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Health is Wealth: Newspaper Coverage of the Economic Impact of COVID-19 in Nigeria

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to determine how newspapers in Nigeria report the impact of COVID-19 on Nigerian economy. A total of four national daily newspapers were randomly selected for the study. These are *Leadership*, *Guardian*, *Nation* and *Punch* newspapers. The study was anchored on agenda setting theory. The quantitative research design was used for the study. The duration of the study was February 27 2020 to October 30 2020. The code sheet served as the instrument for data collection while descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the results of the study. It was found that newspapers mainly utilized official sources. Additionally, straight news format was used to report the impact of COVID-19 on Nigerian economy. It was also found that newspapers in Nigeria neither made suggestions on how to manage the economy in times of the pandemic nor post pandemic. The researcher examined the implications of these results on health communication.

Keywords: coverage; economy; newspaper, COVID-19; Nigeria; impact

Introduction

Media coverage of pandemics is an important area of research because it plays a critical role in determining how the general public understands it. This is because during an outbreak such as with the case with COVID-19, information sharing is key in combating it. Accurate information is what is needed because pandemics create panics, thus making the general public vulnerable to fake news and rumours that often characterize each outbreak. Gever, and Nwabuzor (2014) corroborate that strategic information control is needed in times of outbreaks so as to counter rumour and fake news. In the view of Gever and Nwabuzor, the media and important stake holders that provide accurate information through their coverage during diseases outbreak.

Accurate information about COVID-19 is thus needed to effectively educate the general public and decisions makers on different issues related to the virus. Apuke and Omar (2020) opine fake news and inaccurate information are common features during the outbreak of the virus. This reality underscores the need for the media provide up-to-date coverage on the virus. This is important to guide policy makers, influence policy advocacy and policy implementation. One of the critical areas where information is needed is the impact of the pandemic on Nigerian economy. This aspect is important because while it is good to understand the impact of the pandemic on lives, it is equally essential to pay attention to livelihood. To effectively achieve this, information is needed on how the pandemic is affecting the economy. For example, during the pandemic, people have lost their jobs as a result of layoffs; some are experiencing pay cut while others have had their businesses grounded as a result of restrictions. For example, a BBC (2020) story with the title “Coronavirus: BA reaches deal to suspend thousands of

workers” provides evidence of how the British Airways has been compelled to ask some of the workers to go as a result of COVID-19. Premium Times (2020) carried a story with the title Also, “COVID-19: Arik cuts salaries by 80%, places 90% of staff on leave without pay.” In the story, the newspaper admitted that COVID-19 poses a serious challenge to the operation of the aviation industry globally. Additionally, the closure of schools has a corresponding negative impact of income of those who have business within school premises. Their sources of income have been completely grounded. Those who work in private schools have lost their sources of income as most of the school owners cannot afford to pay teachers when schools are on break.

Despite the impact of COVID-19 on economic activities, studies are yet to interrogate the media report the impact of COVID-19 on the economy with particular reference to Nigeria. This is particularly important because the media have the ability to influence public views about an issue. This assumption is supported by evidence in literature (Gever & Coleman, 2017; Zhou, 2008; Okoro, & Odoemelam, 2013; Nwafor, & Ogbodo, 2015; Yang, & Ishak, 2012). Since the outbreak of studies have so far been conducted on different aspects of the virus as it relates to Nigeria. For example, Odii *et al.*, (2020) reported that COVID-19 has had negative effect on the income of households. Ale (2020) developed a model for information sharing on COVID-19. Olijo (2020) reported that the media in Nigeria did not encourage scientists from Nigeria to contribute in the development of a COVID-19 vaccine. Melugbo *et al.*, (2020) reported that COVID-19 has had an impact on entrepreneurial intention of youth in Nigeria. Gera and Ugwu (2020) developed prototypes of COVID-19 face mask and tested their acceptance

among Nigerian youths. Nonetheless, studies on media coverage of the impact of COVID-19 on the economy are scarce, hence the need for the current study.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to determine how the media frame the economic impact of COVID-19 on commerce in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To determine the sources cited in newspaper coverage of the impact of COVID-19 on Nigerian economy.
2. To determine the story type which the newspapers use to report stories on the impact of COVID-19 on Nigerian economy.
3. To ascertain if newspaper stories make suggestions regarding how the economy can survive during health and economic crises.
4. To ascertain media coverage of the suggestions for post COVID-19 Nigerian economy.

