COVERAGE OF EBOLA OUTBREAK IN NIGERIA IN THE GUARDIAN AND VANGUARD NEWSPAPERS

EZE CHARLES CHUKWUMA
Department of Mass communication
Madonna University
Okija Campus
Nigeria

Abstract
The study examined newspaper coverage of the Ebola Virus outbreak in Nigeria from July 20 to October 20, 2014 which was the date the EVD outbreak lasted, before the World Health Organization declared Nigeria free. The content analysis design was utilized as the research design in analyzing two national newspapers; The Guardian and the Vanguard to ascertain the frequency of coverage, the level of prominence and the nature of stories covered on the EVD outbreak in Nigeria by the newspapers. Findings from the study reveal that the rate of coverage of the Ebola Virus outbreak by the press was low as the news contents on non–Ebola virus issues were reported about seven times more often than the EVD issues within the period of the outbreak in Nigeria. The level of prominence accorded news contents on the EVD was on the average; and sufficient interpretations and in – depth analyses were not adequately carried by the columnists to sensitize the readers on the EVD outbreak within the period it lasted. It is therefore recommended that the Nigerian Press Organization should develop an editorial policy that would make it binding on different newspaper editorial boards to channel their agenda setting roles in championing massive health campaigns and advocacy that would be targeted towards educating their readers on the containment of imminent diseases such as EVD when such occur.

INTRODUCTION
The resurgence of Ebola Virus disease in Liberia on November, 2015 was awash in the Nigeria media. The Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) on November 21, 2015 reported that ‘three new cases of Ebola were confirmed in Liberia by the World Health Organization (WHO)’ (Less than three months after the country was initially declared free of the virus). The Guardian newspaper of November 22, 2015 had in its headline and lead, “Liberia health officials move to control Ebola outbreak in Monrovia. Three new cases confirmed and 153 contacts put under surveillance two months after country was declared Ebola free.”

The British Broadcasting Corporation BBC (2015) further corroborated the information in its headline, “Ebola crisis! Liberia confirms three cases”. Documented history on the World Health Organisation (WHO) (2015) record had it that the Ebola virus was introduced into Nigeria on 20th July 2014 when an infected Liberian man, Patrick Sawyer arrived by airplane to Lagos. Sawyer, died in hospital five days later, setting off a chain of transmission that affected a total of nineteen people out of whom eight died. Nigeria was declared free of Ebola by World Health Organization on 20 October 2014.

In the events that led to the rapid containment of the Ebola Virus Disease in Nigeria, the Nigerian press was commended for her astute surveillance and awareness campaign within the period of the virus crisis in the country. Obukoudata & Abuah (2014 :53) averred that the media surveillance and awareness campaign created by the Nigerian press within the crisis period of Ebola outbreak in the country contributed positively in controlling and containing the Ebola Virus disease to the point of heightening health education, health promotion and health literacy.

Moreover, The World Health Organization in declaring Nigeria free of Ebola on October 20, 2014, acknowledged the role of the Nigeria press when it stated that “the Nigerian press strong public awareness campaigns, teamed with early engagement of traditional, religious and community leaders also played key roles in successful containment of the outbreak”. If the Ebola Virus disease spread in Nigeria between July 20th and October 20th 2014 was contained through massive mass media surveillance and campaign, this indicates a huge media strength and the role of the surveillance function of the press with regards to disease control.

Since the Nigerian press were credited to have performed the roles of surveillance, information, education and creation of the awareness that led to the containment of the Ebola Virus disease in its first
outbreak, these media roles are even urgently needed at this critical period that a resurgence of the Ebola Virus disease has been confirmed in Liberia. Lasswell cited in Obuakoadata & Abuah (2014, p.53) identified the surveillance function of the press as instructive in meeting society needs such as in the process of disease control and prevention. The Oxford Reference (2014) discussed that “the role of circulating information and news which is one of the most important general roles that the press can be seen as serving for society in crisis time as well as mobilization against life – threatening disease is sacrosanct.”

Since the resurgence of Ebola Virus disease in Liberia has been confirmed, the World Health Organization (2015) has warned that the disease could break out again if not adequately monitored.

Decisions made by media professionals tend to determine what information becomes available to the media audiences and what remains available. Ekeanyanwu (2005) corroborated this fact when he stated that, “by putting stories into perspective and interpreting them, print media personnel assign meaning to information and indicate the values by which it ought to be judged.”

