



## VISUAL COMMUNICATION AND THE REPORTING OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF ONLINE PICTURES

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### ABSTRACT

This work is focused on the online pictorial reportage of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. It identifies visual communication contents used in illustrating the nature of Corona Virus and the precautions and measures in preventing the spread of the virus. The work reviews the opinions of related scholars as they perceive the variables in the work. The symbolic interaction theory is used as the theoretical framework for the study, while content analysis is used as the research design. This study indicates that Corona Virus is a global threat and Nigerians should be on guide. The work also recommends that Government should not relent in its effort to ensure that citizens are encouraged to be covid-19 protocol compliant. It also recommends that graphic illustration like the use of pictures and diagram should be deployed for the illustration of covid-19 global updates, raising that pictures tend to be more powerful in the expression of Covid-19 messages than other scientific explanations which tend to be relatively laborious.

**Keywords:** Visual Communication, Covid-19, Pandemic, Nigeria, Online Pictures

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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Photography is one of the unique areas of study in Mass Communication. It is concerned with the study of photography, photographs and the uses and gratification that are generated there from. Photography is just an aspect of graphics of communication which include iconography, ideography, cartoons, graphic illustrations and other forms of artificial language for representation. It has grown from the physics of light, pinhole camera to the evolution of primitive cameras that make use of films to modern electronic and digital cameras. They have been widely used for conventional (often) photojournalism. Fundamentally, pictures or photographs are used as: memory jogger, representational photographs; art-aesthetics, for the expression of the beautiful, the sublime and the ugly and grotesque with the systematic and contemporary effective migration to online journalism: internet powered professional journalism, pictures on

the worldwide web are referred to as online pictures.

Expression-communication photographs are the preoccupation of photojournalist. They are mainly deployed for the purpose of passing messages from the photojournalist to the public. In the study of photojournalism, it is expected that journalistic photographs should be integrated pictures that are representational, artistic and expressional.

Online pictures are visual captures of objects or persons and creative works of art uploaded to the Internet using digitized technological devices like cameras, smart phones, scanners or laptops and other related gadgets. They are a portrayal of visual communication elements and a representation of the past, present and the future. Basically, pictures are appealing to sight and can be used to tell distinct stories for better understanding of a concept or phenomenon. They depict a situation for which they were taken for. Digital

technology has made it easier to communicate and illustrate using pictures because contents are more impactful when illustrated in pictorial symbolism.

Corona virus pandemic (COVID-19) was considered to have been reported widely in Nigeria using communicative pictures which portrayed the nature of the infectious disease, how it metamorphoses, spreads, kills and how it can be controlled. These communicative pictures gave an insight on how dangerous the pandemic would be if not prevented or controlled using all available measure including the media. The study therefore, is aimed at analyzing online pictures of COVID-19 in Nigeria, using visual communication elements.

When pictures are taken and uploaded online, they capture the viewer's sense of sight immediately and give a mental interpretation of what the pictures represent. This is in view that a picture can be more expressive than ten thousand words. However, some viewers are limited in recognizing the purpose of such pictures and how they can be interpreted when not properly labeled. By using visual communication elements to analyse COVID-19 pandemic online, one would have expected that the public would have followed COVID-19 protocol to avoid easy spread, yet this is not so. Could it have been that these pictures are not well presented? This study will explore people's mental capability and solve the problem of wrong, narrow or ambiguous interpretation of COVID-19 pandemic pictures.

The broad objective of the study therefore is to analyze online pictures of COVID-19 pandemic, using visual communication elements and to see if these pictures are causing the desired effect on COVID-19 communication. Other objectives are to: explore on visual communication elements in COVID-19 coverage, study on COVID-19 online pictures and their communication in Nigeria mass media, and establish how pictures can be interpreted by viewers through captioning and picture quality.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 The Concept of Visual Communication

Visual communication is as old as man in quest of sustainability. This has been from the period when human society and civilization had begun, when with the use of energy, they have the **study** to civilization. When human started harvesting and adapting various forms of energy for adaptation to complex **uses**. This means that, as complex as their development and sustainability requirements, humans became hungrier for communication as a means of broadcasting their information

Wilendsen (2012) posits thus: "The history of visual communication dates back to a time when writing was not yet invented, dates back to a time where history was persevered in paintings, found on rocks and in caves more than 40,000year ago". Fast forwarding to usage of ideograms up to the invention of the alphabet, it is safe to say that visual communication has always been part of our existence from the period of human quest to register information on what could enhance sustainable human development.

