



**FRAMING OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN NEWSPAPER CARTOONS DURING  
THE FIRST 35 DAYS OF THE LOCKDOWN IN NIGERIA**

**Yusuf Mu'azu**

Department of Mass Communication  
University of Maiduguri  
ymuazu@gmail.com

**Jude Melea Moses**

Department of Mass Communication  
University of Maiduguri  
ORCID iD  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3455-8323>  
mailmelea@gmail.com

**Michael Bitrus Mingyi**

Department of Mass Communication  
University of Maiduguri  
mcmingyi1691@gmail.com

**Abstract**

The outbreak of the novel coronavirus and its containment approaches have clearly indicated the unpreparedness of different countries around the world to handle global health emergencies. Nigeria as the most populous black race in the world and the first sub-Saharan country to record the disease on February 27, 2020, quickly went into action by imposing restrictions on movements to stop the spread of the virus. In addition, the mass media was included as a frontline sector being purveyors of information on the novel coronavirus. This study examines newspaper cartoon framing of the COVID-19 pandemic, in *The Punch*, *Daily Trust*, *Leadership*, and *The Guardian* newspapers, during the first 35 days of the government-imposed lockdown in Nigeria. This study adopts a content analysis research design to fill the knowledge gap on the current state of how newspaper cartoons were employed during the COVID-19 global crisis. A total of 98 cartoons on COVID-19 were found in 102 newspaper editions during the period. Finding from the study indicated that newspaper cartoons accompanied with texts were employed on a daily basis by *The Punch*, *Daily Trust*, *Leadership*, and *The Guardian* newspapers in Nigeria to share information on the coronavirus. Further findings indicated that the preventive illustration frame was the dominant frame used during the lockdown. The study recommends more illustration-oriented cartoons (without texts) for the benefit of those that cannot read cartoon illustrated text.

Keywords: COVID-19 Lockdown, Newspaper Cartoons, Framing, health communication, Nigeria



## Introduction

It is no longer a question of whether newspaper cartoons are integral parts of newspaper content but rather the nature of issues covered and how these issues are framed. Despite the elitist nature of newspapers, cartoons appeal to both the educated and uneducated. This form of art contributes to the spread of knowledge and information to the educated, half-educated, and uneducated because, without words, a picture could tell a story better than a million words. Cartoons according to Alkhresheh (2020), which have become prominent in newspapers since the advent of journalism as a field, now enjoy a position of a stakeholder in Nigeria's media space. This is possible through the way newspaper cartoonists use analogy, humour, satire, exaggeration, and labelling to put across an issue of public concern into the public domain.

One of the issues that have recently attracted the attention of newspaper cartoonists in Nigeria is the novel coronavirus-19, which is also known as COVID-19. Arguably, COVID-19 which started in Wuhan Province of Hubei, China in 2019 has in less than one year travelled the world; shutting down economies, transportation, socialization, and leaving 565,207,160 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 6,373,739 deaths as of 19 July 2022 (WHO, 2022). The outbreak of the coronavirus-19 has indeed challenged the effectiveness of the existing public health information dissemination mechanism. Because of the dangers posed by COVID-19 and the paucity of information about its treatment and the availability of an effective vaccine, prevention was considered the best cure since the means of transmission of the virus has to be through physical contact with the respiratory droplets of an infected person (WHO, 2020).

The availability of information on safety strategies and prevention measures will undoubtedly help the populace to understand ways they can stay safe. Such information is vital but, the ability of individuals to develop appropriate healthy behaviours is germane to curtailing the wide and fast spread of the virus. Hence, health information that is supposed to ignite appropriate healthy behaviours must be constructed in a way and manner that the information will be easy to retain and recall by the populace, and newspaper cartoon is an excellent tool to achieve that purpose.

As the effects of COVID-19 gripped the entire world, the Nigerian government quickly went into action considering the nature of the spread of the disease and how it could overwhelm the already poor health sector in the country. The Nigerian government, therefore, imposed



restrictions: lockdowns, stay-at-home, physical distancing, curfews, and other preventive measures to stem the spread of the deadly novel disease. To support the government's efforts, the mass media was added as part of the frontline workers – given the responsibilities of media workers in mobilising the public and providing behavioural change communication during health emergencies.

This study investigates how newspaper cartoons, which are an essential content of the newspaper were used in framing the COVID-19 pandemic. The effectiveness of newspaper cartoons to communicate vital information is considered essential during health emergencies. Nwakpu, Ezena, and Ogbodo (2020) posit that whenever a health emergency such as the outbreak of COVID-19 manifests, information flow is usually overwhelming hence, requires extra care in the ways the media frame the virus for public consumption because media contents have effects on their audience. They added that the media coverage of the novel coronavirus was high, but a gap exists in the role newspaper cartoons played in the coverage of the novel disease.

