



Coverage of Covid-19 Pandemic in Africa by Punch and Leadership newspapers

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Abstract

This study investigated the coverage of coronavirus pandemic in Africa by *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers between February 15, 2020 and August 15, 2020. Among other objectives, the study investigated the geographical outlook of *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers in the coverage of the coronavirus pandemic. The research design adopted for the study was content analysis. Following the fact that national and international media organisations provide day-to-day accounts of the spread, recoveries and deaths arising from the pandemic, the study conducted a census of all the editions of the newspapers within the stated time frame. Findings of the study showed that *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers substantially took a narrow approach in the coverage of coronavirus pandemic. Coronavirus-related events in countries other than Nigeria were substantially neglected by the newspapers. Findings of the study also showed that *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers poorly exploited the fact-finding and interpretative roles of feature stories, editorials and opinion articles in leading citizens' contribution to the containment of the pandemic. Based on these findings, the study recommended, among other things, that *Punch*, *Leadership* and other media stations in Nigeria should accord a global approach to global problems and opportunities. Also, the study recommended that *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers should exploit the interpretative roles of feature stories, editorials and opinion articles to ask questions and elicit responses as the audience would do if they had opportunity.

Keywords: Coronavirus pandemic, Coronavirus situation in Africa, mass media, Social responsibility

Introduction

The power of the press (newspaper and magazine) in keeping the public abreast of events in their immediate and larger environments enjoys a global recognition. Unlike the reports of the broadcast media that are

transient and often rendered in a hurry, the press provides ready details and can be consulted at the convenience of the audience. This is especially in these days of availability of online versions of newspapers that provide the audience ready access to local and international events. The character of the press, especially newspapers, in providing accessible details and updates on a wide range of issues makes it a medium of the people. This condition accounts for the crowds witnessed at newspaper stands across cities daily in both developed and developing countries. The ability of newspapers to provide detailed and accessible information on issues also accounts for the special attention governments and other authorities accord the press.

Beyond making information readily accessible on a wide range of issues, newspapers have remained the doyen of the news and information business around the world due to the importance of reliable, accurate and objective accounts of the day's events. The world's clamour for credible news has not only made newspapers veteran but has also made the press a critical stakeholder in the management of the society.

The globally-recognised role of the newspaper in providing reliable, accurate and objective accounts of the day's intelligence gives expression to the role of the press in the management of the society. It is in realisation of this role that governments, including dictatorial regimes, consider the press as one of the important state machineries responsible for organising the society (Daramola, 2005; Hasan, 2013). The role of the press in managing the society becomes more crucial during across-boarder emergencies, especially pandemics. At such points, the press is expected to explore its watchdog function to oversee trends and perspectives in the spread of such a pandemic in order to guide decisions and actions of the governments and people of affected communities. Ogbodo, Onwe, Chukwu, Nwasum, Nwakpu, Nwankwo & Nwamini (2020), in their investigation of how the global media framed covid-19 pandemic, observe that the global media played a significant role in raising awareness on the spread and management of the pandemic around the world. Although, fear and scaremongering frames dominated global coverage of the pandemic, citizens of the global community were substantially furnished with the spread and management of the pandemic around the world.

At the local level, the Nigerian media offered perspectives in the containment of the coronavirus pandemic. The depth of coverage, patterns of frames and tone of media reports on the coronavirus pandemic yielded both positive and negative results which affected Nigerian citizens' reactions to the pandemic. Apuke & Omar (2020), in their investigation of Nigerian newspapers coverage of the pandemic, observe that although the Nigerian media immensely raised awareness on spread and containment of the pandemic, many coronavirus-related reports were alarming and significantly restricted to the pandemic situation in the country. This report corroborates the coverage of Ebola virus outbreak in Nigeria in 2014, where the Nigerian media in serving the health watchdog function essentially dwelled on the Ebola situation in Nigeria. (Ajilore & Atakiti, 2017). Nwakpu, Ezenwa & Ogbodo (2020) observe that Nigerian newspapers played their social responsibility and proximity roles by frequently reporting events surrounding the coronavirus situation in their immediate environment than the pandemic situation in other countries of the world.

