



An Examination of Newspapers' Framing of Blue Economy News Stories in Tanzania: Case Study of Daily News and The Guardian Newspapers

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Article Info

ISSN (Online): 2582-7138

Impact Factor (RSIF): 8.04

Volume: 07

Issue: 01

Received: 22-11-2025

Accepted: 24-12-2025

Published: 26-01-2026

Page No: 600-606

Abstract

This study examined newspapers' framing of the blue economy news stories in Tanzania, specifically Daily News and The Guardian Newspapers. Framing Theory and Development Media Theory guided the researcher in the study. The study employed descriptive research design. The population of the study consisted of all editions of Daily News and The Guardian Newspapers for the period of one year, 1st January to 31st December 2024. Purposive sampling was used to select samples from the target population. The sample size for the study was 678 editions from both newspapers (365 from Daily News, and 313 from The Guardian). Observation and content analysis methods were used to collect data for the study. Data were analyzed statistically through quantitative content analysis techniques. The findings of the study revealed two dominant frames in the newspapers' framing of blue economy news stories in Tanzania: economic frame and sustainable development frame. Also, the findings showed Daily News and The Guardian newspapers portrayed blue economy as a catalyst for economic growth, job creation, revenue generation, and crucial agent for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Tanzania. The study recommends that there is great need for the media in Tanzania to strive for a more balanced framing approach; and, to ensure equal emphasis on economic potential and sustainable environmental governance to support informed policy-making and public engagement regarding the blue economy.

Keywords: Blue Economy, Framing, Newspapers, Sustainability

1. Introduction

The blue economy has become one of the most influential paradigms in contemporary development discourse, reflecting a global shift toward the sustainable management and utilization of aquatic and marine resources. Initially conceptualized during the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in 2012, the blue economy framework has since expanded into a multidimensional policy and research domain that encompasses environmental conservation, economic innovation, and social well-being (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2014) ^[75].

The concept of blue economy integrates traditional marine sectors including fisheries, maritime transport, and coastal tourism with emerging industries such as marine biotechnology, and offshore renewable energy (World Bank, 2017) ^[80]. This expansive nature underscores its relevance to contemporary development challenges and positions the blue economy as a critical driver for achieving global sustainability targets, especially Sustainable Development Goal 14 on the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources (Rees *et al.*, 2018) ^[54].

Globally, the blue economy is recognized as a multi-trillion-dollar economic frontier, with assets valued at approximately USD 24 trillion and an annual output exceeding USD 2.5 trillion. Sectors such as fisheries, aquaculture, marine tourism, port logistics, and seabed resources continue to provide millions of jobs worldwide and are projected to expand significantly in the coming decades.

Africa has increasingly aligned with this global trajectory by framing the blue economy as a catalyst for socioeconomic transformation, particularly for coastal and island nations. In 2020 alone, Africa's blue economy generated billions in revenue and supported approximately 49 million jobs across various sectors, including fisheries, maritime trade, and coastal tourism (References). By 2030, it is estimated that the sector will reach \$405 billion in value and create more than 57 million jobs continent-wide. These projections underscore the continent's immense yet largely underutilized marine and freshwater potential.

Tanzania, with both mainland and island territories, represents one of the most blue-economy-enabled countries in the Western Indian Ocean region. The country is endowed with extensive marine shorelines, territorial seas, inland lakes, rivers, and exclusive economic zones (EEZs) that collectively form a robust ecological and economic base for blue economy activities. Recent valuations indicate that blue economy industries contributed \$7.2 billion to the national Gross Value Added (GVA) and provided employment to over two million people in 2020 (Maskaeva *et al.*, 2024) [38].

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) reported that Tanzania's blue economy contributed approximately 11.9% to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2020 and generated 9.9% of Gross National Income (GNI) through wages (UNECA, 2023) [74]. This contribution is expected to grow as the country continues to streamline its governance structures, policy frameworks, and institutional mechanisms to support sustainable blue economy development.

The Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar (RGZ) has taken bolder steps by adopting the blue economy as a central pillar of its long-term development strategy. The Zanzibar Development Vision 2050 positions the blue economy as a catalyst for structural transformation, emphasizing the sustainable exploitation of marine and coastal resources to drive socioeconomic advancement (RGZ, 2020) [56].

