

Nigeria Tribune Awareness Campaign on Covid-19 and Audience Response to Health Information

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Abstract: *This study examined Nigerian Tribune newspaper reportage of COVID-19 pandemic as a means to creating awareness for audience responses to health information from December, 2019 to May, 2020. The study sought to know whether Nigerian newspapers reported covid-19 promptly as a means to create early awareness before its emergence in Nigeria; determine the frame adopted by Nigerian newspapers in reporting covid-19 as a means of creating early awareness; find out the prominence given to the reportage of covid-19 stories by Nigerian newspapers to create awareness; examine audience perception of Nigerian newspapers reportage of covid-19 as means for early public awareness of the virus; and to know whether Nigerian newspapers reportage of covid-19 as a means of awareness creation spurs audience preparedness to curb the spread of the virus. Adopting quantitative research method, survey design and content analysis were used for this study with a population of 205, 274, 914 for the survey design part, and 122 Nigerian Tribune newspaper was content analysed within the period of four months- December, 2019 to March, 2020. More so, a sample size of 427 was drawn from the population for survey using the Relief App sample size calculator out of which only 128 online respondents responded to the google survey and was used for the study. However, census was adopted in the case of content analysis as the entire 122 editions of the newspaper was analysed. An online questionnaire was created through google.doc as instrument for survey design; code manual and code sheet were also used for content analysis. The data gathered were analysed using SPSS and interpreted in frequency and percentage distribution table. Findings however showed that Nigerian Tribune reported covid-19 before its emergence in the country; frame of reportage was informative thereby giving statistics and record of events as they occur; Nigerian Tribune newspaper placed serious importance to reportage of this virus; created public knowledge and awareness about the virus through early reportage, and; however, the respondents are of the view that early reportage of the virus had impact on government in policy making but made little or no impact on the people in taking preventive actions. The study therefore recommended that though the efforts of the print media professionals cannot be jettisoned in reporting health matters irrespective of the challenges they face in discharging their social role. Nonetheless, a more compelling form of reportage that would engage the public in taking actions in the right direction should be engaged in feature writing, editorials, commentaries and opinions as this is believed to have more detailed views and position on serious health problems such as covid-19 pandemic.*

Keywords: Awareness, Audience Response, Covid-19, Health Information, Nigerian Newspapers, Reportage

Introduction

Any time the world is in crisis in any form, developing countries are always affected because they lack the capacity to adjust effectively or adapt properly. More so, at a time when the world is faced with a pandemic condition, it becomes expedient of government to raise the level of awareness of the mass of the people through mass information and education about the existing phenomena. This is so very fundamental if the society and the world at large would scale through such a great problematic period. Consequent upon this responsibility, the media, being the fourth estate of the realm apart from the government play a sacrosanct role in ensuring that the people are generally equipped with important and needed information via reports such that it creates high level awareness on prevention, medication, and appropriate statistics as a means of follow-up to keep the society abreast of the prevailing condition vis-a-vis such health challenge.

The newspaper, like every other media is socially responsible in ensuring an informed world. Although, the print media has been classified as an elitist medium because of the nature of the audiences it appeals to. That notwithstanding, the role it plays in information dissemination and education is far in-depth considering other media such as broadcast which form of presentation is anchored on conciseness or brevity. The universal problem and panic most contagious diseases create amongst the people or nations when they breakout subject the media to focus much of its attention by playing the most needed and important role in influencing the publics' awareness, and understanding through prompt and adequate reportage so that both government and the people can take the needed steps as at when demanded (Matenge, Freeman et. al., 2017).

No doubt, after the outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) in China around December, 2019, various international media reported the condition thereby creating awareness in order to pre-inform the rest of the world on the new virus rampaging China which had claimed more than a thousand lives as at then. According to Situation Report-91 (2020, April 20), the World Health Organisation (WHO) on 23 March, 2020 reported a total of 373,718 cases were globally recorded out of which 16,236 death cases were reported. Furthermore, as at the time of writing this part of the report, the *worldometers.info* (2020) announced 8,141,521 cases out of which 439,713 had died, and 4,252,417 recovered thereby making active cases a total of 3,449,391 across the globe as at the period. It however means that 5.4% death, and 52.2% recovery cases were reported at the period thereby leaving 42.4% cases active.

