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## Framing the ‘Deep Scars’ of Health Emergencies: Assessment of National Newspapers Coverage of COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

### Sağlık Acil Durumlarının ‘Büyük Travma’larını Şekillendirmek: Nijerya’daki Ulusal Gazetelerin COVID-19 Pandemisi Haber Kapsamının Değerlendirilmesi

<sup>1</sup>Peter Iorper UGONDO

<sup>2</sup>Victor Stephen GANA

#### Abstract

**Aim:** This study examines how four Nigerian national newspapers, Vanguard, Daily Trust, Leadership, and Punch, framed the COVID-19 pandemic through editorial approaches, sourcing strategies, and dominant narratives, and evaluates the impact on public health communication and emergency management.

**Method:** A total of 851 articles published in 528 newspaper editions between March 2020 and December 2021 were analysed using content analysis. The study applied Entman’s micro-frame analysis to identify the main themes and frames used in reporting the pandemic. The data coding and analysis process focused on news placement, type, sourcing strategies, and dominant frames.

**Findings:** The results show that the newspapers addressed COVID-19 through frames such as prevention, treatment, transmission, support measures, vaccination, and misinformation. Placement of reports on the front page increased public interest. The most frequently cited sources were government officials and health professionals, which enhanced the credibility of the reports. However, negative framing shaped by editorial policies and political ideologies influenced public perception and complicated crisis management. Religious and cultural biases, along with misinformation, contributed to vaccine hesitancy. While early coverage focused heavily on fear and uncertainty, over time, it shifted towards more balanced perspectives.

**Conclusion:** The study underscores the significant influence of media framing on public health responses. Editorial decisions and political leanings shaped Nigeria’s COVID-19 narratives, affecting public trust

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, PhD,  
Department of Journalism and Media  
Studies, Faculty of Communication  
and Media Studies, Taraba State  
University, Jalingo, Nigeria.  
✉ [peter.ugondo@tsuniversity.edu.ng](mailto:peter.ugondo@tsuniversity.edu.ng)

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Lecturer, Department of  
Mass Communication, Kwararafa  
University Jalingo, Nigeria.  
✉ [stephengana8@gmail.com](mailto:stephengana8@gmail.com)

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and crisis management strategies. To improve health emergency reporting, media organisations should integrate religious and cultural frames, prioritise balanced coverage, and counter misinformation through evidence-based journalism.

### Keywords

COVID-19, Health emergencies, Media framing, Health communication

### Öz

**Amaç:** Bu çalışma, dört Nijerya ulusal gazetesinin (Vanguard, Daily Trust, Leadership ve Punch) COVID-19 pandemisini ele alış şekillerini editöryal yöntemler, kaynak stratejileri ve baskın anlatılar üzerinden incelemekte, bunun halk sağlığı iletişimi ve acil durum yönetimi üzerindeki etkilerini değerlendirmektedir.

**Yöntem:** Mart 2020 ile Aralık 2021 arasında yayımlanan 528 gazete sayısındaki 851 makale, içerik analizi yöntemi kullanılarak incelenmiştir. Çalışmada pandemi raporlarında kullanılan ana temaları ve çerçeveleri belirlemek için Entman'ın mikro-frame analizi uygulanmıştır. Veri kodlama ve analiz süreci, haber yerleşimi, türü, kaynak stratejileri ve baskın çerçevelere odaklanmıştır.

**Bulgular:** Sonuçlar, gazetelerin COVID-19'u önleme, tedavi, bulaşma, destek tedbirleri, aşılama ve yanlış bilgi gibi çerçeveler üzerinden ele aldığını göstermektedir. Haberin ön sayfaya yerleştirilmesi kamuoyunun ilgisini artırmıştır. En sık alıntılanan kaynaklar hükümet yetkilileri ve sağlık çalışanları olmuş, bu da haberlerin güvenilirliğini artırmıştır. Ancak, editöryal politikalar ve siyasi ideolojiler tarafından şekillendirilen olumsuz çerçeveleme, kamuoyu algısını etkilemiş ve kriz yönetimini zorlaştırmıştır. Dini ve kültürel önyargılar, yanlış bilgiyle birlikte aşı tereddüdüne katkıda bulunmuştur. İlk haberler ağırlıklı olarak korku ve belirsizliğe odaklansa da zamanla daha dengeli bakış açılarına doğru kaymıştır.

**Sonuç:** Çalışma, medya çerçevelemesinin halk sağlığı müdahaleleri üzerindeki önemli etkisinin altını çizmektedir. Editöryal kararlar ve siyasi eğilimler, Nijerya'nın COVID-19 anlatılarını şekillendirerek kamuoyu güvenini ve kriz yönetimi stratejilerini etkilemiştir. Sağlık acil durum haberciliğini iyileştirmek için medya kuruluşları, dini ve kültürel çerçeveleri bütünlendirmeli, dengeli haberciliğe öncelik vermeli ve kanıta dayalı gazetecilik yoluyla yanlış bilgilendirmeyi önlemelidir.

### Anahtar Kelimeler

COVID-19, Sağlık acil durumları, Medya çerçevelemesi, Sağlık iletişimi

## Introduction

Respite came to countries when the global health agency, the World Health Organisation, recently declared an end to COVID-19 as a health emergency (WHO, 2023). COVID-19 has tremendously affected the international community by decimating the populations and displacing socio-economic and political systems at equilibrium. Countries were oscillating from emergency response to managing the disease alongside other infectious diseases like Lassa Fever, Avian Influenza, Cholera, and Monkeypox. Indeed, health systems, economies, and societies worldwide are replete with unprecedented scars of the pandemic. The WHO (2023) said these long-term scars must be a constant reminder that other new viruses could arise with devastating effects.

