



A Review of the Relationship between Newspapers and Health Reporting in Nigeria: Reportage on Lassa fever in Edo State

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Abstract

Lassa fever remains one of the deadliest diseases that the sub-Saharan Africa countries, especially Nigeria, have been battling with. This calls for the need to investigate if the newspaper has any role to play in this health issue; therefore, the Vanguard, Punch, The Guardian and This Day newspapers were selected for analysis. This study, which was anchored on the framing theory of the media, explored survey method of research. It covered the twelve-month period of May 2015 to June 2016. Three hundred and seventy-four (374) respondents were drawn from the three senatorial districts (Edo South, Edo North and Edo Central) in Edo State. Findings showed that the respondents were enthusiastic about the coverage given to Lassa fever outbreak by the newspapers, and that newspapers' reports have helped in increasing knowledge about Lassa fever. Based on these, the research concluded that the selected newspapers did pay attention to Lassa fever discourse, and took Lassa fever as an important issue. Among the recommendations made were that the media, particularly newspapers, should continually facilitate and sustain the discourse on Lassa fever, especially among policy makers, for them to make policies that would aid the people towards achieving good health. Also, newspapers should intensify their research on Lassa fever so that they can come up with more in-depth and detailed reports that will educate the public on the dangers of the disease, and on preventive measures they can adopt. Finally, the government and health institutions should provide an enabling environment for media to perform by providing them with required information about Lassa fever.

Keywords: Awareness; Education; Health; Lassa fever; Reportage

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Introduction

Lassa fever is a form of viral haemorrhagic fever produced by the Lassa virus, and known as Lassa haemorrhagic fever (LHF). Most people infected with the virus do not develop symptoms, but when they do, they manifest as fever, weakness, headaches, vomiting, and muscular pains, according to the World Health Organization-WHO (2016). It has been reported that it is sometimes accompanied with bleeding from the mouth or gastrointestinal system.

The Centre for Disease Control- CDC (2019) adds that moderate symptoms may include weariness, and that in 20% of people more severe symptoms such as bleeding gums, breathing problems, chest pain, or dangerously low blood pressure may occur. According to WHO (2016), once infected, the chance of mortality is roughly 1%, and death usually occurs within two weeks after commencement of symptoms. Some of individuals who survive

it are likely to experience hearing loss, which in around half of these instances improves within three months [1].

The virus that causes Lassa fever was initially detected in Sierra Leone in the 1950s, but it was not identified until 1969, when it killed two missionary nurses in Lassa town in Borno State, Nigeria. The illness was first recognized in Nigeria in 1969, according to Goeijenbier, Wagenaar, Goris, Martina, Henttonen, Vaheer, Reusken, Hartskeerl, Osterhaus, and Van Gorp (2012), and it is named after the town of Lassa, where it was discovered.

In 2018, Nigeria saw the highest epidemic of Lassa fever ever reported. Maxmen (2018) claims that it spread to 18 of the country's 36 states. There were 1,081 suspected cases and 90 recorded deaths as of February 25, 2018. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 317 of the cases and 72 fatalities in 2018 were confirmed as Lassa, bringing the total number of documented cases to 431.

Nigeria had 810 cases of Lassa fever in 2019, with 167 deaths; the highest case fatality rate (23.3%) ever recorded [2]. According to the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control-NCDC (2020), another outbreak of the epidemic occurred in the second week of January 2020, and by the ninth week, the total number of cases had climbed to 855, with 144 fatalities, resulting in a case fatality rate of 16.8%.

In late 2021, Lassa fever killed two senior consultant Gynaecologists from the Dalhatu Arafat Specialist hospital (DASH) in Lafia, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. They contracted the disease during an emergency caesarean operation conducted on a woman who was admitted into the hospital bleeding but unknown to the doctors she had Lassa fever. However, the woman died after the surgery while the baby also died not quite long after the death of the mother [3]. Also in December 2021, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) announced that 4,083 suspected cases had been reported in all the 36 states of Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja following a looming outbreak of Lassa fever in Nigeria. Reports have it that no fewer than eight health workers have been infected while the total number of deaths from the disease had risen to 83 [4].

