CULTURE, MEDIA & FILM | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Nigerian newspaper headlines on Covid-19: a reflection of government and citizens’ perception and attitude

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Abstract: The paper, through content analysis, examined headlines and front-page news of two prominent Nigerian newspapers—The Guardian and Vanguard. The newspapers were purposively selected to measure their coverage of the coronavirus outbreak in Nigeria and government and citizens’ perception against what obtained elsewhere. The level of awareness created to the spread of the pandemic was the major variable used to measure both government and citizens’ attitude. The study covered 4 months from when the virus was first discovered in the country in February 2020 to the imposition of lockdown and its relaxation in June. The following research questions guided the research. Which of the two newspapers gave more headlines on Covid-19? Which one had more front-page news on the pandemic? Was the prominence given to the virus a reflection of government’s/citizens’ attitude to it? How did the citizens perceive Covid-19 arising from information obtained from the newspapers? The findings show that both papers effectively covered the outbreak. It concluded that the Nigerian government paid lip

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, Nigeria, like other nations, was understandably in panic, especially with civilized countries such as France, Britain, America, Germany, India and others seemingly helpless and without a clue for solution. With the lockdown imposed in the country from February to June 2020, unlike other nations, the Nigerian government appeared not to tackle the pandemic with any seriousness. There were accusations and counter accusations on how the palliatives from charity organizations, World Health Organisation (WHO), Non-Governmental agencies and philanthropists, were distributed to victims. The media went agog with the news of underhand and sharp practices by government and individuals regarding the real nature of the pandemic. Government’s actions were in direct contradiction to the purported danger posed to the citizens by the virus, and so there was doubt and outright disbelief of government’s sincerity regarding the disease. This paper is, therefore, a reflection of the response of the citizens and government as reflected in the newspapers during the period.
service in its response to Covid-19, and this reflected in citizens’ indifference to the virus, notwithstanding the media coverage accorded it and contrary to what obtained in other countries.

**Subjects:** History; Cultural Studies; Media & film Studies

**Keywords:** Coronavirus/Covid-19; pandemic; Nigeria; lockdown; newspaper headlines

1. Introduction

The emergence of Covid-19 pandemic has foisted on society an unexpected dislocation of social and economic activities. This has led to unemployment and increased poverty among people who were already ravaged by a skewed world economic order. This situation has caught many Nigerians unawares, leading to despondency and desperation of many, especially coming at the end of December of 2019 when people were recovering from Christmas and end-of-year expenses.

In other words, towards the end of 2019, the world witnessed an outbreak of a pandemic known as coronavirus (Covid-19), which threw global media into frenzy in their efforts to cover and report it. World Health Organisation (WHO), related bodies, Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and research institutions sought measures to address it, while Federal and State governments issued directives and provided palliatives to save lives. The origin of the virus was traced to the city of Wuhan in China (WHO Report, 2020). The virus was code-named Covid-19 by the WHO on 11th February 2020 and subsequently declared a global pandemic (Branswell & Joseph, 2020). The virus spread rapidly and led to a declaration of a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020 (Malin et al., 2020).

The first case of the virus that was reported outside China in January was confirmed in about 215 countries as of 23 June 2020 (ACDC 2020). The index case of the virus in Nigeria, reportedly imported by an Italian, was detected in February by the NCDC in Lagos (NCDC, 2020). As of 23 June, the WHO Situation Report-155 has it that the world had recorded 8,993,659 cases with four 469,587 deaths (WHO CDSR & WHO “Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) Situation report—155, 2020), while Nigeria recorded 21,371 cases with 7,338 recoveries and 533 deaths (NCDC 116, 2020).

The fast spread and mode of contracting this dreaded virus made research institutions, world and national health bodies to give instructions and guidelines considered necessary to be followed in order to curtail further spread while seeking ways of providing lasting cure. Such guidelines included keeping of social distance of at least six feet, avoidance of crowding and wearing face masks (WHO CDAP, 2020). Governments of various nations reacted differently to the guidelines enumerated by the WHO for curtailing the virus; while some followed the guidelines, others modified such in the light of how serious the virus was regarded. For instance, the government of Nigeria at the Federal and State levels gave a stay-at-home order to avoid unnecessary gatherings. This was subsequently followed by a “total lockdown” of the nation’s border (Pandey, 2020). To cushion the effect of the stay-at-home, the three tiers of government, Local, State and Federal, religious bodies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and well-meaning individuals provided palliatives in the form of cash and food items to the indigents in the society (Njoku et al., 2020).

