Selected Nigerian Magazines' Patterns of Cervical Cancer Coverage

Abdulmutallib Ado Abubakar   Agboola Lateef Odesanya   Omoniyi Adeyemi Adewoye   Jimoh Olorede
Department of Mass Communication, University of Lagos, Akoka, Nigeria

Abstract
This paper examined two magazines' pattern of covering cervical cancer. Purposively selected were *Tell* and *The News* magazines. Eighteen (18) editions randomly selected from the first quarter of 2013 (January – March) were qualitatively content-analysed. The study used agenda setting and social responsibility theories, believing that the more the emphasis placed on cervical cancer by the magazines through their coverage – part of their social responsibility role – the more awareness they would create about it. Cervical cancer reportedly triggers about 500,000 new cases and 250,000 deaths annually, with about 80 per cent of cases occurring in low-income countries. The study found that these two magazines featured no report on the disease in the period under study. Therefore, the study recommends that *The News* media should pay attention to fulfilling their social responsibility mandate to Nigerian society.
Keywords: cervical cancer, mass media, agenda-setting

INTRODUCTION

Cervical cancer is one of the contemporary health challenges faced by women, especially those at the productive age (Haque, 2010). According to the World Health Organisation (2013), cervical cancer is the second most common cancer in women worldwide, with about 500,000 new cases and 250, 000 deaths each year. About 80 per cent of cases occur in low-income countries such as Nigeria (Al-Naggar, 2012). Unfortunately, some young women of productive capacity in Nigeria, remain unaware of the causes, symptoms and preventive measures of this disease. Thus, this demands adequate and consistent coverage and communication. This preventable disease, according Ohai (2012: 1) occurs:

> as a result of heavy infection of the cells in the cervix, also known as the neck of the womb. This is caused by the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) and it is usually transmitted among sexually active people. This is due to the skin-to-skin contact of the genital area between the man and the woman whether they use a condom or not. Usually, there is no visible sign that a woman is carrying this virus, so she does not know she is slowly crawling toward cancer, and by the time the cancer starts to spread, the woman has only a short time to live. The virus can stay in a woman's body for up to 10 or 15 years without showing any signs, but there are tests such as the Pap smear and visual inspection of the cervix using acetic acid (VIA).

Most often diagnosed with the disease are women, fifty per cent of whom are aged between 35 and 55. In other words, this form of cancer is rarely found among women below age 20. Approximately, "twenty per cent of cases occur in women aged over 65, demonstrating the necessity of continued screening procedures. The five-year survival window of invasive cervical cancer is currently 71 per cent, but improvements in screening and the development of prophylactic vaccines have decreased the incidence of late-stage cervical cancer (Al-Naggar, 2012; Rozendmlj, et al, 1996).

In Nigeria, cervical cancer is also one of the common genital diseases confronting women. While Ohai (2012) reported that the disease kills one woman per hour in Nigeria, and over 9,000 women annually, Kerry (2013) upped the scale of calamity with his finding that the disease kills about 80,000 Nigerian women yearly. Both Ohai and Kerry's findings show that cervical cancer demands attention from governments, health communication scholars and mass media professionals, who should evolve effective and sustained efforts to create, sustain and deepen awareness about this health issue among others.

The rich potential in using such mass media channels as newspaper, magazine, radio, television, and the new media, to spread messages aimed at tackling cervical cancer challenge among humanity in general, and Nigeria in particular cannot be underemphasized.

Kreps, Bonaguro and Query (1998) have argued that communication and media are considered helpful in solving such menace because of their pervasive roles in creating, gathering, and sharing health information. Therefore, communication is a central social process required both for adequate health care delivery and for the promotion of public health, a situation that will inform and educate individuals about causes of diseases, ways of contraction, symptoms as well as enlightening them on ways of preventing contraction, managing, curing and getting treatment, if infected.

Scholars (such as Kreps, Bonaguro & Query, 1998) have recommended that the persuasive use of

communication messages and media in promoting public health concerns such as cancer of the cervix among women should be done at personal, interpersonal, communal and societal levels. The "four-level process", they argued, attracted many scholars whose area of interest they categorized as health promotion branch of health communication research that deals with the development, implementation and evaluation of persuasive health communication campaigns in preventing major health risks and promoting public health.

It is also part of the intellectual exercises of the health promotion academics to evaluate the use of mediated channels of communication, such as magazines, in disseminating "relevant health information, as well as in examining ways in which health and health care are portrayed by popular media – which deal with the heterogeneous message propagation. For instance, a magazine can cover wide area, last long and appeal to specialized, professional, enlightened audiences, and can thus promote awareness, education and enlightenment regarding health.

