

Public Awareness and Perception of Newspaper Reportage of Lassa fever Outbreaks in Nigeria

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Abstract: *In spite of government's efforts to eradicate Lassa fever in Nigeria, the disease has become endemic, claiming lives in geometric dimension. Previous studies have identified that over three thousand people died annually from Lassa fever with over five thousand (5,000) cases occurring yearly across the West Africa sub region. However, there is dearth of literature on the role of newspapers in creating awareness about the disease, including the perception of the public on the education, surveillance, and mobilization roles of the media. This study, therefore, examined the public awareness and perception of newspaper reportage of Lassa fever outbreaks in Nigeria. The study adopted triangulation method which involved content analysis of The Punch, The Guardian, and The Nigerian Tribune newspapers that were purposively selected to generate quantitative and qualitative outcomes. Two thousand four hundred (2,400) respondents were selected from the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria through multi-stage sampling technique. Twelve health correspondents and editors were purposively interviewed and data from the interviews were analysed. Findings revealed that the newspaper's reportage of health issue was adequate. The result also showed that respondents gained sufficient knowledge on the causes, transmissions, effects, preventions, and control of Lassa fever. Similarly, public perception of Lassa fever significantly increased, as 71.9% of the respondents were satisfied with news and editorials presented by the three newspapers. Furthermore, findings from the health reporters showed that poor economy, unhygienic environment, and inadequate information from the scientists were some of the challenges encountered by health correspondents. The result equally revealed that differences in the newspapers were due to house style, editorial policy, and philosophy of the media organisations. The study therefore concluded that public awareness and perception of Newspaper reportage of Lassa fever will sufficiently improve with increased coverage of the disease. It was therefore recommended that media should deepen coverage of health issues and not wait until there is a health crisis. Also, public health campaigns on hygienic environment and behavioural change as panacea to overcoming Lassa fever should be intensified.*

Keywords: Public Awareness, Perception, Reportage, Lassa Fever, Triangulation method.

Introduction

Media-based health promotion initiatives have the power to change these habits. The manner in which newspapers deliver information on these subjects may affect readers' reactions, which may then have an impact on their health. Newspapers can therefore be used to encourage important behavioral changes in the populace. The factors that determine a person's personal health state are, for the most part, under their control. Lifestyle decisions, diet, and the use of tobacco and alcohol are some of these variables. Newspapers help to raise public awareness of the need to focus on issues such as the environment and people's physical well-being in addition to economic and security concerns. The expression "health is wealth" is a trademark. It is usually expected that the media will provide accurate, unbiased, and thorough information about events and circumstances in its region and outside. Up to now, government mobilization, education, and remedial action have been compromised by media coverage of national health systems, illness outbreaks, health education, and understanding. Lassa fever is a hemorrhagic disease that results in bleeding and unexpected death in humans, according to the WHO (2006). Yellow fever, dengue, and the Ebola virus disease (EVD) are more instances of hemorrhagic fevers. Hemorrhagic fevers frequently present with symptoms like high body temperatures, excruciating headaches, and bleeding from the pores of the body, which can have a high mortality rate. Native to Nigeria, Lassa fever was originally discovered there in 1969. Lassa is a town in the modern-day Borno State.

Lassa fever is common in three regions of Nigeria: the northern region, centered on Lassa; the central region, centered on Jos; and the southern region, centered on Onitsha. Epidemics happened between 2005 and 2008 in a number of states, notably Kano, Nassarawa, Plateau, and Ogun, as well as in cities like Onitsha in Enugu State, Abo Mbaise and Owerri in Imo State, and Ekpoma in Edo State, as a consequence of the widespread Lassa fever outbreak in these areas (Ossai, 2020). The Federal Capital Territory was similarly afflicted by the Lassa fever outbreak, which led to nine recorded cases and two fatalities. Sadly, in recent years, this fatal illness has claimed a large number of lives throughout Nigeria. For example, in Kebbi State, it resulted in the deaths of over seventeen people in 2010. Similar to this, from January 2011 to February 2012, 22 people died as a result of Lassa fever at Irrua Specialist Hospital in Edo State (Akhuemokhan et al, 2017).

