

EXPLORING THE FRAMING OF COVID-19 IN NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS: IMPLICATION FOR PUBLIC HEALTH BEHAVIOUR

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Abstract

This study explores the framing of COVID-19 as they appeared in Nigerian newspapers and its implications for public health behavior. The media plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions and behaviours during health crisis, and understanding how covid-19 was framed in Nigerian newspapers can provide insights into the country's response to the pandemic. Using a mixed approach, this study utilised content analysis as primary source of data from four Nigerian daily newspapers, covering the period from February 2020 to February 2022 on a sample size of 381 stories. The study examined the pattern of frames employed, sources utilised on the covid-19 coverage and explores the implications for public health behaviour, 386 questionnaire were analysed. This study leaned on Framing Theory. Findings showed that reports on treatment of COVID-19 were mostly covered by newspapers. The study also found that the newspaper influence for public behaviour occurred through mask wearing, social distancing and hygienic practices. Newspapers made use of framing patterns in the coverage of covid-19. It was also found that newspapers were motivated in fulfilling its obligation of the watch dog of the society by the desire to interpret as well as provide additional information on COVID-19. The study among others recommended that newspapers must design feedback mechanisms after campaigns to be able to measure success or otherwise of campaigns as it would serve as a good reference point for subsequent campaigns. Newspaper managers and editors should ensure that their content gives a proper understanding of issues reported as many readers make decision based on how much content is contextualized.

Keywords: Covid-19, Newspaper, News framing, public Health, health communication

Introduction

The Coronavirus, first identified in Wuhan China in December 2019, has rapidly spread to almost every nation of the world. The disease is caused by a new and severe type of Coronavirus known as severe acute respiratory syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARSCoV-2). The virus has been pronounced a pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2020). This is because of the rate of morbidity and mortality caused by the infection has reached frightening proportion. As early as fifty days of the outbreak of the virus, confirmed cases rose to 1,603,428 while those already dead got to 95,714 persons all over the world (Worldometers, 2020).

In Nigeria, towards the end of February 2020, we recorded an index case, when a citizen of Italy visited Nigeria on 27th February (Radio Nigeria, 2020). Thereafter, reports of confirmed cases rose to 288 with 51 people already discharged after treatment from in April 9 (NCDC, 2020). Presently, however, Nigeria has delved into the second wave of the pandemic, which is said to be more deadly than the first wave. This has resulted in many states of the federation recording more infections than before. Therefore, as at 12th March 2021, Nigeria has recorded 159,933 cases, 2,001 deaths and 142,404 recoveries (Worldometer, 2021). In Nigeria, the first case was reported on February 27, 2020 following the return of a 46 year old Italian to Nigeria from his home country. This was displayed on the front pages of notable tabloids Ogbodo, et al., (2020),. Like a marauding beast, the virus lurked in every part of the country. There was palpable fear and unbridled anxiety among Nigerians who were relatively helpless and waited pitifully for the next victims. When the COVID-19 related death took a more alarming dimension, the Federal Government of Nigeria swung into action through various measures. One of such measures was the setup of the Presidential Taskforce on COVID-19 and its equivalent of States Action

Committee on COVID-19 at the States level aimed at implementing government policies and actions in controlling the spread of the virus.

The mass media were the custodians of the campaigns. The imperativeness of informing and educating the public on the danger and management of the disease vis a vis the imperativeness of holding the government accountable gave the media enormous responsibilities at this trying moment in the history of Nigeria. The Nigerian newspapers were in the forefront of these campaigns and greater attention was on sensitization of the public that would engender behavioural change in the management of the health crisis. Idoko (2025) notes the much needed behavioural change as regularly advocated by the Newspapers and other media of communication were social/physical distancing, hand washing and wearing of face mask. The Nigerian newspapers were principally in the vanguard of these campaigns which were packaged and presented in form of straight news, opinion columns, editorials, pictures and interviews with good feedback mechanism.