Vijay (2018), on the other hand posits that visual communication has become one of the important approaches used by most people to share information because it enables the use of maps of visual content for travelers who wish to manipulate their ways viewing the landmarks. He further explains that visual communication happens in newspapers, instructional manuals, television, social media, websites and emails. In his view, they are meant to facilitate the processes of education information, transformation and transfer culture, economic development, sustainable environment, cultivation, harvesting and shaping, and for entertainment and for effective health management communication.

Sless (1981, p.187) asserts that Visual communication is the means of conveyance of ideas and information in form that can be seen. In other words, visual communication

in part or whole relies on eyesight. "In this modern era, Smith, (2005, p123) posits that "visual communication is a broad spectrum that include signs, typography, drawing, graphic design, illustration, industrial design, advertising, animation, colours and electronic resources. This takes us to the use of technology in creating visual effects. Rothwell (2010) explains that visual communication makes use of video experts and projection equipment like PowerPoint presentations, overhead projectors, computer projectors which enables pictures and slides to be easily taken right from a computer either online or from a saved file and are blown up or shown on a large screen. The above scholars view visual communication in terms of what can be seen, what can be observed and what can be projected to engage our cognitive memory and give interpretation to the object made visual.

## 2.2 Elements of Visual Communication

Clarkson (2015) asserts that graphics are elements of visual communication. They Include position, colour, size, shape and orientation. These graphic elements help in making a figure or poster. They are basically icons, photos, texts and titles. They are used to create contrast, alignment, repetition and proximity. According to InforGraphic Design Team, there are seven elements of visual communication as follows:

**1.Colour:** It is the most essential element which decorates, emphasize and categorises a visual design colour, communicates emotionally and optically. Warm colours advance while cool colours recede when used to enhance an effect or form in a representation.

**2 Shape:** This element has the magnitude prowess of grabbing audience's attention and creating emotional effect on them. Visual designers can metamorphose any design with available shapes obtained.

**3. Texture:** This is the rough, smooth, shallow, deep, regular or irregular surface of an object. Texture enhances visual experience communicated to the audience

and amplifies the context of the content conveyed. Texture can be used to Photoshop by linking or joining one surface to another.

**4. Tones:** This is the variation of intensified colour. It is used to highlight or shade an object to make it 3-dimensional. Tone helps users to appreciate real colours by giving an image hard or soft look, which can be identified by the value, tint, shade and the percentage of tone applied.

**5. Figure-ground:** This is the ability to create distinctions between the image (figure) and the background (ground). Some designers may decide to hide or emphasize a figure using contrast to emphasize the background on which the figure is placed.

**6. Balance:** This can be symmetrical or asymmetrical. Symmetrical is visual which two sides are nearly the same and can produce a mirror image of each other. Asymmetrical is when two sides of a visual cannot mirror each other to achieve balance. Symmetrical balance creates a stable composition and is mainly used to present instructional visual. Asymmetrical balance is mostly used to encourage audience to interact, query, or provoke thoughts on the design.

**7. Hierarchy:** This position influence on the object. It is obvious that the mirror nearer to the center or the top may attract the audience attention more. Hierarchy enables the audience explore the objects one after the other from a focal point of navigation where the most important information is placed. Hierarchy uses position, scale, colour and shape to convey useful information.

## 2.3 COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

Historically, Corona virus was first identified as a human Corona Virus in 1965, and caused common cool. Researchers discovered similar varieties in animals too and decided to name this variety of viruses after their crown like appearance. The Federal Ministry of Health discovered and confirmed on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2020 in view of a Corona Virus disease (Covid19) case in Lagos State, Nigeria. Toward the end of this pandemic, scientists discovered another variance of

covid19; the omicron BF7 variance. Fortunately, however, this did not pose as much challenges as Covid-19. For the records WHO identified aside other variance like covid19 Alpha b.1.1.7+ e484k in December 2020, n/a variance b.1.1.7 in 2020 +e484k in December 2020, Epsilon variance b.1.4.27/b.1.4.29 September 2020, n/a variance b.1.616 (in February 2021). Indeed, researchers and communication experts are doing systematic studies on the possible consequences, though this is not the fulcrum of this study.

