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**NATIONAL NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF HEALTH ISSUES IN NIGER DELTA,
NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

This study was set out to ascertain the national newspaper coverage of health issues in Niger Delta, Nigeria. The objectives were to examine the frequency of health issues in Niger Delta covered by *The Sun*, *The Vanguard* and *The Nation* among others. The population of the study consisted of 312 editions of the three newspapers published between 6th of June, 2021 to 5th of June 2022: a study period of one year, (each newspaper contributing 104 issues). Philip Meyer's guide for sample selection was adopted to select 248 issues of the three newspapers as the sample of the study. Data were presented in tables and analysis done using simple percentages. Findings of the study revealed that *The Sun* newspaper carried the most number of stories on the health issues in Niger Delta; that the health issues in Niger Delta were mostly portrayed in a positive way by the three newspapers under study and that the major health issues covered by the three newspapers under study were soot related issues. The study concluded that the three newspapers gave the health issues in Niger Delta positive portrayal in their reportage, but projected the health issues in a positive light. It was therefore recommended be alive to their social responsibility and agenda setting functions by offering a balanced and neutral reportage of issues in Niger Delta or negatively portraying them unnecessarily.

Keywords: Newspapers, coverage, health, issues, Niger Delta

Introduction

Since oil was discovered in commercial quantity in Niger Delta region, most communities as the exploration and exploitation are carried out have continued to experience serious environmental degradation as a result of pollution arising from oil spillage, gas flaring, crude oil exploration, pipeline rupture, leaking tanks, oil pollution, abrasion equipment/corrosion, ecological destruction, illegal refinery (Kpo-fire/bunkering) and oil facilities (Okinono, 2013). These had adversely affected

man's socio-cultural activity in the area. Oil spills bleed into the soil, affecting crops and killing plants lives. Oil also run-off into fresh water streams, rivers and lakes, poisoning drinking water, increasing cancer rates, premature births, respiratory illness and destroying native ecosystems. The Niger Delta region began to experience health problems especially, respiratory health issues such as soot, tuberculosis, dysentery, schistomansis, River blindness, typhoid, skin sickness, meningitis, measles, diarrhoea as soon as Shell Oil Company injected a million litres of waste into an abandoned oil well (Orhadahwe, 2016). Many in the area complained of vomiting, cough, dizziness etc. Independent test carried out shows that the substance injected into the land was toxic, yet Shell and Federal government claimed it was not and nothing was done about it, as the people of the area have to suffer for it (Ugochukwu, *et al.*, 2013).

Similarly, Ogoni Star Newspaper, February 7, 2002, observed that oil spills was devastating the farming and fishing community of Baranyowa Dere in Gokana Local Government Area of Rivers State, yet nothing was actually done about it. To the extent, the Niger Delta in recent times has been engulfed in crisis of instability caused by protesting oil community agitating for environmental protection. From Okoluba to Ogidigen; Ogbotobo to Bonny; Ogoni to Iko; Gbaram to Obagi; Umuchem to Peremabiri; Kota to Erema; Egbema to Edagberietc protest, sometimes violence have become a frequently occurring phenomenon. These communities on their part have charged the companies for insensitivity to their crises which are the failure to provide relief material in times of spillage, payment of inadequate compensation, etc. these issues mentioned have also caused demonstrations at Otuasage, Odidi, Biseni, Olugbe, Boro, Permabin, Ogulagha, Oloibin, Akenfa, Okporoma, Rukpoku, Uzere, Obagi, Owazaetc (Ugochukwu, *et al.*, 2013).

In some cases, especially the riverine communities, spilled oil are not cleaned up by the companies but are left for the benevolence of the tidal waves which carry the crude oil off the driver down to the mangrove forest, creeks and rivers far from the point of spillage, hence both terrestrial and aquatic lives destroyed resulting to respiratory health issues and other health problems. In fact, government inability to control pollution is evident by the tardiness with which government responds to critical issues such as this and this indiscipline constantly demonstrated by agencies responsible for monitoring pollution (Agalume, 2009).

