

Public Relations and the Dialectics of Newspapers Coverage of Health Issues in Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examines the extent to which public relations influences the dialectics of newspapers coverage of health issues in Nigeria with the aim of determining how public relations programmes, materials and activities of health interest groups and organisations influences the focus and tone of health articles in selected newspapers in Nigeria. The study is anchored on agenda-building framework derived from Agenda Setting Theory of McCombs and Shaw (1972) which refers to the ability of the news media to impact how important the public understands an issue; and the Information Subsidy Theory of Oscar Gandy (1982) which refers to an effort to influence others by providing information in a controlled manner at a lower cost than it would be were the user to gather it on his or her own. Content and textual analysis were adopted as the research design with three national dailies (*Thisday*, *The Punch* and *Daily Trust*), and *News Releases* of five interest groups and organisations as the subjects of study from which a sample size of 80 newspaper articles and 12 news releases was drawn. Findings of the study show that articles on health issues in the three newspapers relied 78.5% on public relations activities and materials of health interest groups and organisations. The study also found that the public relations influenced the dialectic narratives of the health issues covered. Further findings reveal that public relations exerts overwhelming influence on the dialectics of health information in Nigerian newspapers; and that health interest groups and organisations in Nigeria strategically influences and dictates the tone of news coverage of health issues through their targeted public relations activities and materials to determine the discursive constructions of health issues in line with their targeted behavioural contexts. On the basis of the findings, the study concludes that public relations is a primary influence on the various genres of health stories in Nigerian newspapers.

Keywords: *Public Relations, dialectics, News Coverage, Health Issues*

Background

The tremendous impact of health on the quality and duration of human life and its overwhelming influence on human capabilities is universally recognized. Consequently, health has been described as the most valuable human possession. Given this importance, health issues or challenges are of serious concern for individuals, groups, institutions and governments who strive to preserve it through various means ranging from prevention to therapy, policy to regulation, and prescription to recommendation of healthy lifestyles (Chen & Stoecker, 2020; Catalan-Matamoros & Peñafiel-Saiz, 2019). The interaction between organizational public relations and health news coverage has made public relations influence on journalism one of the oldest topics in the analysis of mass communication, organizational communication, journalism studies, and communication science generally. When societal organizations and groups or NGOs aim to influence public opinion or stakeholder decisions on health issues, they employ, among other instruments, strategic communication and public relations using the mass media as the master forum of the public sphere.

This has rendered one of public relations function - media relations, potentially important, as it very often influence which topics news media report on and how they report about those topics (Vogler & Schafer, 2020). Media relations and other planned public relations programmes of corporate interest often dictates the dialectics of health coverage and discourse in the media as such influences tasks journalism with selecting and presenting the topics and perspectives that are most relevant to the public and in line with the goals of organisations. Journalism for decades have come under attack over how much influence public relations had on daily news content through reliance on information provided for news by corporate organisations (Elrod & Fortenberry, 2020). Despite the criticisms and attacks, public relations continue to exert influence on news coverage of health. A recent study by Hutchens, Lee & Krieger (2022) shows that about half the information provided by public relations officers of interests groups, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and corporate bodies was used in subsequently news stories, and the topics the public relations officers identified as salient to their agencies were the same topics given salience in media coverage.

It is well recognized that the mass media – radio, television, newspapers and magazines plays an enormously influential role in public responses to health issues. Studies confirm that the mass media has substantial power in setting agendas, that is, *what* we should be concerned about and take action on, and framing issues, that is, *how* we should think about them (Hodgetts, Chamberlain, Scammell, Karapu, Waimarie, 2008; Walsh-Childers & Braddock,

