



## EVALUATION OF SOUTH-SOUTH RESIDENTS' LEVEL OF AWARENESS ON NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF MEDICAL TOURISM IN NIGERIA

<sup>1</sup>EZEANOCHIE, Obiageli

<sup>2</sup>EZEGWU, Daniel T., PhD

<sup>3</sup>ASEMAH Ezekiel S., PhD

<sup>1,3</sup> Glorious Vision University, Ogwa, Edo State, ezeanochie@biu.edu.ng

<sup>2</sup>University of Delta, Agbor, ezegwudaniel@gmail.com

**Corresponding Author:** Obiageli Ezeanochie; ezeanochie@biu.edu.ng

### ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the level of awareness among South-South residents in Nigeria regarding newspaper coverage of medical tourism, with the specific objectives of ascertaining the level of awareness and assessing the degree to which newspaper coverage contributes to residents' understanding of medical tourism issues. Anchored on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), the study employed a survey research design, with a sample size of 400 respondents selected through multi-stage sampling, and data was analysed using descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that residents have a relatively high level of awareness about medical tourism through newspaper coverage, which significantly contributes to their understanding of the issues involved. Consequently, the study concludes that newspapers play a critical role in shaping awareness and understanding on medical tourism. Based on the findings, this study recommends that newspapers adopt a more investigative approach to reporting on medical tourism, offering readers detailed insights into its benefits, risks, and wider implications. Furthermore, since the data show that awareness and understanding are significantly shaped by newspaper coverage, it is also recommended that journalists covering health issues receive specialised training in interpreting medical data, contextualising healthcare systems, and analysing policy matters. Strengthening investigative reporting alongside professional capacity building will ensure that newspapers provide accurate, evidence-based, and impactful coverage that deepens public understanding and supports informed health decision-making.

**Keywords:** Medical Tourism, Newspaper Coverage, Awareness, Health Reporting, Theory of Planned Behaviour.

### Introduction

Medical tourism has become a growing phenomenon in Nigeria, with many citizens seeking healthcare services abroad due to concerns about quality, accessibility, and trust in the local health system. In shaping public awareness of this trend, newspapers play a crucial role as agenda-setters, influencing how residents perceive healthcare options and make decisions about treatment. Titles such as *The Guardian*, *The Punch*, and *ThisDay* consistently frame narratives on medical tourism, presenting both its opportunities and its risks. For residents in Nigeria's South-South region, where healthcare challenges are acute, the extent of their awareness of newspaper coverage on medical tourism directly affects their attitudes and perceptions.

Medical tourism has gradually emerged as one of such trends. It describes the process of individuals travelling beyond their national borders to seek medical interventions ranging from wellness procedures to advanced surgeries (Abubakar et al., 2008). For many Nigerians, the attraction lies in the promise of advanced technology, shorter waiting times, and often cheaper access to certain procedures when compared with local options. In destinations like India, Thailand and Mexico, patients find a combination of

affordable healthcare and opportunities for leisure, a pattern which makes medical tourism both an economic and lifestyle choice (Adogla-Bessa, 2015).

However, medical tourism is not without challenges. Nigerian citizens have been implicated in organ trafficking, most notoriously illustrated in the 2022 arrest of Senator Ike Ekweremadu for allegedly trafficking a 21-year-old man to the UK for organ harvesting (Okosun, Ezeji & Asemah, 2023). Such cases complicate public perception and point to the urgent need for reliable newspaper coverage that moves beyond sensationalism to provide nuanced awareness about the risks, costs, and ethical debates surrounding the awareness and understanding of medical tourism. Unfortunately, as Orji et al. (2020) observe, health reporting is often weakened by bias, fragmented context, or over-simplification, thereby leaving audiences with partial or distorted knowledge.

It is within this context that the South-South region of Nigeria becomes an interesting site of study. Residents in this region, often faced with failing healthcare structures, are among those who increasingly consider medical travel as an option. Yet the degree to which they are aware of newspaper narratives on the subject remains largely unexplored.

Ezegwu et al. (2024) remind us that newspapers cover a vast spectrum of societal challenges, including health, and thus are capable of shaping awareness in subtle yet profound ways. When newspapers frame medical tourism positively, they may expand the options residents are willing to consider. On the other hand, when they highlight risks or focus disproportionately on scandals, the outcome could be mistrust and rejection of the practice. This study, therefore, directs attention to how South-South residents interpret and internalise newspaper coverage, with specific focus on their level of awareness of medical tourism.

