



3rd African Conference on Emerging Infectious Diseases and Biosecurity

Accra, 16th – 18th August 2017

Workshop:

*From Viral to Verbal: The Role of
Journalism During a Disease Outbreak*



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Emerging Infectious Diseases
and Biosecurity



From Viral to Verbal: The Role of Journalism During a Disease Outbreak

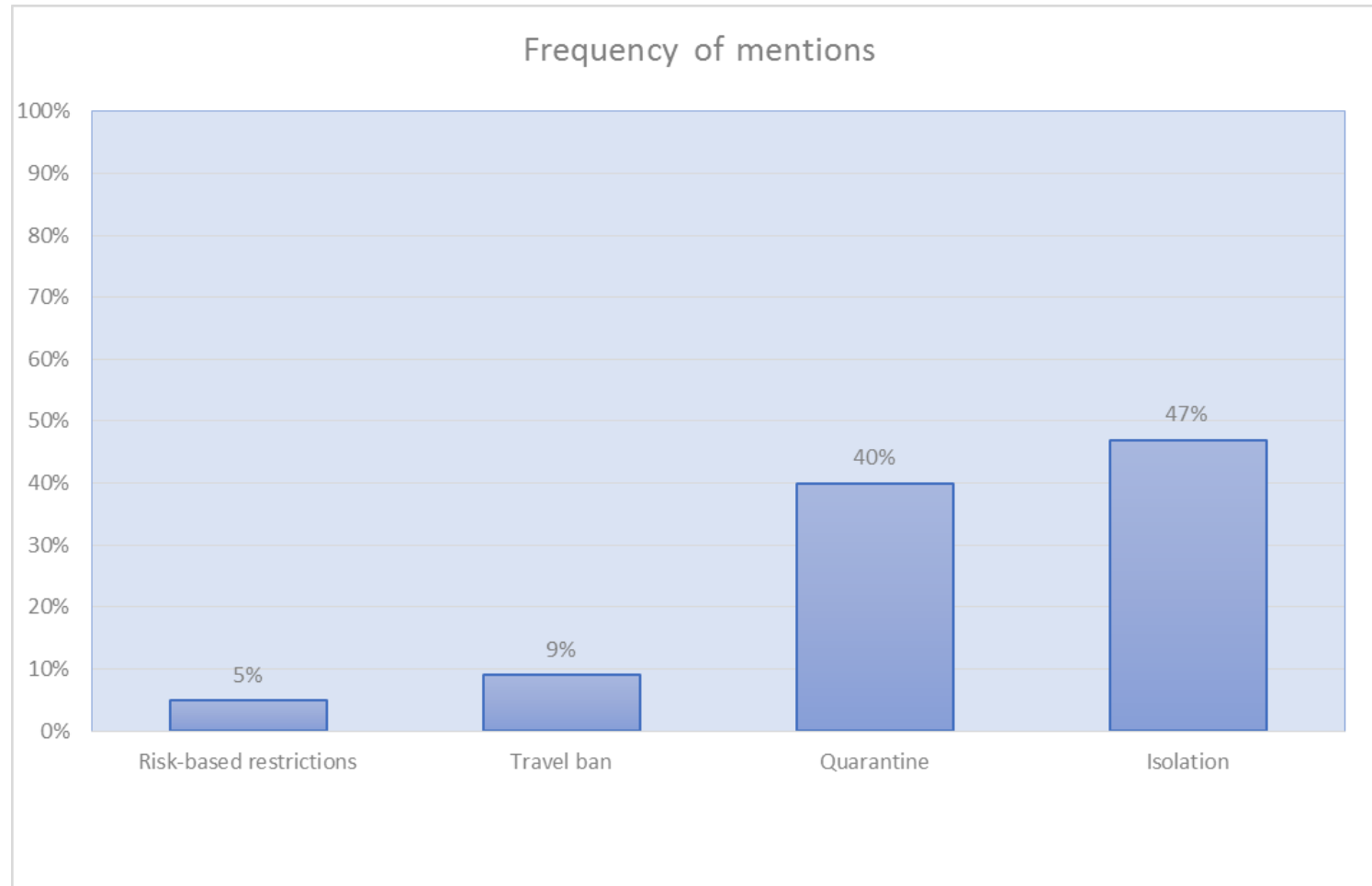
Frames & News Values

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Example: press-coverage of EVD in the US