Research findings have shown that many women of productive age in African countries like Nigeria are not much aware of the risk factors of cervical cancer. Alternatively, their attention seems to have shifted to HIV/AIDS, reported Hoque (2010), who found that a third of the participants in a survey heard of cervical cancer, and over a quarter of them were unaware of risk factors of the disease. Contrarily, another reported study (Al-Naggar, Low & Isa, 2010) found young Malaysian women having adequate knowledge of risk factors of cervical cancer. This clearly demonstrates that Nigerian mass media, especially the magazine, which has specialized audiences, need to do something about the seeming "reportorial snob" of cervical cancer information.

Ghanta (2012), in a content analysis of radio and television patterns of covering health-related issues, argued that all types of media provide information regarding health matters but political, social, crime and sports news were primarily covered in the electronic media. This means that there is conscious or unconscious attempt in the pattern of coverage given to health issues such as cervical cancer and discussion, which might be the reason behind the low level of awareness in Nigeria. Ghanta's findings resonate with the position of another content analysis by Krieger et al. (2011) who drew attention to the needs of those in what they termed "medically underserved communities" which, as they argued, result from the fact that "media do not provide adequate coverage of topics associated with health inequities" (p. 2).

They (Krieger et al., 2011) recognised amount of coverage given to a particular health issue and content of the health information – as two factors that determine how people perceive the seriousness or otherwise of a reported health issue. For instance, they argued that if the amount of coverage given to a certain health problem is disproportionately low compared to the burden of that disease, people are not likely to see the disease (such as cervical cancer) as important and thus, reducing their tendency to take personal action to protect themselves. Contrarily, where the amount of coverage tallies the burden of the disease, the content of the coverage is often not close to health educators' standard.

For instance, Abdelmutti (2009) and Anhang, et al. (2003), in separate studies, found that American and Canadian newspapers and news magazines articles cover cervical cancer issues but the pattern of the coverage was laden with fear-inducing messages that may trigger anxiety in audience rather than educating them (women) on cervical cancer, describing ways of prevention, transmission, symptoms, while explaining the benefits and consequences of testing and outlining the latest screening guidelines in every story.

Thus, this short study would evaluate the amount of coverage given by two selected Nigerian magazines to cervical cancer, a serious health challenge considered one of the killers of women, thus reinforcing the need for intense awareness and behavioural change.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

As Nigeria's Minister of Health, Professor Onyebuch Chukwu personally admitted, awareness about cervical cancer is inadequate in Nigeria. According to him, with adequate awareness that functions properly, the vaccination exercise of cervical cancer that has the 70 per cent potential of reducing the cases could have succeeded. He stressed that Nigeria accounts for documented 10,000 new cases of cancer annually. He noted that of these cases, 8,000 are human papilloma virus, HPV-related – of the cervical cancer kind (Oguntola, 2011). Ironically, less than 0.1 per cent of Nigerian women have ever had cervical cancer screening, indicating that less than one per cent is aware of the existence of this silent killer. Consequently, Nigerian media particularly magazines should have carried such crusade in their editions so that the needs of "medically underserved" (see Krieger et a.., 2011: 2) people that the Health Minister identified would be met. However, in a situation where media houses have not fulfilled their social responsibility mandate, there is a need to save the lives of those at risk. Doing this is contingent upon sustained analyses of cervical cancer-specific contents in the mass media.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

This work set out to analyze the contents of selected magazines in the first quarter of 2013, with its coverage of the deadly disease - cervical cancer. It highlighted the potential styles in the coverage and depth of the information given. It is obvious that citizens depend greatly on the media to give them important bits of health

information. Moreover, because "good health is wealth", it is important for media houses to pay attention to covering health issues. Inadequate coverage of health issues, Krieger et al.'s (2011) findings warned, may reinforce health ignorance such as the elevated cervical cancer incidence and mortality rates in Nigeria.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study finds theoretical inspiration within two theoretical perspectives. Thus, guiding it are the assumptions of the social responsibility and agenda setting theories. It is theoretically believed that communication media operate within a particular socio-political context, to which they relate and provide basic social responsibilities regarding social, educational, political and health values and needs of such complex social structure (McQuail, 2005; Baran & Davis, 2012). Expectedly, magazines as mass media should, as a social responsibility role, provide basic health information on such health issues as cervical cancer to the Nigerian society, which has many productive and future women leaders at risk.

On the other hand, the argument of Agenda Setting theory is that the media (both electronic and print, such as magazine) through the way and manner, as well as pattern of covering an issue, say health-related matters like cervical cancer, can create awareness and influence what people should think about, and how they should think about it. For instance, in a comparative study he conducted in 2009 on Canadian and American newspapers' coverage of issues related to cervical cancer, Abdelmutti, quoting MacDonald & Hoffman-Goetz (2002), argued that articles (in newspapers and magazines) are important sources of health information for the public. Such published materials have the potential of either rectifying misconceptions or presenting incomplete, inaccurate information, which can eventually amplify concerns amongst the public.