The media play a crucial role in the socialisation and education of members of the society in which it operate. The media affect us in many ways: as a major socialising influence, a carrier of culture, a source of information, health, entertainment, a key player in political communication and participatory democracy and a communicator of ideological values, norms, attributes and beliefs (Enobakhare&Ochonogor, 2012). The indispensability of the media is incontestable going by the plethora of responsibilities placed on the media by the constitutions of various democratic societies. The media as the fourth estate of the realm saddled with the responsibility of upholding and advancing democratic ideals because the press from the classical liberal theory views the press as a defender of public interests and watchdog on the workings of government. Since then, journalism is seen as truly an estate of the realm, more articulate and more powerful than other estates (Ashraf, 2013).

Interestingly enough, the press perform its primary function in informing the public on issues considered critical and germane to societal development; articulate public opinion objectively, guide

and act as a check on government and individual. The slogan- the media as the fourth estate of the realm is what links the press to the society through an ideological resonance. The media equally represent and construct conceptions of what constitutes a successful and valued life; along with what is considered to be deficient, deviant, marginalized or undesirable. In a way, the media exert influence on identity and character formation as well as defining who we are including other issues which have to do with stigma, self-esteem, social relations, economic and political positions (Paletset *al.*, 2013).

Similarly, talking about the power of the press (media), Dennis and Merrill (1999) clearly assert that the media are quite powerful. Without contradiction, Dennis and Merrill obviously considered and agreed with the hypodermic needle model of media effects where the media infected the minds of individuals directly with powerful messages. In a way, the media tell us what to think about and how to think, which constitute the theoretical issues of agenda setting and framing. As part of the perceived role of the mass media, the press or mass media are obligated to present ideas and information that will enlighten and widen the horizons of the citizens to prepare the citizens to take independent and rational decisions for self-actualisation. Besides, another important role of the media is that the media are obliged to provide reasoned independent information to the citizens while carrying out watchdog roles on the government.

Communication is bedrock to development, communicating on health issues especially respiratory health issue like soot should not be classified as non-profit making reportage. However, it is believed that the media do not give adequate coverage to education as a sector, perhaps, this accounts for why newspapers in Nigeria only dedicate a day in a week to address education issues unlike politics, advertorials, business and sports which constitute daily contents of news tabloids (Udoudo, 2013). The media are believed to be the vanguard of societal emancipation right from the colonial days in Nigeria by setting agenda for the public opinion leaders and the public.

Statement of the Problem

The Niger Delta has for decades lived with all manner of environmental hazards linked to crude oil exploitation. These range from massive oil spills to acid rains from gas flaring and the proliferation of illegal refineries. These have reduced the life expectancy of the people as their farmlands, fishing resources and even sources of drinkable water have been severely polluted. The residents of the area have been faced with the risk of having to live with soot deposits culminating in asthma, tuberculosis, bronchitis, coronary heart disease and some other respiratory illness. The Federal Ministry of Health Abuja (2021) reports that, about 17,302,419 persons had died in the oil rich Niger Delta region from 2010 to 2021, and these deaths were recorded as a result from illness.

Most communities where the exploration and exploitation are carried out have continued to experience serious environmental degradation as a result of pollution arising from oil spillage, gas flaring and this have adversely affected their socio-cultural activity in the area. In some cases, especially the riverine communities, spilled oil are not cleaned up by the companies but are left for the benevolence of the tidal waves which carry the crude oil off the driver down to the mangrove forest, creeks and rivers far from the point of spillage, hence both terrestrial and aquatic lives destroyed resulting to respiratory health issues and other health problems.

