

Health Communication During a Pandemic: An Analysis of Framing of COVID-19 in Nigeria's *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* Newspapers, April – August 2020

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Abstract:

COVID-19 being a pandemic that had an unprecedented impact on virtually all aspects of human endeavour globally, continues to attract the interest of researchers who have been investigating different aspects. This study therefore analyses the framing of COVID-19 in *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* newspapers in Nigeria from April to August 2020. Data revealed that the two newspapers gave ample coverage of the coronavirus pandemic and that death toll frames and positive frames were significantly used in conveying the stories on the disease. The study also found that the newspapers gave prominence to the pandemic evidenced by the placement of stories on their front pages. Additionally, the research finds that both newspapers employed various frames in the framing of COVID-19, encompassing topics such as hand washing, social distancing, medical care, lockdown measures, and public perceptions, aligning with the third objective of determining framing patterns. The study concludes that the front-page placement of COVID-19 stories by the two newspapers increased visibility, highlighting the significance of the pandemic to their audience and effectively setting the agenda on the issue, with a total of 1,148 stories during the investigated period. Arising from the findings, the study recommends, among others, that newspapers should continue to use positive frames that would enlighten people about important health issues and downplay negative frames that would instil fear. It also recommends that important health issues should be given prominence through placement on the front page since stories on the front pages of newspapers attract attention and tend to carry more weight.

Keywords: COVID-19, Framing Patterns, Media Influence, Positive Frames, Informed Decisions.

The mass media are the main sources of information on a variety of subjects that enlighten the minds, ginger critical thinking and birth rational decisions which translate to positive actions that bring about a progressive society. They play indispensable roles in people's lives by not only providing accurate, balanced, fair, independent, objective, truthful and responsible information in line with the canons of journalism (Obateru, 2016), but also by being the people's mouthpiece, including "providing channels for discussion and debates" (Dennis & Merrill, 2006: 54). No modern society can function effectively without the use of the mass media and their contribution to national development is felt in all spheres. They disseminate information on different subjects, trends and issues such as agriculture, arts, aviation, business, commerce, crime, education, entertainment, environment, health, politics, science and technology, security, among other areas, frequently.

The term, mass media, prior to advancement in technology that birthed the Web, referred to channels of communication for disseminating information to a large number of people using print (newspapers, magazines and books) and electronic (radio, television and film). In the digital age, however, the term has expanded to include the Web and its web-based

applications like online news sites, blogs and social media platforms. Hence, the term mass media as used in this study refers to the channels of disseminating information to a heterogeneous audience using newspapers, magazines and books (print); radio, television and films (electronic), and online news sites, blogs and social media platforms (Web). The mass media, be it print, electronic or the Web, remain the most effective for informing, educating and entertaining the populace; providing analytical, in-depth and interpretative reports on events, locally and internationally, thus helping the people to make informed decisions (Singh & Nity, 2018).

The mass media always set agenda on a variety of issues or subjects in the society. Through the agenda-setting function, "the media give proper prominence to issues so that the public will consider such issues as important" (Igwebuike, 2017: 131). Beyond their agenda-setting function, they also help the populace to make sense of the happenings in society through detailed analysis and explanatory reporting. For instance, on diseases and related health matters, the mass media has been found to be viable channels that are used to sensitise the people, as well as communicate change behaviour. Lucas and Ejiga (2022) highlight this when they posit that the mass media's potential to reach and influence a wide audience

makes them suitable channels for disseminating health communication and implementation of public health policies. Amezcua, McAlister, Ramirez, Espinoza and Salud (1990) cited in Lucas and Ejiga (2022: 68) buttress this:

... mass media has been employed extensively by public health professionals for being the most powerful medium for persuading the audience, shaping their behaviour and modifying their attitudes towards accepting healthy lifestyle and rejecting the previously unhealthy practices and behaviour.

The media, including the newspapers in Nigeria have been in the forefront of campaigns against diseases, including the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the outbreak of the coronavirus, newspapers provided coverage, locally and internationally to highlight its devastating impact on different spheres of life.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is a contagious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) and the first known case was identified in Wuhan China, in December 8, 2019 (Page, Hinshaw & McKay, 2021) and was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on January 30, 2020 (WHO, 2020). The rapid spread of the virus from person to person in Wuhan, then from persons to community later metamorphosed into a global epidemic which warranted the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) to declare the outbreak a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (Cucinotta, & Vanelli, 2020). As of January 16, 2023, there were 662,445,150 confirmed cases of the COVID-19, and 6,704,827 reported deaths global (WHO, 2023). From this figure, 266,463 cases were confirmed, and 3,255 deaths recorded in Nigeria within the same period (WHO, 2023).

