



Perception and Attitude of South-South Residents towards Newspaper Coverage of Medical Tourism in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Background: Medical tourism has become an increasingly significant phenomenon in Nigeria, with newspapers serving as a major channel through which the public receives information on healthcare services abroad. Understanding how residents interpret such media coverage is essential for assessing its role in shaping health-related perceptions and decisions.

Objective: This study examined the perception and attitude of South-South residents towards newspaper coverage of medical tourism in Nigeria. Specifically, it sought to ascertain the level of awareness of such coverage, determine the extent of exposure, examine attitudes towards the content, identify factors influencing perceptions, and assess how coverage impacts decisions to seek medical care abroad.

Method: The study was anchored on the Health Belief Model and perception theory. It adopted a survey design and employed the questionnaire as the instrument of data collection.

Result: Findings revealed that a significant majority of residents were aware of newspaper coverage of medical tourism, with over 75% affirming that newspapers effectively communicated relevant information. Many respondents rated their awareness as high, indicating that newspapers fostered trust and confidence in medical tourism. Engagement with medical tourism content varied, but most respondents found the coverage informative and helpful. Overall, attitudes towards newspaper coverage were positive, with many considering it objective and trustworthy. Notably, favourable portrayals increased willingness to seek treatment abroad, while negative depictions of local healthcare intensified consideration of foreign options.

Conclusion: The study concluded that newspaper coverage significantly influences South-South residents' decisions to seek medical care abroad by enhancing confidence in foreign healthcare services and shaping perceptions of local healthcare.

Unique Contribution: This study extends knowledge by empirically demonstrating how newspaper coverage of medical tourism not only informs but also validates and reinforces existing perceptions of foreign healthcare as superior, thereby influencing health-seeking behaviours.

Key Recommendation: The study recommends that newspaper editors prioritise accuracy and depth in reporting medical tourism issues, while health authorities should collaborate with the media to design awareness campaigns that promote balanced perspectives on both local and foreign healthcare options.

Keywords: Medical Tourism, Newspaper Coverage, Public Perception, Attitude, Healthcare Decision-Making



INTRODUCTION

Medical tourism represents a growing phenomenon where individuals seek medical services abroad, driven by factors such as unavailable treatments, long waiting times and desire for high-quality care with advanced technology. This trend enables patients to access affordable and competitive pricing, innovative treatments, personalised care and cutting-edge medical technology, often combining medical treatment with leisure travel. Abubakar, Basiru, Oluyemi, Abdulateef, Atolagbe, Adejoke & Kadiri (2008) state that medical tourism is the practice of traveling to another country to obtain medical care, which can range from elective procedures to complex surgeries and wellness treatments. This phenomenon has gained significant recognition globally, driven by factors such as the rising costs of healthcare in developing countries, the availability of advanced medical technologies in countries such as the United Kingdom and the increasing awareness of alternative healthcare options. Medical tourism offers patients not only the promise of more affordable medical care but also the opportunity to combine treatment with travel, often in an appealing destination (Adogla-Bessa, 2015). This has led to the emergence of countries like India, Thailand and Mexico as prominent players in the medical tourism market, attracting patients seeking quality healthcare at affordable prices.

However, a disturbing aspect of this trend is the involvement of Nigerian citizens in organ trafficking, as exemplified by the high-profile case of Senator Ike Ekweremadu, who was arrested in 2022 for allegedly trafficking a 21-year-old Nigerian man to the UK for organ harvesting (Okosun, Ezeji & Asemah, 2023). The interplay between perception and attitude towards medical tourism is crucial for understanding how South-South residents view newspaper coverage of this issue. According to Ezegwu, Ezeji; Nwokeocha & Chukwuemeka (2024a p. 177), “newspapers cover issues and information on a broad spectrum of societal challenges which include; news, politics, education, science and technology, religion, commerce, maritime, crime, health, etc”. If the media portrays medical tourism positively, it may lead to more favourable attitudes among the public, encouraging individuals to consider this option for their medical needs. Conversely, negative portrayals could foster a sense of distrust and hinder the acceptance of medical tourism as a legitimate choice. Therefore, exploring these dynamics is essential for assessing how effectively newspaper coverage informs and shapes public attitudes and perceptions regarding medical tourism in Nigeria. On this premise, this researcher examines South-South resident's perception and attitude of newspaper coverage of medical tourism in Nigeria.

