



Application of World Health Organisation Guidelines in Road Traffic Safety Reporting by Select Nigerian Newspapers

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ABSTRACT

Background: Road traffic collisions (RTCs) constitute a significant public health challenge in Nigeria, with the country recording one of the highest rates of road traffic fatalities globally. The media play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and influencing policy decisions regarding road safety. Despite efforts to curb the menace, RTCs continue to plague Nigerian roads. Although studies have examined the epidemiology of RTCs, there is limited understanding of how Nigerian newspapers apply World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines in reporting road traffic incidents.

Objective: This study examined the application of World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines in road traffic safety reporting by four Nigerian newspapers- *Daily Trust*, *Leadership*, *The Sun*, and *Vanguard*- focusing on the frequency of reportage and the identification of WHO-prescribed reporting angles.

Method: The study adopted a quantitative content analysis research design. The population comprised 2,920 newspaper editions published between January 1, 2022, and December 31, 2023. Using the Taro Yamane sample size determination method, 400 editions (100 from each newspaper) were selected. From these, 131 road traffic safety reports were purposively sampled for analysis. A structured coding sheet was used to collect data on headlines, body texts, visuals, and WHO-prescribed reporting angles. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages and presented in tables. Inter-coder reliability was established using ReCal 0.1 Alpha, yielding a Kappa coefficient of 0.987.

Result: Findings revealed that Nigerian newspapers contributed only 0.60% of documented RTC reports compared to 99.40% recorded by the Federal Road Safety Corps, indicating minimal media engagement. Coverage predominantly emphasised the deadliness of RTCs (31.2%), while WHO-recommended angles such as stakeholder perspectives (7.8%), vulnerability of certain groups (10.4%), and strain on public health systems (13.0%) received limited attention.

Conclusion: The study concludes that Nigerian newspapers demonstrate sporadic engagement and partial adherence to WHO guidelines, with a tendency toward episodic and sensational reporting rather than comprehensive, solution-oriented coverage.

Unique Contribution: This study extends existing literature by shifting focus from the epidemiology of road traffic accidents to the quality of media reporting, specifically assessing adherence to WHO guidelines in Nigerian newspaper coverage.

Key Recommendation: The study recommends that journalists receive specialised training on WHO guidelines for road safety reporting, with emphasis on balanced and comprehensive coverage across all prescribed angles, particularly underreported areas such as stakeholder perspectives, vulnerability of high-risk groups, and the burden on public health systems.

Keywords: Road traffic safety, WHO guidelines, Nigerian newspapers, media coverage, road traffic collisions



INTRODUCTION

Road traffic safety constitutes a paramount global issue, primarily due to the alarming frequency of road accidents, injuries, and fatalities. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2020), approximately 1.35 million individuals lose their lives annually due to road traffic incidents, rendering road traffic accidents the foremost cause of death among children and young adults aged 5 to 29 years. These alarming statistics underscore the pressing necessity for comprehensive road safety strategies and increased public awareness to alleviate the catastrophic effects of these occurrences (Egbo & Nwafor, 2024).

Low and middle-income countries bear a disproportionate burden of road traffic injuries and deaths. According to WHO (2022), 93% of global road fatalities occur in these regions, despite these countries accounting for approximately 60% of the world's vehicle population. The rates of road traffic fatalities in Africa are alarmingly high, with Nigeria identified as the nation with the highest incidence of traffic-related deaths (FRSC, 2021). The World Health Organization's Global Status Report on Road Safety 2021 emphasizes Nigeria's status as one of the countries with the highest road traffic fatality rates globally (WHO, 2021).

Media platforms, particularly newspapers, play a crucial role in influencing public perceptions and attitudes regarding road safety. How the media reports on road traffic collisions can significantly affect societal attitudes and behaviours related to road safety. Ethical journalism requires the dissemination of accurate, balanced, and timely information concerning RTCs, addressing aspects such as their causes, impacts, and preventive strategies (Adeolu & Adewale, 2019). The mass media possesses the power to shape health-related behaviours, perceptions, and the reactions of both road users and policymakers responsible for establishing road safety measures (Gupta et al., 2021; Muoneke & Nwafor, 2024).