The word “pandemic” became a popular lexicon globally in 2020-2021 due to the emergence of the COVID-19. DeLeo and Hinnebusch, (2005) describe pandemic as an epidemic of infectious disease that has spread across a large region, for instance, multiple continents or worldwide, affecting a substantial number of individuals. Rogers (2020) define a pandemic as “outbreak of infectious disease that occurs over a wide geographical area and that is of high prevalence, generally affecting a significant proportion of the world’s population, usually over the course of several months” (para. 1). A pandemic can also be viewed as a large-scale (worldwide) outbreak of infectious disease that can greatly increase morbidity and mortality over a wide geographical area and cause significant economic, social and political disruption.

The media used different frames to disseminate information on the COVID-19 pandemic to prompt positive public response. According to Gamson and Modigliani (1987), a frame is a central organising idea or storyline that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them. Media frames include written word, spoken word, visuals and other forms of communication employed to contextualise an issue or topic and are commonly used for emphasis and or equivalency (D’Angelo, 2017). The term framing as used in this study refers to how newspapers

perceived, crafted, interpreted and presented the COVID-19 pandemic news stories to the populace, using texts and visuals to project the important issues related to the disease and leaving others thus triggering positive responses.

Many studies exist on the how the news media framed the COVID-19 in their coverage. For instance, Rooke (2021) investigated an alternative media framing of COVID-19 risks, analyzing streamed video content frames from a popular, far-right alternative media personalities in the UK; Aziz, Imtiaz and Saeed (2022) did a comparative study of two newspapers editorials in Pakistan - *Dawn*, an English newspaper; and *Jang*, an Urdu newspaper and analysed how the COVID-19 stories were framed, while Makata (2021) examined the framing pattern of China before and following the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic by three Nigerian newspapers: *The Punch*, *The Nation*, and *The Sun*. Similarly, Nwakpu, Ezema, and Ogbodo (2020) evaluated audience response to media framing of coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria just as, Onwe, Chukwu, Nwamini, Nwankwo, Elem, Ogbaeja, Nwasum, Nwakpu, and Ogbodo (2020) focused on three online newspapers: *Sahara Reporters*, *Premium Times* and *Daily Post* and their framing patterns of the COVID-19 in Nigeria.

For the purpose of this study, the media in focus is newspaper, specifically *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* Nigerian newspapers. It is also delimited to the COVID-19 pandemic and framing analysis is employed because it offers the best insight into how the selected newspapers contextualised the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, this study is an analysis of the framing of COVID-19 in *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* Nigerian newspapers: April-August 2020.

Statement of the Problem

COVID-19 being a pandemic that had unprecedented impact on virtually all aspects of human endeavour globally, continue to attract the interest of researchers who have been investigating different aspects. While various media-related studies have been conducted on the pandemic, the need for more empirical studies that would expand the corpus of developing literature to illuminate how the pandemic was communicated by the media, among others, remains apposite. Significantly, none of the other studies on media coverage of the COVID-19 in Nigeria has focused on the framing of the pandemic by *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* newspapers thus leaving a literature hiatus. To bridge this knowledge gap, this study, therefore, analyses the framing of the COVID-19 in the two Nigerian Newspapers from March-August 2020.

Research Objectives

1. To find out the frequency of the coverage of COVID-19 by *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* newspapers between March and August 2020.
2. To investigate the prominence of reportage of COVID-19 by *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* newspapers from March – August 2020.
3. To evaluate the framing patterns of COVID-19 by *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* newspapers between March and August 2020.

Literature

Mass Media and Health Communication

The news media have been described as having a powerful presence in the daily lives of nearly every person on planet-earth regardless of race, nation, or socio-economic class because people watch television, listen to the radio, watch movies, read newspapers and surf the web (Rendon, 2002). They provide information and education on a variety of topics and issues, including health. Mass media play a central role in informing the populace about health and medical issues and are used by health professionals and organisations to drive their health campaigns (Catalán-Matamoros, 2011; Thorson, 2006 and Torwel & Rodney, 2010). Boyd and William (2009) aver that mass media in general, help health workers to expand their audience reach because they (mass media) are effective in informing and perhaps persuading target audiences to adopt new behaviours or remind them of critical information about various health issues or diseases and where they can seek help.