### **Objectives of the study**

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Identify the frequency of newspaper cartoons on the coronavirus-19 during the lockdown.
2. Determine the kinds of frames used in the COVID-19-related cartoons in the four selected newspapers.
3. Ascertain the dominant frame used in the COVID-19- related cartoons in the selected newspapers.
4. Examine the tone of the cartoons framed by the newspapers.

### **Statement of the problem**

The Outbreak of the novel coronavirus-19 clearly indicated the unpreparedness of different countries around the world to handle global health emergencies. Nigeria as the most populous black race in the world and the first sub-Saharan country to record the COVID-19 virus on February 27, 2020, quickly went into action by imposing restrictions on movements to stop the spread of the virus. In addition, the mass media were included as frontline workers to serve as an information link between the Nigerian government and information seekers on the novel disease in the country. Nwakpu, Ezena, and Ogbodo (2020) posit that information on



the pandemic was high, and the media achieved this through reporting COVID-19 issues using different genres of newspaper contents such as straight news, features, editorial, and opinions. Nwakpu Ezema, and Ogbodo (2020) added that the coverage of novel coronavirus was dominated by straight news, followed by opinions, features, and editorials. The extensive review of literature on the novel coronavirus revealed crucial yet unanswered research gaps that call for an in-depth examination of Newspaper Cartoon Framing of the COVID-19 Pandemic during the first 35 Days of the lockdown in Nigeria. This is to bring to the limelight the role newspaper cartoons played in information sharing on the deadly virus in Nigeria and to better understand the communication role of newspaper cartoons during health crises.

## **Literature Review**

### **Cartoon as a mass media tool**

Cartoon as a medium of communication has over the years been the subject of debate in different fields of study such as the media, politics, health, and marketing. It is another genre of communication that captures and sustains the attention of the audience usually in an entertaining manner, lightening the mood of the audience (Ahuja & Chhabra, 2002). Similarly, Rivers et al cited in Okere (2012) opine that as entertainment tools, cartoons provide respite for the individual which perhaps encourages him to continuously indulge himself with such palliative media messages. Cartoons are significant features in print, electronic, and social media through the use of caricature to communicate meaningful ideas on salient and trivial topics in a precise manner. Clearly, unlike straight news, editorials, columns, opinions, commentaries, and features, cartoons are parodies filled with humour and used to address important issues in a slight way (Okere, 2012).

There are different types of cartoons such as editorial cartoons, comic strips, and animated cartoons. Cartoons can be found in all the media of mass communication and seem to have been revolutionised by the advancement in information and communication technologies. It is not amazing to see cartoons used as tools for social change because they help to communicate the stand of newspapers on some pertinent national issues. They are used to sensitize both the educated and the uneducated people on important issues to influence positive reactions. According to Okere (2012), cartoons have proved to be very indispensable because while some individuals may not be literate enough to read and adequately understand the messages



contained in the news stories, they are still able to have an understanding of cartoons and the messages in such cartoons.

### **Cartoons and health communication**

The use of cartoons to disseminate health messages is advantageous because it allows readers to have access to life-saving information on COVID-19 such as the benefits of hand washing, social distancing, testing centres, and much more. As purveyors of information, newspaper cartoons are favourable because they are capable of communicating essential information, increasing awareness, and affecting a large number of people to engender positive health changes on a grand scale by enforcing positive health behaviour among individuals. Cartoon can be an effective tool for behavioural change because of the great influence it exerts on the readers with their hilarious images that stick to the mind of the readers (Okoro & Onakpa, 2016; Michelsen, 2009).

Okpara et al (2021) conducted a study on the moderating role of colour in modelling the effectiveness of COVID-19 YouTube animated cartoons on the health behaviour of social media users in Nigeria. The researchers employed a survey research method to sample 470 social media users in Nigeria exposed to YouTube COVID-19 animated cartoons. The researchers arrived at the sample size by using the G\*power program (Faul *et al.*, 2007) and the parameters were power  $(1-\beta)$  at 0.90, 0.30 effect size  $f$ , and  $\alpha=0.05$ . The results of the research revealed that colour significantly moderated the impact of COVID-19 on YouTube animated cartoons on the health behaviour of social media users. Further findings revealed that exposure to COVID-19 YouTube animated cartoons will significantly predict knowledge of the virus. The result also revealed that the recall of messages theme in COVID-19 YouTube animated cartoons significantly predicts health behaviour of social media users and that self-efficacy, task self-efficacy, coping self-efficacy, and outcome expectancy significantly predict health behaviour sustainability among social media users who are exposed to COVID-19 YouTube animated cartoon.