- **U.S. Centre for Disease Control (2014):**
 - **Initial recommendation:** ‘provided public health authorities and partners with recommendations for monitoring people potentially exposed to Ebola and for evaluating their intended travel, including the application of movement restrictions when indicated’; ‘self-monitoring for most exposures, and controlled movement for higher risk exposures, with the goal of applying the least-restrictive measures necessary’. (my emphasis)
 - Risk-based restrictions
- **Sell et al. 2016:** Ebola-related policies addressed by media and CDC in the United States
 - Frequency of mentions of Ebola policy responses in print, television and internet news stories: 1 month before first case – two weeks after final Ebola death

Mentioned policies by the media:



- 'If public health policymakers do not introduce science-based policies in a timely manner, then other, less desirable policies may dominate the news media dialogue' (Sell et al. 2016: 119)

‘Every day, journalists must make [...] choices about what readers want or need to know. [...] Editors need [news judgement] to decide which flood of press releases and tips they get every day are worth pursuing, and which stories in each day’s paper deserve the most prominence.’

(Lanson and Stephens 1994: 10)

What to cover? How to cover it? What to emphasize? Who to talk to?
When to proceed/hold back? etc.

News Values

- What are 'news values'?
 - 'the criteria employed by journalists to measure and therefore to **judge the 'newsworthiness' of events**' and to 'select, order and prioritise the collection and production of news' (Richardson 2007: 91)
 - '**properties of events or stories, or as criteria/principles** that are applied by news workers in order to select events or stories as news or to choose the structure and order of reporting' (Bednarek and Caple 2014)
 - '**(imagined) preferences of the expected audience**' (Richardson 2007: 94)
 - 'function as **guidelines for decision-making** and are invoked, unconsciously or explicitly, at every step of the news process' (Cotter 2010; 67)
- What is news?
- News values afford decision-making parameters.
- Note: space, content mix, deadlines are of course factors that influence production as well

News values and their definitions

News Values	Definition
Negativity	Negative aspects of an event or issue
Timeliness	Relevance of an event or issue in terms of time: recent, ongoing, about to happen or seasonal
Proximity	Geographical or cultural nearness of an event or issue
Superlativeness	Large scope or scale of an event or issue
Eliteness	High status of individuals, organisations or nations involved in an event or issue
Impact	High significance of an event or issue in terms of its effects/consequences
Novelty	New and/or unexpected aspects of an event or issue, including eyewitness reports
Personalisation	Personal or 'human' face of an event or issue; adherence to expectations
Consonance	Stereotypical aspects of an event or issue; adherence to expectations
Aesthetic Appeal	Aesthetically pleasing aspects of an event or issue

Framing

‘To frame is to ***select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text***, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.’ (Entman 1993: 52, my emphasis)

- ‘[T]he social world is ... a kaleidoscope of potential realities, any of which can be readily evoked by altering the ways in which observations are framed and categorized.’ (Edelman 1993; 232)
- **Selection**: choosing to highlight some bits of information of an event over others
- **Salience**: increase of salience leads to higher probability that receivers will perceive the information, discern meaning and thus process it, and store in memory
- Prime elements an event differently, establishing the **salience of the one over the other** (Sniderman et al. 1991)

Summarising Thoughts

- ❖ News values as decision making parameters guiding journalists' selection of events, stories and elements of these
- ❖ Frames call attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements, which might lead audiences to have different reactions. (Entman 1993: 55)
- ❖ *'The news stories we read and hear are the end-product of a series of decisions, practices, and values that are fundamental to the news community'* (Cotter 2010; 87)

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Ebola: the roles of scientific and non scientific information



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Science communication and behavioural change



- International scene



The message: Theoretical perspectives

- Freire (1998) Extension or communication
 - Extension assumes message is going into a blank cognition
 - Communication assumes no one is ignorant and what you already know will influence what is new
- Habermas (1984; 1987; Burkart, 2007) Communicative action
 - Conditions for mutual understanding
 - intelligibility – unambiguous
 - truth - both parties accept the object exists
 - trustworthiness – parties trust each other
 - legitimacy - mutually accepted values and norms

