

Innovations

Coverage of COVID-19 Pandemic in Five Selected Newspapers in Nigeria

**Anyakoha Belinda.U., Cookey, Ibiere.T., Ugwu Alphonsus c., Odenigbo Cynthia.I,
Ogbonna Alozie.C & Wogu Joseph.O**

Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Abstract

This study focused on health journalism's crucial role in shaping public opinion and behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a specific focus on Nigerian newspapers (Daily Sun, The Guardian, Vanguard, This Day, and Daily Trust). The research aimed to evaluate the newspapers' COVID-19 coverage, strengths, and weaknesses, emphasizing the importance of accurate health information during outbreaks. The study investigated the volume and depth of COVID-19 coverage, the reporting formats used, major news sources, and dominant frames employed. Using a content analysis research method, the study examined 5,480 editions of the newspapers as the population, selecting a sample size of 315 through multi-stage sampling. Data collection was conducted using the constructed week approach, and data were obtained from newspapers. The analysis revealed that COVID-19 coverage dominated all major health outbreaks in Nigeria among the selected newspapers at 61.92%. Reports with a length below one-quarter page were the prevailing depth, accounting for 49.39% of the coverage. Straight news format was the dominant mode for reporting COVID-19 news at 38.74%. Government agencies were the major news sources for COVID-19 coverage at 31.72%, and the human interest frame was the dominant approach at 31.00%. Results from the null hypotheses showed no significant difference in the volume of COVID-19 reports, the depth of coverage, the format used, and the dominant frame employed among the selected newspapers. Based on the findings, the study recommended continuous training for journalists to enhance information dissemination during public health crises, increased attention from both the government and media on public health issues, and a research-oriented approach to news gathering and reporting for journalists covering health-related news.

Keywords: Health journalism, COVID-19 coverage, Nigerian newspapers, Content analysis,

Public opinion

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed significant challenges globally, including in Nigeria. The emergence of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) in November 2019, originating from a seafood market in Wuhan, China, quickly spread to over 200 countries and territories, causing widespread panic and anxiety. Researchers, such as Zhao, Cui, and Tian (2020), have proposed that the virus may have originated in bats and transmitted to humans through intermediary species like pangolins, pigs, or civets. COVID-19 spreads among humans through respiratory droplets and can survive on surfaces for days (Rezaei & Netz, 2021; Vasickova, Pavlik, Verani, & Carducci, 2010). As of January 19, 2023, there have been 672,337,015 confirmed cases and 6,736,651 deaths worldwide, with Nigeria reporting 266,000 cases and 3,155 deaths (World Health Organization, 2023). The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a public health emergency of international concern on January 30, 2020, and a global pandemic on March 11, 2020. This unprecedented health crisis led to significant global disruptions, including the postponement or cancellation of events, fears of supply shortages, and a severe economic blow (Congressional Research Service, 2021). Nigeria also experienced harsh economic conditions, with the country entering its deepest economic recession since the 1980s due to lockdown measures and the plummeting price of crude oil (Abomaye-Nimenibo, 2021).

Media coverage plays a critical role in shaping public perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors during health crises. In the case of COVID-19, the media has been instrumental in disseminating information, combating misinformation, and addressing public fears. The Nigerian media, in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Health and the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, launched extensive campaigns to sensitize the public and counteract misinformation circulating online. These efforts were crucial in educating individuals about the nature of the virus and curbing the spread of panic (Okorie, 2022).

The general objective of the study aims to examine the media coverage of COVID-19 in Nigeria by conducting a content analysis of five prominent national newspapers, namely *Daily Sun*, *the Guardian*, *Vanguard*, *This Day*, and *Daily Trust Newspapers*

Specifically, this study seeks to

- Ascertain the volume of coverage by the selected newspaper on COVID-19 pandemic in

Nigeria.

- Examine the depth of coverage of the selected newspaper on COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.
- Determine the formats of coverage used by the selected newspapers in reporting the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.
- Identify the major sources of news reports by the selected newspapers on the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.
- Determine the dominant frames used by the selected newspapers in the coverage of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.

The study was also guided by the following null hypothesis:

HO₁: There is no significant difference in the volume of COVID-19 reports among the selected newspapers in Nigeria.