In recent years, a man died from Lassa fever in Oyo State in August 2012 and Markurdi, Benue State, was the site of an outbreak in January 2013 (Aigbiremolen et al, 2012). In light of insufficient prevention of infections, Lassa fever sadly claimed the lives of four doctors at the National Hospital in Abuja, two doctors at the Ebonyi State University Teaching Hospital, and a member of the medical staff at the University of Benin Teaching Hospital. These outbreaks show the disease's alarmingly worrisome spread throughout all of Nigeria. Nigeria recorded 2,787 confirmed cases of Lassa fever between December 2016 and September 2020, coupled with 516 fatalities. More incidents and fatalities occurred throughout time, with 2020 recording the greatest total of either. By 2020, the disease has spread from 19 states in 2017 to 32 states including the Federal Capital Territory, with more than 60% of the cases being found in the states of Edo and Ondo. Ondo State experienced the highest number of fatalities from Lassa fever over the course of the four years. After reaching its highest point in 2017, the case fatality rate (CFR) has been dropping ever since. On an annual basis, infections reached their highest point in February, then began to decline in April as the rainy season began. Infections peaked in November at the beginning of the dry season. In general, the media disseminate information on health and increase public awareness of disease outbreaks and the need for preventative steps to slow their spread. They can also draw attention to existing problems. According to Lasswell (1984), the mass media's stabilizing functions include keeping an eye on the environment and tying many facets of society together by interpreting news about occurrences and offering remedies. The media educates the public and encourages action on topics that aid in the development and advancement of society while fulfilling its informational mission.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria, lassa fever continues to be a serious public health concern. In light of an increase in cases that exceeded the threshold for an epidemic in January 2020, the NCDC declared a Lassa fever epidemic and launched a nationwide operation known as the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC). 979 cases and 188 fatalities had been reported in 27 states and the Federal Capital Territory as of April 19th, 2020. But since then, there has been a sharp decline in Lassa virus cases, and it is no longer regarded as a national emergency. The Federal Government of Nigeria has put in place a number of efforts to stop the disease's spread, including Federal Ministry of Environment-led environmental remediation programs for Lassa fever in states with high infection rates. The goal of this response effort is to use the media to educate the general public, especially in places where cases are often reported. Any nation's citizens require sufficient knowledge on healthy lifestyles, preventative healthcare evaluates during crises, and knowledge development to prevent inexperience, misinformation, and unhealthy habits that can turn an outbreak into a pandemic. These things are necessary for any nation to have a strong and healthy populace, accomplish its economic advancement, and to industrialize. Lassa fever has been a topic of study for academics from many different fields. The information that is currently available, nevertheless, points to the fact that the majority of these studies were mostly done in Nigeria's northern and western regions, with little to no media engagement. There are not many studies that concentrate on how newspapers report on outbreaks of Lassa disease in Nigeria. Such research would be beneficial in assessing how newspapers might increase public awareness, promote information transmission, and mobilize the populace to meet the objectives set by the federal government and NCDC for encouraging personal cleanliness and lowering the prevalence of Lassa fever. Therefore, the aim of this research is to examine how Nigerian newspapers report on Lassa fever outbreaks.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What is the level of public awareness and knowledge of Lassa fever in Nigeria?
2. To what extent have newspapers contributed to public awareness and knowledge of Lassa fever in Nigeria?

1.4 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to investigate newspaper reportage of Lassa-fever outbreak in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Examine public awareness and knowledge of Lassa fever in Nigeria;
2. Measure the extent to which newspapers contribute to public awareness and knowledge of Lassa fever in Nigeria;

Literature Review

Mass Media Functions

Through its educational and awareness function, the media also tries to sensitize individuals and mobilize them to participate widely for social good. The public is exposed to new inventions and lifestyles through the mainstream media, which opens up opportunities for experiencing life in novel ways. The formulation of societal normative norms is shaped by the mainstream media, involving explicit recommendations, editorials, papers, and direct advertising.

