



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



INFLUENCE OF BROADCAST METEOROLOGICAL INFORMATION ON PUBLIC ATTITUDE TOWARDS WEATHER EARLY WARNINGS IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

Charles Obot ¹ and Aondowase Saawuan ^{2,*}

¹ Department of Film and Multimedia Studies, Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, University of Uyo, Nigeria

² Department of Development Communication Studies, Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, University of Calabar, Nigeria

* Corresponding Author

ORCID Details

Charles Obot: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8702-4790>

Aondowase Saawuan: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-7706-7020>

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ABSTRACT

Climate-induced extreme weather events have increased across the globe leading to loss of lives and property in the last two decades. This has compelled government, individuals and communities to seek ways of cushioning the effects of extreme weather events such as floods, droughts and windstorms. Consequently, the broadcast media in Benue state took up the responsibility of disseminating accurate science-based weather early warnings to the public to enhance early preparedness and adoption of preventive measures. Yet, public vulnerability to extreme weather events still persists in Benue state. This study, examines the extent of public exposure to broadcast weather early warnings, and the influence and effectiveness of broadcast meteorological information on public attitude towards weather early warnings in Benue state. Survey was adopted as the study's design. Structured questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. Data generated were presented using tables, simple percentages, and weighted mean. Results indicate that residents of Benue state were highly exposed to weather early warning messages. Findings further reveal that broadcast meteorological information had limited influence on public attitude towards weather early warnings in Benue state. Results also indicate that broadcast meteorological information was not effective in changing public attitudes towards compliance with weather early warnings in Benue state. The study recommends that broadcast meteorological warnings should be designed to calibrate with the needs, and psychological disposition of their audience to achieve compliance.

Keywords: Weather forecast, Climate change, Weather early warning, Flooding, Droughts.

1 INTRODUCTION

All over the world, one of the greatest challenges confronting humanity in the 21st century is the increasing rate of climate change and its attendant disruptive effects on human lives and the environment. This is occurring even amid

scientific speculation that, the global society is bound to experience worse changes in climate that will instigate unprecedented extreme weather events with devastating impact on human lives and the environment in years to come (Hatori, et al. 2023). The increasing variability and severity of extreme weather events are expected to heighten the occurrence and intensity of disasters, thereby undermining sustainable development, threatening food security, and challenging existing disaster risk management mechanisms (Awolala et al., 2022; Edoaka et al., 2020). The anticipated changes in the world's climate are becoming increasingly apparent through the rising frequency of extreme weather events such as flooding, melting sea ice and sheet mass, droughts, desert expansion, changes in rainfall and precipitation patterns, high windstorms, rising heat waves, sea level rise, and melting of polar ice caps (Azu & Alakwe, 2023).

Weather-related disasters such as flood and droughts have increased both in magnitude and rate of occurrence for the past two decades in Nigeria. Previous studies indicate that flood accounts for 83.3% of all weather-induced disasters that have been experienced in Nigeria, with 84.4% of deaths recorded (Ibrahim & Daura, 2022; Peter et al., 2020). Research evidences reveal that between 2012 and 2020, about 1,187 deaths related to flooding were recorded in Nigeria, while the cost of damage attributed to flooding was estimated at 904.5 million USD (Umar & Gray, 2022, Alfieri et al., 2024). Droughts and desertification have posed serious environmental challenges to the tropical savanna region of Sub-Saharan Africa, contributing to about 95% of deaths related to meteorological hazards in the last five years (Awolala et al., 2022; Edoaka et al., 2020). This has adversely threatened food security, environmental sustainability and availability of forage for cattle rearing in the northern part of Nigeria.

Existing literature has shown the devastating impacts of weather-related disasters, particularly floods and droughts, on individuals and communities across Benue State. A notable example occurred in 2012, when the state experienced severe flooding that caused widespread displacement of residents, loss of lives, destruction of farmlands, loss of soil nutrients and agricultural yields, contamination of water sources, and outbreak of waterborne diseases such as cholera and typhoid (Ternenge, et al., 2024; Agada, 2020; Peter et al., 2020). In most of these extreme weather situations, studies indicate that individuals and communities are often caught unprepared because of their inability to access prior-science based meteorological information that would enable them to adopt appropriate precautionary measures and mitigate the potential loss of lives (Odiana, et al., 2022). Therefore, raising public awareness, ensuring timely dissemination of meteorological warnings, and encouraging adherence to such warnings are considered essential strategies for managing and reducing the risks associated with extreme weather events (Ternenge et al., 2024).