The background has not done justice to the objectives of awareness and understanding. This means that the focus of the work should be that of interpretative journalism and in this case understanding the technicalities of science reporting and health reporting in this paper. If the focus is framing, then the position of Chukwuemeka will suffice and then the objectives will be about newspaper framing of medical tourism.

The author(s) should build on the work of Orji et al. (2020) of leaving readers 'with partial or distorted knowledge.' So the TPB is not apt at all but audience reception theory that carries awareness and understanding. Also, the background fails to let us know of the common newspapers in circulation? National, state or local/community newspapers. Also, are the newspapers online or hardcopy?

## **Statement of the Problem**

Medical tourism in Nigeria has attracted considerable scholarly attention, yet the specific role of newspapers in shaping public awareness and understanding of the issue remains underexplored. Existing studies tend to foreground medical risks (Orji et al 2020), structural dimensions of healthcare (Abba-Aji et al., , 2021), and economic implications (Nwankwo et al., , 2023), while neglecting how newspapers inform the awareness of ordinary readers. Similarly, Chime-Nganya et al. (2017) direct attention to media framing without addressing awareness directly, and broader health communication studies in Nigeria (Asemah, 2015) privilege general health issues rather than medical tourism as a distinct communicative challenge.

This neglect presents a critical gap, as insufficient or misguided awareness from newspaper coverage can expose the public to harm. Readers may develop unrealistic expectations of medical tourism, overlook potential risks, or fail to critically engage with the limitations of foreign healthcare. In regions like the South-South, where health inequalities are pronounced, the absence of evidence on how newspapers shape awareness makes it difficult to determine whether residents are adequately informed to make safe, balanced decisions. This study therefore fills the gap by evaluating South-South residents' level of awareness of newspaper coverage of medical tourism in Nigeria.

## Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Ascertain the level of awareness among South-South residents on newspaper coverage of medical tourism issues in Nigeria.
2. Assess the degree to which newspaper coverage contributes to residents' understanding of medical tourism issues in Nigeria.

## Conceptual Review

### Medical Tourism

Medical tourism is viewed by Abubakar et al., (2008) as the deliberate act of travelling to another country to obtain medical services, ranging from elective cosmetic procedures to complex surgeries and wellness treatments. This definition captures the essence of medical tourism as a cross-border healthcare practice that extends beyond the limitations of local medical systems.

In the Nigerian context, medical tourism has gained ground as residents increasingly encounter systemic inadequacies such as poorly equipped hospitals, limited access to specialised personnel, and infrastructural decay. The practice therefore emerges as a solution for individuals who desire more reliable, efficient, and technologically advanced care. The broader implication is that medical tourism functions not just as a healthcare alternative but as a reflection of the weaknesses of domestic healthcare systems and the growing need for international health integration.

Adogla-Bessa (2015) further defines medical tourism as the integration of medical treatment with tourism and leisure experiences, particularly in destinations that provide advanced care at lower costs. This definition underscores the fact that medical tourism is not merely about receiving treatment but also about the experience of travel, relaxation, and exposure to different cultures. In countries like India, Thailand, and Mexico, governments and private healthcare providers have deliberately positioned their health systems as global hubs for medical tourism by combining affordable treatment packages with hospitality services.

The implication for Nigerians is that these destinations become attractive because they offer comprehensive packages that rival the healthcare opportunities available domestically. This makes medical tourism both an economic and experiential decision for patients, as they weigh the benefits of superior technology, skilled professionals, and an opportunity for recovery in appealing environments against the financial and emotional cost of travelling abroad.

Medical tourism can also be described as a rapidly evolving global healthcare trend that provides patients with access to procedures and expertise not readily available in their home countries. This definition reflects its multifaceted nature, as it covers issues of affordability, cultural compatibility, confidentiality, and reduced waiting times. The explanation reveals that Nigerians are particularly motivated by the chance to secure timely and high-quality treatments that may be delayed or absent in local hospitals. However, medical tourism is not without risks.