Similarly, Labbé et al (2022) conducted a study on the stigma and blame related to the COVID-19 pandemic on editorial cartoons in Canada. A content analysis method was used to collect and analysed 203 editorial cartoons from ten regional online newspapers from January 1, 2020, to March 31, 2021. A research assistant was used to collect data on cartoons on a daily or weekly basis depending on their frequencies. A total of 1564 cartoons on COVID-19 were identified and coded thematically in NVivo 13 using a deductive coding scheme



inspired by the taxonomy used by the World Health Organization's Information Network for Epidemics (WHO-EPIWIN). The study revealed that different segments of the Canadian population were blamed in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the beginning, blame was mostly placed on geographic or cultural "others" (people of Chinese ethnicity, foreigners, travellers, city dwellers) and later shifted to people who were not following public health recommendations. While negatively portraying these individuals may help promote adherence to the recommended measures, it also can exacerbate polarization, especially considering discrimination based on ethnicity and age observed early in the pandemic.

Studies by, Delp and Jones (1996) and Leiner, Handal and Williams (2004) have shown that health communication message disseminated through the medium of cartoons leads to higher message recall than textual versions of the same message among the audience. According to Onuora, Obasi, Ezeah, and Gever (2021), there were cartoons on YouTube sponsored by WHO to sensitize people of about the key aspects of health behaviour in respect of the COVID-19 preventive measures such as the use of facemask, social distancing, and staying at home. These cartoons were in the four major languages in Nigeria: English, Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba. Given the effectiveness of a cartoon as a medium for reaching people of different age strata, education levels, and languages in a humorous way, it also engages readers and helps them to stay informed on a range of issues relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. Whenever there is a health crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the amount of information flow can be overwhelming hence, requires extra care to minimise the risk of the health crisis. Thus, it is important to report the pandemic in a way that helps to douse the risk of the crisis rather than increase it. And one of the ways to do that, aside using straight news, features, and editorial, is the newspaper cartoon, which is an indispensable newspaper medium.

### **Media framing and COVID-19 pandemic**

Wilson and Abubakar (2018) noted that framing issues or events by the mass media are usually showcased in different content types. This according to Tankard et al, (1991) is a vital element in organising media contents through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and collaboration to provide context and suggest fundamental issues or events in the media. Zhou, Wang, Xia, Xiao and Tang (2020) investigated the effects of media reporting on mitigating the spread of COVID-19 in the early phase of the outbreak in China and opined that media reports have the potential to create awareness of the virus among the public and also to promote appropriate behaviour. The scholars submit that:



Media reporting about the COVID-19 may influence the attitude of the public towards the disease and enhance their self-protecting awareness. People informed by the media reports will change their behaviours and take correct precautions such as frequent hand-washing, wearing protective masks... (Zhou, Wang, Xia, Xiao and Tang, 2020 p. 2694).

Onwe, Chukwu, Nwamini, and Nwankwo (2020) noted that some online newspapers like *Sahara Reporters*, *Premium Times*, and the *Daily Post* framed the virus, emphasizing fear and death during the early phase of the COVID-19 disease. Some of the dominant frames identified by the researchers were the palliative frame, lockdown frame, and social distancing frame. Other frames identified by the study were rumour and misinformation frame, causes and transmission frame, fear and death frame, and government/political influence frame. The social responsibility of the media as the conscience of the people has continued to highlight the consequences of the lockdown and emphasised the need for health risk communication palliatives to enable the citizens to survive the lockdown directive by the government.

According to Msughter and Philips (2020) from January 2020 to March 2020, media coverage of COVID-19 was adequate. Political frames and economic frames received the highest article followed by the external regulation and reputation frames. Parvin, Ahsan, Rahman and Abedin (2020) examined the editorial and opinion sections of five e-newspapers in Asia. The study identifies eight categories of issues relating to COVID-19: health and drugs, preparedness and awareness, social welfare and humanity, the economy, governance and institutions, politics, the environment and wildlife, and innovation and technology. Findings revealed that in South Korea and Singapore, the economy and politics received more attention in March 2020. Other issues like health, preparedness, and social welfare were highlighted but the media gave the least priority to issues like environment and wildlife, innovation and technology, and the media. Parvin, Ahsan, Rahman and Abedin (2020) opined that in India and Bangladesh, the media gave much attention to health, preparedness and awareness.

Smith, Smith and Ajayi, (2020) in a study of six Nigerian newspapers' reportage on coronavirus concur that most of the story formats on the newspaper reportage of COVID-19 were straight news. The study also identified major issues covered by the media like the level of preparedness to confront COVID-19, treatment of COVID-19 patients, types of drugs and cure, restrictions of movement and economic shutdown. Similarly, Nwakpu, Ezena, and Ogbodo (2020) concurred that the majority of stories on COVID-19 were in news reports format. The study also identified various frames used by the media to frame the coronavirus



pandemic. Other sections of the newspaper like the editorial and opinion also carried stories on the virus.