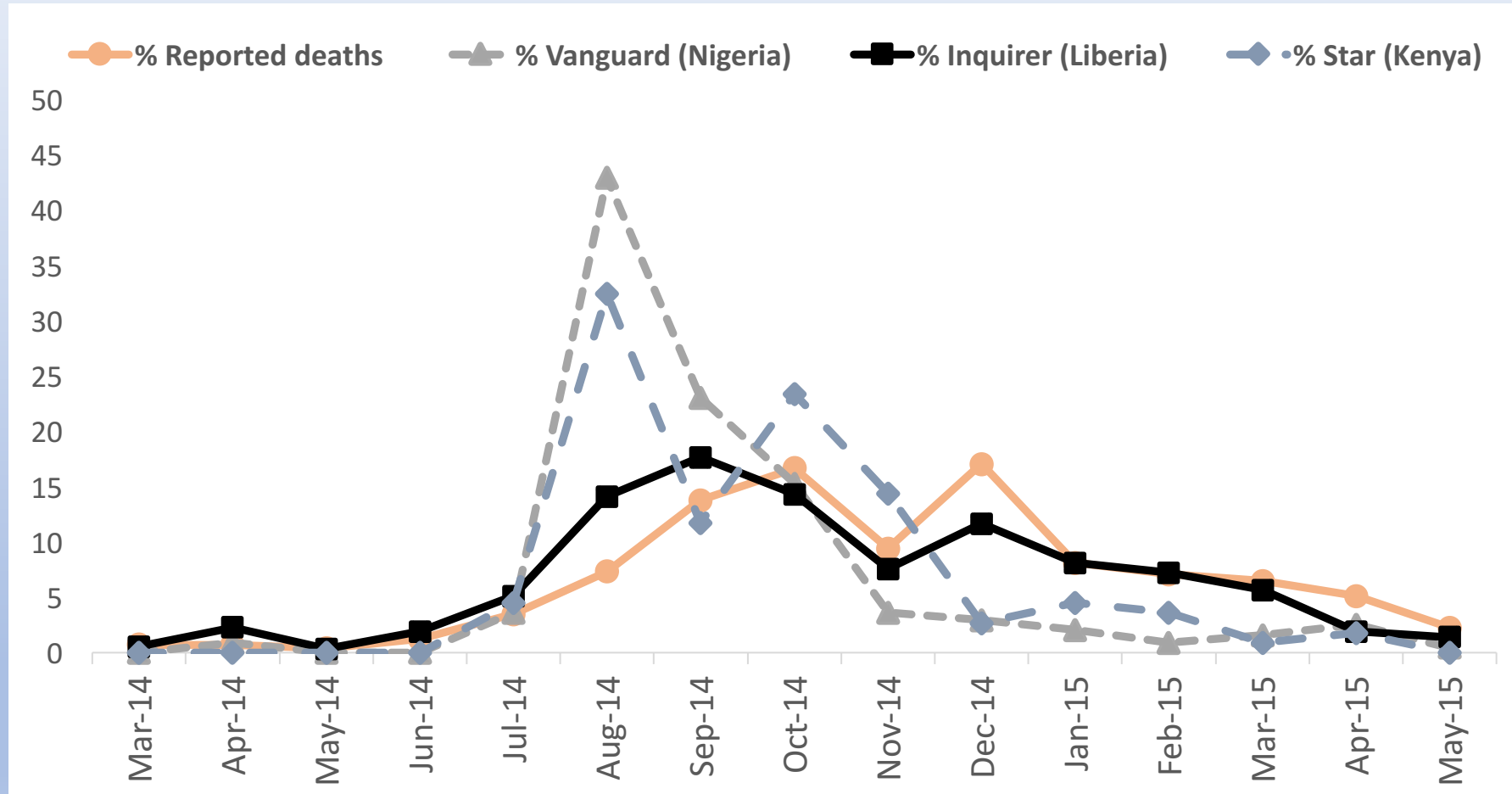
The message: Theoretical perspectives

- Luhmann (1986) *The autopoiesis of social systems*
 - In addition to “information” and “utterance”, communication includes understanding but does not function to produce a consensus, instead, results in an open situation of acceptance or rejection.
- Moscovici (1976; 2008) *La Psychanalyse, son image et son public*
 - Three communication modalities: Propaganda, Propagation or Diffusion lead to Rejection, Accommodation or Acceptance
(the reception of psychoanalysis in France in the 50's)