Literature Review

The role of the media in communicating pandemics/crises

The mass media of communication have important roles to play in communicating health information to the general public. Through media messages, people get to know about health issues. Many decades ago, Flora *et al.*, (1989) suggested four roles which the media can play in health communication. The first role according to Flora *et al.*, is known as media as educator role. This role requires the media to provide information that educates the general public on health issues. Within the context of this study, this requires the media to educate the masses on issues related to COVID-19. Information on the virus could include symptoms, causes, prevention as well as treatment. The second role

according to Flora *et al.*, is media as supporter, Here, the media are expected to support efforts aimed at controlling the negative impact of health issues. Within the context of this study, the media are expected to support efforts aimed at controlling the spread of COVID-19. The third is media as programme promoter, Here; the expectation is for the media to promote programmes that are targeted at combating health issues. From the perspective of the current study, the media are expected to promote programmes that aimed combating COVID-19. The last role, in the view of Flora *et al.*, is media as supplement. This requires the media to augment the efforts of health promoters. The media can achieve this through coverage of health issues.

It is noteworthy worthy that in most instances; the media may not deploy one strategy but a combination of strategies. Kim and Noriega (2019) corroborate that one of the strategies through which the media can play their role in communicating health crisis is combination of education and entertainment. This is sometimes called edutainment. This approach ensures that health messages entertain as well as educate health issues. According to Okim-Alobi and Okpara (2017) the mass media of communication provide health information to the general public thereby serving as a guide for people to adopt life- saving behaviour.

Coverage is one of the leading ways through which the media can fulfill their role to the society. Gever and Ezeah (2020) corroborate that coverage is a key avenue through which the media can carry out their role of communicating health information to the general public. Gever and Ezeah conducted a study to examine media coverage of COVID-19. They divided their study duration into two phases. The first phase was before COVID-19 cases were confirmed in Nigeria. The second phase was after COVID-19

cases were confirmed in Nigeria. The researchers reported that the media in Nigeria did not effectively play their role of communicating health crisis because before cases were confirmed, there were very little stories on the virus, an indication that the media did not provide sufficient warning health messages. Apuke and Omar (2020) investigate Nigerian media coverage of COVID-19 and reported that there were less frequency, less prominence and volume of stories on COVID-19 when compared to other issues reported in the media within the same time frame.

The media and economic progress

There is a significant association between the media and economic development. This is because the media have the capacity to promote economic activities. The relationship between the media and the economy is essential in three ways. First, the media promote commerce through advertising. In this wise, the media can be regarded as tools through people get to know about businesses. Advertisers recognize the important role which the media play in creating awareness about their existence, hence they consistently make use of the media to place marketing messages with a view to educating the consumers about existing products, telling them about new products, or informing them about value addition (Ezeah & Gever, 2017; Gever & Olijjo, 2017). In addition, the media have the capacity to report challenges against economic advancements. Such reports could provide warning information with a corresponding possibility of ensuring that such challenges are addressed immediately. Within this context, it can be said that through its watch dog role, the media can monitor dangers to the economy and report same to the society. This may attract attention of the appropriate stakeholders who may rise to address the problem. Researchers (Gever, 2018; Gever *et al.*, 2019) are of the view that media surveillance role

is essential in changing behaviour and drawing the attention of the general public to issues that pose challenges to the society.

The third area through the media can contribute to economic development is through policy. This may come in two ways. First, is the promotion of already existing policies that have implications on economic development. Isu (2019) holds the view that the manner in which the media report economic policies has the possibility of shaping the way people view such a policy. It also has a possibility of influencing people's attitude to such economic policies. The second aspect is policy advocacy. The media have the capacity to make a case for the formulation of policies that have implications on economic development. Kostadinova and Dimitrova, (2012) conducted a study with an objective to ascertain how the media report economic issues. The researcher made use of different frames that range from economic, to human interest, to thematic as well as episodic. The researchers also targeted election years in Bulgaria with specific attention to seven elections that span from 1990 to 2009. They analysed a total of 543 news stories and found that the reportage of economic issues was determined by the particular issues being reported. In addition, the number of times which an economic issue was reported was greatly determined by the issue reported. The study of Kostadinova and Dimitrova is useful to the current study because it provide empirical evidence regarding the manner in which the media frame issues related to the economy. This information is essential because media framing of the economy has a corresponding implication on public perception and attitudes. This aspect, though not covered by the study of Kostadinova and Dimitrova, it is investigated by Damstra, and Boukes, (2018).

