

**REPORTING SMALL SCALE AND MEDIUM ENTREPRISES DURING COVID-19: AN  
AGENDA-SETTING FUNCTION OF THE MEDIA  
(A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF *THISDAY* AND *VANGUARD* NEWSPAPER)**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study examined reportage of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) during COVID-19 as an Agenda-Setting function of the media, a content analysis of ThisDay and Vanguard newspaper. The objectives of the study were to ascertain the nature of coverage of SMEs reports by ThisDay and Vanguard newspaper during COVID-19 in Nigeria; to determine the prominence given to SMEs reports by ThisDay and Vanguard newspaper during COVID-19 in Nigeria; also to examine the depth given to SMEs reports by ThisDay and Vanguard newspaper during COVID-19 in Nigeria; and to know the most reported SME by ThisDay and Vanguard newspaper during COVID-19 in Nigeria. The study adopted a quantitative content analysis research method in probing the research questions thereby using code guide and code sheet for data collection. Through composite week sampling method, a sample size of 17 editions were selected for each of the newspapers to make a total edition of 34 of both ThisDay and Vanguard newspapers out of 240 editions of the both newspapers from January to April, 2021 which make the population for our study. To this end, study revealed that both Vanguard and ThisDay newspapers reported small and medium enterprise stories in straight news; it also showed that Vanguard and ThisDay newspapers placed majority of the stories relating to SMEs inside the pages of the newspaper; more so that both newspaper reported small and medium enterprises' activities in 1-2 columns depicting that the depth used in report of SME events during COVID-19 in Nigeria was low; and that both Vanguard and ThisDay newspaper did not focus specifically on one aspect of the various small and medium enterprises but considered reporting events on SMEs in a general sphere. Study therefore recommended that there is need for the Nigeria media, particularly print to intensify efforts towards covering practical advancement in small and medium enterprises activities and not only focus on mere information emanating from government or other individuals and institutions.*

**Keywords: COVID-19, Content Analysis, Composite Week Sampling Method, SMEs, Media Reportage.**

## **Introduction**

The outbreak of COVID-19 in December, 2019 in China which later spread across the world within months had a serious negative impact on the world economy. The impacts cannot be over emphasised considering the lock-down policy that became a necessity for the entire world in the bid to curtail the spread of this virus since a cure was not in view at the early period of the pandemic (Ameji, Taiga, & Amade, 2020; Vitenu-Sackey & Barfi, 2021). Considering the negative effect of COVID-19 pandemic on the world economic, the heat was seriously felt not only on small and medium enterprises across board but also big companies and manufacturing industries because people could not go to work at the period thereby resulting to profit loss. The International Labour Organisation (2020) in its report predicted three key areas COVID-19 will affect in job or work environment after the pandemic subsides, these areas include: the quantity of job which include unemployment and underemployment; the quality of work which include wages and access to social protection; and the effect of this pandemic on special groups who are vulnerable to adverse labour market outcome. Consequently, the ILO asserts a universal increase in unemployment rate with about 5.3 million on a low index, and 2.7 million on a high projection.

The small and medium scale enterprises in Nigeria have taken a new perspective in the ways and manners that the public and government took it before 2017, it was argued that before this time small and medium enterprise does not contribute to national economic growth (Olaore, Adejare, & Udofia, 2021). Today, this narrative has changed as studies into this phenomenon have established the significant and crucial positive contribution of small and medium enterprise in national economic development (Aderemi, Ojo, Ifeanyi, & Efunbanjo, 2020). The influence of small and medium enterprise in Nigeria has contributed to employment generation thereby creating a space for the less advantaged population in our society. In other words, SMEs is contributing immensely to Nigeria economic growth by providing employment for people whom the available employment positions does not favour in the society. Consequently, with how badly the outbreak of COVID-19 had affects on the world economy, small and medium enterprises in Nigeria also got its share of this condition due to social distancing, lockdown amongst other policies different governments adopted in order to prevent the spread of the virus.