Since assuming office in 2020, President Dr. Hussein Ali Mwinyi has placed "Uchumi wa Buluu" (Blue Economy) at the forefront of Zanzibar's policy agenda, repeatedly highlighting the need for an "economic revolution" or "Mapinduzi ya Kiuchumi" to accelerate inclusive development (Katunzi & Spurk, 2022) [30, 31]. With blue economy activities contributing nearly 29% of Zanzibar's GDP in 2019 and employing almost one-third of the labour force, the sector is considered fundamental to Zanzibar's future prosperity. Traditional areas such as marine tourism, fisheries, and maritime trade continue to thrive in recent years.

Despite the significant potential and growing policy attention, Tanzania's blue economy remains comparatively underdeveloped and constrained by several structural challenges. These include limited investment in modern technologies, inadequate infrastructure, weak inter-institutional coordination, and insufficient public awareness of blue economy opportunities. The recognition of ocean and freshwater systems as viable economic frontiers and their integration into national development pathways remains limited, particularly on mainland Tanzania (URT, 2016) [76].

In Tanzania, where blue economy policies are still evolving and public understanding remains limited, media coverage becomes a central mechanism through which awareness, attitudes, and behavioural responses are shaped (Govaerts, 2021) [23]. Thus, analysing how the media frames blue

economy issues is fundamental to assessing the sector's visibility, the quality of public discourse, and its potential to support national development goals.

Therefore, this study examined the newspapers' framing of blue economy news stories in Tanzania, specifically Daily News and The Guardian newspapers. It looked at the newspapers' reach and influence in reporting blue economy news stories in Tanzania. The reportage of blue economy news stories by these newspapers has the potential to influence scholarly, practical, and policy-oriented relevance in Tanzania.

2. Statement of the Problem

Although the blue economy concept is a relatively recent policy and development paradigm within the Tanzanian context, it has attracted increasing attention in national discourse, particularly within the print media. The sector blue economy emphasizes the sustainable harnessing of ocean-based resources, integrating ecological stewardship with socio-economic advancement (Manyilizu, 2023) [37]. While mainland Tanzania has yet to enact a comprehensive legislative framework to govern blue economy activities, Zanzibar has institutionalized the sector through the Zanzibar Development Vision 2050 and the Zanzibar Blue Economy Policy, thereby signalling long-term governmental commitment to marine-based development over the next three decades (RGZ, 2020) [56].

Despite its growing salience, scholarship on how Tanzanian print media frames the blue economy remains extremely limited. Spurk and Katunzi (2022) [30, 31] note an observable increase in media coverage following the prioritization of the sector in Zanzibar, the nature, depth, tone, and framing of this coverage remain empirically under-examined. This gap is particularly consequential because media framing significantly influences how societies conceptualize emerging development agendas, allocate attention to associated risks and opportunities, and legitimize or contest governmental interventions. In the absence of systematic scholarly evidence, it remains unclear whether Tanzanian print media provides critical and analytical coverage of the blue economy, or whether coverage reproduces superficial narratives that inadequately interrogate ecological, socio-economic, governance, and equity-related dimensions.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study employed two theories: Framing Theory and Development Media Theory. The integration of these theories was essential given the dual interest of the study on how the newspapers constructed meanings around the blue economy news stories; and how such constructions align with or depart from the developmental imperatives of a developing nation such as Tanzania.

The Framing Theory was mainly developed by Erving Goffman in 1974. The theory asserts that people prefer to use schemas already existing in their heads to group and make meaningful interpretations of news new events and daily encounters. Framing in this aspect therefore means to select and make salient aspects of the perceived reality within a specific communication context by defining the problems, interpreting its cause, making a moral evaluation and suggesting recommendations to the identifies problem (Entman, 1993) [15].

The framing theory assumes that how the media cover an issue and the meaning they give to such issues greatly

influences audiences' perception towards that issue. Therefore, journalists and media organisations frame to simplify complex issues and events (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007) ^[65]. The theory is relevant to this study, because it allows for an analysis of how Daily News and The Guardian newspapers framed the blue economy news stories, and how the frames affected public understanding and behavior (O'Keefe & Wu, 2012).

The development theory was founded by Dennis McQuail, who posits that the focal point of the mass media in developing countries should be on national development (McQuail, 2010). This theory considers mass media as a powerful instrument that can be used to achieve positive development in any society (Yar'Adua *et al.* 2023) ^[82]. It underlines that the media, as an agent of mass mobilization, is responsible for ensuring that the appropriate information is being disseminated to the citizenry at the right time (Amannah, 2017) ^[12]. Development theory is applicable in this study, because it can help to explain the role of newspapers, specifically Daily News and The Guardian in framing and reporting blue economy news stories for sustainable development in Tanzania.