Newspapers play a crucial role in the mainstream media in terms of giving readers accurate information, viewpoints, and analyses. They not only inform readers but also affect how they view problems and could promote novel concepts. For reliable, unbiased, and comprehensive information about events and circumstances both inside and outside of their local environment, the public depends on newspapers. There is an accepted expectation that newspapers will provide this information in order to raise public awareness of the importance of considering not only financial and security problems, but also environmental concerns and people's well-being. Having availability of trustworthy knowledge and information is crucial when it comes to health. The public needs information on healthy lifestyle choices, preventative healthcare methods, medical issues and diseases, and government healthcare programs. The traditional media is intended to play a significant role in increasing awareness, spreading information, and doing so in order to mobilize the people towards achieving national goals and desires for societal reform.

The media, in especially, serves as a vital channel for rural populations to acquire vital health information. The mass media, including radio, television, and newspapers, are effective tools for convincing the target population to embrace new behaviors or to be reminded of crucial information. According to McQuail (2005), the media serves as society's consciousness by acting as the watchdog and warning the same of changes taking place in their environment. It also serves as a mirror through which society can examine itself. Through media content like editorials, attributes, articles, and news on health issues as they arise in society, the general public's consciousness is raised.

News and News Reporting

According to Adaja (2014), news is a realistic narrative of events that people want to know about, need to know about, or should know. In light of this, an event is not news until it is shared with others who are not there at the scene of the event. The mutually beneficial relationship between society and the news media justifies the complementary roles played by the two spheres for the continuous survival of the human species. Through the dissemination of social, economic, political, and technological information, the news media lubricate the many social fabric strands.

The media is well known for playing important roles in society, including educating the public and empowering them to make wise decisions. Editors chose what to publish based on news values, which include significance, accessibility, repercussions, human interest, and anomalies. In order to promote the Millennium Development Goals, the media should take on four key tasks. These responsibilities include educating the public, influencing public opinion, creating an open forum for discussion, and holding stakeholders responsible for their deeds and choices. This study set out to assess how well the print media in East Africa have carried out their duties. According to Anaeto et al (2008), journalism is the art of gathering, creating, and disseminating news and events via the media. Journalism's mission is to inform the public about the most recent events, occurrences, trends, and advancements in all spheres of human activity. These include developing diseases, technology, science, medicine, and human well-being. As a result, journalism must focus on a variety of topics in order to meet the demands of the society and the community it helps, including procedures, methods, outcomes, goods, and people.

According to Anyadike (2013), investigative journalism comprises locating instances of law and regulatory violations in society and holding individuals in positions of authority responsible to the general public. Journalism aims to make public information that a powerful person would prefer to keep hidden. In order for the public to make educated decisions, the media works to present both sides of every story via investigative journalism.

Concept of Perception

Simply put, perception is the process through which a person interprets and makes sense of their surroundings using their physical senses. It describes how different people' or groups' attitudes and actions regarding the same social issue can vary. Social perception is processing information about another person and developing a perception about them in accordance with the information that is accessible and how it is understood.

Social perception is the process of creating an understanding of the social world through the interpretation of sensory data. Perception specifically involves the procedure of forming opinions about the features and personality traits of other people. Rao and Narayan add that attention, emotions, and the environment all have an impact on perception, and that awareness aids in the acquisition, processing, and understanding of information. Individuals develop a mental map of their environment via perception, which enables them to gather, process, and apply pertinent information to suit their requirements. According to Luthan (2005), perception is a complicated cognitive procedure that gives rise to a person's unique interpretation of the environment, which could not be accurate. Furthermore, he emphasizes how perception is mostly learned and varies from person to person because everyone has a different style of filtering and processing information. Due to each person's distinct perspective, even in the same scenario or stimuli, people may respond or behave significantly differently.

According to Asogun et al (2012), communication must have the following five characteristics: transactional in nature, efficient, instrumental, personal, and symbolically. The transactional feature, which describes the ongoing impact that both the sender and receiver have on one other via symbolic behavior, is considered to be the most significant of these features, in their opinion.

Role and Functions of Media in Society

The media is crucial for influencing public opinion and promoting social cohesion in today's environment. The media, which is occasionally described as the "sword arm of democracy," serves as a watchdog to defend the public interest against misconduct and increase public awareness. The media, which after the legislative, executive, and judicial branches forms the fourth pillar of democracy, has a broad obligation to combat prejudice, misconduct, and unfairness in society. In addition, by waging unrelenting campaigns against them, the media plays a critical role in addressing problems like bribery, corruption, and dishonesty inside institutional systems.

