Online Versions of Mainline Newspaper Readers' Perception of NCDC Updates of Confirmed COVID-19 Cases in Nigeria

Dr. Gloria Nneka Ono[1], Odionye, Chinwe Mirian (PhD)[2],
Chiazor Anthonia Chiaghana[1], Dr. Gloria Nwakego Chukwuemeka[1]
[1]Dept. of Mass Communication
Nnamdi Azikiwe University
Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria
[2]Edwin Clark University,
Kiagbodo, Delta State, Nigeria

Abstract. The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) is Nigeria's national public health institute charged with the responsibility of leading the preparedness, detection and response of infectious disease outbreaks and public health emergencies. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the NCDC has been updating Nigerians through the media on the confirmed cases of the pandemic which Nigerians receive with mixed feelings because of the controversies surrounding COVID-19 outbreak and presumed insincerity of Nigerian Government. This study sought to find out the perceptions of online versions of mainline newspaper readers in Anambra State about NCDC updates of the confirmed cases. An online descriptive survey using WhatsApp platform was conducted among a sample of the online version of mainline newspaper readers in the State. Google form questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. Findings showed that 96 percent of the readers in the State perceived NCDC updates to be misinformation. Selective Perception Theory aptly predicted the outcome of the study. The researchers recommended that the health agency should include names, pictures and places of abode of people confirmed as infected alongside its updates for more believability and COVID-19 compliance.

Keywords: Online version, mainline newspaper, NCDC, perception, COVID-19

Introduction

The outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) communicable disease in late 2019 brought a lot of death and untold hardship to the world. It ravaged the world greatly and brought a lot of fear and confusion. To some people, it seemed the world was coming to an end and to others, it was a meaningless situation. Every global effort to contain the spread and death seemed not working well enough until lately which made World Health Organization (WHO) to declare the disease a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on January 30, 2020 (Amzat *et al.*, 2020). The disease began in Wuhan, China, and became a pandemic through human migration, affecting all nations of the world. Human migration means that the disease is being contracted as infected persons travel from one country or from one place the other interacting with people.

The worst hit countries include USA, UK, Italy, France, Germany, Brazil, Russia and Spain showing that the disease is no respecter of high-income, most organized and most powerful nations in terms of having most sophisticated well equipped healthcare system. Amzat *et al.* (2020) affirms that the pandemic overwhelmed the health systems of even high-income countries. In Africa, South Africa and Egypt are the worst hit. Nigeria recorded an case from Italy on February 27, 2020.

Journalists, both locally and globally play active roles in updating the public on measures, best practices and other information to containing the spread of the disease (Obadafin, 2020). Online versions of mainline newspapers in particular carry information on COVID-19 spread. The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) whose main goal is to protect public health

and safety through the control and prevention of communicable diseases in Nigeria, also gives State by State daily updates of confirmed COVID-19 cases using various media including online versions of mainline newspapers. Since the evolution of online versions of mainline newspapers, many people read news online more than they read the hardcopies for obvious reason of being more cost effective. Online newspapers also provide easy, widespread, and timely access to information. Besides, they allow for interactivity among information users and enable them to store, share and retrieve the newspapers' contents quickly and easily (Ijeh, 2008; McQuail, 2007, cited in Patrick, 2015).

Confirming people's online readership preference over the mainline, Adedina *et al.* (2008) cited in Patrick (2015) aver that more people read online versions of newspapers than its hardcopy in Nigeria. This implies that online newspapers are veritable sources of news and information in our country today. The NCDC is the Nigeria's national public health institute charged with the responsibility of leading the preparedness, detection and response of infectious disease outbreaks and public health emergencies.

Statement of Research Problem

COVID-19 infectious disease outbreaks in Nigeria seems to be filled with beliefs and disbeliefs about the disease existence and spread. Nigerians had questioned and are still questioning the NCDC updates showing the daily confirmed cases of COVID-19 when the deceased details were not known for their identification. This confusion must have prompted Okafor (2020) to note that there is a lot of false knowledge and misconceptions about the disease in Africa and Nigeria. Nigerians seem to receive NCDC media updates of confirmed COVID-19 cases with doubts possibly because of the conspiracy theories surrounding the disease and the presumed insincerity of Nigerian government. NCDC is acknowledged to disseminate information about the disease and in particular, the day-to-day numbers of COVID-19 confirmed cases.