However, since the reports relayed by the press become in most cases the agenda in the Nigerian society and even forms part of the public opinion, it is strongly expected that the newspapers cover news on diseases, epidemic and other natural disasters with speed, professionalism, objectivity, fairness, accuracy and a sense of patriotism. It is also expected that the Nigerian press should raise, through its media surveillance and awareness campaign, such dangers and threats to the Nigerian citizens’ health wellbeing to the front burner and do everything possible to see that the public get the right information that will enable them take informed decisions.

In effect, this study sought to find out how the newspapers covered the Ebola Virus disease outbreak in Nigeria from July 20, 2014 to October 20, 2014. What prominence did the Nigerian press exert on the news stories surrounding the Ebola Virus disease outbreak in the country? What level of frequency was conferred on the news stories about Ebola outbreak in order to communicate emphasis? And what roles have the Nigerian press played and what positions did they take during the coverage of the Ebola outbreak which may have contributed in the early containment of the Ebola Virus disease in Nigeria?

PROBLEM
Despite the mobilization of civil societies and authorities at national, regional and communities’ levels to curb the Ebola outbreak through information campaigns, it appeared that Ebola Virus disease is still far from over in West Africa as it resurfaced yet again November 2015 in Liberia with three new cases confirmed by the World Health Organisation.

Obukoada and Abuah (2014) study found that a major factor responsible for the failure of these campaigns has been the lack of strategic and efficient use of the media in the campaign.

Even when the newspapers provided coverage of such outbreaks, the press merely provide straightforward news stories of such, which in most cases are buried in the inside pages of their newspapers, and the reading publics did not seem to be adequately enlightened through in – depth interpretation and analysis by the columnists on such disease outbreaks so as to be adequately informed and be enabled to make contributions towards curtailing or curbing the outbreak. This thereby hindered the effectiveness of the print media surveillance campaigns that would have provided sufficient support for disease management as seen in the Ebola virus disease outbreak.

In the light of the foregoing, this study sought to assess the newspaper’ functions, campaigns and coverage used during the Ebola virus disease outbreak containment in Nigeria. This is with the view to determine whether the press surveillance, coverage and education functions used then could still be relied on if there is any resurgence of Ebola virus disease in Nigeria.

OBJECTIVES
The major purpose of the study is to examine the performance of the Nigerian newspapers in the coverage of the Ebola virus disease outbreak in Nigeria. The study has three major objectives namely:

1. Determining the frequency of stories on the Ebola virus disease outbreak in Nigeria covered by the Nigerian newspapers;
2. Ascertaining the levels of prominence accorded stories on the Ebola virus disease outbreak by Nigerian newspapers;
3. Examining the nature of stories covered on the Ebola virus disease outbreak in Nigeria by the national newspapers.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
In line with the objectives already stated, the following research questions were raised to guide the study:
1. What is the total number of news contents that were covered by the Nigerian newspapers on the Ebola virus disease outbreak in Nigeria?
2. What is the level of prominence accorded to news contents on the Ebola virus disease outbreak in Nigeria by the Nigerian newspapers during the outbreak?
3. What is the nature of news contents covered on the Ebola virus disease outbreak in Nigeria by the Nigerian newspapers?

**TERMS**

**Ebola Virus Disease:** Ebola virus disease is a severe and often deadly virus disease in humans caused by infection with one of the Ebola virus species. It is transmitted to people through direct contact with the blood, body fluids and tissues of infected animals or humans.

**Coverage:** Is the extent to which an important issue, event or subject (such as the Ebola Virus disease outbreak) is reported by the press (*The Guardian* and *Vanguard* newspapers).

**Outbreak:** Is the sudden occurrence of a disease (Ebola virus disease) within a given period and at a given environment or place.

**Newspaper:** Is a large sheet of unbound printed publication, which presents information in words, often supplemented with pictures, issued daily and nationally by *the Guardian* and *Vanguard*.

**Press:** Refers to the newspaper as defined above. It equally means the journalist who report news events as they happen and write other news related articles for *the Guardian* and *Vanguard* newspapers.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Coverage of Ebola Virus Outbreak in Nigeria.

Studies that are related to the current study were examined and summarized here. This is aimed at giving focus and direction to the current study.