2018; O'Keeffe, Nickel, Dakin, Maher, Albarqouni, McCaffery, Barratt & Moynihan, 2021; Copp, Dakin, Nickel, Albarqouni, Mannix, McCaffery, Barratt & Moynihan, 2022). Consequently, research evidence indicate that interests groups, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and corporate bodies do strategically use public relations to exert influence by creating newsworthy events, such as campaigns, demonstrations and protests. Through these sequence of well-thought and planned actions that have specific objectives and public significance, the bodies and groups attract and gain media attention and move news content substantially toward the direction intended by the events and programmes source (Macnamara, 2014; Williams, 2015; Nicholls, 2019). This explains why Boumans (2018, p. 2267) pointed out that “public relations is a driving force behind what gets into the news”. What this means is that interests groups, corporate organizations and non-governmental organizations use public relations to direct the tone of news stories with the aim of attracting attention, change perception and influencing health behaviours. Notwithstanding, the extent to which public relations influences the dialectics of news reports on health issues in Nigeria and how much of health news stories are subjects strategic public relations activities of corporate interests is what this study seeks to investigate. This is against the backdrop of studies which suggest that the mass media often cover health issues out of routine schedules, though such coverage usually lacks depth and prominence (Summ, & Volpers, 2016; Schäfer, 2017; Nicholls, 2019).

Statement of the Problem

Studies in mass media sociology over the years have identified a number of factors that influence news content. Specifically, five categories of factors have been identified as influencing news content (McNamara, 2014; Williams, 2015; Carlson, Robinson, Lewis & Berkowitz, 2018). According to scope of influence, these factors include (1) individual attributes (e.g., media professionals' education and gender); (2) media routines (e.g., gatekeeping, beat system, and pack journalism); (3) organizational characteristics (e.g., political endorsements, editorial positions, and corporate policies); (4) extra-media variables (e.g., advertisers' and news sources' interventions); and (5) ideological influences (e.g., standard social values). In addition to competing media organizations, advertisers, audiences, and government controls, the public relations activities of a variety of news sources, such as interests groups, corporate organizations and non-governmental organizations have been identified as constituting significant influence on news content (McNamara, 2014; Avery & Park, 2019).

Strategic public relations efforts of news sources, goes beyond affecting news events to affecting decisions about whether a topic is included or discarded in the news media agenda (Avery & Park, 2019). This implies that public relations influences even the gatekeeping process of media organizations. Many health stakeholders consider their own appearance in the news media as a cost-effective way of reaching their publics and influencing their health behaviours, consequently they strategically plan their public relations activities to influence media coverage. News releases from different health stakeholders' sources also assist journalists in identifying news items and fill news holes under tight deadlines (Bright, 2016; Hutchens, Lee & Krieger, 2022). Indeed, public relations activities of health stakeholders affect news content directly by providing story ideas to the media that support an organization's position or indirectly by using the media to project health-related issues onto the public agenda (Hutchens, Lee & Krieger, 2022).

While journalists and public relations professionals agree that public relations efforts influence the news, they disagree regarding the extent that public relations professionals impact the flow of information (Lloyd & Toogood, 2015). However, uncertainties regarding the extent of public relations on news coverage of health issues by the Nigerian mass media, as well as the ways in which the Nigerian news media rely on public relations sources for news stories on health issues remains contestable. Notwithstanding, it should be expected that public relations efforts exert more influence over the flow of health information in the news media than other news areas. Journalists' reliance on public relations sources has been shown to be exacerbated by the technical nature of health and medical news (Zhao, Fu & Chen, 2022). Therefore, within the field of health and science news, there is a unique combination of journalist reliance on public relations professionals for news stories and the public's dependency on the news media for knowledge of health issues.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to assess public relations influence on the dialectics of media coverage of health issues in Nigeria. Specifically however, the study seeks to:

1. Determine the extent to which public relations influence newspapers coverage of health issues in Nigeria.
2. Ascertain the sources of information on health issues in selected newspapers in Nigeria.
3. Examine the relationship between news themes and the public relations activities of selected health interest groups in Nigeria.

Research Questions

Based on the research problem and objectives of the study, the following research questions have been put forward to guide the analysis of this study:

1. To what extent does public relations influence newspapers coverage of health issues in Nigeria?
2. What are the key information sources of news reports on health issues in selected Nigerian newspapers?
3. What is the relationship between news themes and the public relations activities of selected health interest groups in Nigeria?

Literature Review

The mass media serve as a leading source for directed health behaviours in every society, and significantly impact health knowledge or perceptions of health knowledge (Volkman et al., 2021). A significant amount of research has been conducted in the media relations field to determine the influence of public relations on news, and while much of it has found significant influence of public relations on media content, there is a significant body of literature that reflects the nature of influence and the underlying relationships. This study reviews literature on two themes that addresses the research objectives.