Consequently, this study sought to find out the perceptions of online versions of mainline newspaper readers about the NCDC updates of the confirmed cases in Anambra State having noted that many people read more of online newspapers than the hardcopies since the evolution of online versions of mainline newspapers. This study became necessary judging that public perceptions and attitudes are important for program success (Oleribe *et al.*, 2020). Do the readers perceive the updates to be true or false? The study sought to unravel the true perception of the updates.

Aim of the Study

The study aimed to ascertain the perceptions of online version of mainline newspaper readers about NCDC updates on COVI-19 confirmed cases, recovery status and mortality rate in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The study objectives include:
1. To find out the online readership of NCDC daily updates of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Anambra State among online versions of newspaper readers.
2. To assess online versions of mainline newspaper readers' perceptions of NCDC daily updates of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Anambra State.
3. To determine whether the readers' perceptions are as a result of their positions on COVID-19 existence and spread in the State.
   Three research questions guided the study:
1. What is the online readership level of NCDC daily updates of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Anambra State among online versions of newspaper readers?

2. How do online versions of mainline newspaper readers perceive NCDC daily updates of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Anambra State?
3. Are the readers' perceptions as a result of their positions on COVID-19 existence and spread in the State?

Significance of the Study

It is remarkable to observe that no research has been done on online version of mainline newspaper readers' perceptions of NCDC daily updates of number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Anambra State. Therefore, the study would help the NCDC to have an idea of how her updates of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the State are perceived among the people with a view to helping her to come up with more believable updates. The study would serve as a reference material on issues revolving around public beliefs about the existence of COVID-19 and the perceptions of NCDC daily updates of number of confirmed cases in Anambra State.

Also, the study would help the general public to understand that their positions on the existence, spread and perception of COVID-19 and its updates in Anambra State could be valuable for both academic and health engagements. This understanding would make the public more available to researchers when their opinions are being solicited.

NCDC: An Overview

Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) is a Federal government agency under the Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH) whose idea was conceived in 2011. Some departments in the ministry were moved to help set up the agency. The bill establishing the agency was signed into law in 2018 before the outbreak of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD). NCDC was established to combat the challenges of public health emergencies and to enhance Nigeria's preparedness and response to epidemics (Devex, 2020-2021, p. 2). Devex added that the agency is also charged with the responsibility of coordinating surveillance system to collect, analyze and elucidate data gathered on diseases of importance to Nigerian community.

The Nigerian President established the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on CIVID-19 to manage the outbreak of the disease across the country. The PTF is mandated to work with FMOH and NCDC in the implementation of the various initiatives and strategies on COVID-19 containment. Many African countries including Nigeria have been battling with public health challenges for years (Njidda, 2018, p. 2). The battle got heavily heated during the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) epidemic that affected many countries in the West African region. The agency helped to control and provided support to other African countries that got affected by Ebola.

NCDC continues to play its remarkable role in the face of the upsurge of coronavirus. It has observed poor public perception and compliance to health protocol on prevention of COVID-19 spread (Plan International, 2020) and carries out public health education and risk communication campaign to contain COVID-19 pandemic. It uses different kinds of media to regularly publish guidelines on the prevention of COVID-19. Such guides include among others, safe hand washing, social distancing, maintenance of personal and respiratory hygiene, use of facemask in public places etc. NCDC also publishes a directory of help lines for each State of the Federation and translated messages on COVID-19 to different local languages to help reach both the educated and non-educated Nigerians (Amzat *et al.*, 2020), all in the bid to contain COVID-19 spread and prevalence.

COVID-19 in Nigeria: Compliance and Updates of Confirmed Cases

A literature search on COVID-19 showed that remarkable number of articles, reports and studies exist despite the newness of the disease. Such search showed that many health experts had projected that Africa including Nigeria would find it very difficult to contain coronavirus

if confirmed on the continent (Amzat *et al.*, 2020). The projection was most expected based on obvious facts. Nigeria does not have well equipped hospitals that will compete with those overseas for treatment of less severe diseases how much more coronavirus. Most Nigerians are pervasively poor and can hardly afford the expensive bills in our ill-quipped hospitals and they cannot also consider treatment abroad. Akunyili (2005) cited in Ono *et al.* (2020) writes:

> the health system in Nigeria and the health status of Nigerians were in a deplorable state. Nigeria's overall health system performance was ranked 187th among the 191 member states of the United Nations by WHO in 2000.

This situation still holds and has even worsened from what it was in the year 2000. Lopez (2019) writes that Nigeria's health care network has been rated among the worst in the world. The state of our health care system can be aligned with Chinua Achebe's write-up many decades ago that things have fallen apart when things would be said to be actually together judging from what is happening in Nigeria today. Nigeria's health system was acknowledged as being in a deplorable state in 2000 and rated among the worst in 2019 and with the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020, what adjective worst than the ones already used will describe Nigeria health system better? If Achebe is to be alive today to meet with the present decay in the country and re-write the novel, one wonders what he would re-title the novel.

