

Comparative Study of Newspaper Framing on Covid-19 Vaccination Drive in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts a comparative analysis of newspaper framing on Covid-19 vaccination drive in Nigeria. The study combined framing theory and agenda-setting theory of the mass media as theoretical framework. Data was generated through content analysis of three widely read Nigerian newspapers that reported Covid-19 vaccines more compared to others-The Guardian, Daily Trust and The Nation. Seventy-three (73) stories were coded out of 228 editions of the newspapers. The data were analyzed using simple frequency and percentage tables in via the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Findings indicate that The Guardian had the highest stories on Covid-19 vaccines reported followed by The Nation, while Daily Trust had the least stories reported, but these stories were buried on the inside pages of the newspapers. On the frequency of stories reported, The Guardian reported more stories on Covid-19 vaccination, followed by the The Nation, while Daily Trust had the least coverage. The newspapers' suggestions were not effective in encouraging vaccination drive. The study concluded that framing of Covid-19 vaccines had not been given the needed prominence and frequency on the vaccination drive. It therefore recommended that Daily Trust newspaper should increase its reportage whenever vaccines are being promoted in combating epidemic or pandemic.

KEYWORDS:

Newspaper, News
Framing, Covid-19
Vaccines, Vaccination
Drive

Introduction

Newspaper has remained a vital resource in the event of pandemic in the 21st century. This was witnessed during the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003, Ebola, 2014 and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in 2015 and now Covid-19 pandemic (Mutua & Oloo, 2020). The basis of news framing is that the newspaper focuses attention on certain events and then placed them within a field of meaning. This field of meaning can have an effect on the audience's beliefs, attitudes and behaviours, by connecting a particular meaning or interpretation on the issue (Ajashi & Alawari, 2020).

Since the HIV/AIDs crisis in 1980s, the media have taken a leading role in informing the public about emerging infectious disease that have the potential to impart large populations (Gerlach, 2016). This means that when disease outbreak

emerges, the news media plays a crucial role in organizing everyday reality about the problem, providing meaning to the unfolding stripes of events and promoting a particular definition of the outbreak. It also provides causal interpretation, moral responsibility and recommendation for the prevention of the disease. Therefore, news framing involves a communication source presenting and defining an issue.

When the Covid-19 vaccines was introduced, millions of people turn to newspapers for the latest updates, information and advice from researchers and government officials and disease experts on whether to comply with the vaccination campaign or not. This decision is dependent on how the newspaper presents the vaccination story. The media acts as the bridge between the public awareness and understanding of the vaccination. The way newspapers frames Covid-19 vaccines' stories determines how the people react whether to be vaccinated or not. This perhaps, makes the good claim that "frames that paradigmatically dominate news are also believed to have dominated audience (Ogbodo, Onwe, Chukwu, Nwasum, Nwakpu, Nwaakwo, Nwamini, Elem & Ogbaeji, 2020). The way information is framed during vaccination campaign is crucial for improving disease prevention, minimizing spread, and impact as well as advance treatment (Ophir, 2018). The media assists in monitoring and tracking the evolving science regarding the virus, as well as the recommended policy response, prevention and treatment.

Problem elaboration

In spite of the pressing and compelling necessity for the Covid-19 vaccination, considerable Covid-19 vaccines apathy and profound non-compliance still persists among the public. The compliance of the vaccine therefore remains low globally and in Africa, especially in Nigeria. As at July 3, 2021, only 1.34 million out of 200 million Nigerians have received the two doses of the Covid-19 vaccines representing 0.6% of Nigerian population (Olu-Abiodun, Abiodun & Okafor, 2022). This has been worrisome giving the prevailing non-compliance among the health workforce and the population who are most at risk of severe Covid-19 infection (the elderly and people with co-morbidity), who appear to be more reluctant in taking the jabs. If people are not taking the vaccines, then it means everybody is vulnerable, and, therefore at risk.