Organ trafficking scandals, such as the 2022 case of Senator Ike Ekweremadu, who was arrested for attempting to traffic a 21-year-old Nigerian man for organ harvesting (Okosun et al., 2023). Such incidents show that medical tourism is a double-edged sword—while it expands opportunities for improved healthcare, it simultaneously exposes vulnerable individuals to exploitation and raises ethical questions about regulation and safety. As a result, there is a strong need for responsible reporting and accurate public information to balance the positive and negative aspects of this global trend.

## **Newspaper Coverage**

Newspaper coverage is defined by Olatunji (2023) as the process of reporting, framing, and disseminating news stories to inform the public about events, developments, and pressing issues at local, national, and international levels. This definition situates newspapers as critical agents in shaping public discourse and raising awareness on matters such as politics, health, education, and economy. Newspapers have long been regarded as credible sources of information due to their structured presentation of facts and their perceived objectivity.

However, the way stories are covered, particularly through the choice of headlines, tone, and prominence, directly influences what readers understand and prioritise. In the case of medical tourism, newspaper coverage becomes central to awareness-building, as it not only introduces readers to the concept but also provides insight into costs, risks, and available destinations. Through doing so, newspapers act as bridges between health systems and the public, helping residents make sense of a complex and often misunderstood issue.

Newspaper coverage is also viewed by Nwankwo and Eze (2024) as the reporting of factual events combined with their interpretation within prevailing cultural and societal contexts. This definition reveals that news reporting is rarely neutral but is instead filtered through cultural values, political climates, and editorial biases. For example, coverage of medical tourism may present it as a symbol of global healthcare opportunities while simultaneously framing Nigeria's healthcare system as weak or failing.

Such framing not only influences awareness but also constructs a narrative that either legitimises or delegitimises domestic healthcare institutions. The implication is that residents' level of awareness is shaped not merely by exposure to news stories but by how those stories are interpreted and presented. This underscores the power of newspapers to go beyond information-sharing to agenda-setting, shaping how society perceives itself and its options for health and wellbeing.

## **Literature Review**

### **Medical Tourism and Healthcare-Seeking Behaviour**

Medical tourism is increasingly recognised as a phenomenon shaped by patients' perceptions of quality, affordability, and accessibility of healthcare services abroad. In countries like Nigeria, where healthcare delivery is marred by inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and uneven access between urban and rural areas, citizens often view foreign hospitals as better equipped to handle specialised treatments.

Scholars such as Adebayo and Ojo (2021) note that this trend is not only driven by the search for medical solutions but also by the desire for reliability, shorter waiting times, and exposure to advanced technologies that are often lacking in domestic facilities. In essence, medical tourism reflects a behavioural pattern where patients bypass local healthcare systems, thereby demonstrating both the limitations of domestic service delivery and the aspirational value attached to accessing care overseas.

Beyond individual choices, medical tourism reflects broader systemic pressures within the Nigerian health sector. The persistent underfunding of healthcare—estimated at less than 5% of the national budget compared to the World Health Organization's 15% recommendation—creates an environment where patients feel compelled to seek treatment abroad (Ogunyemi, 2022).

For many Nigerians, travelling to destinations such as India, the United Kingdom, or South Africa is not simply a matter of preference but of necessity, particularly when life-threatening illnesses such as cancer, kidney failure, or cardiovascular diseases are involved. This behavioural trend further drains national resources, as billions of naira are spent annually on medical travel, which could otherwise

strengthen local healthcare systems. Thus, medical tourism becomes both a coping strategy for individuals and a reflection of systemic gaps that undermine healthcare delivery at home.

In addition, cultural and social factors influence how Nigerians approach medical tourism. For some, receiving treatment abroad has become a symbol of prestige, reinforcing the notion that local hospitals are inferior and foreign healthcare providers are inherently superior (Eze, 2023). This perception is particularly evident among elites and public officials, whose frequent foreign medical trips reinforce the trend for ordinary citizens.

Consequently, healthcare-seeking behaviour is shaped not only by medical necessity but also by social aspiration, with individuals viewing medical tourism as both a health-related and status-driven choice. These dynamics highlight the complex motivations behind medical tourism and underscore its implications for equity, policy reform, and the credibility of Nigeria's healthcare system.

### **Role of Newspapers in Shaping Public Opinion on Health**

Newspapers have long been considered central actors in shaping public opinion by selecting, framing, and disseminating information that influences how citizens perceive social issues, including healthcare. According to Olojede and Okunna (2022), newspapers do not merely reflect reality but construct it through agenda-setting, framing, and priming processes.

