
Infodemic and Public Health Emergencies: Analysing the Emotional Effects of Television News Reportage on the COVID 19

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ABSTRACT: *The unprecedented waves of panic of the corona virus pandemic at the initial outbreak in Nigeria was shocking and disturbing. Media framing of the COVID 19 especially when reported on television news further ignites viewers' emotions. Media framing of the virus and audience emotions are crucial concepts in public health emergencies. The paper examines the emotional effects of television news reportage on the COVID 19 pandemic in Nigeria. The objective of this study was to determine how television news reportage on the COVID 19 pandemic in Nigeria affected audience emotions. The study was anchored on media framing theory, which explains that the media focused attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning and interpretation. The study purposively surveyed fifty-nine academic staff of the Western Delta University, Oghara, Delta State. Results showed that audience experienced disturbed and fearful emotions as a result of the manner in which the COVID 19 news was presented by television news in a thematic, rhetorical and syntactical structure, coupled with various videos of the pandemic, and the duration and the frequency of the coverage on the story of the pandemic. News on the pandemic was built on panic reporting factors. People experienced disturbed emotions as a result of unguided news airwaves during information pandemic. There is therefore need to guide against panic reporting for it triggers further negative emotions.*

Keywords: Audience; COVID 19 pandemic; Emotional effects; Media framing; Reportage; Television news

INTRODUCTION

The volume and speed of the same information over and over again, on a particular issue, received by a particular person or societies has a way of inducing myriad of psychological effects especially when it has to do with public health risk emergencies during information pandemic (infomedic). In a current global environment of tensions, fears, climate change, economic volatility and wars (as reported by the media), it is likely that we will experience continued incidences of mass trauma (Mayhorn & McLaughlin, 2019). This is because, these large scale traumatic events or processes, sometimes referred to as 'mass trauma' (Pfefferbaum, Reissman, Pfefferbaum, Klomp, & Gurwitch, 2008), take various forms and have myriad emotional effects (Witting, 2018). Generally, mass trauma such as natural disasters, technological disasters, wars, environmental degradation, global pandemic, organized violence, and systematic institutional breakdown or failure and other forms of structural inequity have clearly individuals psychological sufferings (Witting, 2018).

Studies have investigated the traumatic effects of the COVID 19 from different perspectives (Serafini, et. al., 2020; Thakur, Jain, 2020; Rubin, & Wessely, 2020). For instance, Boyraz, Legros, and Tigershtrom (2020) relating on the mental health people found that stress, anxiety, depression, frustration, uncertainty during COVID-19 outbreak emerged progressively, which are typically associated with disease outbreaks, and increased with the escalation of new cases together with inadequate, anxiety-provoking information which was provided by media (Serafini, et. al., 2020). Pandemic generally, besides its effects of distress, boredom, social isolation and frustration which directly related to confinement, abnormally reduced social/physical contact with others, and loss of usual habits (Reynolds et.al., 2008; Desclaux, Badji, Ndione, Sow, 2017) together hopeless or despair situations may significantly and independently predict suicidal behaviour (Engel-Yeger et. al., 2016; Pompili et. al., 2014)

Specifically, scholars have and are still studying the emotional effects of framing of the COVID-19 (Tabri, Hollingshead, & Wohl, 2020; Schild, Blackburn, Stringhini, Zhang, & Zannettou, 2020; Makata, 2021). Tabri et al. (2020) evaluated if framing COVID-19 is an existential threat that predicts arousal of anxiety and racial prejudice against Chinese people since the virus started in Wuhan, China. Using adults' participants, the authors found that framing COVID-19 as an existential threat conjures anxious arousal and is positively correlated with subtle and blatant prejudice towards China and the Chinese people. Schild et al. (2020) found out that there was an increased emergence of sinophobic discussions on the Chinese people on Web Communities. Makata (2021) evaluated Nigerian's print media reportage of China following the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The result shows that Nigerian Newspapers paid more attention to China after the index case of COVID-19 in Nigeria. It also discovered that most of the news media reflected negative news about China globally and Chinese residents in Nigeria. Serafini et. al., (2020) identified inadequate information and inappropriate guidelines about the purpose of quarantine. Reddy and Gupta (2020) say the impact of the COVID-19 on vulnerable groups relied in part on the quality of communication and right information.

