

Analysis of First and Second Level Agenda Setting in Selected West African Newspapers' Early Coverage of COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the agenda setting functions of the West African media in the early response coverage of COVID-19 and the extent of connection between the agenda setting roles and the reportage of the novel virus. Anchored on agenda setting theory, the study employed quantitative content, explication textual and collocation analyses to analyse 944

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COVID-19-related media content (news, editorials and features) from selected newspapers (with online presence) in the five Anglophone West-African countries (Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone and the Gambia). Findings show that out of the five newspapers, Nigeria's and Ghana's created public attention to COVID-19 pandemic in form of education, information (news), guiding and opinion moulding (features and editorials), particularly immediately cases were recorded in the two countries. The study established that having the same health crisis does not translate to having a significant and same level of media response in the early stage of the crisis in West Africa.

Keywords: *COVID-19, Media Reportage-Agenda Setting, Early Response-West Africa, Health Crisis Communication*

INTRODUCTION

On February 14, 2020, Africa recorded her first case of Covid-19 when Egypt became the first country to report such in the region. Coming down to the Anglophone Africa countries, Nigeria had her first case on February 27, 2020 (Ihekweazu & Agogo, 2020) followed by Ghana, Liberia, the Gambia, and Sierra Leone which recorded their first cases on March 12, March 16, March 17, and March 30, 2020 respectively (BBC, 2020a; BBC 2020b; Medical Xpress, 2020; Plafker, 2020 & WHO, 2020).

Later, many of these countries started issuing measures and guidelines to defeat the virus. Most of their measures were in tandem with most guidelines issued by the World Health Organisation (WHO). According to WHO (2020) and Sawlani (2020), these measures included prohibition of mass gathering/social distancing, lockdowns/travel restrictions, the use of face

masks, and hand sanitisers. During the early outbreak of Covid-19 in English-speaking West Africa countries, evidence shows that their health institutions enlightened and informed their citizens in form of advocacy and sensitization about the virus, though some performed the functions early while some tarried.

Exploring the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC)'s website for example reveals that the centre had informed Nigerians earlier before the first case was recorded in Nigeria. The first advocacy was published on January 22, 2020 with the title 'Public Health Advisory to Nigerians on Novel Coronavirus.' The second report was published on January 30 with 'What You Need to Know About The Novel Coronavirus.' NCDC went further with another update on January 31 2020 [Public Health Advisory to Nigerians on Novel Coronavirus (#2)]. February 2 had 'Surveillance Case Definitions for New Coronavirus Disease (Version 1)' and 'Public Health Advisory to Nigerians on Novel Coronavirus (#3).' When the first case was recorded on 27 February, NCDC reported it on 28: First Case of Coronavirus Disease Confirmed in Nigeria. On the next day (February 29), it added 'Frequently Asked Questions on Coronavirus' and 'Public Health Advisory to Nigerians on Novel Coronavirus (#4).' Since that first case, NCDC kept on briefing Nigerians about its measures in curtailing the new virus.

In addition, a visit to Ghana Health Service's website indicates that the first awareness about the new Coronavirus was reported on March 4. It captured WHO's DG's remarks on Covid-19. The next awareness was on 7 and 15 March. On 17 March, 'Updates on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) in Ghana' was reported on the website. On 18 March, a report on self-quarantine was updated. The awareness centred on Covid-19 rising to 9 in Ghana. Graphical reports (situation reports) started in May, precisely May 22.

In the Gambia however, the Ministry of Health's website contains downloadable situational reports, but they were in conjunction with WHO. Despite that the first situation report was published on 24 March, it dated 21 March. For Sierra Leone, it was established that the first awareness creation dated March 18 while the president addressed his people on 19, 17 and 31 March. On April 1, the Sierra Leone's health website, mohs.gov.sl, also reported the first case. More reports came on April 2, April 26 and 27. In Liberia's moh.gov.lr, there were 18 downloadable situation reports, though the first volume was dated March 16 while the 18th volume dated April 2. The above content mapping clearly shows how prompt or otherwise the health institutions of the five selected Anglophone West-African nations were in the early outbreak of the pandemic.

This section will be hanging if the basic roles the mass media perform during pandemic are not chipped in. In health crisis situations, the media set an agenda on or/and frame issues. In performing these responsibilities, they become an intermediary between the government and the people by informing and enlightening citizens as well as encouraging them to take positive actions (Shalvee & Sanbhav, 2020). However, Gever and Ezeah (2020) argue that the Nigeria media developed very little interest in Coronavirus-related stories when it had not reached the country. The pattern of reportage later increased for Covid-19 stories when Nigeria recorded her first case. This is an indication that proximity and impact influence the kind of agenda any media outfit sets.

