

## Malaria Reportage in Punch and Nigerian Tribune Newspapers

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### ABSTRACT

The study examined the reportage of malaria from January to December, 2011 in Punch and Nigerian Tribune newspapers. It identified the frequencies of malaria reports in these two newspapers according to the story category, the prominence given to the stories, the sources of story and themes including causes, effect, prevention and treatment of malaria. The simple random system sampling technique was employed to select the two newspapers and content analysis method was adopted to examine them. Results showed that the malaria reportage rates in the reviewed newspapers were 5.9% in 269 Punch newspapers and 7.1% in 308 Nigerian Tribune newspapers. No definite pattern of variation was observed in malaria reportage rate in the two newspapers. However, the highest malaria reports were observed in Punch in December and in April in Nigerian Tribune. Malaria reports were more of news stories in Punch (62.5%) and in the Nigerian Tribune (59.1%) respectively. None of the two newspapers placed malaria report under editorial column. There was no malaria cartoon and advert in Punch and Nigerian Tribune respectively. The two newspapers placed most of their malaria reports in the less important category with percentage rate of 81.3% and 77.3% in Punch and Nigerian Tribune respectively. In-house was the most frequent source of malaria reports with frequencies of 43.8% in Punch and 54.5% in Nigerian Tribune. Reports on malaria prevention had the highest frequency of 62.5% in Punch and 45.5% in Nigerian Tribune while malaria treatment had the least overall frequency of 5.3% in the two newspapers.

The study concludes that malaria reports were not given enough coverage in the two newspapers studied. It, therefore, suggests that malaria reportage rates be increased in Nigerian newspapers so as to create more awareness to the public on malaria issues.

**Keywords:** Malaria, reportage, Punch, Nigerian Tribune, newspapers.

{**Citation:** Oluwadun Oreoluwa Opemipo, Obono Koblowe. Malaria reportage in Punch and Nigerian Tribune newspapers. American Journal of Research Communication, 2013, 1(9): 111-125} [www.usa-journals.com](http://www.usa-journals.com), ISSN: 2325-4076.

## INTRODUCTION

Of all the human afflictions, the greatest toll has been exacted by malaria<sup>1</sup>. Every year malaria causes clinical illness, often very severe, in 300 million to 500 million people; 1.5 million to 2.7 million of whom die. Malaria is most serious in the poorest countries, among underprivileged populations living under the most difficult and impoverished conditions. It, therefore, contributes to the continued marginalization of people living in malarious areas. It undermines the health and welfare of families, endangers the survival and education of children, debilitates the active population, and strains the resources of both the countries and their inhabitants, limiting their ability to contribute to economic and social development<sup>1</sup>.

According to Lettenmaier<sup>2</sup>, relatively less attention has been paid to malaria communication and he is of the opinion that communication is key to malaria eradication. Mozumder and Marathe<sup>3</sup> are of the opinion that timely information can be very useful in reducing child mortality. It is often said that information and communication rule the world and without communication the world is a dead zone. For every person to be knowledgeable and less ignorant there has to be communication. This is why the people have relied on the media for accurate and well trusted information. Therefore, it is the duty of the mass media to provide information on prevalent health issues, such as malaria, in the society.

Communication can be used to achieve the knowledge of transmission and prevention of malaria. Newspapers are generally known for their daily, current, timely information reportage and their easily accessible storage factors. They are, therefore, expected to have important roles to play on malaria reduction through its daily reportage in communities. According to Vivian<sup>4</sup> in most communities, newspapers cover more news at greater depth than competing media. A newspaper may carry more items than the television or radio and even at greater length. Most people would prefer newspaper because it is handy and could be referred back to. A busy man who has limited time, would not have the patience to sit down and watch the TV news, he would prefer to grab a copy of newspaper and read it on his way to work or in his office when he needs to relax.

The issue of malaria has been rampant in Nigeria. So many researchers have kept over-emphasizing on the topic yet millions of people still die of malaria every year. Actions have been taken up against malaria like the RBM (Roll Back Malaria), still malaria cases have not reduced. There might be limited knowledge of the method of transmission, prevention and treatment of malaria among the populace of Nigeria, which is largely made up of non-medically skilled people. Since the media is relied on for the reportage of accurate and trustable information on topical issues, it is believed that mass media has important role to play. There are so many issues affecting the globe, issues like malaria that affect the health of human beings should be emphasized in the media.