The world media did not renge in performing their traditional roles of information dissemination and reporting since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. They were in the forefront of reporting and enlightening members of the society about the virus on a daily basis. The media played the role of informing the public about what was happening in the world, particularly in those areas in which audiences do not possess direct knowledge or experience (Happer & Greg, 2013).

This conforms to the view held by the Director-General of the WHO about the virus in his 11 March 2020 briefing, when he states that “we have never before seen a pandemic sparked by a corona virus. This is the first pandemic caused by a corona virus” (WHODG, 2020). This situation,
therefore, called for a pragmatic approach by the media in informing the public about this strange viral outbreak and how to surmount it. In Africa, the world looks up to Nigeria and its media to take the lead as the “most populous Black Nation” (Odusina, 2020), in such matters as the covid-19 pandemic as it affects Africa and the Black World.

In this paper, the authors examined the reactions of Nigerian print media through their headlines and front-page news stories on the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the response of Nigerians and their government to the emergence of this dreaded virus. This is done through content analysis of The Guardian (Nigeria) and Vanguard newspapers, which were purposively selected within a 4-month period (March to June) with a view to determining the level of prominence the newspapers gave to the spread of the virus in creating awareness and informing the people and in the process save lives, since there was as yet no known cure.

This became germane as the pandemic was believed to be in its infant stage and there was a necessity for an appraisal of what had been done so far by the newspapers, whether they have done well or there is need to intensify efforts or adopt different methods in creating awareness about the virus to the Nigerian public. This work is, therefore, justified because it is believed to be the first on Nigerian newspaper headlines on the outbreak of Covid-19. It is a pace setter as it creates room for a follow-up research or study by other researchers on other aspects of the virus and media coverage to determine how the Nigerian government and the masses responded to it.

No doubt, the emergence of coronavirus on the global scene posed untold health challenges to humanity in its entirety. Every segment of the society was affected. The media of every nation had the unenviable task of informing and disseminating information on efforts to curb the spread of the virus. The Nigerian print media were in the forefront of performing this task of information dissemination on government’s efforts as well as to create awareness and enlighten the populace on the best strategies to cope with the virus and stem further spread. To what extent the print media were able to effectively carry out this assignment is the task before this research, bearing in mind the following questions:

1. Which of the two newspapers—The Guardian and The Vanguard—gave more headlines to Covid-19?
2. Which of the two had more front-page news on the pandemic?
3. Was the prominence given to the virus a reflection of government’s and the citizens’ attitude/response to it?
4. Did the newspapers effectively cover/create awareness on the disease?
5. How did the awareness affect the people’s perception and attitude towards the pandemic?

2. Conceptual and theoretical approach
A lot of research works have been carried out on the subject of the trending Covid-19 pandemic. Such available literatures have not really addressed the issue of the place of the Print media coverage as it affects the reflection of government and the citizens’ perception and attitude as a project. For the purpose of this research, the following will be attempted.

In “The Arts and Humanities”, Gunawan and Aviandy (2020) analysed the problems of the Arts from a variety of approaches. It shows how works of art and other cultural objects related reflected the dynamic of our everyday lives. Behind the artefact discussed lay varied problems: gender, politics, mental health, creativity, media, rights, lifestyles, etc. The analysis given to help us clarifies not only the art itself but increase the understanding of the context of the media also. The deepening of the problem of the media itself will make us more familiar with the phenomenon of the Covid-19 within the context of the people’s perception and attitude as a response to government’s position.
Nwakunor (2020) in “Creative sector must reinvent itself in post Covid-19 era” stressed that there is a global health emergency occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic. This has imposed a severe economic burden in virtually all nations of the world. Nigeria is a mono-economy and is almost entirely dependent on oil revenue for its mainstay. The shock of the effects of Covid-19 in the Nigerian economy is devastating. There is, therefore, the urgent need for information management by the print media to alleviate the already tense situation occasioned by the ravaging Covid-19. This is why journalists and their media must now think outside of the box. Thus, Nigeria must take advantage of the potentials available in the information obtained from the print media to cushion the effect of Covid-19 pandemic.