The Lassa virus is one of numerous viruses listed by WHO as a possible source of a future pandemic, according to Kidney (2016) and WHO (2016). As a result, it has been designated as a priority for urgent research and development in order to produce new diagnostic tests, vaccines, and medications. Apart from the medical measures adopted to address the threat of Lassa fever, the communication and media aspects must also be considered.

Guanah (2018) defines communication as the transmission of information from one person/medium/point A to another person/medium/point B via a dedicated channel, in order to achieve a desired effect or reaction while mass communication is the dissemination of information to a large group of people through various media- mass media (p. 390). Individuals and societies can benefit from timely and accurate communication, according to Smith, Menn, and McKyer [5, 6]. And the United States Department of Health and Human Services (2004). Hassan (2013) also notes that communication thus "involves interaction with our environment-physical, biological and social and without this interaction we will not be aware of whether we are safe or in danger" (p.4).

According to Nwabueze and Obiora (2012, p. 137), print media play an important role in the promotion of national health programmes across the world. Education, information, entertainment, sensitisation, citizen motivation/mobilization, correlation, campaign, and orientation are all important functions in the promotion of national health programmes in Africa.

As a result, the purpose of this study was to look into the coverage of Lassa fever in Nigeria by Vanguard, Punch, The Guardian, and This Day newspapers, as well as the impact of that coverage on the people of Edo State, whom they sought to inform about the dangers of Lassa fever through their reporting between June 1st, 2015 and May 31st, 2016.

Statement of the Problem

Good health and communication are two areas of man's life that are very significant to his existence. No wonder [7]. notes that the role of the mass media in health reportage would go a long way in putting health issues in the minds and lips of every one. He adds that the media are significant sources of health-related information, and can shape the way we think about and discuss health issues.

Consequently, if health communication and the media can be effectively used to enlighten the masses on the causes of Lassa fever, and ways of preventing it, the question whether the media are successful in educating the general public on preventive and control measures to adopt is the problem this study investigates.

Study Objectives

The objectives of the study were:

- i. To ascertain the Level of respondents' enthusiasm towards the coverage given to Lassa fever outbreak by the selected newspapers
- ii. To determine the extent of the knowledge the respondents have about Lassa fever through the selected newspapers,
- iii. To find out the adequacy of newspapers' reports in educating the public on the dangers and preventive measures of Lassa fever.

Literature Review

Theoretical Leaning

This research is based on the Framing Theory. The domains of cognitive psychology and anthropology are where framing theory began. According to Tankard, Hendrickson, Silberman, Bliss and Ghanem (1991), "a frame is a central organising idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration. Similarly Prince [8]. Defines an issue frame as a theme, plot, or title that suggests a favoured interpretation of particular concerns.

According to Scheufele and Tewksbury, framing theory states that the way a news item is presented may impact how it is viewed and comprehended by the audience. The researchers suggested a framing effect model, based on the premise that the news frame triggers particular interferences, thoughts, judgements, and contrasts about topics and policies. The placement of news articles, whether presented with an imposing banner to attract public attention and compassion or concealed inside the newspaper for an interested reader to locate, is of particular relevance. Frames are conceptual constructs that aid in the comprehension of reality as perceived by the individual.

Framing may be subjective. According to Norris [9]. News frames are cognitive schemata, and journalists commonly work with news frames to simplify, prioritise and structure the narrative flow of events, framing is unavoidable in the course of news construction. It is the stage at which journalists identify problems, analyse reasons and make moral judgments [10-12]. To Entman

(1993), framing involves selection and salience. He summarises the main aspect of framing by saying 'frame defines problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgment and proffer solutions. Framing analysis is useful in guiding studies of health-related reporting.

More specifically, this theory is vital to this research because the language used by journalists to describe diseases and risk factors, the tone of the report, and the inclusion or exclusion of discussion of causes, preventions, and therapies can all have a substantial impact on readers' views of a health issue.

