AUDIENCE PERCEPTION OF NEWS REPORTING PATTERNS DURING THE 2020 COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON NTA AND CHANNELS TELEVISION, ABUJA

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Abstract

This research evaluates how residents of Abuja perceived the news reporting patterns of NTA and Channels TV during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. It employed the survey method, using a purposive sampling technique and multi-stage sampling technique, 400 copies questionnaire were distributed across five housing estates in the Abuja Municipal Area Council. The study was guided by news framing theory and cultivation theory. The research revealed that NTA and Channels TV were primary sources of COVID-19 information for a significant portion of respondents, comprising 57.75% of the total respondents. However, satisfaction with reporting accuracy varies, and there are differing views on bias and trustworthiness. Active audience engagement is evident. The study emphasises the complexity of audience perceptions regarding news content and reporting during the pandemic. Challenges include varying opinions on ease of access, timeliness of news updates, and instances of feeling overwhelmed. A majority believed that COVID-19 reporting could have been significantly improved. The study concluded that a substantial level of audience engagement, with NTA and Channels TV emerging as prominent sources of COVID-19 information; however, diverse perceptions on reporting accuracy and content highlight polarisation, suggesting a need for channels to address varying audience expectations and preferences amidst challenges related to news consumption during the pandemic. It recommended, among other things, the enhancement of health reporting, media outlets should address diverse audience expectations, improve reporting accuracy, and overcome challenges related to accessibility and timeliness of news updates.
Keywords: Audience, Channels Television, Covid-19, News reporting, NTA, Perception

Introduction

The 2020 Covid-19 pandemic has been a global health crisis that has affected virtually every aspect of society. The pandemic has also had a significant impact on the way news is reported and consumed. With the rise of digital media, the traditional role of television news has changed, and the way news is reported has become increasingly important for shaping public opinion and understanding of events. In Nigeria, NTA and Channels Television are two of the most popular television stations that provide news coverage of the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic.

The manner in which these television stations report news about the pandemic has the potential to shape the public's understanding of the event and influence their perceptions and actions.

According to Rolnicki (2007, p. 3), knowing a news media, whether a newspaper, magazine, yearbook, radio station, or internet site is necessary to comprehend news. Every society depends heavily on the media, which has grown to be a highly respected institution as a result of this function.

According to Folarin (2002) in Akinfeleye (2006) identified the function of the media in society as follows:

i. A strong force for integration by enabling citizens' access to the range of communications they require in order to get to know and understand one another.
ii. Educating the masses on many issues and topics bordering on politics, desirable social values, culture, health and even advertising.

Akinfeleye (2006) went on to say that, more than anything else, the media is a highly strong tool for bringing about social change in the world. He claimed that the reason the British and Americans referred to their mass media system as the fourth estate and realm of government is due to its significance. There are different patterns in which news is conveyed and reported that draw various audiences to various communication media and channels. The concept of news reporting and writing are the key roles in journalism and its history is as old as human speech. Most of the time, news reports are well-researched, planned and organised documents that are written for a purpose, and the reporter is tasked with delivering the news story through a medium to the audience. Their primary role is to inform the public. According to Akpan (2012), several privately owned stations like Channels Television have been well known for disseminating news and information relating to politics and reporting all important political events worldwide. Akpan (2012) added that viewers of these media contents do not only listen; they also analyse, select, make comments and give opinions on how they perceive media content. The effect on society in general.

The intensity of the Coronavirus disease 2019 or COVID-19 has made the World Health Organization label it as a global pandemic which has caused numerous deaths, and has caused fear and further stress for many individuals (Zhou et al., 2020). These issues have raised the need for the public to receive sufficient health literacy and information that will assist in limiting the spread of the virus while the search for the COVID-19 vaccine goes on. And one way of doing this is through the media. The fact is that, the media as a social institution is bestowed with the core responsibility of educating, sensitizing and informing the public during pandemic (Gever & Ezeah, 2020). Regarding the role of media in a pandemic, it has been argued that the media should have been their teacher implying that the media should make people aware of health issues so that they could be prepared mentally about the behaviors that could help in preventing the spread of a pandemic (Hanitzsch et al. , 2019). Based on the analysis of the study by Gever &Ezeah (2020) it was found out that the best contribution that the media make towards awareness creation and educating the population in the context of a pandemic is through news coverage. This is done through reporting cases of disease, illness or outbreaks in the society, and advising on the right health behaviour to be adopted as well as recommended policies to be put into practice in order to control the spread of a pandemic.