The potentials of what the newspaper was capable of doing in the campaigns against the dreaded Corona virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic was largely dependent on its proper utilization. It is against this background that it was arguably difficult to determine which cases that were news worthy as many issues of the disease presented themselves relatively in complex manners. However, the journalism profession was in no less explicit on the responsibilities of those who covered the health crisis. The theoretical stance of agenda setting and social responsibility of the newspapers to raise issues of national interest to public discourse like the ravaging health challenge, called on the people to take action by adjusting their lifestyles that would completely put an end to the spread and ravaging effects of one of the world's most dreaded viruses.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The outbreak of Corona Virus Pandemic has led to imperativeness of survival which held tenaciously to controlling the continual spread of the virus made the public to completely leverage on media for proper education and sensitisation on the much needed behavioural change. Apuke, & Omar, (2020) note the framing on the virus has significant implication for public perception, attitudes, and behaviours related to pandemic, but this depends on the manner, style, language employed by the gatekeepers in framing stories on covid-19.

However, Hasan (2020) aver that, framing of covid-19 in these newspapers may be adequate, inaccurate, or inconsistent, leading to misinformation and confusion among the public, inadequate adoption of preventive measures, poor compliance with health protocols and negative impact on public health outcomes during the campaigns were direct responses to the various media messages they were exposed to.

Despite extensive newspaper reportage of covid-19 in Nigeria, there remains limited empirical clarity on whether such coverage translated into concrete behavioural change among citizens. This gap necessitates an interrogation of newspaper framing strategies vi-a-vis health communication on behavioural change.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine Nigerian newspaper coverage of COVID-19 and behavioural change, while the objectives are to:

1. Evaluate the pattern of frames employed by newspaper in the coverage of COVID-19 between 2020-2022.
2. Identify the sources of news available to newspapers in reporting covid-19 stories.

3. Find out ways in which covid-19 reports by newspapers influence public health behaviour.

Conceptual Clarification

COVID-19

Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a pandemic which broke out in Wuhan City in China in December 2019. The new strain of Corona virus according to Asmundson & Taylor (2021) is referred to as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Corona Virus (SARS-COV-2). It is the virus that causes COVID-19. As far as the scholar is concerned, the pandemic surprised the world and also overwhelmed the health systems of even high-income countries like United States, Russian, United Kingdom, China and others.

In Nigeria, the novel Corona Virus Pandemic was confirmed on February 27, 2020 with the instrumentality of Nigerian newspapers. The index case was an Italian who had just returned to Nigeria from his home country. In their analysis of level of spread of the pandemic, Ogbada, Okoduwa&Asemah (2021) observed that there was the spread of misinformation about COVID-19 that the virus was produced in a laboratory as a bioterrorism agent, or that the symptoms were caused by 5G mobile networks and that it was designed to eliminate the black race. Misinformation was mostly circulated on various social media platforms. Ogbada et al (2021) further blamed the media for misinformation which according to them contradicted and complicated the awareness campaigns.

The responsibility of the newspaper to set agenda on issues for public discourse is undisputed. The Nigerian newspapers have played significant roles in achieving responsible and responsive governments by being vocal on issues of national interest, (Ezebuenyi, 2018). Newspapers have been recognized globally in providing reliable, accurate and objective accounts of the day's

intelligence. Such feats confirm the roles of the press in the management of the society. Corroborating this stance, Hasan, (2013) affirms that the enormous powers possessed by the newspapers making governments, individuals and organizations consider it as one of the important state machineries responsible for organizing the society.

The role of the press in managing the society became more crucial across-boarders during emergencies, especially pandemics and natural disasters. At such points, the press is expected to explore its watchdog function to oversee trends and perspectives in the spread of pandemic in order to guide decisions and actions of the governments as well as educate the people on management and preventive measures. It is against this background that Ogbodoet: al (2020) in their investigation of how global media framed the COVID-19 pandemic, observe that the global media played a significant roles in raising awareness on the spread and management of the pandemic around the world. Although, fear and scaremongering frames dominated Nigerian newspaper coverage of the pandemic, Nigerians were substantially furnished with the spread and management of the disease.

News Framing

A newspaper is an unbound publication produced at intervals, bearing units of analysis typically supplemented by photographs. Newspapers are distinguished by their critical analysis of topics such as health, which makes the public more conscious of the concepts in news stories. Adalakun and Hamedi (2017) posit that framing a news story in newspapers is prone to factors such as unveiling news angles that grab reader attention, economic interests of the reporter, and competitive media relationships. The researchers' concept of news frames appears quite similar as well. Idoko (2025) explain news frames as the nuances, discrimination, point of view, and

feeling that journalists introduce to stories to analyze complex realities into digestible components for readers and viewers to ingest.