On one hand, while the government and other stakeholders were putting efforts together to help mitigate the various negative effects of COVID-19 on the people, particularly in the area of poverty alleviation which became even more pronounced during the pandemic among many developing and underdeveloped nations. For instance, the KPMG International (2020) reported that in order to reduce the effects of COVID-19 in Nigeria, the government, through Central Bank of Nigeria embarked on different measure one of which included the establishment of fund to support and boost the already affect economy of the country. As a result, about 121 million Euro which amounted to 50 million naira was injected into house hold and other small and medium enterprises across the length and breadth of the nation. This gesture however showed how badly COVID-19 has affected not only small businesses in Nigeria but also homes. On the other, the media being a stakeholder and often referred to as the fourth estate of the real is also socially responsible in providing information, education and enlightenment to the public on various nation issues thereby allowing the media to set agenda for the society particularly as it concerns the public and government.

The media is expected to play a significant role by informing the government of the various negative impacts of COVID-19 on small and medium scale business thereby allowing the government to have a grasp of the various conditions facing this particular sector of the economy as this will allow small and business owners to have opportunities to advance their businesses despite the hit from COVID-19 because the report from the media would have set a ground for government to know where and how to place national resources in order to boost that area of the nation's economy. However, one cannot be certain of the media effort in this direction; this may be due to the fact that many media organisations and professionals were more focused on the pandemic itself vis-à-vis the recent issue of vaccination and other political and scientific issues surrounding the virus. It is therefore on this background that this study is premised to investigate the efforts of the media in reporting events around small and medium scale enterprises in Nigeria with the focus to establish that the media was not carried away by the pandemic thereby neglecting some salient economic areas which are though affected by the outbreak of the virus but to an extent contributed to national economic development.

### **Research Questions:**

The following are the research questions to be investigated:

1. What was the nature of coverage of SME reports by *ThisDay* and *Vanguard* newspaper during COVID-19 in Nigeria?
2. What was the prominence given to SME reports by *ThisDay* and *Vanguard* newspaper during COVID-19 in Nigeria?
3. What was the depth given to SME reports by *ThisDay* and *Vanguard* newspaper during the first wave of COVID-19 in Nigeria?
4. Which of the small and medium enterprises was most reported by *ThisDay* and *Vanguard* newspaper during the first wave of the COVID-19 in Nigeria?

### **Literature Review**

#### ***COVID-19, Public Health, and National Development***

The 2019-nCoV which is also known as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV) is one amongst the various coronaviruses that has affected many lives since its emergence in China in December, 2019, Jernigan (2020). However, today, virtually all the countries of the world are affected from Asia to Europe and America to Africa as about 170 million cases were reported from the time it emerged to May, 2021. About 3,558,163 death cases was reported throughout the world where the continent of Asia is currently topping the heat with 51, 128, 262 cases, and a death rate of 683,281 as at May 29, 2021, *Worldometer.info* (2021). Although some researchers have argued that the said virus is bio-weapon aimed at reducing the world population, Centre for Health Security (2020). However, one cannot doubt this perspective considering the economic tussle between China from whence the virus emanated and America which is further linked to the development of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Furthermore, apart from the serious health threat which the break of the coronavirus has on the people, the economic implication cannot also be ignored on all spheres of human endeavour.

The world today is confronted with a type of disease that has not got a cure. Various governments across the globe and international organisations such as the United Nations,

African Union, World Health Organisation etc since the inception of this virus have been intensifying efforts in scientific and social research to at first put up all measures to curtail its spread amongst the people, and fundamentally to discover a permanent cure. Though an Israeli scientist claimed to have found a cure for the virus; which has been tested on an animal, it is however expected to be tested on human beings three months later in late February, 2020, *www.operanewsapp.com* (2020). But until now, no cure has been found, but a significant progress has been made by government and most international organisations in preventing the spread of the virus through sensitisation programmes by government health ministers and the sensitisation units of most international organisations.

