

ARTICLE

# REPRESENTATION OF FACE MASKS AS A PREVENTATIVE MEASURE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS



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DOI: 10.25200/BJR.v18n1.2022.1462

Received in: July 14th, 2021

Desk Reviewed: August 8th, 2021

Desk Review Editor: Kérley Winques

Revised on: October 16th, 2021

Approved on: October 25th, 2021

**ABSTRACT** – Face mask was identified as an important nonpharmaceutical intervention in halting the spread of Covid-19 across the globe. Health organizations issued advisories accordingly on the use of a face mask in public. To understand how Nigeria newspapers portray face masks in their news reports, a content analysis of four Nigerian newspapers was conducted from February 1, 2020, to September 30, 2020, to understand how face masks are framed in news reportage. News stories with face masks in the title and context of the study were descriptively analyzed. Findings revealed an under-reporting of face masks in Nigerian newspapers. Images were widely used in reporting face masks and pictures showing face masks or people wearing them made up about 50% of the total pictures used. The deductive analysis found 17 frames and five of the frames were prevalent, they include: advisory, punitive, production, donation, and crime frames. The study recommends that Nigerian newspapers include more information about the use of face masks in their reportage especially those that guide how to select, wear and care for face masks if the war against covid-19 is to be won and enable society to function as it used to before the pandemic outbreak.

**Key words:** Face mask. Covid-19. Content analysis. Framing. Nigeria.

## REPRESENTAÇÃO DA MÁSCARA FACIAL COMO MEDIDA PREVENTIVA DURANTE A PANDEMIA DE COVID-19 EM JORNAIS NIGERIANOS

**RESUMO** – A máscara facial foi identificada como uma importante intervenção não farmacológica para conter a disseminação da Covid-19 pelo mundo. As organizações de saúde emitiram recomendações adequadas sobre o uso de máscaras faciais em público. Para entender como os jornais da Nigéria retratam a máscara facial em suas reportagens, uma análise de conteúdo de quatro jornais nigerianos foi realizada de 1º de fevereiro de 2020 a 30 de setembro de 2020, buscando compreender de modo específico como a máscara facial é enquadrada nas reportagens. Foram analisadas, através de análise descritiva, as notícias que continham o termo máscara facial em seu título e no corpo da matéria. Os resultados revelaram uma subnotificação sobre as máscaras nos jornais nigerianos. Imagens foram amplamente utilizadas em reportagens sobre máscaras faciais, e fotos mostrando máscaras faciais ou pessoas usando-as representaram cerca de 50% do total das fotos utilizadas. A análise dedutiva encontrou 17 frames e cinco deles eram predominantes. Eles incluem: quadros consultivos, punitivos, de produção, doação e crime. O estudo recomenda que os jornais nigerianos incluam mais informações sobre o uso de máscara facial em suas reportagens, especialmente aquelas que fornecem orientação sobre como selecionar, usar e cuidar das máscaras, de modo a colaborar para que a guerra contra a covid-19 seja vencida e que a sociedade funcione como costumava ser antes do início da pandemia.

**Palavras-chave:** Máscara facial. Covid-19. Análise de conteúdo. Enquadramento. Nigéria.

## REPRESENTACIÓN DE MASCARILLA FACIAL COMO MEDIDA PREVENTIVA DURANTE LA PANDEMIA DEL COVID-19 EN PERIÓDICOS NIGERIANOS

**RESUMEN** – La mascarilla facial se ha identificado como una importante intervención no farmacológica para contener la propagación de Covid-19 en todo el mundo. Las organizaciones sanitarias han emitido recomendaciones adecuadas sobre el uso de mascarillas en público. Para entender cómo los periódicos en Nigeria retratan la máscara facial en sus informes, se llevó a cabo un análisis de contenido de cuatro periódicos nigerianos desde el 1 de febrero de 2020 hasta el 30 de septiembre de 2020, buscando entender específicamente cómo se enmarca la máscara facial en los informes. Las noticias que contenían el término máscara facial en su título y en el cuerpo de la noticia se analizaron mediante un análisis descriptivo. Los resultados revelaron una escasa información sobre las máscaras en los periódicos nigerianos. Las imágenes se utilizaron ampliamente en los informes sobre máscaras faciales, y las fotos que mostraban máscaras faciales o personas que las llevaban representaron alrededor del 50% del total de las fotos utilizadas. En el análisis deductivo se encontraron 17 encuadres y cinco de ellos fueron predominantes, entre ellos: el de asesoramiento, el punitivo, el de producción, el de donación y el de delito. El estudio recomienda que los periódicos nigerianos incluyan más información sobre el uso de las mascarillas en sus reportajes, especialmente los que orientan sobre cómo seleccionarlas, usarlas y cuidarlas, para colaborar a que se gane la guerra contra el covid-19 y que la sociedad funcione como lo hacía antes del inicio de la pandemia.

**Palabras clave:** Mascarilla. Covid-19. Análisis de contenido. Encuadramiento. Nigeria.

### 1 Introduction

The outbreak of the novel Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), the virus responsible for coronavirus 2019 disease (Covid-19) globally in the first quarter of 2020 changed behavior and perception of the world. The virus with rumored origins in Wuhan, China, led

to the lockdown of most of the free world-leading to the closing of businesses, schools, commercial airlines, and most public places to halt the transmission and spread of the virus (Goba & Jamieson, 2020; Kinetz, 2021). Guidelines released by health organizations informed that the virus was spread mainly by contact between people through respiratory droplets when they cough, sneeze or talk, and by human contact with infected surfaces or materials (Nigeria Center for Disease Control, 2020a, 2020b; World Health Organization, 2020). The Nigerian government responded to the global outbreak of Covid-19 by setting up a Presidential Taskforce. By September 17, 2020, Nigeria had recorded 56.735 cases, 48.092 recoveries, and 1.093 deaths from the virus (Oyekanmi, 2020), while the global toll was over 30 million infections and nearly a million deaths (Google News, 2020). Graphics illustrating these are presented in figures 1 and 2.