HO₂: There is no significant difference in the depth of coverage of COVID-19 pandemic by the selected newspapers in Nigeria.

HO₃: There is no significant difference in the formats used by the selected newspapers for reporting COVID-19 pandemic.

HO₄: There is no significant difference in the sources of news reports on the COVID-19 pandemic by selected newspapers.

HO₅: There is no significant difference in the dominant frames used by selected newspapers in the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.

Media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic

Media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic has been a subject of interest for researchers, who have conducted several studies to understand its impact on society. Guntuku et al. (2020) explored Twitter data and found a significant increase in discussions about mental health symptoms during the pandemic. Allcott et al. (2020) analyzed Google search data and discovered that political affiliation influenced adherence to social distancing measures, with Republicans searching for COVID-19 information less frequently than Democrats. Merchant et al. (2020) discussed the "COVID-19 infodemic," highlighting the need for accurate information to combat the large volume of misinformation circulating online and in the media.

Kang & Jeong (2021) studied news coverage in South Korea and its impact on public health awareness, noting that fear-based frames negatively affected public mental health. Vraga & Bode (2020) examined the prevalence of COVID-19 misinformation in news and social media, emphasizing the importance of accurate reporting and fact-checking. Amin, Tareque, Hasan, & Shovon (2021) analyzed news coverage in Bangladesh, underscoring the media's role in raising awareness about preventive measures despite challenges related to accuracy and consistency.

Furthermore, Jang & Kim (2021) compared news coverage in the United States and South Korea, revealing differences in their focus and framing of the pandemic. Zerback & Schmidt (2020) found that negative news about the pandemic increased stress levels for readers. Chen, Wang, & Lai (2021) addressed the concept of the "infodemic," emphasizing news outlets' role in providing reliable information to the public.

The major sources of news reports on the COVID-19 pandemic included international news agencies like Reuters, AP, and AFP, which played a significant role in shaping the global news agenda on the pandemic (Zhang & Liu, 2021). Schulte, Huxford, & Wiegand (2020) analyzed Twitter and identified common topics in news articles, such as public health measures, vaccine development, and economic impacts. Li & Lei (2020) compared the coverage in China and the United States, highlighting the different emphases in their reporting.

Regarding the format of coverage, Akinfeleye & Ojo (2021) analyzed Nigerian newspapers, *The Punch* and *The Guardian*, and identified themes like government responses, economic impact, and public health messaging. Umeakuana & Okorie (2020) also examined Nigerian newspapers and found similar themes, with a negative frame prevalent in their reporting. Ayodele & Oyeleye (2021) studied three major Nigerian newspapers and found a focus on negative aspects, such as case numbers and deaths, rather than positive stories of recovery.

These studies collectively underscore the significance of media coverage in shaping public perceptions and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. They highlight the importance of responsible and accurate reporting to promote public health awareness and combat misinformation. Moreover, they emphasize the need for balanced reporting that not only addresses the negative impacts of the pandemic but also shares stories of resilience and recovery.

Agenda setting Theory

The Agenda-Setting Theory, introduced by McCombs and Shaw in 1972, originated from their research during the 1968 US presidential election. They surveyed 100 citizens in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, to compare public perception of important election issues with what the local and national media deemed significant. This theory posits that the media play a pivotal role in creating public awareness and concern for salient issues, shaping what the public considers important. It is based on two key assumptions: first, the media filter and shape reality rather than merely reflecting it, and second, media concentration on specific issues leads the public to perceive them as more important than others.

The media's selection and presentation of news stories determine the agenda for the public's consideration of important issues. This process involves giving prominence to certain issues through headline display, pictures, layout, or timing in news coverage (Folarin, 2002). The media's agenda-setting power extends to two levels: the salience of objects (the focus on particular public issues) and the salience of attributes (highlighting specific characteristics or aspects of the issues) (Kiousis & McCombs, 2004).

The relevance of the agenda-setting theory in this research lies in its assumption that the media's coverage sets the agenda for what the public deems important. For instance, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the extensive coverage provided by the Nigerian press would influence how seriously the public perceives the pandemic. Additionally, the media's emphasis on specific aspects of the pandemic would shape the public's understanding and opinions about it. The theory also suggests that the media can actively contribute to public awareness about the COVID-19 virus and its transmission. Due to the massive coverage of the pandemic, the subject has been widely disseminated across Nigerian society, leading to increased public awareness.