Consequent upon the fact that a permanent cure has not been achieved so far, governments and most international bodies at various strata have engaged one another through a united effort to at first prevent the spread of the disease until a lasting solution is discovered even with the discovery of a vaccine. Today, the outbreak of this virus poses serious economic implication on the entire world, this is because of the economic position China holds in the world, (Smith-Binham & Hariharan, 2020). It is a fact that many countries rely on countries like China, America and Europe for importation of finished goods such as clothing, machines, and with the evolution of globalisation the demand for gadgets keep increasing. With the outbreak of coronavirus, the world economy was greatly affected. As a result of the economic effect of this virus, its political implication is however inevitable specifically among developing and underdeveloped nations whose major economic advancement lies on the effort of the people through small and medium enterprises.

Health goes beyond the control and absence of diseases or infirmities; it is however everything that needs to do with the psychological, physical, mental and social condition of the people in general, (Binns & Low, 2015). Public health is such a crucial sector in every nations, this is because of its importance in advancing the cause of humanity. Many scholars have conceptualised the word- public health and have strived to define the very ideas that cumulates this phenomenon. Around 1920, Wilson conceptualised public health as an art of science which involves the prevention of diseases for the purpose of prolonging the lives of the people through the promotion of health and efficiency. This art of science is based on the organisation and education of the community or society on infectious diseases, organisation of medical personnel and materials all in the quest to ensure the health safety of a community or society.

This definition seems to jam-pack thereby trying to explain a definite idea with so many concepts. To make the understanding of public health simpler, the America Public Health Association asserts that “public health promotes and protects the health of people and the communities where they live, learn, work and play.” In this sense, the APHA sees the word “public” from a larger perspective thereby referring to it as any environment where humans may exist. These places are therefore seen as where people may be working, living, learning, and or playing. If one examines the definition by Wilson and APHA one would understand that there has been a sharp shift from what the ideas and ideals of public health used to be or looked liked in time past to what it is actually stands for at this epoch. Therefore, arguably public health has gone beyond just an art of science but rather an advance in social sciences which explains a more complex world in term of provision of healthcare in a globalised world.

No doubt that there has been a tremendous shift or advancement in healthcare, management and most importantly public health matters both in the area of policy making and provisions as a result of globalisation. In other words, globalisation has redefined health practices in all aspect as many areas have witnessed diffusion of innovative ideas on a global scale compared to the manual age thereby making healthcare easier for practitioners, and accessible to the people compared to the previous eras before globalisation. According to Binns & low (2015), they assert that “the mission of public health at this epoch is therefore to achieve an equitable distribution of health for the totality of the people without exception. The society as of today is faced with different evolving health challenges which many be premised on the way people live, the kind of food we eat, climate change etc. As the world is changing so is every things concerning humans which does not exclude health, an example is the emergence of diseases such Laser fever, Zika virus, Ebola, and of recent- coronavirus. The evolvment of these diseases also advanced research in science and technology in other to develop a permanent cure for these diseases.

However, the importance of a healthy nation has no bounds. It is generally believed that when a nation is healthy, there will surely be advancement in the area of economy, and the socio-political atmosphere. In other words, health plays a crucial role in national development of all nations across the globe. Hussain (2010) argues that there have been two divergent views on whether health is actually wealth or that wealth is health. Consequently, scholars who are of the former view are as right as the latter. In explaining the latter perspective, Easterlin, 1999; Cutler et al., 2006 as sited in Husain (2010, p.2) assert that “the latter view also attributes credit for recent improvement of health status to ‘higher incomes’ in promoting technical progress and dissemination of new health technologies”.