Nigeria is among the nations categorized by WHO as one of the vulnerable or 13 high-risk African countries because of our dilapidated healthcare system (Amzat *et al.*, 2020). Health treatment overseas is the exclusive reach of the bourgeoisies in Africa which explains why Nigerian bourgeoisies including President Muhammadu Buhari would always go for treatment abroad. Many of them were not privileged to go to abroad for medical treatment in 2020 because of the global lockdown due to COVID-19 outbreak and lost their lives.

The first index case of COVID-19 in Nigeria is subsequently followed by many recorded cases of the diseases, deaths and recoveries as were disseminated on the media. The first index case was an imported case from Italy. Recently, the NCDC detected a confirmed case with the SARS-CoV-2 Delta variant, also known as lineage B.1.617.2 in a traveler to Nigeria (Disu, 2021). Before the imported index case, Nigeria had already constituted Coronavirus Preparedness Group to fight the disease should it extend to the country. The quality of the Preparedness Group is not expected to be standard for obvious facts earlier adduced in this study but at least an effort was made. Hence, it did not take Nigeria unaware when the first case was reported.

Generally, Nigerians level of compliance with COVID-19 preventive measures is obviously low. The risk perception by the public is also very low because our population structure is made up of youth who may have contracted the disease but have no symptoms (Plan International, 2020). Adults also do not comply with the preventive measures even when research has shown that they are more vulnerable to the disease. Wiley online library (2020) affirms that people of all ages can be infected by SARS-CoV-2, although older individuals and patients with chronic illness are at greater risk. Affirming also the low compliance with COVID-19 preventive measures, Amzat *et al.* (2020) noted that many people and faith-based organizations defied the directives on social distancing and public gatherings by organizing social events and conducting congregational services.

Faith-based organizations especially churches are expected to religiously comply with the preventive measures but the quest for material things or money could possibly not allow them. Most people also put on 'jaw masks' in place of face masks contrary to what the correct thing should be. The much the churches did in 2020 was home television worship which did not last long. They maintained quasi social distancing during worships.

A study on knowledge and compliance with COVID-19 preventive measures among community members in Anambra State revealed that a majority of the respondents believed that COVID-19 pandemic is more of a hoax than reality (Nnama-Okechukwu *et al.,* 2020).

This belief about COVID-19 surge and level of compliance in Nigeria are possible factors to perception of NCDC updates of the confirmed cases. In the year 2020, the daily updates were higher but today, the curve is being narrowed even with the new variant.

Akinlabi *et al.* (2020) study on the perception, impact and coping strategies to COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria showed out that majority of the respondents (62.1%) did not believe in the daily updates by the PTF/NCDC with most of them feeling that the numbers are inflated (52.1%) and politized (55.8%). Similar study by Abdullateef and Okonkwo (2021, p. 6001) revealed that even the aware, educated, and high-income Nigerians equally had misperceptions and skepticism about NCDC. Key reasons for the distrust according to Abdullateef and Okonkwo (2021) include inconsistent reporting, secrecy about patients' database, and perceived corruption tendencies. The respondents believed that NCDC is bloating COVID-19 figures to embezzle public funds.

Online Versions of Mainline Newspapers: Frequency of Readership

There are some newspapers which are predominantly online, but also provide limited hard copies. They are referred to as 'online versions of mainline newspapers'. Mainline newspapers are all the newspapers that are printed and sold at newspaper stands. Lexico (2021) defines online newspaper as 'a newspaper published as an electronic document on a computer network (in later use especially the internet)…' It is the digital version of a print newspaper. Examples of such newspapers in Nigeria include among others: The Punch, The Guardian, Sun News Online, Leadership newspaper, National Mirror, Nigerian Tribune, This Day Live newspaper, The Nation Online newspaper, Vanguard newspaper etc.

A study of online newspaper reading habits among University students revealed that the students read the papers daily. As much as 69 percent of the students read newspapers online (Haruna, 2018, p. 45). Another study of online newspaper readership in the North Eastern Nigeria found that 78.86 percent of the respondents read online newspapers (Matthew *et al.*, 2013, p. 1). The online versions are made possible with the emergence of internet era. With the net, it has become increasingly easy for people to shun print media readership over the online.

