

## The Power of Storytelling: Utilisation of Narrative Techniques in Advocacy Journalism in Raising Awareness about Maternal Health in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

The fact remains that social revolutions around the world would not have taken place without any responsive media coverage. Also, a responsible media coverage would not have taken place without active media advocacy. The synergy of the above is what laid the setting for this study, which sets out to examine the power of storytelling: Utilisation of narrative techniques in advocacy journalism in raising awareness on maternal health issues in Akwa Ibom State. The research objectives of the study were to: examine the different narrative techniques used in advocacy journalism in raising awareness on maternal health issues in Akwa Ibom State; identify the primary elements/ story telling techniques used in advocacy journalism in raising awareness on maternal health issues in Akwa Ibom State; investigate the effectiveness of the narrative techniques used in advocacy journalism in raising awareness on maternal health issues in Akwa Ibom State; evaluate audience reception of maternal health campaign messages in Akwa Ibom State through advocacy journalism. A qualitative research method was adopted for the study, and a review of various concepts, scholarly opinions, and related empirical studies was conducted. Media advocacy and media dependency theories served as the theoretical frameworks for the study. The study concluded that the use of storytelling in advocacy journalism enables journalists to go beyond mere reporting of statistics and facts and instead, create a connection with the audience that is personal and relatable. The study revealed that to achieve maximum impact of stories employed for advocating for maternal healthcare within Akwa Ibom State, there is a need to contextualise various views and voices within the narrative

## **INTRODUCTION**

Media constitute a significant aspect of socialisation and are a core constituent of education and information dissemination among members of a given society. The influence of media is realised in a number of distinct ways: being a primary interface for socialisation, being a conveyor of cultural material, providing information and entertainment, being a primary agent of political communication and participatory democracy, and conveying ideological values, norms, characteristics, and beliefs (Enobakhare & Ochonogor, 2012). The indispensability of the media can no longer be questioned when one looks at the various roles assigned to it in the constitutional provisions of most democracies. The press, as the Fourth Estate of the Realm, plays a significant role in advancing and safeguarding democratic values. The press, as envisioned in classical liberal theory, is perceived as a defender of public interest and as a watchdog of governmental action. Consequently, journalism is regarded as an estate of the realm that wields influential power and assertiveness over the other estates (Ashraf, 2013).

Interestingly enough, journalism performs its primary function of informing the public on issues considered critical and germane to societal development; it articulates public opinion objectively, guides, and acts as a check on government and individuals. The slogan- the media as the fourth estate of the realm is what links the press to society through an ideological resonance. Media create and report definitions of a good life and a successful one, and that which is lacking is deviant, at the margin, or undesirable. Media in a certain way determine the formation of identity and character, and also who we happen to be alongside issues that revolve around stigma, self-esteem, social interaction, economic, as well as political roles (Paletset, 2013). Equally. Advocacy journalism, from the media. In Nigeria. Has become an effective tool for social transformation, keeping government agencies and officials accountable and enhancing the representation of marginalised communities.

It is beyond traditional reporting in the sense that it crusades for causes, disseminates the agendas of the oppressed, and agitates for reforms in society's governance. Advocacy journalism in Nigeria has been engaged in revealing corruption, promoting human rights, and agitating for social justice. Nsikan (2019) explains that advocacy journalism "recognises the power of the media to influence public opinion and policy-making and thereby amplify the voices of excluded groups and bring to debate issues that are in the interests of the poor and vulnerable." Applying the case of Nigeria, its advocacy journalism plays a vital function in addressing healthcare issues since its journalists strive to inform the public, secure government accountability, and advance those reforms that are beneficial to the healthcare sector.

It is possible that such reporting can disclose patterns of illness on a large scale, disparities within healthcare provision, and the influence of healthcare policy on groups. Provision of healthcare and healthcare systems are strained across Nigeria, and public policy and public opinion are the determinants of policymaking and opinion formation on healthcare and the issues of maternity. Ogu (2018) believes that advocacy reporting can "shape public policy, empower

communities, and bring about beneficial change" regarding healthcare and issues of maternity. The healthcare crisis among mothers and babies in Nigeria is an urgent issue, defined by high levels of maternal deaths and limited access to healthcare for expectant mothers.

According to a study conducted by Iyaniwura, Yussuf, and Akinyemi (2016), "Nigeria has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, with an estimated 814 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births." This high rate is evidence of the paramount necessity to enhance maternal health care services and the availability of prenatal and postnatal care within the nation. Maternal health is the health of women during pregnancy, childbirth, and after childbirth. All three stages are joyous occasions, and they enable the women and their children to realise their full potential for health and well-being (WHO, 2021). Significant advances have been achieved over the past twenty years, yet an estimated 287,000 women died in and following childbirth and pregnancy in 2020. That is a highly unacceptable figure. Severe blood loss, infection, hypertension, unsafe abortion, and obstructed labour are the most common direct causes of maternal death and injury, and anaemia, malaria, and heart disease are some of the indirect causes. Most maternal deaths can be prevented by early intervention from a skilled health practitioner who is working in a supportive setting (WHO, 2021). Accordingly, the prevention of avoidable maternal death remains on top of the global agenda.

Simultaneously, survival in pregnancy and childbirth can never be the gauge of successful maternal health care. It is necessary to consider efforts to decrease maternal injury and disability in order to sustain health and well-being (WHO, 2021). Each pregnancy and delivery is different. Addressing inequalities that impact health outcomes, particularly sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender, is central to ensuring all women have access to respectful and high-quality maternity care. It is a wonder why raising awareness on maternal health, particularly among antenatal workers, is of the essence. Because advocacy journalism practice covers such broad areas of issues in intermediating for proper attention in the public, it also becomes of concern for maximum attention to be accorded to maternal health issues and raising awareness on the issues, through the use of storytelling techniques. Advocacy journalism plays a crucial role in increasing the extent of awareness about maternal health problems through storytelling because it can humanise the statistics and put a spotlight on individuals' personal stories of pregnancy and childbirth. By reporting strong accounts of real-life stories of people impacted by maternal health problems, advocacy journalists are able to gain sympathy, arouse public interest, and rally support for policy development and enhancement of maternal healthcare services.

Narrative storytelling in advocacy journalism on maternal health issues is a powerful means of bringing to the fore the lived experiences of women, health practitioners, families, and societies that are impacted by maternal mortality and morbidity (Bell, 2018). The stories are told using statistical facts and data and highlight psychological connotations associated with mothers' healthcare issues and imperatives of evidence-based solutions to address such issues. Using

narrative strategies, activist journalists are best positioned to engage their audience at an individualised level and explain how systemic frameworks are responsible for inequalities in the delivery of healthcare to mothers. Using characters and plot progression and appeals to the audience's feelings, activist journalists are well-suited to tell compelling and contextualised narratives that appeal to their audience. They can show the challenges that women endure to receive quality maternal health care services, the consequences of failure to treat pregnancy and childbirth complications, and the reasons why equity and access to safe maternity care are essential.