The increasing trend of medical tourism in Nigeria raises critical concerns, particularly for residents of the South-South region, who often seek healthcare services abroad due to dissatisfaction with local medical facilities. This phenomenon highlights a significant problem: a pervasive lack of trust in the domestic healthcare system. Moreover, there is a troubling gap in awareness and understanding of medical tourism among South-South residents though some studies such as Orji, Inyang, Akpan, Bassey & Edodi (2020) and Abba-Aji, Balabanova, Hutchinson & McKee (2021) have carried out related studies. Many individuals lack comprehensive information about the potential benefits, risks and costs associated with traveling for medical treatment. The available literature on medical tourism in Nigeria has primarily concentrated on media framing (Chime-Nganya, Ezegwu & Ezeji, 2017) and economic issues (Nwankwo, Udeh & Okwor (2023), medical risks (Orji, Inyang, Akpan, Bassey & Edodi, 2020) neglecting factors influencing residents' attitudes and perception toward the framing



of medical tourism. Moreover, studies on health communication in Nigeria have focused on general health issues (Asemah, 2015) rather than specifically addressing medical tourism. This study bridges this gap by investigating the perceptions and attitudes of South-South residents towards newspaper coverage of medical tourism in Nigeria.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Investigate the extent of exposure of South-South residents to newspaper coverage of medical tourism issue in Nigeria.
2. Examine the attitudes of South-South residents towards newspaper coverage of medical tourism in Nigeria.
3. Find out how South-South residents perceive the newspaper coverage of medical tourism issues in Nigeria

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Medical Tourism

Medical tourism is an increasingly popular phenomenon characterised by the practice of individuals traveling across international borders to obtain healthcare services that may be either unavailable, prohibitively expensive, or perceived to be of higher quality than those offered in their home countries. Medical tourism refers to the practice of traveling to another country or region to receive medical care, often combining tourism and leisure activities, driven by motivations such as cost savings, access to specialised treatments, shorter waiting times, higher quality care, confidentiality, or cultural preferences. According to Lamisu (2018), this phenomenon involves individuals seeking elective or necessary medical procedures, including cosmetic surgery, orthopedic surgeries, cardiac care, dental care, fertility treatments and more, in destinations like the US, India, Thailand Singapore and others, raising important considerations around quality, safety, regulations, insurance, communication and cultural differences.

According to Asa, Fauk, McLean & Ward (2024), medical tourism encompasses a wide range of healthcare services, including elective surgeries, dental treatments and wellness therapies. The authors emphasise that this trend is particularly prevalent among Indonesians who seek specialised medical care for complex conditions such as cardiac issues or orthopedic surgeries.

Understanding Newspaper Coverage

Newspaper coverage is the process through which the media selects, reports and disseminates news stories to inform the public about events, issues and developments at local, national and international levels. Olatunji (2023) emphasises that this coverage is vital for fostering an informed citizenry, as newspapers often serve as the primary source of information for many communities. The analysis of newspaper coverage highlights its role in shaping public discourse; by determining which stories to highlight, newspapers can influence what audiences perceive as important.