This study will outline important and distinctive characteristics of Abuja's media audience and analyse what those audiences think of the news reporting patterns on NTA and Channels Television, Abuja during the Covid-19 lockdown period. The research will focus on how these audiences interpret news articles while examining these diverse reporting strategies.

Statement of the Problem

The 2020 Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the way news is reported and consumed, and the manner in

which news is reported has the potential to shape public opinion and understanding of an event. This work sets out to determine the role of news media in Nigeria, particularly its patterns of reporting and communicating news and information to its audience during the Covid-19. For a long time now, it has been noticeable from prior studies that the press has proved to be a potent tool used in shaping perceptions and causing attitude change; therefore, media organisations incorporate different styles and patterns in their news reportage to get it to have the necessary effect on the audience.

Therefore, the problem of this research is to find out what exactly are those elements that make audiences within FCT, Abuja chooses and prioritise a particular news outlet during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic lockdown season.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this research is to ascertain how viewers perceive television news reporting patterns during Covid-19, and how it affects how much attention is paid to the news. Specifically, the study has the following objectives:

1. To determine the patterns and nature of news reporting during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic by NTA and Channels Tv
2. To find out the perception of the audience on the news content and reporting of NTA and Channels TV during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic
3. To ascertain the challenges of the patterns of News reports by NTA and Channels TV during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Question

The study has the following research questions:

1. What were the patterns and nature of news reporting during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic by NTA and Channels Tv?
2. What was the perception of the audience on the news content and reporting of NTA and Channels TV during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What were the challenges of the patterns of News reports by NTA and Channels during the 2020 COVID-19?

Conceptual Clarification

The emergence of COVID-19 in December 2019, traced back to the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market in Wuhan, China, marked the beginning of a global health crisis. SARS-CoV-2, declared by the World Health Organization in March 2020, has resulted to an unprecedented nationwide lock down. As countries gradually lift lockdown restrictions, understanding the comprehensive impacts of the pandemic is crucial for informing future decisions in managing potential subsequent waves or future global disease outbreaks. The COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdown measures have profoundly affected various facets of daily life. Changes in education delivery, food availability and prices, economic stability, mental health, and environmental pollution have been documented (World Health Organization, 2020). Amid these disruptions, mass media has played a crucial role in shaping public perception and behaviour, as media consumption patterns significantly shifted, altering how audiences interact with and rely on media content during the pandemic.

The channels or ways of moving or putting out mass communication output are the media bearing news, views, advertisements, in newspapers and magazines or commercials on the radio or on the television or on the internet; public relations messages, book reviews and cartoons, music, drama, comedy, films,

public annunciation etc. As a result, the media are crucial for a well-informed and educated populace. As a result, they both reflect and influence society. Due to globalization, the media is in the middle of changing society. Speaking of the world that was recently influenced by the media, it is possible to state that there have been significant changes in all spheres. These changes have also not bypassed the mass media system either as it has undergone tremendous changes in its organization as well. Due to information and communication technologies, now it can be argued that we dwell in a post modernism civilization of knowledge, facts and information. In this era, the media is regarded as one of the most significant forms of communication. The public is informed and made aware of the crisis via the media. In addition to inspiring individuals to take positive action, the media also has the ability to scare people and cause havoc.

Television broadcasts use audio-visual media and electromagnetic waves to communicate, making it a pervasive and persuasive communication method. It informs, educates, and entertains a vast audience, playing a crucial societal role. Television combines sound and visuals, requiring accurate and factual information to maintain credibility. It facilitates communication between people and the government and has the power to shape public perception significantly. Its visual appeal and accessibility make it more engaging than radio, requiring equipment like transmitters, control rooms, cameras, studios, and visual mixers. This powerful medium highlights the importance of news, which serves as accurate, current information distributed through various media, such as conversations, publications, and broadcasts.