Damstra and Boukes, conducted a study to ascertain the link between economic news, public perception and the economy. The researchers made use of a combination of survey research and content analysis to conduct the study. They carried out the study in two broad ways. In the first instance, the researchers determined how economic activities impact on the newspaper contents of Dutch newspapers. In the second phase of the study, the researchers examined how economic news in newspaper influences the perception of media audience. Their result revealed that economic activities influence newspaper contents. They also found that the manner in which newspapers report economic activities significantly influence public perception regarding economic activities.

Boomgaarden *et al.*, (2011) conducted a study to examine how the media report economic crisis and how this influences the expectations that the audience have of economic development. Their result showed that when people are exposed to media messages on economic crises; it influences the expectations that they have regarding the development of nations economies. What this means is that media reportage of the economic impact of COVID-19 may have an influence regarding the expectations that people have concerning the economy of Nigeria.

Health and Economic Development

It is often said that health is wealth. Therefore, when a person has a health challenge, it has a corresponding impact on his or her economic status. Health challenges affect a person's economic status in two areas. In the first place, health challenges compel a person to spend money on treatment. Such money may have been used for other economic ventures. In the second place, health challenges make a person less productive.

Such a situation also negatively impacts on their overall income, thus making them vulnerable to poverty.

Schofield *et al.*, (2011) conducted a study to examine the impact of health challenges on the economy of individuals and reported that people who stop going to work because of challenges with their health have a significant lower income of \$218 in a week unlike \$1,167 for their counterparts who are in full time employment. Okediji *et al.*, (2017) conducted a study to examine the impact of sickness on the income of households and found that a household whose income was \$335.84 before illness earns \$318.01 after illness. The result further showed that \$137.72 was the cost of treating severe sickness while 79% of the respondents spend 10% of their monthly income on health. In addition, 18.9% was the total loss of productivity as a result for health for patients while their caregivers loss 5.1% of productive time. In addition, the researchers reported that 44.7% of respondents reported borrowing because of health challenges, 5.0% sell assets to raise money for treatment.

The second level of impact is on nations. The outbreak of public health emergencies will have significant economic impact on nations. This is because monies that are meant to invest for the development of countries economies will be used for fighting health issues. The World Health Organization (2006) corroborates that health challenges have serious economic implications on nations' economies. The world health body carried a study to determine the impact of healthcare challenges on economic growth and reported that many countries of the world lose significant amount of money because of deaths that are caused by severe diseases such as stroke, diabetes, heart diseases, among others. W.H.O reveals further that China, for example, lost a huge sum

of \$18 billion dollars due to health challenges, Russian Federation lost \$11 billion for the same reason, India lost \$9 billion while Brazil lost \$ 2.7 billion. Also, the report reveals that countries such as Canada, the United Kingdom, Pakistan as well as Nigeria lost varying degrees of amount because of health crises. The implication of the result of W.H.O is that there exists an association between health and economic progress of nations. Som, *et al.*, (2019) conducted a study to determine the link between healthcare and economic prosperity in Africa. The researchers gathered data from 48 African countries from the time frame of fifteen years (2000-2015). The results of the study showed that healthcare challenges are areas such as childcare and maternal health negatively impact on economic progress in Africa. The result of the study revealed further that where there is a 9.4 year increase in life expectancy, it will result to 1 per cent increase in real GDP per capita. The researchers also revealed that spending on healthcare limit advancements in economy. They noted that where there is a 10 per cent increase in health spending, it results to an increase of 0.24 percent yearly average real GDP per capita. Earlier studies by Huang *et al.* (2010); Wilson (2004); Mayer (2001); Mehrara *et al.*, (2011); Elmi and Sadeghi (2012) also reported that a significant association exists between healthcare and economic advancements of countries. The implication here is that COVID-19 is having serious economic impact on nations. Maliszewska *et al.*, (2020) carried out a preliminary study ascertain the impact of COVID-19 on economic development. In doing so, the researchers paid attention to gross domestic product, in addition to trade, utilizing a standard world computable general equilibrium model. Reduction in the use of labour and capital, an increasing cost of in international trade, a reduction in travel services, and less attention to business activities

that require human interactions. The result of the study showed that instead of GDP growing by 2.5 percent, it falls by 2 percent as a result of COVID-19.