Therefore, this study seeks to establish the forms of roles (agenda setting) the English-speaking West African newspapers played at the early stage of COVID-19 pandemic. It also examines the relationship among media agenda setting, rise in COVID-19 cases and public-policy agendas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Media in Africa, like their counterparts in other continents, have passed through different developmental phases. From the time when the mass audience relied solely on print media for information to their dependence on radio and TV broadcasts for media contents, the media landscape in many African countries has shifted to digital formats (online). The emerging technologies, through which media consumers rely heavily on their telecommunication gadgets for on-the-move and accessible information, are facilitating and influencing the increase in this media shift (Southwood, 2016). The growing population of young ones and the increasing level of internet connectivity are also contributing to this new media revolution (Oxford Business Group, 2020).

However, whether the presence of a mass medium is felt online or offline, communication scholars identify some fundamental roles the mass media perform. Traditionally, the mass media educate, entertain and keep people abreast of happenings (Singh & Pandey, 2017). Apart from these traditional functions of the media, Sharma (2015) submits that the mass media play the roles of instruction (provides knowledge and socialisation), correlation (understanding of the society) as well as debate and discussion. Specifically, adoption of the mass media to communicate health education to people keeps growing (Akpobo, 2015; Bala, Strzeszynski & Opor-Madry, 2017; Rogala, 2017; Schliemann, et al., 2019).

Media messages provide information about factors such as disease outbreaks, symptoms, modes of transmission, fatality rates, treatment centres, drugs and prevention methods (Wogu et al., 2019:2).

Research also establishes that the mass media set public agenda through editorial, feature and news writing. For example, editorials critically anal-

yse current trends in the public sphere, and formulate informed opinions on such issues (Kheshgi, 2013 and Silachai & Poonpon, 2016). Then, through news stories, members of the public are educated and enlightened about societal happenings. This function is described by Oriela and Ogbiten (2016) as societal surveillance of the mass media. For news features, opinions are framed in a way that moulds people's views on issues (McCombs, 2011). In this wise, the opinionated writing which is always presented by columnists can be sarcastic, rhetorical, informal, imperative, aggressive, among others (BBC, 2016).

Also, the use of collocation (the choice of grammatical parts of speech-verb, adverb, adjective and noun) to craft these forms of writing is capable of setting media agenda for public consumption. Specifically, Allen (2017) argues that collocation is used to set a second level media agenda- a level that describes issues with word choices. According to him, often times, nouns and adjectives are two vital parts of speech that show how words are collocated in written texts. For example, an adjective can collocate with a noun to give a deeper meaning (e.g., Chinese virus) while a noun too can collocate with another noun to give a special interpretation (e.g., Covid-19 lockdown).

Thus, empirical evidence indicates that the mass media has a very vital role to play in crisis situations when infodemics becomes the order; hence, people crave for accurate, informative, educational, insightful and analytical pieces of information (Maduka, et al., 2015). Consequently, records have shown that the mass media in Africa had one time or the other responded to various public health emergencies in different ways. For example, when the first case of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) broke out in Nigeria on July 20, 2014, the Nigerian media landscape responded to the infection early by informing and educating Nigerians about the virus, symptoms, causes, precautions and safety measures (Akpobo, 2015; Maduka, et al.,

2015; Smith & Smith, 2016), thereby facilitating the early containment of the virus. According to Smith and Smith (2016), early measures such as early closure of schools and late opening of schools contributed immensely to the fight against EVD in Nigeria. When monkey pox was recorded in the country, Oyebanji et al. (2019) argue that though the media reported the new disease, their information only emphasised the number of cases, deaths, new cases and government's responses. However, their stories were marred with 'inaccurate, sensationalised or misleading stories' that could 'hinder actions to safeguard health.' That time, the media framed the disease as 'fatal', 'dreaded', 'deadly', 'spiritual' or 'rare'.

In addition, the constant outbreak of Lassa fever in Nigeria is underreported by the Nigerian media, and that has really been affecting people's holistic approach to its prevention and safety measures (Wogu et al., 2019b). On the other hand, during the media campaign about Lassa fever in Ebonyi State, Nigeria was prompt when its first case was recorded in 2012, to the extent that media messages were created in people's native language with a view to sensitising them about its causes, symptoms, consequences and preventive measures (Wogu, 2018a). Interpretatively, the power of the mass media is so enormous that their reportage can be tilted towards an agenda or against it as seen in the scenarios earlier painted. In fact, empirical evidence shows that what impact an incidence has on the people (Amoroso et al., 2018) as well as how prominent and near it is to them (Parks, 2018 and Boukes, Jones & Vliegenthart, 2020) greatly determine the coverage time of such an event/happening.