Consequently, one thing that had drawn the attention of the World Health Organisation (WHO) about African nations vis a vis Covid-19 is the continent's inability: in terms of political will-power, financial capacity, and most importantly the needed information and education to prevent the spread of covid-19 (Clifford Chance, 2020; Smith, 2020). According to Evans & Ulasevich (2005) as cited in Ciboh (2010), the print media, particularly newspaper is playing important roles in disseminating and setting agenda on health information both with the government and the people; hence its importance cannot be overemphasized in creating awareness campaign on covid-19 for Nigerians to take the needed measure in curbing the spread of this disease that has been declared a pandemic, World Health Organisation, (2020).

Statement of the Problem

With the rate at which covid-19 is spreading across the world like a wildfire, and coupled with the fact that a cure has not been found, this has spread panic all over the world, even to remote areas. One key thing that is believed to be helpful in a condition of this manner is that adequate and prompt dissemination of information about the virus which would lead to general public education on action and measures. As the fourth estate of the realm, the media is duty bound to discharge this social function by providing adequate information to help both the government in the setting agenda, and the people in educating them on the required steps needed to be taken at a critical time of this nature.

However, with the advantage of "news breaking" that the broadcast media and modern media such as *blogs*, and the different social media platforms have over the print, it seems the efforts of the Nigerian newspapers on reporting covid-19 are not felt or considered in the creation of awareness which thus translates to public and governments readiness to combat the spread of pandemic. It is therefore on background that this study is premised, particularly to understand the effort of *Nigerian Tribune* in creating awareness about this virus before its emergence in Nigeria few months after, and to know if such effort translated to government and public taking necessary measure as a result of the information they received through the newspapers.

Research Questions

1. Did the *Nigerian Tribune* report covid-19 promptly as a means to create early awareness before its emergence in Nigeria?
2. What is the frame adopted by *Nigerian Tribune* in reporting covid-19 as a means of creating early awareness?
3. What is the prominence given to the reportage of covid-19 stories by the *Nigerian Tribune* to create early awareness?
4. What is the perception of audience about Nigerian newspapers reportage of covid-19 as means for early public awareness or knowledge of the virus?
5. Did Nigerian newspapers' reportage of covid-19 as a means of awareness creation spur government and the public to take needed actions against the virus?

Theoretical Framework

This study is premised on agenda-setting theory of the press which is thus influenced by social responsibility theory, and the social cognitive theory. These theories are good communication theories that have great influence on this study. While the agenda-setting and social cognition theories are media effects theory, the social responsibility theory is thus a normative theory which spells out the obligations or norms of the press. In line with the view of Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1974) the social responsibility theory is premised on the notion that freedom in the society carries a concomitant responsibility, as such that the press is thus responsible to both the government and the society in carrying out its basic functions for the sake of the growth or advancement of the society. As a result of this, the press- newspaper in carrying out this social function to government and society simultaneously carry out the agenda-setting function in the same process.

More so, Littlejohn & Foss (2009) assert that the agenda-setting theory helps the society, including the government to determine the most important issues in the society. They further explain, that though the press while performing its social responsibility role through information dissemination does not actually tell the people what and how to think about an issue but rather what is to be considered important matters to focus on in the society. As a result, the Nigerian newspapers in this situation help the government and the society to put the issue of covid-19 pandemic in the front burner of discussion in the world basically

because the virus is newly discovered and yet the world has not found a permanent cure, hence the need to curb the spread is crucial for the entire world.

More so, social cognitive theory according to Demer (2005, p.283) is “a media effect theory which posits that people learn through observation, not just through experience”. To this end, Baran & Davis (2010) argue that the experience of people in this situation is an effect of the society being mediated mass media which affects their behaviors, and that effect is influenced by various factors that are known to those people and their conditions. In the light of this, the social cognitive theory influences the direction or pattern of behavior the society is expected to put on during this period of covid-19 pandemic. This behavior is thus expected to be influenced by the mass media, particularly with the newspapers as the case applies to this study. In other words, it is expected that the behavior of the people is influenced by the news or information they are fed with about covid-19 by the media. This however, determines public responses to health information.

Literature Review

Health Reporting: Public Awareness Creation as Media Campaign Strategy.

Like the political beat, health reporting is a serious and sacrosanct aspect of reporting which its intention by media professionals is to communicate health related issues to the public; this is thus the reason for health communication. Bello (2015) argues that reporting health stories by the media is taken seriously because of the important vacuum health matters occupy in the society. Therefore, health reporting just like news reporting is the gathering, editing and dissemination of health information through a specific means to a heterogeneous public.