Health Communication Strategies

Health communication entails the use of various communication methods to raise awareness and spread health messages in order for the users of the information to improve their health. People learn about new medical discoveries, existing diseases, and other health concerns, as well as the dangers they bring and how to prevent and address them, through health communication. The use of the media to communicate health-related concerns to members of society, as well as the need to improve the society's health system, is known as health communication.

The use of communication medium such as print media in carrying out health-awareness campaigns, particularly as it pertains to conveying health hazards and solutions to individuals and groups of people, is one of the roles played by health communication. The media also play an active role in disseminating the knowledge needed to mitigate the risks connected with health problems as part of the process of communicating health hazards (Odukomaia & Oyero, 2010). Furthermore, in their attempts to communicate health-related concerns, the medium of communication assist members of society in reaffirming attitudes that are usually thought to foster the growth of health in society.

According to Atkin and Arkin [13]. The goals of health communication are to educate, improve, alter society, address social problems, run long-term campaigns, and generate comprehension of difficult material. Persuasive or behavioural communication, risk communication, media advocacy, entertainment education, interactive health communication, development communication, and participatory communication are some of the types of health communication identified by the Health Communication Unit (2009). Others include:

Organisational Communication

Organisational communication, which encompasses an organisation's internal communication procedures, ensures that the organisation's mission, goal, objectives, programme priorities, and strategies are understood and promoted by employees at all levels, as well as communicated to the public and patients. Health ministries can assist health care providers in persuading community gatherings and individual patients to communicate information on topics such as exercise, diet, drugs, smoking, drinking, hand-washing, and use of sanitary facilities, among others, by identifying priority areas for health promotion and improvement of individual and collective lifestyles.

Media Literacy

Media literacy is another term for media education. The practice of training children and teenagers critical thinking skills concerning media is known as media literacy. Media have become key routes of cultural enrichment due to their attraction and pervasiveness; yet, some scholars argue that media are no longer considered part of cultural enrichment; they are culture. Media educators work to educate young people on how to access, interpret, analyse, and criticise media messages, as well as how the media shape societal norms, attitudes, and behaviours.

Health Journalism

Health journalism is the provision of health information in various kinds of mass media, mainly in news parts and service sections such as health supplements, magazine articles, radio and television shows, counselling and support columns, and healthy recipes, among other things.

Social Marketing

The use of marketing methods to charitable goals is known as social marketing. Using numerous media channels to convince an audience to accept a concept, a product, a practice, or all three, social marketing is founded on the four "ps" of marketing: product, pricing, location, and promotion. Although social marketing may include behaviour theories and audience research, it seldom employs interpersonal communication tactics, which are a critical component of health communication initiatives.

Nonelli defines social marketing as the planning, implementation, and monitoring of initiatives aimed at increasing target group acceptance of social concepts or behaviours. The objective of social marketing, according to Man off is to raise public awareness about major public health concerns, and to enhance public health [14, 15].

Edutainment

A core principle of enter-educate programming, according to the Pan American Health Organization [16]. Is that entertainment-oriented health information is appealing, intelligible, and capable of influencing health behaviours. Enter-educate programmes include soap operas on television or radio, popular music that promotes healthy habits, and the inclusion of health messages in normal television programming, such as designated driver or seatbelt use. Many health-related themes, such as family planning, diet, and other health concerns, have been promoted through printed publications such as newspapers.

Social Communication

The goal of social communication programmes was to encourage community engagement as well as cultural and educational programming in order to enhance the community's social fabric. Adult education, rural development, notably in the agricultural sector, and maternal and child health in rural and low-income urban regions were the major focus of social communication programmes. Many social communication programmes increasingly include health information as a regular part of their programming. In terms of health, social communicators play a

function comparable to that of a health journalist.