In fact, after the WHO announced the Coronavirus disease as a pandemic in 2019, many countries recorded the loss of so many lives, which led to much panic and increased the anxiety level of the public (Zhou et al., 2020). As expected of the media during health emergencies, the Nigerian media shaped public perceptions, disseminated information, and influenced policy responses to the pandemic. In particular, the media was instrumental in managing the spread and prevention of the disease by framing the crisis and narrating this health emergency's 'deep scars'. The way the media selectively chose and emphasized some aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic was crucial, as it could instill fear in readers' minds, leading to uncertainty and the formulation of extreme measures against the issue at hand (Fawole et al., 2012).

Of course, media framing has the potential to significantly influence public interpretation and behaviour during health crises, affecting compliance with health advice and acceptance of public health interventions. Moreover, the public discourse generated by the media can alter policy discourse, thereby influencing decision-making and resource allocation (Ugondo, 2019). National newspapers have a history of leading public opinion and driving social change in Nigeria, including introducing electoral reforms (Ugondo, 2018). According to Ogwiji et al. (2024), media framing of health emergencies often influences the understanding and actions of the general public toward community reactions to health guidelines and policies in an outbreak period.

From the foregoing, this study aims to examine how Nigerian national dailies represented the 'deep scars' of this wide-reaching COVID-19 disease and the treatment of health emergencies like COVID-19. It also examines the causal interpretations of socio-economic conditions and the responsibility of the health systems and government in curtailing the pandemic. Emphasis will be made on how they reported it and the implications on the public health emergency management domain. The study determines the dominant narratives and frames newspapers use during Nigeria's first to third phases of COVID-19. The content analysis method is employed to identify themes and frames in the articles from the different editions of Nigerian national daily newspapers. The study also provides perspectives on efficient and effective news-sourcing strategies for communicating health emergencies and policies during a global health crisis. It also presents important lessons for strengthening media practice and health communication strategies in Nigeria, with particular reference to framing health emergencies and ways of making health communication more effective during a crisis.

## Objectives of the Study

The study generally examines how national newspapers framed the deep scars of the COVID-19 pandemic by select national dailies in Nigeria. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Ascertain how newspapers framed the pandemic.
2. Identify newspapers' frames on the pandemic issues.
3. Establish the pitfalls in covering Nigeria's pandemic and health system.

## Literature Review

### Framing

The idea of framing was developed by Erving Goffman, who defined it as the process by which we understand our newspaper using a fundamental framework (Goffman, 1973). He claimed the newspaper frame provides an interpretive environment that aids message comprehension. Framing exemplifies the capacity of media messages to establish a context and initiate a dialogue by transmitting the crisis narrative and engaging the general public. Framing helps us understand how the media covers the coronavirus disease mitigation and the dominant frames that will ultimately determine whether the coverage effectively brings attention to the health calamity it has generated.

How Entman (1993) views news framing makes it easy to analyze the framing of COVID-19 scars. His definition demonstrates that in a communicating text, journalists, intentionally or not, do select some aspects of a health challenge and make them more prominent in such a way that it tends to generate a particular viewpoint, interpretation of the causes, apportioning of blame or commendations, and making suggestions for improvements or new courses of action. Thus, newspaper frames identify issues, pinpoint their sources, and assign moral values (Entman, 2013). Therefore, news framing entails how media outlets shape, present, and package news stories to influence the audience's understanding and interpretation. Framing theory is a concept in communication studies that highlights the critical role of media in determining how we perceive and understand reality.

Nisbet (2009) posits that framing is a critical component of communicating emergencies, which influences the perception and societal attitude of the audience toward dominant concerns of health systems and response. Media organisations implement framing to simplify intricate issues, enabling

the audience to rapidly comprehend and formulate opinions about an issue through textual, imagery, or symbolic representations (Tolley, 2016).

## COVID-19 Pandemic

Defining or naming a disease is also part of news framing (Vigso, 2010). Health emergencies such as Lassa Fever and Ebola virus were named after the places they were first discovered, such as Lassa, a village in Borno State, Nigeria, and the Ebola River in Congo. Although considered one of the coronaviruses, giving the pandemic a name had a different approach. Besides the scientific approach, political reasons also underscored the naming of the pandemic. For instance, former US President Donald Trump was quoted calling the disease the “China virus” for reasons most considered as political. According to Cillizza (2020), there were arguments about whether Trump’s shift in rhetoric was merely a case of using correct geographic labelling, given that the coronavirus originated in Wuhan, or if it was part of a more considerable effort to fuel xenophobic sentiment against China.

Scientifically, COVID-19 is also considered a coronavirus because it is caused by one of the respiratory viruses, SARS-COV-2. It was strange that the virus could affect humans, it drew global attention in 2019 at a laboratory in Wuhan, China. Highly infectious, it swiftly blowout in many countries worldwide. The disease primarily causes respiratory symptoms resembling those of a cold, flu, or pneumonia, but it can also affect other regions of the body beyond the lungs and respiratory system. In the first month of 2020, the spread of the virus became so rapid, with fatal cases, that the WHO had no option but to declare it a global health emergency. Two months later, the outbreak worsened from an epidemic to a global pandemic (Talic et al., 2021). Symptoms like fatigue, shortness of breath, and sore throat are associated with COVID-19 (CDC, 2020). For some commentators, the name COVID-19 was preferred to avoid the tendency of politicising the virus’s country of origin.