In their joint edited volume, The anthropology of epidemics, Kelly et al. (2019), they approached epidemics as total social phenomena: processes and events, which encompass and exercise a transformational impact on social life whilst at the same time functioning as catalysts of shifts and ruptures as regards human/non-human relations. Bearing a particular mark on subject areas and questions which have recently come to shape developments in anthropological thinking, the volume brings epidemics to the forefront of anthropological debate, as an exemplary arena for social scientific study and analysis. Loomis (2018) in his Epidemics: The Impacts of Germs and Their Power over Humanity comprehensively reviews the ten most influential epidemics in history, going beyond morbid accounts of symptoms and statistics to tell the often forgotten stories of what made these epidemics so calamitous. The book discusses epidemic disease as a major driving force in shaping our world; brings epidemic diseases out of the background of historical narratives and demonstrates how they had an immensely important role in deciding wars, toppling empires, sparking major leaps in technology and even changing the human genome; integrates science with history, sociology, religion and other disciplines to provide the reader with a unique perspective not found in most other accounts of epidemic disease; and shares fascinating insights such as how an epidemic of yellow fever helped to double the size of the United States and why tuberculosis was once considered a disease of the intellectual elite. The above reviewed literature apparently presents a lacuna in this research to fill.

The coronavirus disease code-named Covid-19 is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. Towards the end of 2019, the WHO announced the outbreak of a coronavirus disease in Wuhan, China (WHO Report, 2020). Within months, the virus spread to other parts of the world and became an enormous challenge. The rapidity of its spread raised its status to that of a pandemic (Ohadike, 1991). This prompted an announcement of a Public Health Emergency Concern in January 2020 by the WHO (2020). After an intensive laboratory assessment, the WHO instituted a name for this new Covid infection, “COVID-19”, on 11 February 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020). The name, no doubt, is a reflection of the year, 2019, when the virus was confirmed.

However, this will not be the first outbreak of a coronavirus disease. A 1968 report has it that the name “coronavirus” was first coined in 1968 and derived from the “corona-like” or crown-like morphology observed for related viruses in the electron microscope (Weiss & Navas-Martin, 2005). Corroborating the above, Lia van der Hoek reports that in the mid-1960s, two types of coronaviruses, HCoV-OC43 and HCoV-229E, were identified. He added that this was besides the existence of other coronaviruses, such as HCoV-NL63 and HCoV-HKU1; HCoV-229E and HCoV-OC43 (Van der Hoek, 2007).

In 2003, another relative coronavirus, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, SARS coronavirus (SARS-CoV), was identified and believed to have first infected humans in the Guangdong province of southern China in 2002. According to the WHO, the virus affected 26 countries and resulted in more than 8,000 cases in 2003 and beyond (WHO SARA, 2020).

These confirm the existence of the virus and its reoccurrence with varied degrees of infection. Common factors, however, as could be gleaned from the various outbreaks, are that coronaviruses
are transmitted from person to person through physical contact, contact with droplets of infected person, obstruction of the air ways leading to shortness of breath (acute and chronic respiratory disorder and central nervous system), fever, malaise, myalgia, headache, diarrhoea, shivering, amongst others. Of these, fever is the commonest. This view was shared by Lia van der Hoek and the WHO that no individual symptom or cluster of symptoms has proven to be specific for a diagnosis of SARS, although fever is the most apparent.

While the enumerated mode of transmission and symptoms are replica of Covid-19, it has, however, caused much harm and panic. In its current state, it has affected about 216 countries, with millions of persons contracting the virus and hundreds of thousand deaths, which made the WHO declare the virus a pandemic on 11 March 2020 (WHO Response, 2020). Though the world at various periods had been plagued by various diseases, the dreadfulness of the current pandemic remains a mystery yet to be unravelled.

