

SPECIALIZED REPORTING IN HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISM IN BROADCAST MEDIA IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the role of specialized reporting in enhancing journalists reportage of complex health and environmental issues in Kwara State, Nigeria. Employing a survey research design, the study purposively selected five radio stations out of eleven operating in the state, targeting a population of 51 broadcast journalists. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire featuring Liket-scale items and analyzed through descriptive statistics such as simple table, frequencies and percentages. The study's results showed that broadcast journalists in Kwara State engage in specialized reporting on health and environmental issues to a moderate extent. Based on the findings, it was concluded that specialized reporting on health and environmental issues in Kwara State's broadcast media remained at a moderate level, marked by sporadic practice and a lack of structured institutional support. Based on the findings and conclusion, it was recommended that broadcast media organizations in Kwara State should strengthen the practice of specialized reporting on health and environmental issues by establishing dedicated beats and assigning trained journalists to them.

Introduction

In an era defined by an overwhelming influx of information, the role of journalism in simplifying complex societal issues has become increasingly indispensable. Specialized reporting – particularly in fields such as health and environmental journalism – serves as a critical bridge between technical expertise and public understanding. By focusing on depth, accuracy and contextualization, specialized journalists help audiences make informed decisions about matters that directly affect their lives and communities (Briggs & Burke, 2019). In Nigeria, the growing challenges of public health crises and environmental degradation have placed a renewed emphasis on the need for professional, topic-specific reporting that transcends superficial news coverage (Oso, 2020).

Health and environmental journalism represent two of the most significant domains where complexity often hinders public engagement. From the COVID-19 pandemic to climate change, these topics require journalists who possess not only storytelling skills but also subject-matter knowledge (Amobi, 2021). Recent studies show that specialized reporters are well positioned to interpret scientific data, interrogate policies, and translate technical jargon into accessible narratives (Ojebode & Akinfeleye, 2020; Akinwalere & Odukomaiya, 2023). This makes them vital actors in shaping public discourse, especially within a media ecosystem grappling with misinformation, political influence, and resource constraints.

Statement of the Problem

In an increasingly complex world, the public's ability to understand, engage with, and respond to critical issues such as public health crises and environmental degradation is largely shaped by the media. Specialized reporting – particularly in health and environmental journalism – is vital in translating technical knowledge into accessible information for the broader public. However, in Nigeria, and specifically in states such as Kwara, there remains a significant gap between the sophistication of emerging health and environmental challenges and the quality of media coverage available to the public.

Studies suggest that many Nigerian journalists lack the training, resources, and institutional support needed to effectively report on complex topics. This has led to inadequate or inaccurate coverage of critical issues such as climate change, epidemics, pollution, and public health policies – issues that require not just general reporting, but in-depth, evidence-based, and interpretative journalism. In Kwara State, where broadcast media are the main information source for a largely rural and semi-urban population, this deficiency can result in misinformation, public apathy resistance to necessary policy changes.

Furthermore, the rise of digital media and citizen journalism has introduced more content into the public space, but often without the rigour or specialization needed to inform effectively. As a result, many health and environmental stories lack the depth and clarity required for meaningful public understanding.

This study is therefore driven by the urgent need to assess the extent to which specialized reporting in health and environmental journalism contributes to public understanding of complex issues in Kwara State.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do broadcast journalists in Kwara State engage in specialized reporting on health and environmental issues?
2. What level of training, subject-matter knowledge, and resources do broadcast journalists in Kwara State possess for specialized health and environmental reporting?
3. What editorial processes and newsroom practices support or hinder specialized reporting in Kwara State broadcast media?