A model example of advocacy journalism successfully drawing attention to maternal health matters through narrative is ProPublica and NPR's Pulitzer Prize-winning "Lost Mothers." (ProPublica, 2021). The investigative journalism practice entailed powerful stories of women whose lives were lost due to pregnancy-related causes in Nigeria, unveiling the racial disparities and institutional shortcomings within maternal healthcare that fuel maternal mortality. In sharing these stories, the project sparked a national discussion on maternal health and calls for policy interventions that aim to change the fate of mothers. However, as a literary tool and tactical instrument, storytelling plays a vital role in raising awareness about maternal health challenges in Akwa Ibom State through advocacy reporting. By using sympathetic storytelling that educates and inspires individuals, the media can bring attention to issues of women's access to maternal healthcare services and campaign for policy measures and healthcare facilities.

Of all the techniques used by advocacy reporting in addressing issues of maternal care, personal narratives are the most significant. By presenting the stories of the people who have undergone the experience of delivery and pregnancy, journalists are best positioned to make their stories more captivating and to make the voices of the most vulnerable heard so that they can articulate their issues. These personal narratives are used to serve as evocative testimonials to articulate the lived reality of Akwa Ibom State women and illustrate the structural barriers to accessing good quality care for their motherhood (Minkler and Donna, 2021). Apart from this, journalists are best positioned to use other methods of visual storytelling, like photography and documentation, by using video to add texture to the effectiveness of coverage of issues related to motherhood across Akwa Ibom State. Images can arouse an influential emotional response and reveal the human cost of mothers receiving substandard care. By using evocative imagery, journalists are best positioned to illustrate the gravity of issues and to necessitate radical steps to end the crisis of maternal care across the region.

Therefore, this study aims to measure the effectiveness of using narrative practice within storytelling within the practice of advocacy journalism, especially for sensitising the public on issues of maternal healthcare within Akwa Ibom State. Advocacy journalism has been the driving force for advocating and putting issues of maternal healthcare in the spotlight within Nigeria by exposing issues such as those faced by pregnant mothers and lobbying for improved healthcare delivery. It is limited by its effectiveness, especially within rural areas where

access to coverage from the media is mainly limited. Other factors of government opposition and censorship also reduce its general effectiveness. While storytelling within advocacy journalism makes complex issues easier to understand and encourages empathy within audiences, it tends to simplify systemic issues like healthcare facilities and socio-economic inequalities.

Reporters are intimidated while reporting delicate health matters, and misinformation abounds in such environments. As much as efforts such as the Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health Program (MNCH2) and interventions from agencies such as the Wellbeing Foundation Africa aim at improving the status of maternal health in Nigeria, the performance on maternal health is still appalling. In Akwa Ibom State, the success of advocacy journalism narrative strategies in improving awareness of maternal health is a doubtful question. Therefore, this study explores the power of storytelling in advocacy reporting, the storytelling adopted, its efficacy, and its reception by the audience. The findings are anticipated to inform healthcare providers, policymakers, and communication scholars on how to utilise more impactful media campaigns in the promotion of maternal health in Akwa Ibom State and beyond. This study aims to investigate storytelling approaches employed in advocacy reporting in bringing awareness about maternal health issues in Akwa Ibom State, assess their effectiveness, ascertain the most effective storytelling determinants, and investigate audience attitudes towards maternal health campaigns with a view to enhancing advocacy and improving maternal health.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Advocacy Journalism: What it is*

Advocacy journalism is a specific type of journalism marked by the overt support of a specific cause or position from the journalist and the avoidance of the appearance of impartiality or the delivery of an unbiased news story. Advocacy journalism often overlaps with activist movements on topics related to the environment, politics, or social issues. It is mainly intended to shed light on issues that the journalist considers necessary and to induce transformative action (O'Connor, 2015).

Advocacy journalism takes numerous forms, ranging from investigative reporting that uncovers corruption or abuse to opinion columns expressing subjective beliefs and opinions of the journalist. Journalists operating in this mode utilise their medium to advance the agendas of marginalised communities, confront existing institutions, and organise for social change. One of the features of advocacy journalism is the open admission by journalists of their biases and underlying agendas. The authors state their opinions and emotions openly, and they never try to hide the agenda behind them. It can be seen as a strength, as it allows readers to identify the stance of the author and helps them make independent choices about the information being conveyed (McChesney, 2016). Advocacy journalism is not without its detractors, however. Some say that journalists' jobs are to be objective and unbiased, and that advocacy journalism blurs the line between activism and journalism. Others complain that advocacy

journalists are less interested in illuminating a balanced and fair display of the news than they are in promoting their agenda (Hess, 2011).

Despite such criticisms, advocacy journalism has been important in bringing about social change and bringing to light important issues. Investigative reporters have exposed cases of government malpractice, environmental damage, and human rights abuses throughout the world. Additionally, opinion writers have critiqued societal norms and advocated for democratic reforms regarding issues of climate change, racial equality, and LGBTQ+ rights (O'Connor, 2015).

Advocacy reporting is an essential tool for social change and focuses public attention on issues of importance. Notwithstanding the many challenges they have faced, the activities of advocacy journalists have shaped social forces and pushed institutions to account. By being upfront about their biases and their goals, advocacy journalists actively engage the public and help bring about a more just and equitable society.

#### *Advocacy Practice in Nigeria: An Overview*

Kugbe and Obi (2020) posit that advocacy programs within Nigeria can be defined as a system employed by various groups or entities to enforce positive changes within policies, practices, and systems that affect their lives and communities. This activity includes raising awareness, developing coalitions, and adopting various methods for influencing policymakers' perspectives to bring about and initiate profound changes. Where government institutions and authorities often manifest resistance to change or do not possess the necessary political will and capacities to respond to pressing issues, advocacy helps ensure social justice, promotes human rights, and ensures sustainable development.

One of the attributes of advocacy activities within the context of Nigerian settings is the need for grassroots and civil society organisations to secure effective partnerships from various stakeholders, including government officials, media, and the public at large, to solicit local support for their activities and shape the decision-making processes. This calls for an in-depth knowledge of the existing political, social, and economic conditions of the country, and the ability to mobilise funds and develop effective communications that will make their voice be heard and ensure their goals are achieved (Dauda & Adeyemi, 2018). Additionally, the activities are often hampered by issues including inadequate funding, persecution from the government, and corruption, which may slow the realisation of their goals. To overcome the setbacks, bring about social transformation, and enable the creation of an equitable and just world, activists are compelled to exhibit resilience, an innovative mindset, and perseverance while advocating for social transformation and developing cooperative relationships with other stakeholders (Ogunleye & Oyeniran, 2017).

In effect, advocacy in Nigeria helps to advance social justice, promote accountability, and bring about democratic governance that builds a more sustainable and equitable future for the people of Nigeria. As a collective voice and technical capacity, Nigerian advocates have the potential to shape policy and practice that directly impacts their constituents and their very lives.

### *Advocacy Journalism in Nigeria: An Explication*

Adopting Alli's (2016) definition, advocacy journalism is a type of news coverage that transcends orthodox news reporting to bring about social transformation, advance public interests, and solicit accountability from stakeholders. Advocacy journalism is vitally important to fight social injustices, expose graft and corruption, and advance human rights and good governance. Advocacy journalism seeks to empower the voiceless and the marginalised in society, challenge power relations, and hold the ruling elite to account.

