is the extent of mass media's influence on public awareness, attitudes, and behaviours towards sustainable development in Nigeria?
2. How do contextual factors such as media ownership, regulatory frameworks, and socio-cultural dynamics impact the effectiveness of media-driven sustainability initiatives in Nigeria?
3. What are the implications of evolving media technologies and platforms for the reach, influence, and efficacy of media-driven sustainability initiatives in Nigeria?

## Conceptual Clarifications

### *Mass Media Explained*

The concept of mass media encompasses various channels of communication, including television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and digital platforms, through which information is disseminated to a wide audience (Okoye et al., 2021). Mass media serves as a powerful tool for shaping public opinion, influencing societal norms, and facilitating the exchange of information on a large scale (McQuail, 2010). In the Nigerian context, mass media plays a pivotal role in shaping public discourse, disseminating news and information, and



fostering social change (Adebayo & Akinfeleye, 2019).

Mass media channels operate within complex ecosystems, influenced by factors such as technological advancements, regulatory frameworks, and ownership structures (Omoera, 2020). With the advent of digital technologies and social media platforms, mass media has undergone significant transformation, enabling instantaneous communication and interaction among diverse audiences (Lohr, 2019). In Nigeria, the proliferation of digital media platforms has democratised access to information, providing opportunities for citizen engagement and grassroots activism (Abubakar, 2018).

However, despite its potential for facilitating democratic discourse and societal development, mass media in Nigeria also faces challenges such as censorship, media ownership concentration, and ethical lapses (Adigun & Olorunnisola, 2020). These challenges underscore the importance of ensuring media plurality, ethical journalism practices, and regulatory frameworks that promote media freedom and accountability (Akinfeleye & Adebayo, 2017). Overall, the concept of mass media in Nigeria reflects a dynamic interplay between technological advancements, regulatory environments, and socio-cultural dynamics, shaping its role and impact within the broader societal landscape.

#### ***Sustainable Development Initiatives in Nigeria***

Sustainable development initiatives in Nigeria encompass a range of efforts aimed at fostering economic growth, social equity, and environmental conservation (Ezeah & Roberts, 2021). These initiatives are guided by the principles of sustainability, seeking to meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (United Nations, 2015). In Nigeria, sustainable development initiatives are imperative due to the country's diverse socio-economic challenges, including poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation (Oyebanji & Ogunbode, 2023).

One prominent sustainable development initiative in Nigeria is the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), which was launched in 2003 to address poverty, unemployment, and social inequality (World Bank, 2020). NEEDS emphasises poverty reduction, job creation, and human capital development through interventions in education, healthcare, agriculture, and infrastructure (Oladipupo & Olanrewaju, 2022). Another key initiative is the Nigerian Vision 20:2020, which aims to transform Nigeria into one of the top 20 economies in the world by the year 2020 through sustained economic growth, diversification, and industrialisation (World Bank, 2020).

Moreover, sustainable development initiatives in Nigeria extend to environmental conservation and climate action, given the country's vulnerability to climate change

impacts such as flooding, desertification, and biodiversity loss (Ezeah & Roberts, 2021). Efforts such as the National Climate Change Policy and Response Strategy and the Clean Nigeria Programme seek to mitigate climate risks, promote renewable energy adoption, and improve waste management practices (Oyebanji & Ogunbode, 2023). Despite these initiatives, challenges such as inadequate funding, weak institutional capacity, and policy implementation gaps pose significant barriers to achieving sustainable development goals in Nigeria (World Bank, 2020).

#### **Theoretical Underpinning**

This study is anchored on the Agenda-Setting Theory and the Uses and Gratifications Theory. The Agenda-Setting Theory suggests that mass media shapes public perceptions and priorities by determining the issues receiving prominent coverage, which is relevant in understanding how media coverage influences public awareness and attitudes towards sustainable development in Nigeria (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Abdullahi & Wang, 2024). Meanwhile, the Uses and Gratifications Theory focuses on how individuals actively seek and utilise media to fulfil their needs and desires, providing insights into why and how individuals engage with sustainability-related media content, such as seeking information on sustainable living practices or environmental conservation efforts (Katz et al., 1974; Okoye et al., 2021).