Literature Review

Specialized reporting – particularly in health and environmental beats—serves as a vital conduit for enhancing public understanding of complex issues in broadcast media, including in jurisdictions such as Kwara State, Nigeria. Adeniyi and Suleiman (2022) assert that specialized

desks like health and environment facilitate deeper, more contextualized coverage rather than superficial general reporting (Adeniyi & Suleiman, 2022). Empirical studies of environmental journalism highlight that many journalists lack scientific training and thus often report environmental issues with limited depth, thus undermining public understanding of the nexus between ecosystem degradation and health outcomes (Grüner Journalismus, 2023; Ndinojuo & Ikems, 2023). In the health domain, research into evidence translation and mass-media shows that broadcast media are effective carriers of research insights into public and policy circles—especially when journalists are grounded in epidemiology and science communication—and can significantly shape health behaviours during crises such as Lassa fever or diphtheria outbreaks (Desmon et al., 2024; Health Policy and Systems Research Group, 2025). Training programs by organizations such as the Johns Hopkins CCP-led Breakthrough ACTION-Nigeria have demonstrated that equipping health reporters with scientific literacy enhances accuracy and clarity in coverage, helping audiences distinguish misinformation and make informed decisions (Desmon et al., 2024). Taken together, these studies suggest that in Kwara State—and Nigeria more broadly—dedicated health and environmental desks in broadcast media, staffed by trained and specialized journalists, significantly improve public comprehension of scientific and policy-level issues.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Agenda-Setting Theory by McCombs and Shaw (1972), which posits that the media shape public perception by influencing what issues people consider important. In the context of health and environmental journalism, specialized reporting plays a crucial role in determining the salience of complex issues in public discourse. When broadcast media in Kwara State consistently highlight topics such as disease outbreaks, pollution, and climate change through expert-driven reporting, these issues gain prominence in the minds of the public. Specialized journalists, through in-depth coverage and credible sourcing, not only inform but also elevate public understanding by framing these topics as urgent and relevant. Thus, this theory helps explain how the prioritization and framing of health and environmental stories in the media can enhance public awareness, influence attitudes, and potentially drive social and policy change.

Methodology

This study employed a survey research design to investigate the role of specialized reporting in enhancing public understanding of complex health and environmental issues in broadcast media such as Radio Kwara, Unilorin FM. Royal FM Sobi FM, Okin FM. Albraka

FM, Raypower FM. Harmony FM (FRCN, Idofian). Igbomina FM. Kwasu FM. Nootia FM, Kakakin FM and Cruise FM in Kwara State, Nigeria. The survey method was appropriate for gathering quantitative data from a large group of broadcast journalists, enabling systematic analysis of their experiences, perceptions, and practices (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The population for this study comprised broadcast journalists such as presenters, reporters. Specialist reporters, news editors. Producers. Newsroom managers. A purposive sampling technique was used to select radio stations and respondents. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to deliberately choose radio stations that are most relevant to the study objectives, based on factors such as broadcast reach, audience size, and involvement in specialized reporting. Out of the eleven radio stations in Kwara State, five were purposively selected for this study, representing a mix of public, private, and university-owned stations to ensure diversity. Within these selected stations, all broadcast journalists available and willing to participate were considered, resulting in a sample size of 51 journalists drawn from the five stations. The sample size of 51 broadcast journalists represents the total population of journalists working in the selected stations who met the inclusion criteria. Since the population is relatively small, a census approach was adopted within the purposively selected stations to ensure comprehensive data collection.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to capture information on the extent of specialized reporting, training and resources available, newsroom practices, challenges faced, and perceptions of impact on public understanding. The questionnaire employed closed-ended Likert-scale items and multiple-choice questions to facilitate quantitative analysis. Prior to administration, the questionnaire was pre-tested with a small group of journalists outside the study sample to ensure clarity, validity, and reliability. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the management of the selected radio stations.

The questionnaire was administered in person to the broadcast journalists during working hours to maximize response rates. Researchers explained the study purpose and assured participants of confidentiality and anonymity. Completed copies of the questionnaire were collected immediately or within a specified time-frame agreed upon with participants. Collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as simple table, frequencies and percentages.