In conclusion, the Agenda-Setting Theory asserts that the media have the power to shape public perception by determining the importance and salience of issues. In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, the media's extensive coverage and emphasis on certain aspects have likely influenced the Nigerian public's understanding and response to the crisis. As such, this theory is relevant in this study, which aims to assess the extent of media coverage on the

COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria and its potential impact on public awareness and perceptions (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Folarin, 2002; Kiouisis & McCombs, 2004).

.Research Design

The research design employed in this study involved the use of content analysis. The population. In this study covers all editions/issues published by the five selected newspapers). *Daily Sun, The Guardian, Vanguard, This Day, and Daily Trust Newspapers* for a 3-year term (January 2020 to December 2022). The research period in Nigeria encompassed the first and second waves of the pandemic. The study's population totaled 5,480 editions. This figure was arrived at by multiplying the total number of publication for each newspaper which is 366 for 2020 (leap year) and 365 each for 2021 and 2022 which $(1096 \times 5 = 5,480)$ by the five newspapers used for the study. A total 315 editions of the selected newspapers formed the sample size which was calculated by multiplying the 21 issues selected per year by the number of newspapers and years studied $(21 \times 5 \times 3 = 315)$.

The study used a multistage sampling procedure. Firstly, five newspapers were purposively selected based on their popularity across Nigeria's geopolitical zones. Secondly, the sample frame covered January 2020 to December 2022, encompassing major COVID-19 outbreaks and vaccination periods. Lastly, the constructed week approach was employed to select 315 editions from the five newspapers, ensuring efficient and representative content representation.

Table 1 Showing selection and sample size for 2020.

Months/Week	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Week A	7 th Jun	2 nd Mar	24 th Nov	29 th July	31 st Dec	10 th July	15 th Feb
Week B	6 th Sept	12 th Oct	21 st Apr	26 th Aug	2 nd Jan	8 th May	19 th Dec
Week C	19 th Jan	21 st Sept	7 th July	13 th May	20 th Feb	14 th Aug	31 st Oct

Table 2 Showing selection and sample size for 2021.

Month/Week	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Week A	24 th Jan	11 th Oct.	13 th Apr	3 rd Mar	14 th Jan	4 th June	25 th Dec
Week B	4 th July	15 th Nov	30 th Nov	8 th Sept.	27 th May	27 th Aug	31 st July
Week C	28 th Feb	15 th Mar	7 th Dec	10 th Feb	28 th Oct	25 th June	27 th Nov

Table 3 Showing selection and sample size for 2022.

Month/Week	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Week A	4 th Dec	7 th Feb	6 th Sept	27 th April	13 th Jan	28 th Oct	8 th Oct
Week B	20 th Nov	14 th Mar	5 th July	10 th August	22 nd Dec	25 th June	30 th Apr
Week C	1 st May	7 th May	22 nd Feb	31 st August	3 rd Feb	27 th May	5 th Mar

Using the Hosti’s formula, the intercoder reliability result was computed to .8, meaning that the instrument is reliable and dependable.

Results

Table 4: Media published by the selected newspapers in their coverage of COVID-19

Option Media (Volume of coverage)	Frequency					Percentage (%)	
	<i>Daily Sun</i>	<i>This Day</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>Daily Trust</i>	<i>Total</i>	
COVID-19	82	73	79	113	66	413	61.92
Lassa Fever	17	12	23	21	16	89	13.34
Malaria	33	34	11	9	8	95	14.24
Cancer	9	4	13	10	12	48	7.20
Other infectious Diseases	7	2	5	3	5	22	3.20
Total	138	115	111	126	107	667	100

Table 4 above shows the frequency distribution of news on different health issues in the five selected dailies from January 2020 till December 2022. The results showed that COVID-19 had the most volume of news in the selected dailies within that period. The results further showed that COVID-19 coverage had a high proportion of coverage at 61.92% during that period. The results further showed that among the selected dailies, *Guardian newspapers* had the highest number of news about coronavirus with a total of 113 news items, while *Daily Trust newspaper* had the least amount of news items on the coronavirus with 66 news items.

