

Press Coverage of Traditional Medical Practice in Nigeria

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KEYWORDS Newspapers. Frequency. Depth. Portrayal. Prominence. Dominant Issues

ABSTRACT This study examined the extent to which Nigerian national dailies cover traditional medicine practice in Nigeria. Content analysis was used for the study. The data were derived from a sample of 416 issues of four purposively selected Nigerian newspapers: *Daily Trust*, *New Nigerian*, *The Guardian*, and *The Punch*, from a population of 2,920 issues covering the period between 2005 and 2006. Analysis was done using frequency and percentage scores and presented in tabular form. The results showed that newspaper coverage of traditional medicine issues compared with that of orthodox medicine fall far short of expectation. Though coverage was dismal in the print media, their portrayal was generally positive but rarely illustrated with relevant graphics to enhance interest and understanding. The conclusion is that knowledge deficit among journalists regarding traditional medicine issues may be responsible for the poor coverage (particularly in terms of frequency) of traditional medicine issues in Nigerian newspapers. This study therefore recommended among others that Nigerian newspapers should consider traditional medicine issues weighty enough for frequent, consistent, prominent coverage to reflect the importance the populace, government, and the international community attach to them. Very importantly, journalism training in institutions and the industry should include health journalism and particularly modern and traditional medical reporting to address knowledge deficits among journalists in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Though scientific or orthodox medicine has tended to overwhelm traditional medicine in many parts of the world, interest in traditional medicine appears to have surged lately. According to Essential Drugs (2003), in the past decade, there has been renewed attention and interest in the use of traditional medicines globally. In China for instance, traditional medicine is said to account for about 40% of all health care delivered. The percentage is said to be 71 in Chile, 65% in India, 48% in Australia, 70% in Canada, 49% in France, and 42% in the United States.

Nigeria is not left out of this embrace. Traditional medicine is said to be popular among 70% of the population. The country inaugurated a Council for traditional medicine and is said to be working out how to integrate African medicine into its health care delivery system (Abubaka 2003; Maiwada 2004; Adelaja 2006).

However, the issue of integrating traditional into national health policy is controversial in many parts of the world. For instance, London (2006:2) stated:

the notion of the science of alternative medicine falsely implies that a meaningful category of health care called alternative medicine exists and is scientifically based. But in common usage, the term is a euphemism used by enthusiasts and profiteers to give the appearance of legitimacy for methods promoted with scientifically implausible, invalidated or non-validated claims.

In spite of the controversy, as of the year 2000, 25 countries have been reported as having a national policy for traditional medicine though about 70 countries have regulation in place for herbal products. Also, traditional medicine is reported to have gained currency in the treatment and care of such life threatening illnesses as malaria and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) in countries such as Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, North Africa, etc. However, there is little systematic evidence regarding its safety and efficacy (Essential Drugs 2003).

The controversies surrounding traditional medicine do not go unnoticed by the scientific and scholarly communities. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has been deeply involved in research policy formulation on traditional medicine covering forms of medicines and therapies such as herbal therapy, mind and spirit therapies, self-exercise therapies, radiation and vibration, reflexology, osteopathy, chiropractic and aromatherapy. Others are dance therapy,

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radiant therapy, preventive medicine, psychotherapy, therapeutic fasting and dieting, etc. (Adesina 2007).

Apart from the scope of research into traditional medicine, the World Health Organisation also points to the main challenges that face researchers of traditional medicine. These include: lack of coherent national health policies and development plans that touch allocation of financial and other resources for traditional medicine research. The second challenge is the need for sound evidence on safety, efficacy, and quality of traditional medicines. The third challenge is the weak linkage between the traditional medicine research community, health services and policy makers hindering utilisation of research results in practice and policy. The fourth challenge is described as the lack of tools for protecting indigenous knowledge and intellectual property rights (WHO 2002).

The background given thus far shows that traditional medicine in Nigeria is as old as the people. It shows again that a large chunk of the Nigerian populace recourse to traditional medicine. It also shows that traditional medicine is growing in importance - the reason government has formulated a traditional medicine policy and established a traditional medicine council to regulate practice and encourage research in five core areas (herbal medicine, bone setting, mental health, traditional birth attendance and sale of traditional medicine ingredients (Chesa 2006).

Similarly, the background here has noted a deeply seated controversy, mutual distrust and suspicion between proponents of scientific medicine on the one hand and adherents of traditional medicine on other. Finally, traditional medicine is said to be facing several challenges including those of safety, efficacy, and quality.

What is worrisome in all these is that media scholars do not seem to know the extent to which the press particularly newspapers in Nigeria are reflective of this growing importance surrounding it and the problems and challenges that confront it. What seems to exacerbate the problem is the paucity of media research whether in the industry or within the academia on the attention given to traditional medicine in the national print press.

Statement of the Problem

Traditional medicine was the only known form of tackling physical, mental and even spiri-

tual infirmities in the olden days, in fact, up until the colonisation of African territories. However, with political, economic and scientific developments, many societies seemed to have consigned traditional medicine to irrelevance.

In spite of this, even in a most advanced and modern megapolis, residues of traditional, alternative, or complementary medical practice still subsists. Even where scientific medicine is the only medical approach legally permissible and others where folk medical practice is tottering, it is true that orthodox medicine is ingrained in herbal and animal medicine. Scientific medicine is sometimes the researched, refined, and updated version of folk medicine. However, in the last 10 years, there has been a resurgence of interest and attention in use and study of traditional medicine globally (Essential Drugs 2003). Hillenbrand (2006) stated that support for traditional medicine has dramatically increased worldwide and that as far back as 1978 during the Alma Ata Primary Health Care Delivery Declaration, the World Health Organisation (WHO) acknowledged the importance of traditional medicine in providing primary health care and urged nations to develop official policies on it. Though there was minimal follow through, the African Union indeed moved traditional medicine to the front burner when it declared years 2001 to 2010 as the Decade for African Traditional Medicine (Davy 2001).