In the Nigerian context, newspapers play an especially important role in health communication because they cater to literate audiences who depend on print media for in-depth analyses and investigative reporting. When newspapers highlight health-related topics such as maternal mortality, disease outbreaks, or medical tourism, they influence not only what the public knows but also how seriously these issues are regarded. Thus, the level of attention newspapers devote to medical tourism has a direct bearing on public knowledge and awareness of the phenomenon.

Furthermore, newspaper coverage operates as a platform for public debate on healthcare policy and accountability. As Okoro and Nwafor (2020) argue, the media in Nigeria has historically functioned as a watchdog, holding leaders accountable by scrutinising their actions and policies. When newspapers consistently report on public officials travelling abroad for medical care, the stories often spark outrage and fuel criticism of government neglect of the local health system.

At the same time, coverage of ordinary citizens crowdfunding for medical treatment abroad reveals the desperation many face, thereby reinforcing the public perception that the Nigerian health system cannot meet critical needs. Through such reports, newspapers shape discourse on medical tourism and indirectly set benchmarks for public expectations of government performance in the health sector.

In addition, the framing of medical tourism in newspapers significantly affects how the public perceives the issue. Positive frames, such as stories of successful foreign treatments, can reinforce the attractiveness of medical tourism, while negative frames, such as accounts of failed procedures or financial exploitation, can discourage it.

Through selecting which aspects to emphasise, newspapers either validate or challenge public attitudes toward foreign healthcare. Consequently, newspapers serve not only as conveyors of information but also as active agents in constructing the social meaning of medical tourism (Olojede & Okunna, 2022). Their influence underscores the importance of examining how print media represents the phenomenon and how such representation impacts public awareness in Nigeria.

## Barriers to Effective Health Reporting in Nigeria

Despite their pivotal role in public education, Nigerian newspapers face persistent constraints that weaken the quality and reach of health reporting. A primary limitation is the lack of specialised training among journalists: many reporters lack the technical skills to interpret medical data or scrutinise health claims, which encourages simplification and occasional misrepresentation of complex topics such as medical tourism (Olojede & Okunna, 2022; Asemah, 2015). As Chime-Nganya et al., (2017) show in their analysis of press coverage of a presidential medical leave, health items frequently default to human-interest angles rather than rigorous explanation; the same tendency undermines balanced coverage of medical tourism and leaves readers with fragmented knowledge.

Commercial and editorial pressures further marginalise health reporting. Newsrooms facing tight budgets and competition for readership commonly prioritise political scandals and entertainment content, consigning health stories to lower prominence or brief, episodic treatment (Ume, 2023; Ezegwu et al., 2024). When newspapers do report on medical tourism they often foreground high-profile cases or promotional narratives—approaches that reflect stakeholder publicity dynamics identified in the medical-tourism literature (Kamassi et al., 2020)—instead of providing systematic, evidence-based accounts that would enable sustained public understanding.

Resource shortages and weak industry linkages compound these problems. Investigative health journalism requires time, specialist sources and funding; in their absence, reporters rely on press releases or shallow interviews, perpetuating surface-level narratives (Lamisu, 2018). Moreover, the complex drivers of medical tourism identified in comparative reviews (Gholami et al., 2020) demand contextualised reporting that local newsrooms rarely provide. Together, these barriers reduce newspapers' capacity to inform readers accurately about medical tourism and heighten the risk that publics will receive partial or misleading impressions. Addressing the deficit therefore requires investment in specialist training, dedicated health beats, and stronger collaboration between media professionals and medical experts.

## Empirical Review

Here's a revised version of your literature review section with the endings recast to emphasise *understanding and awareness* in relation to your study:

Adeoye (2023) carried out a qualitative study examining the medical, legal, and social dimensions of medical tourism in Nigeria. Using interviews and document analysis, the study revealed that many patients face exploitation and misinformation when seeking treatment abroad. Adeoye argued for stronger regulatory frameworks and policies to protect Nigerian patients. While Adeoye's work and the present study both address medical tourism, the former focuses on ethics and governance, whereas the latter interrogates how media coverage shapes citizens' understanding and awareness of the subject.

Chime-Nganya, Ezegwu, and Ezeji (2017) investigated how Nigerian newspapers framed President Muhammadu Buhari's medical leave abroad. They analysed *The Guardian*, *Vanguard*, and *Daily Trust* across an eight-month period, focusing on story genres, prominence, and framing patterns. Their findings showed that coverage largely lacked depth, with little background information provided to readers. The authors recommended that newspapers adopt investigative approaches to give more context to sensitive health-related issues.