The initial COVID-19 case in Nigeria was reported on February 27<sup>th</sup> when an Italian citizen tested positive upon his return from Italy (Macleane & Dahir, 2020). By June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the virus had spread to virtually all the states in the country. In northern Nigeria, Kano, the nation’s most populous state, confirmed its first case on April 11<sup>th</sup>, and by June 9<sup>th</sup>, there were 1,004 reported cases, 477 recoveries, and 49 fatalities. A lockdown was implemented in Kano on April 27<sup>th</sup> after 640 unexplained fatalities occurred within two weeks (Mbah, 2020). As a consequence, handwashing, social distancing, and mask-wearing were mandated for all public activities across the state. Public gatherings were also limited to a small number, while others, such as religious meetings and state and national executive council meetings, were more or less conducted virtually.

## News Media Framing of Health Emergencies

Empirical research demonstrates how media contributes to mitigating the free movement of infectious diseases across areas by promoting adherence to personal and public health practices. According to Moreno, Zamora and Garzón (2023), the media is a significant factor in managing health emergencies, potentially curbing and preventing maladies. These maladies include smallpox, chicken pox, swine flu, Avian flu, Ebola, severe acute respiratory syndrome, monkeypox and COVID-19. During the outbreak of the A/H1N1 pandemic, Rossmann, Meyer, and Schulz (2018) in their study saw how health authorities faced criticism for shortcomings in their crisis communication efforts even as the media was accused of exacerbating the pandemic. Quality and tabloid newspapers were accused of amplifying the swine flu risks by accentuating the struggle and harm of the disease by choosing selectively more dramatised information and frames that amplified the risks, with tabloid papers concentrating more on drama and emotion. Pan and Meng (2016) examined the same swine flu crisis but focused more on news and moral frames, especially vaccine concerns, treatment approaches to risk magnitudes, and sourcing. They found news media using different frames and treatment approaches during the swine flu crisis, highlighting health hazards and societal problems before, during, and after the pandemic.

Some studies focused on the Ebola epidemic in Africa. Adelakun and Adnan (2016), in particular, examined the framing of this disease by select national dailies in Nigeria. They concluded that Nigerian media prioritised treatment/containment frames during the 2014 Ebola outbreak, reflecting their social responsibility role and balancing challenging the interests of sales and the obligation to

contain the outbreak. The Monkeypox epidemic in 2017 was the focus of Ben-Enukora et al. (2020) research, particularly on the risk communication of the outbreak by news media in Nigeria. The study established that Nigeria's news media delayed and lethargically reported on the monkeypox epidemic in 2017, highlighting the need for enhanced risk communication and prevention efforts during public health emergencies. Different from worldwide attention to facilitating the delivery of good health for the citizens, the researchers found a late and weak coverage of health hazards among newspapers in the country. For Adeniran, Kayode, and Oso (2019), maternal and child healthcare problems in Nigeria were the focus of their study. Looking at it from the angle of news media framing, they called for better media coverage to drive development in the health sector since Nigerian newspapers adopted minimal public health frames and predominantly coping frames for maternal and child healthcare issues.

Coming to the health emergency of COVID-19 pandemic, Ophir et al. (2021) observed that media framing of epidemics influenced public perceptions and behaviours. In their study on the relationship between Italian news media framing of COVID-19 and community mobility, the researchers established a strong relationship between news media framing and community mobility in Italy. The news media focused on the causal framing of symptoms and health effects. This significantly increased the social and containment frames, thereby decreasing community movement. In Nigeria, Ogbodo et al. (2020) examined the implications of global media coverage of COVID-19 on public perception and attitudes to the pandemic. The scholars found that media emphasis was dominated by human interest and fear/scaremongering frames. Even though public attitudes and perceptions were greatly shaped, the study indicated that media framing of the pandemic potentially increased health risks for those with existing health conditions. Thus, the coverage of the pandemic by the global media was detailed but without an emphasis on self-efficacy, and it was episodic, focusing more on breaking news. The prevalence of these frames not only shapes public perception and attitudes towards the pandemic but also poses a danger of intensifying problems for persons with pre-existing health concerns, perhaps resulting in anxiety or panic episodes.

Also, Odoemelam (2021), studying framing tactics employed by the print media in their coverage of COVID-19, concluded that major Nigerian newspapers used various frames to frame the COVID-19 health crisis, with negative tones mainly dominating coverage, influenced by their editorial policies and political beliefs. Other key factors included economic challenges, a crisis in public healthcare, strikes by health workers, and instances of wrongdoing. According to Obitube et al. (2023), Nigerian media frames on COVID-19 initially created a 'death-sentence' image but needed constant change to maintain public attention and prevent counter-frames.

These studies (Ogbodo et al., 2020; Odoemelam, 2021; Obitube et al., 2023) suggest that media editorial policies and political ideologies or culture could hamper the efficient portrayal of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. These issues would unquestionably influence media attention and framing focus during health emergencies.

## Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in news framing and is considered a second-level agenda-setting theory. As presented by Goffman in his book *Frame Analysis* (1974), the framing theory posits that individuals engage in the cognitive process of "locating, perceiving, identifying, and labelling" events and incidents within distinct contextual frameworks. According to Goffman, individuals interpret events in their world through primary frameworks, which he categorises as natural and social frameworks used to make sense of daily communication stimuli. Entman (1993, p.52) defines framing as the deliberate selection of aspects of a perceived reality to enhance the salience of a text, promoting problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation or suggestion.