Importance of Health Communication

Health communication is so crucial in the discussion of health concerns; hence scholars such as Afolayan (2009) highlight some of its benefits as follows

Education: General public education is a critical component of a prevention-oriented approach to health and disease issues, as well as the foundation for all communication education. Education can aid in the acquisition of new information. Knowledge, it is often held, determines attitudes, and attitudes, in turn, drive behaviour. Changes in lifestyle and illness risk factors can be influenced through health education. Changes in human behaviour can avert the majority of the world's main health issues and untimely mortality.

Raising morale: According to Afolayan (2009), morale is "the capacity of a group of people to pull together persistently or consistently" (p.46).

He emphasises that the first step in any endeavour to improve the morale of a health team, or a group of individuals, is to communicate, both vertically and horizontally.

Health development: Communication can play an important part in health development by disseminating information about development goals and educating individuals for the tasks that are required of them. Communication is both necessary and beneficial, and the proper use of communication medium may aid in the development of health.

Health Organisation: Communication is the lifeblood of any organisation, according to the World Health Organization [17]. Within an organisation, communication flows both vertically and horizontally. Vertical communication can be downward or upward. Horizontal or cross communication occurs most often at any level between equals. Downward communication stretches from the highest administration to the beneficiaries or employees, passing via a hierarchy of professionals and non-professionals. The degree of flexibility in an organisation's internal communication network is determined by the direction in which communication flows. Intra- and inter-sectoral cooperation relies heavily on communication.

Print Media and the curbing of the spread of Lassa fever

Magazines, films, video, radio, encyclopaedias, official documents, books, duplicated materials, audio records, TVs, the Internet, cinema, journals, and newspapers are among the different forms of print media. According to Daramola (2013), print media is a division of the mass media of communication based on the mechanism engaged in the process of transmitting messages, which is based on printing items of information using electro-magnetic waves, as is the case with broadcast media.

The employment of a technological equipment or apparatus to deliver a message to members of society by appealing to their sense of sight is known as print media. Print media, as opposed to broadcast media, offer information on paper, published,

printed medium such as newspapers and magazines as routes of communication, according to [18-24].

Newspapers and magazines, which, unlike books, are bound and folded, are among the most prevalent and popular print media items. Newspapers and magazines are frequently divided into categories based on their purpose, frequency of publication, production time, circulation, geography, production method, and target readership [25]. For example, the frequency with which a newspaper is published determines whether it is classified as dailies or non-dailies. A newspaper publication must be published, at least, five days a week to be qualified as daily newspapers. All newspapers, whether daily or non-daily, are further subdivided by area, publishing time, and format.

Other differentiating characteristics of the print media, according to Sambe (2005), include the mobility and simultaneity of information or items of news on the broadcast media. The capacity of print media outlets to reach audience members wherever they are situated, according to him, is referred to as portability. This distinguishing trait is also available through broadcast media. Reviewability in the print media, on the other hand, refers to the ability of messages or information on print media channels to be received and or reviewed at the audience's leisure, as opposed to simultaneity in the broadcast media, which refers to all members of the audience at the same time [26].

Specifically, newspapers are extensively read around the world, and they are available and accessible to people of all ages and walks of life in any town. They make provisions of important, current, and interesting information to all categories of readers. Amongst the mainstream media globally, the newspaper industry appears to be the biggest, due to its popularity amid readers, and the fact that it engages the activities of varieties of staff, including freelance journalists and casual workers. Print media also has the advantages of permanency, literate technology, and a unique mental demand. Permanence is defined by Okunna, Omenugha, and Ebeze [27]. As a property of print media that permits the placement of messages in written words and pictures on paper by a specific method that necessitates the use of particular procedures and equipment. The permanence of the print media connotes

Literate technology necessitates that the print media's audience be literate in order to comprehend the messages transmitted via the channels of the print media. Due to the print media's unique mental property, the audience of the various print media channels must concentrate, and not be distracted in order to extract the message transmitted through the various print media channels [28].