Corona virus is a severe acute respiratory syndrome COVID-19 which outbreak is a severe acute respiratory was first noticed in was in 2019, in three people with pneumonia, associated with acute respiratory illness in Wuhan, China in December 2019. According to Islam (2020), "Symptoms of COVID-19 are variable, but often include fever, cough, headache, fatigue, breathing difficulties and loss of smell and taste." As reported by World Health Organization (WHO) in 2020. COVID-19 is spread when an infected person's droplet or liquid from the mouth or nose, when they cough or sneeze, speak, sing or some time breathe is transmitted to close-contact-person through nose, mouth or eyes. Such infected or carriers of the virus can still be contagious and infectious whether they have symptoms or not, especially two days before symptoms appear.

The risks of contacting COVID-19 virus are high in places with the '3Cs', these are crowded places, closed contact places, and confined places. Therefore, to reduce the risk of spreading the disease, one must adhere to the following precautions:

- 1) Follow relevant information on local-guidance-check made available by health workers and government.
- 2) Wear a face mask when in contact with other people.
- 3) Wash your hands with soap and water and do not forget to carry alcohol-based hand sanitizer on you.

- 4) Avoid crowded and closed-door settings including events in poorly ventilated places.
- 5) Stay at least one meter away from people.
- 6) Avoid touching surfaces in public places and clean surfaces you come in contact with using disinfectant.
- 7) Cover your sneezes and cough with a bent elbow and clean with tissue immediately, discard the tissue neatly after used.
- 8) Avoid hand check and embrace when greeting people.

In Nigeria, the index case of COVID-19 was confirmed when an Italian citizen tested positive on the 27th of February 2020. Within a month, Nigeria recorded 139 cases with at least two deaths. In August 2020, there was increased in cases despite the lockdown imposed by the federal and state governments between March to July 2020. The total cases were 45,008 with 1,013 deaths recorded. Jacobs, Ezekiel and Okeke, Malachy (2022).

## 2.4 Theoretical Framework

The importance of theories in research cannot be over emphasized as theories help to explain, shape, direct, frame and evaluate any phenomenon it is used on. Theories are the support for describing and predicting phenomenon. They help to link facts and prevent fragmented studies. Thus, this work used the following theory as a framework.

### 2.4.1 The Symbolic Interaction Theory

This theory was proposed by Lakossa and Reitle with contributors as George mead and Hebert Blummer in 1993. The theory assumes that communication occurs through the creation of shared significant symbols, Images, mental pictures and values. These symbols do not only represent events but define such events in a way that indicates a response. It avers that symbols or pictures, are veritable instruments for proper human interaction in no human society. Therefore, man must construct and live in a world of meaning, social life can proceed if members of a society largely share the meaning of symbols. This study gives a pictorial

representation of COVID-19 pandemic reported online in Nigeria. The images and symbols interacted with the viewers and gave a vivid illustration of the virus where words failed. It is of importance that the Symbolic Interaction Theory suit the frame of this work.

## 2.5 METHODOLOGY

This work is a content analysis of online pictures of COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria. This method was chosen because it is best for pictures analysis. The pictures were categorized according to event and purposive sampling technique was used to select representative sample with the intention of studying the characteristics of the selected samples.

## 2.6 PICTORIAL PRESENTATION of COVID-19 PANDEMIC REPORT

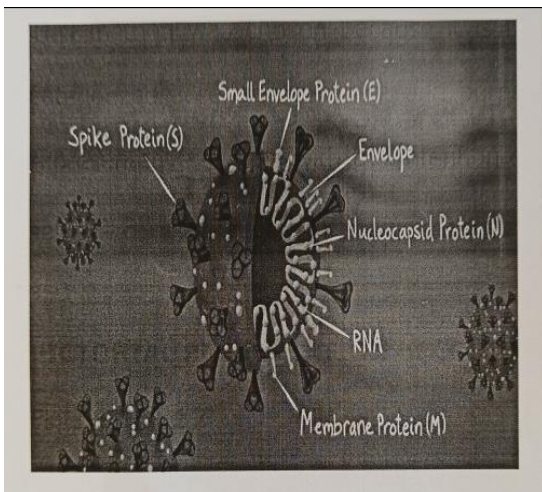


Figure 1 ([www.blog.addgene.org](http://www.blog.addgene.org))