The quality of communication and right information largely depend on the news media. Importantly, the news media happen to be integral parts of modern life as it plays informational as well as educational role. Television news particularly provides its audiences 24 hour live coverage with repeated telecasts catering to a large number of audiences with the most updated information (Daredia & Zehra, 2014). However, watching television and particularly news channels and news segments increases stress score of a person and different

news watching habits have severe implications to a person's psychological health (Haskins, Mille, & Quarles, 1984; Potts, & Sanchez, 1994; Johnson, 1996); this is because seeing coverage on numbers of death caused by violent crimes, terrorism, and pandemic, leads to psychological disturbance (Davey, 2014). Invariably, a mass medium like television because of its features of sounds and images, and the consistency of the volume of pandemic information (infodemic) is assumedly capable of causing psychological trauma on regular audience.

Various communication devices were used by the governments and NGOs to inform and manage people's social behaviour and lifestyle on the pandemic. However, the manner and framing of television news reportage on the COVID 19 pandemic in Nigeria may have emotional effects on its viewers. This attracted the attention and interest of this paper.

Objective of the Study

This study in a broader perspective is part of the field of health communication. Specifically, the objective of the study is to:

1. Determine how television news reportage on the COVID 19 pandemic in Nigeria affected audience emotions

Theoretical Backing

The study is anchored on Media Framing Theory. The concept of framing was posited by Gregory Bateson in 1972 (Arowolo, 2017) and later was brought into the limelight by Erving Goffman in 1974, as 'Frame Analysis' (Dorfman, & Krasnow, 2014). According to Goffman, "framing" is a "schema of interpretation" within which communicators and individuals perceive, understand, detect, categorize, and report events (Makata, 2021). To Arowolo (2017), framing describes the practice of thinking about news items and story content within familiar context. Because the notion of framing has been increasingly central to media analysis (Shih, Wijaya, & Brossard, 2008), it deals with how the media package and present information to the audience or how audiences feel about an issue (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989).

Framing, understood from Entman, (1993) point of view, depicts the media as the watchdog of the society, which appropriates to itself that title as the Fourth Estate of the realm in a democracy. Therefore, framing is a conscious act, in the sense that journalists or media outfits purposely emphasize some aspects of the news above others. Writers and journalists use framing to attract attention to what they want their readers to think about (Markata, 2021)

Framing is an expansion of the agenda-setting postulation by focusing on the essence of the issues at hand rather than on a particular topic. In fact, media framing is an extension of agenda-setting theory. While agenda-setting deals with what the reporter and editor as gate-keepers, media framing looks at all the angles of the news presented, time of the news, the degree of discussion given to the news, salient areas invoked, and the prominence given to the news. It is indeed, how the news is framed. The basis of framing theory is that the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning. According to Dorfman and Krasnow (2014), framing is the process of reconciling new information with one's existing understanding. Journalists in media framing decide which facts, values and perspectives will be given prominence. This means that reporters certainly

apply their own perspectives and interpretative frames when packaging news. Media framing is journalist narratives.

Since its introduction to media studies, framing has grown as a media theory, especially in news reporting. Consequently, framing theory is chosen as the theoretical base for this research because it presents the appropriate standpoint for evaluating the psychological effect of the COVID-19 pandemic by media reports.

Media framings on the outbreak of the COVID 19 were outlined on numbers of death; number of affected persons; preventive measures; causes; the degree to which the virus spread, and the consistent media reportage. All these were capable of creating traumatic effects and uncertainties.

The table below explains media framing during public health emergencies.