Review of Empirical Studies

Over the years much research has been done on audience perception, news reportage and news coverage. There have been some studies relating to news coverage of television broadcasts and how it affects audiences view and perception of the station.

Analyzing two media sources, one party-controlled and the other market-oriented, namely Xinhua News Agency and The Paper respectively, Chen & Xu (2021) 's focus of how the consumers of COVID-19 news stories engaged with COVID-19 news on Jinri Toutiao, which is a unique social media firm. This research found that Xinhua News Agency remained heavily positive, but The Paper provided relatively equal amounts of positive and negative information on the health crisis. Xinhua News Agency, nonetheless, was significantly more episodic envisioning the pandemic than The Paper. Another channel on Sina Weibo that The Paper outperformed Xinhua News Agency was the level of users' engagement. Both party-controlled media under the party's command and market-orientated media in response to the emergence of various forms of news demands and news consumption, have transformed their business models, but not their ideological settings.

Hafidzi et al (2021) investigated how the public responds to information about the Covid pandemic transmitted by the mass media. When conveting various news or similar things to the public in a way that is repeated, it becomes very easy for the masses to grasp it and it leaves a tone of mistrust if it is not based on facts**.** This study aims at revealing and discovering whether or not mass media can enhance the beliefs in Covid-19 or vice versa. The study technique applied to this research is descriptive quantitative and purposive sampling of students studying online and are socially connected to the news on various social platforms. Sampling of this

research involved 300 respondents from 7 campuses in South Kalimantan Province, Indonesia. Accordingly, this study established that regardless of the information disseminated regarding Covid, the continual reinforcement led to unrealistically low concern about Covid among the public. This can be explained by the fact that the distortion of facts can be observed explicitly in the news from various types of mass media, and they have turned into upside-down facts.

Sunday Goodness John (2023) in his study, titled, 'Impact of Media Messages on Containment of Coronavirus Pandemic in Nigeria: A Cross-sectional Survey', used a cross-sectional design and purpose sampling technique. As part of a national survey, 359 responses were gathered through web-based questionnaires. The results underscored the significant impact of media messages on the audience's perception of COVID-19, with 89.08% of respondents indicating their awareness of the virus was influenced by these messages. Furthermore, 87.74% believed that media coverage had effectively raised awareness about the pandemic, and 90.81% stated that they had altered their behaviors to adhere to safety measures as a result of this influence. The study also revealed that a majority of the respondents (75.49%) expressed satisfaction with the overall performance of the media in their campaign to raise awareness about the disease. The respondents who stated that they benefited very greatly to the messages contained in the media consumed were 49. 03% while 44. 01% said that they benefited greatly from the media messages. The findings also revealed that the media created a high level of awareness regarding the pandemic via COVID-19 media awareness messages and demonstrated how the Nigerian media played an active role in minimizing the further spread of the disease back to the country.

This research was conducted by Iheanacho O Cajetan, Jumbo Cynthia, Emeka Williams Etumnu (2021), whereby the researchers sought to establish the extent to which COVID-19 Broadcast Media Campaigns have affected the health awareness rate of the people of Owerri in Imo State. In the study the multistage sampling procedure was applied and the main tool of data collection was the questionnaire. The research established that the Imo State residents per their average estimate of 85% are, to a certain extent, aware of the COVID-19 broadcast media campaign as it is to their health. Additional observation revealed that out of a total of 370 respondents felt that media campaigns on Covid-19 have created a lot of panic, but through the media campaigns on Covid-19 they are informed that contracting the virus needs unhealthy exposure to affected individuals. By pointing out that a considerable proportion (85%) of the respondents claimed to follow broadcast media campaigns about COVID-19, it was suggested that the channel of communication could be a viable platform through which the authorities could use in passing messages to the public on COVID-19 and other health related issues. Hence, the campaign content which the broadcast media is to disseminate should be presented in such a way that people do not get terrified. They should endeavour to sustain the existing custom in influencing the attitude of people into being aware of their health especially in the face of coronavirus.