Table 5. Depth of coverage in the selected newspapers coverage of COVID-19 pandemic

Option Depth of coverage	Frequency					Percentage(%)	
	<i>Daily Sun</i>	<i>This Day</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>Daily Trust</i>	<i>Total</i>	
Full page	3	7	8	11	4	33	7.99
Half page	7	11	11	23	9	61	14.77
Quarter page	29	17	21	31	17	115	27.85
Below quarter page	43	38	39	48	36	204	49.39
Total	82	73	79	113	66	413	100.00

Table 5 above shows the depth of coverage of COVID-19 news among the five selected dailies within the study period. Results from table shows that full page news items of below one quarter of a page have the highest frequency of news reports on COVID-19 during the study period among the selected dailies with a frequency of 204 news items and a proportion of 49.39%. This is followed by news items of quarter page with a frequency of 115 news items and a proportion of 27.85%. News items of COVID-19 covering half page of newspapers was third highest with a frequency of 61 and a proportion of 14.77% while full page news items were the lowest with a frequency of 33 and a proportion of 7.99%.

Table 6. Story Formats used in the coverage of COVID-19 pandemic

Option Story Formats	Frequency					Percentage(%)	
	<i>Daily Sun</i>	<i>This Day</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>Daily Trust</i>	<i>Total</i>	
Straight News	29	24	32	49	26	160	38.74
Feature News	16	13	11	17	8	65	15.74
Editorials	17	14	13	21	13	78	18.89
Columns	20	22	23	26	19	110	26.63
Total	82	73	79	113	66	413	100.00

Table 6 above shows the story formats used for reporting COVID-19 news in the five selected dailies during the study period. Results show that straight news format had the highest frequency of with a total of 160 items and a proportion of 38.74%. This was followed by columns with a frequency of 100 and a proportion of 26.63%, followed by editorials with a frequency of 78 and a proportion of 18.89%. Feature news has the lowest story format with a frequency of 65 and proportion of 15.74%.

Table 7. Source Actors of News Report in the coverage of COVID-19 pandemic

Option Variables	Frequency				Daily Trust	Percentage(%)	
	Daily Sun	This Day	Vanguard	Guardian		Total	
Government agencies	26	19	23	44	19	131	31.72
Healthcare professional	8	7	11	15	11	52	12.59
International Organizations	5	9	12	11	6	43	10.41
Academic institutions	7	6	6	16	9	44	10.65
NGOs	8	5	5	9	7	34	8.23
Industry representatives	11	12	12	9	6	50	12.11
Community members	17	15	10	9	8	59	14.29
Total	82	73	79	113	66	413	100.00

Table 7 reveals the source actors of news reports on the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria by the selected newspapers with the study period. The results showed that government agencies have the highest frequency source of news actors with 131 source actors and a proportion of 31.72%. This was followed by community members with a frequency of 59 and a proportion of 14.29%. Healthcare professionals had the third highest number of source actors with a frequency of 52 and a proportion of 12.59%. This is followed by industry representatives with a frequency of 50 and a proportion of 12.11% and then academic institutions with a frequency of 44 and a proportion of 10.65%. The lowest source actors from the five selected dailies during the study period are non- governmental organizations (NGOs) with a frequency of 34 and a proportion of 8.23%.

Table 8. Dominant News Frames used in the coverage of COVID-19 pandemic

Option Dominant Frames	Frequency				Daily Trust	Percentage(%)	
	Daily Sun	This Day	Vanguard	Guardian		Total	
Human interest frame	28	22	25	34	19	128	31.00
Religious frame	15	19	17	21	11	83	20.10
Cultural belief frame	11	10	19	17	11	68	16.45
Political frame	19	14	12	15	9	69	16.71
Economic frame	9	8	6	26	16	65	15.74
Total	82	73	79	113	66	413	100.00

Table 8 shows the Dominant News Frames Adopted for the Coverage of COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria by the selected newspapers during the study period. Results show that human interest frame has the highest number with a frequency of 128 and a proportion of 31%. This is followed by religious frame with a frequency of 83 and a proportion of 20.10%. Political

frame has the next highest number with a frequency of 69 and a proportion of 16.71% closely followed by cultural belief frame with a frequency of 68 and a proportion of 16.45%. Economic frame has the lowest frequency among the five selected dailies with a frequency of 65 and a proportion of 15.74%.

