

Representation of COVID-19 Pandemic by Select Nigerian Online Newspapers

OJEBUYI, Babatunde Raphael

Department of Communication and Language Arts
University of Ibadan, Nigeria

OGUNKUNLE, Dickson Oluwasina

Department of Communication and Language Arts
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria

ODEBIYI, Stephen Damilola

Department of Communication and Language Arts
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria

Abstract

Media representation of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) disease has implications for citizens' perception of and attitudes to, the pandemic. Existing media studies on the pandemic have not extensively investigated how Nigerian news media have represented the disease. Therefore, this study was designed to examine how the Nigerian online newspapers represented the pandemic. This was to explicate the implications of such representation for the audience's perception of the disease. The social representation theory was employed as the framework, while the sequential explanatory mixed-methods research design was used. COVID-19-related news stories from the websites of three leading Nigerian newspapers (*Punch*, *Vanguard* and *ThisDay*) were purposively selected and content analysed. The findings reveal that the select newspapers used representational strategies such as naming, emotional anchoring, metaphoric anchoring, emotional objectification and personification to report the coronavirus pandemic as a global health crisis. *The Punch*, more than the other two newspapers, mostly used naming (50%), emotional anchoring (55.0%), metaphoric anchoring (52.0%) and emotional objectification (52.0%) to represent COVID-19. Exposure to the foregoing pattern of media representation of the COVID-19 pandemic could influence how the media audiences perceive and react to the disease. It was, therefore, recommended that the Nigerian media should be more euphemistic as much as possible, in their reportage of unpleasant social realities such as the COVID-19 pandemic in a way that eases social tension, mitigates mental or emotional stress and equips the public with the right knowledge and feelings to navigate such phenomena.

Keywords: Anchoring and Objectifying, COVID-19 Pandemic, Media Representation of Social Realities, Nigerian Online Newspapers, Web 2.0 Technologies