Theoretical Framework

Agenda setting theory was used to anchor study. Agenda setting theory has its origin from a 1922 book that was authored by Walter Lippmann captioned *Public Opinion*. In the book, Lippmann argued that the media are responsible for the pictures in our head. Although Lippmann did not categorically suggest agenda setting theory, however, he set a stage for the birth of the theory in 1972. In that year, McCombs, Maxwell & Shaw, Donald carried out a study involving 100 undecided voters at Chapel Hill (Griffin, 2012; McCombs, Maxwell & Shaw, Donald 1974; McCombs, 1993). Their result showed that media contents influenced the voting decision of the voters. Consequently, they argued:

In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position.

The submission above is relevant to the current study because when the media choose and display information on COVID-19 they play important roles in shaping realities about the virus. When the media present stories about the impact of the virus on the economy, they play cardinal roles in determining how people understand the impact of the pandemic on the economy. This is because media consumers will learn not just about the impact of the pandemic but how it affects them as well as how they can effectively adjust their behaviour to match prevailing realities. Therefore, the researcher found this theory useful because it offers the framework for understanding how the media in Nigeria

reported the impact of COVID-19 on the economy. Based on the agenda setting theory, the following hypotheses are articulated:

H1: Sources of stories will significantly predict newspaper story type used in setting agenda on the impact of COVID-19 on Nigerian economy.

H2: Story type will significantly predict of newspaper agenda setting on post COVID-19 Nigerian economy.

Methodology

The design that was used in this study was quantitative research design. The choice of qualitative research design was to assist the research assign values to the units that were coded in the study. The researcher examined four newspapers in this study. The newspapers are *Leadership, Guardian, Nation and Punch* newspapers all newspapers are privately owned because there is no government owned newspaper in Nigeria with national circulation that publishes daily. The sampling technique that was used in this study was simple random sampling. The International Media Newspapers (2016) say there are a total of 28 national dailies in Nigeria. Therefore, the researcher did balloting to select four newspapers that were used for the study. The duration of the study was February 27 2020 to October 30 2020. This duration marks a time when COVID-19 cases were confirmed in Nigeria.

Story Selection

The sampling strategy that was used to select the stories was motif approach. In the views of Gever (2018) motif sampling strategy is the utilization of key words to retrieve data from the websites of media outfits. Consequently, the researchers made use of motif

approach to retrieve data about COVID-19 from all the media houses selected. Specifically, the researchers utilize key words like impact of ‘coronavirus’, ‘Job loss in,’ ‘economic impact of COVID-19.’ We continued searching and refreshing the search results to get more relevant data.

Measurements used

The researchers made use of the following measures to carry out the study:

Sources of stories:

The researchers were interested in the people that were cited in media stories on the subject of interest. Therefore, the following categories of sources were used:

Official sources: These are sources from government officials both elected and appointed. Also, corporate sources from companies were categories as official.

Non-official sources: These are sources that were not official. Examples include members of the general public, public affairs analysts, etc.

Type of story: The attention here was to ascertain the type of stories that the media used to frame the impact of COVID-19 on the economy. The following were used:

Straight news: These are stories that present information without providing detail interpretation about it.

Feature: This type of story provide detailed background information on the issue reported.

opinion stories: These are stories that report the opinion of people (e.g. experts) about the impact of COVID-19 on the economy.

Suggestions on Strategic management in times of health and economic upheaval

Under the above, the researchers wanted to know if the media made suggestions on how the economy can survive during crisis. The following were considered:

Suggestions made: These are stories that made suggestions on how to sustain the economy in times of crisis.

No Suggestions: These are stories that did not make suggestions on how to sustain the economy during the time of crisis.

Post COVID-19 suggestions

We wanted to know if the media made suggestions on how the economy can survive the post COVID-19 challenges. Therefore, the following were used:

Suggestions on coping approaches: These are stories that made recommendations on how the economy can effectively operate in the post COVID-19 era. This recommendation could be in the area of risks management, communication strategies, recovery strategies, recovery planning,

No suggestion: These are stories that did not make suggestions at all to how the economy can cope after COVID-19.