An in-depth understanding of the context of health reporting could liken its activities to health communication. According to Oyama & Okpara (2017, p.3) “health communication is somewhat complex considering that scholars perception of the concept differ, and based on their experiences”. In the light of this fact, Kreps (2015) as cited in Oyama & Okpara (2017) examines health communication as the influence of human and mediated communication on health care delivery and the promotion of health. More so, the United States, Department of Health and Human Services (2002) as cited in Feeley & Chen (2013, p.2) also defined health communication as “the art and techniques of informing, influencing and motivating individuals, institution and public audiences about important health issues”.

Sequel to the definition by the U.S Department of Health and Human Services, the department sees health communication first as an art, and secondly as a technique. In this view, the “art” in health communication relates to reporting skills or the professional and personal ability that a reporter deploys in the gathering and editing of information about health issues, while the “techniques” involves the application or combination of certain mechanical skills with the personal and professional abilities in the dissemination of health issues to target and scattered audience who receives it simultaneously.

The essence of health reporting considering the importance placed on it by media professional is basically to creating awareness on health matters for the sake of the society. In this regard, the print- newspaper and magazine play a crucial role in the creation of awareness in an elitist manner. This is because the print media have a special type of audience whom are the elites in the society. More so, because the newspaper has a long life span thereby making it a good material for reference, its impact on health communication remains outstanding compared to other traditional media like radio and television or even the modern media-the internet.

Although, the art and act of gathering and reporting health stories pose a serious challenge to health reporters particularly in the case where such health issues are easily transmissible like epidemic, and in case as covid-19 pandemic, Bello (2015, p.72) buttresses further that:

“Health reporting involves several challenges. These challenges depend on the personality of the health reporters, the nature of health topic being covered, the environment of coverage and the cooperation enjoyed from the health and science experts. However, it is essential to note that the general challenges involved in health reporting in a particular location and at a given time go a long way to determine the degree of job performance of health reporters in that environment.”.

However serious the challenges of a reporter could be in reporting health events, media cannot but report such events in the interest of the nation and its economic advancement. This is thus as a result of the important vacuum the media occupy in the society being the fourth estate of the realm and the purveyor of information for the creation of awareness on such health matter through the dissemination of information in the quest to educating the general public.

The creation of awareness about a particular health problem in the society is however a mandatory duty of the media professionals. The reason for awareness creation is to raise the bar of the public knowledge about such health matter. In making

health issues a public affair a clear distinction can be made between health reporting and health communication campaign. According to Robinson et al. (2014, p. 621), "Health communication campaign involves a type of communication strategy that is used to deliver health messages directly or indirectly to with the main focus of informing, educating and persuading the public on health issues". At the same time, the coverage of health events by reporters is to put forward to the public domain the knowledge about the health issue in the society with the notion of not only creating awareness but also with the view that the public, including government taking proactive steps towards the right directions. In a nut shell, reporting health issues by the media could be likened to a means of creating public campaign on such health problem which main focus is to spur public actions.

Newspaper as Medium for Health Communication

Different scholars have, to the best of their comprehension and level of professionalism defined newspaper. According to Anaeto, Solo-Anaeto and Tejumaiye (2009, p.2) the newspaper is one of the media of mass communication which belongs to the print class, it is a publication that is not fastened together and is often printed on a periodic basis. Furthermore, Anaeto et al. (2009) argues that the newspaper is an embodiment of varieties of materials or information that are printed on a paper called newsprint. On the other hand, Demers (2005, p.211) opined that newspaper is thus referred to as "a publication which is regularly printed and distributed either on daily or weekly basis and contains news and every other form of writing which are often accompanied with pictures or illustration".

Considering both definitions, Anaeto et al. (2009) share a view with Demers (2005) on the ground that newspaper is a news material that is printed periodically. However, both differ on what ground which actually defines newspaper in relation to communication. According to Demers (2005) the newspaper is a publication, but to Anaeto et al. (2009) the newspaper is a medium of communication through which information are disseminated. To this end however, this study falls within the perspectives of Anaeto et al. (2009:2) on the definition of newspaper being a medium of mass communication.

Communication has been adjudged to be life blood or wire of the existing society, this is so because no part of human existence can be comprehended or enjoyed without communication. In other words, communication cut across all sectors of human existence. Hassan (2014, p.2) asserts that in giving meaning to the word "communication" two things are involved: it is usually difficult to define; but if a trial is made, there are usually variations in the actual meaning. Therefore, communication surpasses being an art but rather a process, Hassan (2014). As a process, communication is however the mechanism through which the society builds relationship which thus transits to development. In a nut shell, the applications of communication to every human activity have brought about social, physical and even spiritual advancement.