Outside Nigeria, the coverage of health and medical issues receives attention in the mass media particularly newspapers, magazines, television and radio. For instance, in two studies by Gray et al. (1998:189) conducted in the United Kingdom, the finding was that:

newspapers commonly included health information in the form of advertisements and news items; magazines included features and readers' letters. Descriptions of disease treatment and states were the most common subjects. Although conventional therapies were featured more than alternative options, there were a considerable number of advertisements and features for alternative therapies especially in newspapers.

On the other hand, the study also revealed that 97.5 per cent and 100 per cent of television and radio items respectively, referred to conventional therapies. The authors concluded that,

“television and radio items were heavily biased towards conventional therapies,” and that, “health issues in television programmes, especially soap operas, rarely reflected the substantial public interest in alternative remedies” (Gray et al. 1998: 180).

Where journalists cover health issues, Bonevski et al. (2008) emphasised the importance of subjecting stories to a test of quality by making sure the story provides answers to the following salient questions: Was the novelty of the treatment reported? Was the availability of the treatment reported? Were treatment options described? Did the story contain elements of disease mongering? Was the reporting of evidence included? Were benefits formed in both relative and absolute terms? Was there mention of potential harms? Was there mention of costs? Was an independent comment included? Was the story sufficiently different from the press release (where this was available)?

Media coverage of public affairs and issues does have a relationship with the perception of reporters, correspondents, and editors of those issues. McQuail (2005) confirmed that media content is influenced by media workers’ socialisation and attitudes. It can also be said that journalists are not immune to the selective processes of exposure, retention, and perception. Baran and Davis (1995: 141) explained selective perception to mean, “psychological recasting of a message so that its meaning is in line with a person’s beliefs and attitudes”.

In Nigeria, the researcher has observed that some attention is lately being paid to traditional medicine as indicated by the attempt at legalising of the practice. Outside of this, the Nigerian media have been showing interest in traditional medicine. While the broadcast media (radio and television) have often promoted traditional medicine fairs, workshops, seminars, and exhibitions, the researcher has also noticed that the print media do feature news, opinions, columns, advertisements, pullouts, among others on traditional medicine.

The problem however, is that there seems to be a paucity of scholarly motivated studies on the character or nature of coverage of this important health sector by the print media in Nigeria. Therefore, the key question that this study sought to answer was: What is the nature of newspaper coverage and portrayal of traditional medicine practice in Nigeria?

Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Ascertain the nature and extent of coverage of traditional medicine practice in *Daily Trust*, *The Guardian*, *The New Nigerian* and *The Punch*.
2. Determine whether the portrayal of traditional medical practice in Nigerian newspapers namely; *Daily Trust*, *The Guardian*, *The New Nigerian* and *The Punch*, is positive, negative or balanced.
3. Assess the prominence and depth of reporting accorded traditional medicine practice in *Daily Trust*, *The Guardian*, *The New Nigerian* and *The Punch*.
4. Examine the formats in which traditional medicine issues are presented in *Daily Trust*, *The Guardian*, *The New Nigerian* and *The Punch*.
5. Ascertain the dominant issues which engage the attention of *Daily Trust*, *The Guardian*, *The New Nigerian* and *The Punch* in the coverage of traditional medicine practice.

Research Questions

The study attempted to provide answers to the following research questions with a view to meeting its objectives:

1. What is the nature and frequency of coverage of traditional medicine practice in *Daily Trust*, *The Guardian*, *The New Nigerian* and *The Punch*?
2. Is the portrayal of traditional medicine in *Daily Trust*, *The Guardian*, *The New Nigerian* and *The Punch* positive, negative, or balanced?
3. What level of prominence and depth of reporting are accorded traditional medicine practice in *Daily Trust*, *The Guardian*, *The New Nigerian* and *The Punch*?
4. In what formats is traditional medicine practice information presented in the following Nigerian newspapers: *Daily Trust*, *The Guardian*, *The New Nigerian* and *The Punch*?
5. Which issues dominate the coverage of traditional medicine practice in *Daily Trust*, *The Guardian*, *The New Nigerian* and *The Punch*?

Scope of the Study

This study involved the examination of four purposively selected Nigerian newspapers namely: *Daily Trust*, *The Guardian*, *The New Nigerian* and *The Punch*. They were purposively selected because while all are national newspapers, *Daily Trust* and *The New Nigerian* are published in the North while *The Guardian* and *The Punch* are published in the South. They are regular, consistently available and bear the contents needed for analysis. It covered the middle portion of the Decade for African Traditional Medicine (2001-2010) that is: 2005 and 2006.

The basis of conducting the study was to see the extent to which traditional medical practice is covered and portrayed by the identified newspapers. More specifically, the study concentrated on parameters such as frequency of coverage, prominence accorded traditional medical practice, format of presenting traditional medical information, and the dominant traditional medical issues that preoccupied the examined newspapers.

Literature Review

The problems of traditional medicine in Nigeria have been in part due to the reluctance of herbalists to divulge their medicinal secrets. Many renowned herbal practitioners have died with their knowledge of medicinal plants and their uses in the treatment of diseases. Another problem has to do with standardisation of dosages. Hillenbrand (2006) observes scientific studies and commercial manufacturing of herb-based drugs have not captured the interests of African production pharmacists yet. Besides ensuring quality standards in terms of nonuse of aseptic technique and the application of sterilising agents have discouraged some from using herbal remedies. But more importantly, the tendency to fuse herbal medicine with spiritual practices such as sorcery, divination, and witchcraft has tended to give traditional medicine a bad image thus making it less appealing to some. This presumably, is the origin of the concept of "witch doctor".

Nevertheless, herbs and traditional medicine remain a popular and sometimes the only source of remedy open to millions of people. This particularly holds true for the poor, the uneducated, and the rural dweller who lack access to ortho-

dox medicine. Though some doubt the efficacy of herbal medicine, a good number is ready to vouch for its potency.