Mu'azu and Moses (2021) studied newspaper framing of the Nigerian Government's COVID-19 Lockdown in the *Daily Trust* and *The Punch Newspapers*. A total of 2,007 newspaper items on COVID-19 were identified with findings revealing *The Punch* newspaper as having the highest number of COVID-19 stories (1,009), News had the highest number of stories, which stood at 1,753 (87.34%) followed by Features 220 (10.96%), and Editorials 34 (1.69%). Out of 2007 newspaper reports, prevention-oriented frames appeared the most with about 547 (27.25%).

While many studies (Mu'azu and Moses, 2021; Msughter and Philips, 2020; Onwe, Chukwu, Nwamini and Nwankwo 2020; Parvin, Ahsan, Rahman and Abedin, 2020; and Nwakpu, Ezena, and Ogbodo, 2020) have confirmed extensive newspaper coverage of COVID-19 pandemic, scholars have paid very little attention to how newspaper cartoons have been employed to frame the virus despite the appeal cartoons hold for both the well-educated and those with little education.

### **Theoretical framework**

This study employed the framing theory to examine Newspaper Cartoon Framing of the COVID-19 Pandemic during the First 35 Days of the lockdown in Nigeria. Wilson and Abubakar (2018) noted that framing is about methods through which the mass media organises and presents news contents. It is one of the media approaches used in communicating images and simplifying complex issues for members of the audience to understand events or issues. The choice of framing theory for this study, which is an extension of the Agenda Setting Theory, was based on the assumption of Entman (1993); Tankard (2003); Borah (2011) and Wakawa (2021) that through the use of different frames, newspapers have the power to influence public opinion through their styles and manner of presentation of events or issues. Tankard (2003) posits that framing is an important element in organising media contents through selection, emphasis, exclusion, and collaboration in order to provide desired context so as to achieve a desired public behaviour. To Entman (1993), framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.



In the light of the COVID-19 outbreak in Nigeria, the Nigerian government swung into action when the first case of the virus was recorded in Lagos and included the media as part of frontline organisations in the fight against the deadly virus. One of the roles of the media during the government's-imposed lockdown is to use cartoon communication to pass the information on the pandemic to enable people make informed decision on the disease. Newspaper cartoonists had the opportunity to illustrate COVID-19 pandemic using different frames, and to reinforce these frames negatively or positively during the lockdown. Although newspaper cartoonists have the power to influence public opinion through the style and manner of cartoon presentation on COVID-19, one of the biggest limitations of the framing theory on this study is, aside from the fact that each newspaper already has its illustration mind frame on the virus, only the media audiences that are exposed to this cartoon illustration can be influenced negatively or positively.

### **Methodology**

Descriptive quantitative research was used to examine the Newspaper Cartoon Framing of the COVID-19 pandemic during the First 35 Days of the lockdown in Nigeria. The manifest contents of cartoons in respect of COVID-19 disease were examined and analysed according to predefined categories. The manifest aspect of content analysis was considered appropriate for this study because this study aimed to describe the physical characteristics of cartoon illustrations on the coronavirus within the first 35 days of the government-imposed lockdown in the country and not the effect on the audience.

A purposive sampling technique was used to choose the *Punch*, *The Guardian*, *Daily Trust*, and *Leadership* newspapers. The choice of these daily newspapers was based on the national coverage, circulation, and the fact that these newspapers are general-interest newspapers that can cover any story of public interest. A total of 126 cartoons were found in 102 editions of daily newspapers – minus the weekly editions. 98 cartoons were on COVID-19 while 28 cartoons were not.

A coding sheet was designed to serve as the tool for the data. Inter-coder reliability was determined by using Holsti's formula:  $2m/N1+N2$ . Each of the two coders identified 10 cartoons from two different newspapers (*The Pilot* and *The Blueprint*) and coded them separately. The coders' decision agreed on 8 cartoons illustrations leading to a reliability coefficient of 0.8



## Frame categories

The frame categories for the research were carefully designed by the researchers to answer the study's objectives. Some variables were self-developed, while some were modified from the works of Onwe, Chukwu, Nwamini and Nwankwo (2020) and Syeda (2020). The frame categories for this study are:

1. **Preventive illustration frames:** These are cartoons on stay-at-home protocol, hand washing, physical distancing, avoiding touching of eyes, nose, and mouth, use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer, avoiding crowded areas, wearing of face mask and vaccine.
2. **Treatment and cure illustration frames:** These are cartoons on drugs solution, herbal solutions, spiritual solutions, and concoctions.
3. **Transmission illustration frames:** these are cartoons showing the various transmissions channels such as: through respiratory droplets from an infected person, direct contact with an infected person, direct contact with contaminated objects and surfaces.
4. **Economic impact illustration frames:** these are cartoons on the effect of the disease on all aspects of the economy; individuals, organizations, and the government – health, businesses, agriculture, and employment.
5. **Conspiracy Theory illustration frames:** These are cartoons on rumours, misinformation, disinformation, conspiracy theories, and fake news.
6. **Palliative illustration frames:** These are cartoons on palliatives given by the government, organisations, or individuals such as food items, medical supplies, money, and buildings.
7. **Medical supplies/construction illustration frames:** These are cartoons on medical supplies such as test kits, PPE, ventilators, and the construction of isolation centres.
8. **Violation of safety protocols illustration frames:** These are cartoons on violation of the coronavirus safety measures such as lack of compliance to lockdown measures; physical distancing, stay at home, wearing of face mask, regular hand washing and the use of hand sanitizer
9. **Security illustration frames:** These are cartoon illustrations on COVID-19 and insecurity.
10. **Others:** These are cartoon illustrations that did not fall into any of the above-mentioned frames.



## Data presentation and Discussion of findings

**Table 1: Distribution of Publications**

Publication	No. of Days	No. of editions used	No. of Cartoon on COVID-19	No. of Cartoon not on COVID-19	Total No. of Cartoons
<i>The Punch</i>	<b>35</b>	26 (25.4%)	26 (20.6%)	8 (6.3%)	34 (26.9%)
<i>Daily Trust</i>		26 (25.4%)	26 (20.6%)	0 (0%)	26 (20.6%)
<i>Leadership</i>		24 (23.5%)	11 (8.7%)	14 (11.1%)	25 (19.8%)
<i>The Guardian</i>		26 (25.4)	35 (27.7%)	6 (4.7%)	41 (32.5%)
<b>Total</b>		<b>102 (100%)</b>	<b>98 (77.7%)</b>	<b>28 (22.2%)</b>	<b>126 (100%)</b>

Source: Content analysis 2021

Table 1 shows the distribution of the newspaper editions that were used during the first 35 days of the COVID-19 lockdown and the number of frames identified from each newspaper. During the lockdown, a total of 126 newspapers on COVID-19 were published by *The Punch*, *Daily Trust*, *Leadership*, and *The Guardian*. 98 cartoons were on COVID-19 while 28 cartoons were not on COVID-19. Out of this total, *The Punch* had 34 (26.9%), *Daily Trust* had 26 (20.6%), the *Leadership* had 25 (19.8%), and *The Guardian* 41 (32.5%). Findings from table 1 revealed that *The Guardian* newspaper had the highest number of cartoons on the deadly virus followed by *The Punch* and the *Daily Trust*. The *Leadership* newspaper had the least cartoons on COVID-19 during the 35-day government's-imposed lockdown. Further findings also indicated that there were no editorial cartoons in the *Leadership* newspaper on COVID-19. All cartoons in the *Leadership* newspaper were found in a corner on the back page of all their editions.



**Table 2: Distributions of cartoon frames on COVID-19**

<b>Frames</b>	<b><i>The Punch</i></b>	<b><i>Daily Trust</i></b>	<b><i>Leadership</i></b>	<b><i>The Guardian</i></b>	<b>Total</b>
Preventive illustration frames	4(4.0%)	10(10.2%)	1(1.0%)	11(11.2%)	26(26.5%)
Treatment and cure illustration frames	1(1.0%)	1(1.0%)	0(0%)	1(1.0%)	3(3.0%)
Transmission illustration frames	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Economic impact illustration frames	9(9.1%)	7(7.1%)	0(0%)	5(5.1%)	21(21.4%)
Conspiracy theory illustration frames	2(2.0%)	1(1.0%)	0(0%)	1(1.0%)	4(4.0%)
Palliative illustration frames	4(4.0%)	2(2.0%)	1(1.0%)	7(7.1%)	14(14.2%)
Medical supplies/construction illustration frames	0(0%)	0(0%)	4(4.0%)	1(1.0%)	5(5.1%)
Violation of safety protocols illustration frames	0(0%)	1(1.0%)	3(3.0%)	1(1.0%)	5(5.1%)
Security illustrated frames	2(2.0%)	2(2.0%)	1(1.0%)	6(6.1%)	11(11.2%)
Others	4(4.0%)	2(2.0%)	1(1.0%)	2(2.0%)	9(9.1%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>26(26.5%)</b>	<b>26 (26.5%)</b>	<b>11 (11.2%)</b>	<b>35 (35.7%)</b>	<b>98(100%)</b>

*Source: Content analysis 2021*

Table 2 above shows the different issues framed in the newspaper cartoons in *The Punch*, *Daily Trust*, *Leadership*, and *The Guardian* newspapers during the lockdown. A total of 98 cartoons on COVID-19 were identified in the selected newspapers. Of the 98 cartoons analysed, 26 (26.5%) fell under the preventive illustration frame, 21 (21.4%) had an economic impact frame, palliative frames had 14 (14.2%) while treatment and cure frames had 3 (3.0%). No cartoon on COVID-19 transmission was illustrated in any of the four selected newspapers. Findings from table 2 revealed that preventive illustration frames had the highest cartoons followed by the economic impact illustration frames and palliative illustration frames – this may be connected to the fact that there was a need to sensitize the people on the preventive measures against the deadly coronavirus.