Public Relations and Health Communications

Assessing health promotions from a strategic communication perspective specifies target audiences and target behaviours, that can be directly influenced by campaign messages. Health campaigns may have the important perspective of a health professional, but not as prominent of a perspective of a strategic communications professional. As a result, a limited variety of strategies have typically been used in health communications. Elrod & Fortenberry (2020) argue that disciplined diversification can yield greater success in health promotion campaigns, by using a broader set of communication tactics that 'are coordinated in a more conceptually sophisticated manner and guided by formative research. A public relations approach is designed to disseminate messages to reach as many people as possible. This means that it would be useful to skillfully employ public relations strategies for generating coverage on a topic and for creating a successful campaign. Implementing public relations into health promotions helps ensure clear and concise sets of messages that are built around a strong call to action. Public relations approaches help in framing the message and providing tone for news reports by providing more content than other strategies can deliver, conveying to people not what to think but what to think about (Vogler & Schafer, 2020).

Public relations rests on a century of evidence-based and theoretically grounded precedents that make it an ideal vehicle for the delivery of health information and promotion. The reliance of public relations on unpaid methods of promotion positions it uniquely among the components of the health communications mix, as other pathways require direct expenditures to effect audience engagement. The typical manner in which healthcare institutions effect public relations is by preparing and forwarding press releases profiling noteworthy matters to news media outlets in hopes that they, in turn, will disseminate given stories to their audiences. The media firms carrying associated stories do not charge a fee for such, as the items are deemed to be of interest to their audiences (Elrod & Fortenberry, 2020). While the cost-free aspect of public relations is highly attractive, the downside is that it places healthcare institutions in positions of reliance on outside parties - news media organizations to accept and present forwarded stories. This, of course, offers no guarantees of circulation and telling the story from the perspective of the health interest organisation or group, as the stories can be rejected for any number of reasons, including perceived audience disinterest, limited allotments of space or time for presentation, breaking news stories which crowd out content deemed to be of less importance, and so on. Even if carried, intended stories may not be communicated as desired, as editorial control rests with conveying news media firms (Kraak, Stanley, Harrigan & Zhou, 2022).

Regardless of such, studies have confirmed that the dialectics of health care reportage is often influenced by public relations due to limited knowledge of health information contexts by journalists and the contexts of the public relations activities of from which the stories emerge. As such public relations is useful communications utility for healthcare organizations and interests groups who use it in tandem with other components of the health campaigns to guarantee message dissemination. Since public relations announcements successfully accepted for publication by news media organizations are ultimately conveyed as news pieces, audiences naturally view them to be highly credible, with the given stories being elevated by the reputations of the presenting news entities. Many consumers are skeptical of commercial conveyances, such as advertising and direct mail, as these are funded by the promoting parties. However, when activities, events, accomplishments, and the like are presented by news media firms, skepticism diminishes, positively influencing audience receptivity and potentially generating greater attention and awareness than that afforded by paid marketing communications applications (Hutchens, Lee & Krieger, 2022).

Media and Public Relations in Society

The news media are the most prominent instrument for disseminating information in society, and it is pretty much a non-negotiable fact that the interests of organizations through their public relations programmes continuously serve to provide the news media with material. However, it is quite questionable, whether the material consists of information that should rightfully be the subject of a news valuation process or whether the public relations programmes are actions aimed at influencing and manipulating news content beyond the normative boundaries for journalists' information exchange with their sources (Ki, Pasadeos & Ertem-Eray, 2019). Irrespective of the motive, it is glaring that the news media are the most outstanding, common, and important channel for interest groups to get their messages out and influence their surroundings. Several researchers argue that a focus on media has, in fact, grown in importance to agents seeking to influence health outcomes, especially concerning those active on the scene of policy shaping in the broader sense (Ki, Pasadeos & Ertem-Eray, 2019; Ferguson, 2018; Hecht, Martin, Donnelly, Larson & Sweetser, 2017). Studies of the relation between public relations and the news media show that public relations actors and journalists often establish close relations in order to fulfill a mutual need (Hecht, Martin, Donnelly, Larson & Sweetser, 2017).