The problem stems from the public health risks associated with the situation. It is evident that the audience's perception can be influenced by how newspapers report on the pandemic. This makes non-compliance with Covid-19 vaccines a critical issue in Nigeria. The framing of these stories can significantly impact whether people accept the vaccines or not. The absence of comparative studies on newspaper framing of the Covid-19 vaccination drive has created a gap in understanding how newspaper reports influence public perception of the vaccination effort. Addressing these concerns necessitates the current study. This holds significance considering the pivotal role of the media in aiding citizens to comprehend health crises within society.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

- i. Assess the level of prominence giving to Covid-19 vaccination stories by *The Guardian*, *Daily Trust* and *The Nation* newspapers.
- ii. Determine the frequency of stories on Covid-19 vaccination drive by *The Guardian*, *Daily Trust* and *The Nation* newspapers.
- iii. Find out the newspapers' treatments (suggestion) on Covid-19 vaccination drive

Review of Related Literature

Framing has been described as a concept, an approach, a theory, a class of media effects, a perspective, an analytical technique, a paradigm, a multi-paradigmatic research programme (D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010). Also, since Goffman (1974) introduced the concept of frame analysis in communication, Entman (1993) applies framing to the analysis of mass media. Subsequently, researchers utilized it to understand how print and other media present information. Consequently, for the last four decades, leading media scholars have applied the concept of framing to explain how the press structures their delivery of news, promoting certain interpretations of events by selecting certain facts (Linstron & Marais, 2012).

Entman (1993) sees framing as selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. He explains that the concept of framing consistently offers a way to describe the power of a communicating text. Analysis of frames illuminates the precise way in which influence over human consciousness is exerted by the transfer (or communication) of information from one location – such as a speech, utterance, news report, or novel—to that consciousness.

Media Framing of Covid-19 in Nigeria: Between Vaccine Reportage and Public Health Promotion

Larson (1984) refers to mass media as a window to the world through which people learn about the world outside their country, while Park (2003) however furthers the argument that the window does not show the world as it is. People only see the world within the frame of the window. If the frame of the window is too small, people will only see a small part of the world. Framing either as a media concept, principle, social phenomenon or a sociological discuss. Reese(2001) corroborates that framing is important in message positioning to audience (front page, inside page or back page). In media practice, it is the direction to which media perceive or want people to perceive a news story by making salient a news angle, based on its judgment of and reference to previous similar occurrences (often driven by editorial interest or ownership philosophy (Yusha'u, 2011), which have significant relevance to how the public interpret and react to the entire story.

The use of media framing to influence audience permeates almost all media reports to foster and trill the overwhelming media audience to align with the interest celebrated by the media. Media framing is used to give reasons to believe or disbelieve, support or desist, involve or withdraw, change or persist, and influence or discourage by twisting news stories in line with the media motive; give exegesis order than the right interpretations; and change, annotate or remove part of the content to influence the public judgments of events. As exemplified in many research works Igboeli and Ezebuenyi (2021) aver that the way the media frame issues of Covid-19 vaccine has the ability to influence audience perception. For Soyemi, Ewedairo and Olomofe (2021), as the effort to curtail vaccine hesitancy, a continuous improvement in communicating the vaccine efficacy and safety is needed, while Tsafa, Nkwam-Uwaoma and Tetsoma (2022) conclude that the newspapers provide greater salience to Covid-19 vaccination and more favourable to Covid-19 vaccination in their coverage.

The emergence of Covid-19, which has been one of the global concerns since early 2020, makes banner headlines in the world media and perhaps formed news angle of audience attraction in the Nigerian media. Different captions, stories, editorials, photos and images, opinions, including cartoons and comics on coronavirus occupies the chunk of the space on the print media, and news channels as well allot more airtimes to health talks, radio and TV dramas as well as newscast on Covid-19 issues than ever before. The outbreak also makes the centre topic of discussion in the social media. If any, this could be regarded as the apex of agenda setting of the media on health. Various angles at which Nigerian media reported Covid-19 and vaccination stories; the frequencies at which the stories were being reported in the media and the emphasis placed on it; the eagerness in the audience to know more about the vaccines in order to cast away rumours; and the aggression demonstrated by the policy makers to be on top of the vaccination campaign involved every Nigerian in “what” and “how” to be safe of the outbreak. Media used this opportunity to demonstrate its value and power not only to influence the audience on what to think, discuss or be concerned about but also set modalities on how to think about the concerned issue.