Although their study is relevant for highlighting the role of media framing, it paid more attention to elite political communication than to how newspaper coverage builds ordinary citizens' awareness and understanding of medical tourism. Similarly, Salam, Salaudeen, and Adeniji (2023) explored the influence

of health insurance coverage on Nigerians' decisions to pursue medical treatment abroad. Employing a survey method, they found a strong positive link between comprehensive insurance and the likelihood of engaging in medical tourism.

Their work highlighted financial considerations as a key driver of medical travel. Although their study shares a methodological similarity with the current research—both rely on survey data—the present study extends the conversation by foregrounding how newspaper reportage informs the public's awareness and deepens their understanding of medical tourism in Nigeria.

### **Audience Response Theory (ART)**

The Audience Response Theory (ART) emerged in media and communication scholarship as a framework for understanding how audiences actively interpret and respond to media messages rather than passively absorbing them. Rooted in cultural studies and reception analysis, ART challenges earlier media effects models that portrayed audiences as homogenous and powerless, instead positing that individuals decode messages in varied ways depending on their social, cultural, and psychological contexts (Hall, 1980). Central to ART is the recognition that meaning is not fixed within media texts but negotiated between media producers and audiences, leading to diverse readings that shape perceptions and behaviours (Livingstone, 2013).

At the core of ART are three interpretive positions audiences may adopt when engaging with media content. The first is the dominant-hegemonic reading, where audiences align closely with the intended meaning encoded by media producers, accepting messages as presented (Hall, 1980). The second is the negotiated reading, which reflects partial agreement with the text, but with selective acceptance and resistance shaped by personal circumstances or beliefs (Morley, 1992). The third is the oppositional reading, in which audiences actively reject the dominant message, reinterpreting or resisting it based on alternative perspectives or experiences (McQuail, 2010). These interpretive positions reveal that audience engagement with media is dynamic and contingent, shaped by individual agency as well as social context.

Despite its strengths, ART has faced several critiques concerning its application and scope. One major criticism is that the model risks overstating audience autonomy while underestimating the structural power of media institutions to shape discourses and constrain interpretations (Philo, 2008). Another limitation lies in methodological challenges, as reception studies often rely on small-scale qualitative data that may not be easily generalisable (Livingstone, 2013).

Furthermore, ART may neglect how broader economic, technological, and political forces influence both media production and reception, thereby oversimplifying complex communicative processes (Couldry, 2012). These critiques suggest that while ART provides a nuanced framework for examining meaning-making, it benefits from integration with models that foreground structural and institutional factors in media influence. In the context of the present study, ART offers a useful lens for evaluating how Nigerians respond to newspaper coverage of medical tourism. Residents of the South-South may adopt dominant readings when they accept positive portrayals of overseas healthcare as superior to local systems.

Others may engage in negotiated readings, acknowledging the benefits of foreign treatment while questioning affordability or accessibility. Oppositional readings may also arise, as some residents reject the glorification of medical tourism and instead highlight the importance of strengthening domestic healthcare. Through applying ART, this study emphasizes that awareness and perceptions of medical tourism are not uniform but reflect diverse interpretations shaped by newspaper coverage, personal experiences, and broader social contexts.

## Methodology

In this research, a survey research design was employed, involving a systematic approach to collecting responses from participants, which enables the exploration of human attitudes and perceptions (Nwaoboli & Asemah, 2023; Oladele, Ekharefo & Asemah, 2023; Asemah & Nwaoboli, 2022; 2024). The South-South region of Nigeria comprises six states: Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers. For this study, the focus was on three states—Akwa Ibom, Delta, and Edo—due to their significant urban centres, which are crucial for understanding regional dynamics. The selected urban centres include Uyo in Akwa Ibom, Asaba in Delta, and Benin City in Edo. This selection is justified by the diverse socio-economic landscapes represented by these cities, which are essential for a comprehensive analysis relevant to this study.

According to the 2006 National Population Census, the populations of these cities were recorded as follows: Uyo: 436,606; Asaba: 149,603; and Benin City: 1,086,882. However, given the age of the 2006 census data, the researcher calculated a projected population for 2024 using an average annual growth rate of 2.1%. The projected populations for 2024 are as follows: Uyo is estimated at 743,179; Asaba at 253,911; and Benin City at 1,846,169.