The study conducted by Lamidi, Adebumiti, and Ayoola (2023) examines the public perception of Adaba FM and Orange FM's coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ondo State, Nigeria. Utilizing a survey research method, the study sampled 400 respondents from the Akure South Local Government area, based on a population of 360,268 using the Taro Yamane sample size calculator and multi-stage sampling

techniques. The analysis indicated that both stations provided adequate coverage of the pandemic, but Adaba FM, a private station, was rated higher in terms of balanced reporting and aggressive campaigning. This advantage was attributed to fewer bureaucratic constraints compared to its counterpart, Orange FM. The findings underscore the importance of radio in disseminating vital health information despite the prevalence of social media.

In a study to investigate the audience exposure, awareness and compliance with covid-19 pandemic messages in Nigeria: A study of residents of Anambra state studied by Chinwe Elizabeth Uzochukwu, Chibuike Julius Nwosu, Adaobi Olivia Okeke (2022) in Nigeria, adopting a survey method and had 400 respondents as the selected sample size using a questionnaire. The researchers also

Theoretical Framework

This research is based on News Framing Theory and Cultivation Theory. Framing theory is one of the most coherent media effect theories that view framing not in terms of the extent featuring, which is considered irrelevant, but the perspective taken (Gever & Ezeah, 2020). The theory was developed in 1974 by Goffman (Goffman, 1974). Framing is defined as the process of choosing among various aspects of a perceived reality and boosting their prominence within a text that serves to communicate. News Framing Theory highlights the media's ability to shape public opinion through selective presentation and emphasis of news stories. This theory is pertinent to this study because it explains how various broadcast stations interpret news for their audience. The idea also demonstrates that how news is delivered can affect the audience's decisions, whether it is salient or not. This theory would assess how these channels frame news reports, focusing on the health, economic, or societal aspects

established that the residents of Anambra state received highly communicated messages on COVID- 19 pandemic; The study also revealed that out of the different media platforms used to pass messages on COVID- 19 pandemic in Anambra state, social media dominated followed by television and radio. The study also noted that Anambra people had a relatively good level of perception towards media messages on COVID-19. Staggeringly, the study and observations pointed out that Anambra residents in spite of being exposed to COVID-19 campaign messages did not fully adhere to the same. Finally, the study found that a number of factors like: importance of religion, low trust in the federal government, death from COVID-19 vaccines, and the view COVID-19 as a hoax were some of the factors that shaped the new non-compliance stance among the respondents.

of the pandemic and how these frames influence audience perceptions.

Cultivation theory proposed more than forty years ago and further elaborated by Gerbner & Gross (1976) initially begins by stating that the viewers of the media would view the world the media shows. Concerning media type most of the researches are obsessed principally with the television (Singer & Yankelovich, 1992; Besley & Shanahan, 2005). The cultivation theory for example states that, the degree of perceived importance is relatively higher for people who spend a lot of time on media than that of people who spend little time on media. For this reason, they would begin to live in what is commonly referred to as 'media reality' with Mean World Syndrome rejecting the real-life data and information and moving around with a feeling that the world and people are much worse than they are (Gerbner and Gross, 1976). It becomes intriguing if persons worried about recent pandemic issues start living with Sick World

Syndrome and if that can be viewed not only from the wrong side but as a step towards the preventive action. Messch et al. 's analysis revealed that (To be positive, the level of fear of H1N1 infection was significantly related to the amount of time spent in social media.) Similarity in COVID-19 was done by Garfin et al., (2020). This theory is pertinent to the study as it suggests that extensive COVID-19 coverage by NTA and Channels TV influenced viewers' perceptions of risk, trust, social norms, behaviours, and emotional responses during the pandemic. This theory is pertinent to the study because it outlines the rationale by which the quantity of television programming viewers consume might influence how they view society. The idea also demonstrates that watching television is one of the most effective ways for an audience to shape their perception and attitude. This theory would examine how continuous exposure to pandemic-related news on NTA and Channels contributes to the audience's perception of the virus, potentially shaping their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors during the unprecedented global crisis.

Research Methodology

The sample size of this study will be based on the National Population Census (2022) recommendation. From the population, a sample of 1,987,330 individuals in AMAC Abuja. The sample size for this study will be statistically determined using Taro Yamane (1967) statistical formula.