As observed by these authors, the Nigeria media, especially the ones that enjoy online presence, were divided into about three categories while reporting news about Covid-19 in its early outbreak. One group dished out misinformation (unintentional inaccuracies), disinformation (fabrications/deliberate manipulation) and malinformation (deliberate information sent

out for a purpose) to people about the pandemic; the second group only reported cases, deaths and recoveries in form of news or drew insights from the pandemic in form features and editorials, while the third group denounced the infodemics pushed out by the first group. For example, Nwakpu, Ezema and Ogbodo's (2020) finding revealed that the coverage of Covid-19 pandemic by four Nigerian newspapers was dominated by straight news (71.3% or 763) of all the items they analysed. Opinionated articles followed; then features and editorials with 15.8% or 169, 11.2% or 120 and 1.7% or 18 respectively. The Punch Newspaper reported the outbreak more frequently than the other three newspapers- The Sun, The Guardian and Vanguard. Their finding also shows that the way the newspapers framed the pandemic encouraged Nigerians to take precautionary measures against the new virus.

Now that literature has established a mixture of media attention and social responsibility in the early coverage of previous health crises such as Ebola Virus Disease (EVD), Lassa fever, Monkey pox and even the novel Covid-19 in Nigeria, it becomes imperative to appraise the early media coverage of a new health crisis, Covid-19. The evaluation, which is focused on selected West African media, aims at investigating the nature of the media coverage during the early outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, the kind of agenda the West African media set during the early stage of the crisis together with the responsibilities discharged by the West African media during the early stage of the new virus. To ascertain the focus of the media agenda during the studied period, authors explored the informative and educative functions of news stories, the agenda positioning function of editorials as well as the analytical function of news features across the selected news media.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

The theoretical base upon which this study stands is the agenda setting theory which focuses on the kind of impact that the mass media could have on issues as a result of the importance or prominence attached to such issues. In crisis situations, such as the one under study, the agenda the media set becomes very important as there is tendency for increased need of information by the people. This makes media organisations the first point of call for them to fulfil the needs. In specific terms, the agenda theory hypothesizes that the mass media possess the ability to transfer the salience of issues on their news agenda to the public agenda (Griffin, 2011). In other words, Weiss (2009) affirms that there is a relationship between the emphasis the mass media place on issues and the importance media audience attaches to those issues. Invariably, when crisis situations occur, “the media may not only tell us (people) what to think about (the crisis), they also may tell us how and what to think about it, and perhaps even what to do about it” (Weiss 2009: 384).

Studies have posited that the roles that the mass media play in emergency situations vary from disseminating information and providing update on the situation (Lowrey, Evans, Grower, Robinson, Ginter, McCormick & Abdolrsunia, 2007) to influencing public responses to the situation at hand (Leask, Hooker & King, 2010) as well as facilitating interaction between the government and the citizens (Riegart & Olsson, 2007) in the course of meandering through the situation. Li (2010:271) also summarizes six roles of the media during crisis. These include warning of predicted or impending disasters; conveying information to officials and the public; charting the progress of relief and recovery; dramatizing lessons learned for future preparedness and taking part in long term public education as well as defining slow-onset problems as crises or disasters. In performing these

roles, the media influence and shape public opinion either intentionally or unintentionally (Weiss, 2009). It is therefore not arguable that the media possess enormous power to set agenda and frame issues which influence what people perceive about these issues, the action they take about the issues and how they think about those issues (Leask, Hooker & King, 2010).

Within the agenda setting discourse, there are three identified types of agendas – media agenda, public agenda and policy agenda (Weiss, 2009). While the issues that the media give salience through their coverage constitute their own agenda, public agenda points to the most important issues from the perception of the members of the public (Weiss, 2009; Griffin, 2011). Policy agenda captures the prioritized issues that government and policy makers take action on. Thus, the agenda setting theoretical framework is an interaction between media, public and policy agendas. Nevertheless, the media agenda, which is the main focus of the agenda setting theory, could be located at two levels. The first level agenda could be largely seen in media content such as news, editorials, features and opinions (Khesgi, 2013; Silachai & Poonpon, 2016). Content that could directly mould people's perception on issues constitute the first level agenda (McCombs, 2011). On the other hand, the second level agenda setting occurs with word choice or vocabulary deployed towards framing issues (Allen, 2017). This implies that the media set agenda at two levels – through direct content as well as in the choice of words in describing issues and events.