For this study, the unity of analysis was the article. That researcher examined only texts. The instrument for data collection was a code sheet. The inter-coder reliability was conducted with the use of randomly selected two coders who were briefed on how to code the data. We utilized Krippendorff's Alpha (KALPHA) to evaluate the inter-coder reliability with the application of SPSS 22 version. The result showed inter-coder reliability of 0.77 for story source, .77 for story type, .79 for recommendation on coping during crisis while .76 was found for suggested post COVID-19 strategies. These showed

that various segments were reliable. In the analysis of result of the study, multiple regression analysis was used while results were presented in tables.

Results

Our search generated a total of 908 stories that were related to COVID-19. However, among the stories, only 301 . This means that only 33 percent of the stories on COVID-19 paid attention to the economic impact of the public health emergency. On the other hand, 67% of the stories only reported the issues related to COVID-19 without paying attention to the economic impact of the issue. This means that the frequency of reportage of the impact of COVID-19 on the economy among the media examined was below 40%. The results of the study is hereby presented in the following charts and tables:

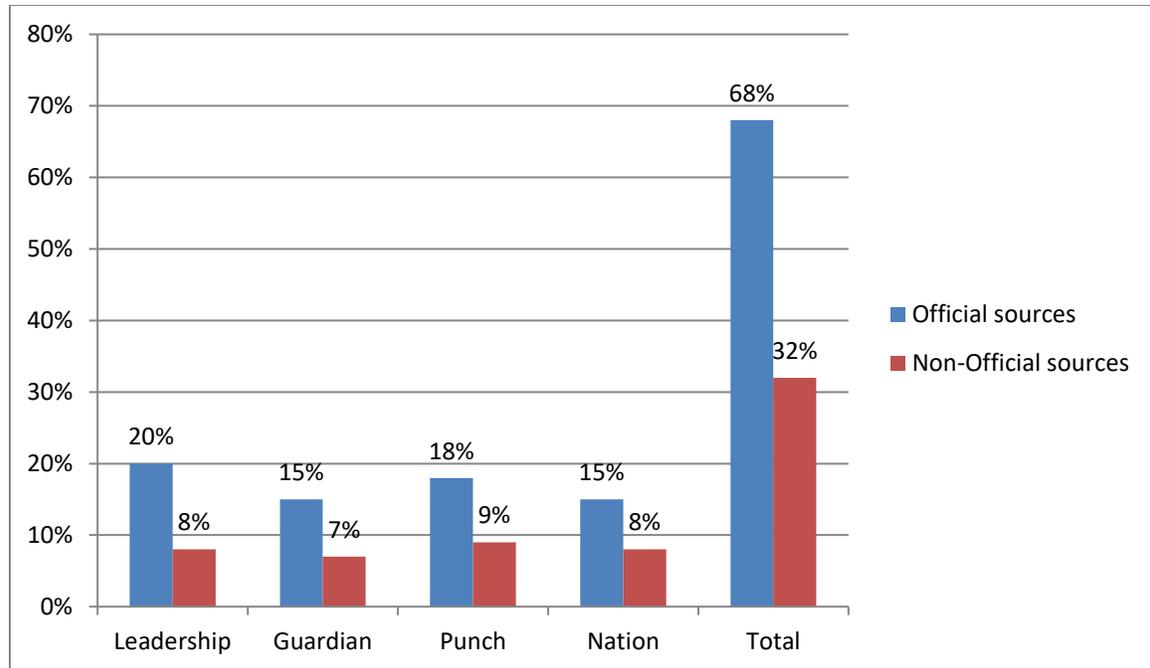


Figure 1 Newspaper sources of stories

The researchers plotted the chart above to determine the sources of stories on the impact of COVID-19 on Nigerian economy as reported by four selected newspapers in Nigeria. It was found that overall; there was the dominance of official sources in newspaper stories in reporting the impact of COVID-19 on the economy. The implication is that the newspapers examined did not give room for independent sources in their sources.