The extension of the health watchdog function of the Nigerian media in the fight against coronavirus is justified by the pandemic being a global health emergency. Also, from the prism of its poor healthcare system, the African continent was predicted to experience direct challenges in managing the coronavirus pandemic. It was thought that the pandemic was going to have similar impacts on African nations following the absence of formidable health infrastructure in the continent when compared to the developed world where the coronavirus pandemic was already taking tolls on the population irrespective of their sophisticated medical infrastructure and personnel. Aware of the poor health system in many African countries and the predictions of authorities in the West with respect to the impact of the pandemic on Africa, the watchdog role of the Nigerian press over the continent in the pandemic economy becomes

critical. The expected extensive watchdog role was to keep the African population constantly abreast of the efforts of authorities, especially governments of affected nations in the continent and the Africa Centre for Disease Control in managing the pandemic. The discharge of health watchdog function of the Nigerian media in the fight against coronavirus pandemic around the African continent provokes the investigation of the roles of *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers in managing the pandemic situation in Africa.

Statement of the Problem

Since the World Health Organisation (WHO) confirmed the index case of coronavirus pandemic in the African continent in Egypt on February 14, 2020, many Nigerians have resorted to searching for headlines in the nation's dailies to acquaint themselves with the spread of the pandemic. Experts' predictions of the devastating impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on Africa due to the poor state of the continent's healthcare system left many worried and glued to the media, especially newspapers for updates even before the first index case was confirmed in Nigeria. The Africa coronavirus experience left many Nigerians agitated and in search of updates on the number of confirmed cases, recoveries and deaths arising from the pandemic.

The contributions of the mass media in managing the coronavirus pandemic around the world has elicited several investigations (Apuke & Omar, 2020; Nwakpu, et al, 2020; Ogbodo, et al, 2020). Many of these investigations left some gaps in knowledge, especially the interpretative role of features, editorials and opinions and the management of human interest appeals associated with the dreaded pandemic. The management of these gaps formed the burden of this study.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following questions:

1. What was the geographical outlook of *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers in the coverage of coronavirus pandemic?
2. How did *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers explore the analytical roles of feature stories, editorials and opinion articles in containing the coronavirus pandemic?
3. What were the human interest appeals associated with coronavirus-related reports of *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers?

Scope of the Study

The study investigated the coverage of coronavirus pandemic by *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers between February 15, 2020 and August 15, 2020. The time frame was presumed to be most appropriate being the period that witnessed rising cases, recoveries and deaths from the coronavirus pandemic around the world. The period also witnessed heightened efforts by critical stakeholders in containing the spread of the pandemic.

The choice of *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers is due to the fact that the newspapers are national dailies committed to the mission of free enterprise and the promotion of diversity across the globe. The newspapers were also selected from other national newspapers since they do not have ownership affiliation with any politician or political party which should affect their coverage of socio-economic issues. Based on their principle of free enterprise, the newspapers were expected to be neutral and forthright in the coverage of coronavirus pandemic.

Literature Review

The study was anchored on the Social Responsibility and Agenda-Setting theories. Some related concepts were also reviewed to highlight the focus of the study.

Social Responsibility Theory

The Social Responsibility theory evolved through the report of the Hutchin's Commission set up in 1942 to respond to the alleged widespread sensational, commercial and monopolistic approach of the libertarian press era. The Commission was saddled with the responsibility to critically examine areas and circumstances under which the press was succeeding or failing ((McQuail, 2010). The libertarian era afforded the press considerable freedom from undue government control. The result of this free marketplace of operation was yellow journalism, characterised by character assassination and sensationalism (Nwachukwu, Asak & Asadu, 2012). It was the abuses associated with libertarianism that necessitated the establishment of the Hutchin's Commission to work out a more responsible press philosophy to meet the needs of the society.