Comparative Analysis Approach of Nigerian Newspapers

The concern of this study is to establish comparative analysis of Nigerian newspapers which holds significant implications for media scholarship, policy, and practice. It is imperative to know the patterns do the Nigerian media frame Covid-19 vaccines news items in the press; causal interpretation on Covid-19 vaccination and media treatment. Knowing this would expose the most prioritized among the media objectives while reporting Covid-19 vaccine Igboeli and Ezebuenyi (2021). Did the newspaper report to sell by arousing the readers' interests? Or did they report to fulfill their professional obligation to inform? Or did they consider their social responsibility to save the public of the dreaded outbreak irreplaceable obligation? Each of these is a factor that influences the media patterns of framing Covid-19 vaccination response in Nigeria. The

interrelationship between media framing of vaccines and the preponderant of the frames that breed the corresponding effects becomes a fundamental and intricate issue at any time the world health is under any emergency health threats (Adelakun & Adnan, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by Framing Theory and Agenda-Setting Theory of mass media.

Framing Theory

Framing theory is used in this study. A sociologist by name Erving Goffman, propounds the theory in 1974. Goffman posited that human beings typically make meaning of events around them with the use of key points called frames. The fundamental point in framing is not on the number of stories, but the angle that the media use in reporting an issue (Marcus, Alom & Joseph, 2020). According to Entman (1993), to frame a communicating text or message, is to promote certain facets of a perceived reality and make them more salient in such a way that endorses a specific problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation.

The concept of framing theory is related to the agenda-setting tradition, but expands the research by focusing on the essence of the issues at hand, rather than on a particular topic. In short, a frame is an emphasis in salience of different aspects of a topic. While agenda setting theory deals with the salience of issues, framing is concerned with presentation of issues (Claes, 2005). He further explains that a frame provides a way to understand an event or issue.

This theory is relevant to the current study because frames have the potential to impact the way the media audiences think about Covid-19 and accepting the vaccination being introduced by the Federal Government. News framing acknowledges the ability of the media message to define a situation like Covid-19 and deter misinformation and rumour about taking the vaccine through their presentation. Public health advocates can use the media to influence decision makers and the audience in order to develop and support health policies.

Agenda-Setting Theory

The theory is developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972 with the assumption that the media repeat report of an issue influences the audience in viewing the issue as important. The media attaches certain importance to news stories through placement, size and frequency of appearance of such issues (Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2016). Agenda setting posits that media audience learnt these important issues from news media thus incorporating a similar set of weights and importance into their own personal agenda.

Folarin (2002) agrees that the mass media have an impact on Agenda-setting in that they have the ability to choose or emphasize certain topics thereby causing the public to perceive the issues or topic as important at every given in a society. The Agenda-setting theory, however, does not give to the media the

ultimate power to determine what the public actually think; but it does give them the power to determine what the public should be thinking about. Ijwo and Omula (2014) corroborate that apart from the traditional functions of informing, educating and entertaining, the media at the same time give prominence to certain issues or events, with a view to bringing such issues or event to the public domain.

This theory is relevant to this study because it spells out the fact that news media have it as an enormous responsibility to determining what is important to bring to the public domain and for public discourse. Covid-19 outbreak and vaccination drive is one that should attract media agenda-setting, so as to report its consequences both on the individuals and the society.

Methodology

Data Sources and Method

Data was generated using content analysis of Nigerian newspapers' framing of Covid-19 vaccination drive. The newspaper editions (for the content analysis) comprised 228 editions of *The Guardian*, *Daily Trust*, and *The Nation* newspapers for the period of seven months (2nd March-15th October, 2021); this time frame is considered because it is the peak of the Covid-19 vaccination campaign in Nigeria. The three newspapers are selected because they featured high readership, and they are influential in setting the tone for reporting coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria (Akor, 2021).

Population of the Study

This study comprises non-human population, newspapers' editions for content analysis. The newspaper editions (for the content analysis) comprised 228 editions of *The Nation*, *Daily Trust*, and *The Guardian* newspapers for the period of seven months (2nd March-15th October, 2021); this time frame is considered appropriate because the period formed the peak of Covid-19 vaccination campaign in Nigeria.