Test of Hypothesis

A total of five (5) null hypotheses guided the study. Chi-square was used in conducting the hypothesis test.

Hypothesis 1

HO₁: There is no significant difference in the volume of the COVID-19 reports among selected newspapers in Nigeria.

Table 9: Chi-Square Test for Association: Volume of coverage, and New papers

Rows: Volume of coverage		Columns: Worksheet columns					
		Daily Sun	This Day	Vanguard	Guardian	Daily Trust	All
COVID-19		82 91.64	73 77.40	79 81.11	113 96.59	66 66.25	413
Lasser Fever		17 19.75	12 16.68	23 17.48	21 20.82	16 14.28	89
Malaria		33 21.08	34 17.80	11 18.66	9 22.22	8 15.24	95
Cancer		9 10.65	4 9.00	13 9.43	10 11.23	12 7.70	48
Other infections diseases		7 4.88	2 4.12	5 4.32	3 5.15	5 3.53	22
All		148	125	131	156	107	667
Cell Contents:	Count						
	Expected count						

Pearson Chi-Square = 54.223, DF = 16, P-Value = 0.000
Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square = 54.053, DF = 16, P-Value = 0.000

* NOTE * 4 cells with expected counts less than 5

Results from table 9 shows the observed values and the expected values assuming no relationship. The results showed that the Human-interest frame has a value of 128 among the

selected Newspapers in Nigeria. It also has a high p-value = 0.151 which is greater than 0.05. Thus given the data we reject the Null Hypothesis and say at least there is a significant different with the Major sources of News Reports across the selected newspapers.

Test of Hypothesis 2

HO₂: There is no significant difference in the depth of coverage of COVID-19 pandemic by the selected newspapers in Nigeria.

Table 10: Chi-Square Test for Association: Depth of Coverage, Worksheet columns

Rows: Depth of Coverage	Columns: Worksheet columns					
	Daily Sun	This day	Vanguard	Guardian	Daily Trust	All
Full page	3 6.55	7 5.83	8 6.31	11 9.03	4 5.27	33
Half Page	7 12.11	11 10.78	11 11.67	23 16.69	9 9.75	61
Quarter Page	29 22.83	17 20.33	21 22.00	31 31.46	17 18.38	115
Below quarter page	43 40.50	38 36.06	39 39.02	48 55.82	36 32.60	204
All	82	73	79	113	66	413
Cell Contents:	Count					
	Expected count.					

Pearson Chi-Square = 12.064, DF = 12, P-Value = 0.441
 Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square = 12.586, DF = 12, P-Value = 0.40

Results from table 10 above shows the observed values are at the top and the expected values assuming no relationship. Its shows that the depth of coverage across 5 Nigeria Newspapers where Below quarter pages which has the highest number of 204 than a full page of 33 for the selected newspapers. Since the p-value is > 0.05 we reject the Null hypothesis and accept the Alternative hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant different of the depth of coverage across 5 selected Newspapers.

Test of Hypothesis 3

HO₃: There is no significant difference in the format used by the selected newspapers for presenting the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 11: Chi-Square Test for Association: Story Formats, Worksheet columns

Rows: Story Formats		Cols: Worksheet columns					
	Daily	Sun	Thisday	Vanguard	Guardian	Daily Trust	All
Straight News	29 31.77	24 28.28	32 30.61	49 43.78	26 25.57	160	
Feature News	16 12.91	13 11.49	11 12.43	17 17.78	8 10.39	65	
Editorials	17 15.49	14 13.79	13 14.92	21 21.34	13 12.46	78	
Columns	20 21.84	22 19.44	23 21.04	26 30.10	19 17.58	110	
All	82	73	79	113	66	413	
Cell Contents:	Count	Expected count					

Pearson Chi-Square = 5.045, DF = 12, P-Value = 0.956
 Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square = 5.073, DF = 12, P-Value = 0.955

The results from table 11 shows the observed values are at the top and the expected values assuming no relationship. Its shows that the Story Formats used in the coverage of COVID-19 pandemic in the selected newspapers was Straight news and the least story format was Features News. It's having a high P-value of 0.95 was above 0.05 and it can be concluded that among the selected newspapers we do not accept the Null hypothesis rather the Alternative hypothesis which says there is at least a significant difference in the story format among the selected newspapers.