The underlying premise of the social responsibility theory is that freedom is worthless except it is exercised with a reasonable degree of responsibility, which involves respect for institutions and service to the community (McQuail, 2010). What this means is that apart from the establishment or legislation of laws to regulate media operations, the mass media, just as individuals, owe society the responsibility to carry out their activities responsibly. The media should accommodate all shades of opinion and not only that of the privileged few. The media should give voice to the voiceless.

McQuail (2010) summarises the central ideologies of the social responsibility theory as:

1. the media have obligation to society and media ownership is a public trust;
2. news media should be truthful, accurate, fair, objective and relevant;
3. the media should be free, but self-regulated;
4. the media should follow agreed codes of ethics and professional conduct;
5. under some circumstance, government may need to intervene to safeguard the public interest (p. 171).

The foregoing submission by McQuail (2010) underscores the argument that community service is the hallmark of media operation. That is, the media should provide support to public governance structures towards achieving a progressive society. During national or global emergencies, the press, as a critical stakeholder in the pursuance of public good, owes the responsibility not only to inform but also to support the government and other authorities in safeguarding the society and its people.

Agenda Setting Theory

The Agenda Setting theory was propounded by McCombs and Shaw in 1972 (Ndimele and Innocent, 2006). The theory conceptualises the role the mass media play in shaping and influencing the opinion of members of the public especially on issues of public interest. The condition that accounts for this situation is based on the fact that regardless of the extent of development or civilisation of a society, the mass media serve as people's window to the world. Lipmann (1922) states that the media help to put pictures of the world in the minds of the audience (Miller, 2002; DeFleur, 2010). This explains the power of the mass media to set agenda in defence of public interest. Griffin (2000), quoting McCombs and Shaw (1972), states that the mass media have the ability to transfer the salience of items on their news agenda to the public agenda. He adds that journalists and the mass media in the free world have a deserved reputation for independence and fairness and that the public look to news professionals for cues on where to lend their attention and judge

as important what the media judge as important. This condition places a huge responsibility on the mass media to shed light and lead opinion on important issues of public interest.

The media not only provide information but interpretation on social issues. The media serve as the conscience of the society (Ekwueme, 2008; Omega & Ochonogor, 2013) This creates the assumption in the audience that the issues upon which the mass media place emphasis must necessarily be important. George (2006), lending credence to this proposition, states that “the amount of attention given to an issue in the media affects the level of importance the public assigns to that issue” (p. 459). Ndimele & Innocent (2006) argue that since people rely on the media for information about events in their society and the world at large, whatever the media accord attention would be considered important. What this means is that the interpretative role of the mass media over an event is crucial in shaping the opinion and disposition of members of the public towards the event.

Power of the Press in Nurturing Social Actions

The power of the press in mobilising and leading social actions is recognised globally. Around the world, cases abound where the power of the press was demonstrated not only in opinion formation but also in the displacement of unpopular regimes. In early Europe and America, for instance, it was the press that championed the crusade against authoritarianism (Daramola, 2005). Another instance was the mastermind of the impeachment of America’s former president, Richard Nixon through the publication of the Watergate Scandal (Ndimele & Innocent, 2006). More recently, former Yugoslavian President, Slobadan Misoveli was in 2006 ousted from power through the revolutionary stance of some media organisations in that country (Ekeanyanwu, 2015).

In Nigeria, as it is felt in many African countries, the press remains a potent force that has influenced leadership changes. For instance, it was the revolutionary approach of the Nigerian press that led to the end of military dictatorship in 1999. It was the press that set the agenda for public outcries against military rule and the eventful return of democratic governance in 1999. Even in the current democratic era, the power of the press is felt in shaping public opinion on various socio-political and economic issues in Nigeria.

The foregoing instances demonstrate that the press possesses the force to set agenda over different social phenomena, such as politics, health and economy. McQuail (2010) sums up the power of the press in the society as follows:

- i. influencing behaviour, intentionally or not;
- ii. defining reality;
- iii. conferring status and legitimacy;
- iv. informing quickly and extensively, but selectively; and
- v. more available to those with political and economic power (p. 87).