History, as recorded by Master's in Public Health (MPH) and Nicolas LePan (MPH, 2020a), has it that in 165 AD, an Antonine Plague, which affected Asia Minor, Egypt, Greece and Italy, took the life of about 5 million people. A similar plague, the Plague of Justinian, an outbreak of the bubonic plague that afflicted the Byzantine Empire and Mediterranean between 541 and 542, claimed the lives of about 25 million and was believed to have killed half the population of Europe, with estimated death of 5,000 persons per day. The Black Death pandemic was recorded between 1346 and 1353. This 7-year plague ravaged Europe, Africa and Asia, with an estimated death toll of 200 million people. Between 1889 and 1890, the globe also witnessed the outbreak of a virus known as the Influenza Flu.

The first cases of the Influenza Flu, which were said to have been observed in May 1889 in places like Bukhara in Central Asia (Turkestan), Athabasca in North-western Canada and Greenland, did not take long before it spread across the world, claiming the life of over one million people (MPH, 2020b). In later years, precisely in 1918, 1956 and 1968, there were other outbreaks of the Flu pandemic which led to the death of about 53 million people: 50 million in 1918, 2 million in 1956 and 1 million in 1968. However, there was a significant difference in the 1918 Flu outbreak, which made it stand out from that of 1889, 1956 and 1968. This was noticed in the victims of fatality.

Where influenza had always previously only killed juveniles and the elderly or already weakened patients, it had begun striking down hardy and completely healthy young adults, while leaving children and those with weaker immune systems still alive (MPH, 2020b).

Other recorded pandemics, worth mentioning, are Human Immuno Virus (HIV)/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and Ebola Virus. These viruses were first discovered in 1976, in the Democratic Republic of Congo in Central Africa. Since the outbreak of HIV/AIDS, which climaxed from 2005 to 2012, an estimated 35 million people have died from its complications (CDC, 2020a). Nevertheless, with much creation of awareness and the development of retroviral drugs, HIV/AIDS has become more manageable and less life threatening, as many of those infected go on to lead productive lives. This confirmed CDC’s report that as at the end of 2018, about 37.9 million people were living with HIV around the world (CDC, 2020a). MPH, in its 2020 report, also corroborates CDC that the annual global deaths from HIV/AIDS dropped from 2.2 million to 1.6 million (MPH, 2020b).

In the same vein, the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) was and still is a severe, often fatal illness virus affecting both humans and animals. The EVD got its name from the Ebola River in Congo where the first outbreak occurred in one of the villages. Report has it that it has claimed the lives of about 11 thousand people (LePan, 2020) since the first outbreak of the virus in 1976 and has resurfaced at regular intervals. It is currently ravaging the Democratic Republic of Congo after it re-emerged in 2014; efforts at curtailing it are ongoing (CDC, 2020b).

From the above historical outline of the diseases outbreak, it is obvious that the world has passed through turbulent times and that Covid-19 is not the first virus to have threatened its
existence. Its outbreak and the approaches at curtailing it, however, differ. Its outbreak brought the world to a standstill; the world economies got shot down, internal and external borders of most countries got closed, international and local flights were cancelled, social and religious activities distorted, mode of dressing changed, use of face mask as the new normal became compulsory, based on advice by the WHO (WHO CDAP, 2020), lockdown and dusk-to-dawn curfew were imposed at various times by international, national and regional governments to checkmate movement, with the exception to the movement of goods, health workers on essential duties and other essential service deliveries (Vanguard, 2020a).

The media have been in the forefront of enlightenment and sensitization of the people about the outbreak of Covid-19 and its nature, as well as the actions to be taken, as outlined by Health Institutions, to avoid being victims to the virus. This is done on a daily basis. The usefulness of the media, social, electronic and print, in the fight against the spread of this deadly virus cannot be overemphasised, as the world witnessed a daily upsurge in morbidity and mortality rates.

Many people are known to be adamant and aversive to change. Some believe in the habitual way of living. Changing the mind set of these set of people, therefore, needs serious awareness and sensitization campaign for better understanding and compliance. At present, there is no known cure to the Covid-19 virus. The only antidote at present is “stay safe” by following laid-down guidelines. The media kept reminding individuals and the society at large of these guidelines by all means possible.

The Nigerian print media have been in the vanguard of this through the daily reportage of events as they concern the virus since its outbreak in the country. The effectiveness of this reportage/coverage and the level of awareness created constituted a justification for this study as it is the first of its kind, given the current nature of the event that gave rise to it.