Test of Hypothesis 4

HO₄: There is no significant difference in the source actors of news reports on the COVID-19 pandemic by selected newspapers.

Table 12: Chi-Square Test for Association: Major Sources of News Reports, Worksheet columns

Rows: Major Sources of News Reports	Columns: Worksheet columns					
	Daily Sun	Thisday	Vanguard	Guardian	Daily Trust	All
Government agencies	26 26.010	19 23.155	23 25.058	44 35.843	19 20.935	131
Healthcare professional	8 10.324	7 9.191	11 9.947	15 14.228	11 8.310	52
International Organizations	5 8.538	9 7.600	12 8.225	11 11.765	6 6.872	43
Academic institutions	7 8.736	6 7.777	6 8.416	16 12.039	9 7.031	44
NGOs	8 6.751	5 6.010	5 6.504	9 9.303	7 5.433	34
Industry representatives	11 9.927	12 8.838	12 9.564	9 13.680	6 7.990	50
Community members	17 11.714	15 10.429	10 11.286	9 16.143	8 9.429	59
All	82	73	79	113	66	413

Cell Contents: Count
 Expected count
 Pearson Chi-Square = 25.023, DF = 24, P-Value = 0.405
 Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square = 25.149, DF = 24, P-Value = 0.398

Results in table 12 show the observed values are at the top and the expected values assuming no relationship. The results showed that government agencies have the highest frequency source of news actors with 131 among the selected newspapers in Nigeria. It also has a high p-value = 0.398 which is greater than 0.05. in conclusion given the data we reject the Null Hypothesis and say at least there is a significant different with the Major sources of News Reports across the selected newspapers.

Test of Hypothesis 5

HO₅: There is no significant difference in the dominant frames used in the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria by the selected newspapers.

Table 14: Chi-Square Test for Association: Dominant Frames, Worksheet columns

Rows: Dominant Frames		Columns: Worksheet columns					
		Daily Sun	This day	Vanguard	Guardian	Daily Trust	All
Human interest frame		28 25.41	22 22.62	25 24.48	34 35.02	19 20.46	128
Religious frame		15 16.48	19 14.67	17 15.88	21 22.71	11 13.26	83
Cultural belief frame		11 13.50	10 12.02	19 13.01	17 18.61	11 10.87	68
Political frame		19 13.70	14 12.20	12 13.20	15 18.88	9 11.03	69
Economic frame		9 12.91	8 11.49	6 12.43	26 17.78	16 10.39	65
All		82	73	79	113	66	413
Cell Contents:	Count						
	Expected count						

Pearson Chi-Square = 22.127, DF = 16, P-Value = 0.139
 Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square = 21.757, DF = 16, P-Value = 0.151

Results from table 14 shows the observed values are at the top and the expected values assuming no relationship. The results showed that the Human-interest frame has a value of 128 among the selected Newspapers in Nigeria. It also has a high p-value = 0.151 which is greater than 0.05. In conclusion given the data we reject the Null Hypothesis and say at least there is a significant different with the Major sources of News Reports across the selected newspapers.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from the study show that during the study period, news items of COVID-19 received the highest frequency of news relating to health issues in comparison to other sicknesses and also had a dominant proportion of 61.92% coverage. This is in line with the postulations of Abubakar, Asemah and Santas (2023) who mentioned that newspapers focused more on reporting of COVID-19 news as part of their contribution towards complimenting efforts in fighting the pandemic. The authors further mentioned that publishing COVID-19 stories as well as measures for staying safe were significantly effective for influencing the adoption of beneficial health behaviours such as improved physical activities, use of hand sanitizers as well

as washing of hands with soap and water. The findings are also in tandem with the views of Anyanwu, Festus, Nwobi, Jaja and Ogutu (2020) who mentioned that COVID-19 had a high volume coverage in Nigeria due to the fact that there were worries about Nigeria's level of preparedness for dealing with the pandemic. Thus increased media coverage, especially among newspapers was necessary in order to properly keep the public informed with efforts being made to combat the virus as well as how the virus is affecting other countries globally. The authors further mentioned that high media coverage was a veritable way to increase public awareness about the coronavirus and also helps the public in keeping track with the surveillance, diagnosis and treatment of the virus in Nigeria.