The print newspapers now struggle to survive because online newspaper readership is gradually increasing among internet users due to obvious advantages it has over print media readership. The online versions are more available and easily accessible than the print or the hard copies apart from being more convenient. The news can be updated very quickly and this is one of the reasons it is becoming more popular (Honor society, 2011). Also online newspapers can be read more elaborately than the printed version.

In addition, online newspapers bring the main news of the day to the focal point of the web site unlike the print which compels readers to hunt for the things they would like to read. They do not contain advertisements common with the printed versions which spells bad omen to print media organizations as advertisers are quick re-thinking stoppage of print adverts due to poor print newspapers circulation that came with online newspaper readership. Online versions brought decline in sale of hard copies and this ultimately depresses advertisers to still patronize the printed versions (Honor society, 2015). The price tag of a newspaper though small, is perhaps the main reason people no longer buy it. Online versions are cheaper and almost free.

Theoretical Framework

Since this study sought to find out online version of mainline newspaper readers' perception of NCDC updates of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Nigeria, perspectives from Selective Perception Theory presented the most productive explanatory framework for the study. The Selective Perception Theory came up when scholars discovered that the audience of mass communication are not passive as the all-powerful media effects theory propounded

(Ajaero *et al.*, 2016). To Leckenby (2000, p. 73) cited in Ajaero *et al.* (2016), Selective perception means that different people can react to the same message in different ways or that a message will not have the same intended meaning for all receivers.

Selective perception theory also known as selective exposure theory, argues that audiences' interpretation of media is dependent on their personal beliefs. People deliberately choose to interpret the media based on their pre-conceived ideas or previous experiences and current dispositions on the issue at stake. The issue at stake is perception of NCDC updates of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Nigeria as daily disseminated on the media by NCDC.

On their part, Okunna and Omenugha (2012, pp. 250-251) cited in Ajaero *et al.* (2016) posit that 'how people understand or interpret mass media messages is important in deciding their responses to the messages and the influence of the messages'. The fact that people have different understanding of messages is a prerogative that they are most likely to interpret the messages differently too which is bound to affect the response and level of influence the messages will have on them.

Relating selective perception theory to this study, it implies that the different respondents that completed the copies of the online questionnaire have different personal beliefs, different previous experiences and current dispositions which most likely affected their different understanding or interpretation of NCDC updates of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Anambra State. The theory is apt in explaining why the different respondents did not have the same perception of the updates. While majority perceived the updates as misinformation, others perceived it as correct.

Methodology

The study employed descriptive online survey using online Google form questionnaire as instrument for data collection. Research assistants helped in distributing the copies of the questionnaire to adult residents in Anambra State who accessed WhatsA interactive platforms. The well-structured questions examined issues relating to respondents' demographic data, access to internet, readability of versions of online newspapers, and perception of NCDC updates of confirmed COVID-19 cases among others. Their demographic variables included their age, sex, educational qualification, marital status, and occupation.

The population of the study was every Anambra State adult literate resident who had access to WhatsApp because research has shown that people access WhatsApp platform more than other social media (Kemp, 2021, p. 2). Anambra is reputed for playing host to a good number of informed Nigerians. The population was an infinite one. Non-probability convenience sampling method where respondents were selected through invitations to complete copies of questionnaire placed on their WhatsApp platforms was used to determine the sample size from the infinite population.

Using simple random sampling for an infinite population, the sample size was determined based on 0.05 significant level of error tolerance thus:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Formula

$$n = \frac{200,000}{1 + 200,000\,(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{200,000}{1 + (200,000 \times 0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{200,000}{1 + 500}$$

$$n = 399.2016$$

Using Taro Yamane's formula above, we have a sample size of 399. The researchers collated 405 completed copies of the online questionnaire and purposively decided to take all of them as sample size. This purposive decision was also based on the ranking of sample sizes by Comrey and Lee (1992) cited in Ono (2015) as: 100 = poor, 200 = fair, 300 = good, 400 = very good, 500 and above = excellent. Data were analyzed using simple percentages and pie-charts.