3. Methodology
The paper is a content analysis of The Guardian and Vanguard newspapers’ daily headlines and front-page news stories for a period of 4 months, March to June 2020. It did not include the weekend editions. The two newspapers were purposively selected as they are the most widely patronized. Within the period under study, the combined daily issues from Mondays to Fridays were 174. This was further reduced to three issues per week, purposively too. For The Guardian, three issues were chosen in a 5-day week, comprising Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, making a total of 53, while for Vanguard also, three issues were selected, covering Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, bringing the total to 51, with the two dailies making up 104 as the total sample. By this method, the 5-day working week was covered, with Monday serving as a comparative day as it is the first working day of the week.

4. Nigerian newspaper headlines on Covid-19 and government/citizens response
The two major newspapers under study, The Guardian and Vanguard, had a grand total of 41 lead or major news stories on Covid-19 within the period, that is, from March to June 2020. While The Guardian had 22 major headlines on Covid-19, Vanguard had 19. This shows that The Guardian newspaper had slightly more major headlines on coronavirus than the Vanguard. It also shows that The Guardian followed the news of the pandemic closer than its competitor based on its lead stories/headlines than the Vanguard.

It is no doubt that both newspapers had several Covid-19-related news stories on their front page. Indeed, the front page of newspapers appears to serve as their tables of content or as news snippets or guidelines to the reader. In the newspapers under study, The Guardian newspaper had 69 coronavirus-related news stories on its front page independent of the Lead or Major headline stories. On the other hand, Vanguard had 88 Covid-19-related news stories on its cover or front page from March to June. The Vanguard had more Covid-19 news stories on its cover/front page but less lead stories by difference of two (2). There is a noticeable drop in news coverage of the
virus in the month of June than in the previous months. This perhaps is a reflection of the attraction occasioned by the novelty of the pandemic. But one is uncertain to deduce whether it indicates a loss of interest from the media.

The Guardian, for instance, had no news reports about the virus on its front page in some days in the month of June, which accounted for the low input within the month. In the same vein, Vanguard did not also have news stories in some days on its cover page in the month of June as other issues such as politics, security concerns, budget and corruption allegations, among others, overshadowed the virus just as the virus had overtaken all other issues of concern in the first two months of its outbreak.

The two newspapers had similar or related headlines on Mondays. This was the only day of the week in which the selected week days coincided. For instance, on 30 March 2020, which is a Monday, while The Guardian says, “Buhari shuts down Lagos, Abuja, Ogun, for 14 days” Vanguard, (2020b), Vanguard declares, “COVID-19: Buhari orders lockdown in Lagos, FCT, Ogun” (Daka et al., 2020).

This trend was observed to be common even among newspapers outside the scope of study as well as with social and electronic media. The obvious explanation to this is the common source of news and the fact of covering news whose language and diction are somewhat related and similar.

While the media played a significant role by purveying information about the ravaging virus, the response by the government and the people was nonchalant. This answers the question whether the newspapers effectively cover/create awareness on the disease? The combined lead and front-page news stories of The Guardian and Vanguard within the 4-month period of this study amount to a total of 198. This, no doubt, reflected close monitoring of the pandemic across the 36 states of the Federation and Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory. The news reports covered the period of the outbreak in the country through the period of lockdown and easing of same, with details of stipulated measures to curb the spread: levels of compliance, those affected, figures of deaths and recovery, among others. It is safe to submit, therefore, that the two print media adequately and effectively covered the coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria as at the time of this research.

Both newspapers gave a greater portion of their space in reporting the coronavirus pandemic. For example, Vanguard had eight lead stories/headlines while The Guardian had six on coronavirus-related lead/major headlines, all on the front page. This shows that both papers were almost at par in their coverage of the pandemic within the first flush of the outbreak. In the month of May, both media appeared to compete in their coverage of the pandemic running neck-to-neck with their reportage. To the 37 Covid-19-related news items of The Guardian, Vanguard had 36. This also lends credence to the submission of both media having common sources of news gathering.