This explains the fact that advancement in technology which is due to globalisation has seriously influenced how health or medical matters are handled this era. For instance, people can test the level of their sugar or even blood pressure in the comfort of their homes without needing to visit the hospital because technology has provided a small electronic gadget that does that. A case of Apple watch Series 5 which contains applications that help monitors user heartbeat is a new technology in health technology. As a result of this, Apple patronage will thus increase thereby cumulating to more profit for the company and thus translates to increase in tax payable to government at the end of the year. These taxes thereby is used to create more social amenities for the people or used in creating more jobs. Through this process, the economy of such society will definitely increase. In a nut shell, while the new health functions injected into a mobile gadget helps to increase a better health status in the society, it also creates income for government who uses it to create a better life for the people. This therefore advances the economy of a nation. To further explain this perspective, Alsan et al. (2006) as sited in Husain (2010, p. 2) assert that “better health does not have to wait for an improved economy; rather, measures to reduce the burden of disease, to give children healthy childhoods, to increase life expectancy etc. will in themselves contribute to creating richer economies.”

However, one begins to wonder why the health sector of most nations often face setbacks and have not truly reflected on the health status of most nations. Although the problems with public health is dependent on various government policies which determines the effort

stakeholders in this sector put into their profession as healthcare giver or practitioners. Though the some countries such as India, Israel, America etc have the best medical health system as a result of the country's zeal and passion for health, but developing nations such as Nigeria despite being the populated nation in the continent of Africa, her health sector is nothing to write home about thereby leading to the situation where the rich and powerful visit these countries for health related matters. The neglect of the health sector in most African nations has drawn the attention of many stakeholders across the continent questioning the will-power of government to this sector every now and then.

Governments at all levels often perceive health sector as one serious sector that gulps money because of what is involve in providing health for the people. This reflects the policies and financial consideration policy makers consider in providing for this sector, (Boyce & Brown, 2019). This situation constitute the pressure policy makers in the health sector face in their quest to ensuring appropriate delivery of the health thereby resulting to cutting down of budget and services which consequently reduces adequate provision in health matters. Because governments and other financial institutions are often of the notion that the health sector is financially tasking and thus often drain the economy, little consideration are given to this sector thereby making the sector incapable of providing the needed services. Although this assertion may differ from one country to the other, for instance, maybe between developed and developing nations such as America and Africa, but it is a general believe to politicians that the health sector is financially tasking.

Nonetheless, though government may be reluctant in spending much as the society would demand in the health sector, yet the need to ensure that this sector is efficient in providing good healthcare services to her people is sacrosanct notwithstanding. This is because many studies have proven that a healthy nation also advances economically in all spheres, and this explains how important the health sector is to a nation's growth. The Commission on Macroeconomics, WHO (2004, p.13) argues that:

*"Decisions regarding the allocation of public funds in the health sector and health-related areas must consider their intrinsic and instrumental value of health. Health is an asset, a component of what economists define as "human capital".*

Drawing conclusion on the importance of investing in healthcare by government, national security is an aspect of the fundamental obligations of the government which is an essential duty amongst other functions. All of these are however hanging on the how healthy a nation can be to make provision of other fundamentals to determine the growth of a country. In the finally analysis, public health determines a lot of things in our society. It helps the developed nations maintain their level of advancement and pushes the developing nations to develop thereby serving the economic interest at the same time.

### ***The Newspaper Medium and Developmental Reporting***

One great medium of mass communication amongst other media is the newspaper. It is such a crucial medium because of one good feature of "recall" - which is the ability of the possessor to have it for reference purpose. The media generally is seen as the fourth estate of the realm because of the various crucial roles it plays in the society. This is one reason Omolaja (2010:21)

opines that, “communication, no doubt, contributes to socio-economic development of a nation.” More so, Boadu (1981:193) as cited in Omolaja (2010:21) have argued that the integrative and interactive nature and ability of the media have over the years contributed to the socio-economic advancement of various communities or society.