Whereas the Chinese national health policy system makes provision for the legal and complementary practice of non-orthodox medicine, Nigeria's health policy is largely orthodox. For instance, a traditional medicine practitioner cannot be employed in a general hospital. Similarly, a surgeon cannot prescribe a pre operative purgative herb for his client.

However, the Nigerian government does not bar its citizens from consuming herbal therapies or accessing other forms of alternative medicine. It plans to regulate the activities of herbal practitioners through the National Council on Traditional and Alternative Medicine. Additionally, traditional medicine practitioners are expected to register and certify their products with the National Agency for Foods and Drug Administration Control (NAFDAC) after confirmatory laboratory tests for safety and efficacy. In this work, we use the words traditional medicine, alternative medicine and complementary medicine to mean the same thing. So, what is traditional medicine?

According to Van der Geest and Whyte (1988:19), the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 1976 defined traditional medicine as, *the sum of all knowledge and practice - whether they can be explained or not - used in the prevention, diagnosis, and elimination of physical, mental, or social imbalances, and relying exclusively on past experience and observations handed down from generation to generation, whether orally or in writing. (p.19)*

Traditional medicine traverses many sections of health care. Traditional healers are seen in the areas of maternal health, orthopedics (bone setting), psychiatry (mental health), as well as in surgical and medical conditions.

Health is a very important concern to humans. This explains why individuals, groups, communities and governments invest time, energy and money on it. However, health issues are complex and technical. They require a measure of knowledge to understand their complexities and intricacies. Interestingly, Gray et al. (1998) gave useful insights into the provision of health information by the mass media, the reasons for the services, as well as what mass media consumers make of the information.

Firstly, the mass media give members of the audience the opportunity to expand their aware-

ness of health issues while engaged in leisure reading, listening, and viewing. Besides, media consumers, whether they are active or passive consumers, often find health information absorbed from the media useful to themselves or those in their social circles. Secondly, health professionals are familiar with the potential influence that the media have over consumers. This is why manufacturers have connected the increasing deregulation of patent medicines to serious promotional campaigns.

Thirdly, though television and radio sets and their users have increased in the United Kingdom, research relating to health information provided by these media is scanty. Gray et al. (1998) mentioned such researches to include:

- (a) Garland's investigation of images of health and medical science on television,
- (b) Gordon's examination of the frequency and accuracy of cardiopulmonary resuscitation portrayed in British medical dramas,
- (c) Reid's review of the effectiveness of mass media health promotion noting the use of soap operas to display posters on set that tallied with initiatives including smoking cessation, immunisation, and AIDS.

Fourthly, based on anecdotal evidence, a high number of consumers visit health professionals with cuttings from the press and reports of items from other media. In spite of this, not much is known about consumer preferences of health information sources though extant studies indicate the apparent influence of the mass media.

In Nigeria, the researcher suspects that research on media coverage of traditional medicine practice is equally limited but a cursory observation of media coverage of health seems to weigh very heavily in favour of orthodox medicine. Even there, issues related to malaria, HIV/AIDS, traffic injuries, and immunisable diseases seem to dominate. Also, where traditional medicine practice is covered, the portrayal of the practice may be more negative than positive while the issues may not receive prominence.

Other problems associated with the coverage of complementary and alternative medicine have been extensively covered in an analysis of news media coverage of complementary and alternative medicine conducted by Bonevski et al. (2008). They pointed out that, "despite its potential to inform and educate the public about health issues, and influence health behaviour

... varying degrees of inaccuracies and omissions in health news stories" are found (p. 2). Other problems include unnecessary sensationalism, inadequate follow-through, failure to consider the quality of evidence, inaccurate portrayal of benefits, lack of consideration of adverse effects and costs, and the failure to obtain comments from independent informants.

Theoretical Framework

The link between health and in our case, traditional and alternative medicine, and the media does have theoretical bases. The Agenda-Setting Theory does provide the framework for explaining the coverage of traditional and alternative medicine in Nigeria. Hanson and Maxcy (1996:82) have cited McCombs and Shaw as having stated that, "readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position". They add that write the media exert considerable influence on certain issues by persistently presenting objects suggesting what individuals in society should drink about, know about, have feelings about. Is this the case with Nigerian newspapers and traditional medicine?

It has been argued however, that the agenda setting theory does not provide certainty over the direction of effects (does agenda setting work directly or through interpersonal influences?) Perhaps, this is the reason Rogers and Dearing's' (1987) model provides for (i) media agenda, (ii) public agenda, and (iii) policy agenda, McQuail and Windahl (1993). This study is not about determining public agenda, but it would be interesting to find out whether the policy agenda on traditional medicine in Nigeria has impacted on media agenda seen through newspaper coverage and portrayal of the same subject matter.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the content analysis research method to determinate the coverage of traditional medicine practice by the print press in Nigeria. Content analysis was used to find out the coverage and portrayal of traditional medicine. According to Babbie (2001:204) content analysis is,

A type of unobtrusive research involving the study of recorded human communication.

Among the form suitable for study of books, magazines, web pages, newspapers, content analysis is particularly well-suited to the study of communication and to answering the classic question of communication research: "who says what, to whom, why, how and with what effect...."

This idea of content analysis conveys the same notion as Kerlinger's (1986) typical definition as cited by Wimmer and Dominick (2000: 135) thus: "content analysis is a method of studying and analysing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables". Scholars resort to the use of content analysis because it is, "a potent and dependable research tool, developed mainly to probe into problems in which the content of communication serves as the rationale for inference" (Akpan 1990: 310). Writing similarly, McQuail (2005: 363) affirmed that, "the content analysis approach brings a statistical summary of a much larger media reality". McQuail added that the method has been employed for several purposes but particularly for comparing media content with a known frequency distribution in social reality.

Population of the Study

Universe of the study consisted of all the issues of *Daily Trust*, *The Guardian*, *The New Nigerian*, and *The Punch* newspapers published and circulated in Nigeria between January 1, 2005 and December 31, 2006 (24 months). These publications were chosen for reasons of national spread, availability, regularity, and inclusion of health and medicine content. The period was chosen because it represented the mid portion of the decade for African Traditional Medicine 2001 – 2010 declared by the African Union. These four newspapers were selected from the top ten national dailies in Nigeria namely: *Daily Trust*, *The New Nigerian*, *Champion*, *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, *The Guardian*, *The Sun*, *Daily Independent*, *Tribune*, and *ThisDay*. This population amounted to a total of 2,920 issues of the four purposively selected national dailies.