Though communication is as old as creation, today, communication has taken a new dimension. As the world enters the 21st century, communication was revolutionized thereby introducing a far reaching effect into the society, (Steeve & Silva, n.d). The drastic changes in communication also affect all human areas ranging from agriculture to science, religion, health etc. this change did not only prevail in workplace but also people's personal life and relationship. Steeve & Silva (n.d) further explains that instant access to information and consistent access through waves thus establishes a new form of communication which has influenced global economy which translates to impact in all human activities.

World Trend on Covid-19 and the Nigerian Case

Covid-19 has been said to be a family of coronavirus: a disease that often affects the respiratory system later leading to pneumonia and of which if not cured on time could lead to death. This virus emanated from Wuhan province of China on December 12, 2019 and affected over a thousand Chinese at the period it broke out. The disturbing situation is that within 12 weeks from whence it emanated in China, according to WHO Situation Reports-41 (2020), the virus had spread around the world with 88,876 cases reported globally out of which China had 80,547 with 2,908 deaths leaving 63 countries with 8,329 reported cases and 122 deaths.

Over a million have been affected with about 8% death across the globe among the people affected. According to the WHO Situation Report-91 (2020), an estimate of 2, 387, 467 cases were reported across countries with death rate of 163,143 in April 20. Few days after this report, the worldometers.info (2020) reported 3, 085, 128 cases out of which 212, 546 already died of the virus. Furthermore, at the early week of May, the worldometers.info (2020) had recorded 3,663,815 cases worldwide with 252,758 deaths, and 1,205,904 recovery of covid-19. Therefore, from the statistics presented, it is clear that the rate at which people are recovering is more than death rate, yet, the rate at which people contract this virus is highly worrisome.

As a result of the rapid spread of the virus, the World Health Organisation and other international organisations such as United Nations, African Union and European Union have put measures in place through research into the phenomenon with the view to providing measures to curbing the spread of covid-19 since a permanent cure is yet to be discovered. One key measure that

various countries of the world have put in place is the need for social distancing, use of nose masks, hand gloves, living hygienic life style, washing hands regularly and or using of 90% alcoholic hand sanitizer.

Nigeria, the most populated nation in Africa, located in Sub-Sahara of the continent with a population of 205, 317, 439 as given by the World Population Review, 2020 is one country with a case of covid-19. According to the National Centre for Disease Control (2020), Nigeria has recorded 2,802 cases across 35 states of the country including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) with a total death of 93 and 417 discharged cases as at April,2020. This however puts Nigeria as number 63rd in the world, 4th in Africa, and 1st in West Africa as at the period, (worldometers.info, 2020). Furthermore, as at May 31st, the number of cases reported in Nigeria has increased to 10,469 with 301 (3%) deaths recorded within the 36 states of the country, (Nigerian Centre for Disease Control, 2020). On one hand, the Nigerian government has been proactive since the emergence of the virus to preventing its spread across the country through the preventive measure given by the World Health Organisation. On the other, poverty, like every other African state has been one great challenge to these measures (Mallapaty, 2020). It is no more news that an average Nigeria citizen lives on 1 dollar in a day as majority of Nigerians get their pay on a daily basis to feed themselves and family. This has been a major setback for citizens' compliance to government measures on lockdown and social distancing in their effort to prevent the spread of the virus.

As argued earlier, the level of poverty and the population of Nigeria have served as deterrent to various government measures in the protection of public health in this period. Although government claims that it does everything within its capacity to make palliatives available to the citizens. However, Nigerians have argued that the government is sectional in providing palliatives for the people as most of these palliatives were distributed mostly in the northern part of the country and this condition has created controversy amongst other ethnic groups. The result of these conditions is that: as at May 31, 2020, the country recorded 10,469 cases with 301 deaths while 3,158 were discharged thereby living 10,168 active cases, (Nigerian Centre for Disease Control, 2020). It therefore translates to mean that the issue was still under control as at March 31st when the country recorded 128 cases, with just 2 deaths. However, by May 31st, cases had increased by 99% (10,341) across the states within two months.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted the quantitative research method using survey design and content analysis. These designs were adopted due to the fact that the study examined newspaper awareness campaign and audience adherence to health information from newspapers on covid-19 pandemic.