In Akran, C. (2015), “News Values: Is the African Voice Suppressed? A Content analysis of six newspaper reports on Ebola in Nigeria in *the Telegraph* and *the Mirror*.” Akran (2015), conducted a content analytical study of six newspaper reports on Ebola in Nigeria in *the Telegraph* and *the Mirror* from July 20th 2014 to October 20th 2014, with particular focus on the adjectives used and sources cited. Three articles from each newspaper were selected based on reports on the start–date July 20th, (2014), median – date (4th September, 2014) and end – date (20th October 2014).

The search was carried out on LexisNexis using query for ‘Ebola’ and ‘Nigeria’ in headlines. With the start and end dates known, the researcher worked out the total days of the event (93 days) in arriving at a median date. The total word content for both sets of articles were close; *the Telegraph* was 2,177 and *the mirror* 2,263. Arising from its finding, the study concluded that there was evidence of little or no competition from newspapers to report on the subject and that most of the newspapers coverage were hardly dissimilar. Moreover, there was lack of depth and width of coverage, this the study traced to logistical challenges with health and safety of reporters. However, it is to be observed that for an event that ran for ninety three days, a 7% sample is considered insufficient for thorough analysis. This, the current study would address.

In Urban Action Group (2015), “Ebola: Study lauds, Faults Media role.” The study conducted by the Urban Action Group of the department of Mass Communication, University of Lagos, gathered and content analyzed reportage of the Ebola outbreak in four national dailies. A total of 719 published reports within a six month period were analysed. The analysis revealed that an average of four news items was published per day.

The study (2015) further revealed that the frequency and prominence of the reports by the press played great role in curbing the spread of the virus in Nigeria. In addition, the national dailies fulfilled their social responsibilities functions of informing the public about the outbreak of Ebola virus disease and revealing precautionary measures to curtail the spread. Other findings from the study revealed that interpretative reports on the Ebola virus disease was low as only twenty six percent of articles was devoted to the interpretation and analysis of the disease, rating it significantly low considering the high mortality rate (90%) of the disease.

Besides, only 11% of the newspaper reports were on the front and back pages, which the study implied that the” Nigerian newspapers did not attach much prominence to the coverage of the Ebola virus disease probably because of other news items contending for attention such as insecurity and politics.

In Obukoadata, P.O and Abuah, F.A (2014), ‘Media surveillance functions within the context of the Ebola Outbreak in Nigeria: Influences and Perceptual Frames”. The study evaluated what influence surveillance campaigns had on disease control and prevention in Nigeria with emphasis on the Ebola virus disease. The
survey design was utilized and a 32–items questionnaire was structured using the likert scale and distributed purposively to six hundred respondents. The data gathered was analysed using the weighted means for the individual items; and the Pearson “r” to test the three hypotheses established in the study. In its findings, the study established three points of influence of surveillance campaigns on the society. First, is that it could result in negative consequences such as panic if not well managed; Second, is that it could provide sufficient support for disease management as seen in the Ebola virus disease incidence in Nigeria if properly managed and Third is that effective and well thought out surveillance campaign will correlate positively in controlling and preventing diseases such as Ebola virus disease to the point of heightening health education, health promotion and health literacy.

In Johnson, W.A; Layefa, G. and Taiwo, A. (2016) , “ The Press and Social Responsibility: Newspaper Coverage of the 2014, Ebola Virus Disease Outbreak in Nigeria.” The study was a retrospective analysis of how the Nigerian press covered the 2014 Ebola Virus disease outbreak. The content analysis technique was used in analyzing two national newspapers, The Punch and the Nigerian Tribune, to determine the extent of coverage and the direction / slant of news presentation by the two newspapers.

Findings from the study revealed that Nigerian newspapers, especially the ones studied were alive to their social responsibility obligation to the society; that at the core of their operations is a firm devotion to public welfare and safety, which they simply demonstrated by giving prominent play to news stories, features and editorials on the dreaded Ebola Virus disease, with the view to inform and safeguard the public.

The present study therefore serves as a significant contribution to providing additional literature on the newspaper coverage of Ebola virus in Nigeria which was lacking in the previous studies reviewed.

In line with the foregoing, the study tried to ascertain the extent of the influence, print media messages had during the Ebola virus disease outbreak in Nigeria; to assess the prominence, frequency and surveillance accorded information on Ebola virus disease in Nigeria and to determine whether such, contributed to containing the outbreak within a short interval that prompted the World Health Organization to declare Nigeria free of the virus on October 20, 2014.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is anchored on the Agenda Setting theory. The theory was proposed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw in 1972/1973. The core idea according to McQuail (2015, p.512) is that “the news media indicate to the public what the main issues of the day are and this is reflected in what the public perceive as the main issues”.

