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Title: Monkeypox: Did the Nigerian media do more harm than good?

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Background: Re-emerging and emerging infectious diseases such as Monkeypox pose significant threat to human health, which may be due to high degree of morbidity or mortality, financial loss or increased public anxiety. News coverage of public health crises can lead to distortion of key facts shared with the community. On the 13th of October 2017, an outbreak of Monkeypox virus was confirmed in Bayelsa State, Nigeria and there was considerable media attention. The last case of Monkeypox in Nigeria was reported 40 years ago. The objective of this study was to describe the kind of information published by the media during the Monkeypox outbreak in Nigeria.

Methods: Between September to December 2017, we reviewed all health media reports captured by the event-based surveillance system at Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), searching for entries reporting the Monkeypox outbreak. Each report was extracted, read twice independently and collated on Microsoft Excel. Reports with ≤ 50 words were excluded. "Hits" were also reviewed; a "hit" is recorded every time a word related to a theme was picked up. The data was analysed thematically using MaxQDA.

Results: Within the four-month period, a total of 3,475 reports were reviewed and 197 focused on monkeypox. Three themes were identified- outbreak information source, sensationalism and spread of the vaccination rumor. Regarding information source, 123(62%) cited government sources, 22(11%) cited non-governmental such as opinion pieces and social groups while 52(26%) did not cite any source. On sensationalism, 756 hits were picked from the 197 articles, which described Monkeypox as an Ebola-like, or spiritual disease. In addition, there were 178 rumour hits of vaccination causing Monkeypox. Majority 88(49%) focused on the impact of this rumour such as vaccine rejection while 63(35%) on community reaction.

Conclusion: Although most of the information reported were from verifiable sources, there was a high level of sensationalism around the Monkeypox outbreak which heightened public anxiety. Health reporters and the media in Nigeria should be trained on how to accurately report disease outbreak reports and health facts.