These illness and soot issue have given the media, particularly the national dailies such as *The Nation*, *The Vanguard*, and *The Sun* newspapers opportunities to report health issues of Niger Delta

region to the masses. The question is how have these national dailies report Niger Delta health issues, especially in the light of one health issue over the other. The amount of report an issue gets determines to a very large extent, public knowledge about the issue. Such reportage also sets the agenda for public discussion and shape public opinion and perception about an issue or region. In this light it is expected that the amount, frequency and portrayal of coverage of health issues in the Niger Delta would go a long way in shaping the way Nigerians and, indeed, the world perceive the region. Therefore, this study set to assess the newspaper coverage of health issues in Niger Delta through content analysis of *The Nation*, *The Vanguard*, and *The Sun* from June, 2021 to June, 2022.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this research was to provide an in-depth understanding of newspaper coverage of health issues in Niger Delta through content analysis of the *The Nation*, *The Vanguard*, and *The Sun* newspapers. More specifically, the study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the frequency of health issues in Niger Delta covered by *The Nation*, *The Vanguard*, and *The Sun* newspapers.
2. To determine the portrayal of health issues in Niger Delta by *The Nation*, *The Vanguard*, and *The Sun* newspapers.
3. To find out the major sources of health issues in Niger Delta covered by *The Nation*, *The Vanguard*, and *The Sun* newspapers

Literature Review

Media landscape in Nigeria

The media development in Nigeria and Africa at large has been described as a product of colonialism (Oso, 2012) and can be regarded as a reflection of the political development of African continent. The media in Africa in terms of the ownership systems, their character, strengths and weaknesses, their political and social outlooks and their outputs and impacts, are all products of the societies that have formed and shaped them. With particular reference to Nigeria, studies have shown that Nigeria has the most vibrant and robust media landscape in Africa (Oso, et al., 2011). Oso (2012) observes that the Nigerian mass media emerged as a colonial product, then turned to be an ideological and political apparatus for the Nigerian nationalists to advance the cause of national independence. The media-scape in Nigeria later developed within the dynamics of the nation's political economy.

Media and Health Communication Campaign

Health communication has been seen as the study and use of communication strategies to inform, influence and motivate individuals' decisions to improve health and enhance quality of life. Rice and Atkin (2013) describe health communication as purposed attempts to raise awareness of improved knowledge about or influence behaviour related to health issues in large audience within a specific period, using an organised set of communication activities and featuring an array of mediated messages of multiple benefits to individuals.

Empirical Review

Asemah (2015) conducted a survey on “A content analysis of newspaper coverage of health issues in Nigeria.” The objectives were among others to determine the extent to which the two newspapers cover health issues. Quantitative research design was adopted, employing content analysis. Findings showed that the coverage was relatively low. From the findings, the coverage of health issues was very low compared to the preference given to politics, business, economics and even sports reports. Based on the findings, the study concluded that newspaper coverage of health issues was low. The reviewed study and the current study are related as both studies focus on newspaper coverage and health issues. But whereas the reviewed study focused on content analysis of newspaper coverage of health issues in Nigeria, the present study focuses on national newspaper coverage of health issues in Niger Delta, Nigeria. The area of divergence is on the objectives and the scope

Sodeinde and Konu (2022) carried a research on “Newspaper coverage and awareness of endometriosis among women who are employees of Babcock University.” A content analysis of four Nigerian newspapers in the year 2019 and a survey were conducted. Of the 1,460 editions analysed, the study found only 21 reports on endometriosis. None of the reports was featured on the front and back pages of the newspapers. This represents a poor coverage which undermines the mass media’s role in health awareness and promotion. The awareness rate of endometriosis among the female employees of Babcock University was low. The women were not aware that endometriosis may cause infertility and that pelvic pain is a symptom of endometriosis. The reviewed work and the pioneer study are related as both studies hinged on newspaper coverage and health issues. But whereas the reviewed study centred on newspaper coverage and awareness of endometriosis among women who are employees of Babcock University, the current study focuses on the national newspaper coverage of health issues in Niger Delta, Nigeria. The difference is on the objectives and the scope.

Chinedu-Okeke et al., (2021) carried a study on “newspaper coverage of covid-19 issues in Nigeria. The study examined the Nigerian newspapers’ coverage on the fight against COVID-19 using the Guardian, Daily Sun, Daily Trust, and This Day Newspapers as a study. Using content analysis, the study analysed the COVID-19 reports published in the three selected Nigerian newspapers from March 2020 to July 2020 to determine their level of coverage, prominence and reportorial approaches given to COVID-19 issues in Nigeria. The analysed data showed that Nigerian newspapers gave wide coverage to COVID-19 issues. The study also found that majority of COVID-19 coverage and reports in the selected Nigerian dailies were published in the forms of hard news, features and editorials. The reviewed study and the present study are related as both studies focus on newspaper coverage and health issues in Nigeria. But the difference is on the objectives and scope.