The four dailies purposively selected from the ten above were: *Daily Trust*, *the New Nigerian* (to represent Northern Nigerian ownership, *The Guardian* to represent elite readership and south eastern Nigerian ownership; and *The Punch* to represent popular readership and West-

ern Nigerian ownership. The criteria for also selecting these publications were as follows: availability and accessibility, regularity of publication, national circulation, and publication of desired content.

Sample/Sampling Technique

Analysing the content of all national dailies for their coverage of traditional medicine issues was impracticable. For this reason, a purposive choice of four national dailies was made. The four purposively selected papers included: *Daily Trust*, *the New Nigerian*, *The Guardian*, and *The Punch*. Each of the four newspapers contributed 730 issues while the four dailies contributed a total of 2,920. The study adopted 14.25 percent sampling rate to make up the sample size. Kerlinger (1979) and Babbie (1990) recommended a sampling rate of 10 to 20 percent for the purpose of determining sample size. Consequently, 14.25 percent of 2,920 newspaper issues gave us 416 issues of the four selected national dailies as the sample. This meant that each of the four publications contributed 104 issues to the sample i.e. 52 issues per year and 104 for the two years of the study period.

The adequacy of this sample is not in doubt, for as Berelson (1952) stated, a small representative sample of a certain population will produce exactly as realistic a result as would the analysis of a larger one. To select the 416 issues in the sample from a population of 2, 920; the purposive sampling technique was used. This involved dividing the population by the sample size and obtaining the skip interval of seven. This coincided with the weekly issues of the publications that contain health pages, sections or pull outs which also bear traditional medicine practice issues.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis is of crucial importance in a content analysis. It is the least aspect or component of a content analysis (Wimmer and Dominick 2000). To Babbie (1990) it constitutes the single unit about which or whom descriptive and explanatory statements are made. It is, really what the researcher counts and categorises. This element, component, unit, or item according to Akpan (1990) could be a word or symbol, the theme, sentence or paragraph of the

item. In this study, the newspaper story or article which may come in the form of news, feature, editorial, letter, photograph, or column was the unit of analysis.

Content Categories

If media content must be understood through analysis, it is important to classify, divide, group, or categorise such content. The process of content analysis includes coding which Babbie (2001) explained as transforming raw data into categories based on some conceptual scheme. Taking the explanation further, Wimmer and Dominick (2000) stated that the serviceability of all category systems depends on three factors, namely: mutual exclusivity, exhaustivity, reliability.

In line with these properties, the following five content categories were constructed for the purpose of generating answers to the research questions: Alternative Medical Systems, Biologically-based Therapies, Mind-body Interventions, Policy, Quality, Research, Safety, and Regulatory Issues.

Non-Traditional Medicine Issues

Since the focus of this study was largely on health issues and the two broad divisions between traditional (folk) medicine practice and orthodox (modern) medicine practice, this category accommodated all articles which relate to health but are not of the traditional medicine type. This category therefore covered such biomedical issues as medical, surgical, maternal/child health, mental health, and diagnostic issues. Other related issues included medical research/innovation, pharmaceutical matters, policy, regulatory, as well as ethical, safety, quality and institutional subject matters.

Coding and Coding Parameters

Coding allows researchers to transform raw data into standardised form suitable for analysis (Babbie 2001). Wimmer and Dominick's (2000) definition is simpler: placing a unit of analysis into a content category. This study involved two coders in examining the sample carefully to identify the unit of analysis related to traditional medicine practice. The parameters for coding content are as identified below: fre-

quency of coverage, depth of reportage (measured in terms of detail, illustration and attribution), prominence, portrayal of issues (portrayal meant depiction in terms positive, negative, or balanced), format of presentation, dominant (topical) issues covered.

The inter-coder reliability coefficient was calculated and the results from both coders gave .73 respectively. Calculated results of about .75 or above are usually considered typical (Wimmer and Dominick 2000).

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

Data from content analysis were recorded on coding sheets having gone through pilot coding. Obtained data were collected, synthesised, and readied for interpretation. The data obtained from coding of newspaper content were arranged in tabular format. This format made presentation clear and calculation of percentage scores feasible. The data were then described and interpreted in the light of objectives and research questions set at the outset of the study.

Operational Definition of Terms

- **Traditional Medicine** – In the context of this work, this means folk or indigenous means of attending to health problems such as the use of herbs, natural products and elements, and spiritual measures such as prayers. Also used interchangeably with alternative and complementary medicine.
- **Orthodox Medicine** – This term is used in this article to mean the use of biomedical methods as taught in medical schools and practiced in hospitals to deal with health problems. It is used interchangeably with the term non-traditional medicine.

RESULTS

Data presentation and analysis emanate from the content analysis of four Nigerian newspapers namely: *Daily Trust*, *New Nigerian*, *The Guardian*, and *The Punch*. The population of the four newspapers stood at 2,920 issues covering January 1, 2005 to December 31, 2006. A sample of 416 issues representing 14.25 percent of the population was content analysed. This consisted of the sample of weekly issues of the four newspapers on the days set aside for the publication of health/medically related articles.