That the press possesses the force to affect public opinion, to define reality and to confer legitimacy on individuals and causes implies that the press is a critical stakeholder in the management of social issues, including health-related conditions. McQuail (2010) adds that the identification of the power of the press constrains governments that place value on public opinion to consciously explore the press in driving public policies. What this means is that the press is a critical partner in the management of national and transnational emergencies. The transnational approach of the press during global emergencies is to keep citizens of the global community abreast of the turn of events overseas. It also means that the press and other agents of mass communication cannot afford a selective approach in the face of a transnational emergency, such as the coronavirus pandemic.

Human Interest Appeals and the Mass Media Audience

According to Folarin (1998), human interest involves the degree to which an occurrence touches the emotions of the mass media audience (Ufuophu-Biri, 2006). It is the attribute of news that attempts to establish a sense of personal identification between the audience and the occurrence in the news. Occurrences that touch the heart make a lot of news. Folarin (1998) adds that “news is ordinary people, their peculiarities, similarities, huge kindness, petty meanness; all the glory and shame of the human spirit can be news” (p. 17). Human interest introduces the audience to participate in the phenomenon that is reported in the news. Udoudo, Nwanmereni & Ire (2015) state that human interest can engender appeals, such as fear, confusion, tension and courage in the audience and these appeals can affect audience’ reactions to a situation reported in the mass media.

That human interest can engender different reactions in the audience also means that the nature of human interest appeals in a news story can affect the attitude and actions of the mass media audience. Human interest appeals embedded in news reports, especially reports on a crisis situation, can engender despair or confidence in the audience. When a news report engenders fear, panic or confusion, the audience can undertake actions that could be inimical to themselves and the society. Udoudo, et al (2015) aver that Nigerian newspapers should be patriotic in the reportage of emergencies, such as insurgency and epidemics by emphasising the aspects of the event that promote the confidence of the audience in the ability of relevant authorities to successfully manage such event. That is, emergency-related news reports should rather educate and lead the participation of the audience in solving a situation than result in panic which could constrain the audience to act unadvisedly.

The reactions of mass media audience to news reports due to the nature of human interest appeals implies that the press owes the responsibility to tailor news reports in the manner that promotes courage in the audience, especially during national and transnational emergencies. Katz and Lazarsfeld (1956), in articulating the Social Responsibility theory, state that the press should take cognizance of the reactions of the audience in the presentation of news reports (Omego & Ochonogor, 2013). That is, news reports should be tailored engender positive actions in the audience. There is no better time to weigh the reactions of the mass media in the presentation of news reports than during emergencies, such as the coronavirus pandemic.

Analytical roles of Features, Editorials and Opinions in shaping Audience Attitude

In newspapers, feature stories provide detailed background information on an issue beyond straight news stories that are often rendered in a hurry due to the need to beat deadline (Usua, 2008; Hasan, 2013). Feature stories are able to provide background information on a matter because features are research-based. A feature story is written after careful investigation and interviews by the reporter. This enables the reporter to unearth hidden facts about the situation. This accounts for why features are regarded as news behind news (Hasan, 2013). The benefit of feature articles is that the audience are initiated into hitherto unknown facts about an event which may have been left by the straight news reporter.

On its part, the editorial is not only written to state the opinion of a news medium on a topical issue but also to make explanations and to persuade the audience to behave in some desired manner. An editorial can also be used to denounce an attitude, a policy or a legislation that is perceived not to promote public good (Itule & Anderson, 2008; Omego & Ochonogor, 2013; Agbanu, 2017). The interpretative and persuasive attributes of editorials underscore the importance of explanatory, persuasive and attack editorials in motivating the audience to support or denounce a cause in defence of public interest.

This interpretative attribute underscores the correlation between editorials and opinion articles. An opinion article represents the explicative view of an expert on an issue. Agbanu (2017) state that news

reporting has gone beyond mere presentation of information to the audience. This is because the audience ought to know the consequences of an occurrence to the society. “They need those issues to be interpreted and put in proper perspective for better understanding. They also want to know the opinion of the people especially professionals and opinion leaders on topical issues” (p. 43). It is the knowledge that is derived from these expert interpretations of an issue that enables informed opinion formation by the audience.