Talabiet al., (2019) did a content analysis of newspaper coverage of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) campaign. This study examined newspaper coverage of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) campaign in Nigeria with aim to know the importance attached to the issue of sustainable development in Nigeria. Four national newspapers: The Punch, The Guardian, Nigerian Tribune and The Nation were used for the study. Content analysis was adopted as the research design. The population of the study was 2,188 editions published within January 2016 to June 2017. However, simple random sampling technique was used to select the sample size of 1,152 while, coding sheet and coding manual were instruments used to collect data. The data were analysed

using percentages and frequency distribution tables. Findings revealed that, although Nigerian newspapers presented SDGs campaign with a positive tone, nevertheless, the campaign publications were in form of news-story presentations, while the presentations were to a large extent placed inside the pages. The reviewed study and the current study are related as both studies focus on newspaper coverage. The area of divergence is on the objectives and scope.

Theoretical framework

The Agenda Setting

The basic premise of agenda-setting theory is that the way in which news media report particular issues influences and helps to shape public awareness and debate (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In much the same way that a committee agenda ranks items to reflect their significance, with the least consequential matters receiving only scant attention or not being discussed at all, media agendas reflect a process of selection (prioritising) with certain issues enjoying sustained and prominent coverage in news reports while others are relatively marginalised or ignored. In this sense, agenda-setting theory has clear affinities with news framing and media effects. In a classic formulation of agenda setting, the suggestion is new media and mass communication that while the media do not tell us what to think, they may tell us what to think about (Nwamara & Etumnu, 2022). Agenda setting, however, does not posit a simple uni-directional model in which news media set the priorities for public debate, but suggests that typically a number of contesting agendas vie for prominence (Folarin, 1998).

The relevance of this theory to the study is evident in the sense that the study is only interested in looking at the thematic contents of newspapers on health issues pages. Any content that is published in the newspaper is what the media want the public to know and subsequently telling us on what to think about. The media content therefore is a reference point to audience public sphere of discussion and any publication on health issues is therefore the media agenda set for that moment.

The social Responsibility Media Theory

The social responsibility media theory was propounded by F.S. Siebert, T.B. Peterson and W. Schramm in 1963 (Anaeto *et al* 2008). This theory was propounded to checkmate the abuse of the press freedom as guaranteed in the libertarian press theory. Precisely, the social responsibility media theory advances that if the press enjoy absolute press freedom then such a freedom carries “concomitant obligations”. That is the press is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying out certain functions of mass communication (Anaeto, *et al* 2008).

The study adopts the social responsibility media theory based on assumption that media, as the fourth estate of the realm are obligated to the society (audience) to furnish the audience with well-articulated information that will drive the audience to take independent decisions for either self or societal emancipation. Today, it is practically impossible to separate man from the media and media consumption in every home is becoming immeasurable.

Consequently, if media accept and fulfil certain essential obligations, then, the ministry of health and environmental sectors should partner with the media to let the government and members of the society know about the salient problems affecting the quality and state of health in Niger Delta region. As said earlier, health reportage should not be a spontaneous or reactive reportage but, there

should be dedicated columns for opinion, features, editorials and analysis to focus on critical issues bothering on health related issues among others.

Methodology

Research design

The method used in gathering data for this study was content analysis. The aim of content analysis is to analyse the content of a document in a systematic and objective manner such that if different researchers engage in the same study, and use the same process, they would arrive at the same findings (Alphonsus et al., 2022). The study adopted content analysis because it is most suitable technique that could be used to ascertain the extent of coverage accorded to health issues in Niger delta by the national newspapers in the region from June, 2021 to June, 2022. The period of the study (2021-2022) was purposively chosen based on timeliness as a core news value. This was the critical period when the health issues in the Niger Delta assumed a more attention with devastating effects for the region. The contents of the threenewspapers were carefully analysed to determine the direction or tilt of press coverage given to the Niger Delta health issues, or the frequency and portrayal of coverage given to the issues during the period. The population of the study was all the editions of the *The Sun*, *The Nation*, and *The Vanguard* newspapers published between 6th of June, 2021 to 5th of June, 2022.