One of the core values of Nigerian advocacy journalism is an unbending commitment to investigative journalism to hold government policymakers and other influential stakeholders accountable for their actions. Nigerian advocacy journalists usually face various challenges like threats, intimidation, and censorship, yet are not deterred from pursuing the truth and justice. Employing quality research methods, comprehensive interviewing, and conclusive analysis, advocacy journalists aim to expose instances of abuse of power, bring issues to public attention, and shape public opinion to bring about change (Ojo, 2018). Nigerian advocacy journalism also involves collaboration with social movements, activists, and civil societies to give a voice to the voiceless communities and initiate policy reforms. By developing authentic partnerships with such organisations, advocacy journalists are suitably positioned to use their voice and influence to champion worthwhile human rights, environmental, and social justice gains (Kogbara, 2020).

Advocacy journalism in Nigeria aims to fulfil its inherent role of promoting openness, responsibility, and democratic government among citizens. By their focus on issues that otherwise may remain unheard or undervalued, citizens are made aware and participative, and ultimately, it leads to an equitable and balanced society for all Nigerians.

#### *Role of Advocacy Journalism*

In fulfilment of this task, Highway Africa (2017) outlines the following functions that advocacy journalism performs in respect of the rights of children or any other development issues, to include:

##### **1. Information**

Advocacy journalists seek to inform their audiences or communities of the problems that concern them. This involves explaining information in a manner that will encourage informed debate to resolve such issues. In order to effectively inform community members, advocacy journalists must comprehend and convey the root, typically obscured, structures that comprise the problem under consideration.

##### **2. Alternative to the Mainstream**

The public and the communities targeted by the mainstream media are typically sceptical of their reliability, often because there is an ulterior commercial agenda. A number of reports have been made on cases where newspapers or magazines tried to print controversial articles but were stopped from doing so due to pressure exerted by advertisers, financial sponsors, or owners. This pressure, along with the objectivity claims of mainstream media, results in the loss of audience trust in what is being served to them. Journalists in

most nations have established such proximity to their government and corporate sources that their reporting comes to take on the tone of discussion between powerful 'insiders,' rather than serving as a watchdog function on government and business interests in the interest of the people. This accusation is less applicable to advocacy journalists and media that address some issues openly and are transparent with their audiences, thereby establishing some degree of trust. Moreover, the provision of an alternative source of information for the members of a community enhances their access to information and offers a distinctive form of coverage. People who consume media tend to be inundated with information presented by mainstream media, which, in most instances, does nothing but attack the senses without offering meaningful interaction. Advocacy journalism surpasses the presentation of superficial information, allowing audiences to discuss and act upon the topics at hand more easily.

### **3. Focus on Audience**

Some of the issues and causes pursued by advocacy media are those affecting their audience and immediate society. Advocacy journalists need to have their ears to the ground at all times so that they can sense what issues are being raised within their society and address them. Advocacy journalism is not for the particular needs of individuals nor a single segment of the population. Still, it goes further into the needs of its audience and the issues that affect the daily lives of the community. It focuses on these matters with the aim of stirring up debate and eventually encouraging change for the better.

### **4. Aim for Change**

As mentioned earlier, the primary mission of most advocacy journalism is to enact some positive change, be it social, policy, economic, or otherwise. This function can be deemed the most critical aspect of advocacy journalism. Initially drawing attention to the concerned issue and subsequently raising awareness among key stakeholders (such as community members, policymakers, government officials, and civil society), the media play a significant role in stimulating debate and discussion in bringing about desired change. Journalists ought to do more than report the news. Still, advocacy journalists must do more than that – they must enhance the ability of the community to respond to the news, enhance the quality of public discourse, assist people in seeking solutions, and demonstrate to the community how to solve – not merely read about – its issues (Lichtenberg, 1999). One of the functions of advocacy journalism is to promote a transformation in the perspectives of community members, alongside fostering improvements in the circumstances or environment of that community. Additionally, it aims to facilitate policy changes that have beneficial effects on community residents.

### **5. Celebrate**

Not everything is good news, but occasionally, positive development serves helpful purposes in the news process. Advocacy reporters differ from conventional mainstream reporters in that they are open to reporting good results and changes that have taken place. Members of the public who have tracked a particular story through a publishing or broadcasting entity are likely to follow its continuation with the hope of a favourable result. They will go on to follow other news after that, aware that good news is indeed reported. Therefore,

advocacy journalism cannot be divorced from development journalism. This entails collecting, packaging and transmitting development-focused news and information (Adebayo, 2014). In this case, reporting, packaging, and transmitting information on maternal health concerns is an advocacy responsibility, as well as development journalism, since maternal health concerns are a development topic.

### *Maternal Health Issues in Nigeria: An Overview*

Maternal health in Nigeria is a significant issue under public health, characterised by high maternal mortality and morbidity. The situation of maternal health is determined by many factors that range from limited access to quality health services, inadequate infrastructure, cultural practices and beliefs, and socioeconomic factors. Improving the Nigerian mothers' health requires an integrated and all-encompassing strategy that includes optimising the delivery of healthcare, raising awareness and sensitisation, and enhancing social determinants (WHO, 2020). Some of the significant impediments to realising the healthcare improvement of mothers are low access to quality healthcare services, according to research evidence documented by Okonofua, Okonofua, and Chibuzor (2016).

The nation records one of the highest global maternal mortalities at 917 deaths per 100,000 live births, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). Many factors contribute to the high case of maternal mortalities, such as complications from delivery, low coverage of healthcare providers and skilled attendants to birth, low coverage of mothers by traditional maternal healthcare and suboptimal facilities, and limited emergency obstetric care. Apart from these, cultural factors such as female genital cutting and early marriage may also contribute to a great extent to the outcome of mothers' health and to complications and high maternal mortalities. The high percentage of obstetric fistula is also a leading contributing factor to mothers' health among Nigerian citizens. It is an injury that develops at birth and may introduce complications that are permanent and may also introduce social stigmatization among the afflicted women. Obstructed and prolonged labor and delays for their treatment are the leading contributing factors to the formation of obstetric fistula. Prevention and treatment of obstetric fistula require improved access to mothers' healthcare services, skilled birth attendants, and complete obstetric services. Not lastly, social factors of the economy are also crucial to contributing factors to mothers' health among Nigerian citizens. Poverty levels, low educational levels, and disparities of genders may discourage or exclude mothers from access to healthcare services for mothers, which may lead to undesirable outcomes for mothers. Rural dwellers and vulnerable groups of mothers are more prone to complications of motherhood due to limited access to healthcare services and an inefficient healthcare system (Okonofua, Okonofua, & Chibuzor, 2016).

In order to address issues plaguing Nigerian maternal health, Mairiga, Saleh, and Kyari (2018), and Adeyemo and Akintayo (2019), believe that healthcare facility improvement, healthcare staff availability, and expansion of healthcare access to mothers, particularly rural and low-income communities, must be invested in. Correction of cultural beliefs and practices influencing

maternal health, maternal education and empowerment, and reduction of socioeconomic disparities are fundamental measures toward improved provision of mothers' healthcare within Nigerian context. This is because improvement of mothers' health will never be achieved for so long that such issues are not addressed.