Thus, the total population for the study area is approximately 3,710,000. The sample size for the research was determined to be 400 using Taro Yamane's (1964) formula for sample size determination. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to conduct a thorough and representative analysis of residents' attitudes and perceptions towards newspaper coverage of medical tourism in Nigeria. This method allowed for a structured sampling process, employing various techniques at each phase to capture a wide range of perspectives and ensure a robust sample.

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

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

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

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

The final stage employed purposive sampling to ensure that only respondents who met specific inclusion criteria were selected. These criteria required that participants (i) had access to newspapers, (ii) regularly read newspapers, and (iii) had encountered newspaper content related to medical tourism. This

approach was necessary to guarantee that the responses reflected informed perspectives relevant to the study objectives. Questionnaires were personally administered to the qualified respondents across the selected communities.

For data analysis, both descriptive statistical techniques such as frequency tables, percentages, and means were used to summarise collated data. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale, and a criterion mean of 3.0 served as the threshold for determining acceptance or rejection of statements. Thus, any item with a mean score of 3.0 or above was considered significant, while items below 3.0 were regarded as not significant. This analytical approach ensured both rigour and validity in interpreting the findings.

## Data Presentation

**Table 1**

***Level of Awareness among South-South Residents on Newspaper Coverage of Medical Tourism Issues in Nigeria***

Perception of Awareness	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Total	X
I am aware of medical tourism through newspapers.	145 (39.1)	127 (34.3)	19 (5.1)	47 (12.7)	33 (8.9)	371	3.82
Newspapers regularly highlight medical tourism issues.	137 (36.9)	121 (32.6)	17 (4.6)	55 (14.8)	41 (11.1)	371	3.69
I have read features/editorials on medical tourism.	129 (34.8)	119 (32.1)	21 (5.7)	57 (15.4)	45 (12.1)	371	3.62

Table 1 showed that awareness of medical tourism issues among South-South residents through newspapers is relatively high, which implies that print media still plays a critical role in shaping public consciousness on health-related matters. The fact that many respondents acknowledged being exposed to coverage and even reading features or editorials suggests that newspapers remain an influential channel for drawing attention to medical tourism.

**Table 2**

***Contribution of Newspaper Coverage to Residents' Understanding of Medical Tourism Issues in Nigeria***

Perception of Contribution	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Total	X
Newspaper coverage improves my understanding of medical tourism.	141 (38.0)	123 (33.2)	19 (5.1)	51 (13.7)	37 (10.0)	371	3.76
I can differentiate between local and foreign medical services due to newspapers.	133 (35.8)	119 (32.1)	21 (5.7)	55 (14.8)	43 (11.6)	371	3.67
Newspaper stories help me evaluate the pros and cons of medical tourism.	125 (33.7)	117 (31.5)	17 (4.6)	61 (16.4)	51 (13.7)	371	3.59

Table 2 shows the contribution of newspaper coverage to residents' understanding of medical tourism. The mean scores (3.76, 3.67, and 3.59) are all above the benchmark of 3.0, confirming that respondents agreed newspapers enhanced their understanding of medical tourism.

This demonstrates that beyond mere awareness, the press is instrumental in shaping how individuals process and interpret health information. The implication is that while newspapers contribute significantly to public understanding, efforts to improve the clarity, depth, and inclusivity of reporting would further enhance their effectiveness in guiding informed health choices.

**Table 3**

*Newspapers through which Respondents are Frequently Exposed to Medical Tourism Coverage*

<b>Newspapers</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
The Guardian	89	24.0
ThisDay	73	19.7
Punch	101	27.2
Vanguard	61	16.5
Other Newspapers (e.g., Tribune, Daily Trust, Sun)	47	12.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>371</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3 highlights the specific newspapers through which respondents are frequently exposed to medical tourism coverage, with *Punch*, *The Guardian* and *ThisDay* standing out as key sources. The implication of this finding is that certain national dailies dominate the dissemination of health-related issues, which points to their agenda-setting power in shaping public discourse on medical tourism. The presence of “Other Newspapers” as a notable category also shows that regional or less mainstream papers still play a supplementary role, ensuring that diverse audiences gain access to relevant information.