Sample Size Determination

In determining the sample size for the study, the researchers used Stempel (1952) Composite week sampling determining 228 editions of selected newspapers (*The Guardian*, *Daily Trust* and *The Nation*) starting from 2nd March-15th October, 2021 (76days). The three newspapers under review are given equal opportunity of representation; the researchers use the constructed week sampling method for the three newspapers (*The Nation*, *Daily Trust*, and *The Guardian*). In order words, a calendar is constructed for each of the editions, beginning from 2nd March, 2021. Using Stampel's constructed week technique, the researchers draw out a calendar starting from the 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23, 26 and 29 and arrived at 76 days per newspaper and arrived at 228 editions.

Units of Analysis

The researchers employed words, sentences and headlines as fundamental units of analysis. These units served different purposes and provided

varying levels of information and context; words were analysed to ascertain the language style used by the selected newspapers. Sentences were used in the analysis which helped in identifying the main point and arguments within the presented stories, while headlines were used for understanding the focus of stories as framed by the selected newspapers under study.

Content Categories

Various issues about Covid-19 vaccines are addressed on the content categories below:

- a. **Prominence:** This determines the importance of the stories; a story on the front page obviously attracts larger population and it gives prominence to the stories. Similarly, a story on the back page also attracts attention, while those buried inside pages were considered less important.
- b. **Frequency:** This refers to how often news articles or reports are published within a specific time period.
- c. **Suggestion (Treatment):** all issues on Covid-19 vaccines are coded to promote certain agendas such as remedy on vaccination response; what should be done to encourage vaccines compliance and other measures employed to stop the spread of Covid-19 pandemic.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Placement of stories on Covid-19 vaccines by *The Guardian*, *Daily Trust* and *The Nation* newspapers

Placement	The Guardia	Daily Trust	The Nation	Total
Front page	6	2	1	9 (12.3%)
Inside page	25	16	22	63(86.3%)
Back page	1	0	0	1(1.4%)
Total	32	18	23	73 (100%)

Table 1 revealed placement of stories on Covid-19 vaccines. One out of eight stories appeared in front page of the selected newspapers with *The Guardian* having the highest number of the placement in front pages, while inside page has six out of seven stories with *The Guardian* recording the highest than other newspapers and back page reports one out of seventy-three stories as the *The Guardian* had the highest, while *Daily Trust* and *The Nation* have no story reported at the back pages of the selected newspapers. This shows that most of the Covid-19 vaccine information is presented inside pages of newspapers under study. The front and back pages are given less attention. This implies that the three newspapers were critical in the campaign for the Covid-19 vaccination drive, but Covid-19 vaccines' stories were not given the prominence they deserved. Stories presented on the front pages of newspapers attracted audience

attention, which were lacking in the three newspapers under investigation. Meanwhile, *The Guardian* had the highest stories of Covid-19 vaccines reported followed by *The Nation*, while *Daily Trust* has the least stories reported.

Table 2: Frequency of stories on Covid-19 vaccines reported by *The Guardian*, *Daily Trust* and *The Nation* newspapers

Month	The Guardia	Daily Trust	The Nation	Total
March	9	4	5	18 (24.6%)
April	3	2	0	5 (6.84%)
May	1	2	5	8 (10.9%)
June	5	2	5	12(16.4%)
July	3	5	1	9 (12.3%)
August	4	3	4	11(15.0%)
September	6	0	1	7(9.5%)
October	1	0	2	3(4.1%)
Total	32	18	23	73 (100%)

Table 2 reveals the frequency of stories on Covid-19 vaccines reported on the three newspapers under investigation. March 2021 records a total of four out of nine stories with *The Guardian* newspapers having the highest stories reported. In April 2021, a total of five out of fifteen stories reports Covid-19 vaccines as *The Guardian* reports the highest numbers but *The Nation* has no single story. May 2021 had a total of three out of eight stories as *The Nation* reports the highest numbers. In June 2021, one out of six stories reported Covid-19 vaccines as *The Guardian* and *The Nation* have equal record of the highest numbers. July 2021 reports one out of eight stories with *Daily Trust* reports the highest numbers. August 2021 has three out of twenty as *The Guardian* and *The Nation* have equal record of the highest numbers, while September 2021 has a total of one out of eleven stories as *The Guardian* records the highest stories reported while *Daily Trust* has no story. Finally, October 2021 has one out of twenty-four stories as *The Nation* has the highest number of stories reported, while *Daily Trust* has no story. This implies that *The Guardian* reports more stories on Covid-19 vaccination, followed by the *The Nation*, while *Daily Trust* has the least coverage among the newspapers under study on the frequency of reportage.