Population of the Study

This study covers Nigeria. Therefore, according to the *World Population Review* (2020), the population of Nigeria amount to 205, 274, 914. On this ground, the population for the survey design is 205, 274, 914, while that of Content Analysis is 122 being the entire editions of *Nigerian Tribune* newspaper (Online editions) from December, 2019 to March, 2020. The *Nigerian Tribune* is a national newspaper widely read in Nigeria and, it is the oldest surviving daily print in the country being that it was established in 1948.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 427 was drawn from the study population using the *Relief Sample Size Calculator Application* with a precision of 0.05 and confidence level of 95 for the survey design. In the case of content analysis, the entire 122 editions of *Nigerian Tribune* Newspaper from December 1, 2019 to March 31, 2020 were analysed for the study.

Convenience sampling was used in administering the questionnaire by sending the questionnaire link to contacts on researcher's social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook. While census was used for the content analysis since researcher could analyse all editions available for the period of the four months under investigation.

Units of Analysis for Content Analysis

The units of analysis coded for this study included Straight News, Editorial, Feature, Cartoon, Commentary, Opinion, Letter to Editor, and Advertorial.

Content Category

1. Column: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6
2. Placement: Front Page, Inside Page, Back Page (the centre page was not considered because the researcher made use of online newspaper edition thereby considering both inside and centre spread as inside page)

3. Frame: this is the mood at which the writer of the story presented the issue of covid-19 or the activity taking place in the report.
 - i. Informative: These are stories on covid-19 giving statistics about people who were affected by the virus or that which spells out negative impact on the society, and which could increase the fear about covid-19.
 - ii. Educative: These are stories on covid-19 giving instructions and measures on preventive actions.
 - iii. Supportive: These are stories on covid-19 where assistance or donations in term of money, medical equipments, and other form material properties are given to support the fight against the virus.

Instrument for Data Collection

An online questionnaire was structured using *google file* for the survey design. The online questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first part attended to Demography data, while the second contained Psychographic data which addressed the main research questions. Code manual and code sheet were used for data collection in content analysis.

Validity and Reliability of Research Instruments

In determining the validity and reliability of the research instrument, face validity was adopted in the case of the questionnaire used for the survey part, and content validity was used to determine the instruments for content analysis. Meanwhile, a pilot study was conducted with both instruments to determine their reliability.

Data Presentation and Analysis

On the survey, only 128 respondents responded to the online Google survey therefore, the 128 respondents were used for the research work.

Table 1: Sex

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Male	88	68.8%
Female	40	31.3%
Total	128	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2020

The above table shows sex of respondents where 88 (68.8%) were Males and 40 (31.3%) were females. Therefore, majority of the respondents are Males.

Table 2: Marital Status

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Single	62	48.4%
Married	65	50.8%
Divorced	1	0.8%
Total	128	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Table 2 represents the marital status of respondents. 62 (48.4%) were Single, 65 (50.8%) were Married, and 1 (0.8%) is Divorced. It therefore shows that most of the respondents are married.

Table 3: Age

Response	Frequency	Percentage
18-22 yrs	8	6.3%
23-27 yrs	31	24.2%
28-32 yrs	22	17.2%
33-37 yrs	36	28.1%

38 Above	31	24.2%
Total	128	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2020

The table above depicts the age of respondents where 8 (6.3%) were between 18-22 years old, 31 (24.2%) were 23-27 years, 22 (17.2%) were 28-32 years, 36 (28.1%) were 33-37 years, and 31 (24.2%) were above 38 years. Table therefore reveals that majority of respondents are within the ages of 33-37.

Table 4: Education

Response	Frequency	Percentage
SSCE	1	0.8%
NCE/ND	8	6.8%
HND/BSc	81	63.3%
PGD	5	3.9%
MSc/MA	31	24.2%
PhD	2	1.6%
Total	128	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Table 4 here reveals respondents' educational background. 1 (0.8%) holds a SSCE, 8 (6.8%) hold NCE/ND, 81 (63.3%) hold HND/BSc, 5 (3.9%) hold PGD, 31 (24.2%) have MSc/MA certificate and 2 (1.6%) hold a PhD. The table therefore shows that majority of respondents hold HND/BSc certificate.

Table 5: Employment

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Employed	59	46.1%
Self-Employed	55	43.0%
Unemployed	14	10.9%
Total	128	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2020

The table above shows the employment status of respondents. Therefore, 59 (46.1%) are employed, 55 (43.0%) are Self-employed, while 14 (10.9%) are unemployed. In a nut shell, most of the respondents are employed.