Additionally, mass education is most effectively and economically delivered through the media. In a far-off village, even one radio set may spread a great amount of information. However, if used incorrectly, the media can lead to civil unrest and national and international conflict through slanted and hostile reporting. To guarantee that media has beneficial effects on society and advances the common good, it is imperative to use it appropriately and ethically (Biswanath,2015). The dominance of media moguls, corporate behemoths, repressive governments, and industrial superpowers can distribute news and information that could incite violence and disorder. Unfortunately, media professionals sometimes neglect their responsibility of impartial journalism in their goal of name and celebrity. Notwithstanding the dangers of abusing the power of the media, it continues to be a vital tool in building a society that is free of hunger, disease, illiteracy, and unemployment. The media are recognized by academics as being watchdogs that protect the public interest by examining the important spheres of society and exposing fraud and corruption. The media, which sets the agenda, increases public awareness of social and health issues, particularly when serious situations call for immediate action.

The media, acting as gatekeepers, offers viewpoints and voices to discuss urgent problems. As information interpreters, the media look for significant topics and place them in perspective so that media consumers can understand them.

News Media Coverage and Health Information

A wide range of media, including print, television, radio, and the internet, have a substantial impact on how the public feels about health-related issues. It has a significant impact on how the public perceives health issues and frames them, influencing our worries and directing our mental procedures. Therefore, public health professionals have long recognized and stressed that it is crucial for the media to deliver accurate and truthful information about health and science issues to the general public. Several studies have been conducted over the past 30 years to learn more about how journalists in media organizations acquire and deliver news as well as how to get more significant health and medical topics covered in the media. The media is also essential in getting the attention of powerful people like legislators, regulators, community leaders, and business executives. Several examples of how journalism has aided reforms in healthcare systems. For example, the media was crucial in raising awareness of the AIDS epidemic and ensuring that it was given national attention by lawmakers and officials. The news media also aided in igniting community- or local-level action. Health communication campaigns are deliberate initiatives to employ communication methods to assist many individuals quickly in achieving specific goals. These programs have existed in the United States since the 18th century, when efforts were made to educate the public about communicable diseases and the benefits of vaccination. During a smallpox epidemic in Boston in 1721, Reverend Cotton Mather persuaded residents to get immunized using flyers and personal appeals. These initiatives, according to Atkin (2001), may have indirectly and prolonged advantages because they increase people's knowledge, motivate them to look for information, and promote interpersonal connection, all of which aid in the early phases of decision-making. Public service

advertising, according to Balbach and Glantz (1998), has the capacity to influence public debate, advocate for changes in laws and regulations, as well as promote certain behavioral changes. Free and paid media both have a significant impact on how public agencies are influenced. Proponents for the programs can influence how the public views situations by running their own commercials and building a platform for their position. When other forums, such as legislatures or oversight bodies, have proven inactive, and this strategy can be particularly efficient.

The Social Responsibility Theory

According to the Social Responsibility Theory, which was created in 1963 by Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm, the media has significant societal assignments and duties. Media workers should uphold professional standards, such as giving the public information that is accurate, true, impartial, and balanced, in order to adhere to these commitments. The media must also be held responsible by society. This theory, which serves as the basis for our study, contends that the mass media in any given society have a responsibility to inform the public of relevant, accurate information in order to prevent ignorance, poorly deliberate choices, and inaction that could contribute to the spread of diseases in the community. This theory's central tenet is the notion that freedom entails obligations, and that the media, which has the freedom to spread knowledge, has a duty to act responsibly toward society. As a result, self-regulation and accepted social norms should serve as the foundation for socially acceptable media behavior (Anaeto et al., 2008). Agbanu (2013:161) claims that the abuse associated with the Libertarian philosophy led to the development of the Social Responsibility philosophy. It was acknowledged that regulations were required to make sure the press was responsible and answerable to society.