Framing refers to how the mass media frame and frame matters and events (Udende & Chile, 2019). It outlines the media's capability to craft news story pieces with predetermined and constrained contextualization, facilitating comprehension or utilizing cognitive heuristics in relating stories to the big picture (Oso, 2017). This implies the media can frame news content by underestimating the perceived adverse effect of a story on the masses by embracing a particular framing pattern. Meanwhile, the media can amplify the proposed subtle effect, leading to a bad impact for the general public. Similarly, Anyadike (2015) believes that the quantity of news coverage on an issue in the media has a direct effect on public awareness, understanding, and perception of the issue.

Framing is a style that media sources apply to select and present information, formulating multiple perceptions for selection purposes by the public (Jibrin, 2019). Framing enables the presentation of news content in many ways, with different versions for stressing or emphasizing the importance of issues and events. Framing brings out the means whereby media summarize and frame news content. Media organizations use framing to simplify complex issues so that they make it easy for audiences to understand and form opinions about such issues using text, images, or symbols, as argued by (Tolley, 2016).

Behavioural change

The concept of behavioural change is a social transformation process that shows how an individual or group of people modify their actions, attitudes or habits making them to act in a favourable way towards a particular situation. It is arguably said that change is difficult probably

because of the temporary setback that accompanies it. The genuine change that is result orientated comes from within oneself. Queensland Health (2017) in her Strategic Campaigns on Behaviour Change argues that motivation and resilience were important factors in initiating behaviour change which would be sustained by overcoming resistance and remaining determined. It identifies six (6) complex steps which make up the complex process an individual or group use to integrate change into their lives:

Pre-contemplative/unaware- At this stage, people claim ignorance and are completely indifferent in the change project. They show high level of resistance because they do not see the need to do something differently from their current lifestyles. They avoid information of the change agenda.

Contemplative- At this stage, people think about the possible need to make some changes in their lifestyles. They are fully aware that there is a problem and that something must be done about this problem. Such groups of people are best described as 'Procrastinators' who now weigh the gain or loss from the possible change in behaviour.

Preparing- Behavioural change is about to take place at this stage. The people at this stage have realized how serious is their situation and are so determined to take action. Here, plans are being made and there is a reaffirmation of the need and desire to change.

Action/Trying- This stage applies to those who made real and overt changes or modification to their lifestyles and are starting a new life. However, the chances of relapse and temptation are very high. The good news is that they are very recipient to information and aggressively seek those who volunteer information. After a period of time, they move from action stage to maintaining having seen the importance of the change in behaviour.

Maintaining- At this stage, they work tirelessly to consolidate the change in their behaviour. The ultimate goal is sustenance of the new habits and to prevent any possible relapse and temptation. The former habit is now seen as not only desirable but a setback that must be avoided at all cost. They people now continually remind themselves of the remarkable progress made so far and the need to sustain the tempo.

Termination/Advocacy/Transcendence- This final stage, according to the model was recently added by researchers to build on the other stages. It is a confirmation of a new behaviour change with the understanding that going back to the old behaviour is no longer perceived desirable. At this stage, there are people who a advocate of the new behaviour and moving from one neighbourhood to others sensitizing the people. There is a possibility of relapse but it is no longer seen as failure but opportunity to help strengthen the already established behaviour which has positively impacted the society.

Literature Review

Media framing of COVID-19

Traditionally, the media is supposed to educate, inform and entertain. Besides these traditional functions the media also perform other functions such as mobilization, status conferral, agenda setting etc. These functions of the media placed them in very strategic position in every human society. It is on this note that the media is referred to as the fourth estate of the realm. This unofficial title is because of the strategic roles the media play in the society.

In light of the importance of media in shaping public reaction and controlling mass hysteria, Ajagbe, & Asemah, (2021)), identified the importance of media during health crises to include: Mass media campaigns are useful in providing information regarding vaccination development,

preventive techniques and measures, drug therapies as well as social distancing measures. Public health programs and campaigns can be used daily to inform the public on latest developments regarding the pandemic discharged cases, those in ICU. Providing verified and accurate number of deaths recorded. Mass media campaigns are capable of eliciting positive behaviour change as well help in preventing negative behaviors. The above points have highlighted the importance of accurate information dispensation during pandemics as it helps to shape and form public opinions which eventually determine public perception and their reactions.