The present study was, therefore, carried out to evaluate the reportage rates on malaria in the Punch and Nigerian Tribune newspapers, which are widely circulated in Nigeria. Attempt was made to examine the prominence given to malaria stories and to identify their sources, genres or categories, and to determine the reportage rates of causes, prevention and treatment in these two newspapers.

## **METHOD OF STUDY**

### **Study Design**

This study is conducted to analyze the reportage rates of malaria issues in Nigerian newspapers. For this study to be appropriately done, the content analysis method was

selected. Content analysis is a systematic method of analyzing past recorded work. Since the topic of the research is on analyzing Nigerian newspapers, therefore, only content analysis could be employed in generating quality results.

### **Study Population**

Two widely circulated Nigerian newspapers namely: the Punch and the Nigerian Tribune were randomly selected by ballot for the study. These newspapers report current issues affecting the nation and they are sold at affordable prices. Also, they are easily accessible; they appeal to the audience and have a wide range of topics ranging from politics, health, entertainment, business and sport. The two newspapers are published every day even weekends.

### **Sample size**

A total of 730 newspapers were speculated as the total sample size for the two newspapers per year, since each of the newspapers is published once every day and a year has no less than 365 days.

### **Sampling technique**

The reports on malaria were searched for from page to page of each paper, and from 1st of January to 31st of December, 2011. The copies of Year 2011 Nigerian Tribune newspapers were retrieved from Sipeolu Law Library of Olabisi Onabanjo University in Ikenne-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria while the Punch newspapers of the same year were obtained from the Medical Library of the same university located in Sagamu Campus, Ogun State, Nigeria.

### **Instrument of data collection**

Content analysis method was used in analyzing the two newspapers to determine: the frequency of malaria stories in the selected Nigerian newspapers, the frequency of reportage areas of malaria including the cause, effect, prevention and treatment in the two newspapers, the prominence given to these stories, the genres or categories to which these stories belong and the sources of the stories.

## Unit of analysis

The story categories of the malaria reported stories were examined as: News stories, Editorials, Features, Adverts, Opinions and Cartoons. The frequency reportage of malaria issues was determined by analyzing the total number of reports on malaria in the two selected newspapers for the chosen duration. The formula employed is  $n/N \times 100/1$ , where  $n$ = total number of malaria reports and  $N$ = total number of papers reviewed.

To examine the prominence or importance given to the stories by the newspapers, the following decisions were made: very important, which means stories are placed at the front pages of the newspapers; important, represents stories that are placed on the third page, centre-spread or back page of the newspapers; and least important represents stories that are written with less attention and, therefore, occupy other pages of the newspapers.

To identify the reportage areas of malaria, the following themes were generated: cause, prevention and treatment. The sources of malaria stories were classified as: in-house/internal source, private individual, unidentified sources and news agencies.

## Methods of data presentation and analysis

The results were presented in tables and figures using the software package SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

## RESULTS

Table 1 shows the malaria reportage rate in the Punch newspaper from the month of January to December in year 2011. Out of the 269 Punch newspapers reviewed, only 16 carried malaria reports. Thus, the malaria reportage rate in Punch newspaper in year 2011 was 5.9%. The highest reportage rate of 22.2% was obtained in the month of December while there was no malaria report in the months of January, May, July, October, and November.

Table 2 shows malaria reportage rates in the Nigerian Tribune newspaper from January to December in year 2011. The table reveals that out of the 308 Nigerian Tribune newspapers

reviewed; only 22 carried malaria reports. Therefore, the overall malaria reportage rate in the Nigerian Tribune newspaper published in year 2011 was 7.1%. The highest reportage rate of 26.9% was obtained in the month of `April while no malaria report was carried in the months of January, July, August and September.