The nexus between feature articles, editorials and opinions is that they go beyond providing news to equipping the audience with the right attitude towards a cause. They provoke the audience to guided actions in defence of public interest. To this end, the audience are introduced to participate in making a progressive society and solving social problems.

Methodology

The research design adopted for the study was quantitative content analysis. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) define content analysis as a study of the manifest contents of communication, such as, news articles, photographs, cartoons, advertisements, etc. Each newspaper produced a total of 183 issues, making a grand total of 366 issues by the two newspapers as the population of the study. In order not to undermine the chances of any of the newspapers through sampling, the study undertook a census and analysed all the issues of the two newspapers within the period of the study. The units of analysis were straight news stories, features, editorials, opinions, interviews, photos, cartoons and letters to the editor. The coding sheet was used to collate the selected units. To determine the reliability of the coding sheet, the Holsti inter-coder reliability method was adopted. The analysis yielded a reliability of 0.83. This showed that the instrument (coding sheet) was reliable. Data analysis was done in tables, using the following exploratory indicators: geographical outlook; analytical roles of features stories, editorials and opinion articles; and human interest appeals associated with coronavirus-related reports of *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Geographical outlook of *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers in the coverage of coronavirus pandemic

Newspaper	Total Number of Coronavirus-related Reports	Coronavirus-related Reports on Nigeria	Coronavirus-related Reports on Africa	Other Affected Countries
<i>Punch</i>	1, 035	965 (93%)	17 (2%)	53 (5%)
<i>Leadership</i>	688	612 (89%)	21 (3%)	55 (8%)
Total	1, 723	1, 577	38	108

On geographical outlook of *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers in the coverage of coronavirus pandemic, data presented in Table 1 indicate that the newspapers dwelled substantially on coronavirus situation in Nigeria. In other words, *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers substantially took a narrow approach in the coverage of coronavirus pandemic. This report is evident from 93% and 89% coverage of the coronavirus situation in Nigeria by *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers, respectively against the paltry 2% and 3% attention accorded to coronavirus situation in other affected African countries by the newspapers.

Table 2: Analytical roles of *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers on coronavirus containment measures through feature stories, editorials and opinion articles

Reports	<i>Punch Newspaper</i>	<i>Leadership Newspaper</i>
Straight News	859 (83%)	519 (76%)
Feature Stories	56 (5%)	87 (13%)
Editorials	22 (2%)	23 (3%)
Opinions	71 (7%)	37 (5%)
Interviews	21 (2%)	16 (2%)
Letters to the Editor	4 (0.5%)	0 (0%)
Photos	2 (0.5%)	6 (1%)
Cartoons	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	100 %	100%

On the analytical roles of *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers in explaining and emphasising the coronavirus containment measures to the public through feature stories, editorials and opinion articles, the presentation in Table 2 shows that the newspapers did not adequately explore the interpretative roles of the mass media in making useful explanations and calling the public to guided actions in containing the spread of coronavirus pandemic. Apart from *Leadership newspaper* that dedicated 13% of its coverage of the pandemic to feature articles, the newspapers failed to maximise the interpretative roles of features, editorials and opinion articles in calling the public to urgent actions in containing the spread of coronavirus pandemic.

Table 3: Human interest appeals of coronavirus-related reports of *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers

Human Interest Appeals	<i>Punch Newspaper</i>	<i>Leadership Newspaper</i>
Inciting Fear	113 (11%)	148 (22%)
Informative	639 (62%)	399 (58%)
Raising Hope	283 (27%)	141 (20%)
Total	1, 035 (100%)	688 (100%)

The presentation in Table 3 indicates the commendable management of human interest appeals associated with coronavirus-related reports by *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers. Data presented in the table show that the newspapers carefully tailored the headlines of their coronavirus-related reports to provide information and raise the hope of the public in the successful containment of the pandemic by the government and other relevant authorities rather than incite fear or panic in the public.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion was based on the research questions that guided the study.