Table 3: The Newspaper Treatments (suggestion) on Covid-19 Vaccination Drive in Nigeria

Treatments	The Guardia	Daily Trust	The Nation	Total
Vaccine confidence	8	5	10	23(31.5%)
Vaccine mandatory	9	0	3	12 (6.4%)
Vaccine available	5	3	2	10 (13.7%)
Astra Zeneca vaccine	6	3	2	11 (15.1 %)
Vaccine awareness	2	2	4	8 (11.0%)
J & J vaccine	1	3	2	6 (8.2%)
Moderna vaccine	1	2	0	3 (4.1%)
Total	32	18	23	73 (100%)

From the table above, data reveals newspaper treatments or suggestions on Covid-19 vaccination drive in Nigeria. Three out of ten stories reported building vaccine confidence in people as *The Nation* recorded the highest number of stories reported, one out of six stories recorded vaccine mandatory as one of the solutions in increasing vaccination drive with *The Guardian* records the highest and *Daily Trust* have no story, making vaccine available has one out of seven stories, while *The Guardian* records the highest number, Oxford/Astra Zeneca vaccine is also recommended as data indicates one out of seven stories with *The Guardian* records the highest number, while creating more vaccine awareness is reported one out of nine stories and *The Nation* reports the highest number of stories. Janseen (Johnson & Johnson) vaccine was also suggested which had one out of twelve stories and *Daily Trust* has the highest stories reported. And one out of twenty-four is reported as Moderna vaccine with *Daily Trust* having the highest stories reported, while *The Nation* has no story reported. The implication of this finding is that newspapers' suggestions are not effective in encouraging vaccination drive except emphasis is placed on educating the public and creating more awareness on the importance of vaccination.

Discussion of Findings

Covid-19 pandemic has been a public health concern worldwide and Nigeria is not exempted. It is in view of this that different strategies including the development and introduction of the Covid-19 vaccination has been implemented to combat the virus, which this study investigates. Findings from the study reveal that the threenewspapers were critical in the campaign onthe Covid-19 vaccination drive, but Covid-19 vaccines' stories are not given the prominence they deserve. Stories present on the front pages of newspapers attract audience attention, which are lacking in the three newspapers under investigation. Meanwhile, *The Guardian* has the highest stories of Covid-19 vaccines reported follows by *The Nation*, while *Daily Trust* has the least stories reported. This placement shapes how news reports are framed. Supporting thisfinding, Thuesen (2020) asserts that the press involvement in news story can

be noticed in terms of 'where' on the pages of the newspapers (front, inside or back page). The decision on where a news item appears on the pages of newspaper and through which format can make such stories salient. Cater (2013) also emphasizes that the most important pertinent stories are usually located on the front page. Entman (1993) also illustrates this finding that text can make bits of information more salient by placement. It can be deduced from the above data that Covid-19 vaccine stories were not given adequate attentions. By not given adequate attention to Covid-19 vaccines' stories, could have been one of the reasons for hesitancy among the public.

Finding shows that *The Guardian* reports more stories on Covid-19 vaccination, follows by the *The Nation*, while *Daily Trust* has the least coverage among the newspapers under study on the frequency of reportage. Even though there are more Covid-19 vaccines related stories for the period under review for the three newspapers, little is said about the Covid-19 vaccination campaign. This finding resonates with an observation by Oronje et al (2011) the primary focus of the media house is on stories that generate revenue, such as advertisements, and on other stories such as political news, rather than health news. Newspapers have the potential to promote a successful health awareness campaign. They disseminate timely message to the audience (Nelson, Kehinde, Williams & Soola, 2014).