The Ebola message in African newspapers

	2013	2014	2015	Total
West Africa				
This Day (Nigeria)		804	112	916
Vanguard (Nigeria)		699	102	801
The Inquirer (Liberia)		559	221	780
Concord Times (Sierra Leone)		85	349	434
The Analyst (Liberia)		237	3	240
Daily Observer (The Gambia)		130	24	154
FOROYAA (The Gambia)		44	22	66
Cameroon Tribune (Cameroon)		34	15	49
Ghanaian Chronicle (Ghana)		20	16	36
East/Southern Africa				
The Star (Kenya)		191	51	242
The New Times (Rwanda)	3	121	32	156
The Herald (Zimbabwe)		101	32	133
The Times of Zambia (Zambia)		55	18	73
New Era (Namibia)	1	44	6	51
The Namibian (Namibia)	3	31	6	40
The Independent (Uganda)	6	10	7	23
Zimbabwe Independent		4	3	7
TOTAL	13	3169	1019	4201

The Ebola message in African newspapers



- Newspaper coverage and reported deaths
- Mass media as mirror of public anxiety over disease incidence

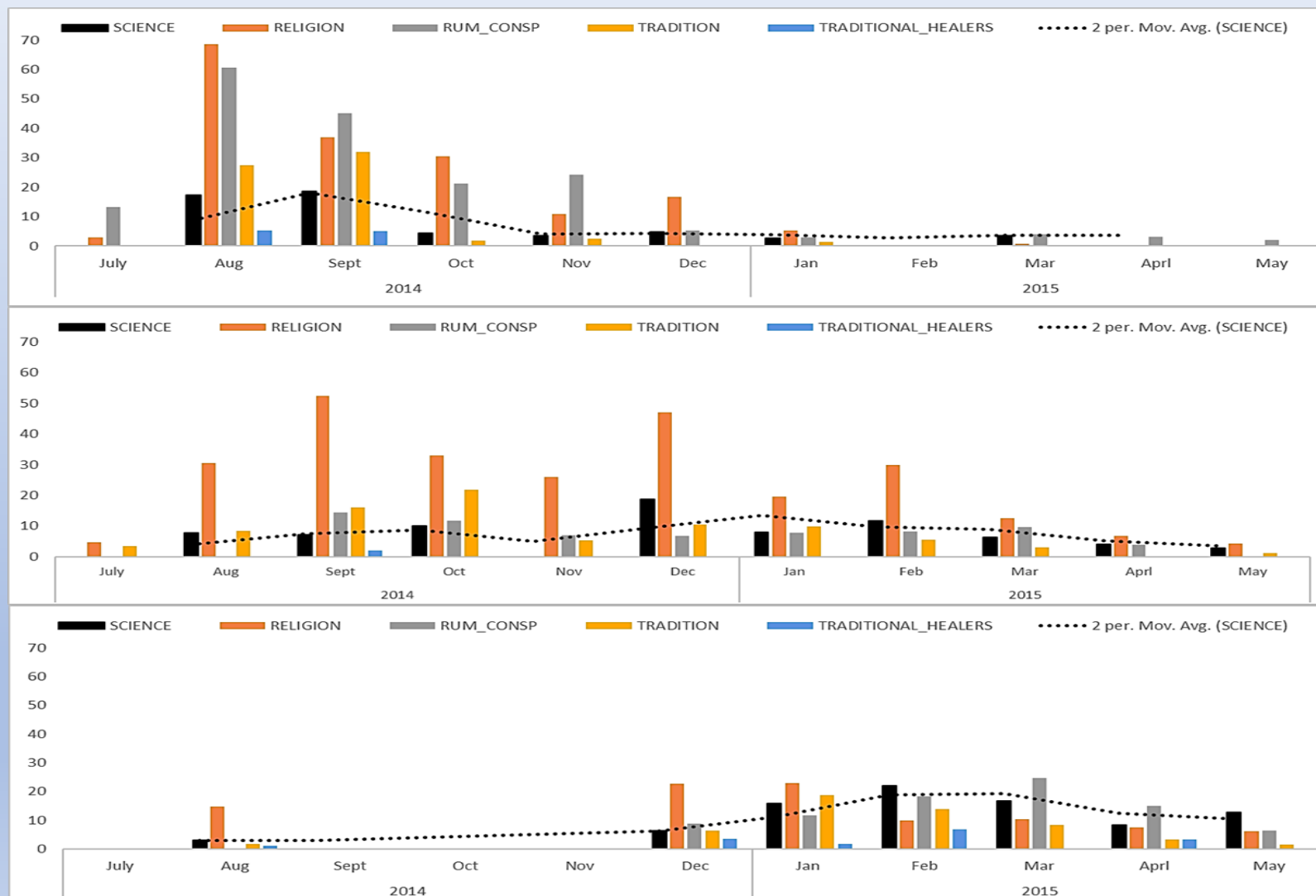
The Ebola message: scientific information