This study employs a quantitative (survey) research method using a structured questionnaire. The population includes viewers of NTA and Channels Television in Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC), F.C.T. Abuja. Purposive and cluster sampling techniques are used. Purposive sampling, a non-probability method, selects AMAC for its middle-class

residents who frequently watch these TV stations. Within AMAC, five housing estates were chosen based on demographic representation and media consumption: Suncity Galadimawa, Pentville Estate Lokogoma, Brains and Hammer Estate Apo, Efab Estate Life Camp, and Prince and Princess Estate Kaura District. In each estate, every fifth house was selected at intervals of ten, and occupants were given the questionnaire. The sample size is based on the National Population Census (2022) recommendation, with a population of 1,987,330 in AMAC, determined using Taro Yamane's (1967) statistical formula.

The Taro Yamane formula is given as:

The Taro Yamane's formula:

Where:

n = Sample size

N = Population

e = Level of significance

Applying the formula:

$n = 399.9$

Therefore, 400 respondents constitute the sample size for the study and 400 questionnaires will be distributed.

The data gathered will be analysed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. For the quantitative, the frequency counts and percentage and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistics will be employed while for the qualitative, the explanation technique will be adopted. The researcher will be using descriptive techniques in the interpretation of data findings that will be presented in tables, charts, and percentages in accordance with the study's research questions. The percentage method will help in summarising the results in tabular form, after which explanation on each of the tables will be given for clarification.

Data Presentations

Table I: Respondents Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency N=400	Percentage %
Male	217	54
Female	183	46

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table I shows the percentage distribution of the respondents' gender. The nearly equal distribution between male (54%) and female (46%) respondents suggests that both genders have been significantly engaged with the news reporting on NTA and Channels Television during the pandemic. This indicates a broad audience reach and potential influence of the reporting patterns studied.

Table II: Respondents Age Distribution

Age	Frequency N=400	Percentage %
18 - 30 years	82	20.5
31 - 40 years	101	25
41 - 50 years	79	20
51 years or Above	138	34.5

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table II shows the percentage distribution of the respondents' age. It indicates widespread engagement with news reporting during the COVID-19 pandemic on NTA and Channels Television in Abuja, spanning from younger adults to older individuals.

Table III: TV Station Respondents Watched

TV Station Watched	Frequency N=400	Percentage %
NTA	134	33.5
Channels TV	248	62
Both NTA and Channels TV	18	4.5
None of NTA and Channels TV	0	0

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table III shows the data regarding the TV stations respondents watched. Channels TV appears to have a significantly larger audience compared to NTA among the respondents surveyed. This

suggests Channels TV may have a broader reach or stronger viewer preference during the COVID-19 pandemic. The preference for Channels TV could indicate that respondents favour its reporting style, content selection, or presentation format over NTA.

Table IV: Number of Years Respondents Watch NTA and Channels TV

Years Watching NTA and Channels TV	Frequency N=400	Percentage %
1-4 years	76	19
5-8 years	131	33
9-12 years	172	43
13 years and above	21	5

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table IV suggests a loyal and long-term viewer base for NTA and Channels TV, highlighting opportunities for sustained audience engagement, strategic content development, and maintaining viewer trust during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

Research Question 1: What are the patterns and nature of news reporting during COVID-19 by NTA and Channels Tv?

Table V: The patterns and nature of news reporting during COVID-19 by NTA and Channels Tv

Data	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
1. Expert or Health Official Interviews in COVID-19 News Coverage by NTA and Channels TV	Very Frequent	61	15.25%
	Frequently	116	29.00%
	Occasionally	174	43.50%
	Rarely	49	12.25%
	Total	400	100%
2. Extent of Updates on Government Policies and Guidelines Related to COVID-19 in NTA and Channels TV Reporting	**Variables**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
	To a Great Extent	105	26.25%

	To some Extent	160	40.00%
	To a Limited Extent	125	31.25%
	Not at All	10	2.50%
	Total	400	100%
3. Usage Frequency of Visuals (Graphs, Charts, and Video Footage) in NTA and Channels TV's COVID-19 Reporting	**Variables**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
	Very Often	87	21.75%
	Often	112	28%
	Occasionally	170	42.5%
	Rarely	31	7.75%
	Total	400	100%
4. Satisfaction with the Tone and Style of COVID-19 Reporting by NTA and Channels TV	**Variables**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
	Very Satisfied	72	18%
	Satisfied	120	30%
	Dissatisfied	133	33.25%
	Very Dissatisfied	75	18.75%
	Total	400	100%

Table V highlights that while NTA and Channels TV frequently feature expert interviews, provide updates on government policies, and utilize visual aids in COVID-19 reporting, there is variability in viewer satisfaction with reporting styles and tones. This data provides valuable insights for media outlets to optimize their reporting strategies to enhance credibility, viewer engagement, and satisfaction during health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Question 2: What is the perception of the audience on the news content and reporting of NTA and Channels TV during COVID 19?