### Figure 1

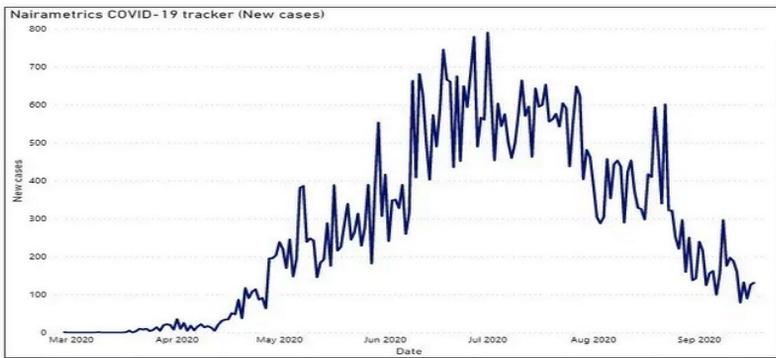
*Total cases, recoveries, and deaths in Nigeria and worldwide from Covid-19 – September 17, 2020*



Source: Google News (2020)

**Figure 2**

*Covid-19 cases across the months in Nigeria*



Source: Oyekanmi (2020)

Advisories by the agency tasked with handling infectious diseases in the country, Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC) released in April 2020 on the use of cloth face masks stated that the Federal Government of Nigeria has mandated the use of face masks or coverings in public to control virus transmission among the general population (NCDC, 2020a). An earlier advisory by NCDC recommended the use of face masks as an optional additional layer and not as a compulsory measure, in addition to physical distancing, hand and respiratory hygiene measures in Nigeria (NCDC, 2020b).

However, an update was issued in May 2020 by the Nigerian government which made the use of face masks compulsory (Atoyebi, 2020), various states and government agencies in Nigeria followed the federal government's proclamation also denying access to visitors not adhering to the guideline (Tribune Online, 2020a; Ukpe, 2020a). There were also cases of extrajudicial killings and sexual harassment of women by security forces under the pretext of enforcing wearing a face mask (Eleweke, 2020; Obaji, 2020; Omilana, 2020). Nigeria, historically, has a poor human rights record (Ndinojuo & Udodo, 2018; Ukpe, 2020b), and security forces used the enforcement of Covid-19 regulations to arrest and extort Nigerians with many cases going unreported. Extreme cases involving the loss of life and sexual assault of women made it to the news like those mentioned above.

## 2 Research problem

This study aims to ascertain how Nigerian newspapers frame the coverage of “face mask” as a nonpharmaceutical intervention (NPI) in curbing the spread of the Covid-19 virus. It emerged that face masks were needed to curb the spread especially for frontline health workers and those exposed to infected persons. The use of face masks received a major boost with the declaration by the Director of Centre for Disease Control (CDC) in USA testifying before the US Congress that face masks are the most powerful public health tool that is available against Covid-19 and might even be better protection against the virus than a vaccine, their effectiveness has been scientifically proven (Dunn, 2020). This underscores the importance of face masks and underlies why this study is relevant. The literature on Covid-19 and measures to combat it are still developing rapidly, this study would therefore add to the growing body of work on the virus and also in the Nigerian context focusing on the use of face masks. Four Nigerian national dailies were selected for analysis, they include; The Guardian, Punch, Leadership, and Nigerian Tribune. The study objectives were:

1. To determine the volume of coverage given to face masks in the selected Nigerian newspapers.
2. To determine the story type used in covering reportage of face masks by the selected Nigerian newspapers.
3. To determine the news slants associated with coverage of face masks in curbing the spread of Covid-19 in the selected Nigerian newspapers.
4. To identify the frames associated with news about face masks.

The research questions were:

1. What is the volume of coverage given to face masks in Nigerian newspapers?
2. What news genres are used in the reportage of face masks by Nigerian newspapers?
3. What are the news slants deducible from news coverage of face masks by the Nigerian newspapers?
4. How were news reports on face masks in Nigerian newspapers framed?

### 3 Theoretical framework – framing theory

There is a broad scholarship on the applicability of framing theory (see Chong & Druckman, 2007; Entman, 2007). Framing has been shown to aid the formulation, establishment, and presentation of media coverage of events. It is a process of presenting information (news items) from a focused angle to a target audience with the outcome being to achieve the desired perception of the event being presented (Entman, 2007). Scholars have abstracted framing as a contrast between “frame in communication or media frame” and “frame in thought or individual frame” (Druckman, 2001, p. 228). The former refers to how communicators present words, images, and style of presentation to convey the message(s) about an event or an issue to the audience (Yousaf, 2015). The argument can be made for the use of face masks and their presentation in the news, what do media gatekeepers consider salient and relevant that would encourage the adoption of wearing a face mask in public? What outcomes have been promoted by media messages, literature has shown resistance to the adoption of face mask usage due to cultural, religious, societal, or personal bias to using a face mask in public (Lee et al., 2020; Zagury-Orly, 2020).