Data Analysis: Demographic Data of Respondents

Respondents' Gender

Table 1. Respondents' gender

Variables	No. of Respondents	Percentage Response
Male	285	70%
Female	120	30%
Total	405	100%

Table 1 shows that 285 out of 405 (70%) respondents were males while 120 out of 405 (30) were females. The implication is that males read online newspaper more than females.
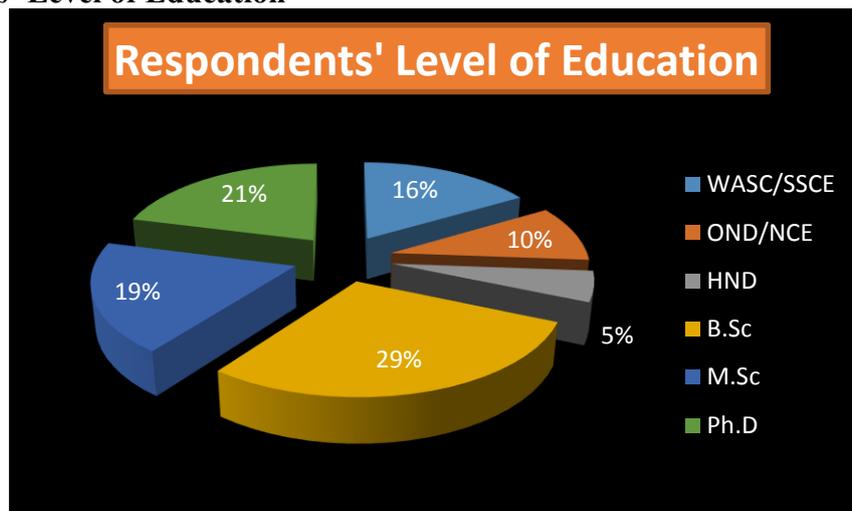
Respondents' Age

Table 2. Respondents' age brackets

Variables	No. of Respondents	Percentage Response
18-27	90	22%
28-37	187	46%
38-47	54	13%
48-57	46	12%
58-67	20	5%
68-77	8	2%
77 and above	-	-
Total	405	100%

Table 2 shows that age bracket 28-37 was predominant at 46 percent (187 out of 405 respondents) followed by age bracket 18-27 (22%) representing 90 out of 405 respondents. The other age brackets fall within 13 percent and below. It is remarkable that none of the respondents was within 77 and above age bracket. The data imply that respondents within age bracket 28-37 read online newspaper more than the other age brackets.

Respondents' Level of Education

Figure 1. Respondents' level of education

Figure 1 shows that educational levels B.Sc and Ph.D were predominant at 29 and 21 percent respectively. M.Sc and WASC/SSCE had below 19 percent and 16 percent respectively while OND/NCE had 10 percent and the least being HND which had 5 percent. The data imply that majority of the respondents had B.Sc educational qualification.
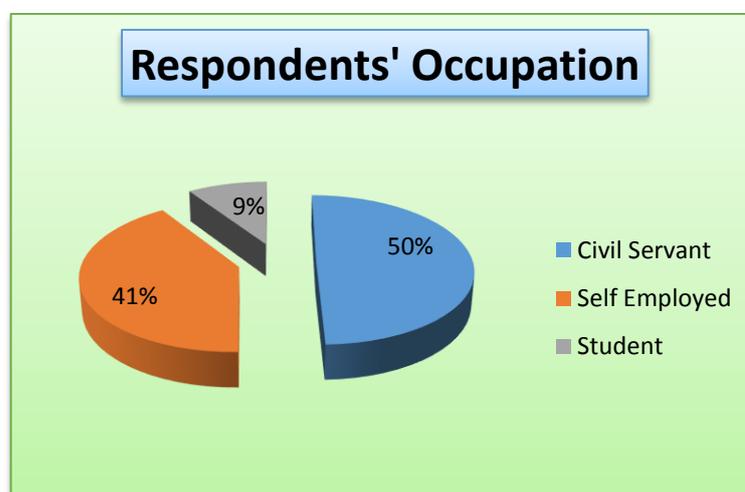
Respondents' Marital Status

Table 3. Respondents' marital status

Variables	No. of Respondents	Percentage Response
Married	257	63%
Single	148	37%
Total	405	100%

Table 3 indicates that 257 out of 405 (63%) respondents were married while 148 out of 405 (37%) were single. The data imply that there were more married respondents than there were singles.

Respondents' Occupation

Figure 2. Respondents' Occupation

Figure 2 shows that 50 percent of the respondents (201 out of 405) were civil servants, 41 percent (166 out of 405) were self employed while 9 percent (38 out of 405) were students. This implies that majority of the respondents were civil servants. Students were the least online newspaper readers.

