

# **Media Report on Covid-19 and Tourism Industry in Nigeria: The Case of the Guardian and Punch Online Newspapers**

By

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## **Abstract**

*The paper attempted to examine the reportage of issues on Covid-19 and the tourism industry in Nigeria. The study was adjudged important bearing in mind that proper media coverage of the pandemic in relation to the tourism sector may help policy makers, tourism managers and planners to develop strategies to deal with the impacts of the pandemic and similar situations in future. The specific objectives of the study were to: (i) determine the frequency and trend in the coverage of COVID-19 and the tourism sector; (ii) ascertain the story type used to discuss issues on COVID-19 and tourism; and (iii) identify the contents in the coverage. Using The Guardian and Punch online newspapers as case studies, the study found that The Guardian and Punch reported news stories on Covid-19 and tourism industry. It was observed that news stories on Covid-19 and tourism industry were reported more in month of April. Findings reveal that news was the major format used in the report. Results also indicate that, covid-19/tourism industry, covid-19/travel and transportation, covid-19/ hotel and restaurants, covid-19/medical tourism and covid-19/ cultural tourism are the major content of the reports. Themes such as eco-tourism, agro-tourism, culinary tourism, archaeo-tourism, funeral tourism, dark tourism, business tourism were not captured within the study period. Following from the findings of the study, the paper recommends that print media should give adequate coverage on issues on covid-19 and tourism industry. Again, the study recommends that the print media should publish more stories using editorials, opinion and features stories for a better understanding of the effect of covid-19 on tourism industry by the public.*

*Keywords: Media Report, Covid-19, Tourism Industry, Nigeria*

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## **Introduction**

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared corona virus disease (COVID-19) a pandemic (Ruby-Cisneros 2020). Since the declaration, the World Health Organization and national authorities, including Nigeria, have been taking several steps for the suppression of the spread of the disease. Some of the strategies include: closure of schools, promotion of hand hygiene, use of face mask, social distancing and lockdown, etc.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its associated lockdown in various countries have resulted in collateral damage to various facets of human life. Perhaps, the tourism sector, because of its multi-faceted inclination, has received one of the hardest blows. Obviously, the tourism sector has been heavily hit by

COVID-19 pandemic, and the strategies for tackling it. In Nigeria, the situation is not different.

Understanding the impact of COVID-19 outbreak on the Nigerian tourism sector is very important, since it helps policy makers, tourism managers and planners to develop strategies to deal with the impacts and similar situations in future. A thorough understanding of the impacts cannot be without adequate reportage of the impacts of the pandemic on the tourism sector by the media.

As potent tools in mass mobilization, information dissemination, entertainment, socialization, integration, cultural promotion amongst others (Chieme, Nyekwere, Nwaubeta & kiriko, 2017), the media are expected to play a leading role in in-depth understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on Nigeria's tourism sector. Nwabueze, Nnaemeka, Umeora and Okika (2015) corroboratively note that the media have the responsibility of setting agenda and also influence the way the public comprehend certain issues, their impacts and the need for action. Thus, sufficient reportage on the impact of the pandemic on tourism will help the government, policy makers, health and tourism authorities, and other tourism stakeholders to formulate a more proactive ways of managing the impact of the pandemic on the tourism sector. Based on the aforementioned, the aim of this study was to investigate how two online media outfits - *The Guardian* and *Punch* newspapers - report issues relating to the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism industry of Nigeria. The analysis places much interest on frequency, trends, story type and contents of the reports.

### **Objectives of the Study**

In lieu of the aforesaid, the study was guided by the following specific objectives: (i) to determine the frequency and trend in the coverage of COVID-19 and the tourism sector. (ii) To ascertain the story type used to discuss issues on COVID-19 and tourism. (iii) To identify the contents in the coverage.

### **Literature Review**

Mass media refers to all of the communications media that reach a large audience, such as television, radio, newspapers (Microsoft Encarta, 2009). The mass media are divided into two broad categories: electronic media and print media. Print media, which is the concern of the study, is mass communication in the form of printed publications, such as newspapers and magazines.