In trying to understand framing from the stance of Entman (1993), framing is essentially about selection and salience; selecting aspects of the information and projecting them as the most important, where they promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation. In exploring news articles on face masks, the uses and consequences of the usage of face masks in public must be made salient if the desired outcome is to increase adoption. The media can appeal to the conscience of the public about not only protecting themselves but also about not infecting members of the society they come in contact with or surfaces they occupy (NCDC, 2020a, 2020b). They can also buttress on the consequences of non-use of face mask in public such as being turned away, denied access to facilities, fined, arrested, and in extreme cases lead to confrontation with trigger-happy Nigerian security operatives with a long history of shooting unarmed civilians (Amnesty International, 2009; Eleweke, 2020; Obaji, 2020).

The use of pictures has been documented in framing studies (Barret & Barrington, 2005; Ndinojuo & Ihejirika, 2019). Ndinojuo and Ihejirika (2019) found that pictures were relevant and used in framing

by Nigerian newspapers. They also found that 44% of the pictures used in their study were captioned, and 11% had source credit. Captions describe what is taking place and help the reader place it in the context of the news, while the source credit provides information on the photojournalist responsible for the picture or image. They add that a poorly written caption has the potential to diminish the impact of the image and credibility of the published content. Haggerty (2016) and Bear (2021) opine that the validity and integrity of the picture will come under scrutiny with the non-inclusion of the copyright holder and accompanying information of a picture embedded within a news article.

#### **4 Literature review**

The media exerts some influence on society with information that shapes public opinion about the world (Ndinojuo, 2020a), its position as the fourth estate of the realm and the watchdog of the society gives it a privileged position when it comes to public affairs. Studies have recognized the important role the media plays in society when it comes to information dissemination (Lee, 2005; Tal-Or et al., 2009). Media effect was illustrated vividly by the agenda setting theory by McCombs and Shaw (1972) who found out that what the voters in the US presidential election of 1968 regarded as the main issues, mirrored what the press reported weeks and months earlier as being the main issues. McCombs (1997) added that news articles influence the public because they provide information that aids consensus on contentious public issues. The press because of their roles and functions to the society may be in a better position to articulate and make simpler government policy decisions to enable understanding of complex issues by the audience which may include doctors, teachers, artisans, bankers, etc.

In periods of uncertainties such as the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, where information is limited with many conspiracy theories and misinformation about the virus, its origin, whether 5G technology has a role in spreading the virus, protocols to follow in and outside home, nonpharmaceutical interventions (NPIs), the safety of the available vaccine and possible cure, the media can be the voice of reason (Ndinojuo, 2020b; Waterson & Hern, 2020). In the early days of Covid-19, the former president of the USA Donald Trump and other promoters of false narratives on the virus were strongly countered by

media fact-checking (Goba & Jamieson, 2020; Kinetz, 2021). The media provides an unbiased and objective perspective to a greater extent than individuals, and their views influence attitudes and opinions about current events. While the fervor on coronavirus reportage has minimized, it is also important to acknowledge the role of the media especially in putting out timely information about NPIs, with some skepticism about the efficacy of the vaccines (Boyd, 2021) and availability of a cure.

Zagury-Orly (2020) informs that despite the success of face masking in reducing community transmissions, the face mask is subject to different levels of acceptance and adherence. One of the reasons for this is the image that a mask wearer portrays. Lee et al. (2020) revealed that males were less likely than females to wear masks, as wearing a mask rubs off negatively on their masculinity. Also, men have an invincibility perception especially in the Nigerian patriarchal society (Amobi, 2013; Dogo, 2014). Men tend to perceive themselves as less susceptible to contracting the disease and its health-related consequences. The culture was also attributed to making people averse to wearing a mask (Lee et al., 2020). People from East Asian, collectivist cultures with social norms that promote altruism, self-sacrifice, and prevalent masking, may feel guilty and discriminated against for not fulfilling their civic duty to protect others. Contrastingly, the Western, liberal cultures, individuals may resist masking due to the stigma of appearing weak or looking ill.

Matuschek et al. (2020) documented the historical use of face masks in controlling viral epidemics. MacIntyre et al. (2009) note that countries stockpile face masks for use as an NPI to control virus transmission during an influenza pandemic. Their study found that compliance to mask use significantly reduced the risk for influenza-like illness (ILI) – associated infection, but <50% of participants wore masks most of the time. They concluded that household use of face masks is associated with low adherence and is ineffective for controlling seasonal respiratory diseases. However, during a severe pandemic when the use of face masks might be greater like what we are witnessing today, pandemic transmission in households could be reduced. They predicted the dependence of NPIs in the event of an influenza-like pandemic such as SARS which will likely result in the shortage of antiviral drugs and vaccines. Their prediction in 2009 became a reality in 2020 at the outbreak of Covid-19; there were global shortages of NPIs with many countries needing medical supplies (Gereffi, 2020).

Conflicting messages from health agencies have also affected adherence, because of the dynamic nature of data due to many unknowns, people may disregard their advisories (Chughtai et al., 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) initially discouraged community mask use in its own published commissioned study (Chu et al., 2020), and reluctantly recommended community mask use in crowded places where social distancing is not possible (Sra et al., 2020; Zagury-Orly, 2020). The US CDC shifted from actively recommending against community mask use to recommending it (Lyu & Wehby, 2020). Zagury-Orly (2020) opines that these inconsistencies may have contributed to common thinking flaws such as the anchoring bias where people rely too heavily upon, or anchor, on initial reports – or confirmation bias – the tendency to preferentially recall information that confirms our assumptions. Based on the important role newspapers plays in society, this study investigates the coverage of face masks in selected Nigerian newspapers intending to understand the scale and manner of its coverage in recognition of the importance of face mask as an NPI as seen in the literature.