Situating this within the context of this study, it is pertinent to examine the roles played by the selected media in the early coverage of the new Coronavirus pandemic in the selected West African countries. This is important because the first stage of any crisis or public health issues is critical in dictating the flow of actions taken in combating the crisis. If the agenda set by the media in any crisis situation is capable of influencing public response

to such crisis, then, there is a need to investigate the kind of agenda set by the media during the early response stage of the public health emergency. There must be an examination of how the increase in global and national cases of COVID-19 affects the first level agenda setting functions of the select West African newspapers. Also, the extent to which attributes of the second level agenda setting functions of the select newspapers reflect and resonate with public and policy agendas has to be examined in the reportage of the pandemic by the select newspapers in the region.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guide the study:

1. What forms of roles did the newspapers play at the early stage of COVID-19 transmission?
2. To what extent did increase in global and national cases of COVID-19 contribute to the use of first-level agenda setting functions [education and information, interpreting and guiding as well as forming opinions and guiding] by the select West African newspapers?
3. What attributes of second level agenda setting functions [noun, adjective and verb] reflected and resonated most with public and policy agendas in the select formats of reporting employed by the newspapers?

METHODOLOGY

Quantitative content, explication textual and collocation analyses were the research methods employed for understanding the kinds of agenda set by the West African newspapers in the early stage of disease. The quantitative content analysis was carried out with the aid of process tracing research

design. This is a design that afforded the researchers the opportunity to pinpoint relevant texts in the news reports of the newspapers and place them into the formulated categories meant for interrogating forms of roles played by the newspapers. Explication textual analysis was used at the second stage of the methodology. Since one of the objectives of the study is to find out how the media want the public and governments to see and respond to the disease, this method becomes relevant as it guides the researchers to pinpoint social and political significance of the reported stories. Identifying the social and political importance of the stories is not sufficient considering the fact that the disease is a pandemic; hence, collocation analysis was also adopted to fill the gap. It was employed with the intent of establishing validity and creating holistic view of the agendas set by the selected newspapers (Mello, 2012). Specifically, collocation analysis helped in understanding the issues and needs put forward to the public and concerned stakeholders in government within the context of second level agenda-setting with the specific reference to description, prescription and prediction of issues and needs related to the disease.

The most popular newspapers (Alexa Rank, May 15, 2020) in Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone and The Gambia were selected. With Alexa Rank, the researchers were able to know that *Ghana Web* (Ghana), *The Punch* (Nigeria), *Front Page Africa* (Liberia), *Sierra Express Media* (Sierra Leone) and *The Point* (The Gambia) were the most popular newspapers as at the time of collecting data for the study. This led to adoption of purposive sampling technique for the selection of the newspapers. This method was also adopted for selection of news stories with exemption of interviews and videos that were coded in addition to systematic and available sampling techniques. While using systematic sampling technique, a 3-day interval was considered for the selection of Coronavirus or Covid-19 stories. For representative samples, WayBack Machine (an online archived

software) helped us in selecting stories that were available for analysis. In this regard, available sampling technique was employed as the third sampling technique. However, two newspapers -*Sierra Express Media* and *The Point*-with very small sample size as archived by WayBack Machine were substituted with the next in rank and high sample size. In Ghana, the coding was done from the paper's repository because its front page does not capture all the Coronavirus-related news for the months.

While formulating the categories, emphasis was placed on formats of reporting. The newspapers' roles of educating and informing the public about the disease were measured using news format. Interpreting issues and needs around the disease was determined through features while forming opinions and guiding governments and citizens were measured using editorial format. These roles were considered as first-level agenda setting functions of the selected newspapers. The coded stories were analysed using descriptive statistics with the specific reference to simple frequency count and percentage. We also used corpus analysis aided by Voyant-tools (www.voyant-tools.org). Two stories for each format were selected from each newspaper for corpus analysis that helped in locating top five trended keywords that aided interpretation of second-level agenda setting of the newspapers.

ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first data source was the newspapers. Ghanaian newspaper had stories for 23 days. It was 26 days and 24 days for Nigerian and Liberian newspapers respectively. In Sierra Leone and The Gambia, we found 22 days and 20 days accordingly. In all, the chosen newspapers reported in 117 days. Out of these days, stories were highly reported in March (49 reports) and January (35 reports) than in February (33 reports).

Out of the five selected papers, only two of them (Nigeria and Ghana) have repositories for Coronavirus on their front pages. However, Liberia's paper has a health column where health-related issues are uploaded. This indicated media readiness on the part of the two media houses to provide information for the readers. For the selected periods in the 3 months for Liberia, it was observed that the front page stories of the selected paper was not regularly updated as expected, though the topmost part of the home page was regularly updated. When the virus broke in the country on March 16, Coronavirus stories dominated the front page of the paper for that day (this shows impact and prominence).

The newspaper selected in Sierra Leone also lacks regular updates. It also has a health column on its front page. From January 1 to January 18, there were no stories; instead, December stories were still on its home page. In February, reportage of some days remained on the home page till the following days (three instances were observed). A similar trend occurred in March where front page stories were left un-updated for days. The Gambia's newspaper also had a column for health. For the first time in 3 months, the Gambian newspaper wrote an editorial on 18th March, the second day Covid-19 was recorded in the Gambia (it added its voice). On this day, Covid-19 news dominated its home page. In fact, foreign stories on Covid-19 were not left out, a practice that was not in place prior to 18th March. The only Covid-19 story reported in the selected paper in Sierra Leone was foreign as it commiserated with China on the outbreak of the virus. The coding of the reports of the newspapers indicated that 944 reports were published, and established that the newspapers educated and informed the public about the disease in March, 2020.