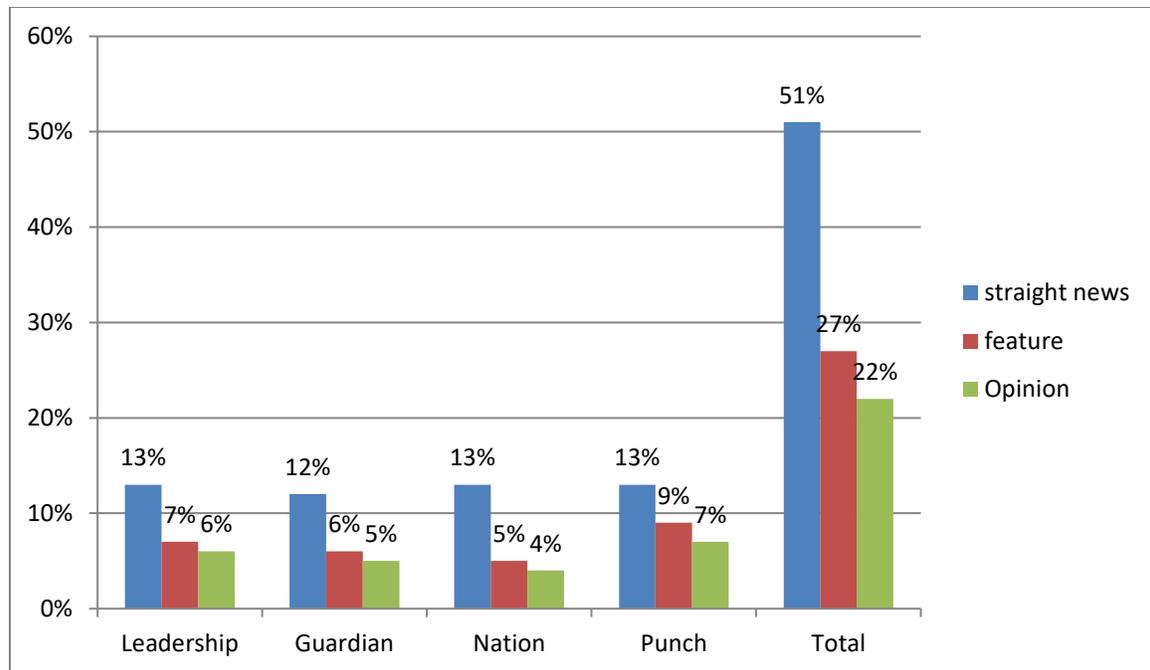


Figure 2 Newspaper story types on impact of COVID-19 on Nigerian economy

In the chart above, the researcher examined the story types that newspapers utilized to report the impact of COVID-19 on Nigerian economy. It was found that across all the four newspapers examined, there was higher utilization of straight news than feature and opinion story format put together. The implication is that newspapers paid greater attention to straight news without providing greater details on stories reported.