Scheufele (1999) proposes four essential assumptions of framing theory: journalists not only select the things they offer but also determine how they are delivered to the audience. This implies that framing theory asserts the media's role in affecting what the audience thinks about and how they interpret and understand the information. Audience frames can align with or contradict media frames and are reinforced each time they are activated, whether in a good or negative context. The process of frame building is systematic and evolves.

In essence, a frame is a mechanism by which a communication source moulds and frames information or messages to quietly influence the audience's perspective of a specific topic. This idea is especially pertinent to this study as the framing of COVID-19 in online publications significantly affects individual and collective efforts to control the pandemic in Nigeria.

## Methodology

Content analysis is the method employed for the investigation. It is defined by Neuendorf (2002, p.1) as the systematic, objective, quantitative examination of message characteristics". The content analysis approach evaluates and defines the meaning of the visible and latent material in the message (Holman, 2017). In evaluating the news items, the micro-framing analysis of Entman (1993) and Iyengar (1991) was relied upon to understand how the news media outlets produced meanings regarding the illness outbreak. This accords with Scheufele & Tewksbury (2007, p. 12), who further claim that "the micro-level construct of framing elaborates how people use the information they have received to create impressions on issues and events", significantly adding to how the public perceives the pandemic and government response.

## Population

The study population comprised all the 528 Vanguard, Daily Trust, Leadership, and Punch newspaper editions from March 1, 2020, to December 31, 2021. The selected newspapers were national dailies published consistently, always available, and affordable to readers.

## Sample Selection

The study employed a consecutive-day sampling technique wherein a sample of 15 days per month was selected from each newspaper in the study period. This is in line with the decision of Riffe et al. (1996) that the mean of 15 consecutive-day sampling does not significantly differ from the population's mean. Also, random sampling was employed to choose three stories for each consecutive day selected in the study period, beginning from March 1, 2020, to December 31, 2021. For 22 months, 22 newspaper editions will be selected, creating 528 editions using Stempel's (1952) guide cited in Krippendorff (2004). From the 528 editions of the selected newspapers, 851 COVID-19-related stories were separated for analysis. Thus, the sample for the content analysis portion of the study is 851 stories from 528 editions of four selected newspapers for the study.

## Unit of Analysis

The units of analysis are individual newspaper articles about the COVID-19 pandemic and specific elements within articles, such as headlines, lead paragraphs, thematic content, and pull quotes.

## Coding Scheme

An emergent coding approach is used to develop the content categories and recording units. So, after a preliminary examination of the data, these categories were selected: Placement, Type of story, Source and Frames. Under placement, recording units are on the front page, inside page, and back page. The recorded story genres published during the COVID-19 pandemic are straight news, leading editorials, opinion articles, features, advertorials and columns. Under the source category, government officials, health professionals, NGO/CSO, diplomats, and religious and political leaders. The frames recorded were prevention, treatment, transmission, palliative, vaccine, rumour, or misinformation.

## Coding Procedure

A codebook outlining each category, recording units and specific coding rules was designed. A tentative set of essentially apriority categories and recording units was arranged in the first phase. This was discussed, criticised and modified. Manual coding was used. Due to the high exchange rate in the country and the lack of funding for the research, the authors could afford an analysis software like Nvivo or Atlas. ti. Two coders with good language and communication education were recruited to assist the authors in coding. The process resulted in deleting some recording units, rephrasing others, and adding



a few new recording units. This enhanced the mutual exclusiveness and exhaustiveness of the recording units under each category. The data coding took two weeks of consistent work to be completed.

Krippendorff's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) formula was used to test the reliability of the coding instrument. Researchers like Ugondo (2018) affirm that the formula is the most commonly acknowledged metric with suitable reliability interpretations in content analysis. The online reliability calculator was used (<http://dfreelon.org/utlis/recalfront/recal2/>). Inter-coder reliability was tested on all five categories. The calculation showed that Krippendorff's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) yielded .90, .89, .91, .79, .80, .81, which indicated high reliability or agreement among the coders.

## Results

The first category considered in the coding was the placement of stories in selected newspapers. This is premised on the fact that a story's degree of emphasis or salience is also determined by where the editor places the story. Hence, a story's prominence, impact or consequence would trigger its placement on the front page to attract readers' attention. Therefore, newspaper framing of any issue begins with the story's placement. In some instances, when stories are placed on the front page, it indicates that those issues are burning issues of public attention. Through the front page, newspapers could also set agendas for readers on issues. Many reporters and editors measure their success by how many of their stories land on the front page.

Therefore, the placement of stories by editors is based on many distinct factors, such as whether or not the story will attract a sizable audience and whether it will increase newspaper sales. Sometimes, it is based on some of the qualities that make a story newsworthy, like the importance of the subject or topic being covered, the significance of the story, the novelty of the story, the timeliness, the story's proximity to the newspaper's primary distribution area, and the story's relevance and utility, among others.

**Table 1:** Placement of stories

Placement	Vanguard	Daily Trust	Leadership	Punch	Total	%
Frontpage	93	123	69	108	393	46.2
Inside page	64	112	53	109	338	39.7
Back page	17	49	9	45	120	14.1
Total	174	284	131	262	851	100
%	20.4	33.3	15.3	30.7	100	-

**Source:** Field Work, 2024

From Table 1, the data show that about half of the stories (46.2%) were placed on the front page of the selected newspapers, meaning that at least four out of nine stories had high visibility among readers. The inside pages accounted for 39.7% of the stories published on COVID-19 and vaccination drives in Nigeria. In other words, about two out of every five stories (338) were placed on the inside pages of the newspapers. The back pages of the newspapers received the least number of stories selected (120). At least one out of every seven stories published by the selected newspapers within the study period was placed on the back pages.