This was quite different from what we found in February (67 reports) and January (10 reports). Reports that established the issues around the disease and guided the audience were published mostly in March (37) more than in

January (3) and February (2). We equally found that the newspapers published reports that warned and guided governments and other stakeholders about the possible consequences of not taming the spread of the disease in March (12) than in January and February, which had one report each.

Examining the publishing period of the reports, we discovered that the selected Liberian, Sierra Leonean, Ghanaian and Gambian newspapers had no publishing time on their stories (Not Available-NA). In Nigeria, the first story reported on Coronavirus by *The Punch* was on 15th January. In the headline, the NCDC was quoted to have said they were ready for Coronavirus in Nigeria. After the first case was reported in Nigeria, *The Punch* created a repository tagged 'Coronavirus Crises 24/7 Updates' before it was later changed to 'Covid-19 Updates.' Ghana's repository was tagged 'Coronavirus News Updates.'

From the available data, it emerged that the chosen newspapers reported mostly in February and March than in January. This is understandable considering the fact that the countries started having cases in February. Nigeria recorded its first case on February 27, 2020 while Ghana, Liberia, The Gambia and Sierra Leone had their first case on March 13, 16, 17 and 30 respectively (Worldometers, 2020). In all, a total 305 cases were recorded between February and March, 2020 in the countries, while global cases spanning January and March, 2020 were 1,041,737 (Worldometers, 2020).

Table 1: First Level Agenda Setting in Select Newspapers

January, 2020	Education and Infor- mation	Interpreting and Guiding	Forming Opin- ions and Guiding
Ghana	0.00	0.0	0.00
Nigeria	70.00	66.66	100
The Gambia	0.00	0.0	0.00
Sierra Leone	0.00	0.00	0.00
Liberia	30.00	33.33	0.00
February, 2020	Education and Infor- mation	Interpreting and Guiding	Forming Opin- ions and Guiding
Ghana	0.00	0.00	0.00
Nigeria	25.37	0.00	0.00
The Gambia	7.46	50.00	0.00
Sierra Leone	1.49	0.00	0.00
Liberia	14.92	50.00	100
March, 2020	Education and Infor- mation	Interpreting and Guiding	Forming Opin- ions and Guiding
Ghana	82.30	29.72	50.00
Nigeria	8.68	29.72	8.33
The Gambia	4.87	21.62	8.33
Sierra Leone	0.21	0.00	0.00
Liberia	3.91	18.91	33.33

Source: Authors' Analysis, 2020

Key: Numbers in percentage

On the basis of first-level agenda setting as presented on Table 1, the Nigerian newspaper educated, informed and guided the public in January when the country was yet to have any case. Liberian newspaper focused on guiding more than informing the public about how to prevent spread of the disease. The selected newspapers from Nigeria and Liberia maintained their lead in terms of educating, informing and guiding the public in February. In March, Ghanaian newspaper led in the area of educating and informing the populace about the disease than other newspapers. These results are

in consonance with the earlier study on the disease which established that selected Nigerian newspapers prioritised straight news over opinionated articles, features and editorials (Nwakpu, et al., 2020). The results also align with the studies of Akpobo (2015), Maduka, et al. (2015), Smith and Smith (2016) that established early response of the Nigerian newspapers within the context of educating and informing the public about Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) in 2014.

Table 2: Word Trends in Select Formats of Reporting of the Select Newspapers

<i>Ghana</i>	<i>First Trend</i>	<i>Second Trend</i>	<i>Third Trend</i>	<i>Fourth Trend</i>	<i>Fifth Trend</i>
<i>Forming Opinions and Guiding</i>					
Eternal vigilance should be the watchword	China	Corona	Ghanaians	Health	Virus
How prepared are we for the fatal coronavirus?	Centres	Government	Health	Outbreak	Public
<i>Interpreting and Guiding</i>					
Coronavirus: 'Mr president, your shirt'	Country	Mr	President	Philadelphia	Remind
The socioeconomic implications of COVID-19: Idealism vs Realism	Affected	Contingency	Going	Health	Measures
<i>Education and Information</i>					
Anxiety grips Tema Chinese shop attendants over Coronavirus	China	Chinese	Country	Virus	Workers
Parliament throws searchlight on coronavirus prevention in Ghana	Adequate	Called	Coronavirus	Disease	Ghana
<i>Nigeria</i>					
<i>Forming Opinions and Guiding</i>					
Preventing a Covid-19 epidemic	Cases	China	Countries	Country	Disease
Coronavirus crisis: Govt's complacency unpardonable	Countries	Country	Disease	Nigeria	World
<i>Interpreting and Guiding</i>					
Lock down Nigeria now!	Cases	Coronavirus	March	Nigeria	People
Likely socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on Nigeria	Budget	Coronavirus	Monday	People	Water