Table VI: Perception of the audience on the news content and reporting of NTA and Channels TV during Covid 19

Statements	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
I believe that the news content provided by NTA and Channels TV during COVID-19 is biased in some way.	138 34.5%	157 39.25%	64 16.0%	41 10.25%	400
I have trust in the information presented by NTA and Channels TV regarding COVID-19.	94 23.5%	146 36.5%	86 21.5%	74 18.5%	400
I have frequently shared or discussed news stories from NTA and Channels TV about COVID-19 with others.	50 12.5%	80 20%	120 30%	150 37.5%	400

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table VI reveals diverse perspectives on various aspects of news content from NTA and Channels TV during the COVID-19 period. It reveals varying levels of audience perception regarding bias, trust, and engagement with COVID-19 news content from NTA and Channels TV. Addressing concerns about bias while maintaining and improving trustworthiness can enhance viewer engagement and satisfaction, crucial for effective communication during public health emergencies.

Research Question 3: What are the challenges with the patterns of News reports by NTA and Channels during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Table VII: The challenges with the patterns of News reports by NTA and Channels during the COVID-19 pandemic

Data	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
1. Accessibility of NTA and Channels TV News Reports During the COVID-19 Pandemic	Very Easy	192	48%
	Somewhat Easy	165	41.25%
	Very Difficult	34	8.5%
	Somewhat Difficult	9	2.25%
	Total	400	100%

2. Challenges Encountered Regarding the Timeliness of News Updates from NTA and Channels TV During the Pandemic	**Variables**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
	No Challenges	102	25.50%
	Minor Challenges	133	33.25%
	Significant Challenges	122	30.50%
	Major Challenges	43	10.75%
	Total	400	100%
3. Instances of Feeling Overwhelmed by the Volume of COVID-19 News Reports from NTA and Channels TV	**Variables**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
	Never Overwhelmed	107	26.75%
	Rarely Overwhelmed	161	40.25%
	Occasionally Overwhelmed	117	29.25%
	Frequently Overwhelmed	15	3.75%
	Total	400	100%
	Variables	**Frequency**	**Percentage**

4. Potential Improvements or Modifications for NTA and Channels TV COVID-19 Reporting	Could Have Been Improved Significantly	257	64.25%
	Could Have Been Improved	62	15.5%
	Could Have Been Improved Slightly	71	17.75%
	No Improvement Needed	10	2.5%
	Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table VII highlights that while accessibility of news reports was generally good, there were challenges with the timeliness of updates and managing the volume of COVID-19 news. There is substantial consensus among respondents for potential improvements in NTA and Channels TV's reporting practices, suggesting opportunities to enhance effectiveness and responsiveness in future crisis communication strategies.

Discussion of Findings

Objective 1: Patterns and Nature of News Reporting During the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic by NTA and Channels TV

The survey results reveals that majority of the respondents attested to tuning in television news broadcasts frequently during COVID-19. This high level of television news consumption, reinforces the traditional media as the main source of information during the crisis. Internationally, television and traditional media sources have remained influential, although modern social media have grown (Casero-Ripollés, 2020; Nielsen et al., 2020). Cutting across all the respondents, 57.75 percent identified NTA and Channels TV as the primary source of COVID-19 information, which underlined the influential part played by the television channels in introducing the pandemic. This is in concordance with findings that established that media coverage could be a useful intervention in reducing the transmission of COVID-19 (Zhou et al. , 2020).