Table 1: Distribution of newspaper health content

Newspapers	Newspaper health content variables		
	Traditional medicine issue items	Non-traditional medicine issue items	Total
<i>Daily Trust</i>	34 (20.86%)	614 (22.91%)	648 (22.79%)
<i>New Nigerian</i>	7 (4.30%)	492 (18.36%)	499 (17.55%)
<i>The Guardian</i>	112 (68.71%)	1096 (40.89%)	1208 (42.50%)
<i>The Punch</i>	10 (6.13%)	478 (17.84%)	488 (17.16%)
Total	163 (5.73%)	2680 (94.27%)	2843 (100%)

Table 1 shows that a total of 2,843 health and medicine related stories occurred in the four newspapers content analysed. Of this number, a mere 163 or 5.73 percent concerned traditional medicine practice whereas, 2,680 stories dealt with non traditional medicine Practice or orthodox medicine practice. This number accounted for 94.27 percent. This means that orthodox medicine issues were reported 88 times more than traditional medicine issues in the four newspapers. A further examination of the table shows that *The Guardian* led in the report of traditional medicine issues by 112 stories (68.71 %) followed by *Daily Trust* with 34 stories or 20.86 percent. *The Punch* and *New Nigerian* trailed behind with 10 stories or 6.13 percent and seven stories or 4.30 percent respectively. Again, *The Guardian* topped the chart in the coverage of orthodox medicine issues with 1,096 stories (40.89%) followed again by *Daily Trust* with 614 stories (22.91%). *New Nigerian* reported 492 stories representing 18.36 percent while *The Punch* reported the least number of stories: 478 or 17.84 percent. The table therefore shows that there is a significant under coverage of traditional medicine issues by the four newspapers. Additionally, it shows that *The Guardian* covers health issues more than the other three newspapers.

Table 2 looks at how the four national dailies cover traditional medicine practice in Nigeria. The study delineated traditional medicine practice into four broad categories: Alternative

medicine, which includes homeopathic, chiropractic and acupuncture practices; biologically-based therapies, which deal with herbal medicine, and heat and light therapies; mind-body interventions, which cover yoga, spiritual healing, and magnetic therapies. The fourth category has to do with matters involving policy, quality, research, and safety in the area of traditional medicine.

Table 2 shows that of the 163 traditional medicine issue items reported in the four newspapers, alternative medicine accounted for three or 1.84 percent. Biologically-based therapies accounted for 128 or 78.53 percent. Mind-body intervention stories were just five or 3.07 percent while policy, research, quality and safety issues amounted to 27 or 16.56 percent. What can be inferred from Table 2 is that the four Nigerian newspapers involved in this study over concentrated on biologically based therapies particularly herbal medicine to the detriment of other forms of traditional medicine. This may mean that other forms of traditional medicine are not developed in Nigeria, that traditional health product consumers are more interested in herbal medicine, or that journalists are either not sufficiently interested or knowledgeable in the other forms of traditional medicine.

Table 3 deals with the coverage of orthodox medicine practice in the four selected newspapers. Orthodox medicine issues were broadly separated into four aspects: medical/surgical issues deal with medical problems requiring

Table 2: Distribution of traditional medicine issue items

Newspapers	Categories				Total
	Alternative medicine	Biologically based therapies	Mind-body intervention	Policy, quality, research issues	
<i>Daily Trust</i>	1 (33.33%)	21 (16.41%)	0 (0%)	12 (44.44%)	34 (20.86%)
<i>New Nigerian</i>	0 (0%)	5 (3.91%)	0 (0%)	2 (7.41%)	7 (4.30%)
<i>The Guardian</i>	2 (66.67%)	93 (72.65%)	5 (100%)	12 (44.44%)	112 (68.71%)
<i>The Punch</i>	0 (0%)	9 (7.03%)	0 (0%)	1 (3.70%)	10 (6.13%)
Total	3 (1.84%)	128 (78.53)	5 (3.07%)	27 (16.56%)	163 (100%)

Table 3: Distribution of non-traditional medicine issue items

Newspaper	Categories				Total
	Medicine/ surgical issues	Maternal/ child health issues	Mental health issues	Policy, quality, research issues	
<i>Daily Trust</i>	284 (29.89%)	168 (32.55%)	11 (19.30%)	151 (13.05%)	614 (22.91%)
<i>New Nigerian</i>	178 (18.74%)	106 (20.54%)	4 (7.02%)	204 (17.63%)	492 (18.36%)
<i>The Guardian</i>	265 (27.90%)	169 (32.75%)	25 (43.86%)	637 (55.06%)	1096 (40.89%)
<i>The Punch</i>	223 (23.47%)	73 (14.15%)	17 (29.82%)	165 (14.26%)	478 (17.84%)
Total	950 (35.45%)	516 (19.25%)	57 (2.13%)	1157 (43.17%)	2680 (100%)

treatment with drugs or surgery as well as other public health issues; maternal and child health issues deal with health problems of women and children and cover reproductive, nutritional and family health. Mental health issues cover psychiatric, psychological, emotional, and behavioural health problems; while policy, research, quality, and safety issues in orthodox medicine form the fourth aspect.

Table 3 indicates that of the total of 2,680 orthodox medicine related stories in the four publications, 950 (35.45%) dealt with medical and surgical matters; 516 stories representing 19.25 percent dealt with maternal and child health matters; 57 or 2.13 percent had to do with mental health issues while 1,157 stories or 43.17 percent related to policy, research, quality and safety issues in orthodox medicine.

Table 3 shows significantly that the four selected news papers reported more health research, policy, safety and quality stories followed by medical/surgical health matters, and maternal/child health issues. Very importantly, the table shows that mental health matters received the least attention from the four publications.

Looking at the performance of each of the four dailies, the table shows that *The Guardian* leads in the coverage of orthodox medicine practice with 1,096 stories (40.89%) followed by *Daily Trust* with 614 stories (22.91%). *New Nigerian* comes third with 492 stories representing 18.36 percent while *The Punch* trails behind with 478 stories (17.84%).

Table 4 enumerates the quantity of traditional medicine issue items in each of the four news papers. The table shows that of the 163 stories counted from the four newspapers, 34 or 20.86 percent occurred in *Daily Trust*. Seven stories representing 4.30 percent were reported in the *New Nigerian*. One hundred and twelve (112) stories computed at 68.71 percent were presented in *The Guardian* while *The Punch* re-

ported 10 traditional medicine stories. This represents 6.13 percent. What this table shows is that *The Guardian* takes the lead in the coverage of traditional medicine issues. It beats the performance of the *Daily Trust*, *New Nigerian*, and *The Punch* by more than double.