TABLE 1: A Framing Typology for Media Coverage of Epidemic Diseases

Frames	Definitions
Consequence	The consequences of the diseases, such as human life (victims), social impact, or economic impact (cost), are the focus of the story. In addition to damages, it also includes any phenomenon, social/ political issues, events, or discussion generated by the occurrence or spread of diseases. For example, the discussion of flu vaccine or drugs, although indirect, is considered as a consequence of avian flu because the “talk” derives from the potential outbreak of the flu.
Uncertainty	This frame is characterized by uncertainties in any aspect(s) of the epidemics including the cause, the cure, the possible spread, etc. Also included is portrayal of the disease as something unknown that is in need of more exploration or examination by the experts or governments.
Action	The story stresses any action(s) against the disease, including prevention, potential solutions, or strategies. The ban on public gathering is one example.
Reassurance	The story expresses the idea that the public should not be worried about the effects of the disease. Stories that emphasize the readiness and/or successes of authorities in combating the disease are also included.
Conflict	The story focuses on the difference in opinions as well as outright arguments/disagreements among news sources. It could be a debate about how to effectively combat the diseases, disagreement about how diseases will evolve and how serious it will affect people, or dispute over the appropriateness or legitimacy of actions. Conflict story is constructed as antagonism between opposing opinions or stances
New evidence	This frame refers to new findings/ results of research efforts or discovery of new evidence that help advance the understanding of the diseases or the ability to quell the diseases. Included in this frame are: discovery of new strains of the disease, new way of spreading/ transmitting, new methods to prevent/cure/treat the disease, development of new medicine, and so on.

Source: Shih, Wijaya, & Brossard (2008).

The work of Shih, Wijaya, and Brossard (2008) showed the manner of media framing during pandemics. Elements of fears, uncertainties, effects or consequences (economic, health social and emotional), reassurance and divergent views or conflict, actions or steps taken by the governments were the items that dominated media framing as shown in the table. This implies that media framing as, Gamson and Modigliani (1989) noted, is media package and presentation of information to the audience or how audiences feel about an issue.

The theory of media framing on emotional effects looks at how the media focuses attention on certain important parts of the pandemic by looking at all the angles of the news presented, the degree of discussion given to the news, salient areas invoked or the prominence given to the news, the degree or level of public risk, the impacts the news generated, and the preventives measures.

Methodology

The research was concerned with the emotional effects of television news reportage on the COVID 19 pandemic on adults. The design was survey in nature. Participants of this study were academic staff members of the Western Delta University, Oghara, Delta State. The researcher purposely drew the participants from a University on the assumption that as academic staff they watched television news especially during the corona virus outbreak. Participants were from the ages of 25-58, and above. The population of the study was 67 as obtained from the Office of the Register of the University.

The Krejcie Robert and Morgan Daryle determination of sample size was used to determine the sample size. The Krejcie and Daryle determination of sample size was developed in 1970 to ascertain sample size from a given population. Given the population of the study (67) based on the Krejcie and Daryle table, the sample size was 59. The data administered and collection was in January 2022. Questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. It was designed specifically to determine the participants traumatic stress experiences of television news reportage on the COVID 19 in 2020.

Measuring Scale

The instrument (questionnaire) was designed to measure Emotional Effects of Television News Reportage on COVID 19 (EETNRC). The scale has 22 items in three tables. To measure the emotional effects of television news reportage on the COVID 19 pandemic in Nigeria, two measuring scales were designed. The measuring scales were the 'yes' or 'no' option for table one and two, and the Likert Scale for table 3. The response pattern of this scale was a 5-1 point (5 = I strong agree; 4 = I agree; 3 = 1 undecided; 2=1 strongly disagree and 1=1 disagree). This 5 point scaling technique had been used by Keshvari and colleagues (2018) and Suckling, Ferris, and Price (2020) in measuring health reporting status and challenges among journalists and assessing risk identification and management in public health practice.

Items in the research instrument were drawn from watching of television news during the lockdown in 2020. This aided the researcher to design the research instrument. Data obtained were analysed in percentage and mean

Results

The sample returned (n=58) was analysed as below.

Table 2: Participants' Emotional Responses to Television News Reportage on the COVID 19 pandemic

Which one of the following items below best expressed your mood on the COVID 19 pandemic by television news reportage?