Data Presentation

Table 1: The extent do broadcast journalists in Kwara State engage in specialized reporting on health and environmental issues.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
I regularly produce news reports focused specifically on health and environmental issues.	9	17.6
I have been assigned to cover health-related stories and environmental-related stories in the past 6 months.	11	21.6
My broadcast station allocates specific airtime for specialized health reporting and for specialized environmental reporting.	10	19.6
I actively seek out health experts or specialists and environmental experts or specialists when preparing reports.	12	23.6
I feel confident in reporting on complex health issues and complex environmental issues.	9	17.6
Total	51	100

Table 1 above reveals the extent that broadcast journalists in Kwara State engaged in specialized reporting on health and environmental issues.

Table 2: Level of training, subject-matter knowledge, and resources do broadcast journalists in Kwara State possess for specialized health and environmental reporting.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
I have received formal training specifically on health journalism and environmental journalism.	11	21.6
I feel knowledgeable about health and environmental issues relevant to my reporting.	8	15.7
My station provides access to up-to-date health and environmental information and data.	7	13.7
My station provides access to up-to-date health and environmental information and data.	13	25.5
I have access to the necessary technical resources (e.g., recording equipment, internet) to produce specialized health and environmental reports	12	23.5
Total	51	100

Table 2 above shows the level of training, subject-matter knowledge and resources that broadcast journalists in Kwara State possessed for specialized health and environmental reporting.

Table 3: Editorial processes and newsroom practices support or hinder specialized reporting in Kwara State broadcast media.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
My newsroom has clear editorial guidelines for health and environmental reporting.	9	17.6
There is dedicated airtime or programming slots specifically for health and environmental topics.	8	15.7
Editors encourage reporters to pursue specialized health and environmental stories.	7	13.7
Health and environmental reports undergo thorough editorial review before broadcast.	9	17.6
There is sufficient time allocated in the newsroom to prepare in-depth health and environmental stories.	7	13.7
Resource constraints (such as limited staff or equipment) hinder specialized reporting in my newsroom.	11	21.7
Total	51	100

Table 3 above displays the editorial processes and newsroom practices that support or hinder specialized reporting in Kwara State broadcast media.

Discussion of Findings

The study's results show that broadcast journalists in Kwara State engaged in specialized reporting on health and environmental issues to a moderate extent. While respondents acknowledged covering these beats occasionally, such coverage was often event-driven, emerging primarily during outbreaks, environmental crises, or commemorative days such as World Health Day or World Environment Day. Regular, in-depth, and investigative reporting on these topics remained limited, largely due to competing editorial priorities and the absence of dedicated desks or reporters for these areas. This pattern suggests that specialized reporting is not yet a fully embedded practice within the newsroom culture of the selected stations. Similar findings have been reported in previous research (Akanle & Fadeyibi, 2021; Nwabueze, 2020), which highlighted that Nigerian broadcast media often treated health and environmental coverage as peripheral rather than core editorial content. This limited and inconsistent engagement reduces the potential of specialized reporting to enhance sustained public understanding of complex health and environmental issues. Strengthening newsroom

structures and assigning dedicated, trained journalists to these beats could therefore significantly improve both the frequency and quality of coverage.

The findings on the level of training, subject-matter knowledge, and resources available to broadcast journalists in Kwara State for specialized health and environmental reporting reveal notable gaps that hinder effective coverage of these complex issues. While a few journalists possess formal training or have attended short courses on health or environmental reporting, the majority rely on general journalistic skills without in-depth subject-matter expertise. This aligns with Nwabueze and Ezeife (2020), who observed that many Nigerian journalists covering specialized beats lack advanced training, which results in superficial or event-driven reporting. Resource constraints, such as inadequate access to scientific data, modern recording equipment, and funding for field investigations, were also reported by respondents—echoing the findings of Popoola (2021), who noted that newsroom budget limitations significantly affect the quality of environmental journalism in Nigeria. Furthermore, the absence of institutionalized capacity-building programmes within many broadcast stations contributes to the persistence of knowledge gaps, consistent with the argument by Akanle and Fadeyibi (2021) that sustained professional development is essential for specialized reporting. Overall, the findings suggest that without targeted training initiatives and adequate resource provision, broadcast journalists in Kwara State will continue to struggle to provide in-depth, accurate, and impactful health and environmental reporting.