To this end however, the newspaper like other mass communication medium have contributed immensely to every society not only from the socio-economic view point but also ranging from politics, sports, fashion, health and even religion to a larger extent. As one main function of the media with specification to the newspaper, the consciousness of the public have been and still mobilized to correcting certain activates of government at all levels. This is because the media also play the watch-dog or surveillance function and thus mid-wife between the government and the governed through the social responsibility role or function. In the political scenario, various scholars such as Shields, Goidel and Tadlock (1995), Westoff and Rodriguez (1995) as cited in Omolaja (2010); Onabajo (2007) etc have argued the positive impact of the media in contributing to political development in areas such as reproductive behaviour of the electorates, education on voting decisions, political knowledge, party politics and candidate saliency, electoral choice and voting stability among other fundamental nationally political matters.

In addressing one major menace rampaging the soil of most African nations, the media have contributed to a greater level in the fight against this scourge through adequate reportage, however, newspaper as a medium is not excluded. Omolaja (2010:27) have argued in this line as he posits that “the natural inability of the citizens to monitor the conduct of officials makes it imperative for the media to do the job. Media performance is therefore germane to democracy.” In a simple analogy, the press have been filling the gap made by the inabilities of the public in concentrating on the activities of the government by playing the role of watch-dog of the society and giving strict monitoring to the government at all levels and reporting back to the public as a means drawing the consciousness of the governed on happenings within the confines of the government.

Omolaja (2010:28) further posits that though the media have been trying its best in the area of reporting corruption particularly as it reflects the behaviour of the public office holders, but to an extent questioned the extent to which their impact have been felt. This fundamental question has been raised by Omolaja (2010:33) is also applicable in the case of the Nigerian newspapers or the print media in a broader level. This is because he argues that the media itself is faced with corruption taking his views on the notion that commercialization of the media also hinders the genuine practice of journalism profession. This does not leave out the brown envelop syndrome. That notwithstanding, cannot make one conclude that the Nigeria newspapers and the media at large are not to a greater extent performing their social responsibility function in the reporting of various activities of government and other socio-economic or even religious issues with the main aim of dispensing their obligations as ascribed by the constitution being the fourth estate of the realm for the purpose of national development.

### ***Small and Medium Enterprise, Nigeria Environment and COVID-19 Pandemic***

The conceptual definition of small and medium enterprise has been seriously examined scholarly. Consciously, the economic implications of small and medium enterprise activities cannot be overemphasised in economic projection or advancement. In fact, it has been asserted on many fronts that most developing and underdeveloped nations are practically at the mercy of SMEs in building and sustaining a viable and competitive economic status among the committee of nations (Muritala, Awolaja, Bako, 2012). However, if I would be arguing as a business oriented person or scholar, it would be fair not to share an understanding of what small and medium enterprise means. However, defining the concept of small and medium enterprise will have a great impact to informing and educate students and individuals within the researcher's field of knowledge. What then is small and medium enterprise? According to Mekwunye, (2018) small and medium enterprises are non-subsidiary businesses such as firms that are independent and have fewer employment capacities. In other words, all businesses or firm that is that are not a subsidiary of another big organisation whose employment ability is low is often referred to as small and medium enterprise.

However, Etuk, Etuk, & Baghebo (2014) have argued that small and medium enterprise has different condition that often warrant what definition or perspective SME is conceptualised. They assert that SME can be define based certain criteria which include the profit being made, number of employee, capital employed, available finance etc. drawing from this argument, it therefore shows that to have a clear definition of what small and medium enterprise means would be pretty difficult. Nonetheless, it is clear that the idea within the scope of small and medium enterprise in the context of Nigeria is the definition made available by Mekwunye (2018). To many developing nations of the world such as Nigeria, small and medium enterprise has contributed to means of employment generation, hence the reason most government have made it a priority to invest in small and medium enterprises in other to fill the vacuum of unemployment that is rampant in the society since government do not have the capacity and most importantly the financial wherewithal to provide government job for all and sundry. The world economy was seriously affected as a result of the emergence of COVID-19, to establish this scenario (Gherghina, Botezatu, Hosszu, & Simionescu, 2020). Many literatures have examined the impact of the pandemic on many businesses both small, medium and large firms, the impact cannot be quantifies in all ramification and have spurred the reason why many nation have begin to support all business in order to raised the bar of world economy which has been effected by the outbreak of the virus (Olaore, Adejare, Udofia, 2020; Aderemi, Ojo, Ifeanyi, & Efunbanjo, 2020; Adiyo, Ze, Tougeum, Dalibi, 2020).