There is general agreement that the media has the capacity to influence audience attitudes, and that it exerts influence on social life (Corner, 2000 in Igglesden, 2002). The media get people informed of happenings around them, analyze issues of national importance to them and help them to take right decisions (Oyero, 2008, p.48 in Fasakin, Oyero, Okorie & Amodu, 2017). In crisis situations, the media are equally there.

As we know, crisis, whether natural disaster or man-made is inevitable in human existence. With their agenda-setting role, mass media play important part in furnishing the public with necessary information before, during and after crisis situations. These pieces of information and analysis help in the overall management of the impacts of crisis.

In a study aimed at evaluating the role of media in informing people in crisis situation caused by Azerbaijan earthquake, Ghassabi and Zare-Farashbandi (2015) remarked that the mass media played important role in the coverage of the incident, as well as motivated the populace to send humanitarian helps to disaster areas.

With particular reference to the social media, Ghada (2015) wrote that social *media proves to be a strategic management too, and even in crisis management, researches have shown its effectiveness at all stages of a crisis*. Ghada notes that Social Media are interactive interfaces that allow exchange of information. This feature makes it a communication medium and a source of useful data that could help in business management, and hence in crisis management.

In a study by Firoz-Ul-Hassan and Mohammed (2014) on the Bangladesh cyclonic storm of May 29, 2014, it was noted that the print media had a unique responsibility in dissemination of early

warning to the people as produced by Bangladesh metrological department, flood forecasting and warning center. The information disseminated contained tips such as the dangers of disasters, how to prepare to be able to face disasters, etc.

Furthermore, Nabuzale, Mberia and Namusonge (2016) in their own study, sought to evaluate the effectiveness of print media on communicating the key crisis events of natural disasters in Uganda. One of the key findings of the study indicated that the print media's factual coverage of natural disasters helps to build trust for the newspaper in the public sphere and therefore promotes crisis communication because the medium is the message. Media's interest in coverage of crisis extends to the realm of epidemics and pandemics, as crisis does not refer only to situations of natural disasters.

As a result of global warming, over-industrialization, inadequate conservation of biodiversity, poor environmental hygiene, wars, etc, the rate at which epidemics and pandemics occur is on steady increase. Anderson (2020) wrote that:

*Pandemic diseases have had far-reaching impacts on the story of our species. From the Spanish flu to smallpox, widespread illnesses have changed the course of history and toppled civilizations. Even today, epidemics have a major impact on travel and world commerce.*

Indeed, many epidemics and pandemics have impacted heavily on the tourism industry. The twentieth century was thought to have experienced three pandemics namely: the 'Spanish' flu or influenza of 1918-19, the 'Asian' flu (H2N2) of 1957 and the 'Hong Kong' flu of 1968. The twenty-first century has experienced pandemics such as SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) in 2002, 'Bird flu' in 2009, MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome) in 2012, Ebola which peaked in 2013-14 (Greger, 2007; Wu et al., 2017) in Gössling, Scott and Hall (2020), and currently, the Corona virus crises.

COVID-19 originated from the Wuhan Province of China in December, 2019, and began to spread rapidly in China and to other parts of the world through the movement of people in early 2020 (Ozil, 2020). Today, corona virus infection has become one of the biggest medical challenges to human race. Equally, various areas of human endeavour have been adversely affected by the pandemic and the measures put in place to checkmate its spread.

As a service industry, consisting of transportation, accommodation and hospitality Collins-Kreiner and Wall (2015); or as an amalgam of activities across various industry sectors, tourism is one of the most affected by the pandemic. In March 2020, for instance, the International Air Transport Associations (IATA) announced that corona virus has seriously disrupted the industry which has caused a major loss. (<https://www.proshareng.com/news/Travel%20&%20Tours/Corononomics-10-Impact>).