The malaria reports in the two newspapers were classified into different genres or story categories namely: News stories, Editorials, Features, Adverts, Opinions and Cartoons. The Fig.1 shows the frequencies of malaria reports according to different genres or story categories in Punch and Nigerian Tribune newspapers published in year 2011. In the two newspapers, the news stories had the highest frequencies of 62.5% in Punch and 59.1% in Nigerian Tribune. The Fig.1 also shows that the two newspapers carried no editorial report on malaria. The frequencies of cartoons in the two newspapers were 0.0% in Punch and 4.5% in Nigerian Tribune.

The prominence of malaria reports can be categorized as very important, important and less important. Figure 2 shows the frequencies of malaria reports in year 2011 according to prominence. The result in Figure 2 shows that the two newspapers placed malaria reports in the less important categories which had frequencies of 81.3% in Punch and 77.3% in the Nigerian Tribune.

Malaria stories can be categorized according to their sources as in-house, private individuals, un-identified sources and news agencies. Fig. 3 shows the frequencies of malaria stories in Punch and Nigerian Tribune in year 2011 according to sources. The result in the Figure 3 depicts that in-house was the most frequent source of malaria reports with frequencies of 43.8% in Punch and 54.5% in Nigerian Tribune. News agencies were the least sources of malaria stories in the two newspapers with frequencies of 6.2% in Punch and 4.6% in Nigerian Tribune.

Malaria stories can further be classified according to the themes of their contents such as: Causes, Effects, Prevention and Treatment of malaria. Table 3 shows the frequencies of malaria stories in Punch and Nigerian Tribune in year 2011 according to themes. The result in table 3 shows that the reports on prevention of malaria had the highest frequency of

62.5% in Punch, 45.5% in Nigerian Tribune and 52.6% overall. Reports on treatment of malaria had the least overall frequency of 5.3% in the two newspapers.

## DISCUSSION

A total of 577 newspapers (269 Punch and 308 Nigerian Tribune) published in year 2011 were reviewed. The newspapers population studied fell short of the expected 730 (365 of each of the two newspapers) by 153 newspapers due to shortage of their supply caused by nationwide strike, elections, heavy downfall of rain, loss of papers and other circumstances, which probably prevented the vendors from supplying them to the libraries.

The malaria reportage rate of 5.9% obtained in Punch newspapers in year 2011 and 7.1% obtained in Nigerian Tribune seem to be on the low side. Also, it appears that there is not much difference in the malaria reportage rates in the two newspapers (Tables 1 and 2). Furthermore, no definite pattern of variation in the reportage rates of malaria from January to December was observed in the two newspapers.

However, the highest malaria reportage rate of 22.2% was published in Punch newspaper in the month of December, 2011 while the newspaper carried no malaria report in five months (January, May, July, October and November) in the same year. The peak malaria reportage rate of 26.9% in the Nigerian Tribune newspaper was observed in the month of April while the newspaper carried no malaria report in four months (January, July, August and September). The reason for no malaria report in the month of January in the two newspapers could easily be attributed to peculiar special nature of the month in which newspapers usually have more than enough articles, advertisement and seasonal greetings for publications. Health issues may probably not be of interest to the newspaper publishers at the first month of a new year.

The frequency distribution of malaria reports in the two newspapers according to their story categories or genres showed in fig. 1 that malaria reports featured more as news stories with frequency of 62.5% in Punch and 59.1% in the Nigerian Tribune. Surprisingly, none of the two newspapers, with a total of 38 malaria reports, placed one report of this



highly infectious disease under editorial column. Also, the Punch newspaper did not carry malaria reports in form of cartoons while the Nigerian Tribune failed to show any advertisement and opinion on malaria. All these omissions on the part of the two newspapers will surely contribute to low level of public awareness on malaria, which newspapers are expected to create. Serious health issues, such as malaria, ought to be given some columns in the editorial pages of newspapers in a malaria endemic country like Nigeria.