Research Question 1: What was the geographical outlook of *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers in the coverage of coronavirus pandemic?

The fact that coronavirus pandemic is a global health emergency makes the adoption of a global approach in its coverage inescapable. This is because citizens of the global community would be desirous of being updated with unfolding events about the pandemic in different parts of the globe. For Africans, citizens of the continent would be desirous of being updated with the turn of coronavirus-related events around the continent, especially due the predicted devastation of the pandemic on Africa following the poor state of her healthcare system. Thus, research question one investigated the geographical outlook of *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers in the coverage of the pandemic. Data presented in Table 1 indicated that the newspapers substantially took a narrow approach in the coverage of the coronavirus pandemic. In other words, the newspapers significantly dwelled on the coronavirus situation in Nigeria. Coronavirus-related events in Africa and other climes were substantially neglected by the newspapers. While 93% and 89% of coronavirus-related reports of *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers was concentrated on the coronavirus situation in Nigeria, only 2% and 3%, respectively of coronavirus-related reports of the newspapers was dedicated to the pandemic situation in other African countries.

The substantial narrow outlook of *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers in the coverage of the coronavirus pandemic does not represent commitment to the realisation of the African Action Plan on development effectiveness, which requires the support of strategic stakeholders, one of which is the mass media, to succeed. It is also a negation of social responsibility and community service in the realisation of the core objective of the Africa Centre for Disease Control which aims at improving surveillance, emergency response and management of infectious diseases around the continent. According McQuail (2010), community service is the hallmark of media operation. What this means is that the press and other organs of mass communication owe the responsibility to support the government and other authorities in driving policies that are targeted at improving the well-being of society and its people. Since the mass media serve as a watchdog and people's window to the world, the coverage of coronavirus pandemic or any global emergency should adopt a global approach. This is not to encourage the neglect of local events by the Nigerian media but the provision of information and interpretation on the turn of events in other affected climes will help citizens of Nigeria to develop the right attitude towards the successful management of threats or opportunities offered by such events.

Research Question 2: How did *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers explore the analytical roles of feature stories, editorials and opinion articles in containing the coronavirus pandemic?

On the analytical roles of feature stories, editorials and opinion articles in emphasising the coronavirus containment measures, data presented in Table 2 indicated that *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers poorly exploited these important fact-finding formats in containing the spread of coronavirus pandemic. Apart from *Leadership newspaper* that dedicated 13% of its coronavirus-related reports to feature articles, the newspapers did not adequately explore the analytical or interpretative roles of feature stories, editorials and opinion articles in not only informing but also leading the participation of the public in containing the spread of the pandemic through guided actions. The poor exploitation of the interpretative role of features, editorials and opinions by *Leadership* and *Punch* newspapers seemingly resulted from the obsession for breaking news, a media culture that undermines investigative and interpretative journalism. Onyenankeya & Salawu (2020) aver that investigative journalism in Nigeria is challenged by socio-cultural and economic factors as well as the gradual disappearance of professionalism.

Perhaps, the failure of the interpretative role of the Nigerian media contributed to the sudden abandonment of covid-19 protocols by many Nigerians. Omege & Ochonogor (2013) state that the goal of

editorials is not simply to inform the audience but essentially to make explanations or interpretations and to persuade the audience to take guided actions on a matter. It is this interpretative attribute that underlies the correlation between feature stories, editorials and opinions. Agbanu (2017) avers that news reporting has gone beyond mere presentation of information to the audience. He argues that the audience ought to be guided on the consequences of an occurrence. “They need those issues to be interpreted and put in proper perspective for better understanding. They also want to know the opinion of the people especially professionals and opinion leaders on topical issues” (p. 43).

Specifically, editorial reactions which represent a call for action by the mass media over topical issues of public interest cannot be negated by the pursuit of some socio-cultural and economic gains, especially during an emergency such as the coronavirus pandemic. As the conscience of the society, the mass media occupy the saddle to ask the questions and to elicit explanations as the audience would do if they had opportunity. The inability to address the curiosity of the audience through interpretation of issues could make the unsuspecting member of the public to act unadvisedly. This could set back the containment of community spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

Research Question 3: What were the human interest appeals associated with coronavirus-related reports of *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers?