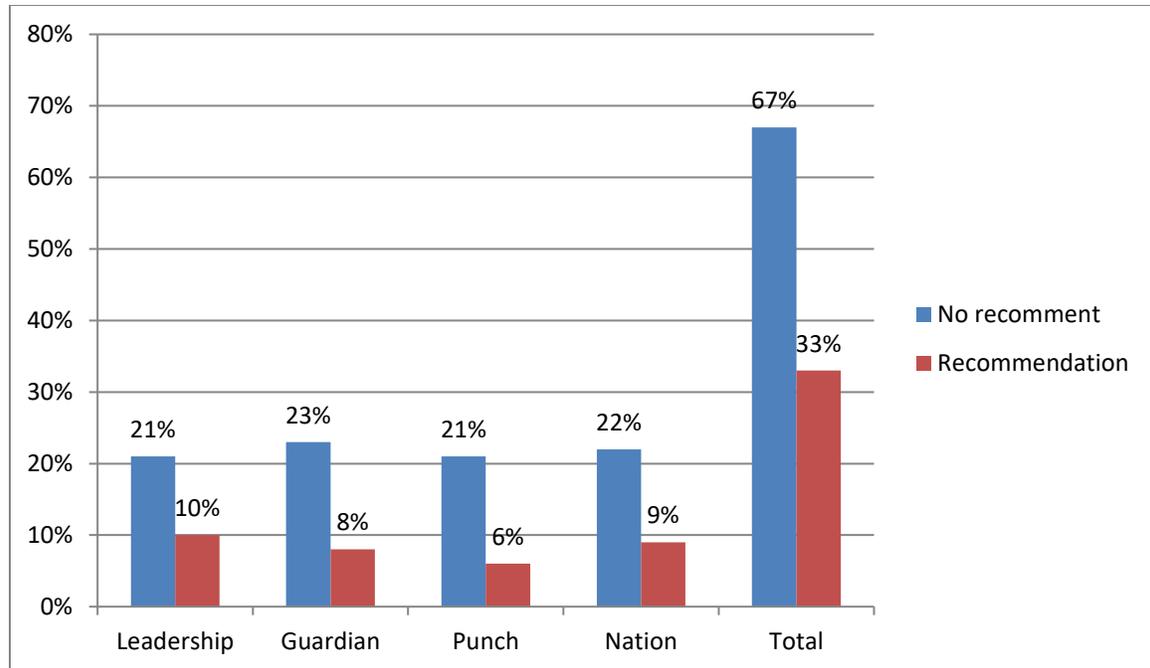


Figure 3 Story recommendations on economic management

In the chart above, the researcher examined if newspapers made suggestions on how to manage and improve the economy in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic. The result of the analysis showed that most of the stories did not suggest how the Nigerian economy can be effectively managed in the midst of the pandemic. In the last chart below, the researcher ascertained if the newspapers examined paid attention to post COVID-19

Nigerian economy.

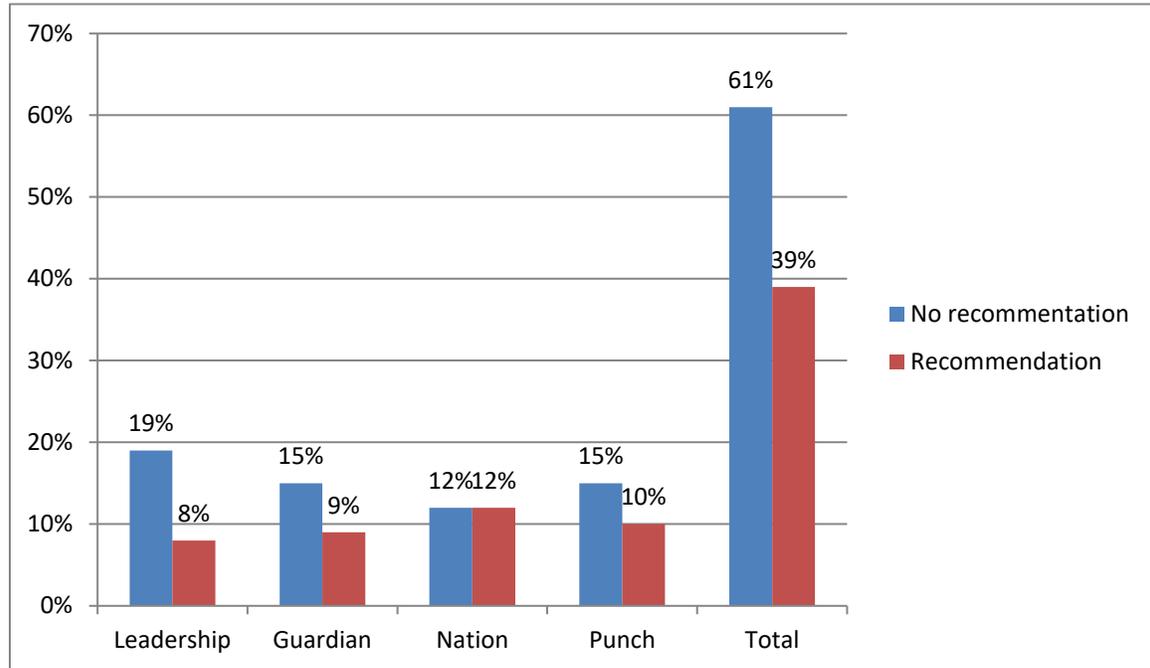


Figure 4 Newspaper recommendations on Post COVID-19 economy

The chart above sought to explain if newspaper stories on the impact of COVID-19 on Nigeria make suggestions on how to effectively manage the economy in the post COVID-19 era. The result showed that generally, very few (39%) of the stories made recommendations on how the economy can survive after the pandemic.

Test of Hypotheses

This study tested two hypotheses. The results of the hypotheses testing is presented in the following tables:

Table 1: Regression analysis of sources of stories as predictors of story type on impact of COVID-19 on the economy

Source	Constant	β value	R square	F. value	P. value
Official sources	3.912	.401	.451	12.401	.001
Non-official sources		.108			.002

The objective of table one above was to determine how sources of stories on the Impact of COVID-19 predict newspaper story type on the impact of COVID-19 on the economy. The analysis revealed an overall p-value of 0.001 with R. Square value of .451. This implies that our model explains 45.1% variance in newspaper story type of the impact of COVID-19 on the economy as a result of sources of stories. The result of the Beta value showed that official sources predicted more ($\beta=.401$).