Nwankwo and Eze (2024) see newspaper coverage as not only the reporting of facts but also the interpretation of those facts within cultural contexts. Their analysis reveals that newspapers



reflect societal values and norms, influencing how events are perceived by different audiences. For example, the coverage of political events in Nigerian newspapers often mirrors the prevailing sentiments of the populace, which can either reinforce or challenge societal narratives. This interpretation suggests that media literacy is essential for readers, as it enables them to critically engage with the news and recognise potential biases in reporting.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The State of the Healthcare Sector in Nigeria

The healthcare sector in Nigeria is characterised by a complex interplay of challenges and opportunities, impacting its ability to deliver quality healthcare services to the population. A major challenge facing the Nigerian healthcare sector is inadequate funding. The World Health Organisation recommends that countries allocate at least 15% of their annual budgets to health; however, Nigeria has consistently failed to meet this benchmark. According to Ojo, Adebayo and Ogunyemi (2021), Nigeria's health budget has remained below 5% of the total national budget, resulting in insufficient resources for healthcare facilities and programs. This financial inadequacy leads to poorly equipped hospitals, shortages of essential medicines and inadequate training for healthcare workers. Abdulraheem, Onajole and Oladipo (2020) further emphasise that this chronic underfunding disproportionately affects rural areas, where access to healthcare services is already limited. Inadequate funding not only hampers the delivery of care but also stifles innovation and improvements in health service delivery.

The state of healthcare infrastructure in Nigeria poses another critical barrier to effective healthcare delivery. Many health facilities are outdated, poorly maintained and lack essential amenities such as clean water, reliable electricity and modern medical equipment. Afolabi, Odebiyi and Afolabi (2022) highlight that inadequate infrastructure contributes to long wait times, overcrowded facilities and diminished quality of care. Additionally, the lack of basic resources discourages healthcare professionals from practicing in rural areas, exacerbating the disparity between urban and rural health access.

Despite the myriad challenges facing the healthcare sector in Nigeria, there are emerging opportunities for transformation. Innovations in telemedicine and digital health have gained traction, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, as they provide alternative avenues for accessing healthcare services (Adebayo, Ojo & Olaniyan, 2022). Telemedicine can bridge the access gap for individuals in remote areas, allowing them to consult healthcare professionals without the need for extensive travel.

Factors Influencing Public Attitude Towards Medical Tourism

One of the most significant factors influencing public attitude is the perceived quality of healthcare services offered abroad. Many patients consider the reputation and accreditation of hospitals when deciding to seek treatment overseas. For instance, studies have shown that medical tourists are often attracted to destinations known for their advanced medical technologies and highly skilled healthcare professionals (Gholami, Keshtvarz Hesam Abadi, Miladi & Gholami, 2020). The reputation of healthcare providers, influenced by international rankings and patient testimonials, plays a critical role in shaping public perceptions. Positive word-of-mouth and recommendations from previous patients can significantly enhance the attractiveness of a destination, as highlighted by Taheri, Chalmers,



Wilson & Arshed (2021). In contrast, negative experiences shared through social media or online platforms can deter potential medical tourists, underscoring the importance of maintaining high standards of care and transparency in medical practices.

Cost considerations also heavily influence public attitudes towards medical tourism. Many individuals are drawn to seek treatment in countries where healthcare services are more affordable compared to their home countries (Nagar, Singh, Malik & Dalal, 2024). Price differentials for procedures such as cosmetic surgery, dental work and elective surgeries can be substantial, making medical tourism an attractive option for cost-conscious patients. However, while low prices can be a significant motivator, they can also raise concerns regarding the quality of care provided. Patients may question whether lower costs compromise the standard of treatment or if hidden fees might arise during their medical journey. Therefore, clear communication regarding pricing structures and the overall value of medical services is crucial in shaping positive public attitudes.

Accessibility and convenience are further factors that shape public attitudes towards medical tourism. The ease of travel, availability of direct flights and the presence of supportive infrastructures, such as medical facilitators and travel agencies, can enhance the attractiveness of medical tourism destinations (Li, Hyun & Kim, 2024). For example, countries that have established streamlined visa processes for medical tourists may experience increased interest from potential patients. Conversely, logistical challenges, such as complicated travel arrangements or lengthy visa procedures, may deter individuals from seeking medical care abroad.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