Figures 1 and 2 are pictures of the nature of Corona virus, showing what the virus is made up of. These pictures consisting of visual

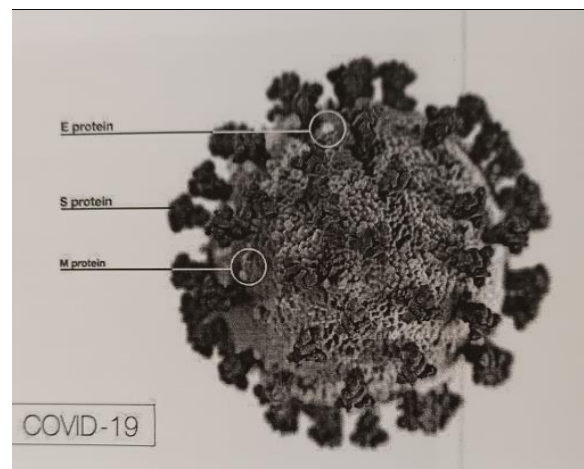


Figure 2 ([www.covid-19.ncdc.gov.ng](http://www.covid-19.ncdc.gov.ng))

elements of shapes, colors, texture, balance, etc., were used to create awareness on how the virus metamorphose.

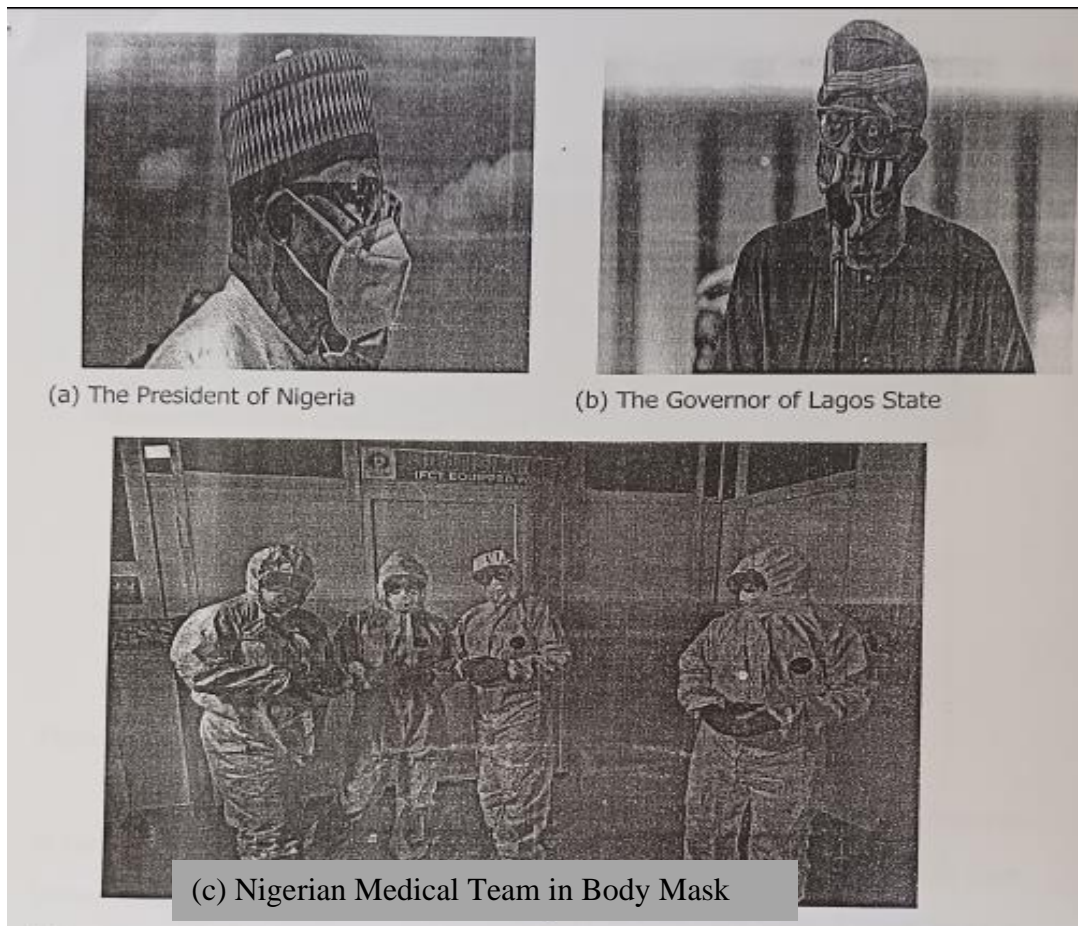


Figure 3 (a: [www.guardiannigeria.com](http://www.guardiannigeria.com), b: [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com), c: [www.ncdc.gov.ng](http://www.ncdc.gov.ng))

Figure 3 (a, b & c) are representatives of the consistent use of nose/body masks by Nigerians during the pandemic. Similar pictures, graphics, cartoons and posters were

effectively used to enable Nigerians know the importance of nose masks as a preventive measure of the virus.