By giving adequate coverage on the pandemic the public is kept informed and educated on how to avoid contacting the pandemic or spreading it. Simply put the media is required to create adequate awareness about health crisis. This position holds true in Ogbonna (2021) who said, the media are expected to provide health information that would help the public adopt to life saving behaviours. He further opines that the media have the duty to cover outbreak of pandemic so as to help society out of such crisis. Little wonder, Gever&Ezeah (2020) posit that coverage is one way through which the media can carry out their communication role of disseminating health information to the general public. The foregoing connotes that one way the media can play her role during health crisis is by giving adequate coverage to the COVID-19 pandemic. This, the media can do through her agenda setting role. Agenda setting simply means that the media can draw attention to a particular event through frequency of her reportage.

Relationship between media campaigns and behaviour change

Most campaigns on the media about COVID-19 were about preventive measures but there were also campaigns that were geared towards behaviour change. Studies have shown that there is relationship between media campaigns and behaviour change. Asemah & Nwaoboli (2021) examined The Effect of Fear Appeal in HIV/AIDS found that the use of fear appeal in HIV/AIDS

campaigns succeeded in changing behaviour. This means that media campaigns were able to bring about behaviour change. In view of the foregoing Abdulazeez et al., (2021) in their study discovered that people changed their behaviour by adhering to the three main public health measures. These were hand washing, physical distancing and wearing of facemask. People did all these to prevent themselves before they received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccination.

This spoke volume of the relationship between COVID-19 campaigns and behavioural change. According to the Scholars, the willingness to change was informed by high level of trust in the information received. This information got to the people through internet, newspaper, television and radio. Besides changing behaviour as a result of high degree of trust in the source of information, people also changed their attitude towards COVID-19 because of the use of fear appeal. Fear appeal according to Aboh et al., {2021} emphasised danger to an individual's wellbeing to drive him or her to take action by avoiding undesirable consequence. Fear appeal is intended to increase attention, participation and persuasiveness.

Fear appeal in newspaper headlines according to Abu, et al., (2020) can bring about change in behaviour if not over used. The use of fear appeal in disseminating COVID-19 related messages was so pronounced among various media. This is true because at the peak of COVID-19, there was hardly a day that passed-by without media bringing messages about those that have died and those in isolation centres. These messages were intended to compel people to change their attitude and behaviour towards COVID-19. In other words, messages about death and those in isolation are telling audience to adopt preventive measures so as to avoid death. Fear appeal works when client is made to be unbelievably frightened and then show him how to decrease the fear by following your advice (Idachaba, 2021).

This is what media did; particularly television stations, The Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) to be specific on a daily basis brought to Nigerians, the number of persons affected in each state and the number of persons that have died. What could be scarier than death? Because of the fear of death people might be compelled to change their behaviour. The efficacy of fear appeal is aptly captured in Asemah & Nwaoboli (2021) who asserted that as a result of the rise in different societal issues and behaviour, sponsors of campaigns, especially on health related issues are rethinking their use of fear appeals in various campaigns, since it appears that other forms of campaign appeals are not having the desired behaviour change effect.

The foregoing connotes that there is a relationship between fear appeal and behaviour change. Simply put, fear appeal can bring about change in attitude or behaviour. Adding to the above point Ogbada & Etuagie (2021) observe that one noticeable role of media during a disease outbreak is to influence attitude, perception, and behaviour of the public, and to help them adopt measures that would prevent them from contracting and or spreading the disease. This means that the media have a mandate to campaign for positive behaviour or behaviour change during health crisis such as COVID-19 pandemic. The position of Idachaba (2021) on this is that there was tremendous improvement on media portrayal of awareness creation on precautionary measures.

Theoretical Framework

Framing Theory

Framing theory was put forward by Goffman Erding in 1974. The theory emerged from agenda setting function of the mass media which pre-supposes that how an issue is characterized to an audience will influence how it is understood Yoza (2015). Therefore, the information presented to the public will change the way that they view an issue. Degaar (2022), views frames as

providing meaning about social phenomena through the highlighting and packaging of information. Framing is central in organizing idea that supplies a context and explains the issue through the selection, exclusion or elaboration of news elements, in the coverage of such an issue. (Folarin 2005). Such aspect as often highlighted at the detriment of others.