Studies have also shown that the mass media are at the centre of sharing information on diseases and championing behavioural change campaigns aimed at preventing and curbing their spread (Bello, 2015; Reynolds, 2016; Torwel & Rodney, 2010). When HIV/AIDS pandemic was at its peak globally, including in Nigeria, the media played the role of change agents and championed behavioural change campaigns for better health which encouraged people to adopt preventive measures to stop the spread of the disease (Collins, Abelson, Pyman, & Lavis, 2006). Similarly, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic created many narratives around the virus – false and misleading information that induced fear and triggered psychological anxiety, including from the media (Aiyewumi & Okeke, 2020; Anwar, Malik, Raees & Anwar, 2020; Ferreira & Borges, 2020). The media, nonetheless, rose to the occasion when more credible and verifiable information became available by providing timely and credible information about the pandemic which helped the populace to respond appropriately (Anwar et al., 2020).

The mass media have been active in promoting and championing health campaigns, including creating awareness on the COVID-19 pandemic. Since good health is a prime concern of humans, its attainment and maintenance involve various aspects. As such, people turn to the news media for health information given that health is one of the main topics covered by mass media (Carducci, Alfani, Sassi, Cinini, & Calamusa, 2011). Carducci et al. (2011) note further that several population surveys found mass media as the main source of public health information, the impact of which has over the years, shaped citizens' knowledge, perceptions, attitudes and general health behaviours.

News Evaluation and Framing in the Media

The concept of newspaper coverage describes the attention given to an issue by the newspaper (Asemah, 2011). It entails how newspapers report events in society. Common indicators of measuring newspaper coverage are frequency, which is the number of times newspapers report a particular event; volume, or depth of coverage, usually determined by the space allotted to a story in a newspaper. The length (volume) of a story is

deemed to be indicative of the importance attached to it by a newspaper. Hence, longer stories are normally considered to have received more volume/depth than shorter ones (Olijo, 2016). On the other hand, prominence has to do with the importance attached to the events reported – usually determined by the placement of the story (Igwebuiké, 2017). According to Igwebuiké (2017: 120):

Stories on the front page are normally considered as receiving more prominence than those on the back page, those on the back page are considered as receiving more prominence than those on centre spread while those on the centre spread are considered as receiving more prominence than those on inside page. Other indicators are text format, which describes the format of journalistic presentation, such as news, editorials, features, columns, etc. Other presentations such as illustrations, cartoons, pictures, and adverts are also considered depending on the interest of the researcher (120).

Also, Granner, Sharpe, Burroughs, Fields and Hallenbeck (2010) explain that:

The frequency of issue coverage influences awareness and imparts a sense of importance about the issue. Prominence of articles concerns the placement and presentation of articles, which attract the reader's attention. Factors related to prominence include placement of the article in the main section of the newspaper, placement on the front page of a section, placement on the top of the page, headline font size, article length and presence of pictures or other visuals. Localization of stories in addition to providing information about, for, or by the community, may also enhance the relevance of the message. Framing of the issue and the type of article (news, feature, opinion, etc.) can influence how the issue is defined, the scope and depth of coverage, and calls to action (656-657).

Beyond frequency and the prominence newspapers give to certain stories, they also use frames to contextualise the topic or issue they cover and report on. Hallahan (1999: 207) notes that, framing as a property of a message, "limits or defines the message's meaning by shaping the inferences that individuals make about the message". The author further opines that "frames reflect judgments made by message creators or framers. Some frames represent the alternative balancing of information (i.e., putting information in either a positive or native light)" (207). Other frames involve the simple alternative phrasing of terms (semantic framing). The most complex form of framing, according to Hallahan (1999) is storytelling, known as story framing, which involves the selection of key themes or ideas that are the focus of the message and the incorporation of a variety of storytelling or narrative techniques that support that theme.