<i>Education and Information</i>										
Nigeria records second coronavirus death	111	Cases	Edo	Confirmed	Enugu	Contacts	New	Recorded	Nigeria	
Nigeria's coronavirus cases hit 81 as NCDC announces 11 new cases	Cases									
Liberia										
<i>Forming Opinions and Guiding</i>										
In Union Strong, Success is Sure! We Can Beat the Coronavirus	Cases		Coronavirus		Crisis		Ebola		People	
Calling the Names of Those Coming Down with COVID-19 Is Wrong; Stop the Stigma, Mr. President, Min. Nagbe & NPHIL	Blama		Case		Health		Mr		President	
<i>Interpreting and Guiding</i>										
Tolbert Nyenswah: Building Testing Capacities Key to Curbing Coronavirus in Liberia	Capacities		Countries		Covid		Health		Testing	
Does Wearing Mask Prevent You from Getting Covid-19? This Is What Experts Think	Covid		Face		Mask		Masks		People	
<i>Education and Information</i>										
COVID-19 Ruled Out; Chinese on Fishing Vessel Dies from Heart Attack	Authorities		Body		Death		Early		Vessel	
Liberia Confirms Third Coronavirus Case, Contacts Tracing Underway	FrontpageAfrica		Health		Minister		New		Positive	

Table 2 contains data that established keywords that dominate the reports of the newspapers at the early stage. It is noticeable that emphasis was on the likely impacts of the disease on people. They equally referred to China, rising cases in the world and their expectations from the government officials, especially Presidents and Ministers of Health. These results are understandable within the expected roles of the media during crisis situation as stressed by previous scholars (Lowrey et al., 2007; Leask, et al., 2010; Li, 2010; Oyebanji, et al., 2019). Examination of the first level agenda setting functions of the newspapers along with global and national cases indicates that the functions were more correlated with global cases more than the national cases. In terms of variation in the cases, the functions also generated significant prediction in the global cases than in the national cases [see Table 3]. In this regard, it could be explained that the newspapers want the public and government officials to understand severity of the disease by alluding to the spread and containment characteristics or issues (McCombs, 2011).

Table 3: Global and National Cases Prediction from First Level Agenda-Setting Roles of the Select Newspapers

Global Cases	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
Educating and Informing	.787 ^a	.619	.239	31.24953
Interpreting and Guiding	.997 ^a	.995	.989	2.53577
Forming Opinions and Guiding	.563 ^a	.317	-.366	28.12316
National Cases				
Educating and Informing	.591 ^a	.350	.133	29.40550
Interpreting and Guiding	.277 ^a	.077	-.231	33.49887
Forming Opinions and Guiding	.137 ^a	.019	-.308	63.72492

^a Global and National Cases as Predictors

Table 4: Emerging Attributes from First Level Agenda Setting for Second Level Agenda-Setting of Ghanaian Newspaper

First Level Agenda	Trends versus Collocative Words				
	<i>Virus</i>	<i>Health</i>	<i>China</i>	<i>Corona</i>	<i>Ghanaians</i>
Forming Opinions and Guiding 1	Far, carrier, cases, China, communities	Agyeman, Manu, initiated, Kweku, Minister	Cameroonian, celebrate, Ghanaians, gone, goods	Virus, air, cases, devastation, far	Away, China, Chinese, concern, considering
Forming Opinions and Guiding 2	<i>Centres</i> Designate, areas, case, designated, directed	<i>Government</i> Public, add, contained, emergency, fail	<i>Health</i> Potential, cases, centres, conscious, curb	<i>Outbreak</i> Caused, control, death, possible, readiness	<i>Public</i> Government, inform, public, cooperative, coronavirus
Interpreting and Guiding 1	<i>Country</i> Need, action, Ghana, people, remind	<i>Mr</i> President, god, maybe, remind, 1918	<i>People</i> Country, forgive, people, actions, advantage	<i>Philadelphia</i> 1918, according, cancel, didn't, pandemic	<i>Remind</i> Need, country, Mr, President, aids
Interpreting and Guiding 2	<i>Affected</i> Areas, aside, contain, countries, critically	<i>Contingency</i> Plan, affairs, best, capturing, cater	<i>Going</i> Disadvantaged, survive, affairs, basic, children	<i>Health</i> Complications, health, organization, access, achieve	<i>Measures</i> Designed, affected, aside, best, capturing
Educating and Informing 1	<i>China</i> Added, brought, citizen, colleagues, lives	<i>Chinese</i> Whilst, attending, brought, citizen, concentration	<i>Country</i> According, borders, country, instruction, protect	<i>Virus</i> Added, detected, entering, informed, lives	<i>Workers</i> Nose, spectacle, attending, condition, gears
Educating and Informing 2	<i>Adequate</i> Called, calling, cases, cleanliness, Coronavirus	<i>Called</i> Adequate, cases, cleanliness, committee, coronavirus	<i>Coronavirus</i> Adequate, called, capacity, cases, central	<i>Disease</i> Ghana, cater, China, come	<i>Ghana</i> Disease, bemoaned, called, case, come