Table 4: Frequency of traditional medicine issue items

Newspapers	Frequency of traditional medicine issues	
	Number	Percentage
<i>Daily Trust</i>	34	20.86
<i>New Nigerian</i>	7	4.30
<i>The Guardian</i>	112	68.71
<i>The Punch</i>	10	6.13
Total	163	100.00

Table 5 rates the prominence that the four analysed newspapers accorded traditional medicine reports. The parameters used in gauging prominence were high for stories placed on the front, back, and editorial pages; medium for stories captured in special pages, pull outs, or supplements, while low rated stories were buried in the inside pages. Based on these criteria therefore, the table indicates that zero number of stories representing 0 percent qualified for high prominence. However, of the 163 stories, 146 stories or 89.57 percent were accorded moderate prominence because they were mostly contained in special health page(s). On the other hand, 17 or 10.43 percent of the 163 stories received low prominence because they were tucked away in the inside pages. What these data indicate is that traditional medicine stories seldom make front-page news or form a serious subject for editorial pages. However, it also means that traditional medicine is considered important enough by some newspapers to deserve special section, page, or pull out in their publications.

Table 6 examines the depth given to traditional medicine issues in the four analysed newspapers. The study defines depth as encompass-

Table 5: Prominence accorded traditional medicine issue items

Newspapers	Prominence variables			Total
	High	Medium	Low	
<i>Daily Trust</i>	0 (0%)	23 (15.75%)	11 (64.71%)	34 (20.86%)
<i>New Nigerian</i>	0 (0%)	3 (2.05%)	4 (23.53%)	7 (4.30%)
<i>The Guardian</i>	0 (0%)	112 (76.71%)	0 (0%)	112 (68.71%)
<i>The Punch</i>	0 (0%)	8 (5.48%)	2 (11.76%)	10 (6.13%)
Total	0 (0%)	146 (89.57%)	17 (10.43%)	163 (100%)

ing the following components: detail for stories that clarify, explain, and interpret issues to ease understanding; illustration where stories are accompanied with photographs or info-graphics for visual effect, and attribution for stories that make clear references to sources, experts, and other credible information providers.

On the strength of the above, Table 6 indicates that concerning detail, the four newspapers performed creditably. The least score is 97.32 percent for *The Guardian*. In terms of illustration of traditional medicine reports, *The Guardian* stands out with a score of 79.46 percent. The three other papers' use of illustration to deepen traditional medicine reportage is insignificant. As it pertains to the use of attribution, three papers scored very high except *The Punch*, which posted a score of 40 percent. Overall, therefore, the four analysed newspapers can be said to have given traditional medicine issues a mean depth of about 69 percent in the coverage of the subject.

Table 7 concerns how the four newspapers portray traditional medicine issues. The variables on portrayal included positive where tra-

ditional medicine is depicted as good, useful, and contributing beneficially to the health care system; negative where traditional medicine is seen as useless and harmful or injurious to users; and balanced where traditional medicine practice is portrayed as potentially useful but requires refinement in quality, improvement in safety and efficacy and regulatory control by statutory authorities.

Based on these variables, Table 7 shows that of the 163 stories on traditional medicine practice in the four papers, 146 representing 89.57 percent were depicted in positive light, seven stories or 4.29 were portrayed negatively while 10 or 6.13 percent were balanced. The data shows that, on the whole, traditional medicine was portrayed positively as captured by the reports contained in the four newspapers selected for this study.

Table 8 contains information on the categories through which traditional medicine reports are presented to the reading public. The categories included news and feature, editorial and opinion articles, and special pages or sections, or pullouts. The table indicates that of a total of

Table 6: Depth of coverage of traditional medicine issue items

Newspapers	Depth variables			Total
	Detail	Illustration	Attribution	
<i>Daily Trust</i>	34 (100%)	01 (2.94%)	34 (100%)	34 x (67.65%)
<i>New Nigerian</i>	7 (100%)	0 (0%)	7 (100%)	7 x (66.66%)
<i>The Guardian</i>	109 (97.32%)	89 (79.46%)	110 (98.21%)	112 x (91.66%)
<i>The Punch</i>	10 (100%)	1 (10%)	4 (40%)	10 x (50%) (68.99%)

Table 7: Newspaper portrayal of traditional medicine issue items

Newspapers	Portrayal variables			Total
	Positive	Negative	Balanced	
<i>Daily Trust</i>	33 (22.60%)	1 (14.29%)	0 (0%)	34 (20.86%)
<i>New Nigerian</i>	7 (4.80%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	7 (4.30%)
<i>The Guardian</i>	102 (69.86%)	5 (71.43%)	5 (50%)	112 (68.71%)
<i>The Punch</i>	4 (2.74%)	1 (14.28%)	5 (50%)	10 (6.13%)
Total	146 (89.57%)	7 (4.29%)	10 (6.13%)	163 (100%)

Table 8: Newspaper presentation formats of traditional medicine issue items

Newspaper	Format variables			Total
	News/features	Editorial/Opinion	Special page/section	
<i>Daily Trust</i>	1 (11.11%)	0 (0%)	33 (21.43%)	34 (20.86%)
<i>New Nigerian</i>	6 (66.67%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.65%)	7 (4.305)
<i>The Guardian</i>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	112 (72.73%)	112 (68.71%)
<i>The Punch</i>	2 (22.22%)	0 (0%)	8 (5.19%)	10 (6.135)
Total	9 (5.52%)	0 (0%)	154 (94.48%)	163 (100%)

163 stories in the four newspapers, nine (9) stories or 5.52 percent belonged to the news/feature format, zero story (0%) occurred in the editorial/opinion format, while 154 stories representing 94.48 percent belonged to the special page/pullout format. The implication of the data is that a great percentage of traditional medicine stories (indeed health stories generally are placed in special health/medicine pages anchored by designated staff writers or reporters some of whom are health journalists. The table also reveals that as important as news, features, editorial and opinion pages are, traditional medicine stories are seldom featured there. This gives the impression that the subject matter is not serious enough for news, feature, editorial and opinion writers.