Table 6: Do you read newspaper, either online or hardcopy?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	117	91.4%
No	11	8.6%
Total	128	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Table 6 here depicts if respondents read newspaper either online or hardcopy. Consequently, 117 (91.4%) said Yes, while 11 (8.6%) said No. Therefore, it shows that majority of the respondents read newspapers either online or hardcopy.

Table 7: How often do you read newspapers?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Frequently	64	50.0%
Occasionally	40	31.3%
When there is need to	24	18.8%
Total	128	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2020

This table above reveals how often respondents read newspapers. As a result, 64 (50.0%) frequently read, while 40 (31.3%) read occasionally and 24 (18.8%) read only when the need be. Therefore, table shows that majority of respondents frequently read newspapers.

Table 8: Have you read newspaper since covid-19 pandemic started?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	115	89.9%
No	13	10.1%
Total	128	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2020

This 8th table shows if respondents have read newspapers since covid-19 pandemic started. To this end, 115 (89.9%) said Yes, and 13 (10.1%) said No. therefore, the table shows that majority of the respondents have read newspaper since covid-19 pandemic started.

Table 9: If Yes, in what format?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Hardcopy	2	1.6%
Electronic Copy	93	72.7%
Both	33	25.8%
Total	128	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2020

The table 9 up here shows the format of newspapers respondents read, 2 (1.6%) read hardcopies, 93 (72.7%) read Electronic copies, and 33 (25.8%) read both. In other words, most of the respondents read Electronic copy of newspapers.

Table 10: If No, why?

	Responses
1.	I am more interested in research
2.	I check out blogs
3.	Because i don't see any reason reading newspapers since I can access all I need using my phone.
4.	I prefer news from social media
5.	I have other sources.
6.	I hate bad news.
7.	I use more of Twitter
8.	I get information through social media
9.	I read the news on social media platforms and news channels a day before they come out in news papers
10.	I have never really been a fan of the newspapers
11.	Because I watch news on TV

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Table 10 reveals the views of respondents on why they don't read newspapers, as such majority of respondents are of the view that the make use of more of social media such as twitter, blogs etc in getting information rather than the newspapers.

Table 11: Did Nigerian newspapers reported covid-19 before its emergence in Nigeria?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	74	52.7%

No	14	10.9%
Maybe	40	31.3%
Total	128	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Table 11 reveals if Nigerian newspapers reported covid-19 before emerging in country. Therefore, 74 (52.7%) of the respondents said Yes, 14 (10.9%) said No, while 40 (31.3%) of them are not sure. This table thus showed that majority of the respondents is of the notion that Nigerian newspapers reported covid-19 before it emerged in Nigeria.

Table 12: Has Nigerian newspapers been consistent in reporting covid-19 compared with other medium?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	88	68.8%
No	9	7.0%
Maybe	31	24.2%
Total	128	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Table 12 shows the respondents views on whether Nigerian newspapers have been consistent in reporting covid-19 issues compared with other medium. Therefore, 88 (68.8%) respondents say Yes, 9 (7.1%) say No, while 31 (24.2%) say Maybe. Therefore, most respondents are of the notion that Nigerian newspapers have been consistent in reporting covid-19 issues like other medium.

Table 13: Do you thing Nigerian newspapers created awareness on covid-19 through early reportage of the virus?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	70	54.7%
No	30	23.4%
Maybe	28	21.9%
Total	128	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2020

The table 13 depicts the respondents view on whether Nigerian newspapers created awareness on covid-19 through early reportage. While 70 (54.7%) said yes, 30 (23.4%) said no, and 28 (21.9%) said maybe. Drawing from this table, majority of respondents are of the view that Nigerian newspapers created awareness on covid-19 through early reportage of the virus.

Table 14: Do you think early reportage of covid-19 by Nigerian newspapers created awareness for government to take early measures to curb the virus?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	53	41.4%
No	41	32.0%
Maybe	34	26.6%
Total	128	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Table 14 reveals the views of respondents on whether early reportage of covid-19 by Nigerian newspapers created awareness for government to take early measures in cubing the virus where 53 (41.4%) said yes, 41 (32.0%) said no, and 34 (26.6%) said maybe. From here it is clear that majority of the respondents believe early reportage of covid-19 by Nigerian newspapers created awareness for government to take early measure in curbing the virus.