In Nigeria, the media made a concerted effort to learn the truth about Lassa fever and inspired the populace to fight its eradication by giving facts and well-informed perspectives as the basis for judgment. By positioning themselves as key players in the fight against transmissible diseases as well as actively taking part in the attempts of society to eliminate them, media professionals can position themselves as vital players in the Social Responsibility Theory, according to Baran and Davis (2012). This theory is based on a number of fundamental ideas, such as acknowledging and upholding specific social responsibilities, self-regulating while abiding by established regulations and institutions, avoiding behaviors that could incite violence, cause civil unrest, or offend minority groups, accomplishing high standards of performance in the public interest, and being responsible to both society and employers or markets. The argument is pertinent given that it is the media's legal responsibility to inform and educate the public about local events, such as the breakout of Lassa virus, and to make sure that they are aware of the risks associated and how to stop its spread. This will aid in not only preventing the spread of the disease but also in teaching the general public about their duty to maintain a clean and healthy environment.

Empirical Reviews

Lovejoy (2007) demonstrated how the media affects how we understand health-related topics. Lovejoy (2007) also pointed out that the media is a major source of health information for decision-makers. According to Lovejoy (2007), a study on "A Content Analysis of Cancer News Coverage in Appalachian Ohio Community Newspapers," the mass media is a vital source of health information for the wider population. Samba (2008) stressed the value of newspapers as a medium for informing the public of news and information. They emphasized the critical role that newspapers play in advancing health development through successful health communication and campaigns. The media was crucial in raising the public's knowledge of the health problems caused by the Lassa fever pandemic. Adewuyi et al. (2009) noted that while Nigeria has seen outbreaks of Lassa fever before, this time around the number of fatalities is typically larger than it was in the prior epidemic.

When you take into account that other West African nations like Mali, Congo, and Senegal have not only reduced the frequency of incidence but have also mobilized against ignorance, filthy, and unsanitary environments and procedures, this becomes alarming. This study aims to investigate the epidemiology, clinical characteristics, laboratory diagnosis, therapy, and preventive measures of Lassa fever. The results of the study indicate that since there is presently no vaccination for the illness, public awareness campaigns that emphasize good personal cleanliness habits are the most efficient means of managing it.

This is crucial since the disease has a significant impact on the high rates of maternal, neonatal, and infant death that impede the fulfillment of the MDGs. According to Gupta and Sinha (2010), consumers frequently rely on the news media to learn about health-related topics. As noted in the works of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2004), good communication can have positive effects on people, communities, and societies, as stated by Smith and McKyer (2011). Additionally, they noted that people's awareness, knowledge, attitudes, self-efficacy, abilities, and commitment to behavior modification can all be increased through good health communication. Development eventually attempts to increase people's alternatives and create a setting that allows people to live healthy, long, and productive lives.

Research Methodology

The study's research design included a triangulation of content analysis, surveys, and personal interviews. Using a mixed method research strategy, the study collected, evaluated, and integrated quantitative and qualitative data to provide a more comprehensive picture of the research problem. This study's data was gathered using three different approaches. The first method, in no particular order, was descriptive survey. The second strategy was an in-depth personal interview (IDI). The third method was content analysis. The data gathering method for the study began with some preliminary actions, such as picking three newspapers to be studied and providing a rationale for doing so. In addition, the demographic and sample for data collection, as well as the unit of analysis and variables, were identified. To collect data, the composite sampling technique was utilized, which included creating a composite week for each month in the sample. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2011), this strategy is widely employed in content analysis studies, in which the researcher selects a single day of the week (e.g., Tuesday) at random from the available four or five days in the month until each weekday gets included in the sample. The study also gathered information from questionnaires issued to reporters and health page editors, as well as organized interviews.

Three news papers were selected for this study which are: the Punch, the Guardian, and the Nigerian Tribune newspapers. The purposive sampling method was adopted as the sampling method. Two thousand four hundred (2,400) respondents were selected from the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria through multi-stage sampling technique. Twelve health correspondents and editors were purposively interviewed and data from the interviews were analysed. The data gathered from the in-depth interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Data Analysis

Research Question 1: What is the level of public awareness and knowledge of Lassa fever in Nigeria?

