

Chapter 11

Framing Family Planning: An Analysis of Nigerian Newspaper Coverage

Mistura Adebisola Salaudeen

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4495-460X>

Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong

ABSTRACT

Given the population explosion and high rate of maternal and infant mortality prevalent in many developing countries, family planning has been promoted as method of controlling the population growth and stemming the occurrence of these birth-related deaths with the mass media as the major campaign tools. This study examined the coverage of family planning-related news in selected Nigerian online newspapers from September 2017 to April 2019, measuring the presence of eight news frames. A quantitative content analysis of the stories revealed that family planning news frequently fell within the attribution of responsibility frame and solution frame. However, it was observed that not enough media attention was given to address misconceptions about family planning, and stories prompting readers to take action on family planning significantly outnumber stories that provided help-seeking information necessary to take such actions. The results provide important insights of how family planning news is reported in Nigerian newspapers.

INTRODUCTION

At a time when the world is increasingly barraged with unprecedented phenomena of lasting global consequences, the roles of the mass media as agents of socialisation, custodians of knowledge, disseminators of factual information, and keepers of truth, have never been more pronounced, particularly in relation to health issues. The mobilisation, instrumental and social control functions of the mass media place them at the crucial spot between the health directives initiated by medical experts and the adoption of health practices by the intended audience (Briggs & Hallin, 2016; Viswanath, Ramanadhan & Kontos, 2007). As sources of mediated health information, the mass media are tasked with the responsibility

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of providing health information, and the way these health campaigns are presented and framed play a pivotal role in the persuasiveness and effectiveness of health behavioural change (Abroms & Maibach, 2008; Fung, 2019).

This chapter, thus, delineates the impact of mediated health campaign messages on health decision making, particularly in the context of family planning-related campaigns. Through a comprehensive assessment of past literature, this chapter explores the relationship between audience exposure to family-planning related messages in the media and their adoption of family planning methods. This study further examines the level of awareness, the campaign initiatives developed and rate of adoption of family planning in Nigeria. Empirically, this study investigates the coverage of family planning-related news in selected Nigerian online newspapers. Through a qualitative content analysis, this study aims to identify the prevalence of some specific frames used by newspapers in reporting family planning news and information. The objective is to examine the rate at which newspapers address misconceptions and provide information that induce people to take positive action about family planning.

BACKGROUND

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa and the seventh globally, with a current estimated population of 204 million (World Population Review, 2020), has a fertility rate of 5.5 births per woman (National Populations Commission, 2019), which makes the country highly susceptible to population explosion. Experts have projected that the country's population will exceed 390 million by 2050 if measures are not taken to curb the rapid population growth (World Population Review, 2020). If left unchecked, overpopulation is capable of wreaking dire havoc with negative implications nationally and globally. Scientists have warned that unbridled population growth is likely to escalate the exhaustion of natural resources, environmental degradation, unemployment rate, food shortages, migration crises and territorial conflicts, that are currently besieging the world (Leblanc, 2018; Mensah, 2019).

Health specialists have advocated that overpopulation should be discussed as a public health issue because it thrives due to inadequate birth control measures (MPH Online, 2020). While many developed nations are managing population growth and recording low fertility rates through contraceptive use, voluntary sterilization and other birth control measures (United Nations, 2017), majority of low and middle income countries, especially in Africa and Asia are recording higher birth rates and lower prevalence of birth control (Mensah, 2019; United Nations, 2017). An attendant health issue of high fertility rate and incessant births is maternal mortality. Maternal mortality is one of the numerous public health challenges facing many sub-Saharan African countries with majority of the deaths caused by complications during childbirth and abortions. The World Health Organisation (2018), estimates that 214 million women of reproductive age in developing countries are at risk of maternal mortality due to lack of modern birth control use.

As part of the efforts to control the burgeoning population of the country and to stem the tide of maternal and infant deaths, the Nigerian Ministry of Health over the last 20 years have launched several information and education campaigns to sensitize the country about the health benefits of contraception use as well as to educate Nigerians about the importance of child spacing (Family Planning 2020, 2018). Much of the campaigns were focused on increasing the use of contraceptives and encouraging families to adopt family planning. Although statistics show a progressive use of contraceptives among Nigerians in the last 10 years (Family Planning 2020, 2018), the adoption of modern family planning

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