The findings from the study show that in terms of depth of coverage of coronavirus news, items of less than a quarter of a page have the highest frequency and proportion of coverage depth in the selected dailies during the study period. This is in line with the views of Chinedu-Okeke, Agbasimelo, Obi and Onyejelem (2021) who mentioned that COVID-19 pandemic and issues related to it received significantly high level of coverage from Nigeria newspapers due to the fact that it could serve as a veritable means for influencing the topic on the public agenda. The study further mentioned that less than quarter size pages had the highest frequency of coverage due to the fact that different bodies and organizations were putting COVID-19 news items as a means to keep the public properly informed and sensitized about the pandemic. The authors also opined with the prevalence of this depth of coverage could also be attributed to cost of news, advert and editorial placements in newspapers, thus less than one quarter page was chosen because it is cheaper than other depths. The findings are also in tandem with the views of Apuke and Omar (2021) who mentioned that though television in Nigeria gave a high level of coverage to the COVID-19 pandemic, newspaper coverage was higher, and this was attributed to the fact private media were of the view that high level coverage of COVID-19 pandemic will increase their readership and newspapers also served as an equally effective means for disseminating news about coronavirus as well as influencing the adoption of beneficial health behaviours among the populace. The authors further mentioned that frequency of reporting health news as a positive correlation with healthy behaviour among people, thus the encouragement of increased frequency of health news.

The findings from the study show that pertaining to the format of reporting COVID-19 stories; the straight news format has the highest frequency and also the highest proportion with 38.74%. Also however, other formats such as columns, editorials and feature news were also visible formats in reporting COVID-19 news. This is in line with the postulations of Apuke and Omar (2020) who in their study surveying four national dailies in Nigeria observed that straight news format was the predominant format in reporting COVID-19 news. The authors further opined that the Nigeria news media performed well in covering the COVID-19 pandemic which in turn created awareness, but coverage was not in-depth as most of the reported stories were predominantly straight news. The authors also mentioned that most of the stories were alarming and elicited panic and most of the topics covered were cases in Nigeria, death rates and concerns about Nigeria's preparedness. The findings from the study are also in tandem with the views of Ojebiyi, Ogunkunle and Odebiyi (2021) who in their study of three online newspapers in Nigeria observed that straight news format was the predominantly used format for delivering COVID-19 stories. The authors however mentioned that columns and editorials by health experts also featured prominently, though not as much as straight news, as these were done in a concerted effort to raise public awareness about the COVID-19. The findings are also in line with the views of Nwakpu, Ezema and Ogbodo (2020) who in their content analysis study of four leading Nigeria dailies observed that straight news format was the dominant format for delivering COVID-19 news in Nigeria newspapers. The authors further observed that the pattern adopted by Nigeria newspaper for delivering COVID-19 news encouraged the populace to take precautionary measures during that period and that continuous reporting of COVID-19 news was effective in creating awareness, thereby "flattening the curve" and containing the spread of the virus. These findings are also in line with the observations of Chinedu-Okeke et. al. (2021) who in their content analysis of four leading Nigeria dailies also observed that majority of the news about the COVID-19 pandemic in the Nigeria dailies were published straight news format, columns and editorials. The authors further mentioned that the story formats elicited fear in Nigerians but significantly influenced an adoption of healthy practices that were aimed at managing the spread of the virus. These findings however differ slightly from the observations of Daniel and Amaechi (2022) who in their content analysis of *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers observed that the two newspapers took a narrow approach in the coverage of the

COVID-19 pandemic. The authors further observed that the two dailies poorly exploited the fact-finding and interpretative roles of feature stories, editorials and opinion articles in leading citizens' commitment to the containment of the pandemic.