### ***Challenges Facing Awareness of Maternal Health Issues in Nigeria***

Olorunfemi, Crockett, and Jean-Louis (2018) validate that enhancing the health of mothers in Nigeria is beset with a myriad of challenges that undermine interventions for maximizing maternal health outcomes and reducing Nigeria's maternal mortality rates. Such challenges include low access to health care, strong cultural beliefs and practices, socio-economic disparities, and inadequate financing of maternal health programs.

#### ***1. Limited Access to Health Facilities***

One of the significant obstacles to fostering maternal health literacy in Nigeria is the unavailability of health care services, especially in under-served and rural communities. A majority of women in Nigeria have no access to skilled birth attendants, emergency obstetric care, and essential maternal health interventions, which are the factors responsible for avoidable maternal mortality and morbidity. Enhanced access to health facilities and services, especially in rural areas, is very vital in fostering awareness for maternal health as well as in enabling the required care for women both during pregnancy and childbirth (Dahiru, & Oche, 2013).

#### ***2. Cultural Beliefs and Practices***

Dahiru and Oche (2013) confirm that cultural beliefs and practices are huge challenges facing the improvement of maternal health awareness in Nigeria.

Traditional attitudes and cultural beliefs about childbirth, including demands for home delivery or traditional birth attendants, will result in delays in seeking care and increased risks of maternal complications. Cultural obstacles to maternal care must be overcome at the community level through mobilization and education to create awareness of the necessity of skilled care during pregnancy and childbirth. (iii) Socio-economic Disparities:

This exacerbates the difficulties of enhancing maternal health awareness in Nigeria. Poverty, insufficient opportunities for education, and gender disparities can restrict women from accessing maternal healthcare services, thereby leading to unfavorable maternal health outcomes. There is a need to transcend these socioeconomic barriers through targeted interventions, such as providing economic support to maternal healthcare access and increasing women's empowerment, in an attempt to improve maternal health awareness and outcomes in Nigeria.

#### ***3. Insufficient Funding for Maternal Health Programs***

This is also a serious drawback to the advancement of maternal health information in Nigeria.

Resource constraints and investments in maternal health services, along with the presence of other competing health priorities, can retard the process of awareness creation for maternal health issues and effective interventions. Enabling the process of awareness creation on maternal health and improved

maternal health outcomes in Nigeria demands heightened investments in maternal health programs, advocacy, and public sensitization campaigns (WHO, 2020). Surmounting these challenges listed above is key in enabling access to all the women in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, to timely and quality maternal healthcare services.

#### *Advocacy Journalism and Maternal Health Issues Awareness in Nigeria*

Advocacy journalism plays a vital role in promoting awareness of maternal health in Nigeria by bringing the challenges and problems facing women's access to quality maternal health care services to light, agitating for policy implementation, and sensitizing the public on matters related to maternal health. Ilo (2017) claims that through the use of investigative in-depth journalism, Nigerian advocacy journalists are able to bring to light systemic vulnerabilities within the healthcare system, cultural practices impacting maternal health, and socioeconomic disparities restricting access to maternal health care services. By unveiling the suffering of marginalized groups and women, advocacy reporting can end up leading to social transformation and improved maternal well-being for Nigeria.

Esan, Mogaji, and Lanre (2019) posit that exemplary instances of advocacy reporting against issues regarding Nigerian mothers' healthcare are characteristic of the activities of news organizations like Premium Times and The Cable, which have released comprehensive reports against issues regarding mothers' deaths, obstetric fistulae, and issues regarding access to mothers' healthcare services. These reports have raised public consciousness regarding issues of Nigerian mothers and have necessitated, by extension, greater accountability and proactive actions from policymakers and healthcare providers. Advocacy reporting also identifies effective maternal healthcare programs and interventions being carried out across various regions of Nigeria, thereby describing best practice and creative ways of enhancing outcomes of regions of mothers' healthcare. By placing such effective instances of practice on the spotlight, such reporters invite constructive actions and call for an up-scaling of effective intervention to enhance awareness and end to solutions to mothers' issues of their healthcare (Yusuf & Ibrahim, 2020). Nigerian advocacy reporters also engage various stakeholders, including non-state actors, healthcare providers, and other leaders within respective communities, to enhance the end goals of their reporting and lobbying activities. Such collaborative engagement provokes stakeholders to coordinate and consolidate support for effective mobilizing of resources, lobby policymakers and influence their decisions, and empower local communities to initiate interventions raising awareness of healthcare among mothers and access to healthcare services (WHO, 2020).

Advocacy journalism is a very effective tool for putting maternal healthcare issues on the public agenda of developing countries like Nigeria that can prompt policy and social reforms to further advance the delivery of maternal healthcare. By raising issues peculiar to that of maternal healthcare and putting the spotlight on the voice and experiences of their mothers and communities, advocacy journalists are important determinants that contribute to an

enlightened and participative citizenry and thus also to improved maternal and children healthcare.

### ***Narrative Techniques in Advocacy Journalism***

Advocacy reporting is a specific type of reporting that entails more than mere reporting of facts and entails the active support for specific causes, ideologies, or social issues. It is usually marked by large doses of bias or hidden agendas and uses several narrative devices that are intended to prompt the audience to act. Some of the methods used are:

#### ***1. Use of Lively Linguistic Formulations and Pictorial Depictions***

One of the basic tools used in advocacy reporting is the use of evocative language and imagery to incite affective responses from audiences. By using evocative language presenting an image of urgency, injustice, or tragedy, activists are able to evince emotional outpouring, thus eliciting sympathy and empathy for a cause by audiences. For instance, news outlets have used evocative images and photos of children and war refugees to mobilize public opinion and force the government to make policy decisions (Bryant, 2016).

#### ***2. Stories of Human Interest and Personal Experiences***

One of the widely used methods by advocacy journalists is the use of personal narratives and stories based on human interest and which aim to simplify usually complex issues, thereby making their object more accessible to the masses. By using stories of people who have been hurt by policy issues or social issues, the advocates are able to translate statistics to people-oriented stories and aim at capturing people on the affective level. For instance, while reporting on the Black Lives Matter Movement, journalists used the accounts of people who have been racially discriminated against and brutalized by the police to mobilize public awareness and campaign for social change (Lichtenstein, 2018).

#### ***3. The use of Framing and Narrative Framing Approaches***

Equally, advocacy journalists use framing devices and narrative structures to coordinate the news' presentation and meaning to their publics. By framing issues for specific contexts or geographically situated settings, the advocates possess significant power to shape how audiences perceive and order the importance of what occurs. To cover global warming, for example, journalists will use a moral or inter-generational responsibility frame to the story to prompt people to act and to put pressure on policymakers to bring about change (Boykoff & Goodman, 2009).

#### ***4. Use of Storytelling Techniques***

Advocacy journalists have the freedom to use an array of narrative tools, such as structural devices, plot and development, and character formation, to tell captivating stories that sustain and engage the audience. By constructing narratives that have a beginning, a middle, and an end, advocates are successful at immersing their audience within the narrative, thus presenting their message in a deeply affecting and emotional way. For instance, while documenting the #MeToo Movement, journalists used anecdotal reports, chronological accounts, and dramatic revelations to expose chronic patterns of sexual harassment and abuse in a variety of industries and institutions (Grady, 2018). Advocacy journalism uses a variety of narrative tactics to tell compelling narratives, shape

public discourse, and spur social change. By applying rich vocabulary, personal stories, framing methods, and traditional story structures intentionally, advocates are skilled at telling narratives that not only captivate their audiences but also affect their audience emotionally, leading to actions being taken on fundamental issues.