The major assumption of the theory is that the media set agenda for the public to follow. Hence, most of the pictures we store in our heads, most of the things we think or worry about, most of the issues we discuss, are based on what we read, listened to or watched in different mass media.

The media make us to think about certain issues, they make us to think or feel that certain issues are more important than others in our society.

McCombs and Shaw (1972), in Asemah, (2011 p. 176) wrote that:

- In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality.
- Readers learn not only about a given issue but, how much importance to attach to the issues from the amount of information in a news story and its positions.

Establishing further on the tenets of this theory, Wimmer and Dominick (2000) observe that the theory on agenda setting by the media proposes that the public agenda or what kinds of things people discuss, think and worry about is powerfully shaped and directed by what the media choose to publicise. This means that if the news media chose to give the most time and space to covering HIV/AIDS or Ebola Virus Disease, these health issues will become the most important items on the audiences’ minds.

The agenda setting theory therefore ascribes to the print media the power to determine what the publics should be thinking about. This, Lazarsfeld in McQuail (2015, p. 512) referred to as the power to ‘structure issues’. And it is an essential part of advocacy and attempts at influencing public opinion. According to Folarin (1998), the elements involved in agenda setting include:

a. The quantity or frequency of reporting;

b. Prominence given to the reports through headlines display, pictures and layout in newspapers, magazines, films, graphics, or timing on radio and television;
c. The degree of conflict generalized in the reports and
d. Cumulative media specific effects over time.

The Agenda setting theory is apt for this study because, the frequency of news stories on the Ebola Virus Disease; the prominence level accorded such news stories on EVD and the strategic positions in the newspapers where news stories on EVD are placed by the Nigerian press, as such, could project the issue of the outbreak high and thereby establish such awareness campaign to the public, making them important public policies of the readers and the wider Nigerian society.

METHODOLOGY

The content analysis is the research design for this study. This choice is formed by the fact that the method is popular with mass media researchers, as an efficient design to investigate the contents of the print media. Wimmer and Dominick (2003, p.143) stated that “content analysis is used in a study of agenda setting” and Nwabueze (2009; p.75) opined that “content analysis is an objective way of determining and quantifying the existences, phrases and words within a text”.

POPULATION OF STUDY

This study was designed to carry out an analysis of the contents of two major national newspapers in Nigeria; which are The Guardian and Vanguard for a period of 94 days, July 20 – October 21, 2014.

The study chose the 94 days because they were the dates that the Ebola virus disease outbreak held sway in Nigeria before the country was declared free of the outbreak on October 20, 2014 by the World Health Organisation. Hence most Nigerian newspapers would give a comprehensive coverage of the Ebola virus disease outbreak within this period. For the two national newspapers therefore, the population was one hundred and eighty – eight (188) newspapers.

SAMPLE SIZE

The sample size for this research work is 48 newspapers. The researcher selected ¼ or 25 percent as a representative sample of the population of 188 newspapers. Analysing the entire population of this study would have been appropriate. Nevertheless, there are certain reasons which favour the adoption of a representative sample. For instance, the accessibility of the entire newspapers needed to reduce cost and for accuracy purpose. In view of these reasons, the representative sample size was adopted for the study.

SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

The systematic sampling technique was used to obtain a reliable representative sample to work with. Using this technique, all elements in the population of the study were listed (From July 20th to October 21st 2014) (See Sample frame, Appendix I). Since it would be cumbersome to study the entire issues within 94 days, meaning 94 Issues per newspaper which amounts to 188 issues. The researcher decided to take up one fourth (¼) of the whole population of study. The representative sample size (n) which is 24 for each of the newspaper was determined by multiplying the population of study by this adopted fraction thus:

\[ n = \frac{94 \times \frac{1}{4}}{24} = 3.9 \]

Also, since not every issue of these daily newspapers should be picked to make up the 24 adopted representative sample size to be studied, the total population (94) was further divided by the representative sample size (24) to get an interval skip or skip interval.

This is a systematic way of getting the Issues that would be used for the study on the calendar. It means if the researcher decided to start from 1st day on the population calendar (or sample frame), he would then know the number of days to skip before picking another day in sequential and consistent order without increasing or decreasing the skip interval.