People's awareness of health concerns, as well as their comprehension of medicine and science in general, is shaped in large part by the print media. Print media's transmission of health information is significant in changing public views and perhaps behaviour, according to research [29, 30]. To Hodgetts and Chamberlain the media have the advantage of being both instrumental and explicitly involved in society's shared understanding and knowledge of health issues.

Many individuals, according to Fremitus [31]. Rely on the news media for health-related information. The media also provide a significant quantity of information to policymakers. A responsible approach to newspaper news presentation would necessitate a higher commitment from the media to display relevant health concerns in order to empower readers.

Notes that, "the role of the mass media in health reportage would go a long way in putting health issues in the minds and lips of everyone... The media are significant source of health-related information and can shape the way we think about and discuss health issues" (pp. 175). Individual health decisions may be influenced by media coverage, which may also serve to avoid poor health and contribute to changes in public policy and public perception [32-33]. It is for this reason that Guanah (2019) buttresses this role of the journalist and the media thus, noting that:

It is the responsibility of journalists to bring to the front burner of discussions current and topical issues that could have, naturally, been swept under the carpet. The role of the press (mass media) in the society is so sacrosanct that it is a misnomer to rate it as the fourth estate of the realm. The press is a 'government' itself because it the press that makes people appreciate arguments on issues, and when the press is silent the society is in trouble. The press is to the society what the blood is to the body, because it is an indispensable part of the society. Whatever the case may be, it is until the 'press government' participates in any matter that it really becomes an issue, hence it is the defender of the poor, and the watchdog of the society (pp.81-82).

To do so, the print media run health-awareness campaigns, particularly when it comes to conveying health hazards and remedies to people and groups in society. Following the outbreak of Lassa fever in Nigeria, the media should give reliable information that would help in the quick containment of the epidemic by providing accurate, timely, and relevant information on the disease. Health information is critical in driving strategic health behaviours, treatments, and decisions, health information is the most valuable resource in health care and health promotion [34].

The media should inform the people about Lassa fever by offering information and counselling, as well as evaluating the severity of the issue. A preventative health care system is built on the foundation of health education. The media should also give educational materials on illness prevention methods. Educating the public about Lassa fever can assist raise awareness of the disease's dangers and the skills needed to mitigate them. The general public's education is an essential component of a prevention-oriented approach to health and disease issues, as well as the foundation for all communication education [35].

Folarin (2010) believes that the media should be driven by a desire to educate the public about health concerns. They should be willing to include the receiver in a problem-solving process. Folarin (2010) considers the media to be critical tools for bringing about beneficial social change [36].

It is also the job of the media to set the topic for national debate on the outbreak of Lassa fever in Nigeria, as well as to

raise knowledge about the disease through public awareness campaigns aimed at stopping the disease's tide. One of the most effective ways for the media to promote healthcare is through public awareness campaigns, which are thought to reach the target population [37]. In order to decrease or abolish the spread of Lassa fever in Nigeria, the media should focus on it through various publications. The media should also continue to assist the government's efforts to alert the people about the outbreak of Lassa fever so that it can be contained.

Methodology

This study adopted Survey research method, utilising questionnaire as research instrument to enable the study assemble accurate data. Survey method was used because it is justified by experts' submission that survey enhances the study of both small and large number of people that derived from the entire population and share basic characteristics of the elements that make up that population [36].

Population of the Study

The survey focused on the awareness of people about the outbreak of Lassa fever in Edo state, Nigeria as published in Vanguard, Punch, The Guardian and This Day newspapers during the period of study. The state has a population of three million, two hundred and thirty-three thousand, three hundred and sixty-six- 3,233,366 (2006 Population Census). It is made up of three Senatorial Districts (Edo South, Edo Central and Edo North).