Analysis of Other Variables

Which version of mainline newspapers do you read most of the time? Tick only one option

Table 4. Respondents' preferred online versions of mainline newspapers

Variables	No. of Respondents	Percentage Response
Vanguard newspaper	99	24%
The Punch newspaper	69	17%
The Nation online newspaper	45	11%
Premium Times	3	1%
The Sun News online	70	18%
This Day newspaper	13	3%
Nigerian Tribune newspaper	11	3%
The Guardian newspaper	87	21%
Leadership newspaper	4	1%
National Mirror	4	1%
Total	405	100%

It can be seen from Table 4 that Vanguard and The Guardian newspapers were the most read version of online newspapers among the respondents while Leadership and National Mirror were the least read. While 24 percent (99 out of 405) and 21 percent (87 out of 405) of the respondents read Vanguard and The Guardian newspapers, 1 percent of the respondents (4 out of 405) read Leadership and National Mirror respectively. The other newspapers' readership was below 20 percent.

Do your choice newspapers report COVID-19 issues especially NCDC updates of confirmed COVID-19 cases?

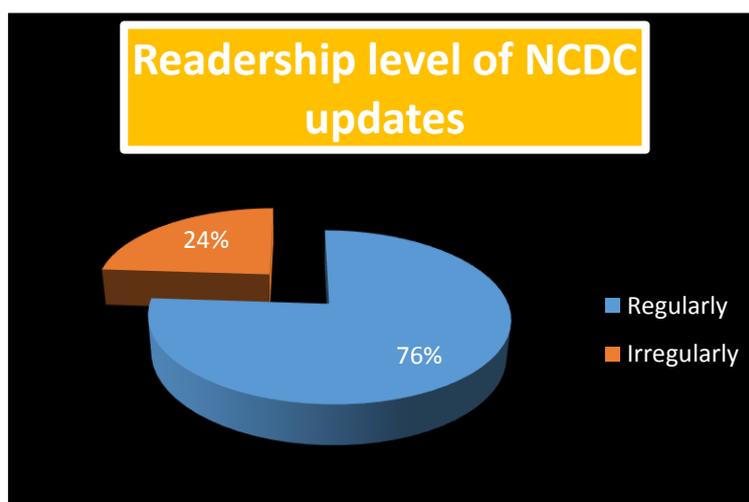**Table 5. Choice newspapers report of NCDC updates of confirmed COVID-19 cases**

Variables	No. of Respondents	Percentage Response
Yes	405	100%
No	-	-
Total	405	100%

Table 5 shows that all the respondents (100%) said that COVID-19 issues and in particular, NCDC updates of confirmed cases are reported in their different choice newspapers. This implies that NCDC updates of confirmed COVID-19 cases are reported in the various newspapers.

Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question 1: What is the readership level of NCDC updates of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Anambra State among online versions of mainline newspaper readers?

The question was necessitated by the need to confirm that the respondents were aware and actually read the NCDC updates before wanting to know their perceptions of the updates. Their responses are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Readership level of NCDC updates

The figure shows that majority of the respondents, 308 out of 405 (76%) regularly read NCDC updates of confirmed Covid-19 cases in Anambra State while only 97 out of 405 (24%) respondents irregularly read the updates. Their responses imply that they read the updates but on varying degrees.
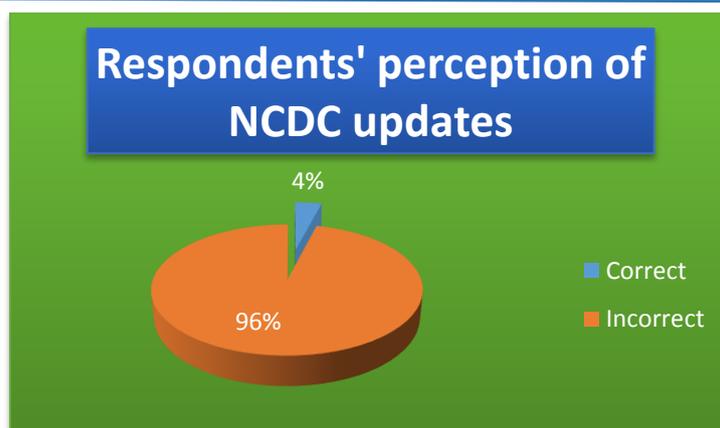
To further ascertain respondents' readership and knowledge of the updates, the respondents were asked the present updates of the cases in the State thus: *What is the present status of NCDC updates of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Anambra State?* Their responses were as presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Respondents' knowledge of the present updates of COVID-19 confirmed cases in Anambra State

Variables	No. of Respondents	Percentage Response
On increase	-	-
On decrease	391	97%
I do not know	14	3%
Total	405	100%

Table 6 indicates a high level of knowledge (97%) of the present updates of the confirmed cases. Only 14 out of 405 (3%) of the respondents did not know whether the updates were on increase or decrease. Those who said the updates are on decrease were correct.