This section reviews literature related to the current study and how the studies agree and differ from each other. Chime-Nganya, Ezegwu & Ezeji (2017) analysed the framing of President Muhammadu Buhari's medical leave in Nigerian newspapers, focusing on several key aspects such as the genre of the stories, their prominence, framing patterns, dominant frames and the frequency of reports. The research examined three prominent newspapers—*The Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *Daily Trust*— for eight months, utilising content analysis as its primary research method. The findings revealed that the newspapers did not provide adequate background information regarding President Buhari's medical leave, which could have offered readers a more comprehensive understanding of the context. The scholars recommended that Nigerian newspapers should move away from brief reporting on critical national matters and instead pursue in-depth investigations. They also highlighted the need for future studies to explore audience perceptions of media coverage, pointing to a gap in understanding how the public interprets and reacts to such reports. The study above and the current one examines how media coverage influences public perceptions and attitudes, indicating a shared interest in the role of media representation. While Chime-Nganya et al. (2017) focused on the framing of a political figure's medical leave, the current study investigates the broader topic of medical tourism, thus shifting the context from political framing to healthcare perception.



Conversely, Adeoye (2023) examined the complex interplay of medical, legal and social issues associated with medical tourism in Nigeria and its implications for the country's healthcare landscape. The study employs a qualitative research design, utilising in-depth interviews and document analysis as primary instruments for data collection. The findings highlight significant concerns, including potential exploitation of patients who may be misinformed about the risks and benefits of seeking care abroad. The author recommends that Nigerian policymakers develop comprehensive guidelines to address the multifaceted challenges posed by medical tourism, including the establishment of monitoring systems to evaluate the quality of care provided overseas. While this study aligns with the current research in that both investigate aspects of medical tourism in Nigeria, it diverges in focus, centering on regulatory and ethical considerations rather than public perceptions.

Also, Salam, Salaudeen and Adeniji (2023) explored the influence of health insurance coverage on medical tourism decisions in Nigeria, focusing on how financial factors shape individuals' choices regarding healthcare options. The authors adopted a quantitative research design, employing a structured questionnaire to gather data from a diverse sample of respondents, including potential medical tourists and healthcare professionals. Their findings reveal a significant positive correlation between health insurance coverage and the likelihood of individuals opting for medical tourism. The study suggests that individuals with comprehensive health insurance are more inclined to seek out medical procedures abroad, as they perceive it as a viable option for accessing high-quality healthcare at reduced costs. The authors recommended that stakeholders, including government bodies and insurance companies, promote health insurance awareness and accessibility to empower individuals to make informed healthcare choices. While the current study also employs questionnaire as a primary research tool, it differs significantly in its focus on public attitudes toward medical tourism rather than financial factors influencing decision-making. This creates a complementary perspective, as both studies contribute valuable insights to the understanding of medical tourism dynamics in Nigeria.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Health Belief Model

The Health Belief Model (HBM) was developed in the 1950s by social psychologists Irwin Rosenstock, Godfrey Hochbaum and Stephen Kirscht as a framework for understanding health behaviours and the factors that influence individuals' decisions to engage in health-promoting activities (Ansari & Singh, 2024; Asemah, 2016; Asemah & Omosotomhe, 2016). Initially created to address the issue of tuberculosis screening, the model emerged from the social psychology perspective, incorporating elements of cognitive psychology and behavioural science. The HBM posits that individuals are motivated to take health-related actions based on their perceptions of the threat posed by a health issue and the benefits of taking preventive action (Yarosan & Asemah, 2008). Over the years, the model has been refined and expanded to address a wide range of health behaviours, including vaccination, smoking cessation and chronic disease management, making it a foundational theory in the field of public health and health education (Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017).