Comparatively, Daily Trust had more stories on the front page, inside page and back page, followed by Punch, Vanguard and Leadership. The selected newspapers devoted the back page to columnists against the traditional style of giving the back page for sports stories. The novelty and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and its vaccines were a significant concern for the selected newspapers. The result also implies that newspaper columnists were concerned about the pandemic and contributed to dissecting the issue for public consumption and decision.

After the placement of stories, the following category was looked into: the story genre or types. Newspapers classify stories into different categories according to their structure, style of writing, and authorship. Stories that account for the day's events without the writer's opinion or embellishment

of facts are called straight news reports. A story that expresses the opinion of the newspaper organisation is referred to as an editorial, while one that expresses an individual opinion is an opinion article. An advertorial is sponsored content, and a feature is an extended news story. A column may take a full page or half, and it is regularly published. It has the editorial's tone, but it represents an individual opinion. A column could be written by even those who are not journalists.

**Table 2:** Types of stories selected

Story Type	Vanguard	Daily Trust	Leadership	Punch	Total	%
Editorial	11	7	5	9	32	3.8
Straight news	76	191	89	164	520	61.1
Opinion	47	29	13	31	120	14.1
Features	21	39	16	41	117	13.7
Advertorial	4	7	2	5	18	2.1
Column	15	11	6	12	44	5.2
Total	174	284	131	262	851	100

**Source:** Field Work, 2024

Table 2 shows that of the six-story types examined, 3.8% were editorials, representing one out of every twenty-six stories published by the selected newspapers. The advertorial was the most minor story type reflecting COVID-19 and vaccination, accounting for 2.1% of the stories, representing one out of every forty-eight stories examined from March 1, 2020, to December 31, 2021. The highest frequency of story type is the straight news, which accounted for 61.1% of the total stories examined. This means that of every five stories examined, at least three were straight news stories. The second most frequent story type is the opposite editorial (op-ed) or opinion stories, which represented 14.1%, indicating that for every seven stories examined, at least one must be an opinion article. Features, also called extended news stories, constitute the third most frequent story type examined, with 13.7% of the total stories examined. Hence, about one out of every story examined would be a feature story. Table 3 also shows that at least one out of every nineteen or twenty stories examined would be a column. Hence, columns constituted 5.2% of the total stories examined in the study.

Among the selected newspapers, Vanguard had the highest number of editorial stories, showing that the newspaper contributed more than other newspapers as an organisation to the discourse of COVID-19 and vaccines.

**Table 3:** Sources of stories

Source of stories	Vanguard	Daily Trust	Leadership	Punch	Total	%
Government Officials	31	73	29	72	205	24.0
Health Professional	56	69	73	64	262	30.7
NGO/CSO	24	11	31	38	94	11.0
Diplomat	15	19	31	11	76	8.9
Religious Leaders	31	24	17	43	115	13.5
Political Leaders	36	12	18	32	99	11.6
Total	193	208	199	260	851	100

**Source:** Field Work, 2024

Data presented in Table 3 above shows that health professionals (30.7%) and government officials (24.0%) were the major sources of stories on the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccination, with most stories being featured in Daily Trust and Punch newspapers. Therefore, most stories about the COVID-19 pandemic and the vaccines emanated from reliable sources.



**Table 4:** Frames of Stories

Type of Frames	Vanguard	Daily Trust	Leadership	Punch	Total	%
Prevention Frame	29	67	35	83	214	25.1
Treatment Frame	8	28	31	42	109	12.8
Transmission Frame	30	19	24	48	121	14.2
Palliative Frame	49	12	19	24	104	12.2
Vaccine Frame	12	35	47	53	147	17.2
Rumour/ Misinformation Frame	32	44	24	56	156	18.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>851</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Field Work, 2024

Media framing of stories is a major genre of journalistic writing that influences how and how readers think after consuming messages. As indicated in Table 4 above, out % of the four selected newspapers for this study, 35.9% of the stories were framed on Punch newspaper, while Daily Trust newspaper is second highest with (24.0%). Leadership newspaper is the least with (18.3 %).

The prevention frame in the four newspapers was 25%, with articles highlighting measures to limit virus spread, such as automated temperature screening, contact form questions, social distancing, and respiratory hygiene practices. The WHO recommends physical-social distancing, case identification, and contact tracing to prevent and control COVID-19, while others emphasise the importance of social distancing, handwashing, and avoiding crowds. The treatment frame for COVID-19 is 12.8%, with Vanguard reporting the least. Daily Trust, Leadership, and Punch have the highest percentages. Vanguard’s coverage includes guidelines for managing critically ill adults, daily updates on active medical treatment, and new guidelines for successful patient discharge.