There are so many roles cartoons can play in creating awareness of health issues to the public. First, some people who buy newspapers because of their desire to read the cartoons. Cartoons are usually funny pictures which help to relax the readers and also send impactful messages to them. The only cartoon carried by Tribune in February 2011 was designed by Adeeko<sup>5</sup>, which showed the picture of a male child prostrating before his mother. The mother asked “you have malaria? Okay, what medicine did the doctor recommend for you?” The boy said “bread and bean ball!”. The awareness of malaria, which such a funny cartoon creates, is that malaria patients need to see medical doctors for diagnosis and drug prescription for the treatment of this common but dangerous disease. Also, cartoons can help create awareness on prevention of malaria by showing pictures on how to use insecticide treated bed-nets.

The result depicted in Fig. 2 showed that the two newspapers placed malaria reports in the less important categories, which normally appear in other pages apart from the front page, center spread and back page. However, 4 (18.2%) out the 22 Nigerian Tribune newspapers that were reviewed placed malaria reports in very important categories, which appeared in the first page. Breman<sup>6</sup> gave the statistical fact that malaria is very common and endemic in countries with less knowledge about the causes and prevention of malaria causing up to 2.7 million deaths each year. Nigeria is one of the malaria endemic countries in the world. Therefore, awareness on this deadly disease ought to appear in prominent pages such as first page of the newspapers.

The result depicted in Fig. 3 showed that in-house was the most frequent source of malaria reports with frequencies of 43.8% in Punch, 54.5% in Nigerian Tribune and 50.0% overall



in the two newspapers. Also, news agencies were found to be the least sources of malaria stories in the two studied newspapers. The results implied that news agencies in Nigeria are not interested in malaria reports. This of course is not good enough. News agencies are not supposed to show apathy for health problem like malaria, which has been reported to cause the death of million children below 5years in Africa<sup>7,8,9,10</sup>. On the other hand the Nigerian Journalists need to be commended for playing prominent role in sourcing malaria reports through in-house.

The result in table 3 showed that reports on prevention of malaria had the highest frequency of 62.5% in Punch, 45.5% in Nigerian Tribune and 52.6% overall in the two newspapers. However, the tables showed that treatment had least overall frequency of 5.3% in the two newspapers. Prevention is usually better than treatment. This notion may be responsible for the high frequencies of reports on malaria prevention in the two newspapers. The reports on malaria prevention centered around promotion of the use of insecticide treated bed-nets (ITBN), spraying of rooms with insecticide, cutting of bushes around homes, draining of stagnant water, using window and door nets to prevent mosquito contact with humans. The low frequencies of malaria treatment in the two newspapers could be attributed to medical ethical issue. It is against medical ethics for newspapers to educate the public on drug dosages for the treatment of diseases as it may encourage self medication, which may lead to development of microbial drug resistance.

## CONCLUSION

In a bid to control malaria, due prominence should be given to the reportage of malaria so as to communicate and increase the knowledge of members of the society. Over the years, malaria has been a concern to experts in Public Health and Medical Microbiology because Africa has been the victim of the worst climate in the world, which encourages many causative agents of these infectious diseases. Newspapers are affordable and easily

accessible thereby paving way for a larger audience. It is, therefore, necessary for newspapers to report more on malaria to make the government aware of the challenges this disease causes and to educate the members of the society on how to control this disease.

Before malaria can be effectively controlled, the society must have the basic knowledge about Plasmodium (the causative agent of malaria disease), prevention of mosquito (the vector of malaria parasite, the Plasmodium) and how to prevent human from being bitten by infected female Anopheles mosquitoes through the use of insecticide treated bed nets (ITBN), clearing of bushes and drainage of stagnant water.

Media men should be aware of their roles as advocates of health research policy in the country. Due prominence should be given to malaria reports to create better awareness to the society. If malaria reports are placed on front page or back page, the readers would know the importance of gaining knowledge about the transmission and prevention of malaria, and would be interested in reading such because of its placement. Key players in the print media industry should be mobilized and agree together to make certain policies to assign and dedicate particular number of columns in their newspapers for malaria issues.

Photo news are very effective ways of communicating. Most readers would love to read a story with a picture or just gaze at particular pictures and get the meaning of the message. This form of communication is very useful especially for busy people who have no time to read the newspaper extensively. It is also effective for illiterates who find it difficult to read. Pictures of dying children should be placed on the frontage of many newspapers to attract its readership level.