Framing Theory is a philosophical postulation that explains how news content is typically shaped and contextualised by a media outlet (Msughter & Phillips, 2020). According to Pan and Kosicki (1993), framing can be seen in many places within the arrangement of a message. These are syntactical arrangements or structures, stable patterns of arranging words and phrases in a text. They work through biasing the cognitive

processing of information by individuals and further operate by providing contextual cues that guide decision-making and inferences drawn by message audiences (Hallahan, 1999). Framing effects can be conscious, such as when a person purposefully uses messages cues to attempt to retrieve stored knowledge from memory. Framing effects can also be unconscious or automatic, such as when a person categorizes a topic or message during the pre-attention phase of processing and then processes information using rules that are considered appropriate. The manner of framing can shift how people understand and respond to issues they care about (Raffoni, 2009; Spacey, 2016 & Heffernan, 2018). Entman (1993) summarised the essence of framing processes thus:

Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in the communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. Frames, then, define problems, determine what a causal agent is doing and costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of cultural values; diagnose causes, identify the frames creating the problem; make moral judgments, evaluate causal agents and their effects; and suggest remedies, offer and justify treatments for the problem and predict their likely effects (55).

Empirical Review

Morissan, Wahab, Siang and Cahyowati (2020) conducted a study on “Media Framing on Covid-19 Pandemic in Malaysian and Indonesian Newspapers.” The research was aimed at finding out which frames are dominant during COVID-19 pandemic coverage from January 25 to June 10, 2020 in Indonesian and Malaysian newspapers. Two leading newspapers were selected as samples: *Berita Harian* represents reporting from Malaysia and *Kompas* represents reporting from Indonesia. The study used a deductive analysis approach that involves predefining certain frames (alarming, reassuring, or neutral) as content analytic unit to confirm the degree to which these frames appear in the news. The study found that *Berita Harian* reported the COVID-19 pandemic with all the three frames (alarming, reassuring, and neutral) where a neutral frame is the most dominant (39.3%) followed by alarming (32.10%) and reassuring (28.60%). Meanwhile, the framing of *Kompas'* reporting on the COVID-19 pandemic was dominated by an alarming tone (83.30%) and neutral (16.70%) while the reassuring tone was absent from the newspaper. The study also found that militaristic language was largely absent both in *Berita Harian* and *Kompas*. Their work shares similarities with this study in terms of methodology and the theoretical framework. However, although the two studies examined the contents of newspapers and how they framed COVID-19, they focused on newspapers in different geographical locations.

Another study of interest is that by Nwakpu, Ezema and Ogbodo (2020) with the topic “Nigeria media framing of coronavirus pandemic and audience response.” The study employed a quantitative design (newspaper content analysis

and questionnaire). The content analysis examined the nature of media coverage of coronavirus in Nigeria and China using four major national newspapers (*The Sun*, *The Vanguard*, *The Guardian* and *The Punch*). The study adopted framing theory. The finding showed that the coverage of the pandemic was dominated by straight news reports accounting for 763 or (71.3%) of all analysed items. This was followed by opinions 169 (15.8%), features 120 (11.2%) and editorials 18 (1.7%) respectively. *The Punch* 309 (28.9%) reported the outbreak more frequently than *The Sun* 266 (24.9%), *The Guardian* 258 (24.1%) and *Vanguard* 237 (22.1%). Finding also revealed that the framing pattern adopted by the newspapers helped Nigerians to take precautionary measures. The study concluded that continuous reportage of COVID-19 has proved effective in creating awareness about safety and preventive measures thereby helping to “flatten the curve” and contain the spread of the virus. It recommended that the newspapers should avoid creating fear/panic in reporting the pandemic. The theory and methodology adopted in the above study, and this are similar. However, the focus of this study is on *Daily Trust* and *Vanguard* newspapers.

Another study by Bwakan (2020) was on integrating community radio with Social and Behavioural Change Communication (SBCC) for community sensitisation against coronavirus spread in Plateau State. The study adopted the survey research design with Diffusion of Innovation Theory as the theoretical underpinning. The study's findings showed that the integration of community radio with SBCC helped tremendously in sensitizing the communities on safety tips for curbing the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. The study recommended that people in Shendam should take advantage of the sensitization campaigns aired by *Agro FM 91.5* and adhere to the safety measures for their well-being. The study evidenced the role of the mass media in educating and enlightening the people through health-related information. This study therefore responds to the quest for more empirical studies to document how the news media covered the COVID-19 by analysing how *Daily Trust* and *Vanguard* newspapers framed the pandemic in their coverage.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Framing Theory which is credited to have been propounded by Gregory Bateson in 1972. Framing Theory is sometimes referred to as second-level Agenda Setting, because it has a close relationship to Agenda Setting Theory. Framing Theory can also be viewed as an extension of the media agenda-setting function on how news media “prioritize an issue and make the audience think about its effects” (Communication Theory, n.d.: 1).