Findings from the study show that pertaining to the source actors of COVID-19 news in the selected newspapers during the study period, government agencies were the highest source for COVID-19 news during the study period. This was followed by community members with healthcare professionals ranking third. This is in line with the views of Ojebuyi, Lasisi and Ajetunmobi (2021) who observed that that the NCDC (which is a government agency) was the major source of news of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria newspapers. The authors further mentioned that the government bodies were also able to disseminate credible information during that period as they had access to data and also fulfilled their role of showing a high level of preparedness of the government for tackling the pandemic. The authors also asserted that the NCDC was also disseminating credible information based on collaborative efforts with international health bodies, thus keeping the populace informed about treatment developments and trends globally. The findings from the study are also in tandem with the postulations of Ajegbu and Akoja (2022) who in a content analysis of four leading national dailies (the *Guardian*, *Punch*, *Vanguard* and *Daily Sun*) mentioned that government bodies such as the NCDC were the major source of COVID-19 news in Nigeria newspapers and they served as a means for reassuring citizens about the preparedness of of the health sector in meeting up with the challenges of the pandemic. The authors further mentioned that government efforts were also geared towards making for a more healthy state despite the precarious condition of the health sector of the country. The findings are also in tandem with the views of Abbas (2022) who observed that the dominant source for COVID-19 news in Nigeria newspapers were government agencies as they provided data from research as well as collaboration with international health authorities. The author further mentioned that newspaper reports of the COVID-19 serves as a means for the government to properly sensitize the public about the need to embrace vaccines available for controlling the virus and also preventing the politicization of the pandemic.

The findings from this study show that the dominant frame for reporting COVID-19 news is human interest frame with a proportion of 31%. Findings also show that religious frame (20.1%), political frame (16.7%), Cultural belief frame (16.45%) and economic frame (15.74%)

are also frames under which COVID-19 news are reported by Nigeria newspapers. This is in line with postulations of Eze, Okonkwo, Ezeugwu, Ukwueze and Ezeugwu (2021) who observed that news of COVID-19 was presented from the human interest angle with the aim of reducing disinformation and influencing certain health behaviours. The authors further mentioned that the newspaper reports were geared towards generating interest in pandemic but succeeded in engendering fear and panic in some circles, thus creating a risk of disinformation. The findings are also in tandem with the views of Onwe, Chukwu, Nwakpu, and Ogbodo (2020) who observed that newspaper reporting of the COVID-19 pandemic laid significant emphasis on the health infrastructure deficit, poverty, economy, politics and business. The authors further mentioned that newspapers in Nigeria anchored on human interest frame because every facet of COVID-19 news shared had a direct impact on human welfare within the country. The authors also observed that the pandemic did not just affect the physical health of individuals within the country but also affect the mental health as well as financial well-being of people, thus the human interest frame was dominant in newspaper reports of the pandemic. The findings are also in agreement with the views of Uzochukwu and Ikegwunam (2022) who mentioned that newspapers gave adequate coverage of COVID-19 not only because it claimed several lives but it had a significantly profound effect on how people lived because it ushered in the “new normal”, which included working from home, social distancing and cancellation of events that have crowds in attendance. The authors further mentioned that newspaper coverage of the coronavirus gave rise to behavioural changes among individuals and organizations, thus the pandemic significantly affected human welfare in different facets beyond physical health.

The results of the null hypotheses indicated that there was no significant difference in the volume of coverage of COVID-19 pandemic among the selected newspapers used for this study. The results also showed that there was no significant difference in the depth of coverage of COVID-19 stories among the selected newspapers used for the study and also there was no significant difference in the depth of coverage of COVID-19 among the selected newspapers. Results further showed that there was no significant difference in the dominant formats used by the selected newspapers in presenting COVID-19 news in Nigeria and there was also no significant difference in the major source actors of news reports on COVID-19 pandemic by the selected newspapers. These are in line with the postulations of Chinedu-Okeke et. al. (2020) who

mentioned that the COVID-19 pandemic received optimal attention among newspapers in Nigeria. The results are also in tandem with the views of Apuke and Omar (2020) who mentioned that there was significant depth in the coverage of COVID-19 stories among newspapers in Nigeria. The results are also in tandem with the views of Anyanwu, Okpevra and Imiti (2022) who mentioned that though human interest frame was the dominant frame used in reporting COVID-19 news among Nigeria newspapers, there was a significant spread in different frames among newspapers in reporting COVID-19 stories.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic had severe economic and sociological consequences globally, including in Nigeria. Newspapers played a crucial role in disseminating information, updates, and government measures to control the virus. The study analyzed five selected newspapers' coverage of COVID-19 over three years, finding no significant differences in frequency, depth, formats, source actors, and dominant frames. The study highlights the importance of newspapers in informing the public and influencing healthy behaviors, contributing to knowledge for future health challenges and effective information dissemination.

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