### **Theoretical framework**

#### ***Agenda-Setting Theory***

The agenda-setting theory was propounded in 1972/1973 by Max McCombs and Donald L. Shaw. The theory is believed to be concerned with the idea that the media does not tell the various media audience what or how to act think but rather, the media is focused on what the people should think about. The media power on the society cannot be overemphasised because it has the strength to communicate to a large and scattered people at the same time thereby constituting the purveyor or reservoir of information for the society. According to Anaeto, Onabjo, & Osifeso (2012:89), they assert that the people know about different societal events as a result of the information disseminated to them by the media. Also, the significance



which they ascribe to the same issues tends to be proportionate to the amount of attention given to the same issues in the media. In other words, it is what the media focuses attentions on that invariably becomes the talk in the society. Anaeto et al. (2012) further establish that the number of times an issue is being reported by the media; the use of headlines and picture display strategies to play up a report in the media; and reports that give room for “point and counter-points are the strategise often deployed by the media in setting agenda for the society. Although, this theory have been challenged on several grounds by different scholar considering the emergence of new age media which has given the mass media audience the power to determine what they watch, read or listen to, yet one would agree to the fact that the media till date still set agenda but not without its weaknesses. Therefore, this theory is adopted for this study because the media have the powers to present small and medium enterprises’ event to the various stakeholder of the economic sector for the purpose of projecting the like challenges facing the sector due to COVID-19 pandemic. By reporting this sector, it will help inform the government and other stakeholder within the financial and economic background to muscle efforts in changing the narratives of the negative effects of the pandemic on SMEs.

## **Methodology**

### ***Design, Population, Sample, Sampling Techniques, and Research Instrument***

This study is a quantitative research and the design adopted is content analysis. This is because the researcher is examining newspaper (document) to examine the coverage of small and medium enterprise activities during COVID-19. Content analysis sought to analyse the various contents (issues) in a document (newspaper) as it relates to the study under investigation

The population of this study is derived from calculating all the editions of the two newspapers (*Vanguard* and *ThisDay*) been published within the period of four months (January-April, 2021). Therefore, the population of this study is a total 240 editions where each of the newspapers has 120 editions. This is determined by calculating the numbers of days in January to April, 2021 which amount to 240 days. The 120 days is then multiplied by the two newspapers to give a total of 240 editions to make the population of study. From the population, a sample size 34 edition were selected from both newspapers where 17 editions were selected each through composite week sampling technique.

The research adopted code guide and code sheet for data collection. The code guide and code sheet is a research instrument that is best used in content analysis. While the code guide contains variables to be examined in the newspapers with codes, the code sheet is the instrument where the researcher transfers the code from the code guide into for analysis and interpretation.

## **Result**

**Table 1: Total Stories of SME reports in the Newspapers during COVID-19**

<b>Newspapers</b>	<b>2021 (Number of Stories)</b>
Vanguard	15
This Day	9
Total	24
Percentage	100%

*Source: Author’s Field Survey, 2022*

Table 1 shows the number of stories found in the two newspapers (34 editions) that were selected and analysed. As a result, there were 15 stories relating to small and medium enterprise in *Vanguard* newspaper, and 9 in *ThisDay* newspaper. Therefore, a total of 24 stories were seen and analysed for the study.