In Nigeria, over 35,000 employees under the National Association of Nigerian Travel Agencies (NANTA) have been seriously affected by the COVID 19 pandemic (Oruonye and Ahmed 2020). The writers Oruonye and Ahmed (2020), in their study, found that *industries in the tourism sector such as airlines, hotels, and entertainment are facing declining demand and patronage with travel crashes and cancellations leading to revenue loss as a result of COVID- 19 disease.*

The impacts of the pandemic on Nigeria's tourism sector need to be properly covered by the print media for effective response by government, policy makers, and other tourism stakeholders. The aforesaid becomes very necessary when we realize that *the globalization of tourism have led to a new reality for the tourism industry, where crises that occur in a place can affect tourism activities around the globe*, (Meditinos and Vassiliadis, 2008), let alone crises such as pandemic. Therefore, this study sought

to assess the coverage of COVID-19 impact on Nigeria's tourism industry, using The Guardian and Punch online newspapers as focus of inquiry.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study was anchored on Agenda-setting Theory and Social Responsibility Theory. Agenda-setting Theory was first suggested by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw based on their study of the media's role in 1968 American presidential election. This theory states that the media dictate what the people think about, not what the people think. Nwabueze *et al* (2015) affirmed that, by frequently covering and giving prominence to issues in the media, the audience attach importance to those issues more than others and by so doing, the mass media set agenda for public discussion. They noted that the media, through agenda setting role, tell the public which issue is important. This, therefore, means that examination of agenda-setting can present an explanation of why information about certain issues are addressed often, while other issues are based on an event to the public and how public opinion on certain issues are shaped (Tesema, 2012).

The relevance of this theory to the study is that, through constant media reportage, issues on Covid-19 pandemic and tourism industry become important public discourse, and the level of attention given to the issues in Nigeria could be ascertained through media reports. This is more so because the media determine, to ascertain extent, the type, amount and frequency of information that reach the general public. Social Responsibility Theory, on the other hand, is an extension of the Libertarian theory of the press and it places emphasis on the moral and social responsibility of persons as well as institutions which operate the mass media (Okoro& Naji, 2012). The theory is based on the principle that the press must be responsible to represent all aspects of situation in the society. In other words, the theory insists that the mass media should permeate and represent all the strata of the society (Stephen, 2014). Capturing it succinctly, "it presupposes that newspapers must have social conscience, be devoted to public welfare and public service; they should be responsive to problems in the society" (Johnson, Layefa, Taiwo, 2016, p.7).

### **Methodology**

This study adopted content analysis research method, which is suitable when one seeks to look at the manifest content of communication in the print media. Content analysis, according to Chioma and Ojomo (2015), is the only objective research method through which media content such as: textual materials of the print and audio visual materials of the broadcast media can be studied without bias. In this study, therefore, online contents of two Nigeria newspapers (*The Guardian and Punch*) were the focus of the study. The population for the study included all stories on Nigeria as published on the official websites of *The Guardian* and *Punch* newspapers that is, on [www.guardian.ng](http://www.guardian.ng) and [www.punchng.com](http://www.punchng.com) from April 2020 to June 2020, specifically, for a period of three months (3 months). The topic "COVID-19 and Tourism" was employed as the main theme to access the home pages of the two Nigeria online newspapers in order to view their reports. In determining the sample size, the researchers purposively examined news stories on COVID-19 and tourism.

The units of analysis were news, features, editorials, opinion articles which are the genre of media content that give accurate, objective and in-depth account of occurrences. For the content category, Wimmer and Dominick (2011:165) noted that the precise constitutions of these categories vary with the topic of inquiry. The content categories were based on Covid-19 and the tourism industry. To determine the count for each issue, the following units were used: **frequency** (number of times each unit of analysis appeared), trend (the number of times stories appeared in a month), location (using dedicated sections), **story type and contents** (using news, editorials, features, opinions and pictures), **content** (using themes discussed in the reports). Using SPSS version 20.0 frequency, simple percentages were analyzed.