This explains why Barans and Davis as cited in Ijwo (2015) asserted that, “media do tell us what to think about.... But through framing, they tell us “how to think” about issues in the news. This is done by the use of devices such as metaphor, characterization, catchy phrases, deception, and visual images or even omissions of, and emphasis on certain news bits. News frames are assemblage of words, images and action patterns that have been given relatively fixed meanings by the dominant culture or philosophy. Presentation of issues could be with the use of episodic frames or thematic frames. Episodic frames adopt a case-study perspective on an issue or portray just one incident. On the other hand, thematic frames provide greater contextualization and background, linking that particular incident to larger concerns.

Most studies on framing theory focus on the power of framing as a tactic for the mass media and even political elites, including politicians, to manipulate the public opinion in order to achieve a certain political goal. Thus, the justification for adopting framing theory lies in its ability to make clear that the identification of the particular patterns of the representations within the informative narratives of the COVID-19 can potentially influence the way the issue is perceived by a large number of audiences and the attendant mass actions they take.

It has been said that the way a particular issue or event is presented affects the way it is perceived and understood (Ajagbe, .& Asemah, 2021). Ideally, framing research examines the construction of new stories, how these stories articulate frames, and how audience members interpret these frames. The framing approaches in media studies relate to the psychological and

sociological proposition that individuals need certain interpretative frames to be able to establish an opinion or an evaluation about a matter. When Degaar, (2022) stated that “there is no such thing as unframed information”, they point out how framing is such a large part of communication and society. Framing is based on the assumption that how an issue is characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by the audience. This means, through the use of frames by the media in coverage of corruption issues, they will be understood by people in the society.

This theory is relevant to the current study since they talk about making issues salient in people’s minds, COVID-19 (health) is a major culprit. Continuous portrayal of COVID-19 issues translates to setting agenda about what the people think of regarding the roles assigned to the mass media. Therefore, the several exposures from the media on COVID-19 acts through elements of this theory will go a long way in reducing corrupt acts in the country. If public figures know that their corrupt acts will be giving a lot of publicity, they are likely to have a rethink before stealing public funds.

Methodology

Content analysis and survey research method (questionnaire) were used to gather data for the study.

Population of the Study

The population of this study are residents of Benue State. According to National Bureau of Statistics (2016), Benue State has a projected population of 5,787,786 residents. This stands as the population of the study.

Sample Size Determination

The sample size of 386 was used for this study. This was statistically determined using Taro Yamane's formula for population above ten thousand. The sample size of 400 is justified because information gotten from the sample was generalised to be representative of the entire population under study.

Sampling Techniques and Procedure

A multi stage technique was employed to select respondents for this study. The first stage stratified Benue State into three geo-political zones (Zone A, Zone B and Zone C). In the second stage, one LGA was purposively selected from each zone on the basis that these LGAs are zonal headquarters and likely to contain larger and more educated populations who would have been exposed to the Naira redesign policy communications. Thus, Katsina-Ala was selected to represent Zone A, Makurdi to represent Zone B, and Otukpo to represent Zone C.

A purposive sampling was used to select council wards. In Katsina-Ala LGA, Township, Ikurav 2, and Utange were selected. For Makurdi LGA, Wailomayo, Fiidi, and, Ankpa Ward were selected while For Otukpo LGA, Township I, Township II, and Ugboju were selected.

The next stage of sampling which involved the selection of compounds or houses from chosen council wards, the study made use of proportionate sampling technique to determine how many houses were sampled in each ward, this is because, local government and wards sampled have different population size. In thus wise, 214 houses were sampled in Makurdi, 88 were sampled in Otukpo and 98 were sampled in Katsina –Ala local government. The reason is to ensure the researcher sample houses were there were people who would be able to provide the needed information for the study.

Methods of Data Collection and analysis

The study employed the use of code sheets and questionnaire as instruments of data collection. The researcher made use of code sheet in collecting quantitative and questionnaire for the qualitative data while secondary sources came from textbooks, journals articles, book chapters and internet sources.