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

To arrive at the sample size for the study, the researcher randomly selected two local government areas (LGA) from each of the three (3) senatorial districts, this gave a total of six (6) local government areas. Oredo and Egor LGAs were selected from Edo South Senatorial district. Oredo LGA has a population of 374,515 while Egor LGA has a population of 340,287. The total population of the two LGAs is 714,802. Esan Central and Esan West LGAs were selected from Edo Central senatorial district. Esan Central LGA has a population of 105,242 while Esan West has a population of 127,718. The total population of the two LGAs is 232,960. Owan West and Etsako West LGAs were selected from Edo North Senatorial district. Owan West LGA has a population of 99,056 while Etsako West LGA has a population of 198, 975. The total population of the two LGAs is 298,031.

Therefore, when the population of the six LGAs were added together, it gave the population of the study as one million, two hundred and forty-five thousand, and seven hundred and ninety-three (1,245,793). Using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table, 384 was chosen as the sample size. The table provides that when a given population is from 1000,000 and above, the corresponding sample size should be 384. The researcher adopted Proportionate Allocation Formula to determine the sample size to draw from each senatorial district thus:

The researcher adopted the multi-stage sampling design for the study. Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekharefo and Okpanachi (2012) assert

that, “multi-stage sampling requires the researcher to choose his samples in stages until he gets the required sample” (p.190). From the selected six LGAs, electoral wards were chosen thus: Oredo LGA- 12 wards; Egor LGA- 10 wards; Esan Central LGA-10 wards; Esan West LGA- 10 wards; Owan West LGA- 11 wards, and Etsako West LGA- 12 wards. Based on the sample size of each Senatorial district, respondents were selected from these chosen wards. Respondents selected were those who read Vanguard, Punch, The Guardian and This Day newspapers. They were asked if they read these newspapers before they were handed the copies of the questionnaire.

Reliability and Validity of Instrument

A Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was run to determine the reliability of the instrument between responses of 20 respondents in two separate occasions, and on the same questions. There was a strong positive correlation between respondents’ first answers and the second, which was statistically significant ($r = 0.6$, $n = 20$, $p = 0.05$). Face validity by mass communication research experts was done on the questionnaire, and suggestions made to improve on it were effected.

Data Collection, Presentation and Analysis

The copies of the questionnaire were administered through three trained research assistants. Out of the 384 copies of the questionnaire distributed, only 374 copies were returned, representing 97.40% response rate. The data gleaned from them were analysed using simple frequency distribution tables, percentages and numbers for easy interpretation.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

(Tables 1-9) that the selected newspapers are inundated with reports about Lassa fever and these reports have helped the respondents to take steps that prevented them from being victims of Lassa fever.

Discussion of Findings

Respondents' response suggested that they are very enthusiastic about the coverage given to the Lassa virus epidemic by the Vanguard, Punch, The Guardian and This Day newspapers

Table 1: Indicates that the study had more male respondents than female respondents.

Respondents	Frequency	%
Male	202	54.01
Female	172	45.99
Total	374	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 2: Ages of Respondents.

Respondents	Frequency	%
18-30	21	5.61
31-45	283	75.67
46-55	-	-
56 & Above	70	18.72
Total	374	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 3: Shows that majority of the respondents were married (Marital status of Respondents).

Respondents	Frequency	%
Single	114	30.48
Married	260	69.52
Divorced	-	-
Total	374	100

Table 4: Revealed that all the respondents are literate in varying degrees and levels, however, majority of the respondents were BSC/HND holders (Educational Qualification of Respondents).

Respondents	Frequency	%
Primary	-	-
SSCE	121	32.35
OND/NCE	70	18.72
B.SC/HND	171	45.72
PGD/MSC	12	3.21
Others	-	-
Total	374	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

Table 5: The respondents cut across different spheres of the society, and that majority of them were into business (Occupation of Respondents).

Respondents	Frequency	%
Student	40	10.7
Business	141	37.7
Public/Civil Service	93	24.86
Self employed	69	18.45
Others	31	8.29
Total	374	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

Table 6: Indicates that most of the respondents frequently read the selected newspapers under study (Frequency at which respondents read the selected newspapers).

Respondents	Frequency	%
Regularly	163	43.58
Often	130	34.76
Occasionally	59	15.78
Sometimes	11	2.94
Rarely	11	2.94
Total	374	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

Table 7: Level of respondents` enthusiasm towards the coverage given to Lassa fever outbreak by the selected newspapers.