Findings also reveal building vaccine confidence as one of the suggestions in promoting vaccination. This is evident as reported by Olaniyi (2021) on *Daily Trust* newspaper that for President Muhammadu Buhari's decision in taking the Covid-19 vaccines in the public was a demonstration of leadership and faith in the safety and efficacy of the vaccines. Notwithstanding debates on vaccine, at present it was still very wise measure to be adopted. So, NCDC and other relevant Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDGs) should persuasively dispelled and latched on the facts in discountenance the misinformation and building vaccine confidence with expert views (Editorial, 2021) of *The Guardian* newspaper.

The researchers also find that Astra Zeneca vaccine is safe as newspaper suggests on Covid-19 vaccination campaign. It is reported that Yobe State Committee on Prevention and Control of Covid-19 had called on the people to dismiss any misinformation and rumour against the Oxford/Astra Zeneca vaccine, affirming its safety and effectiveness, suggesting citizens make themselves available for vaccination. Agidi (2020) also reports on *Daily Trust* newspaper that Astra Zeneca vaccine is safe and urges Nigerians that the conspiracy theories and misinformation should be ignored and stresses that no known adverse effect of the vaccine has been recorded.

In making Covid-19 vaccines compulsory, data indicates that Edo State Governor, Godwin Obaseki, and his Ondo State counterpart has made efforts in making Covid-19 vaccines compulsory as a way for vaccination compliance. Their effort was criticized that not only do they not had enough doses in making vaccination compulsory, let alone bar the unvaccinated people from accessing public facilities such as hospitals, banks, markets, worship centres, they have so

far remain unpersuasive about the efficacy of the vaccine (Editorial, 2021) of *The Guardian* newspaper.

Another treatment on Covid-19 vaccination drive is making vaccines available. On this, Osuntokun (2021) confirms on *The Nation* newspaper that the number of vaccine administrators to Nigeria is meager considering her population. Findings from this study also reveal creating vaccine awareness as another method of increasing vaccination. Diedong (2013) avers that creating awareness is crucial on influencing people's behaviour and health-seeking attitudes. Also, Emorinken (2021) posits as published by *The Nation* that more informative and education programmes be stepped up in creating more awareness on the need for citizens to be vaccinated.

Data from the study equally reveals that the press suggests Janseen (Johnson & Johnson) vaccine as a means of achieving Covid-19 vaccination drive. Akor (2021) reports in *Daily Trust* newspaper after thorough evaluation NAFDAC Vaccine Committee conclude that the data on the vaccine meets criteria for efficacy and quality. The data reveals that vaccine known and potential benefits outweigh its known and potential risks thereby supporting the manufacturers recommended use in cushioning the spread of the pandemic. This, therefore, explains the facts and anticipated delay in subsequent supply of the vaccines in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The framing of Covid-19 vaccines on the three newspapers is critical in the campaign on the Covid-19 vaccination drive, but Covid-19 vaccines' stories are not giving the prominence they deserved. Stories present on the front pages of the newspapers attract audience attention, which are lacking in the three newspapers under investigation. Meanwhile, *The Guardian* has the highest stories of Covid-19 vaccines reported followed by *The Nation*, while *Daily Trust* has the least stories reported. *The Guardian* reports more stories on Covid-19 vaccination, followed by *The Nation*, while *Daily Trust* has the least coverage among the newspapers under study on the frequency of reportage. March and September have the highest period of Covid-19 vaccines reported. The newspapers' suggestions are not effective in encouraging vaccination drive except emphasis is placed on educating the public and creating more awareness on the importance of vaccination.

Recommendations

- i. *The Guardian*, *Daily Trust* and *The Nation* newspapers should increase their reportage whenever epidemic or pandemic emerged and vaccines were developed and being promoted in combating the outbreak.
- ii. Newspapers should report more on Covid-19 vaccines related information to combat the widespread rumours and misinformation that had led to the non-compliance of the Covid-19 vaccines.
- iii. The press should focus more on building confidence on the Covid-19 vaccines, increase awareness by sensitizing and educating the public for

positive attitude and acceptance of the vaccines.

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