4.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

Data in this research is presented in two stages due to the triangulation method adopted. Firstly, data was presented on content analysis which is the main source of data collection instrument on a sample size of 381 stories derived on covid-19, while the last data is presented on survey carried out on respondents to examine the influence of newspaper reports on behavioural change that occurred among the people through newspaper influence from messages published in the tabloids. Four hundred questionnaires were administered to respondents, however, 386 were returned, data is analyse based on the 386 questionnaire.

Table 1:Framing patterns that characterised the reporting of COVID-19 in newspapers

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Isolation	111	29.13	29.13	29.13
Vaccine	48	12.59	12.59	41.72
Death	31	8.13	8.13	49.85
Discharge	50	13.12	13.12	62.96
Treatment	138	36.22	36.22	100
Total	381	100.0	100.0	

Source: Content Analysis, 2025

Table 1.Sought out framing patterns that characterized the reporting of COVID-19 in these newspapers. 111 (29.13%) of framing patterns that characterized the reporting of COVID-19 in

these newspapers were on isolation cases of affected individuals, 48 (12.59%) of framing patterns that characterized the reporting of COVID-19 in these newspapers were on vaccine and vaccination of affected and unaffected persons, 31 (8.13%) of framing patterns that characterized the reporting of COVID-19 in these newspapers were on deaths of infected person from COVID-19, 50 (13.12%) of framing patterns that characterized the reporting of COVID-19 in these newspapers were discharged cases of COVID-19 while 138 (36.22%) of framing patterns that characterized the reporting of COVID-19 in these newspapers were on treatment of affected persons with COVID-19 virus. This implies that newspapers made use of framing patterns in projecting COVID-19 stories.

Table 2 Source attribution of COVID-19 stories in newspaper coverage

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Presidential Task Force	135	35.4	35.4	35.4
Minister for Health and Officials	53	13.9	13.9	49.3
Interest Groups/Civil Society	35	9.18	9.18	58.48
Frontline Workers	27	7.08	7.08	65.56
WHO/NCDC	131	34.3	34.3	100
Total	381	100.0	100.0	

Content Analysis; 2025

Table 2 indicates that, out of 288 editions of the selected newspapers, 381 news stories with different source attributions were either from Presidential Taskforce, Minister of Health/Government Officials, Interest Groups/Civil Society Organizations, frontline workers and WHO/NCDC. Individually, Presidential Taskforce on COVID-19 had 35.43%, 13.91% of sources of information came from Minister of Health/Government Officials, 9.18% came from Interest Groups/Civil Society organizations, 7.08% sources to newspaper came from frontline

workers, while 33.59% source came from WHO/NCDC. This implies that information reported by newspapers had credibility and authenticity. Hence it came from people in authority and from those who had knowledge of the pandemic

Table 3: Public health behavioural changes influenced through newspapers coverage of COVID-19

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Social Distancing	94	24.35	24.35	24.35
Mask Wearing	187	48.44	48.44	72.79
Proper Hygiene	40	10.36	10.36	83.15
Hands Washing	65	16.83	16.83	100
Total	386	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey 2025

Table 3. presents data on ways which behavioural changes occurred from newspaper reports influence on public compliance with COVID-19 protocol. 94 (24.35%) respondents agreed newspaper reports influence public compliance with COVID-19 protocol by social distancing, 187 (48.44%) respondents agreed that behavioural changes occurred from newspaper reports influence on public compliance with COVID-19 protocol were Mask wearing, 40 (10.36%) respondents agreed behavioural changes occurred from newspaper reports influence public on compliance with COVID-19 protocol was Proper hygiene while 65 (16.83%) agreed behavioural changes occurred from newspaper reports influence public on compliance with COVID-19 protocol by hands washing. The implication of these results is that there was a positive compliance with COVID-19 health protocols which helped in reducing the spread of the virus among the public.

Discussion of Findings

On pattern of frames employed in the coverage of COVID-19 by the newspapers, it was established by Collinson, Khan, and Heffernan (2015) that, the media during health crises to include: Mass media campaigns are useful in providing information regarding vaccination development, preventive techniques and measures, drug therapies as well as social distancing measures. Public health programs and campaigns can be used daily to inform the public on latest developments regarding the pandemic discharged cases, those in ICU. Providing verified and accurate number of deaths recorded. Mass media campaigns are capable of eliciting positive behaviour change as well help in preventing negative behaviors. The above points have highlighted the importance of accurate information dispensation during pandemics as it helps to shape and form public opinions which eventually determine public perception and their reactions.