To raise awareness and encourage proactive measures regarding road safety, the World Health Organisation published a guide in 2015 aimed at shaping the reporting practices of journalists. This guide sought to reframe narratives surrounding road traffic collisions into discussions focused on road safety, underscoring the importance of prevention and the extensive social and economic repercussions associated with RTCs (WHO, 2017). However, a significant research gap exists in evaluating how media coverage corresponds with the WHO's recommendations for road safety awareness in developing nations, especially in Nigeria. This study addresses this gap by analysing the implementation of WHO guidelines in road traffic safety reporting in selected Nigerian newspapers.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Recent data from the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), the World Bank, and WHO reveal a consistent rise in road accidents in Nigeria, leading to an annual death toll of 41,693. Road traffic collisions represent a significant danger to public health and safety in Nigeria, underscoring the urgent need for extensive awareness and prevention initiatives. The media serves a crucial function in the dissemination of information and the formation of public attitudes, positioning it as an essential element in tackling this challenge.



While the Nigerian media has the potential to impact road traffic collisions by promoting positive actions and countering detrimental beliefs and misconceptions, it remains uncertain to what extent it adheres to the best practices outlined in the WHO's Reporting on Road Safety guidelines (Akinpelu & Emeke, 2019). Despite attention given to the relationship between media coverage and road safety awareness in previous studies, a significant gap persists regarding the extent to which media outlets incorporate the WHO's guidelines for road safety in their reports, particularly in developing nations such as Nigeria. Consequently, there is a pressing requirement for empirical research that systematically evaluates the quality of road traffic safety reporting in Nigerian newspapers, with a specific focus on adherence to WHO guidelines.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study is to investigate adherence of select Nigerian newspapers to the WHO's guidelines on road traffic safety reporting. The specific objectives addressed in this article are:

1. To analyse the frequency of road traffic safety reportage in the selected Nigerian newspapers.
2. To identify WHO's guidelines on road traffic safety reporting in stories of the selected Nigerian newspapers.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The selected research method is quantitative content analysis. This approach is particularly fitting as the study systematically analysed newspaper content to assess the frequency and patterns of road traffic safety reporting in relation to WHO guidelines. Unlike survey or interview methods that emphasize opinions or perceptions, quantitative content analysis allows for an objective, replicable, and systematic examination of published media texts. It enables the researcher to quantify reporting trends, categorize story angles, and compare coverage across different newspapers using statistical measures. Since the study aimed to evaluate compliance with established reporting standards in existing media content, quantitative content analysis offers the most suitable and dependable framework compared to other research methods.

Population and Sample

The population of this study comprised *Daily Trust, Leadership, The Sun, and Vanguard newspapers*. The analysis spanned two years, from January 1, 2022, to December 31, 2023, including a total of 2,920 editions from the four newspapers. These newspapers were selected for their widespread popularity and effective roles in shaping public opinion and discourse. Using Taro Yamane sample determination method, 400 editions were selected (100 from each newspaper) as the sample size, focusing specifically on editions featuring road traffic accident stories, yielding a final number of 131 reports for analysis using the purposive sampling technique.



Data Collection and Analysis

A coding sheet was utilised as the data collection instrument. The coding process encompassed news stories, feature pieces, and opinion columns from the selected newspapers. Units of analysis included headlines, body text, and visual elements. Content categories comprised individual news stories, features, columns/opinions, and photos/illustrations related to road traffic collisions.

The validity of the research instrument was ensured through supervisory review, external assessment during seminars, and a comprehensive coding scheme developed using ReCal 0.1 Alpha. The Kappa measurement of agreement was assessed at 0.987, indicating high inter-coder reliability. A pilot test was conducted to refine data collection methods and coding strategies before full-scale implementation.