The purposive selection of the three national dailies was therefore based on their national spread or wide circulation and the fact that they were readily available on the news-stands every day. Another purpose for selecting the three national newspapers was that they allocated some pages exclusively to Niger Delta issues on a daily basis. The three newspapers under study appear on the news stand twice a week; this then means that a total of 312 editions of these newspapers were published within this period. A breakdown of the population shows that 104 editions were published by each of these newspapers as each is published twice a week. Therefore, the population of this study consists of 312 editions of *The Sun*, *The Nation*, and *The Vanguard* newspapers published within the study duration.

The researchers drew a relevant and representative sample for the study. In view of this, Philip Meyer's recommendation of 248 was adopted to represent the population since the total population falls below 1,000. Meyer recommends that for a population within this range, 248 as the sample size is representative enough. Therefore, 248 editions of the newspapers made up the sample of the study. Since the sample was 248, this number was divided by the three newspapers under study with two editions remaining. The two remaining editions were added to the two oldest among the three, which were *The Vanguard* and *The Nation* newspapers. Therefore, *The Vanguard*, and *The Nation* had 83 copies each, while *The Sun* had 82 editions. The unit of analysis could be a single word or a symbol, a single assertion about a subject or an entire article or story. In this study, the units of analysis were straight news reports, features, letters-to-editors, editorials, cartoons and supplements about the respiratory health issues in Niger Delta region. The content categories are the health issues such as soot, food poisoning, tuberculosis, Cholera and Diarrhoea, skin sickness and Measles.

To ensure reliability of the instrument used for this research as well as researcher non-bias, and also to reduce the margin of error, a professional coder was employed to assist the researcher in coding the content categories. This was followed by an inter-coder reliability test. The categories independently recorded (coded) by the two coders were compared. A total of twelve (12) items were categorised. The two coders agreed on seven and disagreed on five (5). The difference in categories was correlated using the Holsti agreement formula:

$$r = \frac{2(C1.2)}{C1 + C2}$$

The correlation coefficient r was equal 0.87 which validated the coding categories and indicated that the instrument was reliable.

The data for this study were collected using the coding sheet. The coding producers involved the coders spotting and placing the contents based on the content categories created for the study. This work used content analysis method of research to gather data from *The Sun*, *The Nation*, and *The Vanguard* newspapers published between June 6th, 2021 to June 5th, 2022. The data were recorded on coding sheets having gone through pilot coding and it took the researchers and their team about two weeks to code the contents of the sampled newspapers. Content analysis is a method most suitable for the study of manifest content of document. The data obtained from coding of newspaper contents were arranged in tabular format. This format made presentation clear and calculation of percentage scores feasible. The data were then described and interpreted in the light of objectives and research questions set at the onset of the study.

Results:

Table I: Frequency of Health Issues Items in Niger Delta Covered by Newspapers

S/N	Newspapers	No. of Editions Coded	No. of Items	Percentage
1.	<i>The Sun</i>	82	69	39
2.	<i>The Vanguard</i>	83	58	33
3.	<i>The Nation</i>	83	49	28
	Total	248	176	100

The data presented in the Table above indicated that The Sun newspaper carried the most number of stories on the health issues in Niger Delta compared to the other two newspapers.

Table II: Portrayal of Health Issues in Niger Delta by *The Sun* Newspaper

S/N	Issues/Portrayals	Positive	Negative	Balanced	Neutral	Total
1.	Soot	17 (9%)	3 (2%)	0 (0%)	2 (1%)	22 (12%)
2.	Food Poisoning	6	0	3	2	11

		(3%)	(0%)	(2%)	(1%)	(6%)
3.	Tuberculosis	0	5	3	2	10
		(0%)	(3%)	(2%)	(1%)	(6%)
4.	Cholera/Diarrhoea	3	9	2	3	17
		(2%)	(5%)	(1%)	(2%)	(10%)
5.	Skin sickness/Measles	6	0	0	3	9
		(3%)	(0%)	(0%)	(0%)	(5%)
Total		32	17	8	12	69
		(17%)	(10%)	(5%)	(7%)	(39%)

As indicated in Table II, it was revealed that the health issues in Niger Delta region of Nigeria were mostly portrayed in a positive way by *The Sun*. Data also showed that Soot was the most positively portrayed issues in *The Sun newspaper*.