**Table 3: Nature of Newspaper Coverage of SME report during COVID-19**

Newspaper	News	Editorial	Feature	Commentary	Total
Vanguard	13	0	0	2	15
This Day	8	0	1	0	9
Total	21	0	1	2	24
Percentage	88%	0%	4%	8%	100%

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2022

Table 2 shows the nature of newspaper coverage of small and medium enterprise reports during COVID-19 in Nigeria where both *Vanguard* and *ThisDay* newspaper had 21 (88%) straight news on SME, 0 (0%) for editorial, 1 (4%) for feature, and commentary 2 (8%). Therefore, this means that majority of the reports on small medium enterprise as covered by both newspapers were covered in straight news

**Table 4: Prominence of Newspaper Coverage of SME report during COVID-19**

Newspapers	Front page	Inside page	Back page	Total
Vanguard	0	15	0	15
This Day	1	8	0	9
Total	1	23	0	24
Percentage	4%	96%	0%	100%

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2022

Table 4 shows the prominence or placement of newspaper coverage of SME during COVID-19 in Nigeria. To this end, the table reveals that both *Vanguard* and *ThisDay* newspaper had 1 (4%) of stories relating to SME on the front page, 23 (96%) appeared on the inside page, 0 (0%) appeared at the back page. What this mean is that majority of the stories were placed inside both newspapers.

**Table 5: Depth of Newspaper Coverage of SME report during COVID-19**

Newspapers	Column 5-6 Highest	Column 3-4 High	Column 1-2 Low	Total
Vanguard	3	2	10	15
This Day	2	2	5	9
Total	5	4	15	24
Percentage	20%	17%	63%	100%

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2022

Table 5 shows the depth of newspaper coverage of SME reports during COVID-19. It is revealed in the above table that both newspapers had 5 (20%) of SME stories that occupied 5-6 columns, 4 (17%) covered 3-4 columns, 15 (63%) covered 1-2 columns. This simply means

that majority of the stories on small and medium enterprise reported by *Vanguard* and *ThisDay* newspaper covered 1-2 columns.

**Table 6: Type of SME report covered by *Vanguard* and *ThisDay* newspaper during COVID-19**

Newspaper	Agric	Sci/Tech	Artisan/Voc	Manuf.	General	Total
Vanguard	2	3	1	1	8	15
ThisDay	0	1	0	0	8	9
Total	2	4	1	1	16	24
Percentage	8%	17%	4%	4%	67%	100%

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2022

Table 6 shows the type of SME that was mostly reported by *Vanguard* and *ThisDay* newspaper during COVID-19 in Nigeria. As a result, the table reveals that both newspaper reported 2 (8%) agricultural related SMEs, 4 (17%) science and technology related SMEs, 1 (4%) Artisan/Vocational related SMEs, 1 (4%) Manufacturing/Industrial related SMEs, and 16 (67%) general SMEs. Therefore, it is revealed that majority of small and medium enterprises stories reported by *Vanguard* and *ThisDay* newspapers covered all aspect or types of SMEs during COVID-19 in Nigeria.

## Discussion

### **RQ1: What was the nature of coverage of SME reports by *ThisDay* and *Vanguard* newspaper during COVID-19 in Nigeria?**

Sequel to research question one, study reveals that both *Vanguard* and *ThisDay* newspapers reported small and medium enterprise stories in straight news. This implies that all within the reach of both newspapers are just information made available to the media on small and medium enterprise. This shows that the *Vanguard* and *ThisDay* newspapers did not find a reason to pay much attention in covering SMEs activities in relation to how people involved in SMEs are performing. If the newspapers had ventured into investigative reporting on SMEs it will definitely reflect in editorial, commentary, and feature articles in both newspaper. This however translates to mean that little focus is given to follow up events in small and medium enterprise activities during COVID-19.