4. Literature Review

In their study, Germond-Duret and Germond (2022) ^[21], considered blue economy as an opportunity for economic growth, and for-profit maximization; with the term 'opportunity' being regularly employed to qualify the blue economy. For them, blue economy is a catalyst of making the ocean profitable, a way of creating value, profit, growth, prosperity, and jobs. Alternatively, they term blue economy as the business of the sea (Doty, 1996) ^[13].

Also, DEFRA (2021) emphasizes that the newspapers (written press) constitute the third source of information about the marine environment after television and radio, and films. It further notes that unfortunately today the mass media have mostly been concentrating on plastic pollution, while ignoring other crucial aspects of marine economy (Keller & Wyles, 2021) ^[32].

Bennett *et al.* (2021) identify 10 risks that result from the framing of the blue economy as "beneficial for the economy, developing nations, and coastal communities". Of particular interest are the risks of dispossession, cultural impacts, marginalization of women, as well as human and indigenous rights abuses. They, in other words, believe that there is a risk that the socio-cultural dimension of the blue economy is forgotten in practice, as is the case in the narrative. These risks are not currently understood and communicated by the UK press.

Carvalho and Burgess (2005) believe that there is significant divergence in the coverage of the blue economy-based stories in newspapers, depending on political orientation or type. However, they underscore that mass media framing and reportage of blue economy news stories is inevitable for the public's understanding and perception of the importance of proper harnessing of marine resources for the economic prosperity of a nation.

The above literature highlights the importance of marine resources in the economic growth of a nation. The researchers also insist on the need for the mass media, particularly newspapers, to pay special attention in framing and reporting news stories related to the blue economy issues.

5. Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative approach through directed content analysis of the two national English newspapers that is Daily News and The Guardian newspaper to establish how the print media in Tanzania cover the blue economy. Content analysis is the study of the content of communication regarding context and intentions contained in a message (Prasad, 2008). Instead of asking people questions through interviews and questionnaires, content analysis focuses on observing and analysing documents produced by people. It is deemed to be a less obtrusive and non-reactive method of social research (Fayo, 2023).

Through content analysis, the researcher identified the blue economy issues covered by both Daily News and The Guardian Newspapers to determine how the blue economy is framed, primary sources, and the priority given to the blue economy stories published by the two publications. The quantitative technique entailed using a code sheet to collect and interpret data. Evaluating quantitative data collection involved systematic coding and analysis of the Daily News and The Guardian newspapers using a structured code sheet to categorize and interpret specific framing elements on the blue economy.

The content analysis followed a systematic and replicable coding procedure designed to ensure consistency, validity, and reliability in quantifying how the Daily News and The Guardian framed the blue economy in Tanzania. The coding process began with the development of a structured codebook, which served as the central reference for all coding decisions. The categories used in the codebook were developed deductively and inductively. Deductively, the study drew on established framing literature particularly economic, environmental, political, and developmental frames commonly identified in media studies to generate initial thematic categories.

These initial categories were complemented inductively by conducting a preliminary reading of a sample of articles from both newspapers. This piloting stage helped identify context-specific frames, recurrent topics, and unique patterns in the Tanzanian discourse on the blue economy, such as the prominence of government-led initiatives, maritime governance, fisheries management, and infrastructure development.

The final coding categories thus reflected both theoretical grounding and empirical patterns relevant to the Tanzanian media context.

To ensure clarity and replicability, each coding category was accompanied by operational definitions, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and illustrative examples drawn from sample articles. This ensured that coders interpreted the categories consistently and understood how to classify textual elements such as frames, sources, article prominence, and placement. The structured code sheet was then developed to guide the recording of numerical data for each newspaper item.

Coder training formed a critical part of the coding procedure. Two coders, including the researcher and an independent trained assistant familiar with media studies, participated in the coding process. The training involved a step-by-step review of the codebook, followed by a joint coding exercise of a small set of sample articles not included in the main study.

During this phase, coders discussed coding decisions, clarified ambiguities, refined definitions, and adjusted the codebook where inconsistencies emerged. This training ensured that both coders shared a common understanding of the coding categories and the procedures for assigning values to the variables.

To ensure reliability, both coders independently coded a subset of 10–15% of the sample. Inter-coder reliability was then calculated using Cohen's Kappa, which is the preferred reliability coefficient for categorical data. A Kappa value above 0.70 was considered acceptable for this study, consistent with methodological standards in quantitative content analysis. Where discrepancies between coders occurred, disagreements were discussed in a consensus meeting. The goal of this discussion was not only to reconcile differences but also to identify categories needing further clarification or refinement. The codebook was updated accordingly before proceeding with the full coding of all articles.