Mutua and Oloo Ong'ong'a (2020) analyzed international news media coverage on COVID -19 and found that the media provided information concerning the early phases of the outbreak, which was vital in shaping the public's understanding and eventual control of the disease's spread. Concerning Nigeria, Gever and Ezeah (2020) examined the analysis of COVID-19's reporting in Nigeria's media outlets particularly television, radio, and newspapers. The study realized that prior to the first case of COVID-19 in Nigeria, the sampled Nigerian media organization had relatively low concern on the issues of COVID-19. Nonetheless, as soon as cases were recorded, the media receives a boost in its concern and coverage. The mixed findings with regard to obtaining satisfaction with the news coverage emphasized a difference in how the respondents gauged the aspects of accuracy and reliability of the given information. Although these channels were core in reporting news, their news was not always welcomed or even trusted by the whole population. While the channels is more likely to be moderate since 44. 25% of the respondents use expert interviews more often than 55.75% use them less often, thus it can be stated that there is only partial compliance with the best practices in health communication where expert opinions play a significant role in the context of credibility. This irregularity in the expert coverage may have in some ways caused the negative sentiments among some of the watchers. Morani et al. (2022) concluded that often, the audience wanted to have more government experts' opinions, along with opinions from independent specialists, regarding the pandemic's management. A good news media is central to disseminating credible information and ensuring that opinions arising from specialists are used for enlightening the public and keeping government accountability.

Of the surveyed individuals, 66.25% positively evaluated the updates of government policy, which correlates with the findings of Apuke and Omar (2021) who observed that government media outlets disproportionately promote official sources. The percentage column shows that blogs received positive feedback on government policy updates while the frequency of the visual content's post was not regular, indicating variation. The satisfaction level regarding the tone and style of reportage was relatively low, to which many viewers complained about, implying that the news delivery approach did not meet the audience fully during the pandemic. This aligns with Asogwa et al. (2020) who identified that government media (NTA) in Nigeria utilize affirmation hence are more positive than private media (Channel TV). Apuke & Omar (2021) have identified that private media outlets' had a higher proportion of negative tone stories, while most of the stories used visual and motion footages.

Objective 2: Perception of the Audience on the News Content and Reporting of NTA and Channels TV During the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic

The perceived news is biased in the response of the 73. 75% meaning most of them have a perception that the news is not impartial. This could probably explain why there is perceived high bias while at the same time, 60% of the respondents had a level of confidence in the information. While the results indicated that there is a perceived bias in the content, the trust in the content seemed to be unaffected, meaning that the issue is not as straightforward as people losing trust in the media because of perceived bias.

Tobechukwu (2011) found that based on the contents of reports and information, state owned media disseminates, the dominant topic analyzed is government and official politicians'

statements. This is a clear indication that the content of media, aims at delivering to the pleasure of the government and the ruling party. Apuke & Omar (2021) study also revealed that the government-assigned media cited more of government officials, while the private media cited more on the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC). Some prior research studies indicate that the government media often focus on the officials and the press releases (Apuke & Tunca, 2020; Gever et al., 2018). The ownership and political environment were also the predictors of positive, neutral, and negative tones in the media (Dunaway, 2013). As stated by Asogwa et al. (2020), where the media is being owned with reference to commercial interest, the content that will be aired will be designed to appease advertisers, opposition parties, politician's and other pundits. However, if the media is controlled by the government, it will focus on the issues that will suite the government. According to the study conducted by Asogwa et al. (2020), it has also indicated that the government media NTA often uses the positive tone more than the private media, Channels TV. Previous studies have concluded that the government media also had a higher number of government intervention frames as compared to the private media (Apuke & Tunca, 2019).

This survey participants indicated a restricted interaction with the content even though 80% trust and depend on these sources and restricting oneself to forwarding news items only occasionally (32.5%). This finding supports other studies that establish that even though audiences view and trust specific news sources, their interactions and shares of content are limited (Islam et al., 2020; Nielsen et al., 2020). This reserved interaction may imply a lack of congruency between the level of trust people place in the information and the extent to which they are willing to contribute to sharing of the information.

Objective 3: Challenges of the Patterns of News Reports by NTA and Channels TV During the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic

From the survey conducted among the respondents, it was evident that the difficulties encountered in acquiring news reports and other reports were relatively low at 6.25% only. This implies that the channels were relatively helpful in passing news information although the physical/ physical distancing measures activated by the pandemic limited convenience on the channels. However, 68.75 per cent of the respondents pointed out that they faced difficulties regarding the update frequency. This issue resonates with a similar body of literature showing that adequate sharing of information in such periods is a critical barrier (Casero-Ripollés, 2020; Ofcom, 2020).