## **5 Methodology**

### **5.1 Design**

This study used content analysis to examine reports in five purposively selected online national newspapers in Nigeria about “face mask”; they include: The Guardian, Punch, Leadership, and Nigerian Tribune newspapers. The main rationale in choosing the selected newspapers was their reputation as seen in their national circulation. Punch prides itself as the most widely read newspaper in Nigeria and reports news with a slant of entertainment; together with The Guardian and Nigerian Tribune rank in the top 10 online newspapers in Nigeria (Odeyemi, 2017), Leadership is one of the most popular newspapers from Northern Nigeria (Shehu, 2015).

### **5.2 Data collection**

A coding sheet was used to collect data about news articles on face masks by Nigerian newspapers. Digital editions of the newspapers were used to collect data of news stories about face masks. They were

used because of the technicalities that allow researchers to scrutinize an article, assess its sources, and communicate using channels physical copies lack. The use of digital editions of newspapers in research has been validated in several studies (Ndinojuo, 2019, 2020a). The period of study was eight months, from February 1, 2020, to September 30, 2020, giving a total of 243 editions for each newspaper and 1.215 editions as the study universe.

### **5.3 Coding procedure**

Data gathering begins with typing the word 'face mask' in the search query of the websites of the selected newspapers. Entries with 'face mask' in the headline that refer to Covid-19 were selected for inductive quantitative and qualitative content analysis. To ensure reliability, two independent coders were trained using the coding guide. The units of analysis include all published content available on the website of the selected newspapers within the study time frame. The content categories include Guidance (stories that advise on how to select, wear, and/or care for the face mask), Picture (find if the picture is about face masks or persons wearing face masks), Punishment (if the story mentions punishment for not wearing a face mask), How to report defaulters, and frame (the theme of the story). The stories were also coded for genres of reporting and local/international news. Local news on face masks were coded as news stories whose content were about Nigeria, while international stories were those about face mask with no emphasis or mention of Nigeria within the story, neutral stories were those that do not mention any location within the story. A pilot study was conducted to determine intercoder reliability; this yielded a coefficient of 0.72. Neuendorf (2002) emphasized that coefficients of .70 may be considered acceptable in a few exploratory studies depending on the research objectives. Because this is an exploratory study, the coefficient of reliability was acceptable for the study.

## **6 Data presentation and analysis**

The findings and analysis are presented in this section.

## 6.1 The volume of coverage given to face masks in Nigerian newspapers

The findings revealed a total of 240 stories with face masks in the heading. This was from a total of 1,215 editions. A breakdown is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Frequency of face mask stories in Nigerian newspapers*

S/No.	Newspaper	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	The Guardian	34	14
2	Leadership	19	8
3	Punch	109	45
4	Nigerian Tribune	78	33
Total		240	100

Table 1 shows that Punch had the highest volume with 45 percent of the total entries while Leadership had the lowest content of news about face masks by volume with 8 percent. A further breakdown of the entries by months gives more insight into the coverage of news about face masks in Nigerian newspapers in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Distribution of face mask stories in Nigerian newspapers by months*

S/No.	Newspaper	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Total
1	The Guardian	-	-	-	-	-	12	12	10	34
2	Leadership	1	0	11	1	1	4	1	-	19
3	Punch	4	3	41	23	6	21	7	4	109
4	Nigerian Tribune	1	4	21	28	8	12	2	2	78
Total		6	7	73	52	15	49	22	16	240

Table 2 shows that The Guardian and Leadership had no entries with “face mask” in the headline in some months, while the former missed

out in February through June; the latter missed the month of September. For The Guardian, the problem seemed to be linked to its website algorithm. Search query revealed webpages containing stories on face masks, but they open up to an extent and the pages do not show further results. The anomaly is such that after a certain number of pages, the search page will not show further results, for this study, this occurred after the 11th results page from the search query. This is shown for clarity in Appendix A1 and A2. Looking closely at Appendix A1, one can see that beyond the results of search page 11, there are possibilities of more entries on pages 12, 13, and beyond. Instead, a page saying “No articles found matching your query” is what is seen on page 12 as seen in Appendix A2.

This was responsible for the volume of coverage ascribed to The Guardian newspaper. The entries in Table 2 indicate that if the glitch that led to the display of empty pages in the search query is fixed for the newspaper, it may at least have double the number of entries for The Guardian newspaper. This view is valid considering that the months with the most entries are April and May. The Guardian was only captured in the third month with the highest entry which was July. Figure 3 presents the scattered plot showing the peak months of coverage with April being the highest, followed by May and July. February recorded the least entry; this was the period of the early outbreak of the Covid-19 virus globally.