Malhotra & Dave (2024) note that the Health Belief Model is anchored on several key constructs that collectively shape an individual's decision-making process regarding health behaviours:

1. **Perceived Susceptibility:** This construct refers to an individual's belief about the likelihood of experiencing a health issue. For example, a person who believes they are at high risk for a disease is more likely to engage in preventive behaviours.
2. **Perceived Severity:** This dimension reflects an individual's assessment of the seriousness of the health issue and its potential consequences. If an individual perceives a disease as severe, they are more likely to take action to avoid it.
3. **Perceived Benefits:** This construct addresses the belief in the efficacy of the recommended health action in reducing the threat of the health issue. Individuals are motivated to act when they believe that the benefits of taking action outweigh the costs.
4. **Perceived Barriers:** This dimension encompasses the potential obstacles that may hinder an individual from taking health-related actions. Identifying and addressing these barriers is crucial for promoting health behaviours.
5. **Cues to Action:** These are external factors or triggers that prompt individuals to take action. Examples include health campaigns, reminders from healthcare providers, or personal experiences with illness.
6. **Self-Efficacy:** This more recent addition to the model emphasises an individual's confidence in their ability to take action. Higher self-efficacy is associated with a greater likelihood of engaging in health-promoting behaviours.

The Health Belief Model was applied by using its key constructs—perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived benefits, perceived barriers, cues to action, and self-efficacy—to interpret how South-South residents' health perceptions shaped their understanding of and responses to newspaper coverage of medical tourism in Nigeria.

METHOD

In this research, descriptive survey research design was utilised. It involves a systematic collection of responses from participants which makes it possible to address issues related to human attitudes and perceptions (Nwaoboli & Asemah, 2023; Oladele, Ekhareafo & Asemah, 2023; Asemah & Nwaoboli, 2022; 2024). The South-South region of Nigeria consisted of six states: Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers. For this study, the researcher focused on three states—Akwa Ibom, Delta, and Edo—due to their significant urban centres that are key to understanding the dynamics within the region. The selected urban centres are Uyo from Akwa Ibom, Asaba from Delta, and Benin City from Edo. This selection is justified by the diverse socio-economic landscapes these cities represent, which are crucial for a comprehensive analysis as it relates to this study. According to the 2006 National Population Census of Nigeria, the populations of these cities are as follows: Uyo: 436,606; Asaba: 149,603; and Benin City: 1,086,882. However, because the population census of 2006 is too stale, the researcher calculated a population projection for the year 2024 with an average annual population growth rate of 2.1%. For Uyo, with a 2006 population of 436,606, the projected population for 2024 is 743,179. Asaba's population is calculated to be 253,911 and Benin City's population is projected to increase from 1,086,882 in 2006 to 1,846,169 in 2024. Therefore, the total population of the



study is 3,710,000. The sample size for the research was 400 and it was determined using Taro Yamane's (1964) sample size determination formular. The researcher employed a multi-stage sampling technique to conduct a thorough and representative analysis of South-South residents' attitudes and perceptions towards newspaper coverage of medical tourism in Nigeria. This approach allowed for the breakdown of the sampling process into distinct stages, utilising various techniques at each phase to capture a wide range of perspectives and ensure a robust sample.

The first stage involved selecting specific local government areas (LGAs) from the three states—Akwa Ibom, Delta, and Edo—based on their population sizes and demographic diversity. The purposive sampling technique was used to achieve this. For Akwa Ibom State, Uyo LGA was chosen; for Delta State, Warri South LGA was selected; and for Edo State, Oredo LGA was identified. This selection ensures that the research reflects the demographic diversity within each state, providing a comprehensive understanding of urban and rural perspectives on medical tourism coverage.

In the second stage, communities were chosen from each selected LGA. Each LGA consists of various communities that represent different socio-cultural dynamics. For Uyo LGA in Akwa Ibom State, the communities selected were Nwaniba, Ifa Atai, and Ikot Ekpene. From Warri South LGA in Delta State, the chosen communities included Warri Urban, Effurun, and Uvwie. In Oredo LGA in Edo State, the selected communities were Ogbe, Oliha, and Ogbelaka.