Options	Frequency (n-58)	Percentage (%)
Angry	03	5.17
Disturbed	18	31.0
Worried	13	22.4
Fear	09	15.5
Anxieties	05	8.52
Was not disturbed at all	10	17.2

Majority of the respondents were disturbed on the COVID 19 pandemic as reported by television news channels.

Table 3: Psycho-Emotional Analysis of Participants' on Television Reportage on the COVID 19

Please indicate personal effects and experience of television news reportage on the COVID 19 pandemic

Options	Freg. (n-58)	(%)
1. I had sleeping problem at the start of the pandemic news	10	17.2
2. I became very worried	17	29.3
3. I had fears and anxieties	09	15.5
4. My blood pressure got increased	00	00
5. I felt nothing	03	5.17
6. I worried because of my financial situation	06	10.3
7. Loss weight	00	00
8. I was afraid to go out to visit others	13	22.4
9. I became suspicious of everybody	00	00
10. I became sick as a result of fear	00	00

Majority of the respondents were very worried

Table 4: Ways How Television News Items Affected Participants

Indicate ONE way how television news items on the COVID 19 affected you? It affected me through ...

S/N	Items	SA	A	UD	SD	D	χ
1.	The framing of the headlines		13	-	18	27	1.98
2.	When COVID 19 reports was presented as the first main news items	-	43	-	02	13	3.25
3.	The body of the news	-	17	-	17	24	2.17
4.	The duration of the coverage	19	17	04	06	12	3.43
5.	The frequency of the coverage	-	39	-	02	17	3.41
6.	The manner the news was presented by the reporter (in thematic, rhetorical and syntactical structures)	24	15	03	06	10	3.63

Point of acceptance or rejection (3.00)

DISCUSSION

Drawn from the objective of the study, fifty nine (59) members of academic staff of the Western Delta University, Oghara Delta were sampled through the administration of questionnaire. However, 58 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved. This represented 98%. The data collected were pooled and analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts, percentage and mean. The sample size returned (58) consisted of 44 male respondents representing 75.8% of the population and 14 female respondents representing 24.1% of the population. The responses of the women were separated from the men respondents in order to ascertain their moods or psychological state as mothers and women on the COVID 19 pandemic coverage by television news. However, the data collated from the women respondents showed that both male and females respondents expressed same responses in almost all in the items in the three tables. This explains that the female respondents' moods or psychological states on the COVID 19 pandemic coverage by television news were not different from the male respondents, an indication of 'shared or same feelings'.

The moods of the respondents on the COVID 19 pandemic coverage by television news were expressed in table one. Respondents were disturbed by the panic reporting of the COVID 19 by television news. As a results of the features of sounds and images, television medium more than radio is capable of arousing viewers' emotions such as anger, fears, worries, and anxieties. Studies have shown that audience responds to different emotional state when they watched violent contents on television (Bodenhausen, Sheppard, & Kramer, 1994; Nabi, 2003; Kim & Cameron, 2011). Nabi (2002) found that different versions of news stories on domestic terrorism elicit anger and fear, and induced different emotions. Iyengar (1991) found that TV news framing affects attributions of responsibility for both the causes of and the preferred treatments of social problems. Television is an emotional-induced instrument; that is why it is a heavy and rich medium of emotions. As such, the frequency and the duration at which television news channels in Nigeria and different parts of the world focused so much on the COVID 19 pandemic could be described as 'panic reporting', led to panic or anxiety viewing.

The respondents also expressed personal experience of television news reportage on the COVID 19. Table 3 showed that as a result of the panic reporting or coverage on the COVID 19 pandemic, respondents experienced different emotional effects. Results showed that 17.2% of the respondents had sleeping problem at the start of the pandemic news; 29.3% were worried about the pandemic; 15.5% of the respondents experienced fears and anxieties; while 10.3% of the respondents were worried because of their financial situation. Another emotional effect was that some respondents were afraid to go out to visit others. Though businesses and schools were shutdown but the fear to visit was another problem. People became suspicious of one another. No one is certain who carries the virus. This became a situation that everyone is a likely carrier of the virus. These personal experiences expressed by respondents were as a result of how television news items on the COVID 19 were farmed by the news media. The bottomline of all these effects was worried.