**Figure 3**

*Showing the peak months of coverage*

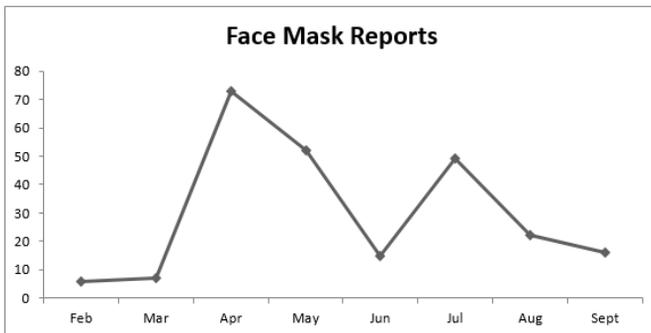


Table 3 measured the local/international coverage of news stories on face masks in Nigerian newspapers. Stories on face masks were dominantly local news coverage with 84 percent, while international news accounted for 14 percent. Four news items (2%) were found to be neutral;

such stories were mainly about beauty and maintaining a stylish outlook while wearing a face mask. There was no mention of locations within the story; they were mostly beauty tips and staying fashionable in the face of the raging scourge of the pandemic. The Guardian had the highest ratio of local-international coverage; international stories accounted for 29 percent of its stories, compared to the others; Leadership (11%), Punch (13%), Nigerian Tribune (10%).

**Table 3**

*Ratio of local to international face mask stories<sup>1</sup>*

S/No	Newspaper	Local*	Neutral*	International*	Total
1	The Guardian	21	3	10	34
2	Leadership	17	0	2	19
3	Punch	95	0	14	109
4	Nigerian Tribune	69	1	8	78
	Total	202 (84%)	4 (2%)	34 (14%)	240

The Guardian has always been regarded as an elitist newspaper, hence the affinity for international stories. Leadership is inclined to reports about northern Nigeria, this may account for why it had the smallest international and local coverage of face masks stories.

## **6.2 The story type used in covering reportage of face masks by Nigerian newspapers**

Inferences from Table 4 indicate that Straight news was the dominant genre for coverage of face masks accounting for 63 percent of the total news items. It is followed by the World genre with 14 percent. The other types were fairly evenly distributed accounting for between two percent and six percent.

**Table 4**

*Genre used in coverage of face mask*

	Genre	The Guardian	Leadership	Punch	Nigerian Tribune	Total
1	Features	1	-	9	5	15 (6%)
2	Fashion & Beauty	3	-	-	2	5 (2%)
3	Health	-	-	7	2	9 (4%)
4	Interview	1	-	4	1	6 (2.5%)
5	Opinion	-	1	2	1	4 (2%)
6	Politics	3	-	1	1	5 (2%)
7	Religion	2	-	2	2	6 (2.5%)
8	Science & ICT	1	-	1	2	4 (2%)
9	Straight news	13	16	69	54	152 (63%)
10	World	10	2	14	8	34 (14%)
Total		34	19	109	78	240

### **6.3 News slants associated with coverage of face masks in curbing the spread of the Covid-19 virus in Nigerian newspapers**

The first news slant analyzed was on guidance on how to select, wear, and care for the face mask. The results are summarized in table 5.

**Table 5 - Guidance in use of face mask as reported by Nigerian newspapers<sup>2</sup>**

S/No	Newspaper	Stories*	Select*	Wear*	Care*	Total
1	The Guardian	34	5	3	2	10
2	Leadership	19	0	0	0	0
3	Punch	109	2	2	2	6
4	Nigerian Tribune	78	6	6	3	15
Total		240	13 (5%)	11 (5%)	7(3%)	31(13%)

Table 5 shows that Nigerian newspapers did not devote much coverage to guidance on how to select, wear, and care for the face mask. None of the parameters exceeded 5 percent of the total

240 face mask stories, with the care of face masks receiving the least coverage at 7 news items (3%), Leadership had no entry for any of the guidance parameters. Appendix A3, A4, and A5 were used to show screenshots of news stories containing the category that examined select, wear, and care for the face mask from The Guardian, Punch, and Nigerian Tribune, respectively. Some examples of the headlines of face masks' stories are presented: "5 Tips To Avoid Chin Acne While Using Face Mask" (Adekanye, 2020), "Fabric face mask offers least protection, says pathologist" (Adejoro, 2020), "WHO Issues Guidance on Locally-made Face Masks" (Tribune Online, 2020b).

**Table 6**

*Effects of non-compliance and reporting defaulters' not wearing face mask*

S/No	Newspaper	Punishment	How to report defaulters
1	The Guardian	10	0
2	Leadership	1	0
3	Punch	33	0
4	Nigerian Tribune	19	0
	Total	63 (26%)	0

Table 6 presents data on how to report defaulters not wearing a face mask in public and the various punishments they received. There was no instance of the press reporting how the public should handle defaulters from the data analyzed, however, on the subject of effects of defaulting, the newspapers recorded 63 (26%) instances of punishment or denial of service. This underscores the severity of not wearing a face mask; nearly one out of four stories reported was about the punishment meted out to defaulters.

**Table 7**

*Use of Images in reporting face mask news showing gender*

S/ No	Newspaper	Stories on face masks	Stories with pictures	Gender in pictures				Total
				Female		Male		
				With face mask	Without face mask	With face mask	Without face mask	
1	The Guardian	34	16 (8%)	7	7	20	3	37
2	Leadership	19	19 (9%)	6	12	4	16	38
3	Punch	109	99 (47%)	13	32	52	65	162
4	Nigerian Tribune	78	77 (36%)	31	90	43	116	280
	Total	240	211	57(11%)	141(27%)	119(23%)	200(39%)	517

Table 7 justifies the use of images as a unit of analysis, about 88% of the stories were accompanied with images showing that there are insights to be drawn from their use. Punch had the greatest number of pictures (99), while The Guardian had the least (16). Other deductions from the data when comparing their individual use of images show that Leadership used images for all its stories (100%) on face masks, followed by Nigerian Tribune (99%), Punch (90%), and The Guardian (47%) was the least among the four newspapers. When reporting the gender of the people captured, Table 7 showed that 34% of the total people captured wore face masks compared to 66% of persons without a face mask. Of this number, 11% were female wearing a face mask while the males constituted 23%. The images showed more people appearing without a face mask than with one. A further breakdown of the use of images is presented in Table 8.