Although Abdelmutti's study took place in a different socio-political and cultural environment, it does not nullify the fact that the way a news medium covers an issue, even in Nigeria, does influence concerns and attitudes toward it. He stressed the concept of media agenda setting that states that the media can decide the importance of an issue by allocating attention and time to the coverage of that issue. Consequently, the seriousness, frequency and accuracy that magazines give to the causes, symptoms, and treatment of cervical cancer would help to create awareness among both the affected and the vulnerable within a population, and that can eventually help in curing suffers and preventing those at risk of contracting it. Thus, the emphasis a medium gives to a specific topic or controversy such as cervical cancer, influences the way members and individuals in the affected society such as Nigeria would discuss it.

MAGAZINE'S HEALTH AGENDA AS SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

A fundamental responsibility of journalism professionals working in established democracies and nations like Nigeria that are still democratizing is to serve in a very acceptable social way of social mobilisation and awareness on issues as important as health. A publishable article in a magazine should provide a solution to the major societal ills, which could be about health or any other matter; but in a situation where a particular ailment is becoming endemic, a need for adequate prioritizing rises. Thus, health stories, such as those about cervical cancer, should get some separate treatment, while journalists handling such delicate beat should be encouraged to discuss the potential benefits and harms of an intervention, and verify information from independent sources (Abdelmutti, 2009). However, the media even in developed nations do not always set such agenda. Priority seems to favour political and other social issues (Krieger et al., 2011).

According to Dutta-Bergman (2005) cited by Abdelmutti (2009), magazine as well as newspaper readership can be a viewed as predictor of information-seeking behaviour, because print media readership allows for an "autonomous" health information search. By serving as important sources of health information, magazines – and indeed newspapers – and other mass media forms produce an increased communication of health-related messages. In fact, the cited scholars argued that the role played by the mass media in communicating cervical cancer finds illustration in media analyses of publications on the topic. Thus, scholars should examine the pattern of such coverage in *The News* media in order to strengthen such vital social responsibility role. However, this information shall only provide the educational needs of the public about cervical cancer.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for this study is a qualitative content analysis of two national magazines (*Tell* and *The News*) in Nigeria. According to Adler and Clark (2011: 358-359), content analysis is "a technique that is particularly useful for doing historical investigations" which could be systematically be conducted through analyzing content of any form of communication like magazine articles. This method could be quantitative or qualitative. They argued that when researchers are interested about testing hypothetical statements, which is deductive and can be statistically analysed, they use quantitative method. On the other hand, qualitative content analyses, which this study adopted, is inductive in nature, where researchers observe "individual texts (or portions of texts) and build to empirical generalisations about texts (or portions of texts) in general (Adler &

Clark, 2011: 372). Therefore, in this study, we observed the pattern of cervical cancer coverage of *Tell* and *The News* magazines in order to make some explanations as to how they cover "the third most common cancer of the female genital tract" (National Cervical Cancer Coalition, 2005, as cited in Vaderman, 2007:3).

Purposively, the two magazines were selected on the grounds of their popularity, wide and diverse audience as well as circulation among the various readers cutting across geopolitical regions, social classes and political plurality, out of nearly twenty news magazines published in Nigeria (Batta, 2012: 11). Observation has it that the two magazines are popular advocates of both classes of the Nigerian society because they respond to the major social maladies stemming from socio-eco-political and religious issues.

SAMPLING PROCEDURE

A total of eighteen (n=18) editions of both magazines published within the first quarter (Q1) – January, February, March – of 2013 (as shown in the table below) were content-examined to find out the amount of coverage given to cervical cancer. This helped the study to achieve its earlier stated objectives. Three editions were selected from each month, using simple random sampling method. Thus, nine (9) editions each, representing three per month, were randomly chosen from *Tell* and *The News* to arrive at the sample of 18 editions. It should also be noted that in case of *The News* we were unable to get January editions and we replaced them with the immediate month (April).

Table 1: Editions of *Tell* and *The News* content-analysed for the study

MAGAZINES	EDITIONS		
	January	**February**	**March**
Tell	7, 14 and 28	4, 11 and 25	4, 8 and 11
The News	15, 22, and 1 (of April, alternated)	4, 18, and 25	11, 18, and 25

Source: Field research data, 2013

The content categories used to content-analyse the above editions of the selected magazines were highlighted and explicitly explained below:

1. **Type/content of story**: Feature, brief, how-to article, information, interview, opinion
2. **Position of story**: Front of the magazine, cover, back of the magazine
3. **Source of story**: Research, public health officials, private health professionals, seminar, conference, others
4. **Length of story:** Half column, one column, two columns, three columns, four columns,
5. **Focus of story:** Symptoms, causes, treatment, mortality

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this short study are presented in a theoretical way without employment of any statistical data. Thus, the outcome is interpretative and observational in nature that will probably provide basic for a longitudinal quantitative content analysis. The finding presented and discussed simultaneously based on each publication.