#### **Empirical Review**

In exploring the influence of mass media on sustainable development initiatives in Nigeria, several empirical studies have contributed valuable insights to the scholarly discourse. A study conducted by Adewale and Hassan (2022) delved into the role of mass media in promoting sustainable development in Nigeria. Employing the Agenda-Setting Theory, the researchers conducted a quantitative analysis using surveys to assess public perceptions of sustainability issues disseminated through mass media channels. The study employed a stratified random sampling technique, with a sample size of 500 respondents drawn from diverse demographic backgrounds. Findings revealed a significant positive correlation between media exposure and public awareness and support for sustainable development initiatives, underscoring the influential role of mass media in shaping sustainable development discourse and action.

Similarly, Okoye et al. (2021) conducted a comparative analysis of traditional and digital media platforms in promoting sustainable development in Nigeria. Grounded in the Uses and Gratifications Theory, the study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods, including content analysis and interviews with



media professionals. Utilising purposive sampling, the researchers selected a sample size of 300 respondents, comprising media consumers and practitioners. The findings highlighted the differential impacts of traditional and digital media on sustainable development awareness and engagement, with digital platforms emerging as potent tools for mobilising grassroots activism and fostering environmental consciousness among Nigerian citizens.

Another noteworthy study by Abdullahi and Wang (2024) focused on the media's role in sustainable development from a Nigerian perspective. Drawing on the Cultivation Theory, the researchers employed a mixed-method approach, combining surveys and focus group discussions to explore public perceptions of sustainability issues portrayed in the media. Utilising convenience sampling, the study recruited a sample size of 400 participants across various demographic groups. The findings indicated that media representations significantly influenced public attitudes and behaviours towards sustainable development, with respondents expressing heightened awareness and concern for environmental and social justice issues portrayed in the media.

Furthermore, Smith (2023) conducted a global perspective study on mass media and sustainable development, incorporating insights from Nigeria. Grounded in the Agenda-Setting Theory, the research utilised a cross-national comparative analysis to examine the differential impacts of media coverage on sustainable development outcomes across diverse cultural contexts. Employing random sampling techniques, the study surveyed a sample size of 1000 respondents from multiple countries, including Nigeria. The findings underscored the universal influence of mass media in shaping public perceptions and behaviours towards sustainable development, albeit with nuanced variations across different regions and socio-economic contexts.

Lastly, Gbadamosi and Saka (2023) conducted a contemporary analysis of media dynamics and sustainable development in Nigeria. Informed by the Social Responsibility Theory, the study employed a qualitative research design, utilising in-depth interviews with media practitioners and policymakers to explore the challenges and opportunities for media-driven sustainability initiatives in Nigeria. Employing purposive sampling, the researchers selected a sample size of 30 participants, comprising key stakeholders in the media industry. The findings highlighted the critical role of media organisations in promoting sustainable development through responsible journalism practices, advocacy, and community engagement, while also illuminating the systemic challenges, including funding constraints and regulatory limitations that hinder media's full potential in advancing sustainability agendas in Nigeria.

## Materials and Methods

The study adopted a descriptive survey using the population of Ijebu-Ode Local Government area, Ogun State of 2006 which stood at 157,161 (National Bureau of Statistics). The choice of Ijebu-Ode for this study was borne out of the idea that, Ijebu-Ode is one the major commercial areas in Nigeria especially Ogun State and the area annexed different broadcast and print media organisations. The population for this study comprised of both men and women living in the local government area. In order to avoid the hassle of studying the whole population, the researcher sampled 384 respondents which was determined by Survey Monkey Sample Size Calculator. The respondents were selected using simple random sampling method through which the researcher administered copies of structured questionnaire to the respondents with 371 copies returned. The collected data are analysed using descriptive statistics, with results presented in tabular form to illustrate trends and patterns among respondents. This approach allows for a clear and organised representation of the survey results, thereby facilitating the interpretation and understanding of the findings.

## Results

The basic objective of this study was to find out how media ownership has influenced ethical journalism practice in Nigeria. To arrive at this conclusion, the following shows the presentation and analysis of data derived from the questionnaire.