Framing refers to how the media organise and present information to the public on certain issues, or event and giving them particular context to sway interpretation and necessitating selective influence over how members of the public view reality. Framing Theory is a philosophical postulation that provides explanation on which news content is typically shaped and contextualised by a media outlet (McQuail, 2005). The theory incorporates the concept of intertextuality (Gordon, 2015). Entman (1993) defines framing

as the act of picking some features of professed reality and giving them more salience in a communication, and thus promoting a certain problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the phenomena. In short, “frames may foreground some aspects of truth and exclude certain others” (Druckman, 2001: 230).

Journalists present (frame) the information they gather in different ways. Frames either inform or emphasize or do both with the purpose of impacting opinion on a given subject (Druckman & Chong, 2007; Leeper & Slothuus, 2019; Scheufele, 1999). As a theoretical framework, framing explores how people construct their social worlds, generate meanings, relations, and identities through linguistic and paralinguistic means (Gordon, 2015) or ‘contextualisation cues’ (Gumperz, 1982) that help recipients in meaning making and sense making. Merilainen and Vos (2011: 4) agree that “framing is directed at the zero-sum game rule, like agenda setting in which the raising of one issue leads to the demise of another. The selective interests of people influence how many issues can be salient at any one time.” This means that framing in communication, defines how news media coverage shapes mass opinion. Through the use of frames by the media, several events can be understood by people in the society.

Iyengar, 1991, cited in Baysha and Hallahan, (2004: 234) identifies two types of media frames, “the episodic and thematic frames”. While episodic framing “depicts public issues as concrete instances or specific events that are the results of actions by individuals” (p. 234), thematic media frames help people to understand issues of the moment and form their opinions. The thematic frame is considered important for this study.

The theory was found appropriate for this study which sought to know how issues related to COVID-19 were framed by the two Nigerian newspapers in their task of informing and enlightening the people on a major health crisis. Based on the theory’s postulations the way they framed stories on COVID-19 would have impacted the contextualisation and meaning-making of issues, as well as the importance their readers attached to issues related to the pandemic, thus establishing a nexus between the study and the theory.

Methodology

This study adopted content analysis as a method, employed the quantitative research approach and used the observational checklist as instrument for data collection. A content analysis is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within texts or sets of texts (Alawode, & Adesanya, 2015). Babbie (2013) averred that content analysis is the examination of recorded human communications such as books, magazines, bulletin board postings on the internet, laws, and constitutions as well as any components or collection thereof. This method which deals with an objective and systematic textual analysis of content, is considered suitable and was used to determine the framing of the coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria by *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* newspapers.

The quantitative research approach is used in the study because it offers a blueprint that allows a researcher to focus

on quantifying the collection and analysis of data (Bryman, 2012). The study analyzed the framing of COVID-19 focusing on frequency of coverage, prominence given, extent and framing pattern of the pandemic in the two newspapers.

The population of the study comprised the total editions of *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* from April 1st, 2020, to August 31st, 2020, pertaining to the COVID19 pandemic. This brings the population to 306 (153 editions per medium). The sampling procedure involved two stages: media and editions. First was the purposive selection of media, which resulted in the choice of *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust*. The rationale behind the selection of the newspapers is that while the former represents the southern or Lagos-Ibadan axis, the latter represents the northern axis, with a different philosophy and regional representative characteristics which reflects in their style of reportage and news presentations.

Purposive sampling technique is considered suitable for the study because it allows researchers to select their participants based on the knowledge they have about the population. The choice of study duration was influenced by the declaration of a lockdown on March 30, 2020, in Nigeria with immediate effect in Lagos, Ogun and Abuja, as a result of the pandemic (Ibrahim, Ajide & Julius, 2020) and lasted till the country’s third phase of eased lockdown on September 3, 2020 (Adebowale-Tambe, 2020). April 1st being the next day to the commencement of the lockdown was picked to begin the sampling while August 31st being the last day of the month nearest to the end of the lockdown was considered suitable to end the sampling net.