Tell

The study discovered that the magazine, which has existed since early 1990s, with a reputation for its brave roles during the years of military rule in Nigeria, covered nearly nothing about health, let alone cervical cancer. The magazine's 13th page *Health Extra*, which is dedicated to health, featured no story regarding cervical cancer in any of the nine editions content-analysed (see appendix). More so, *Health Extra* page is always part of its "Front of the Book" items. The health issues treated in the Health Extra pages in the studied editions were on diabetes, early morning sex, reducing fatness and two stories on HIV/AIDs (see appendix).

The foregoing scenario indicates that the magazine may have failed to fulfill its social responsibility role in that regard. Thus, the magazine implies, perhaps not intentionally, that its editorial contents have little regard for the health of readers and the nation in general. It may be argued that it is based on this annihilation by 'editorial snob' of contemporary health matters and total blackout of cervical cancer that has contributed to rising cases of cervical cancer in Nigeria To re-echo Chukwu, Nigeria documents 10,000 new cases of cancer annually with 8,000 of these cases being cervical. This, to some degree, indicates that the magazine's attention is on political issues as Daramola and Mustapha-Koiki (2011:41) found.

It is imperative to add that the few health stories were the outcomes of research findings from either the United States of America or the United Kingdom (see appendix). Thus, this paper discovered that the magazine relied heavily on foreign sources and neglects a few scientific findings that affect their target audience. In other words, the paper engaged in 'Afghanistanism', a common practice in the Nigerian media industry. It is also deducible from the above discussion that the pattern of the coverage is zero, which also signifies that nothing regarding focus of the story as defined in the content categories.

The News

The News is a Nigerian newsmagazine that seems to have carved a niche for itself over the years, including those spent under the military. Like *Tell,* it was part of the 'guerilla' struggles against military dictatorship in Nigeria. As far as the coverage of health issues, especially of the cancer of the cervix, this magazine is as 'guilty' as the former, because like *Tell*, it featured just one story on health (cerebral palsy) and none on any kind of cancer, throughout the period of analysis.

Under *Life, The News'* own page for health and allied matters, the magazine featured a two-page story on cerebral palsy, a condition associated with failure in body and muscular coordination caused by a damage to one or more specific areas of the brain during growth of the fetus (Olajide, 2013: 43). The 'lone' story came from an event organized by Benola, a Lagos-based cerebral palsy initiative, which a reporter with the magazine had reported (see appendix). As Kreiger (2011) noted in their study, the dearth of health coverage noted in the magazine's studied editions confirms that some mass media, like *The News* and *Tell*, do not pay desired attention to coverage of health, not to talk of cervical cancer.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Scholars in the field of health and communication studies are now shifting their academic searchlight to the role communication and communication media should be playing in creating awareness and promoting knowledge about health. Since people depend on the mass media for a myriad of their information needs, the media through regular reports on health issues will help members of the public in taking appropriate personal actions concerning such health issues.

However, findings (Vaderman, 2007; Daramola & Mustapha-Koiki, 2011; Krieger et al., 2011) have shown that some media organisations are not practically living up to theoretical expectations regarding their commitment to the public's right to know, especially, as the study has found, about issues affecting lives.

One consequence of this is that there arise "medically underserved communities" (Kreiger et al., 2011: 2), which means that a society may arise, where citizens remain unaware of the gravity of certain health challenges, and clueless as to the level of seriousness they should attach to health issues such as cervical cancer. The likely danger of this reportorial failure is the gradual 'planting' of a health 'time bomb' that has a potential to 'explode' existing records, thus constituting great hazard to lives of women especially.

Thus, this study has also similarly discovered paucity and vacuum, with respect to media coverage of life-threatening health issues like cervical cancer, as seen both in the two magazines studied and as studies in other lands have confirmed. Therefore, the following recommendations are as follow:

1. The failure of some mass media to cover health adequately appears to be a global trend. As this and other studies have found, the mass media stand indicted. Therefore, some adjustments are imperative. This study recommends that Nigerian magazines should also give additional emphasis to health related issues by increasing the number of pages, in the case of *Tell*, while *The News* should allot some pages, for health issues.
2. They should try to give attention to the scientific findings that are available in Nigerian educational institutions and research centers. Should they have to rely on foreign findings, the magazines should cull only those studies whose findings are relevant to the needs of local audience.
3. It is also recommended that further studies may want to attempt a similar treatment of media coverage of health issues, this time doing a comparison of how some forms of cancer are reported across mass media types (radio versus television, newspaper versus radio and so on). This may help in deepening literature in the area, with findings having strength that is more 'generalisational'.

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