Table 5: Emerging Attributes from First Level Agenda Setting for Second Level Agenda-Setting of Nigerian Newspaper

	Trends versus Collocative Words				
	<i>Cases</i>	<i>China</i>	<i>Countries</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Disease</i>
First Level Agenda					
Forming Opinions and Guiding 1	Reported, country, death, develop, died	Korea, South, China, according, burden	High, Asia, burden, challenge, China	Disease, anybody, based, benefiting, cases	Country, based, burden, catch, China
Forming Opinions and Guiding 2	<i>Countries</i> Ban, high, including, Nigeria, entering	<i>Country</i> Disease, entering, Italy, parts, people	<i>Disease</i> Country, people, approach, cases, challenge	<i>Nigeria</i> Countries, handle, applying, ban, basis	<i>World</i> China, 10,000, able, Adhanom, cases
Interpreting and Guiding 1	<i>Cases</i> Lagos, cases, confirmed, virus, March	<i>Coronavirus</i> Nigeria, infected, public, timeline, Abuja	<i>March</i> New, confirmed, March, Nigeria, cases	<i>Nigeria</i> Confirmed, coronavirus, March, timeline, Abuja	<i>People</i> Infected, Nigeria, state, weeks, aeroplane
Interpreting and Guiding 2	<i>Budget</i> Ahmed, barrel, capital, cars, cut	<i>Coronavirus</i> Infections, Nigerians, 4,000, aviation, Canada	<i>Monday</i> March, reported, trading, 15,000, Canada	<i>People</i> Stay, attendance, authorities, China, communities	<i>Water</i> Communities, people, provision, dry, embrace
Educating and Informing 1	<i>///</i> Confirmed, cases, covid, country, increased	<i>Cases</i> 111, coronavirus, country, covid, death	<i>Confirmed</i> 111, cases, covid, increased, press	<i>Contacts</i> Date, follow, isolate, returnees, till	<i>Recorded</i> Fatality, weekend, 111, cases, confirmed
Educating and Informing 2	<i>Cases</i> Covid, Lagos, March, recorded, state	<i>Edo</i> Enugu, 55pm, Bauchi, cases, covid	<i>Enugu</i> Edo, Lagos, state, Osun, Rivers	<i>New</i> Cases, recorded, announced, bringing, capital	<i>Nigeria</i> Reported, cases, centre, control, country

Table 6: Emerging Attributes from First Level Agenda Setting for Second Level Agenda-Setting of Liberian Newspaper

First Level Agenda	Trends versus Collocative Words				
	<i>Cases</i>	<i>Coronavirus</i>	<i>Crisis</i>	<i>Ebola</i>	<i>People</i>
Forming Opinions and Guiding1	Countries, reported, re- porting, 143, al	Clearly, covid, preventing, action, actions	Management, crisis, masks, asking, aspects	Economic, accord- ing, active, affected, business	Contact, 184, abroad, affected, close
Forming Opinions and Guiding2	<i>Blama</i>	<i>Case</i>	<i>Health</i>	<i>Mr</i>	<i>President</i>
	Talk, allegations, bash- ing, began, callers	Phillips, Blama, chase, come, con- tact	Workers, assured, au- thorities, began, behind	Blama, person, presi- dent, radio, add	Tried, Weah, 13th, assured, audio
Interpreting and Guiding1	<i>Capacities</i>	<i>Countries</i>	<i>Covid</i>	<i>Health</i>	<i>Testing</i>
	African, Ambulance, building, confident, control	Health, systems, weak, able, Africa	Capacities, care, case, cases, chain	Carc, challenged, countries, develop- ing, facilities	Capacities, capacity, covid, Liberia, Africa
Interpreting and Guiding2	<i>Covid</i>	<i>Face</i>	<i>Mask</i>	<i>Masks</i>	<i>People</i>
	Attending, hospital, per- son, staffs, transmitted	Masks, mask, use, people, protection	Use, people, having, wear, wearing	Adding, use, wear- ing, cause, CDC	Mask, droplets, face, use, like
Educating and In- forming1	<i>Authorities</i>	<i>Body</i>	<i>Death</i>	<i>Early</i>	<i>Vessel</i>
	National, BMC, covid, deadly, death	Reportedly, Tues- day, accessing, attack, early	Vessel, authorities, cap- tain, cause, Chinese	BMC, Tuesday, 829, attack, authorities	Death, Liberia, pier, reportedly, 829
Educating and In- forming2	<i>FrontpageAfrica</i>	<i>Health</i>	<i>Minister</i>	<i>New</i>	<i>Positive</i>
	Confirmed, development, Eugene, learned, Lenn	Announce, con- vene, Jallah, March, Minister	Confirmed, convene, development, Eugene, Jallah	Calm, case, country, disease, government	Coronavirus, disease, person, son