Today, the influence of public relations programmes on the news media appears in many different shapes in daily life. It involves anything from traditional press conferences and press releases to various more or less successful long-term agenda-setting cum agenda-building-related activities. Among other things, strategies for controlling the news agenda are based on producing and serving the media with material that promotes the instrumental purposes of the senders' interests. This type of media influence and strategies for controlling the news agenda are today often referred to by the concept news management (Arqoub & Dwikat, 2023). The media have become an increasingly important stage for health organizations' external communication; making the media a prominent marketplace for health information. Supriadi, Hafiar, Safi & Amin (2023) note that today, the media are the most important marketplace for health interest groups and organisations – all important deals are settled in the media sphere, and as everyone is squeezed together on the same media scene, it becomes very loud, very crowded and very short of oxygen.

In contemporary society however, the media do not constitute a platform with actors of equal importance to public relations practitioners in the health sector. Rather, the media sphere appears as a media hierarchy. Typically, the

largest radio and television stations along with the large national newspapers constitute the most important targets for public relations activities of health interest groups and organisations. Within television, news programmes are especially sought after, followed by talk shows and entertainment programmes. For public relations activities directed at the print media, the editorial and debate pages of the daily newspapers are essential targets. When it comes to activities such as promotion of health services and launches, trade magazines and other types of specialized press increase in ranking and become a high priority. For perception and behavioural change, and opinion-generating campaigns, regional and local media are also of interest (Arqoub & Dwikat, 2023). The media organisations pick up their health stories mostly through public relations materials or activities of health interest groups and organisations. Meanwhile, news material from public relations sources outside the media are seen as a contribution to journalistic work and as a way of cutting costs. This point of view has made way for the agenda-setting theory to be meshed with the theory of information subsidy in this study into a theoretical conceptualisation tagged ‘agenda-building framework’ meaning “efforts by policy actors to increase the consumption of persuasive messages by reducing their costs” (Li & Kent, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

Health communication research demonstrates that consuming news media messages about health topics influences numerous health beliefs and behaviours, and that health promotions professionals often have a vision of what health changes they want to see, but can sometimes lack the direction to execute these messages. This has made the integration of public relations into health communication efforts essential to ensure successful campaigns. This study is anchored on agenda-building framework – integrating the agenda-setting theory and information subsidy theory as the theoretical framework.

Introduced by McCombs and Shaw (1972), agenda setting refers to the ability of the news media to impact how important the public understands an issue to be through the amount of coverage it garners. Agenda setting is based on two assumptions: (1) the news media does not reflect reality, it filters and, and in doing so, its representation of reality is distorted, and (2) media concentration on a few issues leads the public to perceive those issues to be more important than issues not receiving media coverage. Thus, much agenda setting scholarship has focused on topical salience transfer, from the media to the public (Ferguson, 2018).

Oscar Gandy in 1982 introduced the information subsidy theory - referred to as an effort to influence others by providing information in a controlled manner at a lower cost than it would be were the user to gather it on his or her own. Li & Kent (2021) elaborate that information subsidies refers to the process of providing news stories, reports, facts, or other forms of information or intellectual capital to reporters or gatekeepers at low cost or not cost at all, with the intention of affecting the perceptions or actions of readers, viewers, or recipients of the information. In turn, the subsidizing agency (public relations professionals of health interest groups or organisations) generally expects to gain a higher degree of influence or power over information consumers as well as advantage over competing information sources than would ensue were they not to provide the subsidy.

In summation, Supriadi, Hafiar, Safi & Amin (2023) describe the agenda-building framework as policy agenda setting, which involves not only the active role of media organizations, but also the participation of policymakers, interest groups and the public.

Methodology

The central aim of this study was to determine the extent to which public relations influence the dialectics of newspapers coverage of health issues in Nigeria. To achieve this, convergent parallel design (also known as mixed method) which allows for the simultaneous collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2019) was employed. Consequently, quantitative content analysis of newspaper articles and textual analysis of news releases of selected health interest groups and organisations used as sources in the articles were carried out concurrently but separately to develop a more complete understanding of the influence of public relations on the dialectics of newspapers coverage of health issues in Nigeria.