## Results

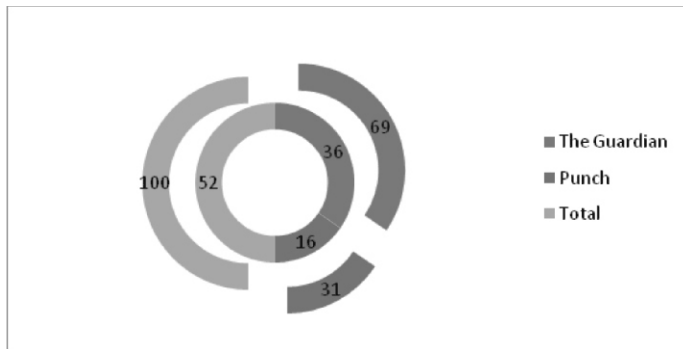


Fig.1: Frequency distribution of reports in *The Guardian* and *Punch* newspapers

The results in fig. 1 show that the two sampled newspapers, *The Guardian* and *Punch*, reported

stories on Covid-19 and the tourism industry. The results clearly indicate that 69% of the stories were reported by *The Guardian* newspaper, while *Punch* newspaper reported 31% of the stories. This implies that *The Guardian* newspaper reported the higher number of stories on Covid-19 and the tourism industry. It also shows that the *Punch* newspapers devoted lesser attention to the issue within the study period.

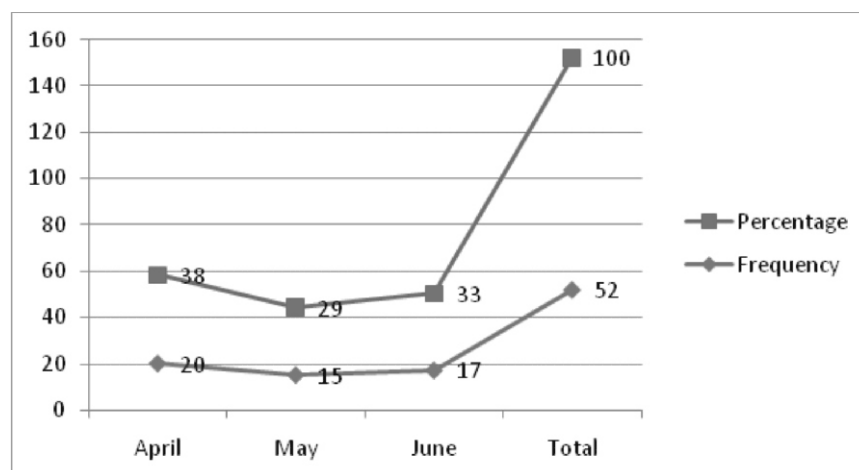


Fig. 2: Trend in the coverage

From the results in Fig.2, the month of April had 20 stories on covid-19 and tourism industry with 38%. The month of May recorded 15 (29%), while June presented 17 stories with 33%. This indicates that more reports were published by *The Guardian* and *Punch* newspapers in the month of April.

Table 1: Data distribution based on story location

Dedicated Section	Newspaper		Frequency	Percentage (%)
	The Guardian	Punch		
Travel and Tourism	17(47%)	-	17	33
National/Daily News	19(53%)	16(100%)	35	67
<b>Total</b>	<b>36(100%)</b>	<b>16(100%)</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>100</b>

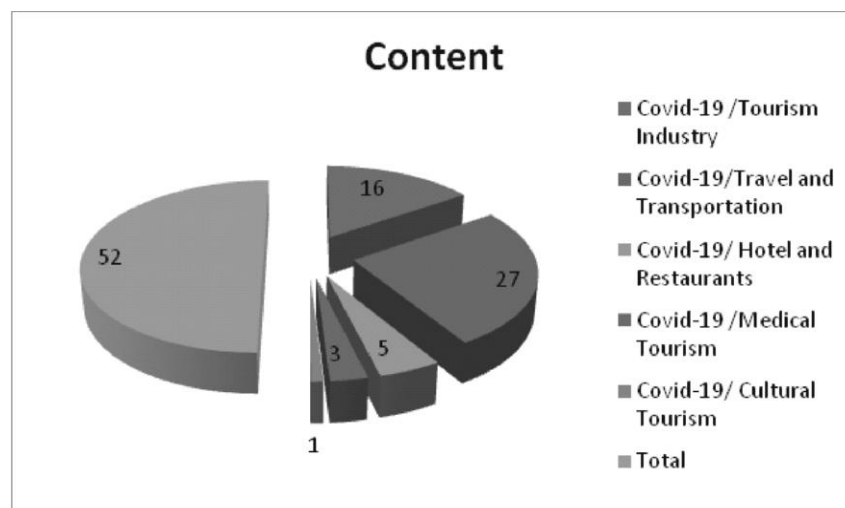
Table 1 shows data distribution based on the location of the story. This means pages dedicated for stories relating to tourism industry in Nigeria. The results clearly indicate that only 33% of stories on covid-19 and tourism industries were presented on the dedicated page of travel and tourism: National/Daily News record 67%. This implies that majority of the stories were presented on sections dedicated to National/Daily news.