Concerning the overload in news, proposed stimuli conditions poorly reflected the respondents' ability to manage the news volume; nevertheless, 29. 25% of respondents claimed they were overwhelmed by the amount of information, showcasing that despite the majority of participants being able to cope with the news flow, a significant portion of the sample experienced difficulty with news processing. This has served to put more emphasis on the necessity of proper functioning in delivering news throughout in order to adequately meet the demands that are required so that the general public will not be subjected to an over doze of information. The 64. 25% that called for moderate improvement for news reporting is an indication of a rather high need for better news practices, given the fact that the 97. 5% wanted these improved. This call for improvement corresponds with what Apuke and Omar (2021) suggested that media ownership and politics play a large role in the

coverage of COVID-19 in Nigeria. This has affected the attitude of the public as many of them no longer see the pandemic as something serious, but rather politically motivated virus to highlight the failings of the political party in power**.**

From the aforementioned study, NTA and Channel TV were among the most sought information sources in the course of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic though with mixed feelings and apparent bias. Top reporting patterns consisted of frequent updates of information, their visualization, and interviews with experts, but, at the same time, not everyone watching the broadcasts was always satisfied with these aspects. The overall perception of the audience showed confidence in the content despite feeling the channels were biased and shared content both positively and negatively. The challenges included timeliness of the updates, accessibility, and sheer volume of news, a sign that improvement in the news reporting practices was greatly needed.

Conclusion

The study reveals a substantial level of engagement among respondents, with a significant portion frequently watching news broadcasts during the pandemic, indicating a heightened importance placed on staying informed during critical times. The influence and trust commanded by NTA and Channels TV emerge prominently, as a considerable number of respondents rely on these channels as primary sources of information on COVID-19. However, the diverse nature of opinions on satisfaction with the reporting accuracy and comprehensiveness suggests a polarisation in perceptions, possibly stemming from differing expectations or experiences with the news coverage. Notably, a substantial proportion of respondents perceives significant differences in content and reporting styles between NTA

and Channels TV, emphasising the diverse perspectives within the surveyed group. The research also uncovers a complex landscape of audience perceptions regarding news content during the pandemic. While a considerable percentage perceives bias in the news coverage, indicating subjectivity or partiality, trust in the information presented by NTA and Channels TV varies among respondents. The active engagement of the audience, with a significant portion frequently sharing or discussing news stories, underscores the participatory nature of the viewership. The nature of news reporting during COVID-19, as gauged through expert interviews, coverage of government policies, use of visuals, and satisfaction with reporting tone and style, reveals mixed perceptions among respondents. The varying levels of satisfaction and engagement with reporting strategies suggest a need for channels to address diverse audience expectations and preferences. Challenges associated with news consumption during the pandemic include varying opinions on the ease of access, challenges related to the timeliness of news updates, and instances of feeling overwhelmed by the volume of news reports. These challenges highlight the importance of addressing issues related to accessibility and timely information dissemination

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are hereby made:

1. Since a high percentage of respondents believed that news articles contents are perceived to be bias, these media outlets should address the issue. Using clear guidelines for editing, expanding the selection of sources, and offering more balanced points of view may help on the issue.

2. Although respondents generally reported that it was not very difficult to read or watch news

reports, addressing the challenges regarding information with regards to timely news updates is essential. To avoid the negative impacts of these challenges, news outlets must focus on effective dissemination of information and avoid time delays in relaying the news to the audience through efficiency and the use of advanced technology.

3. Realizing that there is a high percentage of the respondents who perceived existences of differences in content and reporting style between NTA and Channels TV, the news outlets may wish to explore other means of reporting. This may comprise the use of different modes and methods of narrative such as modes of writing and spoken language

4. Regarding the Visual appeal, NTA and Channels TV should raise their standards to increase the attractiveness of their news presentations. Further, there is a need for moderation so as not to exhaust the audience with the constant recurrences of different stories making rounds on the news.

Funding Statement

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