Transmission frame, as indicated in the table, has 14.2%, with the highest placement of the framed stories on Punch Newspaper (48) and Vanguard (30), while Leadership is the least with (19) respectively. Punch (12<sup>th</sup> April 2020): “If COVID-19 patient cough or sneeze droplets are released, it can also be transmitted when one is in close contact with the sick patient”. On Vanguard (12<sup>th</sup> December 2021), “The incidence of COVID-19 grew steadily in Nigeria, moving from an imported case and elitist pattern to community transmission. The case fatality stood at 2.8%. The country recorded an upsurge (52% of total cases) in the transmission of COVID-19 during the short period the lockdown was relaxed”. Another frame on the transmission on Daily Trust (27<sup>th</sup> November 2020) the epidemiology of COVID-19 in Nigeria has since evolved, with cases identified in almost the 36 states of the country”. Leadership (1<sup>st</sup> May 2021) PTF Informed the President on Transmission of COVID-19 in Nigeria.

The palliative frame with about 12:2% has most of the stories placed on Vanguard (49), Punch (24), Leadership (19) and Daily Trust (12) within the period of the study and some of the frames were captured in this manner; Vanguard (9<sup>th</sup> May 2020) “FG Sets to Provides Palliatives to Households”, also Vanguard (2<sup>nd</sup> December 2020) “N50b Targeted Credit Facility” Central Bank of Nigeria. Punch (8<sup>th</sup> June 2020) “Successful Applicants for CBN COVID-19 Palliatives to Access Funds”. Again Leadership (23<sup>rd</sup> March 2021) “CBN Adds \$120m to COVID-19 Pandemic Relief Funds for Loans”. In another edition of Leadership (21<sup>st</sup> April, 2020), “How COVID-19 Food Palliatives were Hijacked, Distributed among Party Members”. Daily Trust (27<sup>th</sup> October 2020) “On EndSARS: why distribution of looted COVID-19 Food Palliatives was delayed”.

Vaccine Frame during the period covered by the study was a serious concern shared by the selected newspapers, as 17.2% were devoted to it. Most of the frames were anchored on the acceptability and resistance levels of the vaccination in Taraba State. Some of the sampled frames included Vanguard (3<sup>rd</sup> December 2020) “everyone, everywhere should have access to COVID-19 Vaccine ~ WHO” Punch (22<sup>nd</sup> October 2021) with 23.7% of vaccine acceptance in Nigeria, public health policymakers must prioritise and develop strategies that will effectively increase the acceptance across the country”.

Leadership (8<sup>th</sup> August 2021) "COVID-19 Vaccination is the only way to Reduce the Spread". Daily Trust (12<sup>th</sup> September 2020) "distrust among government officials formed major reason for the refusal of COVID-19 vaccine". Vanguard (30<sup>th</sup> March 2021) "Pastor Chris Oyakhilome Condemns Nigerian Christians Taking COVID-19, saying that, Christians should believe in the Word of God". Vanguard (29<sup>th</sup> June 2020) "COVID-19 Vaccination in Nigeria, once again, Religion Leaders Stand in the way ~ Prof. Jibrin Ibrahim" Vanguard (2<sup>nd</sup> August 2021) WHO supports Bauchi State to vaccinate over 700,000 persons with oral cholera vaccines during reactive campaign."

Another significant proportion of 18:3% of the framed stories was on Rumour and Misinformation, which also trailed the acceptance and hesitancy level of COVID-19 and the Vaccination in Taraba State, the conspiracy theories or misinformation that the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccination is just a Western plot to depopulate or dehumanise Africa. Some prominent frames, among others, included; "COVID-19 Vaccination in Nigeria, more than 10,000 Nigerians report side effects. Daily Trust (2<sup>nd</sup> June 2021)". Again, on the side effects, "A combination effects and the body of language of the leaders make the whole story about the Pandemic unreal. I will never allow anyone close to me to be vaccinated, and nothing will happen to us" ~ Femi Kuti Vanguard (1<sup>st</sup> September, 2021)." Gaskiya, this COVID-19 vaccine is a death sentence" Leadership (14<sup>th</sup> May, 2021). In an exclusive interview with Sen. Ali Ndume published in Punch (12<sup>th</sup> July 2020) "He said, according to a listener assessment by a local radio station in May 2020, 96% of its listeners had heard COVID-19 messaging on its station, but 45% still did not believe that COVID -19 is 'real or deadly.' This is because the major actors, which include government, NGOs and other community leaders, cannot be trusted." Still looking at the major frames, "Why some Nigerians are gloating about COVID-19, they latched on to rumours that Mr Buhari, 72, had been infected by his chief of staff and was gravely ill on a ventilator." ~ SGF Daily Trust (23<sup>rd</sup> April, 2020).

## Discussion of Findings

The first finding was on how newspapers framed the pandemic and vaccination. The study established that Vanguard, Daily Trust, Leadership and Punch framed the COVID-19 pandemic by placing the most stories on the front page for greater visibility and attention by readers. At least four out of nine stories had high visibility among readers.

Therefore, news story placement is a strategic decision by editors and producers. It reflects the perceived importance of different stories and the newspaper audience engagement strategies. Stories on the front page typically attract the most readers' attention. Therefore, newspapers often place the most important or attention-grabbing stories there to engage readers or viewers immediately. The media's capacity to direct public attention toward particular issues can shape what people think about and prioritise various problems. According to agenda-setting theory, through the daily selection and ranking of topics, the media establishes the perceived importance of different events and sets the public agenda (Coleman & Blumner, 2009; McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Additionally, by repeatedly highlighting specific thematic elements through framing, the media construct interpretive frameworks for understanding these issues (Weaver et al., 1998). Health experts, government officials, prominent political figures, non-governmental organisations, diplomats and health-related agencies like the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) were the key sources the select newspapers drew from stories. Credible sources like these ensure that the public is well-informed and can make informed decisions based on accurate information. And by citing them, showed responsible reporting and facilitated the slowing down of sensational or misleading content about the pandemic. Of course, in an era of misinformation and fake news, using credible sources helped newspapers combat the spread of false narratives and conspiracy theories. It contributed to a healthier information ecosystem during the pandemic.