**Table 8***Use of Images in reporting face mask news*

S/No	Newspaper	Total number of pictures	Picture credits	Picture caption	Picture of face mask	Picture of people wearing a face mask	Pictures without a face mask
1	The Guardian	18 (8%)	10	16	0	9	9
2	Leadership	19 (8%)	0	0	5	4	10
3	Punch	104 (45%)	4	70	20	28	56
4	Nigerian Tribune	90 (39%)	12	24	9	40	41
Total		231	26	110	34	81	116

The images were analyzed under the total number of pictures used in the stories analyzed, picture credits, picture captions, pictures showing face masks, pictures of people wearing face masks, and pictures without face masks. A total of 231 pictures were used in the 240 stories analyzed, giving an average of 0.96 pictures per story. Punch used the most pictures (104), while The Guardian used the least (18). In terms of average picture per story for each of the newspapers, The Guardian had an average of 0.53 pictures per story, Leadership had 1 per story, Punch was 0.95, and Nigerian Tribune had an average of 1.15. Leadership and Nigerian Tribune both had averages above the total average of 0.96 for all the newspapers analyzed.

Table 7 also shows that 11 percent of the images had picture credits, while 48 percent were captioned to describe the event or the individual in the photograph. Images showing face masks made up 15 percent of the pictures, those showing people wearing face masks were 35 percent of the total images, and pictures not showing face masks or people wearing face masks were 50 percent. Cumulatively, images with face masks in them either as an item or being worn by people was about 50 percent of the total pictures, however, in terms of raw numbers, pictures without face masks were more in number with a difference of one. Appendix A6 was a screenshot showing different images of face masks in the Leadership news story.

## 6.4 The frames associated with news about face masks

The frames associated with framing stories on face masks are presented in table 9; face masks' stories were coded exhaustively to be mutually exclusive. Elements may interweave with each other, but the dominant theme is chosen especially if it is captured clearly in the headline.

**Table 9**

*Framing face mask stories in Nigerian newspapers*

S/No	Frames	The Guardian	Leadership	Punch	Nigerian Tribune	Total
1	Advisory	7	5	25	14	51
2	Advocacy	4	-	-	-	4
3	Awareness	1	-	1	2	4
4	Beauty	-	-	-	2	2
5	Business	-	3	6	2	11
6	Crime	1	1	14	3	19
7	Demerits	-	-	4	-	4
8	Dissent	1	-	2	2	5
9	Donation	4	5	12	17	38
10	Environment	1	-	-	-	1
11	Fashion	3	-	-	2	5
12	Issues	-	-	5	6	11
13	Oddity	1	-	1	-	2
14	Opinion	-	1	-	-	1
15	Production	1	3	9	10	23
16	Punitive	8	1	30	18	57
17	Religion	2	-	-	-	2
Total		34	19	109	78	240

The findings from the inductive coding process produced 17 frames; of these, five were prevalent, i.e., they are found in all four selected newspapers. The prevalent frames are; Advisory, Crime, Donation, Production, and Punitive frames. As denoted by their names, Advisory frame stories are those that contain government and health institutions advisory on the use of face masks in public to curb the spread of the Covid-19 virus; Crime frame involves stories where crimes are perpetrated because of face masks mainly by security operatives;

Donation frame contains stories where face masks are donated by governments, politicians, businesses, individuals; Production frames are those that talk about the production of face masks; while Punitive frames addresses punishments by the government, organizations, and individuals against defaulters not wearing a face mask in public.

Seven of the frames were represented in double digits; the punitive frame was the most represented in newspaper coverage with 57 stories, followed by the Advisory frame with 51 entries. Donation and Production frames had 38 and 23 stories, respectively. The Crime frame had 19 entries while Business and Issues frames had 11 entries each. The rest of the frames were represented in single digits, and the Dissent frame recorded the most single-digit (5). The discussions of the findings from this study are presented in the next section.

### **6.5 The volume of coverage given to face masks in Nigerian newspapers**

The volume of coverage of face masks in news headlines of Nigerian newspapers produced a total of 240 articles, arising from a study sample of 1.215 editions of the sampled newspapers, for an average of 0.20 mentions per day or once every 5 days. Considering that face mask is a key component of NPIs that militate against community spread of Covid-19 and the fact that CDC considers face mask as more important than the vaccine against Covid-19 (Dunn, 2020), it would be safe to say that face mask has been under-reported by Nigerian newspapers. The central nature of a face mask as an NPI suggests that it should be in the news daily. Given the prominence of face masks in curtailing the spread of the Covid-19 virus, the media is expected to set the agenda for public debates on societal issues. The more frequent the coverage of face masks in Nigerian newspapers, the more important the public will attach to its adoption and the consequences of its non-use in public.