Zones	Newspaper Type	Familiarity With Audience			Sub	Total
		Very Familiar	Familiar	Not Familiar	Total	
South-West	<i>Punch</i>	50 (2.1%)	52(2.2%)	40 (1.7%)	142 (5.9%)	395 (16.6%)
	<i>The Guardian</i>	38 (1.6%)	39 (1.6%)	41 (1.7%)	118 (4.%)	
	<i>Nigerian Tribune</i>	46 (1.9%)	33(1.4%)	56 (2.3%)	135 (5.6%)	
South-East	<i>Punch</i>	65 (2.7%)	33 (1.4%)	29 (1.2%)	127 (5.3%)	400 (16.8%)
	<i>The Guardian</i>	41 (1.7%)	64 (2.7%)	28 (1.2%)	133 (5.6%)	
	<i>Nigerian Tribune</i>	34 (1.4%)	32 (1.3%)	74 (3.1%)	140 (5.8%)	
South-South	<i>Punch</i>	55 (2.3%)	43 (1.8%)	40 (1.7%)	138 (5.8%)	

	<i>The Guardian</i>	42 (1.8%)	40 (1.7%)	25 (2.1%)	132 (5.5%)	
	<i>Nigerian Tribune</i>	33 (1.4%)	46 (1.9%)	51 (2.1%)	130 (5.4%)	400 (16.8%)
North-West	<i>Punch</i>	35 (1.5%)	60 (2.5%)	50 (2.1%)	145 (6.0%)	
	<i>The Guardian</i>	51 (2.1%)	40 (1.7%)	35 (1.5%)	126 (5.2%)	
	<i>Nigerian Tribune</i>	40 (1.7%)	39 (1.6%)	45 (1.9%)	124 (5.2%)	395 (16.6%)
North-East	<i>Punch</i>	37 (1.5%)	40 (1.7%)	49 (2.0%)	126 (5.2%)	
	<i>The Guardian</i>	40 (1.7%)	55 (2.3%)	38 (1.6%)	133 (5.5%)	
	<i>Nigerian Tribune</i>	56 (2.3%)	40 (1.7%)	40 (1.7%)	136 (5.7%)	395 (16.6%)
North-Central	<i>Punch</i>	47 (2.0%)	72 (3.0%)	28 (1.2%)	147 (6.1%)	
	<i>The Guardian</i>	63 (2.6%)	20 (0.8%)	44 (1.8%)	127 (5.3%)	
	<i>Nigerian Tribune</i>	40 (1.7%)	48 (2.0%)	38 (1.6%)	126 (5.2%)	400 (16.8%)
TOTAL						2385

Table 4.1: Familiarity with Audience.

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Interpretation:

It was revealed that 10.8%, 11.2%, 10.9%, 11.1%, 11.2%, 12.1% of the respondents were familiar with the newspapers on the newsstands in South-West, South-East, South-South, North-West, North-East, and North-central respectively, with the largest percentage of 12.1% familiar with *the Newspaper in North-Central on public awareness and knowledge of Lassa fever in Nigeria.*

Research Question 2: To what extent has newspapers contributed to the public awareness and knowledge of Lassa fever in Nigeria?

Zones	Newspaper Type	Knowledge Level Due To Lassa Fever Reportage			Sub Total	Total
		Very knowledgeable	More knowledgeable	Knowledgeable		
South-West	<i>Punch</i>	38(1.6%)	39(1.6%)	40(1.7%)	117(4.9%)	
	<i>The Guardian</i>	47(2.0%)	59(2.5%)	35(1.5%)	141(5.9%)	
	<i>Nigerian Tribune</i>	58(2.4%)	45(1.9%)	34(1.4%)	137(5.7%)	395 (16.6%)
South-East	<i>Punch</i>	48(2.0%)	39(1.6%)	56(2.4%)	143(6.0%)	
	<i>The</i>	31(1.3%)	54(2.3%)	34(1.4%)	119(5.0%)	