*Table 2: The story type used in the reports*

Genre	Newspaper		Frequency	Percentage (%)
	The Guardian	Punch		
<b>News</b>	34	12	46	88
<b>Editorial</b>	2	-	2	4
<b>Feature</b>	-	2	2	4
<b>Opinion</b>	-	2	2	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>100</b>

In Table 2, news had 48%. **The second most common story type employed by *The Guardian* and *Punch* newspapers was the feature with 4%. This is followed by opinion article identified by 4% stories.** Editorial presented 2 stories with 4%. This indicates that, news had the highest frequency and stories on Covid-19 and tourism industry were reported largely through the news.

*Fig.3: Content of the reports*



The summary of the results on contents of the reports are presented in Fig. 3. It reveals that 52% of the stories were based on Covid-19/travel and transportation. Another notable theme of the report was covid-19 and Tourism industry, identified by 30% of the story. The least content of the reports includes themes such as covid-19/ hotel and restaurants, Covid- 19/medical tourism and Covid-19/cultural tourism with 10%, 6% and 2% respectively. These results clearly indicate that Covid-19/Travel and Transportation followed by Covid-19

/Tourism were the most popular themes reported by *The Guardian* and *Punch* newspapers within the study period.

## Discussion

The results from the data analysis on proportion of stories show that the two newspaper - *The Guardian* and *Punch*- reported stories on Covid-19 and tourism industry, even though a small number of 52 reports were published within the three months of the study. It is evident from the result that *The Guardian* newspaper presented majority of the reports with 69%. Findings indicate that the two newspapers devoted less attention to stories on covid-19 and the tourism industry. Considering the role tourism industry plays in boosting the economy of Nigeria, it shows that the two newspapers have not set agenda for public discussion in relation to the effect of Covid-19 on tourism in Nigeria and similar occurrences in the future .

It was also discovered that *The Guardian* newspaper reported only 17 and 19 news stories on both travel/tourism industry and national/daily news sections respectively. On the part of the *Punch* newspaper, no report was presented on the travel and tourism section. Only 31% reports were published within the study period as can be seen in Fig.1 and Table 2.

As regards the trend in the coverage across the three months, it was observed that news stories on Covid-19 and tourism industry were reported more in month of April, 2020 with 38%. This could be as a result of the increasing cases of patients with the virus within the month.

This indicates that despite the growing rate of covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria, the online newspapers under study are yet to give sufficient reports on its effect on tourism industry. With the trivial coverage, it shows that issues on Covid-19, as well as the tourism industry, are handled with levity and still considered as being on the verge for public debate. It is also evident from the result, that the selected newspapers have not adequately executed their social responsibility. Due to increase in cases of Covid-19 pandemic that have led to very large numbers of Nigerians to be put out of place as the closure of activities in tourism industry, “the press is duty bound to serve public interest by providing” (Johnson *et al.*, 2016.p.7) frequently, news reports on issues pertaining to Covid-19 pandemic and the effect on tourism industry for public understanding.