The third stage involved selecting specific streets or areas within each community to enhance the granularity of data collection. The resercaher used convenience sampling in this stage. In Uyo, for example, Nwaniba included Nwaniba Road, Ifa Atai encompassed Ifa Atai Street, and Ikot Ekpene included Ikot Ekpene Street. In Warri, Warri Urban featured Main Street, Effurun included Udu Road, and Uvwie encompassed Uvwie Junction. In Oredo, Ogbe covered Ogbe Street, Oliha featured Oliha Market Area, and Ogbelaka included Ogbelaka Community Hall.

The fourth stage utilised stratified sampling to select respondents from each community, with a total of 400 respondents evenly distributed to maintain gender balance and socio-economic diversity. The breakdown of the 400 respondents is as follows: 133 respondents from Uyo LGA, with 44 from each community (Nwaniba, Ifa Atai and Ikot Ekpene); 133 respondents from Warri South LGA, with 44 from each community (Warri Urban, Effurun, and Uvwie); and 134 respondents from Oredo LGA, with 45 from each community (Ogbe, Oliha, and Ogbelaka), and 44 from the remaining community to make up 134. Each community had an equal number of male and female respondents.

The final stage involved simple random sampling to select the final sample of 400 respondents from the chosen communities. This process utilised a random number generator to ensure that every individual has an equal chance of being included in the study. The adoption of simple random sampling at this stage is critical for eliminating selection biases, thereby producing a representative sample of respondents from the selected urban areas in the South-South region. This randomisation enhances the validity of the study by ensuring that the findings can be generalised to the broader population. The researcher administered copies of the questionnaire



directly to respondents in person. Data analysis for this study was analysed using descriptive statistics to summarise and describe the findings.

RESULT

Table 1: Exposure to Newspaper Coverage of Medical Tourism in Nigeria

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	150	40.4
Agree	130	35.0
Neutral	30	8.1
Disagree	40	10.8
Strongly Disagree	21	5.6
Total	371	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

The findings in Table 7 regarding exposure to newspaper coverage of medical tourism indicate that a considerable portion of respondents agree they are informed by such media. While many strongly agree or agree, a smaller percentage remains neutral or disagrees, revealing varying levels of engagement with the content.

Table 2: Newspapers through which respondents are Frequently Exposed to Medical Tourism Coverage

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
The Guardian	90	24.2
ThisDay	75	20.2
Punch	100	27.0
Vanguard	60	16.2
Others	46	12.4
Total	371	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025.



Table 2 highlights the newspapers frequently accessed for medical tourism coverage, showing a clear preference among readers for publications such as *The Guardian and Punch*. This indicates that these newspapers play a vital role in disseminating information on medical tourism.



Table 3: Summary of Perceptions on Newspaper Coverage of Medical Tourism

Response Category	Coverage Accurately Reflects Quality (T14)	Newspapers Exaggerate Benefits (T15)	Confidence in Care Abroad (T18)	Likely to Consider Medical Travel (T19)
Strongly Agree	151 (40.7%)	68 (18.3%)	158 (42.6%)	154 (41.5%)
Agree	115 (31.0%)	91 (24.5%)	119 (32.1%)	128 (34.5%)
Neutral	25 (6.7%)	45 (12.1%)	31 (8.4%)	29 (7.8%)
Disagree	58 (15.6%)	105 (28.3%)	45 (12.1%)	45 (12.1%)
Strongly Disagree	22 (5.9%)	62 (16.7%)	18 (4.8%)	15 (4.0%)
Total	371 (100%)	371 (100%)	371 (100%)	371 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 3 provides a comprehensive overview of respondents' perceptions regarding newspaper coverage of medical tourism. A majority (71.7%) of respondents believe that newspaper reports accurately reflect the quality of healthcare services abroad, suggesting a high level of trust in media narratives. However, when asked whether newspapers exaggerate the benefits of medical tourism, responses were more divided: while 42.8% agreed that exaggeration occurs, a slightly higher proportion (45.0%) disagreed, indicating a near balance between trust and skepticism. These findings collectively suggest that newspapers play a significant role in shaping public attitudes and decisions related to medical tourism, although a segment of the population remains cautious about the reliability and framing of these media reports.