February and March were the initial months when global health authorities were trying to understand the potency and transmission of Covid-19. The advisory released by WHO and the NCDC in Nigeria did not make face mask compulsory during these periods (NCDC, 2020a). But with the increase of infection and death rates from April on, the advisory on face masks changed to compulsory, hence, the spike in newspaper reports about face masks. Governments and organizations in Nigeria started implementing punitive measures

against defaulters. June witnessed another dip in coverage only for July to usher in an increase in face mask reportage; the preceding months witnessed a steady decline in face mask coverage. The mood in society is also more relaxed about face masks currently. Although they are still worn in public, it is no longer with the same vigor as seen during peak infection periods between April – July. Organizations also, no longer insist on no face mask, no entry, even though the bills showing the warnings are bold and visible.

### **6.6 The story type used in covering reportage of face masks by Nigerian newspapers**

The dominant story genre used in reporting face masks in Nigerian newspapers was “straight news” taking up about 63% of the total news reported. This underlies the importance newspapers attached to the use of face masks as a public issue and given its significance in curbing the spread of Covid-19 already highlighted in (Dunn, 2020; Zagury-Orly, 2020), its coverage is vital for public health and safety. Newspapers were constantly and consistently reporting news about face masks, keeping it on the front burner, ensuring that the public is informed on the topic. The importance of face mask adoption and use in public was next covered the most under “world” (14%) reinforcing its significance as a global health issue. The effects of the virus in Africa and Nigeria have been underwhelming when compared to its impact in Europe and North America, this notwithstanding, has seen some prominent Nigerians being affected including the late chief of staff to the president of Nigeria Mallam Abba Kyari (Ndinojuo, 2020b).

### **6.7 The news slants associated with coverage of face masks in curbing the spread of Covid-19 in Nigerian newspapers**

The first news slant measured in the news coverage of face masks was guidance to select, wear and care for the face mask; the results indicate that information on the guidelines was not adequate (13%). This under-coverage implies that the mass media have missed out on using their mass platform to inform readers about the relative advantage of using one type of face mask over another, and also the need to adopt cloth face masks due to the anticipated global shortage

of medical N95 face masks. There is also the need to assuage the public not to stock up on medical face masks to ensure they are always available for frontline health workers. It is common for medical face masks and other NPIs to become scarce during pandemics (Gereffi, 2020), newspaper coverage of substitutes such as cloth face masks that are readily available should be encouraged. Sra et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of developing a rational approach to ensuring sufficient supply for frontline healthcare workers in cases of shortage.

The next news slant measured was on how to report defaulters not wearing face masks in public and the punishment defaulters received. Findings showed that government did not provide any particular way of reporting defaulters, there was no contact person, phone numbers, emails, physical address, or protocols to follow once an individual is spotted in public without a face mask. Governments around the world are struggling to cope with the impact of Covid-19 and may not pay much attention to handling face mask defaulters. On the other hand, news reports that include punishments meted out to face mask defaulters abound in the news. Results recorded 63 (26%) such incidents. Varying types of punishments were seen ranging from denial of service/access, arrest, arraignment in court, and fines.

This tallies with the views of Atoyebi (2020) and others (Tribune Online, 2020a; Ukpe, 2020a) who informed that after the Nigerian government made the use of face masks compulsory, offenders were to be turned back (and denied services), while some were arrested and subsequently prosecuted. There were also accusations of extrajudicial actions against Nigerian security forces in the reports as captured by authors in the literature (Eleweke, 2020; Obaji, 2020), allegations of rape and murders were leveled against security operatives in Nigeria enforcing the wearing of face masks in public. Recall that Ndinojuo and Udodo (2018) informed that historically, security operatives in Nigeria have a poor human rights record, and the entire security apparatus of Nigeria requires serious long overdue reform especially when it comes to the issue of human rights.

The use of images in reporting about face masks was also analyzed. This slant is important because a face mask has a visual element; it is distinguishable and easily recognizable. Newspapers can set the agenda when it comes to wearing a face mask by including it in news reports (in its different variants) either as a standalone image or when being worn by an individual. Readers who may not know what it is will see the picture and easily recognize it in public. Nigerian newspapers considered pictures relevant in the reportage of

face masks by including them in 88% of the news articles analyzed for the study. This reinforces the importance of pictures as documented in studies (Barret & Barrington, 2005; Ndinojuo & Ihejirika, 2019).

The findings revealed that only 11% of the images had credits and 48% were captioned, which was similar to those in Ndinojuo and Ihejirika (2019) that found 11% and 44% for source attribution and captions, respectively. Nigerian newspapers seem to have maintained their style of image use with these different studies producing similar outcomes in how images are attributed and captioned. There is also the issue of credibility of the images used in the news stories, with no mentioned attribution. Source credits give legitimacy to an image used; while captions improve understanding of the role of the image concerning the narrative being portrayed. This supports the views of Haggerty (2016) and Bear (2021) who state that the validity and integrity of the picture will come under scrutiny with the non-inclusion of the copyright holder and accompanying information of a picture embedded within a news article.

The study also found out that images containing face masks (either as a standalone object or being worn) and those not showing face masks at all were roughly the same with images not showing face masks slightly more in number (116 compared to 115). The reason for the high number of images without face masks was that news editors used official government pictures in most of the news reporting. These were the same pictures used in reporting about government activities pre-Covid-19 era. In most of the images where governmental officials are captured in situ within the context of the news being reported, they are shown to wear a mask.

A similar trend was noticed for images used in interview scenarios, the newspapers used headshots or official still images of the interviewee to report the news instead of using a new picture that was specifically taken for the interview. A reason for this may be that the interview was conducted online. Because the interview did not mention where it was conducted, we can only speculate about what may have happened. This is one limitation of content analysis studies, there may not be room to fact check information from the news producers, rather, content analysis reports content as it is and readers can make their own deductions from the analysis.