**Table 1. Malaria reportage rates in some selected Punch newspapers in Year 2011**

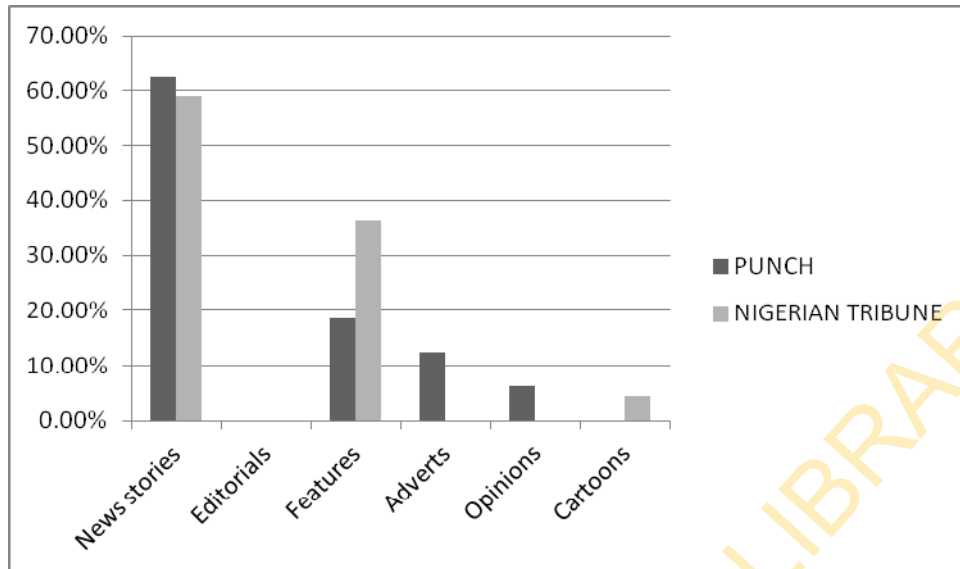
Month	N	n	(%)
January	12	0	(0.0)
February	20	1	(5.0)
March	22	1	(4.5)
April	25	3	(12.0)
May	26	0	(0.0)
June	24	1	(4.2)
July	20	0	(0.0)
August	24	2	(8.3)
September	20	2	(10.0)
October	21	0	(0.0)
November	28	0	(0.0)
December	27	6	(22.2)
<b>Total</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>(5.9)</b>

KEY: N=Number of newspapers reviewed; n=number of newspapers that reported malaria story; (%)= malaria reportage rate.

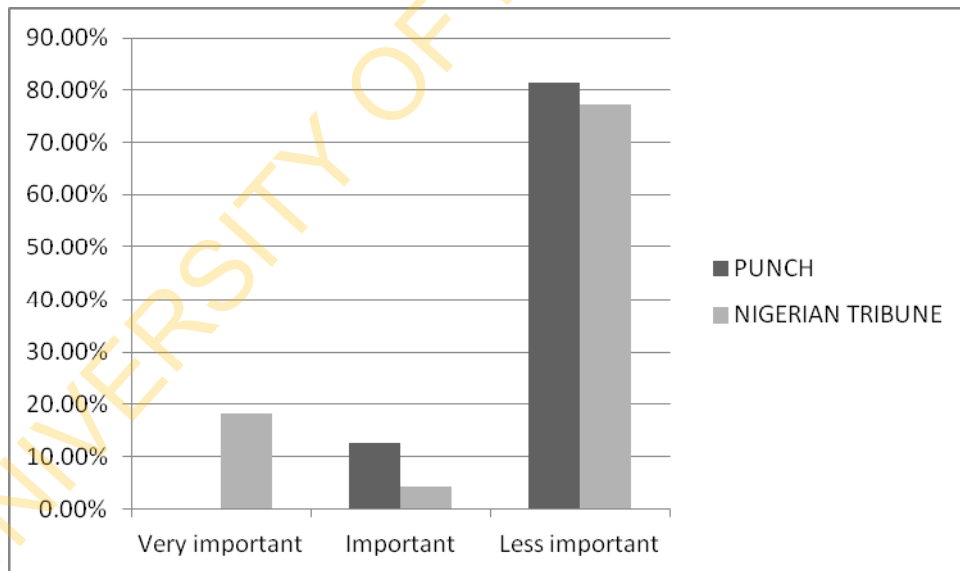
**Table 2. Malaria reportage rates in some Nigerian Tribune newspapers in Year 2011**