Throughout the coding phase, coders maintained a log of uncertainties or borderline cases. These cases were reviewed jointly at predetermined intervals to minimize drift in coding and ensure ongoing alignment with the established definitions. This iterative and collaborative approach enhanced the reliability and validity of the coding results, thereby strengthening the overall rigor of the study's quantitative content analysis.

Therefore, content analysis was ideal for this research topic since the target was to analyse the content of both Daily News and The Guardian newspapers to determine how they covered the blue economy sector.

6. Findings

The findings of the study are summarized in the table below.

| Dominant Frame | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Economic frame | 160 | 66.7% |
| Sustainable development frame | 60 | 25% |
| Other frames | 20 | 8.3% |
| Total | 240 | 100% |

Source: Field data, 2025.

The findings show a clear prevalence of the economic frame, accounting for 160 articles (66.7%) of the blue economy news stories published by the two papers under the study period. Sustainable development frame occupied a second position, appearing in 60 articles (25%). The category labelled "other frames", which included political and social justice perspectives, constituted only 8.3% of all the articles. A comparative analysis of both the Daily News and The Guardian newspapers suggest the Daily News newspaper being a state-owned outlet, leans more heavily on economic framing, focusing on government development narratives, while The Guardian, though privately owned, still largely aligns with pro-growth discourses.

The study findings also show a significant source concentration in favour of government officials, who account for 82.5% of all cited sources in the blue economy stories published by Daily News and The Guardian newspapers from January 1, 2024, to December 31, 2024. This category of sources included high-ranking political figures such as the President of the United Republic of Tanzania, the President of Zanzibar, ministers, permanent secretaries, members of parliament, Regional Commissioners, District

Commissioners and local government officials.

The second-largest group of sources consists of development partners, who accounted for 13.3% of the stories. They included representatives from international organizations, donor agencies, and foreign technical advisors. The third category for other sources comprised only 4.2% of the sources; they involved non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academic experts, local fishermen, coastal communities, environmental activists, and private sector stakeholders.

The findings indicate that 33.3% of all blue economy news stories were assigned high prominence, appearing on the front pages (pages 1–2) of the Daily News and The Guardian newspapers. Consistently positioning blue economy stories in prominent pages, by the Daily News and The Guardian newspapers published from January 1, 2024, to December 31, 2024, actively elevated the blue economy within the public sphere. This suggests that editorial teams at both publications recognized the blue economy not merely as a recurring news item, but as a priority agenda aligned with the state's development vision, particularly under Tanzania's Blue Economy Policy framework.

Furthermore, the findings show that 50% of the blue economy stories published by Daily News and The Guardian newspapers from January 1, 2024, to December 31, 2024, received medium-prominence coverage on inner pages from 2 to 5, which. This reinforces the interpretation that blue economy reporting received consistent and deliberate editorial attention throughout the year under review.

Altogether, the placement patterns of the blue economy stories in Daily News and The Guardian newspapers published between January 1, 2024, to December 31, 2024, indicate a sustained and strategic effort by the media to frame the blue economy as a matter of national importance, relevance and urgency.

7. Discussion

The findings show a clear and overwhelming dominance of the economic frame, which accounted for 66.7% of all blue economy news stories published by the Daily News and The Guardian newspapers throughout 2024. This framing is centered on issues such as economic growth, investment promotion, job creation, infrastructure development, and the commercial exploitation of marine and aquatic resources. The consistent use of the economic frame strongly reflects the two newspapers' alignment with national development priorities, particularly those articulated in key policy frameworks such as the Tanzania Development Vision 2025 and the Zanzibar Blue Economy Policy.

The economic frame was consistently evident in coverage by both newspapers. From a media framing perspective, according to Entman (1993)^[15], the media frames suggest that newspapers are playing a role in reinforcing priorities by selectively highlighting the potential of such frames. The predominance of economic framing has important implications for public understanding, policy direction, and governance of marine resources in Tanzania. Firstly, it may result in a technocratic and top-down conceptualization of the blue economy, one that emphasizes state and investor interests, while downplaying local community concerns, ecological thresholds, and equity issues.

Secondly, the framing may influence policy framing itself, reinforcing the idea that success in the blue economy is measured primarily through GDP contribution, infrastructure

expansion, and foreign direct investment (FDI), rather than ecological health or social inclusion. This unbalanced framing, however, risks obscuring the multidimensional nature of the blue economy, which, as defined by the African Union (AU, 2020)^[1] and other regional bodies, is not solely about economic growth but also includes sustainable resource use, biodiversity conservation, and human development.