**Know the symptoms of COVID-19, which can include the following:**

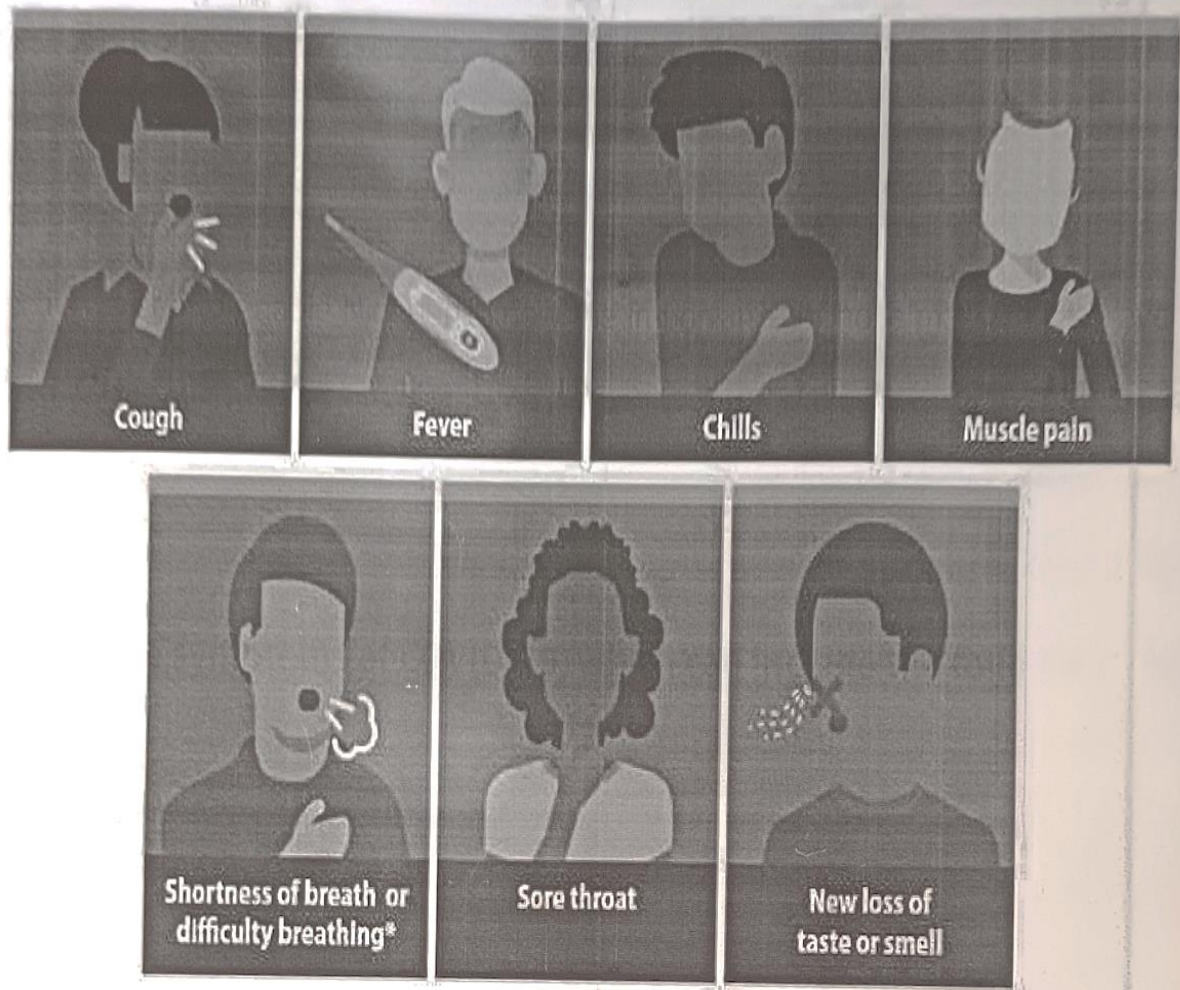


Figure 4: [www.al.com](http://www.al.com)

Fever, continuous dry cough, tiredness, loss of taste, smell, etc., are symptoms of Corona virus as illustrated in the Figure 4. Whether

infected or not, people were advised to always cover their sneezes and cough with their bent elbow if tissue paper is not handy.

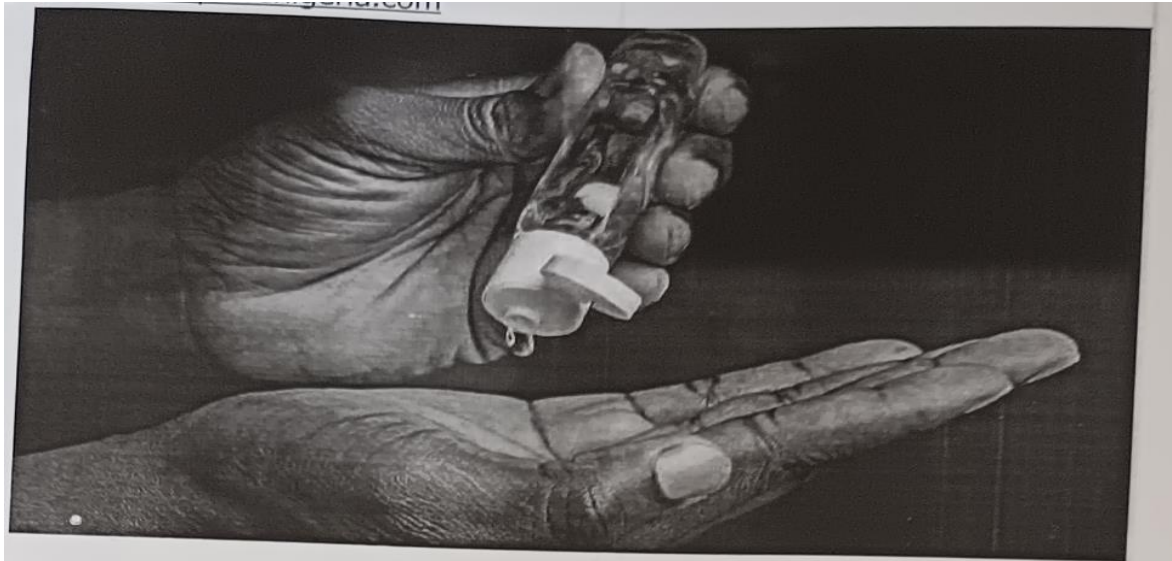


Figure 5: [www.pulsenigeria.com](http://www.pulsenigeria.com)

Figure 5 depicts the relevance of sanitizers during COVID-19 pandemic. The human hand is constantly in contact with surfaces, hence the need to keep it always clean.

People were advised to use alcohol-based hand sanitizers to avoid the spread of the virus.



Figure 6: [www.ncdc.gov.ng](http://www.ncdc.gov.ng)

Owing to the fact that Corona virus is characterized by high fever, thermometers were used to check people's temperature to

identify serious cases of fever during the pandemic, as illustrated in Figure 6.



Figure 7: [www.brookings.edu.com](http://www.brookings.edu.com)

Figure 7 is an illustration of how Nigerians were expected to wash their hands using running water in order not to contact Corona

virus. Pictures of these illustrations were in many ways used to inform the masses of necessary precautions.