RESULTS

Objective 1: Frequency of Road Traffic Safety Reportage

Tables 1 and 2 present the monthly distribution of road traffic safety reportage across the four selected newspapers for 2022 and 2023 respectively.

Table 1: Monthly Distribution of Road Traffic Safety Reportage (January-December 2022)

Month/Year	Daily Trust	Leadership	The Sun	Vanguard	Total
January 2022	2 (14.3%)	2 (12.5%)	2 (18.2%)	2 (9.5%)	8 (12.9%)
February 2022	1 (7.1%)	1 (6.3%)	1 (9.1%)	2 (9.5%)	5 (8.1%)
March 2022	0 (0.0%)	2 (12.5%)	1 (9.1%)	2 (9.5%)	5 (8.1%)
April 2022	1 (7.1%)	1 (6.3%)	1 (9.1%)	1 (4.8%)	4 (6.5%)
May 2022	1 (7.1%)	1 (6.3%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (9.5%)	4 (6.5%)
June 2022	1 (7.1%)	1 (6.3%)	1 (9.1%)	1 (4.8%)	4 (6.5%)
July 2022	1 (7.1%)	1 (6.3%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (4.8%)	3 (4.8%)
August 2022	1 (7.1%)	1 (6.3%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (4.8%)	4 (6.5%)
September 2022	1 (7.1%)	1 (6.3%)	1 (9.1%)	2 (9.5%)	5 (8.1%)
October 2022	1 (7.1%)	1 (6.3%)	1 (9.1%)	2 (9.5%)	5 (8.1%)
November 2022	2 (14.3%)	1 (6.3%)	1 (9.1%)	2 (9.5%)	6 (9.7%)
December 2022	2 (14.3%)	3 (18.8%)	2 (18.2%)	3 (14.3%)	9 (14.5%)
Total	14 (100%)	16 (100%)	11 (100%)	21 (100%)	62 (100%)

Source: Content Analysis January 1, 2022 to December 31, 2022



Table 2: Monthly Distribution of Road Traffic Safety Reportage (January-December 2023)

Month/Year	Daily Trust	Leadership	The Sun	Vanguard	Total
January 2023	1 (6.7%)	2 (10.0%)	1 (8.3%)	3 (13.6%)	7 (10.1%)
February 2023	1 (6.7%)	1 (5.0%)	1 (8.3%)	2 (9.1%)	5 (7.2%)
March 2023	1 (6.7%)	1 (5.0%)	1 (8.3%)	2 (9.1%)	5 (7.2%)
April 2023	1 (6.7%)	1 (5.0%)	1 (8.3%)	1 (4.5%)	4 (5.8%)
May 2023	2 (13.3%)	2 (10.0%)	1 (8.3%)	1 (4.5%)	6 (8.7%)
June 2023	1 (6.7%)	1 (5.0%)	1 (8.3%)	1 (4.5%)	4 (5.8%)
July 2023	1 (6.7%)	2 (10.0%)	1 (8.3%)	2 (9.1%)	6 (8.7%)
August 2023	1 (6.7%)	2 (10.0%)	1 (8.3%)	1 (4.5%)	5 (7.2%)
September 2023	1 (6.7%)	2 (10.0%)	1 (8.3%)	1 (4.5%)	5 (7.2%)
October 2023	1 (6.7%)	2 (10.0%)	1 (8.3%)	2 (9.1%)	6 (8.7%)
November 2023	2 (13.3%)	2 (10.0%)	1 (8.3%)	2 (9.1%)	7 (10.1%)
December 2023	2 (13.3%)	2 (10.0%)	1 (8.3%)	4 (18.2%)	9 (13.0%)
Total	15 (100%)	20 (100%)	12 (100%)	22 (100%)	69 (100%)

Source: Content Analysis January 1, 2023 to December 31, 2023

The data reveals significant fluctuations in road traffic safety reportage across the study period. In 2022, a total of 62 reports were published, with December recording the highest concentration (9 reports, 14.5%), followed by January (8 reports, 12.9%). The mid-year months of July and August showed the lowest coverage, with 3 and 4 reports respectively. Vanguard demonstrated the highest engagement with 21 reports (33.9%), while The Sun contributed the least with 11 reports (17.7%).