In this study, the skip interval was derived thus:

\[ \text{Skip interval} = \frac{\text{total population}}{\text{Sample size}} \]

\[ \text{Skip interval} = \frac{94}{24} = 3.9 \]

\[ \text{Skip interval} = 4 \]
The researcher began from the first number in the sample frame i.e. (July 20) in starting the selection of the date to begin the count of samples. The interval skip 4 was subsequently added to get the other days whose Issues were studied (See Appendix II 2014 Calendar that guided the sampling). Following the scheme above, July contributed 3 issues, August 8 issues, as well as September 8 issues, while October contributed 5 issues. All summed up to 24 issues per newspaper.

CONTENT CATEGORIES
The items studied were coded into subject matter categories in order to determine and analyze the story classifications of the coverage. To ascertain the level of prominence accorded to the news stories of Ebola Virus Disease outbreak in Nigeria, by the national newspapers, the following divisions were made: Front Page (FP) stories means very prominent stories, Back page (BP) stories are next in prominence, Inside page (IP) stories are least in the order of prominence placed on the coverage.

To determine the frequency of coverage accorded to news stories on the Ebola Virus disease outbreak in Nigeria within the period under study; the total news contents including: News Stories, Features, Editorial, Letters – to –the – Editor and Columns that reflected the coverage of the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak were measured against the total news contents on other Non Ebola Virus disease outbreak (Non EVD) within the period of study.

To ascertain the nature or classification of the stories that covered the Ebola virus disease outbreak in Nigeria by the Nigerian press, the volumes of the news contents were assessed whether; they were straight news stories; Features; Editorial; Letters – to – the – editor or columns? The units of analysis were as indicated in the (Appendix 111) on coding guide.

INTERCODER RELIABILITY
The inter coder reliability referred to the levels of agreement among independent coders who coded the same contents using the same coding instrument. The researcher got the assistance of a colleague in Madonna University Nigeria, Okija campus.

She was instructed and given guideline on coding items into the appropriate subject categories already defined by the researcher. The coding of the newspapers was done by the researcher and this staff of the university.

PILOT STUDY
Both coders coded a total of 800 news contents, agreed on 728 and disagreed on 72 news contents. In using Holsti (1969) formula for determining the reliability of nominal data in terms of percentage of agreement:

\[
\text{Reliability} = \frac{2 \cdot M}{N_1 + N_2}
\]

Where M is the number of coding decision in which two coders agreed, and N1 and N2 are the total number of coding decisions by the first and second coders, respectively. Thus, since the two coders coded a sample of 800 news contents and agreed on 728 of them, the calculation is:

\[
\text{Reliability} = \frac{2 \cdot (728)}{800+ 800} = \frac{1456}{1600} = 0.91 = 91
\]

Reliability .91 for the pilot study.

MAIN STUDY
In the main study content analyses, the two coders coded a total of 3200 news contents, agreed on 3040 and disagreed on 160 news contents. Using the same Holsti (1969) formula as above, Inter – coder reliability is thus:

\[
\text{Reliability} = \frac{2 \cdot M}{N_1 + N_2}
\]

Since two coders coded a total of 3200 news items and agreed on 3040 of them, the calculation is;

\[
\text{Reliability} = \frac{2 \cdot (3040)}{3200 + 3200} = \frac{6080}{6400} = 0.95
\]

Reliability = .95.

In estimates of reliability according to the Holsti (1969) formula, since this measurement had a high value, it thus indicated that the coders were in agreement and hence the researcher’s coding was reliable.
The researcher employed simple percentage as the method of data analysis. Data, however, were converted into figures and presented on tabular format.

**DATA PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The researcher employed simple percentage as the method of data analysis. Data, however, were converted into figures and presented on tabular format.

**DATA PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

At the beginning of this study, a total of three research questions were posed to help in ascertaining the coverage that Nigerian newspapers gave to the Ebola Virus disease outbreak in the country. It is pertinent here to re-state these questions for ease in understanding the data presented and for other reference purposes. They are:

**Research Question One:** What is the total number of news contents that were carried by the Nigerian newspapers on the Ebola Virus disease outbreak in Nigeria?