Explication

The data from Table 4 to Table 6 further indicates the derivation of first level agendas from the second level agendas with the specific reference to the collocation of the trended keywords with verbs, adjectives and nouns used by the newspapers. The explication analysis presented below shows that the newspapers set a mixture of public and policy agenda with the adoption of descriptive, prescriptive and predictive words. This has earlier been described as a means of establishing and reinforcing second level agenda setting with word choice or vocabulary deployed towards framing issues (Allen, 2017). They equally leveraged verbs, adjectives and nouns that have tendency of calling concerned government officials and the public to the benefit of being proactive in preventing entry and containment of the disease. Citizens are not also left out. Where possible, both the citizens and governments were reprimanded when the cases rose in March. Arguably, the newspapers analysed issues that must be addressed towards total containment of the disease spread (Kheshgi, 2013 and Silachai & Poonpon, 2016).

Ghanaian Newspaper

How prepared are we for the fatal coronavirus?

*As seen in other countries where Covid-19 had started ravaging, Ghana too was leaving no stone unturned to protect her citizens against the virus. The paper, therefore, re-echoed government's measures such as hand washing with soap, personal hygiene and social distancing (**Forming Opinions and Guiding 2**).*

Coronavirus: 'Mr president, your shirt'

*A satirical piece that analyses the look-worm attitude the Ghanaian President took over the spread of Covid-19 in the country. Instead of playing politics with the pandemic, the president is advised to ponder on the Ghanaian economy (**Interpreting and Guiding1**).*

Anxiety grips Tema Chinese shop attendants over Coronavirus

Ghanaians and Non-Ghanaians at a community put on their face masks while attending to customers despite that the virus was not yet detected in Ghana. People were advised to take their protection very serious. The fear people had for the virus had affected sales (Educating and Informing1).

Nigerian Newspaper

Coronavirus crisis: Govt's complacency unpardonable

The Nigerian government isn't serious yet for Covid-19 containment. Despite the government's measures, cases kept increasing. Experts advised that panic and complacency be avoided if the fight against the virus would succeed. The government wasn't swift in issuing containment measures to the public. The number of testing centres was low compared to the population. Covid-19 is not Ebola, and not banning visitors coming into the country and locking people down on time was disastrous to the country. People needed enlightenment on personal hygiene while foreign travellers coming here be isolated for 14 (Forming Opinions and Guiding 2).

Nigeria's coronavirus cases hit 81 as NCDC announces 11 new cases

The NCDC announced Nigeria's Covid-19 cases reaching 81 after 11 new cases were recorded (Educating and Informing 2).

Liberian Newspaper

Calling the Names of Those Coming Down with COVID-19 Is Wrong; Stop the Stigma, Mr. President, Min. Nagbe & NPHIL

Debunking Covid-19-related rumour in Liberia, the government got it morally wrong to have named the index case of Covid-19, as the person was subjected to public fright and stigmatisation. The index case was later tongue-lashed and insulted on the social media (Forming Opinions and

Guiding 2).

Does Wearing Mask Prevent You from Getting Covid-19? This Is What Experts Think

Using face masks throughout the day is harmful to one's health as breathing more in it attracts bacteria. Medical experts advise that face mask be used in congested areas or places with a high number of infections. People with flu-like coughs should also use it regularly. Hand washing and sanitising are also important (Interpreting and Guiding 1).

Liberia Confirms Third Coronavirus Case, Contacts Tracing Underway

A 63-year old woman was confirmed positive of Covid-19, and she was given the expected medical attention immediately. Though her contact tracing began, the country's Incident Management Team (IMT) planned to hold a meeting to review the current health measures and issue new ones (Educating and Informing 2).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, this study has established that having the same health crisis does not translate to having a significant and same level of media response at the early stage of the crisis in West Africa. This position is better discerned in the context of the level of media education and immediate knowledge about the crisis, which have implications for deployment of media resources such as appropriation of reporting formats towards setting public and policy agendas for the concerned stakeholders. It is therefore imperative for the media managers to equip their personnel with relevant knowledge of using appropriate reporting formats and techniques ahead of crisis situations, while the knowledge should be prioritised by the personnel.

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