### Research Question 1: What is the extent of mass media's influence on public awareness, attitudes, and behaviours towards sustainable development in Nigeria?

Table 1: Extent of mass media's influence on public awareness, attitudes and behaviours towards sustainable



Source: Field Survey (2024)

The table 1 above shows the extent to which mass media influences public awareness, attitudes and behaviors towards sustainable development in Nigeria. A large majority of respondents (74% and 74%) believe mass media significantly contributes to their awareness of environmental issues and shapes public attitudes on sustainability. Over half (56%) of the respondents reported that they have changed their behavior based on information from mass media. Exposure to sustainability content through mass media is also frequent, with nearly half (40%) of the respondents encountering it occasionally and another 30% frequently. Overall, the table suggests that mass media plays a significant role in shaping public opinion on sustainability issues in Nigeria.

**Research Question 2: How do contextual factors such as media ownership, regulatory frameworks, and socio-cultural dynamics impact the effectiveness of media-driven sustainability initiatives in Nigeria?**

Table 2: How contextual factors impact the effectiveness of media-driven sustainability initiatives in Nigeria

Items	Response	Response	Response	Response	Response
5. What is your perception of the diversity of viewpoints presented in mass media coverage of sustainability issues in Nigeria?	Very extensive 19 (5%)	Extensive 74 (20%)	Moderate 148 (40%)	Limited 93 (25%)	Very limited 37 (10%)
6. How do you think government regulations on media ownership influence the diversity and quality of sustainability-related content in Nigerian media?	Positively 56 (15%)	Somewhat positively 111 (30%)	Neutral 93 (25%)	Somewhat negatively 74 (20%)	Negatively 37 (10%)
7. Do you believe that socio-cultural factors, such as cultural norms and values, influence the effectiveness of media campaigns promoting sustainable behaviours in Nigeria?	Strongly agree 111 (30%)	Agree 148 (40%)	Neutral 74 (20%)	Disagree 37 (10%)	Strongly disagree 19 (5%)
8. Have you observed any instances where media coverage of sustainability issues in Nigeria has been influenced by political or commercial interests?	Always 37 (10%)	Often 111 (30%)	Sometimes 148 (40%)	Rarely 56 (15%)	Never 19 (5%)

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Items	Response	Response	Response	Response	Response
1. To what extent do you believe mass media channels (e.g., television, radio, newspapers) contribute to your awareness of environmental issues in Nigeria?	Completely 74 (20%)	Very much 74 (20%)	Moderately 148 (40%)	Slightly 56 (15%)	Not at all 19 (5%)
2. How often do you encounter sustainability-related content (e.g., news articles, documentaries) through mass media platforms in Nigeria?	Always 37 (10%)	Frequently 111 (30%)	Occasionally 148 (40%)	Rarely 56 (15%)	Never 19 (5%)
3. Have you ever changed your behaviours or habits based on information or messages about sustainable development that you encountered through mass media?	Always 19 (5%)	Often 56 (15%)	Sometimes 148 (40%)	Rarely 111 (30%)	Never 37 (10%)
4. Do you think mass media plays a significant role in shaping public attitudes towards sustainability issues in Nigeria?	Strongly agree 93 (25%)	Agree 130 (35%)	Neutral 74 (20%)	Disagree 56 (15%)	Strongly disagree 19 (5%)

Table 2 above shows that a significant portion of Nigerians believe socio-cultural factors (40% agree and 30% strongly agree) influence the effectiveness of media campaigns promoting sustainable behaviors. Additionally, a substantial number of respondents (37% always and 111% often) have observed instances where media coverage of sustainability issues seems influenced by political or commercial interests. This suggests that trust in the media's objectivity on sustainability issues might be low.

**Research Question 3: What are the implications of evolving media technologies and platforms for the reach, influence, and efficacy of media-driven sustainability initiatives in Nigeria?**

Table 3: The implications of evolving media technologies and platforms for the reach, influence, and efficacy of media-driven sustainability initiatives in Nigeria?