Table 1: DISTRIBUTION OF THE ENTIRE COVERAGE ON EBOLA OUTBREAK AND NON EBOLA OUTBREAK ISSUES IN NIGERIA BY THE TWO NEWSPAPERS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Covered News Issue</th>
<th>Joint Frequency Coverage Of the 2 Newspapers</th>
<th>Joint % Coverage of the 2 Newspapers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EVD Outbreak News</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non EVD Outbreak news</td>
<td>2817</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>3200</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A total of 3200 news contents were polled from the 48 issues of the newspapers that constituted the representative sample. Of this figure, 2817 (88%) were news content coverage on non Ebola Virus disease, while 383 (12%) news content coverage were on the Ebola Virus disease outbreak within the period of the study.

This shows that the news stories on non Ebola Virus disease outbreak were reported about 7 times more often than the real Ebola Virus disease outbreak news contents within the period of the outbreak in Nigeria.

This is rather absurd and disapproving. It is a demonstration of a rather lopsided quantitative news imbalance that tend to disfavour the frequency that ought to be accorded to the Ebola Virus disease outbreak in Nigeria within the period, so that the readers would be aware of the enormity of the outbreak and its attendant implications.

The Nigerian print media gate keepers did not do well to heed the observation and right counsel of Overholser and Jamieson (2006) who both asserted;

> In choosing and displaying news, editors, reporters and newsroom staff play an important part in shaping reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in the news story and (its frequency).

By not devoting ‘enough’ repeated coverage of the Ebola Virus disease outbreak in their pages of newspapers so that such frequency would help to lay the expected emphasis to their readers, the newspaper gate keepers had indirectly suggested by this action that other non Ebola Virus issues were more relevant than the outbreak which is not in tune with the surveillance function of the press.

**Research Question Two:** What is the level of prominence accorded to news contents on the Ebola Virus Disease outbreak in Nigeria by the Nigerian newspapers?

Table 2: DISTRIBUTION OF THE COVERAGE ON THE EBOLA VIRUS DISEASE OUTBREAK BY THE DIFFERENT TWO NEWSPAPERS: **GUARDIAN AND VANGUARD**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names of newspapers</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Guardian</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Vanguard</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the issues of the two newspapers content analyzed, it is obvious that the two national newspapers: *the Guardian* and *the Vanguard* devoted similar percentages i.e. 50% - apiece – coverage to the Ebola virus disease outbreak in Nigeria within the period under study.

**Research Question Two:** What is the level of prominence accorded to news contents on the Ebola virus Disease outbreak in Nigeria by the Nigerian newspapers?

Table 3: PROMINENCE ACCORDED NEWS CONTENTS ON THE EBOLA VIRUS DISEASE BY THE TWO NEWSPAPERS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspapers Page Placement</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Front Page</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back Page</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The study, from the data presented in Table 3, tried to assess the prominence accorded news stories on the Ebola Virus disease outbreak in Nigeria by the Nigerian press within the period of the outbreak. This, the researcher felt would be demonstrated by the sections of the newspapers in which an editor decides to place a story. For example, a Nigerian news editor would normally place his lead story for the day on the front page.

The information from Table 3 showed that the two newspapers placed 11% (41) of their EVD news contents on their front pages; 88% (339) EVD news contents were placed in the Inside pages of their newspapers, while a percent (3) EVD news contents were placed at their back pages.

In as much as the press would be commended for some level of prominence accorded to the news stories on the EVD outbreak, it is to be noted that 11% placement of EVD news contents on the Front Pages did not showcase an ideal high prominence expected to be accorded such Ebola Virus disease outbreak in the country. More news contents on the Ebola Virus disease (EVD) outbreak were expected to have been featured on the Front pages of their newspapers through Banner and ‘Screaming’ headlines to accord the EVD outbreak the expected high prominence needed at that critical period.

For in line with this, Obukoada and Abuah, (2014, p.54) contended that “with the outbreak of the EVD in Nigeria, the role and efficiency of the press in performing her surveillance function has come under scrutiny. The expectation was that the press is expected to be drivers in this regards.”

Moreover, in dealing with disease control and prevention, the World Health Organization outlined communication action for outbreak readiness where essential knowledge is disseminated before and during an outbreak. According to the WHO (2012) report “communication was expected to focus on the risky aspects of outbreaks, to be proactive and definitive towards health education, health promotion and health literacy.” If these goals were to have been achieved, the Nigerian newspapers would have, through placement, accorded the EVD outbreak coverage more prominent positions on their Front pages and even include larger headlines to the ‘EVD outbreak’ to ensure that high prominence is accorded to it through their agenda setting functions.