Furthermore, the work obtained a sample interval of 7 which made the systematic selection of the actual sample. Using systematic random sampling, the random start of the selection was 1st April 2020. In consistently applying the sample interval (7), the next term is the 7th of April 2020 edition and the one that follows was the 14th of April 2020 edition of the newspapers under study. This was done until 25 editions of *The Guardian* newspaper and 25 editions of the *Daily Trust* were selected as sample. The total sample size is, therefore, 50.

Data Presentation

Data collected were presented in tables, frequencies and percentages and were analyzed in the sequence of the research questions using quantitative method.

Table 1

Medium	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Daily Trust</i>	542	47%
<i>The Guardian</i>	606	53%
Total	1,148	100%

Source: Field Work, 2022.

An examination of Table 1 revealed that *The Guardian* newspaper has the highest number of coverage on the COVID-19 and this may be because the newspaper is situated in Lagos State, the epicenter of the pandemic in Nigeria.

Table 2

Medium	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Daily Trust</i>	46	36%
<i>The Guardian</i>	83	64%
Total	129	100%

Source: Field Work, 2022.

From Table 2, *The Guardian* newspaper had the highest number of stories on the coronavirus pandemic placed on its front pages with 64% (representing 83 items). This may not be unconnected to the newspaper being Lagos-based. The highest number of cases of COVID-19 was recorded in Lagos during the period under study and the newspaper demonstrated sensitivity to the need to provide information and educate its audience on the pandemic.

Table 3

Medium	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Daily Trust</i>	25	76%
<i>The Guardian</i>	8	24%
Total	33	100%

Source: Field Work, 2022.

Data from Table 3 showed that both *Daily Trust* and *The Guardian* newspapers had a very low rating on content on the COVID-19 on their back pages. However, *Daily Trust* had more stories with 76% (representing 25 items). The implication is that the investigated newspapers did not accord COVID-19 stories much prominence on their back pages as only a few stories were found.

Table 4

Medium	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Daily Trust</i>	14	61%
<i>The Guardian</i>	9	39%
Total	23	100%

Source: Field Work, 2022.

Results from Table 4 indicate that few stories appeared on the centre pages of both newspapers, with *Daily Trust* leading having 61% (representing 14). This may not necessarily be negative, considering that the two newspapers placed most stories on COVID-19 on their front pages as seen on Table 2.

Table 5

Medium	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Daily Trust</i>	416	43%
<i>The Guardian</i>	547	57%
Total	963	100%

Source: Field Work, 2022.

As evident in Table 5, *The Guardian* newspaper has a significant content (57% representing 547) on the pandemic, and *Daily Trust* with a fairly reasonable number too. These results imply that 'other pages' were used more by the studied newspapers in reporting COVID-19.

Table 6

Story Types	<i>Daily Trust</i>	<i>The Guardian</i>	Total	Percentage
Hand washing frames	24	20	44	4%
Social distance frames	20	31	51	5%
Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth frames.	22	18	40	3%
Seek medical care early when you notice cough and breathing difficulty frames.	18	21	39	3%
Stay at home/travel ban/lockdown frames	68	80	83	10%
Lack of ventilators frames	21	31	52	5%
Not believing in COVID-19 frames	31	29	60	6%
Lack of isolation centres frames	24	28	52	5%
Border closure frames	22	31	52	5%
Enforcement frames	21	23	44	4%
Death toll frames	77	79	156	14%
Donation frames	22	17	39	3%
Self-isolation frames	21	24	45	4%
Testing positive frames	16	19	35	3%
Testing negative frames	18	21	39	3%
Discharge	18	23	41	4%

frames				
Use of hand sanitizer frames	41	44	85	7%
Use of face and nose masks frames	43	49	92	8%
Avoid touching surfaces frequently touched by other frames.	15	18	33	3%
Total	542	606	1,148	100%

Source: Field Work, 2022. (Percentages were derived from the total figures)

From Table 6, the two newspapers' narratives within the study duration tilted more toward death toll frames (14%); next to that are lockdown or stay-at-home frames (10%); use of face and nose mask frames (8%) and the use of hand sanitizer frames (7%). Others include social distance frames, lack of ventilator frames, not believing in COVID-19 frames, lack of isolation centers frames, and border closure frames. The implication of these framing patterns is that the newspapers paid a lot of attention to the daily infection rate, the fatality being recorded, and the measures employed to curb the further spread in the country. This aligns with journalistic news evaluation routine which rates news based on fatality figure, the number of people affected and the social responsibility of keeping the people informed and educated on how to curtail the spread.