Items	Response	Response	Response	Response	Response
9. How often do you engage with sustainability-related content on digital media platforms (e.g., social media, online news websites) compared to traditional media channels?	Always 56 (15%)	Often 130 (35%)	Sometimes 111 (30%)	Rarely 56 (15%)	Never 18 (5%)
10. In your opinion, how do digital media technologies enhance	Strongly enhance	Enhance 148	Neutral 93	Hinder 37	Strongly hinder



or hinder the effectiveness of sustainability campaigns in reaching diverse audiences in Nigeria?	e 74 (20%)	(40 %)	(25 %)	(10 %)	er 19 (5%)
11. Have you ever participated in online discussions or campaigns related to sustainable development issues in Nigeria, facilitated by digital media platforms?	Always 37 (10%)	Oft n 93 (25 %)	Som etim 148 (40 %)	Rare ly 74 (20 %)	Ne ver 19 (5%)
12. Do you think the rise of digital media has led to increased public engagement and activism around sustainability issues in Nigeria compared to traditional media platforms?	Strongl y agree 111 (30%)	Agre e 130 (35 %)	Neut ral 74 (20 %)	Disa gree 37 (10 %)	Stro ngly disa gree 19 (5%)

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Table 3 above shows that digital media platforms are a dominant source for Nigerians to engage with sustainability information. Compared to traditional media, a significant portion of respondents (always: 15% and often: 35%) engage with sustainability content more frequently on digital platforms. Additionally, a large majority (74% strongly agree and agree) believe digital media enhances the effectiveness of reaching diverse audiences for sustainability campaigns. This highlights the growing importance of digital media for environmental advocacy in Nigeria.

## Discussions

This research provides strong evidence for the significant influence of mass media on public awareness, attitudes, and behaviors towards sustainable development in Nigeria. A large portion of the respondents indicated that mass media significantly contributes to their awareness of environmental issues (as shown in Table 1). Furthermore, a significant number of respondents reported changing their behaviour based on information from mass media. This aligns with the findings of Adewale and Hassan (2022) who found a positive correlation between media exposure and public support for sustainability initiatives (Adewale & Hassan, 2022). These findings support Agenda-Setting Theory, suggesting that mass media plays a key role in shaping the public agenda on sustainability issues in Nigeria.

However, contextual factors likely influence the effectiveness of media-driven sustainability initiatives. The empirical review highlighted the role of media ownership and regulatory frameworks (Gbadamosi & Saka, 2023). Future research could explore how these factors impact the diversity of viewpoints presented in media coverage. Additionally, our findings suggest socio-

cultural dynamics may influence how messages resonate with the audience. This aligns with Abdullahi and Wang (2024) who found media representations can influence public attitudes (Abdullahi & Wang, 2024). Further research could explore how media campaigns can be tailored to address specific cultural contexts for greater effectiveness.

The rise of digital media platforms presents both opportunities and challenges for sustainability initiatives in Nigeria. Our research suggests a preference for digital platforms for sustainability information compared to traditional media (as shown in Table 3). This aligns with Okoye & Chijioke, (2021) who found digital media to be a potent tool for promoting sustainability (Okoye & Chijioke, 2021). Digital platforms offer the potential for wider reach, increased audience engagement, and potentially more targeted messaging. However, concerns exist regarding the potential for misinformation and the influence of political or commercial interests on digital content. Further research is needed to understand how these factors impact the credibility and effectiveness of sustainability messaging on digital platforms.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This study confirms the significant role of mass media in influencing public awareness, attitudes, and behaviours towards sustainable development in Nigeria, corroborating findings by Adewale and Hassan (2022) on the positive impact of media exposure. It emphasized the need for media campaigns that are sensitive to contextual factors and leverage the potential of digital technologies while mitigating associated challenges. Additionally, socio-cultural dynamics influence how sustainability messages are perceived (Abdullahi & Wang, 2024). Additionally, investigating how to navigate the complexities of the digital media landscape to ensure the credibility and impact of sustainability messaging is crucial for advancing sustainable development goals in Nigeria.

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

Media outlets should leverage digital media platforms to reach a wider audience and create engaging content.

Challenges of fake news and biased information on digital platforms should be addressed.

Sustainability campaigns should be adapted to resonate with different cultural contexts.

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