Similarly, it has been observed that the print media appear to use their front pages the same way books deploy their tables of content. This implies that the front page of newspapers guide the reader on where to locate the body of the stories whose headlines were captured. The Vanguard had 88 coronavirus news items on its front page, to The Guardian’s 69. This brought the grand total of the two newspapers’ front page/cover page news stories on Covid-19 to 157, within the first 4 months of its occurrence in Nigeria. In this line of reasoning, the analysis answers the questions as to the newspaper that had more front-page news and the one that gave more headlines to Covid-19. This shows that the media played a vital role. But was the prominence given to the virus, a reflection of government’s attitude/response to it?

The answer to the above question appears to be tricky as it has to be deduced from the content of some of the news stories. This is because there were lots of conflicting and contradictory information which reflected government’s attitude to the entire Covid-19 saga. While some stories appeared to show government as committed to the cause of tackling the pandemic, the reality before the masses
was completely at variance with such position. For instance, the media on 8 February alerted that: “Nigeria at risk of Coronavirus”, and the Nigerian Senate immediately responded that the federal government was not doing enough to curtail the possible outbreak of the virus as speculated by the media (Vanguard, 2020c). Another instance can be found on the Vanguard news headline of 2 March 2020 with the caption: “APC, PDP fight over Covid-19 index case.” The rider to the headline says: “Nigeria only preparing, not prepared,”—NMA. This equally corroborates the Nigerian Senate’s stand stated above. Now the question that comes to mind is, why should the two political parties, the ruling, All People’s Congress (APC), and the opposition, People’s Democratic Party (PDP), squabble over such serious health issue to the point of playing politics with it? And why should the Nigeria Medical Association (NMA) say that the country was not prepared?

And again, in April, the federal government threw caution to the wind at the burial ceremony of the late Chief of staff to the President, Abba Kyari, who allegedly died of Covid-19, by not observing Covid-19 protocols as enumerated by the WHO and the NCDC. Some experts even advocated that all attendees of the burial should be quarantined as:

the gathering violated the ban on all forms of gathering in the Federal Capital Territory and government’s directive on social distancing, which were part of measures put in place by the government to contain the spread of the coronavirus (Adeoye et al., 2020).

Government’s insincerity of purpose to the laid down safety tips on the fight against Covid-19 and its sermon of “do what I say and not what I do” equally earned a negative response from the citizenry. Most Nigerians likewise breached the Covid-19 etiquette. This was based on reaction to government’s attitude.

The Guardian of 2 March 2020 had as one of its front-page news stories, “Worshippers shun coronavirus score and attend services in large numbers.” These are few of the evidences which reflect government and citizens’ attitude to the outbreak of the virus, and it is not encouraging. Thus, in the beginning, government’s attitude to the virus was not encouraging and it set the tone to the overall attitude of Nigerian masses to the virus. Even when government’s attitude seemed to improve with the imposition of staggered lockdown across the states, compliance was suspect as there were evidences of violation traceable to government’s careless approach. The implication of this is the risk of the spike in the spread of the virus. There is, therefore, the need by all concerned to play by the rules as enumerated by the WHO and other related health bodies and as purveyed by the media.

5. Perception and response to media report

The eruption of the novel coronavirus aptly dubbed Covid-19 pandemic has impacted society negatively. From earliest times to the present, epidemics in pandemic proportion have affected human history in differing ways. Of the epidemics of pandemic proportion such as yellow fever, cholera, the global influenza epidemic 1918–1920, none had a close semblance with the Covid-19 pandemic. And in each case, man has always sought some solution. Under the current Covid-19 pandemic, several attempts and efforts have been made from different sectors/quarters to stem the tide.

Based on information obtained from the newspapers, the general opinion on the seriousness of the Covid-19 is that though the situation is real and serious as it were, yet there is a lot of sentimental news circulated and shared by the two newspapers in review. Many took the news as being real, by not filtering them through their own filter, which invariably elicited panic. Some also believed that the news from the newspapers was correct, only the measure taken by the government was irresponsible, slow and ill-thought and therefore affected citizens’ attitude and perception.

Thus, it would seem that the newspapers presented the gravity of the situation at the level where they were, but people were not quite civilized and did not have proper education to
understand the phenomenon and its enormity. However, the newspapers tended to dramatize the situation and caused panic for people who did not know or were not well informed from official, accredited sources, to obtain a high rating. Deaths occurred daily due to natural and other causes, but now people were made to believe that the deaths occurred because of the coronavirus. No doubt, the virus is contagious. Nevertheless, the newspapers inadvertently exacerbated the general state of panic among the literate class.