Research Question 2: How do online versions of mainline newspaper readers perceive the NCDC updates of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Anambra State?

Figure 4. Respondents' perception of NCDC updates

Figure 4 indicates that 389 out of 405 (96%) respondents perceived NCDC updates of confirmed COVID-19 cases as misinformation. Over four-fifth of them (96%) perceived the updates as misinformation while only 4 percent (16 out of 405) of the respondents perceived the updates as correct. The data imply that majority of the respondents perceived the updates as incorrect or misinformation.

Research Question 3: Are their perceptions as a result of their positions on COVID-19 existence and spread in the State?

This question was asked to determine whether respondents' perceptions of NCDC updates of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Anambra State were as a result of what they believed about COVID-19's existence and spread in the State. Their responses were as shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Respondents' perception of the confirmed cases based on what they believed about COVID-19's existence and spread in Anambra State

Variables	No. of Respondents	Percentage Response
Yes	389	96%
No	16	4%
Total	405	100%

The data in Table 8 indicate that those whose perceptions of NCDC updates of confirmed COVID-19 cases were as a result of what they believed about COVID-19 existence and spread were in the majority, 96 percent (389 out of 405 respondents). Only 4 percent (16 out of 405) said their perceptions were not based on what they believed about the disease existence and spread.

Next, those who said their perceptions were as a result of what they believed about the existence and spread of COVID-19 were asked what they believed about the existence and spread of the disease thus: *If yes, what do you believe about the existence and spread of COVID-19 in Anambra State?* Their responses were as presented in Table 9.

Table 9: What the respondents believed about the existence and spread of COVID-19 in Anambra State?

Variables	No. of Respondents	Percentage Response
COVID-19 does not exist in Anambra State	56	14%
The deceased are not identifiable	93	24%
The figures are escalated	199	51%
COVID-19 is not as prevalent as it is being reported	41	11%
Total	389	100%

From Table 9, it could be observed that majority of the respondents, 199 out of 389 (51%) believed that the numbers of the COVID-19 confirmed cases in Anambra State are escalated. This implies that the respondents believed that COVID-19 is existent in the State with its resultant casualties but that NCDC escalates the numbers. Also, 93 out of 389 (24%) of the respondents believed that the deceased persons reported by NCDC were not identifiable meaning that their identity details were not disclosed and this formed their perceptions of the NCDC updates. While 56 out of 389 (14%) of the respondents believed that COVID-19 is non-existent in the State, 41 out of 389 (11%) believed that the disease is existent in the State but not as prevalent as it is being reported.

Discussion of Findings

The study aimed at investigating the perceptions of online version of mainline newspapers readers about NCDC updates of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Anambra State. The study objectives were to find out the readership level of NCDC updates of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the State, to determine the perceptions of the respondents about the NCDC updates, and to ascertain whether their perceptions were as a result of what they believed about the disease existence and spread. Online descriptive survey was the study design while Google form questionnaire was as the instrument for data collection. Data analysis was done using simple percentages and pie charts were used. Copies of the online questionnaire were distributed to many adult literate residents in Anambra State who had access to WhatsApp. A total of 405 copies of the questionnaire were collated and purposively studied based on rankings of sample sizes for an infinite population by Taro Yamane and Comrey and Lee.

The study found out that online version of mainline newspaper readers had a high readership level (76%) of NCDC updates of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Anambra State invariably agreeing with Haruna (2018, p. 45) finding that people (students) read online newspapers daily and Matthew *et al.* (2013, p. 1) finding that 87.86 percent of the respondents read online newspapers. A total of 389 out of 405 (96%) respondents perceived the updates as incorrect. This is in consonance with Akinlabi *et al.* (2020) finding that majority of the respondents (62.1%) did not believe in the daily updates by the PTF/NCDC with most of them feeling that the numbers are inflated (52.1%) and politized (55.8%). It also agrees with Abdullateef and Okonkwo (2021, p. 6001) finding that even the aware, educated, and high-income Nigerians equally had misperceptions and skepticism about NCDC. Their perceptions were based on what they believed about COVID-19 existence and spread in the State.

Others were that the deceased were not identifiable and that the disease is not as prevalent as it is being reported confirming Abdullateef and Okonkwo (2021) findings on key reasons for the distrust of NCDC updates. Selective Perception Theory is apt for the study because it justifies the findings of study. The respondents reacted differently to NCDC updates of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Anambra State based on their personal beliefs and current dispositions about the updates.