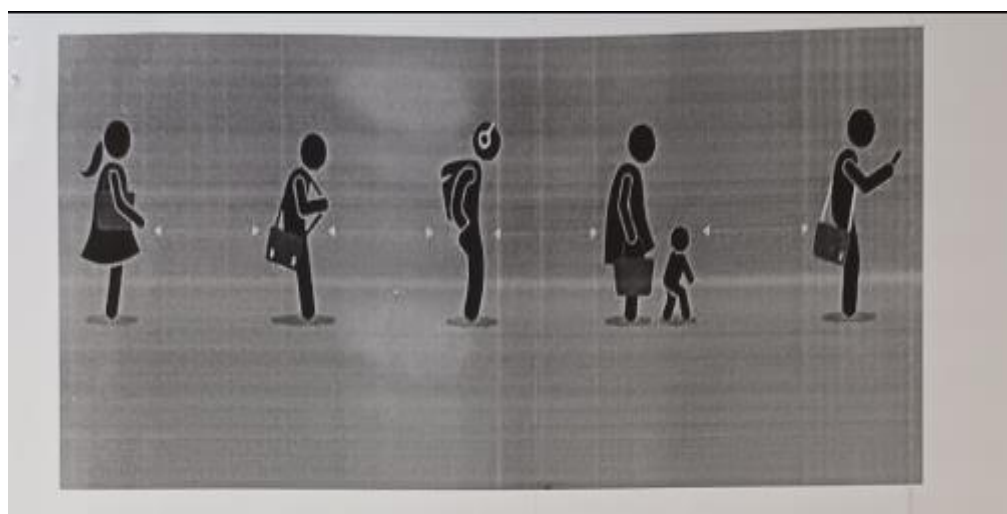


Figure 8: [www.nigeriahealthwatch.com](http://www.nigeriahealthwatch.com)

Social distancing is portrayed in Figure 8. To control effectively the spread of Corona virus, Nigerians were advised to keep a distance of at least one meter away from other contacts, shapes, balance, texture and figure-ground were used in this reportage. All of the displayed pictures are from online sources. They indicate the measures used to tackle the killer virus and control its spread.

## 2.7 SUMMARY

The negative effects of COVID-19 on the socio-economic lives of Nigerians are lingering. When the situation was severe, the lockdown in major cities disrupted the nation's economic growth as people were asked to work from home. Considering that Nigeria is digitally backward, everything was on hold until the lockdown was relaxed.

Nigerian students missed a full academic year and all worship centres were closed for more than three months. Many social reduced including social interactions as social distancing is one of the precautions of COVID-19. After the lockdown, civil, and private workers resumed work and businesses reopened. Currently, Nigerian schools are in session and worship centres are fully operational. However, Nigerians are still reminded that COVID-19 is a global threat and everyone have to be on guard. According to Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), Nigeria have so far recorded 164,684 cases of Corona virus. With 154,687 recovered cases and 2,061 deaths.

## 2.8 CONCLUSION

Most cases and preventive measures of Corona virus were illustrated in pictures, cartoons, graphics and many other forms of visuals. These visuals portrayed symbolic images, textures, shapes, colors, tones, balance and figure-ground. They vividly made it easy for Nigerians to understand the messages of all the procedures to watch out for. NCDC did not relent in giving updates when due to enable Nigerians have first-hand information on global effects and consequences of negligence by citizens NCDC also ensured that suspected cases were isolated and sick patients were quarantined. The federal and state government did well to set up test and treatment centres in all the states. Palliative given by distinguished philanthropist and companies were distributed to respective States to caution the effects of COVID-19 in Nigeria.

## 2.9 RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the global health threat Corona virus constitute, it is advisable to make more research on how to combat corona virus outbreak, with vaccinations that are readily available. Treatment centres should be advanced to meet world standards. Continuous improvement and follow up by Nigerians will go a long way to stop the

spread of the virus and eventually eliminate it, therefore effective online and offline pictorial illustrations of Corona virus updates should be intensified by NCDC and government. As usual, all travelers into the country should be tested, screened and treated as the cases demand.

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[www.pulsenigeria.com](http://www.pulsenigeria.com)