Human interest appeals are important elements in the consideration of the contents of mass communication. This is because human interest involves the degree to which an event affects the emotions of the audience and the appeals such event produces in the audience. That is, the human interest appeal that results from exposure to an event through the mass media can influence the attitude of the audience towards the event. Thus, research question three investigated the human interest appeals associated with coronavirus-related reports of *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers. Data presented in Table 3 indicated the commendable management of coronavirus-related reports by the newspapers to elicit positive appeals in the audience. While 62% and 58% of coronavirus-related reports of *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers, respectively were informative, 27% and 20% coronavirus-related reports of the newspapers, respectively raised hope of the public that the successful containment of the pandemic was attainable. Not only were headlines, such as, “*Covid-19: Obaseki reaffirms commitment to combating pandemic*” (Leadership of July 15, 2020, p. 19); “*Covid-19: LCCI commends FG’s effort in sustaining economy*” (Leadership of July 16, 2020, p. 14); and “*First human trial of Oxford covid-19 vaccine shows promise*” (Leadership of July 21, 2020, p. 6) informative but capable of raising the hope and courage of the audience that the successful containment of covid-19 pandemic was attainable.

The human interest appeals associated with an event can introduce the audience to participate in the event and can as well distance the audience from the event. Thus, Udoudo, et al (2015) state that Nigerian newspapers should demonstrate patriotism in their coverage of emergencies, such as, insurgency and epidemics by emphasising the angle of an event that promotes courage or confidence of the audience in the efforts of the government and other authorities. Katz & Lazarsfeld (1956) aver that the press should take cognizance of the reactions of the audience in the presentation of reports (Omego & Ochonogor, 2013). It goes to say that media reports must be tailored to engender positive reactions from the audience. There is no better time to demonstrate this advanced watchdog function by the Nigerian media than during emergencies, such as, the coronavirus pandemic.

Conclusion

This study investigated the coverage of coronavirus pandemic in Africa by *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers. The study evaluated the outlook of the newspapers in the coverage of the pandemic. It also evaluated the analytical roles of the newspapers in emphasising the containment measures of the pandemic and the human interest appeals associated with corona-virus-related reports of *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers. Findings of the study indicated that the newspapers significantly took a narrow approach in

the coverage of the pandemic. Interactions with respect to the coronavirus situation in other affected African countries and the rest of the world were scarcely reported by the newspapers. *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers also performed poorly in the utilisation of the analytical roles of feature stories, editorials and opinion articles to lead audience participation in the fight against coronavirus pandemic. However, the prudent management of human interest appeals by the newspapers is commendable. Rather than inciting fear or panic, *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers substantially tailored their coronavirus-related reports to inform and to raise audience hope in the successful containment of the pandemic by the government and its agencies.

Recommendations

1. *Punch*, *Leadership* and other Nigerian media organisations should accord a global approach to global problems and opportunities. The coronavirus pandemic presents both threats and opportunities to citizens of the global community and not Nigerians alone. Thus, the coverage of events relating to the pandemic should leave neither Nigerians nor other citizens of the global community bereft of events in their larger environment. The analysis of coronavirus-related interactions around the world should endear positive attitudes in citizens of the global community towards the pandemic.
2. *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers should consciously exploit the interpretative roles of feature stories, editorials and opinion articles in addressing controversies and agitations of the audience over a phenomenon. As the conscience of the society, *Punch*, *Leadership* and other media stations in Nigeria have the responsibility to ask questions and elicit responses as the audience would do if they had opportunity.
3. The conscientious exploitation of the interpretative roles of features, editorials and opinion articles is critical not only in leading the confidence of the audience but also engendering their participation in winning the fight against a social problem. As critical stakeholders in the management of emergencies, *Punch*, *Leadership* and other Nigerian media organisations should go beyond provision of information to make useful interpretations that should guide the attitude and actions of the public towards issues of public interest.

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