Quantitative data was collected from newspaper articles to identify the type of articles, ascertain the information sources of health stories, and establish the focus of the stories. Also, textual analysis of news releases of selected health interest groups and organisations used as sources of information in the articles sampled for the study was carried to determine the relationship between the tone of the news releases and focus of the stories. The aim was to verify the correlation between the news releases and the dialectics of health information in the articles sampled for the study. The population of the study therefore, comprised of 390 daily editions of *Thisday*, *The Punch* and *Daily Trust* newspapers published between January 2, 2023 and June 30, 2023; and 12 news releases of 5 health interest groups and organisations. A sample size of 126

editions of the three newspapers comprising of 42 editions of each of the three national dailies, resulting in a total of 80 articles on health issues; and 12 news releases of 5 health interest groups and organisations comprising of government and non-governmental organisations were determined for the study using composite week sampling technique and purposive sampling.

Findings and Analysis

The content analysis enabled revelation of the linguistic practice of presenting and analyzing information through the type of articles, juxtaposing oppositional viewpoints of sources; and the construction of meaning and identity through focus or slant of articles. Using the Cohen kappa, an inter coder reliability of 0.93 was established, data collected from both content and textual analysis were triangulated and analyzed using the PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2022). PROCESS is a macro that allows for the testing of mediation and moderation paths simultaneously. Frequencies of types of news articles, information sources of health stories, and focus of the stories are presented using simple percentages to enable stepwise multiple regressions.

A test of the interaction between efficacious terms in the type of articles, sources of information, and focus of the articles and key characteristics of public relations narratives deduced from textual analysis of the news releases were used in the triangulation process in determining the dialectics of the three newspapers coverage of health issues. To answer the research questions, the data collected from content and textual analysis to determine the influence of public relations on the dialectics of newspapers coverage of health issues in Nigeria was presented and analysed per research question.

RQ1: To what extent does public relations influence newspapers coverage of health issues in Nigeria?

To determine the extent to which public relations influences newspapers coverage of health issues in Nigeria, data contained in Table 1 which provides information on the types of articles was used.

Table 1: Types of Articles on Health Issues

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
News stories	31	38.75%
Editorials	11	13.75%
Features	14	17.5%
Opinion/columns	10	12.5%
Interviews/letters	6	7.5%
Advertorials/supplements	8	10%
Total	80	100%

Frequency of types of articles on health issues: An illustration of the frequencies described in detail in table 1, shows that news stories constitutes the highest content of types of articles on health issues in the three newspapers sampled during the study period, account for 38.75 %, followed by news features with 17.5%; and editorials accounting for 13.75%. Opinion columns in the three newspapers sampled during the study period also constitute content of types of articles on health issues with 12.5%, and are trailed by advertorials and news supplements with 10% while interviews and letters to the editor constitutes the least content of types of articles on health issues in the three newspapers sampled during the study period with 7.5% representation.

This data implicitly answers the research question to the effect that in traditional news reporting, news stories, features and advertorials/supplements are heavily reliant on news releases, internal sources, events and materials of organisations. As such it can be inferred to connote immense public relations influence on newspapers coverage of health issues in Nigeria, owing to the fact that 78.5% of the articles published within the study period across the three newspapers relied wholly on public relations materials and activities of interest groups and organisations; and the fact that interest groups and organisations usually use the public relations materials and activities to set the tone, influence the narratives and inherently shape public perceptions about the health issues through the media.

RQ2: What are the key information sources of news reports on health issues in selected Nigerian newspapers?

Data contained in Table 2 which provided information on sources of information used in writing the articles was used in answering research question two. The import of the data is that sources of information for articles often serve

as a filter that sets the tone for a given story (Volkman, Hokeness, Morse, Viens & Dickie, 2021).

Table 2: Source of Information for Health Stories

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Governmental/Non-Governmental Organisations	24	30%
Government functionary/Public officials	15	18.75%
News agency/Staff reporter/Freelance contribution	10	12.5%
Research report/Programme communiqués	11	13.75%
Health interest groups/organisations	18	22.5%
Unidentified sources	2	2.5%
Total	80	100%

Frequency of Source of Information for Health Stories: Sources of information for the articles on health issues in the three newspapers sampled during the study period was determined through attributions. Data in table two shows that information obtained from governmental and non-governmental organisations sources ranked highest with 30% attributions. This was followed by information from health interest groups and organisations with 22.5% while information attributed to government functionaries and other public officials accounted for 18.75%. The data also reveal that information attributed to research reports and programme communiqués stood at 13.75%, closely followed information attributed to news agencies, staff reporters of the newspapers, and contributions from freelancers which accounts for 12.5% of the articles sampled. Only two articles out of the 80 articles sampled for the study, accounting for 2.5% were not attributed to any source.