Table 7

Tones of Frames	Daily Trust	The Guardian	Total	Percentage
Positive frames	275	319	594	52%
Negative frames	239	254	493	43%
Neutral frames	28	33	61	5%
Total	542	606	1,148	100%

Source: Field Work, 2022.

Table 7 shows that there were 594 positive frames (representing 52%) and negative frames (43%), while neutral frames amounted to 5%. The differences in the framing tones imply that the two newspapers investigated reported and framed the COVID-19 pandemic from different perspectives thereby, validating the adoption of media framing theory, which says that media make an issue salient and direct audience attention to specific issues, ideas, and individuals while downplaying what lies outside the frames.

Discussion of Findings

From the findings above, it was established that *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* newspapers provided ample (frequency) coverage of the coronavirus pandemic with the former having a little more than the latter, thus answering research question one. This finding is in agreement with the study conducted by Shalghan and Lucas (2020) who found that media reports on the coronavirus were impressive, timely, and comprehensive thus helping residents of Jos to cope with the pandemic. Therefore, it could be seen that the two (*The Guardian* and *Daily Trust*) newspapers set a satisfactory agenda on COVID-19 through the volume of stories on the pandemic. Also, the findings support the study that investigated the media coverage of COVID-19 in Nigeria, specifically analyzing the frequency and depth of coverage, story format, news sources, media tone, and themes in four prominent newspapers (*Daily Sun*, *Vanguard*, *Daily Trust*, and *Leadership*) from February 2020 to April 2020. While the Nigerian media effectively raised awareness of the pandemic, the coverage was deemed lacking in depth, with a prevalence of short and primarily straight news stories (Apuke & Omar, 2020). Nevertheless, inadequate reportage of COVID-19 was documented post-COVID-19. This study by Komiti and Asemah (2021) was conducted to determine the reportage of COVID-19 by online versions of six Nigerian newspapers, namely; *Tribune*, *Punch*, *Vanguard*, *The Nation*, *Daily Trust*, and *Leadership* published between 29th April, 2021 and 29th May, 2021. Findings revealed that COVID-19 was not adequately reported by the select newspapers,

In discussing research question two which is centred on the prominence given to the COVID-19 pandemic in *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* newspapers, placements of stories on their front pages show that the newspapers attached importance to the pandemic. This aligns with the finding from a study conducted by Nzioka (2005) that newspaper and magazine editors draw the reader's attention to stories when they are placed on the front page. Cohn (2018) buttresses the finding when he stated that, the front page of the newspaper is the place to put the "lede" of the day. Weaver (2014) also corroborates this stating that, the front page of the newspaper is where the best stories of the day are displayed. The front page brings readers the weightiest news and the strongest stories that have the most impact on many people.

The agenda-setting theory says that "the media give proper prominence to issues so that the public will consider such issues as important" (Igwebuike, 2017: 131). This result has implications on health reporting in Nigeria because it will spur the newspapers and indeed the other media houses to continue to set the agenda on health-related matters. Smith et al., (2020) also align with this finding as the aim of their study was to analyze mass media reportage in newspapers in Nigeria with the view to highlighting its role in combating the pandemic. Using content analysis, publications on COVID-19 between January 2020 and May 2020 of six widely read national newspapers (*Punch*, *The Nation*, *The Guardian*, *Sun*, *Tribune* and *Vanguard*) in Nigeria were analysed. Results revealed that news reports on the COVID-19 pandemic was high (55.3%) followed by front page news of 6.1%.

Moreover, the study by Apuke and Omar (2021) investigated television news coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, focusing on *African Independent Television (AIT)* and the *Nigeria Television Authority (NTA)* from February to July 2020. Findings revealed that both TV stations adequately addressed COVID-19 issues, but private media, particularly *AIT*, gave more prominence to the coverage. This was evident in the higher frequency of COVID-19 stories as headlines and their longer airtime, with more stories exceeding 61 seconds, indicating a greater emphasis on the topic compared to the government-owned *NTA*. The study also included interviews with 30 participants to gauge their perceptions of the media coverage of the pandemic.