### ***Utilized Narrative Techniques***

Advocacy journalism is a particular journalistic specialty, and its intent is to shape public opinion and bring social change by using mainly narrative techniques that make its mission fairly clear. By telling compelling narratives, advocacy journalists connect to their audience, engage people emotionally, and motivate people to act upon significant issues of interest to their publics.

#### ***1. Utilisation of Individual Stories and Testimonials***

One of the strongest devices used by activist journalists is the use of personal testimony and experience, used to make broader issues tangible and accessible to people and thereby provoke an emotional response from the audience. By using judicious anecdotes and personal accounts, activists are better placed to position broader social issues for their audience. For example, for the narrative of the refugee crisis, anecdotal accounts of people who have fled war and persecution are used by journalists to attempt to communicate the human price of displacement and to invoke the feelings of empathy and solidarity from among the audience (Kinnvall, 2018).

#### ***2. Use of Narrative arcs and Structures to Organize Information and Engage Readers***

One of the methods by which the storytelling function within the context of advocacy reporting is achieved is using narrative frames and structures to tell and articulate their story and convey and transmit their message to their audience. By putting facts within an organized and interesting framework that contains a beginning, end, and a middle, the advocates are better placed to relate to the audience and also to pass on their message. For example, for environmental activism, journalists use grass-roots initiative and success story narratives to show the triumph of collective activism and to motivate people to act (Nocera, 2016).

#### ***3. Visual Narration Methodology***

Advocacy journalists use the art of image storytelling to maximize their narratives. Using multimedia elements such as photographs, videos, and infographics, activists are able to make an effective graphical representation of their argument to incite the audience's immediate emotional response. When describing the effects of global warming, for instance, writers are now using spectacular photos of retreating glaciers and extreme climatic phenomena since they seek to convey the scale of the crisis and urge prompt actions (Bednarek, 2019).

#### ***4. Framing and Character Development***

Framing and characterization are some of the common narrative devices that are used by advocacy journalism to shape public opinion and debate. By positioning issues within specific contexts or frames, publics can be directed to a preferred meaning or reaction. For example, in social movements for social

justice, journalists are more likely to use frames to portray stories to be David and Goliath struggles or victories for the disenfranchised and thus emphasize disenfranchised groups' resiliency and courage (Benesch, 2018).

These narrative methods are especially useful within the practice of advocacy journalism since they allow for advocates to tell compelling stories that engender empathy and mobilization and, ultimately, spur change on the social sphere. Advocacy journalists are also skilled at using personal anecdote, narrative design, imagery, and contextual framing to advance their message and invite public engagement to address societal imperatives.

Storytelling methods utilized for advocacy reporting of issues of Akwa Ibom State maternal healthcare.

Advocacy journalism serves to awaken public awareness and prompt reforms of important issues of social interest, particularly those specific to maternal care. For Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, issues of maternal care are of particular interest due to their implications for poverty, substandard medical facilities, and social culture.

### ***1. The use of Personal Testimony and Narratives***

One of the major methods used while campaigning for the need for Akwa Ibom State to attend to its mothers' healthcare needs is reporting and documentation of personal experiences and testimony of pregnant mothers who have been subjected to challenges while accessing their respective healthcare needs for their mothers. By documenting such experiences, campaigners are hence best placed to narrate the experiences and challenges of expectant mothers in the area and make the problem more tangible and close to people. For instance, a reporter can interview an expectant mother who has suffered complications due to their inadequate prenatal care and thus illustrate the adverse undertones of substandard healthcare services (Onwuchekwa, 2017).

### ***2. Integration of Data Visualization and Multimedia Elements***

One of the major tools for storytelling methods is the use of data graphics and multimedia devices to convey information in an informative and simplified format. Mapping, photography, and infographics are tools that can be employed by advocacy journalists to explain statistics around the healthcare issues of pregnant mothers across Akwa Ibom State, such as access to healthcare and maternal deaths. Using data visuals makes their potential for more impactful stories and for securing higher levels of audience participation easier to attain (Folayan et al., 2018).

### ***3. The Method of Collective Narration***

Using a community narrative approach by advocating journalists improves voice and representation among the people of Akwa Ibom State. The participation of the advocates and activists, physicians, and locals provides first-hand views and feedback on issues and solutions to issues of maternal care. It ensures that the voice of the people who are directly concerned by issues of maternal care is heard and makes it easier for the local communities to participate towards advocating for change (Ekott, 2020).

#### 4. *Framing and Narrative Arcs*

The narrative structures and areas of concentration that are linked to narrative methods are crucial determinants used in defining advocacy reporting, especially for the case of Akwa Ibom State and its issues of maternal healthcare. The media are capable of awakening citizens to inherent system flaws, for example, skewed distribution of resources or the absence of policy programs for addressing issues of maternal healthcare, thus evoking calls for crucial reforms within the system. Through the development of a narrative that evolves from the discovery of flaws to the adoption of effective solutions, stakeholders are likely to express the need and extent of urgency for putting issues of maternal healthcare at the top of the agenda of the state government (Bassey et al., 2019).

However, narrative devices are effective in advocacy reporting of maternal healthcare issues in Akwa Ibom State, as they allow the advocates to inform, shape opinion, and arouse public pressure for policy change. By using personal stories, portrayals of statistics, collective narratives, and framing, journalists can bring attention to the fate of expectant mothers in the state and galvanise action toward the enhancement of maternal health care services and results.

#### *Review of Related Empirical Studies*

The following empirical studies related to this study were reviewed as follows:

*Eke, C., Oke, M. M., Bufumoh, A. A., & Apata, T. (2023). National Newspaper Coverage of Health Issues in Niger Delta, Nigeria. IMSU Journal of Communication Studies, 7(1), 241-254. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-88497-8>*

This research aimed to determine the extent of national newspaper reporting on health matters in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The goals were to investigate the frequency of health challenges in the Niger Delta as reported by newspapers such as The Sun, The Vanguard, and The Nation, among others. The study population was made up of 312 copies of three newspapers published between June 6, 2021, and June 5, 2022; each of the newspapers published a total of 104 copies. Philip Meyer's sample selection model was employed in order to determine the sample for this study, and this resulted in taking 248 copies from the three newspapers. The data were tabulated, and analysis was conducted through simple percentages. The research findings were that: The Sun newspaper had the highest number of health issue-related articles in the Niger Delta; that the coverage of health issues in the Niger Delta was positively framed in all the three newspapers being studied; and that the predominant health issues reported by the three newspapers were those concerning soot.

The results of the study indicated that the three dailies presented a positive frame of health issues in the Niger Delta in their news reports. As such, it was suggested that the media must be responsive to their social function and agenda-setting role by giving a balanced and neutral account of happenings in the Niger Delta so as to prevent any unwarranted negative frame. The above study relates to this paper as it shows an explorative analysis of the effects and efforts of media intervention on the subject of health communication. It is on this foundation that, regardless of the difference in methodology, both still connect

in that they provide a perspective on health issues, one of which is the maternal health-related challenges in Nigeria.