### **RQ2: What was the prominence given to SME reports by *ThisDay* and *Vanguard* newspaper during COVID-19 in Nigeria?**

Resulting from the tables presented to address research question 2, investigation shows that *Vanguard* and *ThisDay* newspapers placed majority of the stories relating to SMEs inside the pages of the newspaper. What this simply implies is that little or no preference or importance is place on small and medium enterprise related activities during COVID-19. However, if these stories had appeared most on either the front or back pages of most of the newspapers analysed, this will tell the degree of importance or prominence these newspapers placed on the stories reported. This is so because both front and back pages of the newspaper are believed to sell a story more than those placed inside. Therefore, this buttresses the fact that both newspapers place little or no prominence on small and medium enterprise events during COVID-19 pandemic.

**RQ3: What was the depth given to SME reports by *ThisDay* and *Vanguard* newspaper during the first wave of COVID-19 in Nigeria?**

Base on findings about research question 3, investigation reveals that both newspaper reported small and medium enterprise activities in 1-2 column. However, by using 1-2 columns for SME stories, what this means is that the depth used to report of SME events during COVID-19 in Nigeria was low. This therefore boils down to the amount of information and events available for both newspapers to explore for reportage. In other words, if both newspapers were serious about reporting SME activities during the COVID-19 period through event follow-ups, the newspapers would have enough issues to disseminate relating to SME activities such that even 3-4 columns would not be enough to detail happenings within this sector which has a significant impact on the economy of the nation, and particularly because of the serious involvement of youths in small and medium enterprises.

**RQ4: Which of the small and medium enterprises was most reported by *ThisDay* and *Vanguard* newspaper during the first wave of the COVID-19 in Nigeria?**

Investigation on research question four shows that both *Vanguard* and *ThisDay* newspaper did not focus specifically on one aspect of the various small and medium enterprises but considered reporting events on SMEs in a general sphere. In other words, both newspapers reported general events about small and medium enterprise. By general event, it means that most of the reports presented issues around SMEs vis-à-vis agriculture, science and technology, vocation or skills, manufacturing and industry. However, though the newspapers presented reports on different types of SMEs but why this is so was because most of the stories were those emanating from government directly or indirectly through its financial agencies such as the Central Bank of Nigeria, or private individuals such as the Tony Elumelu foundation, or international institution like the World Bank etc whose vision is to strengthen the small and medium enterprises to boost national economy and engage the youths for their personal and national growth.

**Conclusion**

This paper investigated Nigeria media reportage on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) during COVID-19 thereby making *ThisDay* and *Vanguard* newspapers the choice of the media for the study. Consequent upon investigation, study reveals that although the Nigerian media reported events around small and medium enterprises during COVID-19 despite the many challenges that the world faced during the outbreak of the pandemic, particularly the devastating economic effect it had throughout continents. To this end, one cannot but agree that the Nigeria media reported events around small and medium enterprises. Nonetheless, the tenacity of reportage reflects the importance placed on this coverage. Considering this condition, it is therefore scientifically logical to conclude that the Nigeria media during COVID-19 put little or no effort in reporting activities small and medium enterprises activities due to depth, nature of reports, and most importantly is the placement of these stories in the newspapers.

**Recommendations**

Based on the various findings this study, and considering the efforts or zeal of the Nigeria media in reporting small and medium enterprises' events during the heat of the pandemic, one cannot rule out the positive impact of small and medium enterprises to national economic

growth, and because the media is perceived as the fourth estate of the realm, the following recommendations were made:

There is need for the Nigeria media, particularly print to intensify efforts towards covering practical advancement in small and medium enterprises activities and not only to focus on mere information emanating from government or other individuals and institutions. By digging deep beyond the surface, and reporting how small and medium enterprises are faring through interviews, feature articles, and commentaries will encourage more coverage in this direction. This effort will increase the depth and even the placement of reports concerning small and medium enterprises in their proper roles and significance.

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