	<i>Guardian</i>					400
	<i>Nigerian Tribune</i>	43(1.8%)	45(1.8%)	50(2.1%)	138(5.8%)	(16.8%)
South-South	<i>Punch</i>	39(1.6%)	67(2.8%)	43(1.8%)	149(6.2%)	
	<i>The Guardian</i>	38(1.6%)	57(2.4%)	34(1.4%)	129(5.4%)	
	<i>Nigerian Tribune</i>	44(1.8%)	33(1.6%)	20(1.7%)	122(5.1%)	400 (16.8%)
North-West	<i>Punch</i>	35(1.5%)	52(2.2%)	43(1.8%)	130(5.4%)	
	<i>The Guardian</i>	42(1.8%)	52(2.2%)	34(1.8%)	137(5.7%)	
	<i>Nigerian Tribune</i>	44(1.8%)	38(1.6%)	46(1.9%)	128(5.3%)	395 (16.6%)
North-East	<i>Punch</i>	48(20%)	39(1.6%)	45(1.9%)	132(5.5%)	
	<i>The Guardian</i>	47(2.0%)	54(2.3%)	35(1.5%)	136(5.7%)	
	<i>Nigerian Tribune</i>	47(2.0%)	45(1.9%)	35(1.5%)	127(5.3%)	395 (16.6%)
North-Central	<i>Punch</i>	44(1.8%)	67(2.8%)	43(1.8%)	154(6.4%)	
	<i>The Guardian</i>	47(2.0%)	52(2.2%)	35(1.5%)	134(5.6%)	400
	<i>Nigerian Tribune</i>	44(1.8%)	43(1.8%)	25(1.0%)	112(4.7%)	(16.8%)
Total						2385

Table 4.2: Level of satisfaction*Source: Field Survey, 2021***Interpretation**

As observed from the data obtained from respondents, it was noted that all of the respondents claimed to have, at least, gained more knowledge about the Lassa fever through newspaper reportage of the disease. Meanwhile, 35.4% of the respondents claimed to have gained more knowledge from *the Punch* newspaper with *Nigerian Tribune* newspaper following closely with 33.6% of respondents' selection. Thirty-two point three percent of *Guardian* readers made the same claim. The credibility of a medium to sustain itself is in its ability to provide accurate, correct, and timely information. According to Fortunato (2005), a significant goal of the media is to not only increase citizens' awareness but also to enable them to make informed choices.

Conclusion

The general goals and objectives of this study were realized based on the outcomes of this research endeavor. As a result, the findings in this study indicated that newspaper coverage of Lassa fever disease had a considerable impact on public awareness of the condition. This indicates that people's awareness of the condition can be influenced by newspaper coverage. The reportage style and ideology of the three journals clearly differed. The significance level of respondents' perceptions suggested a statistically significant difference in respondents' perceptions of Lassa fever sickness newspaper coverage. According to the findings, a bigger percentage of the population (60.3%) felt that the three newspapers' coverage of the condition was inadequate. The examination of the survey method using the administered questionnaire revealed that 60.3% of respondents thought the newspaper coverage of the health problem was appropriate. According to the findings, 5.7.1% of respondents were happy with the Lassa fever reporting. Furthermore, the Lassa fever coverage provided respondents with enough knowledge of the disease's causes, transmission, effects, preventative measures and control. According to McQuil (2005), "the media serve as the conscience of the society by acting as the watchdog and warning the public of the changes around them" and "provide the society with a mirror of itself."

The media must satisfy the information needs of the society in which it operates by attempting to inform, alert, persuade, interpret, educate, lead, inspire, and design ways for a civil and organized society. The media is mandated by law to inform, educate, and amuse the society in which it functions. Four health reporters from each of the chosen publications were questioned for the interview. Based on their professional expertise, 83.3% of respondents thought that newspaper coverage of the Lassa fever pandemic gave the public enough information to be aware of it. Lassa fever outbreak was hampered in large part by the state of the economy and the availability of scientific data. While 25% of the health reporters said that the information provided by scientists was insufficient for comprehensive public awareness and education about Lassa virus, 50% of them identified the bad economy as a key barrier preventing people from having free access to information. They learned from their experience that gathering data on Lassa fever was difficult because the data sources were uncooperative.

Recommendations

1. Reportage of Lassa fever disease by the three (3) newspapers under study should not be too focused on a section of the disease. Other than majorly educating the public on the causes, more emphasis should be laid on prevention, effects, control, and transmission of the disease.
2. Encouraging discussion of the Lassa fever disease among groups in the society. This is better done at village squares, town halls, and interpersonal levels for effective mobilisation against seasonal pandemics like the Corona virus –Covid 19.
3. Other than through the news and editorials, information could be passed on through cartoons and advertisements as children would gain a considerably good amount of knowledge about the disease through cartoons.

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