Theory	Keywords	Meaning units	Frames
Scientific information	Contracted, disease, infection, risk, transmit, vaccine, virus, viral disease	Ebola symptoms: Fever, vomiting, headache, muscle pain, diarrhoea, nausea, bleeding, etc	Containment Diffusion
		The 'uneducated' vs inadequate government responses	Obstacle
		Dengue, Lassa, Malaria symptoms: Fever, vomiting, headache, muscle pain, diarrhoea, nausea, bleeding.	Obstacle

The Ebola message: non scientific information

Theory	Keywords	Meaning units	Frames
Traditions	Traditions, mourning, mats, traditional healers, spiritual healers	mourning, hugging, washing	Obstacle
		claims to cure	
		suspension of mourning, hugging etc.	Containment accommodation
Religious beliefs	Christian, religion church, mosque, Muslim, prayers. Spirits	laying of hands, praying for the sick	Obstacle
		Religious beliefs and gatherings Protection in prayer but avoid	Paradoxical accommodation
		Suspension of shaking hands, touching, care for sick	Containment accommodation
Rumours and conspiracy theories	Rumour, corruption	corruption, diversion, accountability.	Obstacle
		local remedy – salt, bitter kola	
		Rumours of spread of disease	Accommodation
	Conspiracy depopulation, racism, racist, stigma, terrorist, new world order	Conspiracy theories of spread	Stigma/revolt
		economics of an African disease	
		viral terrorism	
		bio terrorism, depopulation, new world order	

Td-idf: Stat importance of sci and non sci information



Graphs of monthly changes in td-idf from July 2014 (19) to May 2015 (29).

Top to bottom:

This Day newspaper, Nigeria;
The Inquirer, Liberia; *Concord Times* Sierra Leone*

*Data missing for September to November 2014.

Scientific and non scientific information

- Ebola as a scientific phenomenon

- The EVD shuts down the immune system, causing high fever, headache muscle pain, weakness, headaches, muscle aches and chills. Loss of appetite, feel diarrhoea and nausea.
- Similarity with Lassa fever, Dengue fever and Malaria fever

- Ebola as spiritual disease – paradoxical accommodation

- pastors were laying hands on the sick to cure them of “spiritual attacks”
- a church leader told pastors that all those who fasted for 100 days should have no fear of Ebola but should avoid laying hands the sick
- We must however keep away from Ebola but “The Prophet said: (There is no "Adwa") i.e. transfer of a disease by itself, but with the permission of Allah ...