It is thus deducible from the table that cumulatively, governmental and non-governmental organisations, health interest groups and organisations; government functionaries and other public officials, as well as research reports and programme communiqués account for 85% of information sources for health stories in the three Nigerian newspapers. This information answers research question two to the effect that it can be interpreted to mean that public relations exerts overwhelming influence on the dialectics of health information in Nigerian newspapers given that only 12.5% of the articles sampled were sourced from news agencies, and written by staff reporters or stringers of the three newspapers studied.

RQ3: What is the relationship between news themes and the public relations activities of selected health interest groups in Nigeria?

To establish how public relations influences the dialectics of the three newspapers coverage of health issues, it was necessary to find out the focus of the articles on health in the three newspapers. This along with the textual analysis of the news releases will help in identifying the relationship between the themes of the articles and the selected news releases of the health interest groups and organisations in Nigeria. Several nested dialectics of news coverage of health issues exist that relate to the use of language and the connection between discursive process and behavioural context. These dialectics and their interrelation harbour the possibility for recursive relationship between public relations and news context as reflected in the dialectic between type of articles, information sources, focus of journalistic reporting and social and political structures.

Table 3: Focus of newspapers articles on health

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Outbreak/containment awareness campaign	14	17.5%
Environmental/preventive health advocacy	9	11.25%
Behavioural/attitudinal change campaign	13	16.25%
Perceptions/habits/behavioural advocacy	10	12.25%
Healthy habits/behaviours reinforcement	7	8.75%
Mass education/mobilization	12	15%
Health policy/programme promotion	15	18.75%
Total	80	100%

Frequency of the focus of newspaper articles on health: Table 3 provides an illustration of the frequencies of the focus of news articles on health in the three newspapers sampled for the study during the study period. The data shows that articles focusing on health policies and health programmes promotion constitutes the highest content of the articles sampled with 18.75% content, closely followed by articles that focused on diseases outbreak and containment awareness campaign which accounts for 17.5% of the content. Articles intended for mass education and mobilization of the public regarding health policies and programmes followed with 15% content; and articles focusing on behavioural and attitudinal change of the public ranked next with 16.25% content, while articles that were targeted at changing public perceptions and habits or behaviours towards certain health issues trailed with 12.25% content. Articles

focusing on environmental and preventive health advocacy in the three newspapers sampled during the study period accounted for 11.25% of the content, while articles targeting healthy habits and behavioural reinforcements in the three newspapers sampled during the study period accounted for 8.75% of the content.

It is implicitly evident from the data that the dialectics of health coverage by Nigerian newspapers as adduced from the focus of the articles examined in the three newspapers sampled during the study period is significantly dictated by the public relations activities of health interest groups and organisations in Nigeria. It also infers that the flow of health information through the news media in Nigeria is significantly influenced by the public relations materials, events, programmes and activities of health interest groups and organisations. This is however, understandable, owing to the complexities, sensitivities and technicalities that underlie health information.

Textual Analysis of News Releases

To gain a more broad-based and informed insights into the influence of public relations on the dialectics of newspapers coverage of health issues in Nigeria, news releases of 5 health interest groups and organisations comprising of government and non-governmental organisations were textually analysed. The textual analysis of 12 news releases provides insight into how the public relations narratives of the health interest groups and organisations were consciously created, planned and implemented to influence the dialectics of newspapers coverage of health issues in Nigeria. The textual analysis was coded into two broad themes which enabled the utilization of PROCESS Macro for triangulations, a procedure generally applied for analyzing qualitative and quantitative evidence through triangulation in PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2022). The correlation between the quantitative and qualitative data to establish the relationship between the news releases as key public relations materials of health interest groups and organisations, and newspapers coverage through the triangulation are used in answering research question three.