Using multiple story genres enriched knowledge on the COVID-19 pandemic and the vaccine in Taraba State. Newspapers used story types to frame the COVID-19 pandemic. Some story types, such as editorials, features, and opinion articles, contain more background information, in-depth analysis, and well-researched ideas that guide public disposition over issues of public concern.

Overall, framing an issue can trigger different cognitive responses from the audience. For example, an issue framed as a “public health crisis” may evoke a different reaction than if it is framed as a “national security threat.” These framing effects can sway public opinion in one direction or another. For example, when President Trump tweeted that chloroquine and other related malaria medications helped treat COVID-19, its framing in the media engineered panic buying of the drug in different countries. The Punch reported that hospitals in Nigeria documented increased cases of chloroquine overdose as a result of Trump’s endorsement. The World Health Organization frowned at this and implored the media to feed the public with only the reports that have medical/scientific evidence. It issued a statement saying that “Hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine are under investigation in clinical trials for pre-exposure or post-exposure prophylaxis of SARS-CoV-2 infection and treatment of patients with mild, moderate, and severe COVID-19” (WHO, 2020).

The second finding in the study is the types of frames Vanguard, Daily Trust, Punch, and Leadership newspapers used in framing the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccination. These are the prevention frame, treatment frame, transmission frame, palliative frame, vaccine frame, and rumour/misinformation frame. These frames provided the angles through which news stories were presented to the audience. They determined how information on COVID-19 and vaccination was packaged, emphasised, and interpreted, and they play a crucial role in shaping the narrative surrounding a particular story. News frames can influence what aspects of the pandemic became prominent in public discourse.

These frames build on the list established by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), who identified five generic frames commonly found in news reports: conflict, human interest, economic consequences, morality, and responsibility. Ogbodo (2018) expanded this list by adding ethnicisation and politicisation, bringing the total to seven generic frames. Other studies have further contributed by introducing fear/scaremongering and hope as frames utilised in pandemic coverage. The COVID-19 pandemic presents a relevant context for examining the types of frames employed by the media in this study. The extensive media coverage of COVID-19 has sparked public reactions, making how the media has portrayed and influenced the discourse around the pandemic a critical issue. Since COVID-19 is associated with a prolonged global health crisis, the media’s role in shaping this narrative is particularly significant. In addition to the established frames, using religious frames by the media may also be crucial for managing future health emergencies.

These scars are underscored by poor media editorial policies, political ideologies, or culture that hampered Nigeria’s efficient framing of the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, the initial death sentence and incurable frame usually used at the outbreak of health emergencies do not help in managing a prolonged crisis but only momentarily. Adeloye et al. (2017) observed that Nigeria’s health workforce crises are exacerbated by poor administration, inadequate facilities, and factions among health workers, highlighting the need for health workforce and governance reforms. These issues would no doubt sway media attention and framing focus during health emergencies.

## Conclusion

The study found that newspapers such as Vanguard, Daily Trust, Leadership, and Punch framed the COVID-19 pandemic by prioritising stories on the front page for maximum visibility. This strategic placement highlights the importance of these stories and engages readers, aligning with the agenda-setting theory, which suggests that media influences public focus and the prioritisation of issues. The newspapers also used credible sources like health experts, government officials, and agencies such as WHO and NCDC, ensuring accurate information dissemination and combating misinformation. They employed various story genres, including editorials and opinion pieces, providing in-depth analysis and guiding public opinion.

This research revealed clear indications of damage in the structure of health pandemics. The media editorial practices and political ideology or culture hindered the effective handling of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, resulting in negative consequences. Moreover, the early pronouncement of a death sentence and the notion of an incurable situation typically employed at the onset of health emergencies may not contribute to effectively addressing a prolonged crisis, but rather offer only temporary relief. Nigeria’s health workforce issues are worsened by ineffective management,

insufficient facilities, and divisions among health workers. This emphasises the importance of implementing changes in health workforce and governance. These factors would undoubtedly impact the level of media attention and the way health emergencies are presented and discussed.

However, the exemplars in stories, particularly about notable individuals getting vaccinated, added depth and human interest, enhancing reader engagement. An example is the media coverage of President Trump's endorsement of chloroquine, which led to panic buying and overdoses. Thus, the nature of news framing during a health emergency could hamper the management of such a crisis. Thus, media editorial policies and political ideologies hindered Nigeria's effective framing of the COVID-19 pandemic. Early framing of health emergency frames, such as death sentences and incurable crises, is unhelpful for prolonged crises. In addition, Nigeria's health workforce crises, caused by poor administration, inadequate facilities, and internal divisions, require reforms. These issues likely influence media attention and framing during health emergencies. Besides rumour-mongering and misinformation, religious, cultural and political leanings emphasised in media reports were major scars in framing the pandemic. It is strongly recommended that religious frames be included in managing future health emergencies.

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## Özet

Bu çalışma, dört Nijerya gazetesinin COVID-19 pandemisini nasıl ele aldıklarını incelemektedir. İncelenen gazeteler Vanguard, Daily Trust, Leadership ve Punch'tır. Amaç, bu gazetelerin pandemiye nasıl şekillendirdiğini, hangi editoryal yöntemleri ve kaynakları kullandıklarını, hangi ana mesajları verdiklerini görmektir. Çalışma, gazetelerin krizle ilgili yaptıkları haberciliği analiz ederek halk sağlığı iletişimini ve kriz yönetimi üzerindeki etkilerini araştırmaktadır.