DISCUSSION

Discussion of results or findings is based on the research questions:

What is The Nature and Frequency of Coverage of Traditional Medicine Practice in Nigerian Newspapers?

The data presented in Table 1 is helpful in providing the answer to this question. The data show clearly that 2,843 health-related stories were counted in the four national dailies, namely *Daily Trust*, *New Nigerian*, *The Guardian*, and *The Punch*. Of this number, traditional medicine issue content accounted for 5.73 percent while orthodox medicine issue content amounted to 94.27 percent. The data therefore indicate a very significant under coverage and under reportage of traditional medicine issues.

The answer to research question one therefore is undoubtedly that the frequency of coverage of traditional medicine practice is far less, compared to that of orthodox medicine practice. This finding tallies with the observation of Gray et al. (1998) that newspapers and magazines

reported more of conventional medical practice than alternative medical practice. The questions that these pose are several. Does this mean that journalists consider orthodox medicine more important than traditional medicine? Alternatively, does it mean that orthodox medicine is more acceptable than traditional medicine among members of the population? Or does it mean that media professionals are not interested or knowledgeable enough in traditional medicine? Given this situation, where does this leave the commitment of the United Nations, World Health Organisation, the African Union, and other development agencies in the promotion of traditional medicine? What does it portend for the declaration of the Decade of African Traditional Medicine?

Is the Portrayal of Traditional Medicine Practice in Nigerian Newspapers Positive, Negative, or Balanced?

Table 7 provides data, which assist in answering this research question. The data indicate that 89.57 percent of stories in the four newspapers portrayed traditional medical practice in positive terms. In other words, the stories depicted traditional medical practice as good, useful and beneficial to health consumers and the health care system. Stories that viewed traditional medicine practice negatively accounted for a paltry 4.29 percent. Again, the remaining 6.13 percent of stories still saw traditional medicine practice as potentially useful though it would need more research, more refinement in quality, and more regulation.

This finding is significant in the sense that it appears traditional medicine does not seem to suffer the fate faced by mental health issues. For according to Lawrie (2000), stereotypes and stigmatisation towards psychiatric patients are maintained and periodically reinforced by negative press. He notes that media coverage of psychiatric disorders has been selective, misinforming, and melodramatic.

What Level of Prominence and Depth of Reporting Are Accorded Traditional Medical Practice in Nigerian Newspapers?

The clues to answering the above stated research question could be gleaned from Tables 5 and 6. Table 5 provides information on prominence accorded traditional medicine by the four selected newspapers while Table 6 deals with the depth of coverage of traditional medicine issues. In Table 5 we see that while 0 percent of stories counted received high prominence and just 10.43 percent attracted low prominence, 89.57 percent of stories were accorded moderate display. Moderate display here means that while the stories were not carried on front, back or editorial pages, they were displayed on specially designated pages, sections, or pull out. What this means is that traditional medicine issues were given sufficient prominence.

Concerning depth, Table 6 examines it in terms of detail, illustration, and attribution embedded in traditional medicine stories. The table shows that for all four newspapers, their detail profile amounted to more than 97 percent. However, concerning illustration, only *The Guardian* illustrated its stories to the tune of 99.46 percent. The other three papers showed insignificant streak in providing illustration for their traditional medicine stories. On attribution, the four papers performed very well above 98 percent except *The Punch* which did so at the level of 40 percent. Overall, the mean performance for the four newspapers in terms of depth stands at about 69 percent. The answer then is that the level of prominence accorded traditional medicine stories and the depth with which they are covered are high.

In relating these findings to the theoretical framework, some implication for the agenda setting theory is seen. The theory conveys the idea that consumers of media products learn about issues as well as the importance to attach to issues based on the amount of information provided by the media. Considered alone, the study shows that the newspapers involved in this study gave sufficient depth and prominence to traditional medicine issues. Ordinarily, this should mean that their agenda setting function deserves accolades. However, when the frequency of coverage of traditional medicine is compared with that of orthodox medicine, such function drastically reduces. It means therefore

that to set meaningful agenda, the newspapers do need to give sufficient prominence and depth as well as adequate frequency of the coverage to traditional medicine issues.

In What Formats Are Traditional Medicine Practice Issues Presented in Nigerian Newspapers?

Format refers to the journalistic form in which the press presents information to the reading public. In the study, three categories of formats were identified namely: news/feature articles, editorial/opinion articles, and special page/pull out articles. Table 8 contains data on newspaper presentation formats for traditional medicine issue items from which the answer to research question four can be extracted. The data show that 5.52 percent of the stories were presented in the news/feature format. Also, zero percent of stories belonged to the editorial/opinion format, while 94 percent of traditional medicine stories were presented as special page/pull out articles.

What this finding suggests is that the Nigerian newspapers involved in the study preferred to use the departmentalised or compartmentalised format in presenting health information particularly information about traditional medicine practice. The finding also implies that the newspapers tend to deny traditional medicine information the variety and dynamism, which are the hallmarks of journalism as Batta (2004) noted. By not extending the presentation format to news, feature, editorial, and opinion pages, it does appear that traditional health information is restricted, i.e. compartmentalised. Beyond this however, it does appear that by "boxing" traditional medicine information into the special page, members of the reading public are somewhat denied the channel of contributing to the discourse on traditional medicine which readers generally have by contributing articles to features, editorial, and opinion pages.

The importance of such contribution by the public increases the breadth of perspective and diversifies the sources of information for both the press and readership by exposing all to a variety of viewpoints (Comrie 1999). In the same vein, Anim (1996) underscored the opinion function as crucial. The reasoning behind this being that analysis and interpretation of issues allow for marshalling the variant strands of the

issues and presenting the options in clearer and deeper perspectives to everyone. If traditional medicine information is presented in a variety of forms, the cumulative effect would give more prominence to the issues, it would also open newspaper readers to more opportunities of learning about traditional medicine issues.