Conclusions/Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers concluded that online version of mainline newspaper readers in Anambra State perceived NCDC daily updates of confirmed COVID-19 updates in the State as not representing true number of confirmed cases. Their perceptions seemed justified based on what they believed about COVID-19 existence and spread.

The researchers therefore recommended that NCDC should disclose the identity details of those who had died of the pandemic to boost the confidence level of Nigerians. They should henceforth attach the videos of those at the treatment centers and what they use in treating the patients for more openness and believability of the updates of confirmed cases.

References

Abdullateef, M., & Okonkwo, B. (2021). Why trusting Nigeria Centre for Disease Control information is difficult: A study of awareness, knowledge and perceptions of Nigerians hesitant towards COVID-19 management by HCDC in Nigeria. *Traektoriâ Nauki= Path of Science, 7*(5), 6001-6008. DOI: 10.22178/pos.70-11.

Ajaero, I. D., Okoro, N. M., & Ajaero, C. K. (2016). Perception of and attitude towards mass media reportage of the 2012 flood in rural Nigeria. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244016666887.

Akinlabi, A., Gbolahan, B., Busayo, F., Deborah, S., & Racheal, O. (2020). Perception, impact and coping strategies to COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. A conference paper. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344161960

Amzat, J., Aminu, K., Kolo, V. I., Akinyele, A. A., Ogundairo, J. A., & Danjibo, M. C. (2020). Coronavirus outbreak in Nigeria: Burden and socio-medical response during the first 100 days. *International Journal of Infectious Diseases, 98,* 218-224.

Devex (2020-2021). Nigeria Centre for Disease Control. Retrieved May 20, 2021, from https://www.devex.com

Disu, Y. (2021). Confirmed case of Delta variant detected in Nigeria. Retrieved July 14, 2021, from https://www.ncdc.gov.ng

Haruna, I. (2018). A study of online newspaper reading habits among university students in Nigeria. *International Journal of Communication: an interdisciplinary journal of communication studies*, *23*(2), 35-46.

Honor society (2011). Differences between online newspaper and printed newspaper. Retrieved from https://www.differencesbetween.com

Honor society (2015). Printed Newspapers vs. Online Editions: The pros and cons. Retrieved June 3, 2021, from https://www.honorsoceity.org

Kemp, S. (2021). Digital 2021: Nigeria. Retrieved June 2, 2021, from https://www.datareportal.com

Lexico (2021). Meaning of online newspaper in English: Online newspaper. Retrieved June 6, 2021, from https://www.lexico.com

Lopez, O. (2019). Nigeria's health care system on the med. Retrieved June 5, 2021, from https://www.google.com

Mathew, J., Ogedebe, P. M., & Adeniji, S. B. (2013). Online newspaper readership in the North Eastern Nigeria. *Asian Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities, 2*(2).

Njidda, A. M., Oyebanji, O., Obasanya, J., Ojo, O., Adedeji, A., Mba, M., Oladejo, J., & Ihekweazu, C. (2018). The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control. *BMJ Global Health, 3*(3).

Nnama-Okechukwu, C. U., Chukwu, N. E., & Nkechukwu, C. N. (2020). COVID-19 in Nigeria: Knowledge and compliance with preventive measures. *Social Work in Public Health, 35*(7), 590-602.

Oleribe, O., Ezechi, O., Osita-Oleribe, P., Olawepo, O., Musa, A. Z., Omoluabi, A., Fertleman, M., Salako, B. L., & Taylor-Robinson, S. D. (2020). Public perception of COVID-19 management and response in Nigeria: A cross sectional survey. *BMJ Open, 10*(10).

Okafor, B. N. (2020). Compliance to COVID-19 preventive measures towards the environmental health in Nigeria Universities. *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development, 4*(6), 775-782.

Ono, G. N. (2015). *Assessment of NAFDAC media campaign to change consumers 'attitudes and behaviours towards food and medication drugs in South East Nigeria*. An unpublished Ph.D dissertation, department of Mass Communication, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria.

Patrick, N. (2015). Assessment pattern of readership of online newspapers in selected Nigerian universities. *International Journal of Linguistics and Communication, 3*(2), 35-46.

Plan International (2020). COVID-19: Low public perception, compliance hampering school reopening. News and press release. Retrieved May 7, 2021, from https://www.reliefwed.int

Williams, T. (2018). Selective perception theory. Retrieved June 7, 2021, from https://www.mediumandmessages.org

WorldOmeter. (2021). Total coronavirus cases in Nigeria. Retrieved June 6, 2021, from https://www.worldometers.info