The main objective of the study was to determine how television news reportage on the COVID 19 pandemic in Nigeria affected audience emotions. Table 4 provides answers to the main objective of the study. News framing or media report on the COVID 19 as shown on television had a way of inducing disturbed emotions on the viewers. Results from table 4 showed that respondents emotions were affected by the following factors: by the framing of the headline; when the COVID 19 reports was made as the first main news items; the body of the news; the duration of the coverage; the frequency of the news coverage on that particular

story (this means developing story); and the manner the news was presented by the reporter (the manner of presentation includes extent of interest given to the news, repetition of the same story along with videos, and the numbers of reporters and correspondents used on the same story from the media house, and various experts invited to talk about the story. At a mean point ($3.63 \geq 3.00$) as obtained in item 6, table 4, manner in which the reporter presented the COVID 19 pandemic reports in thematic, rhetorical and syntactical structures on television determines how the viewers were affected emotionally. Given these factors mentioned above, and the definition that media frames is the persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual (Gitlin, 1980), the manner news was presented by the reporter may have elements of journalist's emotions on it. To Nabi (2003), specific emotions influence individuals' information accessibility, desired information seeking, and solution preference.

In line with these six news items that affected viewers' emotions, Pan and Kosicki (1993) identified four structural dimensions of news frames. These are: (a) syntactical, (b) script, (c) thematic, and (d) rhetorical structures. Syntactical structures are the "headline, lead, episodes, background, and closure," which means sequential and stable arrangement of words or phrases into sentences. Script structure provides a description of events and activities in a consistent and stable way. Thematic structures in a story consist of a main theme, subthemes, and supporting elements. Rhetorical structure is related to journalists' writing style, involving five framing devices such as metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions, and visual images. The whole factors discussed imply media framing. News is as the media presented it. That is, the way information is presented via news elements can influence the way people perceive the issue (Kim, & Cameron, 2011). The authors posit that news provides frames to influence people's emotional response as well as subsequent perceptions. By this, the media not only set agenda for public discussion by its frequency coverage on a particular story but news becomes 'media framing'. The media framing postulation adopted for this study is applicable to these findings.

The manner news on the COVID 19 was framed by television news was built on panic reporting. Panic reporting always emanates from breaking news such as in politics, security, natural disasters, and disease outbreak. Panic reporting especially on health matters affects the public emotionally. Dong and Zheng (2020) noted psychological disorder caused by too many news coverage while Wahl-Jorgensen (2020) believes that fear had been a strong causal factor of pandemic death

News is framed in different ways. In the aspects of headline casting, the duration and frequency of coverage and developing story, and manner of presentation by the reporter news frame. These factors determine how audience emotions are affected.

Conclusion

At the early outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic in Nigeria, as a result of the massive volume of information on the pandemic reported and discussed in all the news media throughout the country, and the world at large, coupled with series of videos shown on television news, viewers experienced disturbed and fearful emotions that affect them psychologically. Audience emotions were affected by the manner in which the COVID 19 news was presented by the reporter in thematic, rhetorical and syntactical structures, coupled with the casting or framing of the headline, the duration and the frequency of the coverage on the story of the pandemic explain the negative emotions experienced by Nigerians as a result of unguided news airwaves during the outbreak. News is the presentation of the media.

Certainly, the medium of television is not a causal factor for audience disturbed and fearful emotions on the COVID 19 information pandemic but primarily by the manner of presentation by the news media. The manner of presentation of the COVID 19 news could be described as panic reporting. When the news airwaves are not cautiously guided, it leads to panic reporting. Panic reporting especially on public health is a situation where the public entertains fear from a media health report.

Recommendations

There is need therefore to guide the unguided airwaves with some cautions especially when it comes to public health risk emergencies. It is imperative that journalist should not emotionally get involved in news framing as such may further trigger audience disturbed emotions. There is need also for other researchers to look into the concept of panic reporting and how it affects broadcast audience.

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