What Issues Dominate the Coverage of Traditional Medicine Practice in Nigerian Newspapers?

Traditional medical practice covers a variety of issues. In this study, such issues were grouped as follows: alternative medicine issues which cover practices such as homeopathy, chiropractic and acupuncture; biologically based therapies which deal with practices in herbal medicine and other natural therapies that use heat, light, water, aroma, colour, etc; mind-body interventions which embody practices involving yoga, spiritual healing and magnetic therapy; and then research, policy, quality, safety and institutional issues involving traditional medicine.

Table 2 bears data, which assist in answering research question five. The table indicates that of the four issues mentioned above, alternative medicine issues scored 1.84 percent; biologically-based therapy issues had 78.53 percent, mind-body interventions attracted 3.07 percent while policy, quality, research issues scored 16.56 percent. What this means is that, biologically based therapy issues dominate the coverage of traditional medicine practice in Nigerian newspapers. This finding has several implications. By concentrating on biologically based aspect of traditional medicine, does it mean that herbal medicine is more developed or prevalent in Nigeria? Alternatively, does it mean that other aspects of traditional medicine have failed to gain grounds among the populace? On the other hand, does it mean that journalists are not knowledgeable or interested enough in aspects other than herbal medicine?

Questions such as these perhaps prompted medical researchers in the United Arab Emirate (UAE) to probe the views of medical students and general practitioners on alternative medicine. Hassan et al. (2000) found out that the majority of general practitioners believed they should know about herbal medicine, but were divided concerning homeopathy and acu-

puncture. They are also reported not to see the need to know about mind-body therapies or chiropractic.

The significance of the answer to this research question lies in the fact that purveyors of information such as print journalists need to be fully abreast of information on all aspects of traditional medicine prevalent in the population. They also need to be sufficiently interested in the issues if they must develop of a significant mass of readership.

Considering the relevance of this finding to our theoretical framework, we see some relationship with the agenda setting theory. What the finding here suggests is that as far as traditional medicine issues are concerned, the newspapers selected for this study presented a narrow agenda to the reading public. By concentrating on herbal medicine practice, the newspapers tended to limit the exposure of readers to a narrow perspective of the practice. The implication for journalism practice therefore is that, to broaden the scope of exposure for the reading public, the newspapers have to widen the breadth of coverage of traditional medicine issues. This way, they would be better placed to set a fuller agenda on the issues.

CONCLUSION

In view of the above findings, these conclusions can be drawn: Firstly, the Nigerian print media have yet to key into the trend. The coverage of orthodox medicine far outstrips that of traditional medicine both in terms of frequency of coverage and prominence accorded the issues. Secondly, though traditional medical issues are sparingly reported and covered by the print media in comparison to orthodox medicine issues, the dismal coverage is consolably portrayed in positive light and given sufficient depth in terms of providing detail and appropriate attribution. However, illustration of traditional medical stories with diagrams, photographs, and informational graphics is still below the mark for many newspapers. Thirdly, though captioning or displaying traditional medical stories on special pages, sections, and pullout is a convenient way of compartmentalisation (segmentation of readership through specialisation) and providing prominence, the special section format has tended to bar traditional medical stories from front pages, news pages, editorial columns, and

opinion pages. This denies traditional medicine issues the benefits of frequent editorial endorsement and public participation via opinion articles. Finally, the knowledge base of the Nigerian print journalist is somewhat restricted. Apart from a smattering of insights in herbal medicine, the Nigerian journalist has clear handicap in reporting other vast areas of traditional, alternative and complementary medicine available in society. Homeopathy, *ayurvedic* medicine, acupuncture, chiropractic, osteopathy, magnetic therapy, reflexology, etc. are seldom covered yet the practices go on in the society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the findings and conclusions brought to the fore in this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Nigerian print media should accord traditional medical issues the same importance and prominence given to orthodox medical issues. Traditional medical issues should not be relegated to the background in terms of the frequency of reports, the display of the reports, the variety of formats adopted in the presentation of the reports, and the depth of treatment given the issues reported.
2. To make traditional medical stories captivating, attractive, comprehensible, and meaningful; newspapers should strive to use not only colour photographs, but also other useful illustrative devices such as diagrams and graphics. Doing this may not only generate interest in the readership, it may make those health pages alluring and could even increase sales for the newspapers.
3. If traditional medical issues must be given the importance they deserve, their presentation should not always be compartmentalised in special sections, pages, and pullouts. The issues should be considered weighty enough to attract frequent editorial comments. Knowledgeable practitioners, researchers, academics, manufacturers, marketers and users of traditional medicine should be frequently and consistently syndicated to produce articles for the reading public.
4. To build the capacity among journalists in traditional medical issues, educational institutions engaging in the training of journalism professionals should introduce health journalism as an important component of their training. Likewise, managers, directors, editors, proprietors, and professional journalism unions should as a matter of urgency provide opportunities for practitioners to acquire knowledge through short courses, symposia, workshops, seminars, excursions and other such training so that journalists can be equipped to report traditional medicine practice accurately, objectively, fairly, and ethically.
5. Senior journalists, whether they are proprietors, managers, editors, directors, or senior correspondents, have a key role to play if the potentials of traditional medicine are to be realised. They can do this by establishing public-friendly publications addressing traditional medical issues. Now those publications are still in the precincts of academics, researchers, and professionals. They should also assign more journalists to cover the traditional medical beats in addition to creating sub desks for traditional medical issues in their health news department manned by appropriately trained personnel. They should equally strive to increase the quantity and quality of traditional medical report pages even if it means seeking sponsorship from researchers, manufacturers, and marketers of traditional medicine products.
6. The local, state and federal government through their ministries of information, education, agriculture, science and technology as well as health should promote through publicity, mobilisation, instruction, protection and cultivation of medicinal resources, funding and research; the development of traditional medical practice in Nigeria. Appropriate legislation should be put in place to regulate the operation of the practice including adequate checks on quackery, fakery, and charlatanism.

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