Month	N	n	(%)
January	27	0	(0.0)
February	23	2	(8.7)
March	26	2	(7.4)
April	26	7	(26.9)
May	29	5	(17.2)
June	28	3	(10.7)
July	26	0	(0.0)
August	29	0	(0.0)
September	28	0	(0.0)
October	27	1	(3.7)
November	22	1	(4.9)
December	17	1	(5.9)
<b>Total</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>(7.1)</b>

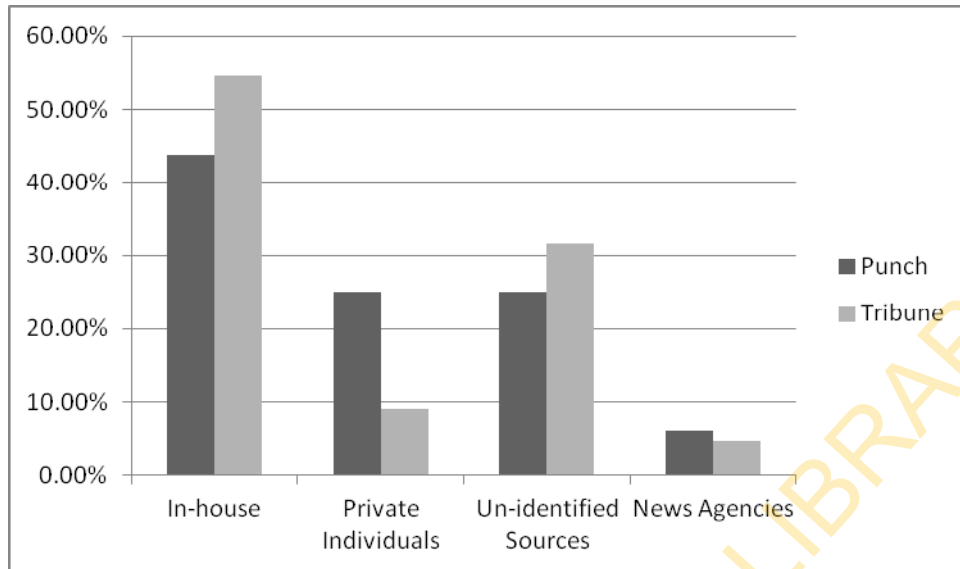
KEY: N=Number of newspapers reviewed; n=number of newspapers that reported malaria story; (%) malaria reportage rate.



**Figure 1. Frequencies of malaria reports according to the story category in some Punch and Nigerian Tribune newspapers published in Year 2011.**



**Figure 2. Frequencies of malaria reports in some Punch and Nigerian Tribune newspapers in Year 2011 according to Prominence.**



**Figure 3. Frequencies of malaria stories according to sources in some Punch and Nigerian Tribune newspapers in Year 2011.**

**Table 3. Frequency distribution of malaria stories in some Punch and Nigerian Tribune newspapers in Year 2011 according to themes**

Theme	Punch		Nigerian Tribune		Total	
	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)
<b>Causes</b>	2	(12.5)	2	(9.0)	4	(10.5)
<b>Effects</b>	2	(12.5)	10	(45.5)	12	(31.6)
<b>Prevention</b>	10	(62.5)	10	(45.5)	20	(52.6)
<b>Treatment</b>	2	(12.5)	0	(0.0)	2	(5.3)
<b>Total</b>	16	(100)	22	(100)	38	(100)

Key: N = frequency of malaria stories according to theme; (%)= Relative reportage rate

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors wish to acknowledge the permission of the staff of Medical Library and Sipeolu Law Library all of Olabisi Onabanjo University for allowing them have access to the Punch and the Nigerian Tribune newspapers of year 2011 in their archives..

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