In 2023, coverage increased slightly to 69 reports. December again recorded the highest frequency (9 reports, 13.0%), with January and November each contributing 7 reports (10.1%). Vanguard maintained the lead with 22 reports (31.9%), while The Sun again had the lowest contribution with 12 reports (17.4%). This sporadic pattern of coverage, characterized by periodic surges rather than consistent monthly reporting, indicates that Nigerian newspapers engage with road traffic safety issues reactively rather than proactively, potentially limiting sustained public dialogue on road safety.

Objective 2: WHO-Prescribed Reporting Angles

Table 3 presents the identification of WHO-prescribed reporting angles for road traffic safety in the analysed stories.



Table 3: WHO-Prescribed Reporting Angles for Road Traffic Safety

Code	Story Angle	Daily Trust	Leadership	The Sun	Vanguard	Total
WHO-1	Deadliness of RTCs	5 (29.4%)	6 (28.6%)	4 (30.8%)	9 (34.6%)	24 (31.2%)
WHO-2	Strain on public health system	2 (11.8%)	3 (14.3%)	1 (7.7%)	4 (15.4%)	10 (13.0%)
WHO-3	Effect on quality of life	2 (11.8%)	2 (9.5%)	2 (15.4%)	3 (11.5%)	9 (11.7%)
WHO-4	Vulnerability of certain groups	2 (11.8%)	3 (14.3%)	1 (7.7%)	2 (7.7%)	8 (10.4%)
WHO-5	Stakeholder perspectives	1 (5.9%)	2 (9.5%)	1 (7.7%)	2 (7.7%)	6 (7.8%)
WHO-6	Coverage of new proposals/laws	2 (11.8%)	2 (9.5%)	1 (7.7%)	3 (11.5%)	8 (10.4%)
WHO-7	Analysis of solutions to RTCs	3 (17.6%)	3 (14.3%)	3 (23.1%)	3 (11.5%)	12 (15.6%)
Total		17 (100%)	21 (100%)	13 (100%)	26 (100%)	77 (100%)

Source: Content Analysis January 1, 2022 to December 31, 2023

The analysis of 77 stories reveals varying levels of emphasis on WHO-recommended angles. The most frequently reported angle was the deadliness of RTCs (WHO-1), accounting for 31.2% of coverage, with Vanguard contributing the highest number of stories (9, 34.6%). This focus highlights the media's tendency to emphasize catastrophic consequences, which resonates strongly with audiences but may not always lead to sustained public engagement or policy action.

Analysis of solutions to RTCs (WHO-7) was the second most frequent angle at 15.6%, demonstrating some effort to explore preventive measures. However, critical angles received limited attention: stakeholder perspectives (WHO-5) comprised only 7.8% of coverage, vulnerability of certain groups (WHO-4) accounted for 10.4%, coverage of new proposals or laws (WHO-6) represented 10.4%, effects on quality of life (WHO-3) made up 11.7%, and strain on the public health system (WHO-2) constituted 13.0% of total reportage.

Vanguard led in total reportage with 26 stories (33.8%), followed by Leadership with 21 stories (27.3%), Daily Trust with 17 stories (22.1%), and The Sun with 13 stories (16.9%). These disparities suggest differing editorial priorities and resource allocations, which influence the comprehensiveness and impact of road safety reportage across outlets. The underrepresentation of angles such as stakeholder perspectives, vulnerability of certain groups, and strain on the public health system points to missed opportunities for a more holistic and impactful approach to road safety reporting.



DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that Nigerian newspapers provide minimal and sporadic coverage of road traffic safety issues, with only 131 reports identified across 2,920 editions. This observation aligns with Gupta et al. (2021), who noted that media coverage of road traffic safety in India was also limited and often focused on individual events, rather than sustained or policy-oriented discussions. Similarly, Adeolu and Adewale (2019) remarked that Nigerian media engagement with road safety education tends to be inconsistent and lacks depth. Consequently, this study reinforces the existing evidence that media in developing countries often view road traffic crashes as isolated incidents rather than systemic public health issues.

The prevalence of reports highlighting the deadliness of road traffic collisions (31.2%) supports the findings of Gupta et al. (2021), who discovered that media framing often prioritizes sensational and episodic narratives over thematic, preventive analysis. This trend reflects what framing theory describes as episodic framing, which focuses on dramatic events instead of underlying causes and long-term solutions. However, this study goes a step further by quantitatively demonstrating the imbalance in adherence to specific reporting angles prescribed by WHO, thus providing a more structured empirical measurement than previous descriptive studies.

The limited focus on stakeholder perspectives, the vulnerability of high-risk groups, and the strain on the public health system stands in contrast to the expectations set out in the World Health Organization's reporting guidelines, which call for comprehensive, prevention-oriented journalism. While prior studies have pointed out general shortcomings in road safety reporting, this study enhances our understanding by systematically coding WHO-recommended angles and calculating their proportional representation. This establishes a clearer benchmark for assessing compliance with international standards.

Additionally, by comparing newspaper coverage with data from the Federal Road Safety Corps, this study introduces a notable quantitative contrast (0.60% versus 99.40%) that has not been prominently highlighted in earlier research. This comparative aspect enriches existing scholarship by showcasing the gap between institutional data production and media representation, thereby emphasizing missed opportunities for agenda-setting and ongoing advocacy.

Worthy of note is that this study not only confirms earlier findings about episodic and sensational reporting patterns but also contributes to knowledge by providing a structured evaluative framework based on WHO guidelines, an empirical proportional analysis of reporting angles, and documentation of the disparity between media output and official safety records. These insights create a stronger foundation for policy recommendations and future research on media performance in public health communication within developing contexts.



CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that Nigerian newspapers show a limited and inconsistent commitment to thorough reporting on road traffic safety. While there is some alignment with World Health Organization guidelines, the coverage tends to be sporadic and primarily highlights the fatal outcomes of crashes rather than focusing on preventive measures, vulnerable groups, stakeholder involvement, or broader health implications. The relatively low number of reports compared to those documented by the Federal Road Safety Corps further suggests a weak influence in setting the agenda for sustained public awareness. Overall, the media's current approach does not fulfill its potential role as an active advocate for road safety and public health communication in Nigeria. This conclusion arises from the infrequent coverage that mainly centers on fatalities while offering minimal attention to preventive strategies and policy aspects recommended by the World Health Organization, especially when compared to documentation by the Federal Road Safety Corps.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Journalists should receive specialised training on WHO guidelines for road safety reporting, emphasizing balanced coverage across all prescribed angles, particularly underrepresented themes such as stakeholder perspectives, vulnerability of certain groups, and strain on public health systems.
2. Strategic partnerships should be established between media organizations and road safety agencies (particularly FRSC) to facilitate data sharing, expert access, and joint advocacy initiatives that enhance the quality and impact of reportage.
3. Editorial policies should prioritize solution-oriented reporting that explores preventive measures, policy developments, and systemic interventions alongside coverage of accident events.
4. Researchers should explore future on the impact of media coverage on public behaviour and policy outcomes, as well as investigate barriers to comprehensive road safety reporting in Nigerian newsrooms.

Ethical clearance

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions

Prof. Thomas A. Alemoh, Ndonima Danjuma and Omale Nelson Iteji conceived the study, including the design, so and so collated the data, and so and so handled the analysis and interpretation, while so and so the initial manuscript. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final draft, and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

Data availability statement

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

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