Table III: Portrayal of Health Issues in Niger Delta Covered by *The Nation*

S/N	Issues/Portrayals	Positive	Negative	Balanced	Neutral	Total
1.	Soot	15	0	7	2	24
		(8%)	(0%)	(4%)	(1%)	(14%)
2.	Food Poisoning	0	5	0	2	7
		(0%)	(3%)	(0%)	(1%)	(5%)
3.	Tuberculosis	4	0	2	0	6
		(2%)	(0%)	(1%)	(0%)	(3%)
4.	Cholera/Diarrhoea	0	7	3	2	12
	Skin sickness/Measles	(0%)	(4%)	(2%)	(1%)	(7%)
5.		6	0	3	0	9
		(3%)	(0%)	(2%)	(0%)	(5%)
Total		19	12	12	6	49
		(10%)	(7%)	(7%)	(3%)	(28%)

The data presented in the Table III showed that health issues in Niger Delta were mostly portrayed in a positive way by *The Nation newspaper*. This was followed by negative and balanced portrayals respectively.

Table IV: Portrayal of Health Issues in Niger Delta Covered by *Vanguard newspaper*

S/N	Issues/Portrayals	Positive	Negative	Balanced	Neutral	Total
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National Newspaper Coverage of Health Issues in Niger Delta, Nigeria?

1.	Soot	13 (7%)	0 (0%)	2 (1%)	5 (3%)	20 (11%)
2.	Food Poisoning	7 (4%)	0 (0%)	3 (2%)	0 (0%)	10 (6%)
3.	Tuberculosis	0 (0%)	5 (3%)	2 (1%)	0 (0%)	7 (4%)
4.	Cholera/Diarrhoea	0 (0%)	10 (5%)	3 (2%)	0 (0%)	13 (7%)
5.	Skin sickness/Measles	3 (2%)	0 (0%)	2 (1%)	3 (2%)	8 (5%)
	Total	23 (13%)	15 (8%)	12 (7%)	8 (5%)	58 (33%)

The data presented in Table IV revealed that health issues in Niger Delta were mostly portrayed in a positive way by *The Vanguard newspaper*. This was followed by negative portrayals. However, data showed that Soot issues were the most positively portrayed while Skin sickness and Measles were the most negatively portrayed issues in the newspaper.

Table V: Major Health Issues in Niger Delta Covered by the Newspapers

S/N	Issues	<i>The Sun</i>	<i>The Nation</i>	<i>The Vanguard</i>	Total
1.	Soot	22 (12%)	15 (9%)	20 (11%)	57 (33%)
2.	Food Poisoning	9 (5%)	6 (3%)	8 (5%)	23 (13%)
3.	Tuberculosis	10 (6%)	12 (7%)	7 (4%)	29 (16%)
4.	Cholera/Diarrhoea	17 (10%)	7 (4%)	13 (7%)	37 (21%)
5.	Skin sickness/Measles	11 (6%)	9 (5%)	10 (6%)	30 (17%)
	Total	69 (39%)	49 (28%)	58 (33%)	176 (100%)

The data presented in the Table above showed that the majority of the health issues covered by the three newspapers under study were soot related-issues. This was followed by issues on Cholera and Diarrhoea about the health issues in Niger Delta.