Uguru, B. A. (2024), *Influence of Media Advocacy on the Knowledge of Prevention Measures and Management Strategies of Early Childhood Diseases among Nursing Mothers in Ikwo L.G.A of Ebonyi State. British Journal of Mass Communication and Media Research* 4(1), 25-51. DOI: 10.52589/BJMCMRUIOF7G37.

This research assessed the role of media advocacy in raising awareness regarding preventive measures and management alternatives for early childhood illnesses among nursing mothers in Ikwo L.G.A. of Ebonyi State. The research method used in this study was a survey research design. A questionnaire was employed as the data collection research instrument. The participants were given a total of 850 copies of the questionnaire. Data analysis was conducted through the application of frequency tables, percentages, and independent sample tests as methodological instruments. The analyses conducted show that the findings of the study exhibit a high prevalence of early childhood diseases in the Ikwo local government area of Ebonyi State. In addition, it was discovered that communication intervention programs are carried out to enhance the knowledge of preventive measures and control strategies for early childhood diseases among nursing mothers in the Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State.

The findings revealed that communication intervention programs aimed at early childhood illnesses have not succeeded in enhancing the knowledge of prevention and control measures among lactating mothers in the Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. The study recommended that there ought to be an increased level of awareness of early childhood disease among individuals, families, and communities, achieved through enhancing community participation in disease control activities. It further indicated the need for vast research aimed at establishing better ways of carrying out communication intervention programs on early childhood diseases, which may enhance nursing mothers' knowledge on prevention and management measures. From the above, it is clear that both studies relate to the reference that both underscore' media advocacy as an independent variable and how to create an awareness of preventive measures on a disease that children are exposed to, invariably connecting to maternal health situations applicable to pregnant mothers.

Utalor, J. C. (2019). *Influence of Broadcast Media Messages on Awareness, Perception and Attitude of Maternal Health Among Reproductive Women in Ilorin. African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research* Volume 2, Issue 1, 2019 (pp. 57-116)

Poor information and limited knowledge about maternal health among women have been recognised as some of the factors that have contributed to high maternal mortality rates in developing nations. Because broadcast media have been recognised as an effective communication medium in developing nations, the current study endeavoured to explore the perceived effect of broadcast media messages on attitudes, knowledge, and perceptions of women regarding maternal health in Ilorin. The research aimed to: ascertain women's exposure level to broadcast media messages; examine the awareness level of women to maternal health messages on broadcast media; examine the perception of women

about maternal health messages on broadcast media; and investigate the influence of maternal health messages on broadcast media on women's attitude towards maternal health. Quantitatively, through a survey research design, 382 respondents were sampled for the study. Questionnaire copies were distributed to women in old and new settlements of Ilorin with the expectation of return. Stratified sampling was used to distribute questionnaires proportionally among settlements, and purposive sampling was used to distribute the questionnaires separately to female respondents. Data were subjected to frequency and percentage tables, mean, standard deviation, correlation, and regression analyses. The results of the study were as follows: Ilorin women utilised mainly broadcast media as their primary source of maternal health information; however, they perceived radio to be more effective than television in disseminating maternal health messages, at 58.2% preference rate. That, apart from talk shows and health programs, maternal health messages were not often aired through other programs (31.4%, 41.2%). Results also indicated that women consented to the assertion that broadcast media positively transform their attitude towards maternal health ( $M=1.9$ ,  $SD=1.1$ ). In addition, women utilized broadcast media as a significant source of awareness on maternal health ( $M=2.2$ ,  $SD=1.2$ ). Women reported a favorable attitude toward broadcast media messages regarding maternal health ( $M=2.3$ ,  $SD=1.2$ ). It was established that broadcast media is extensively used by women and is a major source of information on maternal health issues but radio was found to be more effective than television in disseminating maternal health messages. The study therefore recommended that television should be properly used for mother's health campaigns for its advantage of sound and moving image and maternal health messages should be promoted by broadcast media programmes such as drama, documentary, and news.

### *Theoretical Framework*

The following were the theoretical underpinning of the study.

### *Media Advocacy Theory*

Wallack introduced Media Advocacy Theory in 1994. The theory states that mass media campaigns cannot be regarded as a final solution, not simply due to doubts regarding their effectiveness but also since they fail to deal with the underlying social determinants of destructive behaviors. Media advocacy is a novel approach that is gaining wider usage in the field of public health. The use of mass media strategically for promotion of public policy initiatives is regarded as a technique that is fundamentally based on community activism for the promotion of healthy public policies. Wallack (1994) submits that the approach essentially varies from conventional mass media approaches in that it redirects the focus from individual levels to social levels, from individual problems to political issues, and from practice or behavior to policy or environmental arenas.

The traditional media strategies have the overall aim of bridging the "knowledge gap," whereas media advocacy seeks to fill the "power gap." As theorized, improvements in health outcomes are said to be largely attributable to increasing control over the policy arena, rather than merely acquiring knowledge

regarding specific health practices and behaviors. In order to wield political influence, it is necessary to impact the news agenda.

Competency in media is necessary to obtain wide coverage of certain issues and shape the framing of stories. Media advocacy thus uses a strategic use of mass media in combination with community advocacy in order to change the social environment or support a public policy campaign. This type of advocacy adopts a participatory model that emphasizes the need for communities to gain control and power to bring about change in their environment. It places the media in a central position for raising those issues needing to be raised and applies pressure on decision-makers. Advocacy is not merely about actions taken by the media but personal actions to cause to happen that which serves the interest and the welfare of the people. However, this theory significantly becomes of relevant to this study in that to change or to bring maternal health issues to the barest minimum, advocacy journalism or to say, media advocacy must be adopted to diffuse awareness, build knowledge on the preventive measures needed to equip the prenatal attendees, especially those in Akwa Ibom State, and help to promote public health goals by using the media to strategically apply pressure for policy change and also, provides a framework for moving the public health discussions from focusing only on health behaviours and practices of individuals and switch focus to the behaviours of policy makers whose decisions affect the environment which the people lives and acts. The emphasis should be placed on the "power gap" rather than the "information gap" related to issues linked to maternal health in Akwa Ibom State.

#### ***Media Dependency Theory***

According to Asemah (2011, pp. 178 - 181), Media Dependency Theory, or briefly Media Dependency, was developed by Ball Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur in 1976. The theory relies on classical sociological theory in contending that media and their audiences must be studied within the broad framework of social systems. The theory states that, in times of crises or instability in societies, individuals demonstrate a heightened dependence on mass media for information and, therefore, become more vulnerable to its impact. This theory explains the interdependencies among large social systems, mass media, and the individual, providing an exhaustive account of media effects. In essence, the initial dependency hypothesis predicts that as individuals increasingly rely on media to fulfill their needs, media's function in their lives will also increase commensurately, thereby making media's impact on such individuals all the more significant.

However, the basis of media dependency theory is of significant to this study. This is because, media dependency theory provides an exponential analysis of pre and post-natal attendees, NGOs, Government and other relevant health agencies dependent on media advocacy messages on maternal health related issues. On a clearer sense, media dependency theory offers an exegesis on the single reliant nature of women in relation to messages intended to promote maternal health issues through the instrumentality of advocacy journalism.