In discussing research question three which is on the spread of framing patterns and tones, death toll frames and positive frames were significantly used in conveying the stories on the COVID-19 pandemic in both *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* newspapers. This is in line with Rodelo's (2021) finding. Rodelo had found that the media framed the COVID-19 pandemic along the pattern of responsibility attribution, human interest frames, political actions frames, scientific information frames, and self-efficacy frames. Also, positive frames were reported in the study by Mu'azu and Moses (2021) who analysed the framing of the Nigerian Government's COVID-19 Lockdown in the *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* Newspapers from 30th March to 4th May 2020. Out of 2007 newspaper reports, Preventive oriented frames appeared the most, followed by Palliative oriented frames. Findings further suggest that an overwhelming majority of media reports concerning the COVID-19 were positive and aimed at creating awareness of the dreaded virus.

In contrast to the current study, Msughter, and Phillips (2020), analyzed the framing of COVID-19 by *Daily Trust* and *Vanguard* newspapers. The findings indicate that both newspapers predominantly employed negative frames rather than positive or neutral ones in their coverage of the pandemic. The study concludes that *Daily Trust* and *Vanguard* primarily framed COVID-19 in economic and political terms, downplaying critical frames related to health, safety, and quality of life. Additionally, the finding is in contrast with that of Dahal and Khatri (2021) whose study found that the tone of the media coverage of the pandemic is more negative in the privately owned media.

The findings of this study can also be related to the framing theory on which the study is hinged as both *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* newspapers framed stories on the COVID-19 pandemic in several ways. From the perspective of the framing theory, framing by newspapers or media, in general, conforms by giving issues more salience in a communication, and thus promoting a certain problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the phenomena (Entman, 1993). The finding is also in line with the position of Dimitrova and Stromback (2005) and Ofori-Birikorang (2010) cited in Msughter and Phillips (2020) that through framing, the media provide important information and knowledge which often influence public or audience opinion and decision.

Conclusion

The paper analysed the framing of COVID-19 in *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* Nigerian newspapers through content analyses of the two national dailies. Findings showed that both newspapers provided ample coverage (frequency) on the coronavirus pandemic with the former having a little more. It was also found that the two newspapers gave prominence to coverage of the pandemic. *The Guardian* gave significant prominence in terms of stories on the front page; *Daily Trust* placed more stories on the pandemic on back page and centre spread, while *The Guardian* had more stories in other pages.

The research concludes that front page placements of stories on COVID-19 by the two newspapers made the stories visible and demonstrated the importance attached to the pandemic to their audience. They thereby, made the people to view the issue as important thereby setting the needed agenda on the pandemic. That there was a total of 1,148 stories on the pandemic in the two newspapers during the period investigated is noteworthy. The conclusions drawn align with objectives one and two of the study, which were to investigate the frequency and prominence of coverage.

On the framing of the COVID-19 by the two newspapers from April to August 2020, this study concludes that hand washing frames, social distance frames, avoiding touching eyes, nose, and mouth frames, seeking medical care early frames, stay at home/travel and lockdown frames, lack of ventilators frames, not believing in the COVID-19 frames, lack of isolation centres frames, border closure frames, enforcement frames, death toll frames, donation frames, self-isolation frames, testing positive and negative frames, discharging frames, use of hand sanitizer frames, use of face and nose masks frames, avoid touching surfaces frequently touched by people frames as well as positive, negative and neutral frames were adopted by the studied newspapers in the framing of the COVID-19 pandemic. This conclusion is in line with objective number three which was to determine the framing patterns by the newspapers.

Recommendations

From the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are made:

1. Newspapers should continue to be at the forefront in setting agenda on important issues within society such as the COVID-19 pandemic as this would enlighten the people and guide them on ways to act during such crisis. For example, the reluctance of many Nigerians to take the COVID-19 vaccination might have been different if the news media did more in enlightening the populace on the importance of taking the vaccine.
2. Since stories on the front pages of newspapers tend to carry more weight, newspaper establishments should continue to set the agenda on health issues through front page placement as this will make the audience pay more attention to health campaigns.
3. The government at all levels and other stakeholders should invest more in the media and position them to

better inform and continue to educate the people on health issues.

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