Discussion of Findings

From the data presented and analysed which infer the newspaper coverage of health issues in Niger Delta through content analysis of *The Sun*, *The Vanguard*, and *The Nation* newspaper from June, 2020 to June, 2021. Research objective one: examine the frequency of health issues in Niger delta covered by *The Sun*, *The Vanguard*, and *The Nation* newspaper. The answer to this question one is presented in table I. The data presented in this table revealed that *The Sun*, *the Vanguard* and *The Nation* newspapers carried the much number of stories on the health issues in Niger Deltabut *The Sun* carried most number of stories on the health issues in Niger Delta compared to other newspapers. This finding is in tandem with Chinedu-Okeke et al., (2021), when found that the Nigerian newspapers gave wide coverage to COVID-19 issues. Conversely, this finding equally refutes the study of Asemah (2015) as found that the coverage of health issues was very low compared to the preference given to politics, business, economics and even sports reports. The agenda setting theory in which this study is anchored gives backing to this finding as the theory posits that any content that is published in the newspaper is what the media want the public to know and subsequently telling us on what to think about. The media content therefore is a reference point to audience public sphere of discussion and any publication on health issues is therefore the media agenda set for that moment. Also, agenda setting theory proposes that the idea or information which people have about public issues tend to be proportionate to the amount of emphasis place on such issues by the media. This implies that the way the media see and regard issues is the same way the masses would regard such issues.

Finding in objective two revealed that the health issues in Niger Delta were mostly portrayed in a positive way by the three newspapers under study. This was followed by the issues being given negative portrayal, balanced portrayal and neutral portray. This finding corroborates the study of Talabiet al., (2019) as stated that Nigerian newspapers presented SDGs campaign with a positive tone, nevertheless, the campaign publications were in form of news-story presentations, while the presentations were to a large extent placed inside the pages. However, the findings of this study are supported by the social responsibility media theory that underpinned this study. The theory states that media, as the fourth estate of the realm are obligated to the society (audience) to furnish the audience with well-articulated information that will drive the audience to take independent decisions for either self or societal emancipation. Health reportage should not be a spontaneous or reactive reportage but, there should be dedicated columns for opinion, features, editorials and analysis to focus on critical issues bothering on health related issues among others.

Further findings from objective three revealed that the major health issues covered by the three newspapers under study were soot issues. This was followed by cholera and diarrhoea, skin sickness and measles, tuberculosis and food poisoning respectively. This finding refutes the finding of Sodeinde and Konu (2022) when found that Of the 1,460 editions analysed, the study found only 21 reports on endometriosis. None of the reports was featured on the front and back pages of the newspapers. This represents a poor coverage which undermines the mass media's role in health awareness and promotion. Lending credence to the account of Udoakah (2003), the press as the watchdog of the society barks at strange things thereby alerting members of the society to rise and

fight the abnormality or evil in the society. The agenda setting theory that this study anchored on supports this finding as Anaeto (2003) in expanding the agenda setting theory states that the media set agenda for general discussion in the public through the number of times an issue is reported. The use of headlines and choice of placement of issues by the media help in building public debates in the society.

Conclusion

From the findings of the study as summarized above, it is concluded here that the three newspapers gave the health issues in Niger Delta positive portrayal in their reportage, but projected the health issues in a positive light. Also, since *The Sun* newspaper carried more stories on health issues in Niger Delta than the other the three newspapers, it would be safe to conclude that it is either their Niger Delta region correspondents is the most active and effective among the correspondents of the three newspapers or that the newspaper is the most Niger Delta-friendly among the newspaper under study

The study also concludes that to achieve human security and health of the Niger Delta, greater collaboration in the fight against environmental degradation and pollution is a step in the right direction. The government, regional and international organizations, non-governmental organizations and local communities should help to establish the problem arising from the Niger Delta region. Also, the Nigerian media can adopt a peculiar news pattern of coverage brings the Niger Delta Health issues to a limelight to get the attention of the government to stand in better position to help to curb or mitigate the menace. It equally establishes that the Nigerian press is far from being developmental in their pattern of covering regional health issues.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following suggestions or recommendations have been made:

- i) The media should be alive to their social responsibility and agenda setting functions by offering a balanced and neutral reportage of issues in Niger Delta or negatively portraying them unnecessarily.
- ii) Newspaper journalists should spend time to carry out thorough investigations, make personal observation and confirm their facts before going to press.
- iii) The Nigerian press should renew attention towards enriching its reports with depth while being proactively disposed towards advocacy journalism as the watchdog of the society.

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