Having established the focus of the articles as a precursor for the dialectics of coverage, the relationship between themes of the articles and the public relations activities of selected health interest groups in Nigeria was determined by comparing the title of the news releases with the headlines of news stories across the three newspapers, and also comparing the lead of the articles and the lead of the news release to ascertain semblance in tone and slant. The textual analysis revealed that all the 12 news releases examined made headlines across the three newspapers, with some stories appearing on the same

day with the news releases and some a few days afterwards. It was also discovered that some of the news releases received very wide coverage. The highest usage found in the comparative analysis was news releases from governmental and non-governmental organisations such as the Federal Ministry of Health (FMH), Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), National Agency For Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), World Health Organisation (WHO), United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), amongst others as well as releases from government and non-governmental officials.

The headline of a news release announcing measures taken by the National Agency For Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) regarding the *Indomie* crisis made headline for the three newspapers on May 1, 2023. The headline of the news release titled: "Cancer Scare: The National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control, (NAFDAC) Temporary Bans Importation of Indomie Chicken pending conclusion of Testing by Food Lab Services Directorate" made the following headlines in the three newspapers: "Cancer scare: We've banned importation of Indomie noodles (Daily Trust, May 1, 2023)"; "Cancer: Crisis Rocks Indofood As NAFDAC Bans Indomie (Thisday, May 1, 2023)"; and "Cancer scare: NAFDAC Bans Importation of Indomie Noodles into the Country (The Punch, May 1, 2023)." All the three newspapers had the same lead which was a paraphrase of the first and second paragraph of the news release issued by NAFDAC: "The National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control, (NAFDAC) has banned the importation of Indomie noodles into the country. The Director General of the Agency, Prof Mojisola Adeyeye, stated this in a news release made available to journalists, on Monday, stating that the Nigerian regulatory body took the action amid investigation by Taiwan and Malaysia authorities which reportedly discovered ethylene oxide, a cancer causing agent, in the product."

The textual analysis data in corroboration with the data on focus of stories, collectively answers research question three by clearly establishing the relationship between themes of the articles and the news releases of the selected health interest groups and organisations in Nigeria. This implies that although it may not be the case with other genres of newspaper articles, public relations influences to a great deal the dialectics of the three newspapers coverage of health issues, and by implication health interest groups and organisations in Nigeria strategically influences and dictates the tone of news coverage of health issues through their targeted public relations activities and materials to determine the discursive constructions of health issues in line with their targeted behavioural contexts.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The focus of research on media coverage of health as reviewed in the study has mostly focused on the degree to which news sources are capable of influencing journalists, achieving access, and their ability to frame the issues on their terms. Much less attention has been paid to examining how health interest groups and organisations (governmental and non-governmental) strategically utilise public relations to influence coverage of health issues, dictate the dialectics of discursive constructions and keep issues off the news media agenda (Bright, 2016; Anderson, 2017; Avery & Park, 2019; Elrod & Fortenberry, 2020; Copp, Dakin, Nickel, Albarqouni, Mannix, McCaffery, Barratt & Moynihan, 2022). While there is growing recognition that “control over the media is as much about the power to silence and suppress issues as it is to publicise them” (Anderson, 2017, p. 12), much remains to be done.

In the instance of this study with the overwhelming evidence of public relations influence on the dialectics of newspapers coverage of health issues in Nigeria, the study concludes that public relations was a primary influence on the various genres of health stories in Nigerian newspapers, as without the news releases, and media briefings and organised public relations activities of health interest groups and organisations, newspapers coverage would have been shallowly low and without focus. As there was little or no significant effort made by journalists and editors across the three newspapers to initiate coverage through interviews with experts or independently investigate health issues, and provoke public discourse around the issues.

Consequently, it is the recommendations of this study that more research needs to examine behind-the-scenes relations between sources and journalists, and the efforts of news sources to prevent competing groups among health interest groups and organisations from gaining news media attention in relation to health issues. Also, although we now know a great deal more about health interest groups and organisations sources and their communication strategies, we know relatively little about powerful multinational corporate interests and organizations, governments, and lobby groups whose interests dominates public relations activities of health interest groups and organisations in Nigeria. There is still a considerable amount to be done in examining journalistic attitudes to scientists and health professionals as news sources on health issues, particularly in the context of calls for scientists and health professionals to make greater efforts to engage with the public and demonstrate impact.

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