Overall, the perception about the Covid-19 arising from several media reports, especially the ones in review on the Covid-19 and its cure, has clearly shown how empty the medical sophistication claimed by the west is. Most people believed that the WHO is playing a script handed in by the sponsors. People, even in the US, are using local herbs and getting well (FDA, 2020). America is groping in the dark, to the extent of deploying a failed Ebola drug to deal with the Covid-19©. Therefore, there is need to domesticate research to our environment. The WHO should not be in a position to warn or reject any treatment, especially one that has shown positive results. The WHO is buying time hoping there would be a vaccine with a magic wand and then pressure third-world governments to criminalize people who do not take it. As long as the Madagascar cure (Koigi, 2021) is not killing people, Agbo (a local herbal mixture) is not killing Nigerians, which shows the cure we have. Is it not curious that the Nigerian government is ignoring Maurice Iwu? (EXTRA). Where is there no research funded from the billions going to the NCDC in the name of Covid-19 (Iroanusi, 2020)?

In other words, the world has clearly been scammed with fake infection and death figures as projected by the newspaper reports. But come to think of it; is it possible to scam the whole world? The scientists, medical doctors, governments, the NCDC, the European centre for diseases control etc, scammed? When did malaria become so deadly? Is malaria contagious? Scam?

For this scam to succeed, virtually all the doctors, media houses and infectious disease experts in the western world, Japan, Korea and China, would have to be complicit. What is the mathematical possibility of that happening? The alternative theory is that the scam was perpetrated by all the super-geniuses on Earth (aided by extra-terrestrial beings), on the one hand, and billions of gullible, subhuman zombies, on the other. Second, if the aim of the scam is pecuniary gain as implied, do you think the proceeds from the scam (sales of vaccines) will be commensurate to the trillions of dollars that have been lost to the pandemic as a result of the collapse of economies? What is the possibility that only complicit pharmaceutical companies will produce effective vaccines? Would this powerful, all-wise cabal deprive non-complicit companies from developing vaccines? Would the proceeds be juicy enough to persuade all western democracies and the Asian Tigers to become part of the scam? How about the challenges posed by ideological divide? Such claims and perception are simply a rehash of unfounded conspiracy theories.

Thus, one will begin to think that Covid-19 will go down as one of the world’s biggest, most shamefully overblown, overhyped, overly and irrationally inflated and deceptively flawed global health crises in world history. The fact as we know is that Covid-19 is a disease that sickens some and proves fatal to others, mostly the aged and those with compromised immune systems. It does nothing to the vast majority.

6. Conclusion
The authors examined the Nigerian newspapers’ coverage of the coronavirus outbreak on their headline and front-page news stories within the first 4 months of its outbreak, March to June 2020. A total of 104 out of 174 daily issues of the selected newspapers were examined. This reflected a 3-day working period in a 5-day working week, leaving out two issues per week, yet covering the whole week from Monday to Friday. The findings showed that the Vanguard and The Guardian newspapers gave an effective and adequate coverage of the pandemic within the given period as 198 stories were devoted to the pandemic. This shows deep commitment of the selected media to their traditional job of news/information gathering and dissemination. There were also evidences
to conclude that despite the media coverage, Nigerian government at the various levels seemed not to have handled the pandemic with the seriousness it deserved. It also showed government’s initial lackadaisical attitude to the pandemic, as many reports showed. For instance, it is sad to note that within the period where other countries were rewarding their health workers, Nigerian government was playing politics with theirs, which led to the NMA embarking on a nation-wide strike over non-payment of allowances (The Guardian). It should also be noted that it is the said allowance that led to the strike. Also, Monday, 6 April, The Guardian reports: “Wike accuses Buhari of politicising N10b coronavirus fund given to Lagos State” (Erezi, 2020). These and many other stories put the question mark on government’s attitude to the pandemic.

It must be pointed out that the virus and efforts to curtail it are ongoing. It is hoped, therefore, that the government may change its attitude, which in turn may have influence on its citizens as the events unfold. This will, no doubt, help in curtailting the spread of the dreaded virus.

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