Araştırma, içerik analizi adı verilen bir yöntemle yapılmıştır. 2020 Mart ile 2021 Aralık arasında yayımlanan toplam 528 gazete sayfasındaki 851 makale incelenmiştir. Çalışmada, pandeminin gazetelerde hangi temalarla çerçevelendiğini belirlemek için mikro-frame analizi yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Bu süreçte, gazetelerin haberleri nasıl sıraladığı, hangi tür haberlerin ön planda olduğu, hangi kaynakları kullandıkları ve hangi temaların baskın olduğu gibi unsurlar incelenmiştir. Bu tür bir analiz, medyanın toplum üzerindeki etkilerini ve krizlere nasıl yaklaşıldığını anlamamıza yardımcı olmaktadır.

Bulgular, gazetelerin COVID-19'u genellikle birkaç ana tema etrafında ele aldığını göstermektedir. Bu temalar arasında önleme, tedavi, bulaşma, destek önlemleri, aşılar ve yanlış bilgiler öne çıkmıştır. Bu haberlerin birinci sayfalarda yer alması, halkın konuya ilgisini artıran önemli bir faktör olmuştur. Pandeminin ilk dönemlerinde gazeteler, COVID-19'un toplum üzerindeki etkilerini korkutucu bir dille aktarmıştır. Hükümet yetkilileri ve sağlık uzmanları sıkça alıntılanan kaynaklar arasında yer almış, bu da haberlerin güvenilirliğini artırmıştır ancak gazetelerin editoryal politikaları ve siyasi ideolojileri, bazı haberlerin olumsuz şekilde çerçevelenmesine neden olmuştur. Bu da halkın hükümete yönelik güvenini etkilemiş ve kriz yönetimini zorlaştırmıştır. Örneğin, bazı gazeteler hükümetin sağlık önlemleri ve acil durum planlarını eleştirmiş, bu da halkın hükümete olan güvenini sorgulamasına yol açmıştır. Ayrıca, dini ve kültürel önyargılar ile yanlış bilgiler, özellikle aşıya karşı tereddüt konusunda önemli bir etken olmuştur. Medyada yayılan yanlış bilgiler, halk arasında aşıya karşı bir güvensizlik oluşturmuş ve sağlık önlemlerinin uygulanmasını zorlaştırmıştır.

Pandeminin başlarında medya, korku ve belirsizlik temalarına odaklanmış ve bu da halk arasında paniğe neden olmuş. Ancak zamanla medya çerçevelemesi daha dengeli bir yaklaşım benimsemiş, aşı güvenliği ve sağlık hizmetlerinin önemi gibi konularda daha pozitif ve bilgilendirici içerikler yer almaya başlamış. Bu değişiklik, halkın güvenini kazanmayı ve kriz yönetimi stratejilerini iyileştirmeyi hedeflemiştir.

Araştırmanın sonuçları, medya çerçevelerinin halk sağlığı üzerindeki etkilerini açık bir şekilde göstermektedir. Medyanın kullandığı dil, halkın krizlere nasıl yaklaştığını ve sağlık mesajlarını nasıl algıladığını doğrudan etkileyebilir. Çalışma, medya organlarının editoryal kararlarının ve siyasi eğilimlerinin, COVID-19 anlatılarını nasıl şekillendirdiğini ve bu anlatıların halkın güvenini ve kriz yönetim stratejilerini nasıl etkilediğini göstermektedir.

*Sonu olarak, medya kuruluřlarının saėlık acil durumu raporlama srelerinde dini ve kltrel ereveleri daha dikkatli entegre etmeleri gerektiėi ortaya ıkmıřtır. Ayrıca dengeli raporlama nceliklendirilerek halkın doėru bilgilendirilmesi saėlanmalıdır. Medyanın yanlış bilgilerle daha etkin mcadele etmesi ve kanıta dayalı gazetecilik ilkelerine baėlı kalması, halk saėlığı krizlerinin ynetimi aısından byk nem tařımaktadır. Medyanın bu sreteki rol, krizlerin daha etkili ve saėlıklı bir şekilde ynetilmesini saėlayacak nemli bir faktrdr.*

*alıřma, Vanguard, Daily Trust, Leadership ve Punch gibi gazetelerin COVID-19 pandemisini nasıl erevelediėini ve bu haberleri birinci sayfalarda nasıl sunduklarını ortaya koymuřtur. Bu stratejik yerleřim, haberlerin nemini vurgulamakta ve okuyucuyu cezbetmektedir; bu da medya etkisi teorisine uyumludur. Medya etkisi teorisinde, medyanın kamuoyunun odaklanmasını ve meselelerin nceliklendirilmesini etkilediėi ne srlmektedir. Gazeteler ayrıca saėlık uzmanları, hkmet yetkilileri ve Dnya Saėlık rgt (WHO) gibi gvenilir kaynaklar kullanarak doėru bilgi yayılmasını saėlamıř ve yanlış bilgilerin nne gemiřtir.*

*Son olarak medyanın editoryal politikaları ve siyasi ideolojilerinin Nijerya'daki COVID-19 pandemisinin etkili bir şekilde ynetilmesini engellediėi ve saėlık acil durumu raporlamalarının dikkatli ve dengeli bir şekilde yapılması gerektiėi sonucuna varılmıřtır.*