Scientific and non scientific information

- Ebola the plague of love and tradition
 - Bassonians, Kru and Grebo people spend time on mats mourning their dead ones and wash the bodies as part of traditional rites
 - Many traditional secret societies believe that following a covenant, a dead member's ghost will torment others if they failed to observe the traditional rites of passage of washing the corpse
 - Bat meat is good meat and social status enhancer
- African herbal cure
 - Promises of a cure was common on radio advertisements.
 - Preventive remedies: A soap from Liberia; drinking and bathing in salt water, so strong it was relayed by town criers and in churches and mosques; eating bitter cola

Scientific and non scientific information

- Rumours and conspiracy theories

- Bitter Kola and Nano Silver are not in the interest of western pharmaceuticals who are undermining the use of local cures
- Former Gambia's president, Yahya Jammeh described the treatment of westerners with new drugs and the neglect of Africans as racism ... "The same thing was also done for HIV/AIDS ... Then who created the virus".

- Corruption an opportunity for sleaze

- "We are so fraud - minded in Nigeria that even misfortunes excite us".
- Inadequate controls over the disbursement of funds; missing generators, inflated payroll, missing allocations.
- A community outreach worker: "They say ... 'we can give you a certificate from the Ministry of Health that it wasn't Ebola.' Sometimes it is \$40. Sometimes it is \$50. Then they offer bags to them and (the family) carry on their own thing."



Scientific and non scientific information

- Poverty: hunger versus disease; food before medicine
 - Ebola is real, residents say but criticized government's actions which restricted people's movement as a containment measure, but which also left many with few survival options
- Stigma (Goffman, 1963) Notes on the management of spoiled identity
 - West point, Liberia, the ETU was looted by residents shouting "No Ebola". A government official said the looting was to render the facility unusable and stop the influx of the sick to the area.
 - In Guinea, the Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders officials were attacked by locals. Eight awareness officials were killed in another incident. Similar attacks took place in Sierra Leone.
 - A homeless man said friends drove him away when he was sick fearing he might have been infected with the Ebola virus. An 80-year-old man was denied access to his home even after being discharged



Scientific and non scientific information

Oral Polio Vaccine Controversy in Nigeria (Falade, 2015)

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Total
Coverage	8	10	16	24	11	14	4	7	5	100
	Pre-revolt		Revolt					Post revolt		
Religious/Un-Islamic	6	10	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Western conspiracy	0	5	12	24	9	0	0	7	0	9
Effective Vaccine	78	67	47	69	87	40	11	33	27	57
Risk from vaccine	6	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Logistics/funding	0	10	29	4	0	53	89	60	73	26
Others/corruption	11	10	3	2	4	7	0	0	0	4
Percentage	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
No themes	4	5	6	5	3	3	2	3	2	

Scientific and non scientific information

Vaccination controversies in history (Falade, 2014: 2018!?)

Country	Year	Communication themes/suspected effects	Opposing groups	Vaccine
United States	1721 to 1722	Transmits syphilis, black plague, leprosy	Clergy and scientists	Smallpox
England	1840 to 1871	Mark of the beast, against civil liberties, transmits syphilis	Working class, reformers, church, scientists, etc	Smallpox
United States	1890 to 1922	Medical tyranny, coercion, un-Godly	Scientists, anti-vaccination League, Christian Scientists	Smallpox
Brazil	1904	Torture code, vile secretions expelled from sick animals	Middle class, elite, church, press, congress, etc	Smallpox
United Kingdom	1974	Neurological complications	Scientists, public	DTP
Japan	1975	Neurological complications	(Fallout of UK episode)	DTP
United Kingdom	1998	Autism	Scientists, public	MMR

Scientific and non scientific information

Vaccination controversies

Country	Year	Communication themes/suspected effects	Opposing groups	Vaccine
USA, Australia, New Zealand	1998+	Autism	Fallout of UK episode)	MMR
Cameroon	1990	Sterilising vaccine	Catholic priests and opposition politicians	Tetanus Toxoid
Tanzania	1990	Sterilising vaccine (anti-hCG)	Scientists, Islamic preacher	Tetanus Toxoid
Nigeria	2001 to 2009	Western conspiracy, contaminated with HIV and anti-fertility substances	Islamic groups, politicians, scientists	OPV
United States	Post 2000	Asthma, diabetes, Gullian-Barre syndrome, encephalopathy, autism and inflammatory bowel disease, mercury exposure, etc	Scientists, the public	DT, DTaP, DTP, Hepatitis B, Measles, OPV, MMR, Rubella