Providing members of the public with timely and accurate science-based meteorological warnings has proven to reduce the adverse impacts of weather extreme events and enhance early preparedness and resilience (Olajide, 2023). Such timely and accurate weather warnings enhance people's understanding of changing weather dynamics, especially among residents of disaster-prone areas, and promote early preparedness and change of attitude towards mitigating the potential risks (Timm et al., 2020). Consequently, the broadcast media in partnership with weather monitoring agencies, like the Nigerian Meteorological Agency (NiMet), the Nigerian Hydrological Services Agency (NIHSA), and other risk management stakeholders in Benue State, took up the responsibility of disseminating weather early warnings through radio jingles, slogans, weather forecasts, documentaries and public service announcements to members of the public to improve their disaster knowledge and adopt positive precautionary measures towards mitigating the potential risks.

Despite the concerted efforts of the broadcast media in alerting members of the public of impending weather extreme occurrences, public vulnerability to extreme weather events such as flood and droughts still persist in Benue State. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to determine the extent to which members of the public were exposed to broadcast weather early warnings in Benue State; assess the influence of broadcast meteorological information on public attitude towards weather early warnings in Benue State; and assess the effectiveness of broadcast meteorological information on public attitude towards weather early warnings in Benue State.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Broadcast Meteorological Information and Public Attitude to Early Warnings

In every society, the mass media play a substantial role in shaping how people perceive and respond to social and environmental issues. As critical stakeholders in disaster risk management, the mass media, particularly broadcast, play a vital role in ensuring that members of the public receive timely and accurate information about extreme weather events (Ganiyu, 2017). Such advance information can enhance risk perception and promote positive preventive attitudes aimed at mitigating potential risks (Diakakis et al., 2022; Timm et al., 2020; Ejem et al., 2023). Timely dissemination of meteorological warnings through the broadcast media enhances awareness of impending disaster threats among vulnerable communities and promotes the adoption of appropriate preventive behaviours aimed at safeguarding lives and property (Chigozie et al., 2024). Broadcast meteorological warnings enables individuals and

communities to respond proactively and appropriately to impending weather-related hazards (Dauda & Kolo, 2022; Ezebuonyi et al., 2020).

Timely access to accurate meteorological information strengthens preparedness for extreme weather threats, as it empowers individuals with a better understanding of the potential consequences for their lives, livelihoods and communities. This has often influenced individuals to change their attitudes, beliefs, and misconceptions regarding impending disasters, ultimately leading to a reduction in the rate of casualties (Timm et al., 2020). When effectively utilized, broadcast meteorological warnings can influence public attitudes and encourage appropriate measures to lessen the effects of extreme weather events. Besides, the effectiveness of individual and community disaster-risk management efforts is significantly influenced by the timeliness, accuracy, and manner in which meteorological threats are presented through the broadcast media (Ejem et al., 2023; Ganiyu, 2017).

Meteorological warnings disseminated by the broadcast media can shape public perceptions and motivate individuals to take proactive measures rather than merely react to extreme weather hazards (Sarma, 2021). The wide coverage capacity of the broadcast media, particularly radio, enables early-warning messages to reach remote communities through jingles and slogans that help counter rumours, misinformation, and misconceptions about impending extreme weather hazards (Ganiyu, 2017; Chigozie et al., 2024). Engaging the broadcast media in the dissemination of early meteorological warnings before disasters occur is essential for increasing public awareness of impending hazards and their potential risks. Such awareness enables individuals and communities to make informed decisions and take appropriate preventive actions (Ejem et al., 2023). By consistently drawing the public's attention to impending extreme weather threats, broadcast media can foster a culture of disaster awareness and preparedness among audiences, promote public debate and positive attitudinal change, and help reduce potential risks.

However, broadcast audiences interpret messages in different ways depending on prevailing circumstances. Media consumers selectively identify the media content that aligns with their interests and needs (Asemah, et al., 2022). This implies that mere dissemination of broadcast weather extreme warnings to members of the public does not necessarily guarantee that they will positively respond to the demands of the message (Ejem, et al, 2023). This is also a clear indication that broadcast media messages alone cannot determine public change of attitude, as media effects are mediated by a range of factors, including individuals' educational level, cognitive ability, perceptions, beliefs, past experiences, and other contextual influences.