## METHODOLOGY

The researcher relied on desktop and analysis of library literature materials, review of related and relevant empirical studies and theories, opinions and views of scholars in the area using data base materials, papers, publications and other internet sources. According to Chloe (2023), methodology refers to the overall strategy choose to interpret the different component of the study in a coherent logical way thereby ensuring that the research problem is effectively addressed. The paper was analyzed in reviewed context and keywords were focused on the title and research objectives. Qualitative method designed primarily to yield non quantitative or non-numerical data was adopted. It involves and collection of extensive narrative data in order to gain insight into the phenomena of interest (Stemped & Wesley, 2000).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *What are the Different Narrative Techniques Used in Advocacy Journalism N Raising Awareness on Maternal Health Issues in Akwa Ibom State?*

Advocacy journalism is a powerful tool in achieving awareness and social change on serious matters such as maternal health. In Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, the persistent issue of high maternal mortality rates underscores the urgent necessity for advocacy journalism to continue placing the issues women face in pregnancy and childbirth in the limelight.

One of the most powerful techniques used in storytelling by advocacy journalism is personal storytelling. By reporting the tales of individual women who experienced complications during pregnancy or childbirth, journalists can give maternal health a human face. Personal stories based on individual experiences have a tendency to create empathy and sympathy among audiences and, thereby, enable the investigation of potential solutions. A pertinent illustration provided within a report published by The Guardian shows the heartbreaking story of a new mother who unfortunately passed away while giving birth owing to the absence of access to emergency obstetric care. The example shows severe deficiencies within the healthcare system that need to be addressed immediately (Olukoya, 2020).

Data journalism is one of the specialist storytelling methods that are used within the practice of the type of newspaper reporting known as advocacy journalism. Journalists use factual details and statistics to outline the condition of Akwa Ibom State maternal healthcare. By using objective facts and statistical data, the capacity of reporters to measure the extent to which the problem is widespread and to select areas that need to be improved is increased. For instance, according to the World Health Organization survey, Nigeria is among those countries that document significant maternal deaths across the world, and Akwa Ibom is one of the areas that are renowned for high shortfalls (WHO, 2019). The use of empirical measures ensures that the severity of the problem is highlighted and calls for responsibility from policymakers and healthcare providers to intervene.

Besides this, such an advocacy journalist employs expert witness and interview evidence to contextualize and enable the investigation of Akwa Ibom State maternal complications. By conducting their discussions outside healthcare providers, researchers, and policy makers, such journalists are offering various opinion on issues that face pregnant women within the area. By using expert opinion, such evidence not only supports how prevalent the issue is but also indicates potential for improvement in the quality of their care. For instance, within an article released by Nigerian Health Watch, medical practitioners' opinion was requested to estimate the extent to which substandard healthcare facilities are responsible for maternal deaths in Akwa Ibom State, thus empowering policymakers with appropriate information (Nigeria Health Watch, 2021).

Advocacy journalism, nevertheless, performs a fundamental function in bringing attention to maternal health matters in Akwa Ibom State through the utilization of several narrative methods. Through the application of personal anecdotes, fact-based narrative, and expert testimony, journalists are able to craft a narrative that is informational, engaging, and motivates action. Through such practices, advocacy journalism is capable of influencing change and enhancing maternal health outcomes in the State.

***What are the Major Elements/Story Telling Techniques Used in Advocacy Journalism in Raising Awareness on Maternal Health Issues in Akwa Ibom State?***

The practice of advocacy journalism functions as an essential instrument to both inform the public and encourage responses toward maternal health problems in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. By employing storytelling methods, journalists make the problems pregnant women in the area face visible while promoting program transformations and generating community engagement that tackles maternal healthcare disparities. Journalists employ personal storytelling extensively in their advocacy journalism to disseminate information about maternal health problems across Akwa Ibom State. Professional journalists use real-life stories of pregnant women who faced complications to personalize maternal health issues so audiences develop intimacy through shared emotion. Personal narrative storytelling tackles the obstacles pregnant women face while revealing their anxiety levels as well as their achievements in order to make the case stronger for better maternal care service improvements throughout the region. The personal accounts help engage the audience on an emotional level while building their comprehension of maternal health issues in Akwa Ibom State, according to George (2020).

Advocacy journalism implements visual storytelling as an essential storytelling technique to explain advocacy issues. Journalists who blend photographs along with videos and multimedia components in their reports provide visual evidence about the difficulties pregnant women endure and the problems of insufficient maternal healthcare services. Through visual storytelling, journalists target the audience's feelings while drawing their focus toward critical maternal health care issues in Akwa Ibom State. A documentary about maternal mortality within the region adopts visual storytelling techniques to share the personal experiences of pregnant women along with their families,

which helps demonstrate the need for maternal health improvement (Hernandez & Wagner, 2015).

Advocacy journalism thrives through community storytelling, which serves to strengthen marginalized groups' abilities to protect their rights while amplifying local voices throughout the community. Journalists can use community member interviews with traditional birth attendants, midwives, and community health workers to show how grassroots maternal health improvement work matches alongside community-based solutions. Storytelling within communities creates citizens' unity, generates teamwork, and generates unified action to resolve maternal healthcare problems in Akwa Ibom State (Lester, 2019).

The effective use of storytelling tools stands as an indispensable strategy for advocacy journalism to spread knowledge about maternal health problems inside Akwa Ibom State. Media professionals who implement personal stories alongside visual media and group narratives are able to effectively engage audiences and lead both government officials and the general public toward beneficial changes in maternal care. The storytelling method of advocacy journalism helps to raise the voices of pregnant women while strengthening communities and driving improved maternal health results in Akwa Ibom State. *What is the Effectiveness of the Narrative Techniques Used in Advocacy Journalism in Raising Awareness on Maternal Health Issues in Akwa Ibom State?*

Advocacy journalism is an important means by which advocacy on maternal health issues in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, is raised and mobilized. Narrative techniques help journalists to reveal the difficulties that women go through during pregnancy and childbirth, hence influencing public opinion and even public policy change. Advocacy journalism relies heavily on one of the key narrative techniques used in journalism, which is storytelling, specifically by means of personal narratives. However, by telling the stories of individual women who have encountered problems achieving prenatal care or maternity care services, journalists communicate understanding and empathy to the audience. Morgan, Shanahan, and Signorielli (2015) have researched that personal stories are the ones that will hit the reader right in their heart and invoke a response, like why should they care about this and do something about it? It might offer a window into the barriers that women in Akwa Ibom state have to access acceptable health care due to distance to health care facilities, lack of trained medical staff, and belief in cultural norms, among others, to abstain from seeking health care if pregnant.

Advocacy journalism is another advocacy journalism's way of data-driven storytelling to bring attention of various maternal health issues to people. A feature on the maternal mortality rates, healthcare infrastructure, and maternal health outcomes in Akwa Ibom State will present statistics and findings from research on the problem, which can be presented to help give a total picture of the problem and bring to focus how urgent it is. Data-driven storytelling has been shown to educate the public, shape discourse, and influence policy decisions (Song, Liu, & Maynard, 2019). For instance, if journalists cite the statistics of the

maternal mortality rate in Akwa Ibom state, it can then help in drawing attention to how maternal deaths can be reduced, especially when access to emergency obstetric care and skilled birth assistants is poor.