Finding on the public health behavioural change that occurred among the people from exposure to newspaper messages on COVID -19 showed that most campaigns on the media about COVID-19 were about preventive measures but there were also campaigns that were geared towards behavioural change. Studies have shown that there is relationship between media campaigns and behavioural change. Asemah&Nwaoboli (2021) examined *The Effect of Fear Appeal in HIV/AIDS* found that the use of fear appeal in HIV/AIDS campaigns succeeded in changing behaviour. This means that media campaigns were able to bring about behaviour change. In view of the foregoing Abdulazeez et al., (2021) in their study discovered that people changed their behaviour by adhering to the three main public health measures (hand washing, physical distancing and wearing of mask); all these people did to prevent themselves before receiving the first dose of COVID-19 vaccination. This shows that there is a relationship

between COVID-19 campaigns and behavioural change. Abdulazeez et al., (2021), revealed further that the willingness to change was informed by the high level of trust in the information received and a low self-rated health status.

It can be said that people changed their behaviour because they have high degree of trust in the information they received about the pandemic (COVID-19). This information got to the people through internet, newspaper, television and radio. Besides changing behaviours as a result of high degree of trust in the information received, people also changed their attitude towards COVID-19 because of the use of fear appeal. Fear appeal according to Asemah & Nwaoboli (2021) emphasizes danger to an individual's wellbeing to drive him or her to take action by avoiding undesirable consequence. Fear appeal is intended to increase attention, participation and persuasiveness.

Pertaining sources utilised by newspapers in the coverage of covid-19, Oghada, Okoduwa&Asemah (2021) posit that the broadcast media were great and reliable avenue through which the people of Edo were satisfied and enlightened on the pandemic. Therefore, media campaigns during health crisis such as COVID-19 remains critical in the management of the crisis. This is true in that public perceptions of health issues are not only shaped by their experiences and impression received from other people but news media reports on various issues, (Ahmed & Bate, 2013).

In view of the foregoing it can be said that during health crisis people seek a lot of information about the disease especially when the disease affects them physically or their social wellbeing. The media are major sources through which the people can acquire information that will help them cope with such health crisis. This is so because media organizations especially mainstream media get their information from reliable sources to a large extent. It is therefore advisable that

people should rely more on such media sources during health crisis like the pandemic. A 2019 USAID report according to Muoboghare & Anho (2021) has it that “the media is an important ally in public health situation. It serves the role of being a source of correct information as well as advocate for correct health behaviour”. In the light of the above it can be said that the media is not only a source for correct information but also an advocate of positive behaviour change. This is true in that Muoboghare & Anho (2021) observe further that media reports on various health issues can have over bearing effects on the populace overtime. According to the scholars several heath communication studies have found health information in newspapers effective in health behavioural change.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on these findings, this study therefore concludes that:

Newspapers provided maximum update during the COVID-19 pandemic through its adequate pattern of frames employed in shaping public perception which helped in clearing misconceptions which emanated from the public on the pandemic. This was done through framing of verified stories and acknowledging all sources to information received on covid-19 which enhances authenticity and credibility of reportage. The most prominent pattern which newspapers framed covid-19 stories were isolation of infected persons from the spread of the virus. This made the public to know that infected persons must not leave among the public but in an isolated area for treatment while the implication of newspaper framing of covid-19 came as a result of the behavioural change that occurred among the people. Behavioural change such as wearing of mask was the most occurred change among people, followed by social distancing.

In tune with the findings from this study and the conclusion reached, the following recommendations have been made:

- i. Reports are often doubted especially when one didn't hear or see it directly from the media. Sources bring about authenticity and credibility of news reports, newspaper should always attribute health reports with first hand sources, statistics with follow up verification before news publishing to enhance accuracy.
- ii. Even as the newspaper criticize for a positive change, they should devise ways of applauding the public on successful behavioural change as this will encourage them to develop interest in subsequent campaigns as the need arises.
- iii. If newspapers failed to frame preventive behaviours adequately, media training and editorial policies must address health gaps.

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