2.1.1 Review of Empirical Studies

Communication and media scholars have conducted empirical studies on the influence of broadcast media on audience attitude towards weather early warnings in Nigeria and beyond. For instance, Ezebuonyi et al. (2020) examined influence of the Abia Broadcasting Corporation's 2019 flood warning campaign, "*Flood is Coming Again*". Results indicated that most respondents residing in flood-prone areas who encountered the radio jingle reported being positively influenced by the message. Findings also showed that over two-third of the respondents living in flood-prone areas expressed willingness to adopt preventive measures to reduce the potential effects of the flooding on them. The study recommended the adoption of a behavioural change communication approach by ABS Radio and other broadcast stations to encourage residents in flood-prone areas to evacuate or implement other appropriate preventive measures to safeguard themselves from the potential impacts of the flooding.

Friday et al. (2023) investigated the extent to which farmers in Anambra North were exposed to, believed, and complied with flood early warning messages. The findings revealed that although the farmers had substantial exposure to flood-related early warnings, they demonstrated a relatively low level of trust in the content of the messages. Results further indicated that compliance with flood early warnings among Anambra North farmers was low. Despite the fact that most farmers received the warnings before the onset of flooding, only a small proportion acted on the information by moving to safer settlements.

Ejem et al. (2023) examined how broadcast media messages contributed to the amplification or attenuation of flood-risk perceptions during the 2022 floods in selected southern states of Nigeria. The results showed that exposure to broadcast flood-risk information among respondents was generally limited and inconsistent. Results revealed that the alerts disseminated by the broadcast media were inadequate to significantly increase public perception of the seriousness of the impending flood risks. Findings also showed that residents of flood-prone communities demonstrated low compliance with broadcast risk messages, which was attributed largely to the challenging socio-economic circumstances confronting them.

Ternenge et al. (2024) assessed how audiences responded to broadcast media coverage of flood forecasts in Nigeria, focusing on flood-prone states of Anambra, Benue, and Lagos. Results revealed that broadcast media exerted limited influence on how residents responded to flood forecast and awareness messages. Rather than motivate the public to

adopt preventive measures against flood risks, the media appeared to encourage adaptive responses, including adjusting to the prevailing circumstances and seeking relief assistance and other forms of support.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the Agenda Setting theory. Agenda setting theory, propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972, explains how the mass media influence public attention by attaching prominence to certain issues over others. According to Chigozie, et al. (2024), agenda setting theory posits that the media identify important societal issues and give them sustained and prominent coverage, thereby increasing their salience and placing them at the front burner of public discourse. Folarin (1998) notes that editors, newsroom personnel, and broadcasters play a critical role in shaping public agenda through their decisions about which news stories to select and how to present them. Consequently, media audiences do not only become aware of particular issues but also develop perceptions of their importance based on the amount of coverage they receive and the prominence given to them in news reports.

Agenda setting theory is applicable to this study because the media serve as the eyes and ears of the society with the responsibility of scanning the environment, identifying, and reporting issues considered important to the public. Through this process, the media influence how people perceive, interpret, and judge the significance of these issues. Thus, by identifying and consistently alerting the public of impending meteorological threats through news forecasts, public service announcements, jingles, documentaries and slogans, broadcast media can influence the public to attach importance to early warning messages regarding the threats. When broadcast media attach priority to reporting weather extreme event and its impacts on society, it is likely that the public would take it serious and adopt preventive measures towards mitigating its impact.

3 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted survey as its design. The population of the study was 6,141,300 residents of Benue State. A sample size of 384 respondents was drawn using the Roger Wimmer's Sample Size Calculator. Multistage sampling technique was adopted in the study. Benue State was clustered into three senatorial districts – Benue North East, Benue North West, and Benue South. Purposive sampling technique was used to select three key local government areas in Benue State – Katsina-Ala, Makurdi, and Otukpo. These local governments were selected based on their vulnerability to extreme weather events such as flood and droughts. Proportionate sampling approach was used to draw 108 respondents from Katsina-Ala, 146 from Makurdi and 130 from Otukpo local government areas respectively. Questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. Data generated were presented using frequency tables, simple percentages and weighted mean where applicable.

4 RESULTS

A total of 384 (100%) copies of questionnaire were distributed to respondents in the sampled local government areas, 376 (98%) copies of the questionnaire were successfully returned and found usable, while 8 (2%) copies of the questionnaire were not returned. The 376 copies of questionnaire were used for analysis and presented as follows:

Table 1: Extent of public exposure to broadcast weather early warnings in Benue State

Extent of Exposure	Frequency	Percentages%
Very large extent	80	12.2%
Large extent	193	51.3%
Little extent	72	6.6%
Very little extent	25	19.1%
Neutral	6	1.5%
Total	376	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 Shows that majority of the respondents, 193 (51.3%) were exposed to weather early warning messages from radio and television to a large extent. This could be an indication that the broadcast media in Benue State gave adequate coverage to extreme weather events such as flood and drought.