Apart from expert interviews and testimonies, they (maternal health issues) also seek to advocate for maternal health issues in Akwa Ibom state. Reporting on maternal health can include speaking to healthcare professionals, researchers, and policymakers and helping to offer context, analysis, and solutions to that end. Experts can provide knowledge on the causes of maternal mortality, suggest courses of action grounded in scientific evidence, and advocate for policies that can enhance maternal health. They also have their voices carry weight and credibility, influencing the community as well as decision-making and driving action on maternal health issues.

Advocacy journalism, with its narrative techniques, is potent in arming the public with awareness of maternal health-borne problems within Akwa I(cm Cou) State, and it is also equipped to try to sway policy decisions and general change. Journalists do this through personal storytelling of how pregnant women get treated, education to the public about maternal health, and action for improvement of maternal health outcomes in Akwa Ibom State by presenting the issues using the data and expert interviews.

#### ***What is the Audience Perception of Maternal Health Campaign Messages in Akwa Ibom State Through Advocacy Journalism?***

Advocacy journalism in Akwa Ibom state, Nigeria, is a powerful tool that makes contributions to awareness and action regarding different maternal health conditions. Bringing to light the challenges anticipated of pregnant women in the state is done through campaigns and messages of the public, through the journalists through whom they are delivered, to enable people to change the status of maternal health care. The degree of awareness created amongst the public constitutes a significant component in the response of the audience to the maternal health campaign's message. These are placed within the context of advocacy reporting for raising awareness regarding the issues being faced by women involved in maternal healthcare within Akwa Ibom State and more particularly the problem of maternal mortality, access to quality healthcare, and those social and cultural obstacles that deter the use of medical care for pregnant women. Empirical evidence indicates that the application of advocacy reporting holds the ability to build public awareness and prompt people to seek more information regarding issues of maternal healthcare and their respective treatments (Lin et al., 2018).

Audience reach and influence through campaign communications regarding maternal care within Akwa Ibom State is crucial. Narrative reporting, observational data analysis, and expert opinion are types of reporting that reach the audience and seek to mobilize public debate and improvement of maternal healthcare services. Through direct audience interaction, reporters are capable of evoking interest, challenging debate, and evoking public support for enhancing maternal healthcare and international advocacy (Smith, 2016).

Emotional appeals enabled by advocacy reporting bring about other potential behavior changes that are triggered by communications linked to maternal healthcare programs. Journalists are capable of highlighting the

importance of prenatal care, the need for skilled delivery services, and emergency obstetric care availability, all while encouraging stakeholders to take actions that would better the condition of maternal health within their communities. Empirical evidence has proven that compelling message delivery leads to effective outcomes that appear in the form of improved use of maternal healthcare services, embracement of healthy pregnancy behavior, and progressing advocacy for maternal healthcare policy (Johnson, 2020).

Advocacy journalism also occupies a crucial position regarding the propagation of information regarding Akwa Ibom State maternal health programs and impacts public awareness, engagement, and behavioural change. Besides playing this role, journalists are also capable of shedding light on the issues of interest and are skilled at mobilizing the public and moving people to become advocates or champions of maternal health in the area, thus solidifying public support based on reliable information and enabling improvement in mother and child healthcare services.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The potential of the use of the storytelling narrative technique in advocacy journalism on maternal health issues in Akwa Ibom State cannot be overemphasised. Personal narratives, visual storytelling, and community storytelling from journalists have the potential to help pregnant women receive help, evoke empathy and emotional response from the audience, and generate action to improve maternal outcomes in the region. This is because if journalists can share the stories of individual women, then you will be able to see how women find it hard to access good healthcare services, how the cultural belief pieces of the puzzle influence women's maternity practices, and how important it is to roll out policy changes and community-based solutions urgently.

Storytelling in advocacy journalism enhances the responsibility of the journalist. It gives him the capability, beyond mere reporting of statistics and facts, to create a personal and relatable connection with the audience. With storytelling narrative techniques, pregnant women in Akwa Ibom State can be shown the struggles and triumphs in the hope that it raises awareness, the public engages, and people become advocates for maternal health. Furthermore, storytelling can amplify the voices of marginalized communities and local stakeholders' empowerment on how to expedite maternal healthcare, as well as encourage teamwork to address systemic problems in maternal care.

In addition, the power of storytelling narrative technique in advocacy journalism is to influence policy decisions and the telling of public discourse about maternal health issues. Journalists can show compelling narratives that are based on data and the opinions of experts, advocating for evidence-based interventions, requesting more investments in maternal health service provision, and holding public officials accountable for building gaps in the health system. Storytelling can be a force for social change and act as a launch pad for social good toward a healthier state of maternal health in Akwa Ibom State.

In this regard, storytelling narrative techniques are crucial advocacy journalism techniques on maternal health in Akwa Ibom State, as the narratives can impact the public and even decision-makers to listen, participate, and act as much as possible. Through storytelling, journalists in the region can use their power to amplify pregnant women's voices, create a conversation, and push for change to improve maternal health outcomes in the region. Ultimately, storytelling is a powerful tool of advocacy journalism to raise awareness, galvanize support, and cause a transformative impact on maternal healthcare in the Akwa Ibom State.

#### **FURTHER STUDY**

1. With regards to maintaining the effectiveness of storytelling for advocacy reporting on Akwa Ibom State maternal health, it is good to leave space for using different perspectives as well as diverse voices that come under the story. The worth of the project may be accessed through journalists who are able to cite the experiences of pregnant women, health workers, leaders, and policymakers, and thereby provide a voice to the audience about maternal health challenges as well as prospects. Through an approach such as this, ensuring that the dialogue is comprehensive, capturing the ground realities of issues concerning maternal health in the state, and echoing the complexities included in the matter is possible.
2. Moreover, in today's digital world, the use of multimedia platforms, like social media, podcasts, and interactive sites for advocacy journalism on maternal health in Akwa Ibom State, can be used to amplify their use in advocacy journalism about maternal health. Journalists can create an interactive experience by using visual elements like photographs, videos, infographics, and interactive maps to engage more audiences. Using multimedia resources can also expand reach, facilitate the sharing of stories, and encourage even the degree of participation and involvement from the grassroots level.
3. This also encourages community members (primarily victims) to tell their own stories and experiences of maternal health, which is strong in advocacy journalism in Akwa Ibom State. Pushing these local voices empowers this journalist to give a sense of ownership, solidarity, and collaboration to the community. Community storytelling also enables the identification of grassroots solutions, ensures cultural competency, and promotes sustainable change from the ground up. In this instance, journalists ought to take a page directly toward the voices of those affected by maternal health.
4. There should be collaboration between local organizations, NGOs, healthcare providers, and government agencies to help enhance the reach, credibility, and impact of storytelling in advocacy journalism on maternal health issues in Akwa Ibom State. This can be done by forming partnerships with key stakeholders, where journalists can have access to additional resources, expertise, and networks to support their advocacy efforts. Equally, working together towards a common goal can lead to increased awareness, advocacy campaigns, and policy changes that address maternal health

disparities and improve healthcare services for pregnant women in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

5. Stronger emphasis should be placed on civic advocacy journalism in a bid to help raise the voice of the vulnerable ones in our society, who are the ultimate beneficiaries of any development discourse, especially on health-related issues.

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