Another important finding from the use of images was the number of individuals wearing or not wearing a face mask and the gender represented in the images used by the newspapers. A total of 517 individuals were seen in the 231 pictures used in 211 stories, of

this, 66% of the individuals were not wearing pictures compared to 34% shown wearing a face mask. The counting of individuals was an index that seemed biased against those wearing face masks especially when images of congregations in places like churches, mosques, parliament, and government programs like the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), a mandatory camp that gathers graduates from Nigerian universities below the age of 30. To reduce this bias, a maximum number of ten individuals for each gender was assigned to any large congregation, and in most of the cases, the congregations showed were not wearing face masks. Ndinojuo (2019) identified this limitation as an unintended bias of content analysis where the researcher relies on his interpretation and analysis of newspaper texts and images. He advised that to curtail this bias, coding rules should be set up early in the study to guide image and text selection, and their analysis.

Regarding the gender of those in the images, findings highlighted that men were more likely to wear face masks compared to women, just as men were also most likely not to wear face masks. What this entails is the dominance of men over women in the news. Because the men dominate the women when it comes to who is being reported, the quantitative data would hence be in their favor when measuring the adoption of face mask use in public. The findings partially support the view of Lee et al. (2020), they revealed that males were less likely than females to wear masks, as wearing a mask rubs off negatively on their masculinity. Also, men have an invincibility perception where they tend to perceive themselves as less susceptible to contracting the disease and its health-related consequences. This study cannot sufficiently test this view, but what can be perceived is the male dominance over females in issues being reported, and this is supported by the patrilineal culture of the Nigerian society generally (Amobi, 2013; Dogo, 2014).

## **6.8 The frames associated with news about face masks**

The frames used in the reportage of face masks by Nigerian newspapers were summarized in mutually exclusive frames and the findings produced 17 frames through a deductive coding process. Five prevalent frames were captured across the four newspapers analyzed. Advisory Donation and production frames might have been expected to be prevalent because of the nature of the frames; governments will issue advisories during such pandemics (as seen in NCDC, 2020a, 2020b), and the shortages of medical equipment will make “production” of such

equipment vital, one should, therefore, expect governments, corporate organizations and wealthy individuals to make donations to assist government and communities battling the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic. What was unanticipated was the prevalence of “Crime” and “Punitive” frames. All the newspapers reported about crimes being committed in the process of ensuring compliance with government directive of wearing a face mask in public, the crimes, and punitive measures were attributed to both private citizens and security operatives. As described by Atoyebi (2020), Eleweke (2020) and Obaji (2020), some of the punitive measures and crimes credited to security operatives include denial of access, arrest, rape, and in the most severe cases extrajudicial murder.

When reconciling the framing narrative and the prevalent frames found in this study, Yousaf (2015) reminded us of the impact of media communication and the impact of words, images, and presentation style in audience perception of the message. The advisory informs the public about safety protocols and what actions to take if an infection is suspected, the donation frame reminds the public that government and corporate bodies are supporting efforts in ensuring relief gets to those who are in need, while the production frame provides information that, although there may not be enough equipment, efforts are being made to ramp up production to ensure there is little or no shortage of face masks and other essential materials needed to fight the viral pandemic.

Crime and punitive frames restate the consequences of not adhering to government protocols and to avoid an altercation with overzealous individuals and security agents who may step outside the bounds of the law when confronting people not wearing a face mask in public. This aligns with the views of Entman (1993) about the characteristics of framing, where selection and salience are fundamental. When analyzing the frames for this study, we found that the newspapers used salience in projecting “advisory” to inform the public, and “selection” was applied in making five of the prominent frames being made prominent across the newspapers over the other frames. Chong and Druckman (2007) opined that this selection is what manifests as the resulting frames when media reports are analyzed.

## **7 Conclusion and recommendation**

In conclusion, this research looked at how Nigerian newspapers framed face masks as one of the NPIs used in mitigating

the spread of Covid-19 in their news reports. This is an ever-changing field as new information keeps emerging as scientists try to understand how to reduce the spread of infection and death rates while research on the vaccine is being updated and the available ones being made rolled out steadily. Findings revealed that there are face mask stories every five days on average and this may not be enough to remind the public about the dangers of not wearing a face mask in public. Advisory and Donation frames were the dominant frames found from the news articles in the selected Nigerian newspapers.

Newspapers have a mass platform that should be leveraged to provide guidance information to the public on protocols put in place to safeguard lives and businesses and ensure humanity emerges stronger from this pandemic. The numbers of international stories about face masks also underscore the global nature of the pandemic and how its effects have been felt across national, regional, and continental boundaries. To stop the spread of Covid-19, it is important everyone follows government advisory, especially in public, and face mask adoption is important in stopping communitywide infections. A limitation of this study was the use of digital editions of newspapers, future studies can use physical versions to ascertain if the findings will be consistent. Also, future studies can extend the media forms to include television and radio reportage of face masks.

## NOTES

- 1 Table's caption: \*Local – News within Nigeria / \*International – Stories that focus on other countries other than Nigeria / \*Neutral – Stories that location is not mentioned.
- 2 Table's caption: \*Stories – Total number of news about face masks in Nigerian newspapers / \*Select – Stories with information on how to select a face mask / \*Wear – Stories with information on how to wear a face mask / \*Care – Stories with information on how to care for and disposal of a face mask.

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