The findings related to the study's specific objective one reveals a narrow framing spectrum in Tanzanian print media's coverage of the blue economy. While the economic frame aligns with national priorities and reflects legitimate development concerns, its dominance also suggests a potential imbalance in how the issue is communicated to the public. The limited visibility of sustainable and alternative frames points to a need for more inclusive, critical, and ecologically informed journalism, particularly in an era where marine ecosystems face mounting pressures from climate change, over-exploitation, and geopolitical interests. Another central finding of this study is the predominant reliance on government sources in blue economy news reporting. Analysis of 681 news articles published by the Daily News and The Guardian newspapers between January 1, 2024, to December 31, 2024, reveals that 82.5% of all blue economy-related content was sourced from state-affiliated actors. These included high-profile political figures such as the President of the United Republic of Tanzania, the President of the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar, various cabinet ministers, regional and district commissioners, and other local government officials.

Government actors often provide press releases, official speeches, and curated media briefings that are carefully crafted to promote a specific agenda. As a result, journalists who rely predominantly on these sources are more likely to adopt the frames embedded in the source material, whether consciously or unconsciously. This overwhelming dependence on official sources signals a state-centric sourcing pattern, which is significant not only in terms of content generation but also in shaping the broader framing of the blue economy in the Tanzanian media landscape. The overreliance on a narrow pool of state-centric sources raises critical questions about media pluralism, public engagement, and democratic accountability.

The findings suggest that blue economy stories published by Daily News and The Guardian newspapers published from January 1, 2024, to December 31, 2024, received substantial editorial prominence, reinforcing its status as a rising issue on the national agenda. This prominence aligns with the strategic objectives of Tanzania's development policy and reflects broader shifts in media framing of economic and environmental priorities.

The analysis of news story placement reveals that the blue economy has garnered notable editorial prominence in Tanzania's major print media. Specifically, 33.3% of all blue economy-related articles published in the Daily News and The Guardian newspapers from January 1, 2024, and December 31, 2024, appeared on the front page, while 50.0% were positioned on pages 2–5, which are considered medium-prominence or high-visibility pages in newspaper layout conventions. Only 16.7% of articles were relegated to the inner pages, typically perceived as areas of lower editorial priority. Prominence patterns demonstrate that both newspapers strategically elevated blue-economy issues, consistent with Agenda Setting Theory (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001)^[25].

This pattern indicates that blue economy issues are not only being reported frequently but are also receiving strategic editorial placement, reflecting an increased recognition of the sector's relevance to Tanzania's socio-economic development. The level of prominence suggests that the blue economy is emerging as a priority issue in national discourse, consistent with government efforts to promote the 2024 National Blue Economy Policy and related initiatives.

8. Conclusions

The findings show that Daily News and The Guardian Newspapers framed blue economy as a vehicle for national sustainable development in Tanzania.

The newspapers' high reliance on state actors as key sources of information about blue economy in Tanzania, reflects the prevalence of a top-down information flow characteristic of development journalism model, available many in post-colonial African media landscapes.

The narrow source diversity constrains the range of perspectives represented in the newspapers' framing and reportage of blue economy news stories in Tanzania; thus, limiting the possibility of critical, inclusive, and participatory discourse on blue economy matters.

The findings point to a complex and evolving media landscape in which the blue economy is being increasingly recognized as a strategic development priority, yet its framing and sourcing remain narrow.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study affirms the relevance of framing theory and agenda-setting in analysing how the media shape public perceptions of complex policy domains. This has important implications for the democratization of knowledge, media accountability, and the quality of public deliberation in a developing country context.

Finally, the findings underscore the dual role of the Tanzanian newspapers as both enablers and limiters of public discourse on the blue economy. On one hand, the visibility and frequency of blue economy coverage indicate increasing national prioritization of the sector. On the other hand, the dominance of economic frames and government sources reflects a restricted narrative space that may limit public understanding of the broader ecological, social, and governance challenges integral in blue economy development.

9. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following: First, the newspapers in Tanzania should diversify its sources of blue economy news stories, instead of relying highly on government sources.

Second, the newspapers in Tanzania should radiate other impacts of blue economy, instead of focusing on the economic aspect alone.

Third, the newspapers in Tanzania should ensure that they serve as a public forum accessible to public members in discussing issues related to the blue economy.

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How to Cite This Article

Geoffrey T, Nikata CA. An Examination of Newspapers' Framing of Blue Economy News Stories in Tanzania: Case Study of Daily News and The Guardian Newspapers. *Int J Multidisc Res Growth Eval*. 2026;7(1):600–606.

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