Table 2: Regression analysis of story type as predictors of newspaper commendations post COVID-19 Nigerian economy

Story type	Constant	β value	R square	F. value	P. value
Straight news	4.139	.632	.551	11.418	.001
Feature article		.208			.003
Opinion		.199			.004

In table two above, the researcher sought to determine how story type predicts media framing of the impact of COVID-19 on the economy. The result of the story showed that straight news, feature news and opinion article all predict media framing of the impact of COVID-19 on the economy. The result showed an R. Square value of .551, an indication that our model explains 55.1% variance in media framing of the impact of COVID-19

on the economy as a result of type of story. Straight news ($\beta=.632$) contributed more in predicting media framing of the impact of COVID-19 on the economy. This suggests that there were more straight news stories than feature articles and opinion put together.

Discussion of Findings

In this study, we examined how Nigerian media report the impact of COVID-19 on the economy. In doing so, we focused attention on four newspapers namely *Leadership*, *Guardian*, *Nation* and *Punch* newspapers. We anchored the study on agenda setting theory. We also paid attention to four aspects that may influence media agenda setting of the impact of COVID-19 on Nigerian economy. These are sources of story, the story type as well as the recommendation related to the operation of the economy during health and economic crises as well as post COVID-19 economic activities. Our result showed that there was dominance of official sources in newspapers coverage of the impact of COVID-19 on Nigerian economy. This situation denied the general public the views from other sources like experts who would provide a balance view and analysis about and issue. This aspect of the result has extended the study of Apuke and Omar (2020) who examined media coverage of COVID-19 without paying attention to neither story source nor the impact on the economy. Also, it was found that story type significantly predicted media coverage of the impact of COVID-19 on the economy. We also found that the media examined essentially made use of straight news in reporting the impact of COVID-19 on Nigerian economy. The implication is that the media did not provide greater details on issues reported. This aspect of the finding extended the study of Gever and Ezeah (2020) who examined media coverage of COVID-19 without paying attention to

economic impact. The current study also extended the study of Olijó (2020) who examined media coverage of race towards the development of COVID-19 vaccine without paying attention to impact of COVID-19 on Nigerian economy. Finally, the result of the current study showed that the media examined did not pay attention to making suggestions on how the economy operate during health crisis and economic challenges. Also, media contents paid less attention to how the economy can survive the post COVID-19 era. These results have implications on policy, scholarship and practice. First, in the area of policy, the findings of the study make a strong case for the need for come up with a policy that educates media practitioners on how to promote survival strategies in the economic sector during health and economic crises. Such a policy will also make provision for the media to be at the forefront of preparing the economy for the post COVID-19 era. The result also makes a strong case for a synergy between business operators and media houses on how to best assist the economy in critical times like COVID-19. The result has implication on scholarship by adding to the existing body of literature on media coverage.

Conclusion/ recommendations

Based on the result of this study, we conclude that the frequency of media reportage of the important of COVID-19 on the economy is below 40%. We also conclude that in reporting the impact of COVID-19 on the economy, the media pay less attention in making suggestions on how the economy can cope with the threat which COVID-19 poses. The current study has made theoretical, scholarly practical contributions. Theoretically, the study has provided evidence to link agenda setting theory with media coverage of health crisis within the context of economic development. This information

may be useful for interpreting agenda setting theory from the perspective of media contributions to economic development. Scholarly, the current study has added to the existing body of literature on COVID-19. The current study has also advanced literature on COVID-19 by highlighting the economic dimensions to studies related to the virus. This study equally has implications on policy advocacy. This is because the result could serve as a blueprint for planning and implementing policies related to media roles in economic development. Summarily, the basic contribution of the current study is that it has provided empirical evidence for understanding how newspapers in Nigerian report the economic impact of COVID-19.

The following suggestions are made. In the first place, further studies should interview journalists and communication experts to suggest communication strategies in economic sector for post-COVID -19 economies. In addition, it is the recommendation of the current study that other researchers should examine how micro, small and medium scale enterprises are coping with the challenges that COVID-19 poses.

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