**Table 3: Format and nature of newspaper cartoon used in framing COVID-19**

Publication	Text Format		Nature	
	With text	Without text	Single panel	Comic strip
<i>The Punch</i>	26 (26.5%)	0 (0%)	26 (26.5%)	0 (0%)
<i>Daily Trust</i>	26 (26.5%)	0 (0%)	25 (25.5%)	1 (1.0%)
<i>Leadership</i>	11 (11.2%)	0 (0%)	11 (11.2%)	0 (0%)
<i>The Guardian</i>	35 (35.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	35 (35.7%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>98 (100%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>62 (63.2%)</b>	<b>36 (36.7%)</b>

Source: Content analysis 2021

Table 3 shows the format and nature of newspaper cartoons on COVID-19 as illustrated by *The Punch*, *Daily Trust*, *Leadership*, and *The Guardian* newspapers during the government-imposed lockdown in the country. Out of all the 98 newspaper cartoons on the COVID-19, all of them were accompanied by texts. Out of the same 98 cartoons accompanied with texts, 62 (63.2%) appeared as single panels while 36 (36.7%) appeared as comic strips. While all the 26 (26.5%) appeared as single panels in *The Punch* newspaper, followed by 25 (25.5%) in the *Daily Trust*, and 11 (11.2%) in the *Leadership*, all the 35 COVID-19 cartoons representing 35.7 appeared as comic strips in *The Guardian* newspapers. The findings in table 3 showed that all the cartoons on COVID-19 were accompanied by texts and most of these cartoons appeared as single panels.

**Table 4: Tone of newspaper cartoon used in framing COVID-19**

Publication	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Total
<i>The Punch</i>	5 (5.1%)	14 (14.2%)	7 (7.1%)	<b>26(26.5%)</b>
<i>Daily Trust</i>	7 (7.1%)	5 (5.1%)	14 (14.2%)	<b>26(26.5%)</b>
<i>Leadership</i>	4 (4.0%)	7 (7.1%)	0 (0%)	<b>11(11.2%)</b>
<i>The Guardian</i>	11 (11.2%)	23 (23.4%)	1 (1.0%)	<b>35(35.7%)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>27(27.5%)</b>	<b>49(50%)</b>	<b>22(22.4%)</b>	<b>98 (100%)</b>

Source: Content analysis 2021

Table 4 shows the tone in the illustration of newspaper cartoons on COVID-19 by *The Punch*, *Daily Trust*, *Leadership*, and *The Guardian* newspapers during the government-imposed lockdown in the country. Out of all the 98 cartoons on the COVID-19, 50 percent of these cartoons had positive tones followed by 27.4 percent with negative tones while 22.2 percent



had neutral tones. *The Guardian* newspaper had the highest number of positive cartoons, 23 representing 23.4 percent followed by *The Punch* newspaper with 14 cartoons representing 14.2 percent. In the same light, *The Guardian* newspaper had the highest number of negative cartoons, 11 representing 11.2% followed by the *Daily Trust* with 7 cartoons representing 7.1 percent. The *Daily Trust* had the highest number of neutral cartoons, 14 representing 14.2 percent followed by *The Punch* newspaper with 7 cartoons representing 7.1 percent. Findings from Table 4 showed that the selected national dailies used a more positive tone to illustrate cartoons on the coronavirus during the lockdown.