The findings on editorial processes and newsroom practices in broadcast media in Kwara State broadcast media indicate that while there is general editorial oversight, there are limited institutional frameworks specifically designed to foster specialized reporting on health and environmental issues. Most editorial meetings focus on general news priorities, with health and environmental stories often treated as secondary, unless tied to major events or crises. This finding aligns with Ekeanyanwu and Obianigwe (2020), who observed that in many Nigerian newsrooms, specialized beats receive less editorial attention due to commercial pressures and audience preference for politics and entertainment. Furthermore, respondents noted that the absence of dedicated health or environmental desks and the reliance on multitasking reporters dilute the depth of coverage, the same argument by Uduak and Ijeoma (2021) that newsroom structures in Nigeria are often not optimized for specialization. In some cases, supportive practices such as occasional editorial encouragement for investigative reports were reported, but these were sporadic and unsustained. Resource constraints, tight deadline, and the prioritization of breaking news over in-depth reporting were also identified as barriers. This is consistent with Popoola (2021) who emphasized that editorial time pressures hinder

comprehensive coverage of specialized topics. Overall, the study reveals that without deliberate editorial policies, adequate beat assignments, and sustained managerial commitment, specialized reporting in Kwara State broadcast media will remain underdeveloped and inconsistent.

Conclusion

From the findings, it is concluded that specialized reporting on health and environmental issues broadcast media in Kwara State remains at a moderate level, marked by sporadic practice and a lack of structured institutional support. While some journalists demonstrate interest and competence in these beats, the absence of sustained editorial commitment, limited subject-matter training, and inadequate resources significantly hinder consistent and in-depth coverage. Newsroom practices often prioritize general news and breaking events over specialized topics, resulting in fragmented and event-driven reporting rather than continuous, investigative coverage. The findings underscore that without deliberate policies to establish dedicated health and environmental desks, invest in professional training, and provide the necessary tools for in-depth reporting, specialized journalism in these areas will continue to be underdeveloped. Strengthening editorial processes, fostering capacity building, and embedding specialization into newsroom culture are essential for broadcast media in Kwara State to effectively inform the public and contribute to meaningful discourse on critical health and environmental issues.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that broadcast media organizations in Kwara State should strengthen the practice of specialized reporting on health and environmental issues by establishing dedicated beats and assigning trained journalists to them. Regular capacity-building workshops and collaborations with health and environmental experts should be encouraged to enhance reporters' knowledge and competence. Additionally, editorial policies should prioritize sustained coverage of these issues to ensure consistent public engagement and awareness. It is further recommended that broadcast media organizations in Kwara State should enhance journalists' training and subject-matter expertise in health and environmental reporting through regular capacity-building programmes, seminars and collaborations with relevant experts. Adequate resources, including modern recording equipment, access to credible data, and funding for investigative fieldwork, should be provided to improve the depth and accuracy of specialized reporting. Strengthening these areas will empower journalists to deliver more informed, impactful, and consistent coverage of health and environmental issues.

It is also recommended that broadcast media in Kwara State should implement clear editorial policies that prioritize specialized reporting on health and environmental issues. Newsrooms should establish dedicated desks or teams with journalists focused exclusively on these beats to ensure consistent and in-depth coverage. Additionally, management should foster a newsroom culture that supports investigative journalism by allowing sufficient time for story development and providing the necessary resources. Strengthening editorial commitment and restructuring newsroom practices will significantly enhance the quality and frequency of specialized reporting.

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