Table 2: Influence of broadcast meteorological information on public attitude towards weather early warnings in Benue State

S/N	Influence of broadcast meteorological information on public attitude towards weather early warnings	1 SD	2 D	3 A	4 SA	$\bar{X}$	Decision
1	I have been able to follow the recommended safety measures after being exposed to broadcast meteorological information.	115 (30.6)	164 (43.6)	56 (14.9)	41 (10.9)	2.06	Rejected
2	I take some precautionary measures after being exposed to broadcast meteorological information.	87 (23.1)	114 (30.3)	99 (26.3)	76 (20.2)	2.44	Rejected
3	I monitor the disaster situation without taking preventive action after being exposed to broadcast meteorological warnings.	48 (12.8)	73 (19.4)	174 (46.3)	81 (21.5)	2.77	Accepted
4	Meteorological messages I receive from radio and television encouraged me to take early warnings seriously.	109 (29.0)	98 (26.1)	107 (28.5)	62 (16.5)	2.32	Rejected
5	I have no trust and confidence in weather early warnings, so I ignore them.	28 (7.4)	54 (14.4)	101 (26.9)	193 (51.3)	3.22	Accepted
6	Though I have full knowledge of the disaster and associated potential risks, I still take early preventive action.	45 (12.0)	74 (19.7)	156 (41.5)	101 (26.9)	2.83	Accepted

SD= Strongly Disagree; D= Disagree; A= Agree; SA = Strongly Agree Figures in parentheses are percentage equivalent of raw scores Source: Field Survey, 2025

The result on table 2 shows that 164 (43.6%) of the respondents with a weighted mean score of 2.06 disagreed following the recommended safety measures after being exposed to broadcast weather early warnings. Also, 114 (30.03%) of the respondents disagreed taking some precautions after being exposed to broadcast meteorological information. Similarly, 174 (46.3%) of the respondents with a weighted mean of 2.77 agreed monitoring the disaster situation without taking preventive action after being exposed to broadcast meteorological information. Another 109 (29.0%) of the respondents strongly disagreed that the meteorological messages they received from radio and television encouraged them to take early warnings seriously. Again, 193 (51.3%) of the respondents with a weighted mean of 3.22 strongly agreed that they have no trust and confidence in weather early warnings, so they ignored them. Lastly, 156 (41.5%) of the respondents agreed that they had full knowledge of the disaster and associated potential risks but failed to take early preventive action.

Table 3: Effectiveness of broadcast meteorological information on public attitude towards weather early warnings.

S/N	Effectiveness of broadcast meteorological information on public attitude towards weather early warnings	1 SD	2 D	3 A	4 SA	$\bar{X}$	Decision
1	Broadcast meteorological information influenced me to take proactive measures towards mitigating disaster impacts.	53 (14.1)	129 (34.3)	106 (28.2)	86 (23.4)	2.61	Rejected
2	Loss of lives, agricultural yields and property damage declined due to my compliance with the weather warnings I receive from radio and television.	59 (15.7)	137 (36.4)	119 (31.6)	61 (16.4)	2.48	Rejected
3	I still face disaster risks despite being exposed to weather early warnings.	63 (16.8)	102 (27.1)	128 (34.0)	83 (22.1)	2.61	Accepted

4	I do not take preventive actions despite being aware of the risks through early warnings from radio and television.	60 (16.0)	75 (19.9)	144 (38.3)	97 (25.8)	2.74	Accepted
5	I have relocated to a safe location due to the early warning messages I receive from radio and television.	87 (23.1)	139 (37.0)	93 (24.7)	57 (15.2)	2.32	Rejected

SD= Strongly Disagree; D= Disagree; A= Agree; SA = Strongly Agree Figures in parentheses are percentage equivalent of raw scores Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 3 indicates that 129 (34.3%) of the respondents with a weighted mean of 2.61 disagreed that broadcast meteorological information influenced them to take proactive measures towards mitigating the disaster impact. Also, 137 (36.4%) of the respondents disagreed that loss of lives, agricultural yields and property damage have declined due to their compliance with the weather early warnings they received from radio and television. While 128 (34.0%) of the respondents with a weighted mean of 2.61 agreed that they were faced with disaster risks despite being exposed to weather early warnings. Another 144 (38.3%) of the respondents disagreed taking preventive actions despite being aware of the potential risks through the early warning messages they received from radio and television. Whereas, 139 (37.0%) of the respondents with a weighted mean of 2.32 disagreed relocating to a safe location due to the early warning messages they received from radio and television.