### **Discussion of findings**

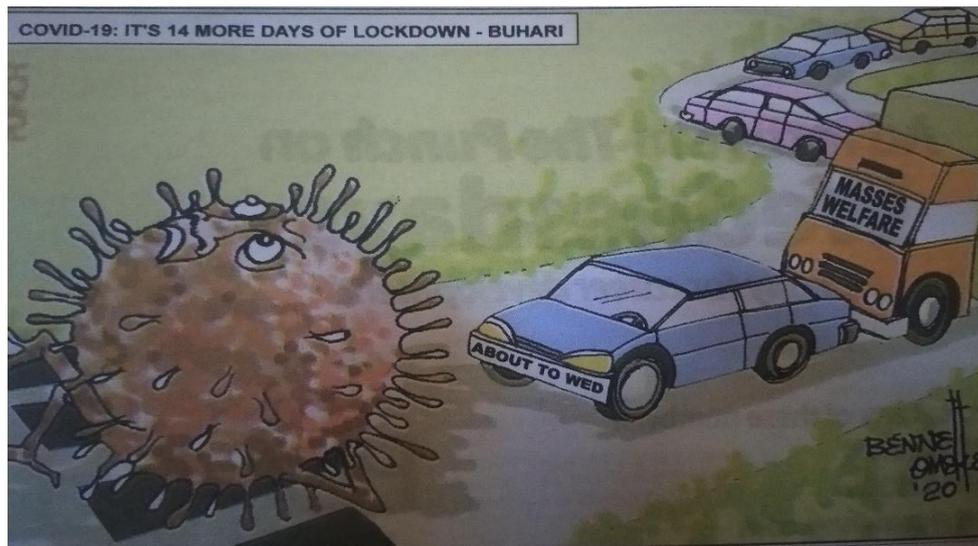
Media framing is an important element in the news production process because it helps bring out the salience of an event or issue (Wilson & Abubakar, 2018). Delp and Jones (1996) and Leiner, Handal and Williams (2004) posit that when health communication messages are framed and disseminated through cartoons there is a higher message recall than the same textual message disseminated among media audience. Different types of cartoons such as editorial, comic strips, single panels, and animated cartoons were used by *The Punch*, *Daily Trust*, *Leadership*, and *The Guardian* newspapers in framing different issues on COVID-19 during the first 35 days of government-imposed lockdown in Nigeria. Finding from the study showed consistency in the illustration of different issues with 77.7 percent cartoons frequency on the deadly coronavirus during the lockdown. This finding is supported by the work of Nwakpu, Ezena, and Ogbodo (2020), Msughter and Philips (2020), and Mu'azu and Moses (2021) that aver that the frequency of newspaper framing of the coronavirus disease was adequate even when their unit of analysis were news, editorial, and feature reports.

Out of the nine frames used in the illustration of newspaper cartoons on the coronavirus, the study found that the preventive illustration theme had the dominant frame representing 26.5 percent followed by the economic impact illustration frame representing 21.4 percent. This finding is contrary to the findings of Msughter and Philips (2020) who found in their study on media framing of the COVID-19 pandemic in the *Daily Trust* and *Vanguard* newspapers in Nigeria that the political frame and economic frame were the dominant frames. The work of Parvin, Ahsan, Rahman and Abedin (2020) on the novel coronavirus pandemic, the role of print media in Asian countries showed economy and politics have the dominant frames. In a contrary study, Onwe, Chukwu, Nwamini and Nwankwo (2020) in the analysis of online newspapers' framing of patterns of COVID-19 in Nigeria found fear and death as the



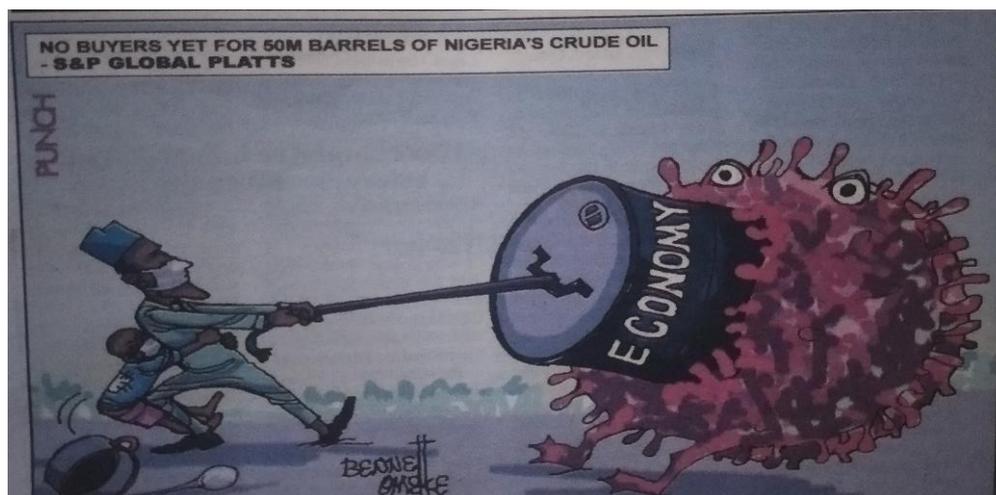
dominant frame. The dominant theme of this study which, has to do with the preventive illustration frame is connected to the fact that there was the need to sensitize the people to protect themselves through the use of social distancing, wearing of facemask, regular washing of hands and regular use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer since the virus was a novel virus and the WHO was yet to pronounce any vaccine and treatment measures on the disease during the lockdown.