DISCUSSION

The study's findings indicate that South-South residents generally hold positive attitudes towards newspaper coverage of medical tourism in Nigeria. A significant majority of respondents (71.7%) believe that newspaper reports accurately reflect the quality of healthcare services abroad, suggesting a high level of trust in media narratives. This trust is further reinforced by the fact that 74.7% of respondents stated that reading about medical tourism in Nigerian newspapers increases their confidence in the quality of foreign medical care. These findings are consistent with previous research, which suggests that media coverage plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions and attitudes towards medical tourism (Chime-Nganya et al., 2017; Asemah & Edegoh, 2014). A possible reason for this high level of trust may be that many respondents perceive foreign healthcare systems as more advanced than local ones, and newspaper reports tend to reinforce these pre-existing beliefs. In this way, the media do not just inform but also validate the perceptions that residents already hold about foreign medical care.

The study also found that newspaper coverage significantly influences residents' decisions to seek medical care abroad. A substantial majority (76%) of respondents reported being more likely to consider traveling abroad for treatment after reading positive articles about medical



tourism. This finding is supported by other studies, which suggest that media coverage can influence public attitudes and decisions related to medical tourism by providing information about the benefits and risks of seeking medical care abroad (Li et al., 2024; Nagar et al., 2024). However, this study goes further by showing that the influence of newspaper coverage is not only informational but also aspirational, as the coverage tends to frame medical tourism as a symbol of quality and prestige, thereby motivating residents to align themselves with what they perceive as superior healthcare options. This extends existing knowledge by demonstrating that media influence operates at both practical and symbolic levels.

However, the study also revealed that a segment of the population remains cautious about the reliability and framing of media reports on medical tourism. This finding is consistent with previous research, which suggests that while media coverage can be influential, it can also be subject to biases and limitations (Asemah & Gujbawu, 2016). This caution may stem from growing public awareness of sensationalism and commercialization in media reporting, which raises questions about whether coverage is always in the best interest of audiences. By highlighting this cautious minority, the present study not only confirms earlier concerns about media bias but also underscores the need to understand how media credibility affects decision-making in contexts where health outcomes are at stake.

The study's findings further highlight the importance of credibility and trust in media narratives about medical tourism. The fact that respondents trust newspaper reports about medical tourism suggests that media outlets have a significant role to play in shaping public perceptions and attitudes towards medical tourism. This finding is consistent with previous research, which suggests that credibility and trust are essential components of effective health communication (Yarson & Asemah, 2008). Through situating credibility and trust at the center of medical tourism discourse, this study extends the literature by showing that the power of the media lies not only in information dissemination but also in shaping health-related aspirations and choices in a context where local healthcare systems are often distrusted.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study is that South-South residents generally hold positive attitudes towards newspaper coverage of medical tourism in Nigeria. Majority of the respondents perceive the coverage as informative and credible, which enhances their understanding of medical tourism options. Also, the factors influencing their attitudes include personal experiences, the credibility of the information presented, and the qualifications of the authors. Based on the findings, it is recommended that:

1. Newspaper editors and journalists should prioritise the accuracy and depth of their reporting on medical tourism.
2. Health authorities should collaborate with media outlets to create public awareness campaigns about the realities of medical tourism.
3. Medical tourism providers should actively engage with local newspapers and media to share success stories, testimonials and information about their services.



Ethical Clearance

Ethical consent was obtained from all participants involved in this study. Participants were informed that the exercise was conducted solely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured throughout the process.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest in the conduct of this research.

Authors' Contributions

Obiageli Ezeanochie conceived the study and contributed to its design, Daniel Ezegwu, Ph.D. managed data collation, analysis, and interpretation, and Ezekiel S. Asemah, Ph.D. drafted the initial manuscript. All authors critically reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and take full responsibility for its content and integrity.

Availability of Data and Materials

The datasets generated and/or analyzed during this study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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