Table 14: Do you think early reportage of covid-19 by Nigerian newspapers spurred the preparedness of the people to prevent the contract and spread of the virus?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	36	28.1%
No	48	37.5%

Maybe	44	34.4%
Total	128	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Table 14 reveals the opinion of respondents on whether early Nigerian newspaper reportage of covid-19 spurred the preparedness of the people to prevent the contract and spread of the virus. The table hence shows that 36 (28.1%) respondents say yes, 48 (37.5%) say no, while 44 (34.4%) say maybe. Therefore, most of the respondents are of the view that early reportage of covid-19 by Nigerian newspapers did not spur the preparedness of the people to prevent the contract and spread of the virus.

Table 14: Statistics for Content Analysis

Newspaper	Year	Month	Day	Story	Column	Placement	Frame
1	2	4	122	593	593	593	593

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Table 14 shows the statistics for the newspaper that was analysed- *Nigerian Tribune*. This table shows that just one newspaper was analysed within two years (2019-2020 where only December was picked in 2019, and January, February, March were select in 2020 to make four months. The entire days within the three months is 122 thereby making up 122 editions of the newspapers, and 593 stories were analysed out of which column, placement and frame were determined in the cause of analysing the 122 editions of the newspaper.

Table 15: Story Type

Story Type	Frequency	Percentage
Straight News	499	84.1%
Cartoon	8	1.3%
Editorial	6	1.0%
Feature	24	4.1%
Opinion	26	4.4%
Commentary	0	0%
Letter to Editor	20	3.4%
Advertorials	10	1.7%
Total	593	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Table 15 shows the nature or type of stories used in reporting covid-19. As a result, it reveals that 499 (84.1%) of the stories was reported in straight news, 8 (1.3%) in cartoon, 6 (1.0%) in editorial, 24 (4.0%) in feature, 26 (4.4%) in opinion, 0 (0.0%) in commentary, 20 (3.4%) in letters to the editor, and 10 (1.7%) in advertorial. Therefore, it is revealed that majority of the stories were reported in straight news.

Table 16: Column of Stories

Columns	Frequency	Percentage
1-2 (Low)	159	26.8%
3-4 (High)	181	30.5%
5-6 (Highest)	253	42.7%
Total	593	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2020

This table 16 reveals the columns most of the stories were reported in the newspapers, 159 (26.8%) of the stories covered 1-2 columns, 181 (30.5%) in 3-4 columns, and 253 (42.7%) in 5-6 columns. Therefore, it is revealed that most of the stories were reported in 5-6 columns.

Table 17: Story Placement

Placement	Frequency	Percentage
Front page	63	10.6%
Inside page	525	88.5%
Back page	5	0.8%

Total	593	100%
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Source: Field Survey, 2020

The table 17 up shows the where covid-19 stories were placed in Nigerian newspapers. Therefore 63 (10.6%) of the stories were placed at the front pages, 525 (88.5%) inside the pages and 5 (0.8%) at the back page.

Table 18: Frame of Story

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Informative	267	45.0%
Educative	256	43.2%
Supportive	70	11.8%
Total	593	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Table 18 reveals the frame used in reporting covid-19 stories in Nigerian newspapers 267 (45.0%) of the stories were informative in frame, 256 (43.2%) were educative, and 70 (11.8%) were supportive.

Discussion of Findings

RQ1: Did Nigerian newspapers promptly report covid-19 as a means to create early awareness before its emergence in Nigeria?

Consequent upon investigations, study revealed that the Nigerian newspapers promptly reported covid-19 before its emergence in Nigeria due to the fact that most Nigerians read newspapers frequently as they have access to electronic copies than hardcopies. Furthermore, the content analysis part corroborated this fact as the first story on covid-19 appeared on *Nigerian Tribune* newspaper on Tuesday, January 21, 2020 which was the fourth week of the month, while majority of the stories were straight news with 5-6 columns. In other words, the Nigerian newspapers reported on covid-19 five weeks before its emergence in Nigeria on Thursday, February 27, 2020. Therefore, most Nigerian newspapers created awareness on covid-19 through reportage before it started in the country.

RQ2: What is the frame adopted by Nigerian newspapers in reporting covid-19 as a means of creating early awareness?

More so, probing into this research question, study showed that most Nigerian newspapers reported covid-19 pandemic in informative frame. In this regard, majority of the stories covered in *Nigerian Tribune* newspaper were giving statistics of people affected with the virus, and stories about the effects of the spread of the virus which often depicts its negative impacts on the society such as closing of institutions which often increase the fear of the virus in the minds of the people.