From the findings of the study, issues on covid-19 and tourism industry were reported using mainly the news format. This can be seen in the report published by *The Guardian* on April, 25<sup>th</sup> 2020 with the headline: ITPN makes case for inclusion of tourism sector in FG palliative measures. Another news story was published by the *Punch* on May 20, 2020 that 1.25 million tourist workers may lose jobs- FTAN. The result equally showed that only 2 reports were presented by *The Guardian* via the editorial, while the *Punch* had no story. Additionally, feature and opinion stories which are major means of presenting issues in detail were few. The implication is that descriptive and investigative stories, which

can expound or provide in- depth reports on impact of covid-19 on tourism industry, were low in the two online national newspapers. In other words, there was no elaborate analysis for the general public to understand the impact of the pandemic on tourism industry. Feature articles go beyond the straight news presentation by providing informative stories on tourism industry and covid- 19 issues to the public. Reporting complex issues through feature and editorial, in-depth interpretation of the issues are provided for public understanding. On the other hand, opinion articles give the mass opportunity to present their own views on topical issues. As can be seen in table 2, only the Punch newspaper presented stories on Covid-19 and the tourism industry via opinion.

From the findings of the study the themes discussed in the reports **includes**, covid- 19/tourism industry, covid-19/travel and transportation, covid-19/ hotel and restaurants, covid- 19 /medical tourism and covid-19/ tourism. Fig. 3 clearly indicated that majority of the reports were devoted to Covid-19/travel and transportation. This is followed by Covid-19/tourism industry. An examination of a few headlines published by the two national newspapers present some of the interesting revelations indicated above.

On June 20<sup>th</sup> 2020, *The Guardian* reported a story with the headline: *UNWTO seeks rapid government's response to Covid-19 challenges as tourism restart*. Another story was published on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020 by the *Punch* with the heading: *Travel, hospitality industry may not recover NACCIMA warns*. From the story, the Nigerian Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines, and Agriculture (NACCIMA) urged the Federal Government to urgently adopt measures to protect and stimulate the travel and hospitality trade in the country which was worse hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. Also on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2020, *The Guardian* captured a news story with the headline: *UNWTO leads Action for Tourism's Covid-19 Mitigation Recovery*.

It was further revealed that not much coverage was given to the covid-19/ hotel and restaurants, medical and cultural tourism. Hotel and restaurants as part of the tourism industry handles issues that have to do with well the being of tourists. Medical tourism, on the other focuses, on the health of tourists who visit a country while cultural tourism which is the major aspect in tourism, handles all issues that have to do with the culture a country. Looking at the results in Fig.3, less attention was devoted to these areas. It was also observed that most of the stories on medical and cultural tourism were based on foreign stories. A striking example of the report can be seen in the news story published by the *Punch* with the heading: Covid-19: Eiffel Tower to reopen on June, 25<sup>th</sup>. This story is evident on the 9<sup>th</sup> June of, 2020. In the report, Eiffel tower is one of the most frequently visited tourism sites in Paris. It was shut down due to Covid- 19 pandemic. Another good example of a foreign story was reported by *The Guardian* on May 23<sup>rd</sup> 2020: Covid-19- South Africa cancels 2020 Indaba, Lilizela Awards. In the story, the event Travel Indaba remains one of the most powerful platforms for Africa to showcase their unique and warm African tourism story including their cultural, heritage and artistic assets.

The implication of this finding is that the selected online newspapers, in carrying out their social

responsibility roles did not give much coverage to issues on covid-19 and cultural tourism in Nigeria. It also implies that news stories on the impact of covid-19 on Nigeria's cultural tourism in relation to the role they play to boost Nigeria's economy are less important. Taking into consideration the role these areas play in boosting the economy, reports need to be presented by the media for the public to understand their importance and strategize for future pandemic.

It was observed that other themes such as eco-tourism, agro-tourism, culinary tourism, archaeo-tourism, funeral tourism, dark tourism, business tourism were not captured within the study period. This clearly indicate that the sampled newspapers did not adequately play out their social responsibility function in show casing other areas that relates to tourism as well as the effect of Covid-19. Since it is the responsibility of the media to inform members of society on all issues without restraint, it is then, the obligation of the press to bring to the society, issues on covid-19 pandemic and tourism industry with a view to exposing those negative effects on the industry, individual as well as national development. Without frequent reportage of issues of the epidemic on tourism industry, the economy of the country will adversely be affected.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The media should give adequate coverage on issues on covid-19 and tourism industry.
2. The media should publish more stories using editorials, opinion and features stories for a better understanding of the effect of covid-19 on tourism industry by the public.

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