**Figure 1:** Preventive illustration cartoon



*The Punch*, Wednesday, April 15, 2020, p. 17

**Figure 2:** Economic impact illustration cartoon



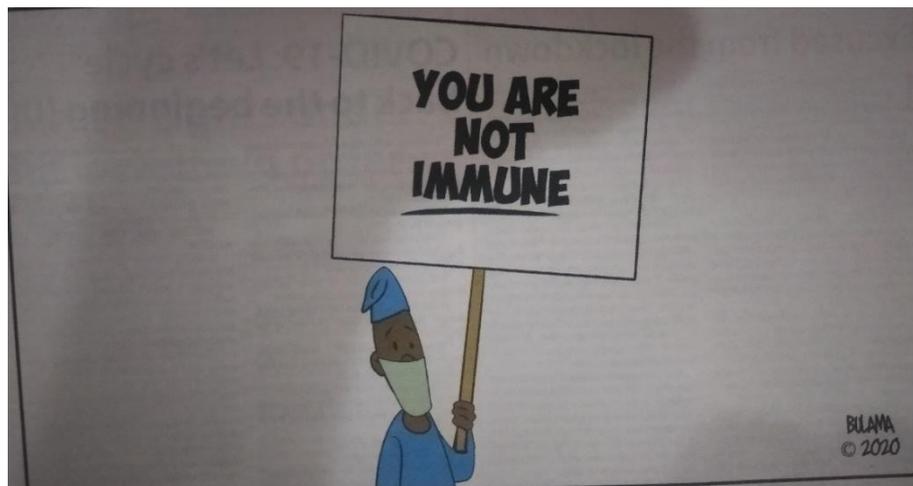
*The Punch*, Thursday, April 21, 2020, p. 16

The tone in the newspaper cartoon framing COVID-19 during the government-imposed lockdown was positive. Out of a total of 98 cartoons on the coronavirus, 50 percent of these



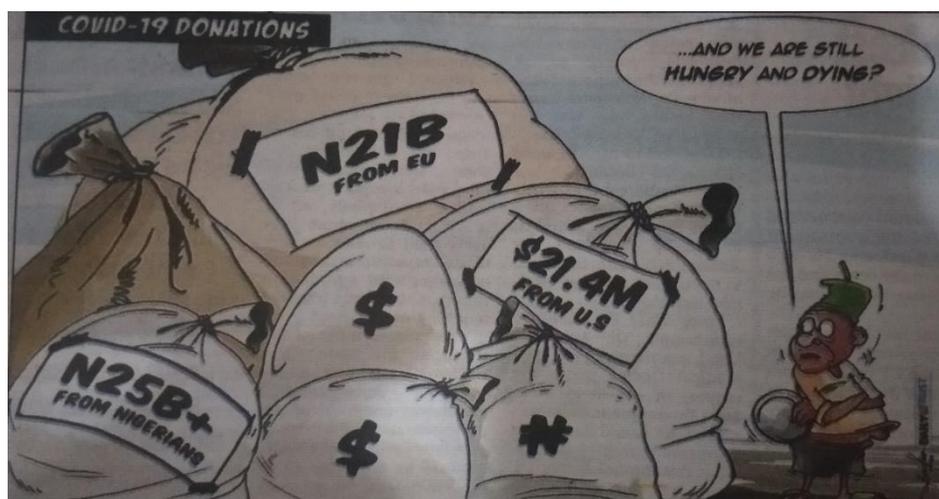
cartoons had positive frames. This finding supports a study conducted by Mu'azu and Moses (2021) on the framing of the COVID-91 by *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* newspapers. The positive tone in the newspaper cartoon framing of the coronavirus was also in line with the government's directives for the media to provide information on the virus to ensure that people make informed decisions on the virus – a reason the media were included as one of the frontline organisations in the fight against the deadly coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria.

**Figure 1:** Cartoon illustration with positive tone



*Daily Trust*, Sunday, April 19, 2020, p. 9

**Figure 2:** Cartoon illustration with negative tone



*Daily Trust*, Thursday, April 30, 2020, p.13



## Conclusion

The aim of the study was to examine Newspaper Cartoon Framing of the COVID-19 Disease during the first 35 days of the Government-imposed lockdown to stem the spread of the coronavirus disease in Nigeria. Based on the descriptive research method employed through the use of quantitative content analysis, this study concluded that newspaper cartoons were significantly used as health communication tools during the lockdown to disseminate coronavirus messages to the people. The study further found that the preventive illustration cartoon theme was the dominant frame used by *The Punch*, *Daily Trust*, *Leadership*, and *The Guardian* newspapers.

**Limitation of the study:** The purposive selection of just four newspapers: *The Punch*, *Daily Trust*, *Leadership*, and *The Guardian* newspapers out of a universe of more than 100 national newspaper titles in Nigeria limits the generalization of the study to only the selected national dailies.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors of this research declared no potential conflicts of interest.

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