5 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results indicated that broadcast media played a significant role in creating awareness about extreme weather events in Benue State, as most of the residents reported using broadcast media platforms as sources of early warning messages about impending weather-related hazards. This is reflected in the responses of the 193 (51.3%) majority of respondents who reported a high level of exposure to early weather warnings disseminated through broadcast media. This result corroborates the findings by Ternenge et al. (2024) and Friday et al. (2023) who reported that most Nigerians had a high level of exposure to early warning information communicated through broadcast media channels. The studies found that a substantial proportion of broadcast audiences in Nigeria had extensive exposure to flood warning messages, with reported exposure levels of 62% and 98.2% respectively. This finding also underscores the relevance of the agenda setting theory to the study. Agenda setting theory believes that mass media can identify a salient societal issue and beam special focus and attention to such issue with the main intent of putting them on the plane of public discourse. Thus, the consistent dissemination of early weather warning messages by broadcast media increased public knowledge of the issue and its potential effects on individuals and communities.

The results showed that broadcast meteorological information had limited influence on residents' attitudes towards weather early warnings in Benue State. This was shown in the responses of 164 (43.6%) respondents who reported not adhering to the recommended safety measures and 174 (46.5%) who only monitored the evolving extreme weather situations without engaging in any preventive action despite being exposed to broadcast weather early warning messages. The finding agrees with Friday et al. (2023), who reported a generally low level of compliance with weather early warnings among residents of flood-prone communities in Anambra. Despite being exposed to flood early warning messages from the broadcast media, most farmers in Anambra North did not yield to the recommended preventive measures. Ajaero et al. (2016) similarly found that although broadcast media provided timely warnings about the 2012 flood, many members of the public failed to heed to the messages. This lack of compliance led to loss of lives and property. This finding, however, contradicts the submission of Odiana et al. (2022) that people become victims of weather extreme events because of their inability to access timely and accurate science-based early warnings that would facilitate their preparedness to mitigate its impacts on lives and property.

The result indicated that broadcast meteorological information had limited effectiveness in changing public attitudes towards weather early warnings in Benue State. This was shown in the 129 (34.3%) of the respondents who reported that the warnings did not motivate them to take proactive measures to reduce the potential impact of the disaster, and the 139 (37.0%) of the respondents who reported they failed to relocate to safer locations despite receiving early warning messages from the broadcast media. This result is similar to that of Friday et al. (2023), which reported that compliance with flood early warnings among Anambra North farmers was low, as most of the farmers who received the warnings before the onset of flooding failed to act on the information and remained in the disaster-prone areas. The result however, differs from what was found by Alias et al. (2019) that most residents of Kelantan, Malaysia, responded positively to early warning messages by adopting recommended preventive measures and expressing willingness to relocate to a safer area. Most of Kelantan residents in Malaysia followed the flood preventive measures, and were willing to evacuate to safer locations. The result also concedes with the submission of Ejem et al. (2023), that mere dissemination of weather early warning to members of the public is not enough to guarantee attitudinal change. For

Asemah et al. (2022), individuals' responses to media messages are largely influenced by their willingness to engage with the messages, since such responses are mediated by some intervening factors.

6 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the study concludes that broadcast audience in Benue state were adequately exposed to broadcast meteorological warnings about extreme weather dynamics. However, most of the audience members failed to comply with the recommended actions of the early warnings, implying that broadcast meteorological information had low influence on audience' public attitudes towards weather early warning messages in Benue state. This also indicates that broadcast meteorological messages were not potent enough to instigate public change of attitude towards compliance with weather early warnings in Benue State.

Recommendations

The study recommended as follows:

- Broadcast media should continue providing members of the society with credible meteorological updates, since such lead-time information is believed to be useful in early preparedness in disaster situations.
- Broadcast media should tailor meteorological messages to calibrate with the needs, attitudes, beliefs, past experiences and psychological dispositions of their audiences. This will go a long way to influence their instincts towards compliance with weather-related warnings.
- Since broadcast media messages are ineffective in engendering attitudinal change in members of the public, disaster risk management stakeholders should explore alternative communication channels such social media and use of opinion leaders in disseminating meteorological information to members of the public. Meteorological messages from such media platforms may be more convincing and persuasive to instigate public change of attitude.

STATEMENTS ON COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors affirm that there is no conflict of interest in the authorship of this article.

Statement of informed consent

The consent of all participants involved in the study was obtained. Participants were adequately briefed about the purpose of the study, what is required of them, and the intended use of the information provided. Participation in the study was voluntary, and the confidentiality and anonymity of participants and the information provided was assured.

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