**Research Question Three:** What is the nature of news contents covered on the Ebola Virus Disease outbreak in Nigeria by the Nigerian newspapers?

Table 4: DISTRIBUTION OF THE COVERAGE ON EBOLA VIRUS DISEASE OUTBREAK IN NIGERIA ACCORDING TO THE NATURE OF NEWS CONTENTS IN THE TWO NEWSPAPERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of News Contents</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News Stories</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Features</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorials</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters – to – the Editor</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columns</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis of data in Table 4 revealed that the two newspapers – Guardian and Vanguard reported 383 news items on EVD outbreak in the issues studied. Of the 383 news contents, 86% (328) were reported as straight news stories; 10% (40) were presented as Feature articles; 1% (4) was uniformly presented as Editorials and Letter – to – the Editor consecutively, while 2% (7) were featured as Columns.

It is of interest to note that exactly two – third (86%) of the entire news contents were straight news stories. A pointer to the fact that the newspapers indeed informed their readers and thereby satisfied to an extent the informational requirement of the audience; but what is worrisome is the fact that not much informed interpretations and analyses were done on the Ebola Virus disease outbreak within the period. Since just a paltry 12% were devoted to Features and Columns articles, what it portend was that the newspaper readers were rubbed of the interpretative news analyses expected from the newspapers’ columnists.

In addition, only one percent news content were featured as Editorials and this affected negatively the responses from readers through the Letters – to – the – Editor section as only one percent feedback were equally received by the newspapers, which was rather scanty.

This finding tends to suggest that the Nigerian reading public did not seem to be adequately enlightened through in – depth analysis by the news columnist on the Ebola Virus Disease Outbreak so as to make enough meaningful contributions. The Nigeria press should have heeded the submission by Cohen (1970, p .27) who stated that, “news has gotten so complex that mere reporting is not good anymore; the
journalist has to add analysis to news stories.” A lot of interpretations and background are needed to find out the implication of news breaks on the Ebola virus disease outbreak to the lives of the people.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The objectives of this study were threefold;
1. To identify the total number of news contents that was covered by the Nigerian newspapers on the Ebola Virus Disease outbreak in Nigeria.
2. To ascertain the level of prominence that was accorded news contents on the Ebola virus disease outbreak by the Nigerian newspapers.
3. To find out the nature of news contents that was covered on the Ebola Virus disease outbreak in Nigeria by the Nigerian newspapers.

In order to achieve these objectives, the coverage of the Ebola virus disease outbreak in Nigeria from July 20 to October 20 2014 by the Nigerian newspapers, via Guardian and Vanguard newspapers was studied. Samples of 48 issues of the two newspapers were systematically selected for the study and a total of 3200 news items were coded and analyzed.

CONCLUSION

From the interpretations and contents analyses of the news contents studied, the following results and conclusions were drawn:

Eighty-Eight percent of the news contents published in the press during the Ebola outbreak periods in Nigeria were on Non Ebola Virus disease issues, only 12 percent of the news contents published within the period were on the Ebola Virus disease outbreak. Of the news contents covered on the Ebola Virus outbreak by the newspapers, 11 percent were positioned on the Front pages of the newspapers, eighty-eight percent news contents on the Ebola outbreak were positioned in the Inside pages of the newspapers, while a percentage of the news contents on the Ebola Virus disease outbreak in Nigeria was positioned at the Back pages of the newspapers studied.

Furthermore, Eighty-Six percent of the news contents published by the newspapers on the Ebola Virus disease outbreak within the period were straight news stories, 10 percent were features articles on the outbreak and 1 percent was editorial. Since not many contents were devoted to the in-depth interpretation and analyses of the Ebola Virus disease outbreak and its surrounding issues in the country, there was scanty feedback associated with the responses from readers through the Letters – to – the – editor column on the Ebola outbreak which had one percent outcome.

In effect, the Nigerian reading public was not adequately enlightened, through in – depth analyses by the columnists, on Ebola virus disease outbreak issues and policies so as to make enough contributions in the newspapers.

Most of the straight news stories featured in the press on the Ebola Virus disease outbreak were in the Inside pages of the newspapers. Some of these inside pages were devoted to highlight the onslaught of the outbreak and its containment within the period under study. The special themes on such special pages were “the Ebola Outbreak”, “Ebola Containment” and “Ebola Special Coverage” in the Guardian newspapers. While in the Vanguard newspapers, the special inside pages were tagged “Ebola Alert”, “Ebola Watch”, “Ebola Spread”, “Ebola Scare” and “Periscope – Ebola”.