**Discussion of Findings**

The study's findings reveal that South-South residents in Nigeria have a relatively high level of awareness about medical tourism through newspaper coverage. As shown in Table 1, 39.1% of respondents strongly agreed that they are aware of medical tourism through newspapers, while 34.3% agreed. With a mean score of 3.82, above the criterion mean of 3.0, this indicates substantial awareness.

This aligns with Audience Response Theory, which posits that audiences do not merely consume media passively but actively interpret, negotiate, and sometimes resist media messages depending on their socio-cultural context (Asa, et al, 2024). In this case, respondents' awareness of medical tourism reflects the negotiated readings that occur when newspaper content intersects with people lived health realities. This finding is consistent with Ezegwu et al. (2024), who noted that newspapers cover a vast spectrum of societal challenges, including health, and are capable of shaping awareness in subtle yet profound ways.

The study further shows that newspaper coverage contributes significantly to residents' understanding of medical tourism issues. As presented in Table 2, 38.0% of respondents strongly agreed

that newspaper coverage improves their understanding of medical tourism, while 33.2% agreed, yielding a mean score of 3.76. This supports Nwankwo and Eze (2024), who argued that newspapers play a critical role in shaping public opinion through agenda-setting and framing.

From the perspective of Audience Response Theory, this implies that audiences are not merely informed but actively use newspaper content to evaluate the pros and cons of medical tourism, thereby integrating media messages into their decision-making. This resonates with Adeoye (2023), whose study on medical tourism emphasised that policy and governance are important, but public knowledge—often mediated by the press—plays a crucial role in shaping health-seeking behaviour.

The findings also reveal which newspapers are most influential. According to Table 3, *Punch* (27.2%), *The Guardian* (24.0%), and *ThisDay* (19.7%) dominate respondents' exposure to medical tourism coverage. This aligns with Lamisu (2018), who observed that editorial selection and prioritisation determine which issues gain prominence in the public sphere. Within the Audience Response Theory framework, this dominance indicates that audiences gravitate toward certain titles not only because of access but also because of perceived credibility, trust, and resonance with their realities.

This also connects with Chime-Nganya, Ezegwu and Ezeji (2017), who demonstrated how newspapers framed Buhari's medical leave with limited depth, showing that while newspapers have power to set agendas, audiences still interpret coverage within broader political and social contexts. The implications of these findings are significant. First, the fact that respondents believe newspaper coverage contributes to their understanding of medical tourism issues demonstrates that the press has a responsibility to go beyond surface reporting.

As Olojede and Okunna (2022) emphasised, journalists covering health issues need specialised training to interpret medical data and provide in-depth analysis of complex health trends. Second, the audience's demonstrated awareness and engagement confirm Salam, Salaudeen, and Adeniji's (2023) observation that structural factors like insurance or finance influence medical travel, but media framing equally shapes how people perceive and rationalise their health choices. Taken together, this study shows that newspaper coverage interacts with public perception through processes of selective exposure, negotiated meaning, and critical reflection, reinforcing the utility of Audience Response Theory in explaining media influence on awareness and understanding of medical tourism.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that South-South residents in Nigeria have a relatively high level of awareness about medical tourism through newspaper coverage, which significantly contributes to their understanding of the issues involved. Newspapers, particularly *Punch*, *The Guardian*, and *ThisDay*, play a critical role in shaping public discourse on medical tourism, highlighting the need for accurate, evidence-based, and impactful reporting on health-related issues.

Building on the findings of this study, it is evident that while residents demonstrate relatively high awareness and understanding of medical tourism issues through newspapers, there is still a need for deeper and more analytical reporting. Since the data in Table 1 showed that many respondents are aware of medical tourism largely through basic news reports, newspapers could enhance this awareness by adopting a more investigative approach. This would provide readers with richer insights into the benefits, risks, and wider implications of seeking medical care abroad, thereby moving coverage beyond surface-level exposure.

Furthermore, Table 2 revealed that respondents rely on newspapers to improve their understanding and to evaluate the pros and cons of medical tourism. To strengthen this role, journalists covering medical and health-related issues require specialised training. Such training would equip them with the skills to interpret complex medical data, contextualise healthcare challenges, and critically analyse policy issues.

Through combining investigative reporting with enhanced journalistic capacity, newspapers can play a more transformative role in guiding informed public discourse on medical tourism in Nigeria.

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