Respondents	Frequency	%
Very High Level	160	42.78
High Level	125	33.42
Undecided	5	1.34
Low Level	68	18.18
Very Low Level	16	4.28
Total	374	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

Table 8: Extent of the knowledge the respondents have about Lassa fever through the selected newspapers.

Respondents	Frequency	%
Very High Knowledge	177	47.33
High Knowledge	114	30.48
Average Knowledge	4	1.07
Low Knowledge	42	11.23
Very Low Knowledge	37	9.89
Total	374	100

Table 9: Adequacy of newspapers' reports in educating the public on the dangers and preventive measures of Lassa fever.

Respondents	Frequency	%
Largely Adequate	184	49.2
Fairly Adequate	155	41.44
Averagely adequate	5	1.34
Not Adequate	22	5.88
Very Inadequate	8	2.14
Total	374	100

(76.2%). This indicates that newspapers were successful in their mission of raising public awareness about a significant social issue.

Newspapers have undoubtedly helped to educate the public about Lassa fever by giving information that is both useful and beneficial in the battle against the epidemic. This is in accordance with Okunna & Omenugha's (2012) assessment of newspapers' value. The duo point out that the newspaper is a medium that gets its position as a bearer of current information or news from the fact that newspapers have long been a valuable source of information that has aided people in managing their health.

In addition, newspapers educate the general population on how to preserve excellent health and live a long life. Okunna and Omenugha (2012) go on to say that this has been the job of newspapers from their origin, and that it is a role that they do far better than any other mass media.

The second goal of this study was to establish the respondents' degree of knowledge on Lassa fever, and it was discovered that respondents had a lot of facts and information (77.81%) about the epidemic, thanks to the selected newspapers. The implication is that the responders are aware of the risks and the numerous ways in which Lassa fever can be contracted.

This is why, according to Griffiths and Knutson (as cited in Agbi, 2016, p.13), "three effects might occur after an individual's exposure or contact with health information: the learning of correct health information, the changing of health attitudes and

values, and the establishment of new health behavior" regardless of the medium or strategy. Uwon (2012) also points out that the media are important sources of health-related information, and that they have the ability to influence how we think about and debate health issues.

The manifest data acquired from the field indicate that the volume and frequency of reporting on Lassa fever by the newspapers were high (90.64%), which was used to determine the appropriateness of the selected newspapers' reports in teaching the people on the risks and preventative measures of Lassa virus. In some respects, this must have aided in the disease's successful containment so far. This finding supports Adefisan's (2014) assertion that it is the job of the media to set the agenda for national debate regarding the epidemic of Lassa fever in Nigeria, as well as to raise knowledge about the disease in order to prevent or eradicate its spread.

Guanah, Obi, and Akumabor assert that the media are important aspects of society because of the obligations they bear, which include monitoring the environment in which they operate and educating the public in all circumstances and situations since they serve as the society's watchdog. This supports the notion that the media are reliable providers of accurate, timely, and educational information for the general population.

Conclusion

Based on the outcomes of this study, it can be concluded that the selected newspapers paid attention to the Lassa fever debate, and treated the disease as a major news story. This is demonstrated by the fact that they provided a thorough report on Lassa fever. People were educated and informed about Lassa fever because of frequent media stories.

Though the findings of this study revealed that respondents were enthusiastic about the coverage given to the Lassa fever outbreak by the selected newspapers; that respondents' knowledge of Lassa fever was high; and that the selected newspapers adequately reported on Lassa fever, the media can still do more because the way they frame health issues in their reporting can go a long way to promote a nation's health and development.

The media, according to the trio of Guanah, Obi, and Akumabor (2020), report to the public information they acquire from both within and outside the society in which they are positioned. Therefore, as the framing theory, on which this study is based, emphasises, "it is important to add that the perception people eventually have about any issue is mostly influenced by how the media report such stories or events".

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