The headlines and news stories positioned by the newspapers in their Front pages on the Ebola Virus Disease outbreak were strategically placed with banner headlines which would have created some level of prominence and urgency needed at that period for the health stakeholders and other policy makers to act towards the containment of the outbreak.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are hereby made:
1. The Nigerian Press Organization should develop an editorial policy that would make it binding on different print media editorial boards to channel their agenda setting roles in championing massive health campaigns and advocacy targeted towards educating their readers on the containment of imminent diseases, epidemics and or outbreaks when such occur.
2. The Nigerian press should realize the enormous challenge before them, of making all Nigerians aware through their surveillance functions of the critical issues upon which the successes of health campaigns are based. Hence, the health reporters should always seek out relevant truths for the people who may not witness or comprehend the trendy events that affect them.
A situation where news worthiness and prominence are rated only when such events concern the political class, the elites or insecurity, is rather another condemnable move aimed at widening the news flow imbalance in both information gathering and sharing. The Nigerian Union of Journalist (NUJ) is hereby admonished to strengthen the resolve of her members to always stick to the ethics of the profession in the matters of information gathering and dissemination. When the ethical codes are religiously followed by the reporters, a lot of objectivity, fairness, balance and professionalism will be uplifted.

Nwaozuzu (1997, p. 87) has already established the fact that news stories have gotten so complex that mere reporting is not good enough anymore. The Nigerian journalists are once more called upon to brace up in adding enough brilliant analyses to health related news. A lot more of interpretation and back grounding are needed for the readers to find out the implication of statements and health related issues reported during disease outbreaks.

The watchdog and surveillance – campaign function of the Nigerian press should be further strengthened and ‘sharpened’ so as to be on the watch out against any re-emergence of the Ebola outbreaks, since a resurgence of such has been reported in the neighboring west African country Liberia, where, the Nigerian’s first Ebola index patient emanated from.

References
The Guardian. (2015). Liberian health officials move to control Ebola Outbreak in Monovia as


### APPENDIX I

**Comprehensive list of the sample frame**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>July</th>
<th>August</th>
<th>September</th>
<th>October</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
<td>66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
<td>67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>37</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>38</td>
<td>70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
<td>73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### APPENDIX II

**2014 Calendar that Guided the Sampling**

#### July

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
<th>Sunday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### August

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
<th>Sunday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
September

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
<th>Sunday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

October

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
<th>Sunday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX III

Coding Guide


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NO</th>
<th>SUBJECT CATEGORIES</th>
<th>UNITS of ANALYSIS</th>
<th>CODE NUMBERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Frequency of stories</td>
<td>News stories Features Editorial Letter–to–the Editors Columns</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Prominence Of stories</td>
<td>Front page Back page Inside page</td>
<td>6 7 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX IV
CODING SHEET
Topic: Newspaper Coverage of Ebola Outbreak in Nigeria: A study of the *Guardian and Vanguard*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of Stories</th>
<th>Prominence of Stories</th>
<th>Nature of Stories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX V
NEWSPAPER CODING INSTRUCTIONS
A. Names of Newspaper
1. Enter title of each newspaper on top of every coding sheet used.
2. Enter the edition of all newspaper used and be as specific as possible

B. Subject Categories
At the heart of any content analysis is the category system used to classify the media content. To ensure mutual exclusivity, subject categories have been defined into three broad categories as known in the coding guide see (Appendixes III).

C. Unit of Analysis:
The unit of analysis is the thing that is actually counted.
1. A list of 13 possible subjects which are grouped into broad categories and assigned nominal values ranging from 1 – 13 have been drawn as units of analysis (See Appendix III)
2. There is an existing slot into which every unit of analysis fits.
3. Fix every unit of analysis into only one category.
4. To code content place a tally in front of a category each time you discover a unit that belong to the category.
5. Sometimes several subjects will be covered within the same story. Choose the one that is given most prominence, e.g. in terms of the amount of space or commentary devoted to it.
6. While coding, if you find that certain unit fall simultaneously into two different categories, alert the researcher so that the definitions of such categories can be reversed
7. For each of the 13 units of analysis, a number of topics to help you fit the story into an appropriate subjective area have been suggested. For instance, if the content is about news story, you will code it 1, if the content is an editorial, you will code it 3 and if a front page story, code it 6.