RQ3: What is the level prominence given to the reportage of covid-19 stories by Nigerian newspapers to create early awareness?

On the prominence of importance placed on the reportage of covid-19 pandemic by Nigerian newspapers, it was revealed that *Nigerian Tribune* newspaper placed a great importance to reporting the pandemic. Although majority of the stories were placed inside the pages of the newspaper with 88.5% (525) out of the 593. This shows the seriousness and importance placed on the reportage of the virus. This is further established where majority of the stories covered 5-6 columns depicting high reportage. Consequently, Nigerian newspapers place high prominence on the reportage of covid-19 to create early awareness of the virus in Nigeria.

RQ4: What is the perception of audience about Nigerian newspapers reportage of covid-19 as means for early public awareness or knowledge of the virus?

Study showed that the Nigerian newspapers created early public knowledge and awareness about covid-19. In addition, in the bid to reinforce the awareness and knowledge of covid-19, Nigerian newspapers were consistent in their reports like other traditional and modern media as all editions of *Nigerian Tribune* newspaper from January 21, 2020 till March 31, 2020 had stories on covid-19. More so, this fact was further stressed as *Nigerian Tribune* newspaper revealed that the reportage of covid-19 increased with time particularly from Thursday, January 27, 2020 where an edition had at the least 2-3 stories and 4-10 stories from first week in March.

RQ5: Did Nigerian newspapers' reportage of covid-19 as a means of awareness creation spur government and the public to take needed actions against the virus?

Findings on this question revealed that early report of covid-19 by Nigerian newspaper as a means of creating public awareness had impact on the society but in a different manner with the government and public. On one hand, it was revealed that early newspaper reportage of this virus set the government in motion to provide measures in the fight against the virus for the sake of the preventing its spread in Nigeria. On the other hand, the early reportage of this virus by Nigerian newspapers did not spur the preparedness of the public in taking steps to prevent the contract and spread of covid-19. Therefore, the early reportage of covid-19 only had a great impact on government and less impact on the public.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to detect if Nigerian newspapers created awareness on covid-19 through early reportage, and to examine the response of the public on the virus as a result of the early reportage. Although health reporting is a very serious business because of its importance to the survival of the society in all ramifications, as such health reporters encounter serious challenges in the process, (Bello, 2015). Despite the challenges reporters face, and coupled with the covid-19 pandemic, study has shown that Nigerian newspapers created awareness on covid-19 through early reportage of the virus. This therefore shows that newspapers help in creating early awareness on health matters through early reportage for the purpose of informing and educating the public (Ciboh, 2010). This however goes contrary to the assertion of Oyama&Okpara (2017) that Nigerian media has done little in providing health information to the public because practitioners priorities media contents as little or no attention is often given to health matters.

In line with findings, the Nigerian newspapers was able to educate the society via its social responsibility functions by providing necessary information on covid-19 from an early stage, and further provided a leverage based on the media agenda-setting function for government to think ahead in providing preventive actions for the society against the covid-19 pandemic where the social cognitive theory take its course. Furthermore, though the efforts of Nigerian newspapers was able to put government to action in giving directives to protecting the society, yet the media effort does not have a direct impact on the public in being responsive to taking actions in preventing the spread of covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. In other words, newspaper reportage of health related issues does not actually translate to the type of awareness needed for the public to taking proactive and preventive measures per se. Although the media are important source for health information and often help to form the basis of public thoughts (Uwom&Oloyede, 2014). Therefore, the study revealed that newspaper's reportage of health issues in most cases does not propel the public to taking the necessary actions in preventing the contract and spread of a health problem the media is creating awareness on.

Recommendation

Various studies have shown that the print media play an important role in creating awareness on health problems. This cannot be denied considering the fundamental function of the media in the area of information dissemination which could help the public see further in health related matters and provide government the key areas to focus on during periods of epidemic or pandemic health issues. On this ground, reporting health is a risky duty particularly when the health issue becomes epidemic or pandemic in the case of the present covid-19, and considering the hazards that are related to reporting during such period. However, no matter how risky reporting an health issue could be, the media professionals particularly in the print should not only strive to report health stories but must also ensure a more compelling form of reportage that would engage the public to taking actions in preventing such pandemic or epidemic just as such reports causes government in taking actions. However, this could be achieved when the newspapers do more reporting of health related issues through editorial and feature stories understanding the fact that both feature and editorial stories have strength in passing out directives on any societal issue as this could help the public take actions towards prevention.

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