



Content Analysis of Broadcast Media Health Programmes on Illicit Drug Use in Enugu Metropolis, Nigeria

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Abstract

Illicit drug use remains a significant public health and social concern in Nigeria, particularly among young people, prompting the use of broadcast media for anti-drug communication. This study analysed broadcast media health programmes on illicit drug use in Enugu Metropolis, Nigeria. Specifically, it examined the dominant themes, programme formats, and framing strategies employed in anti-drug communication. The study adopted a qualitative documentary research design and thematic content analysis. Data were obtained from selected broadcast media health programmes, campaign reports, policy documents, and publications from relevant national and international institutions published or broadcast between 2020 and 2025. Documents were purposively selected based on their relevance to the study objectives. Data analysis followed six stages: familiarisation, open coding, categorisation, theme generation, theme review, and interpretation. Findings revealed that the programmes emphasised the health, psychological, social, and legal consequences of illicit drug use, alongside prevention, rehabilitation, and community participation. Public service announcements, radio jingles, documentaries, health talk shows, expert interviews, news reports, and panel discussions were the predominant formats. Illicit drug use was predominantly framed as a public health, social, and law enforcement issue, with emphasis on preventive education and rehabilitation. The study recommends sustained thematic coverage, diverse programme formats, and stronger collaboration between broadcast media organisations and public health institutions to promote consistent, evidence-based anti-drug communication.

Keywords: Broadcast media, health programmes, illicit drug use, thematic content analysis, anti-drug communication

Introduction

Illicit drug use remains one of the most significant public health and social challenges confronting countries across the world. The growing consumption of psychoactive substances has been associated with numerous adverse consequences, including increased crime, violence, mental health disorders, poor educational attainment, unemployment, and reduced economic productivity. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), an estimated 292 million people used drugs globally in 2022, reflecting the continued expansion of illicit drug markets and the emergence of new synthetic substances (UNODC, 2024). Similarly, the World Health Organization (WHO) identifies substance use disorders as a major contributor to preventable morbidity and mortality, particularly among young people, and emphasizes prevention, health promotion, rehabilitation, and effective health communication as essential components of comprehensive drug control strategies (WHO, 2024).

Nigeria continues to experience a substantial burden of illicit drug use, particularly among adolescents and young adults (Obadeji et al., 2020; Ajayi & Somefun, 2020). Studies among



Nigerian young people have documented significant levels of substance use, with 24.5% of university students reporting lifetime recreational drug use and 17.5% reporting current use (Ajayi & Somefun, 2020). Cannabis, tramadol, codeine, and other pharmaceutical substances are among the drugs commonly used non-medically in Nigeria (Dumbili, 2020). The consequences of illicit drug use extend beyond individual health and include psychological distress, aggression and violence, sexual violence, seizures, and other social harms, thereby creating broader challenges for individuals, families, and society (Dumbili, 2020; Obadeji et al., 2020).

In response to these challenges, health communication has become an important component of drug prevention strategies. Broadcast media, particularly radio and television, provide platforms for disseminating health information to large and diverse audiences through documentaries, public service announcements, talk shows, interviews, news reports, and educational programmes. These media platforms are widely utilized by government agencies, public health institutions, and civil society organizations to communicate information on the dangers of illicit drug use, available support services, and national drug control initiatives. From the perspective of Agenda-Setting Theory, sustained media coverage contributes to defining issues of public importance by giving prominence to particular social and health concerns, thereby shaping public discourse surrounding those issues (McCombs, 2005).

Although broadcast media have become central to public health communication on substance abuse, existing scholarship has largely concentrated on measuring the prevalence, determinants, and consequences of illicit drug use or assessing audience awareness through survey-based studies (Gureje et al., 2007; Obadeji et al., 2020; Ajayi & Somefun, 2020; Orekyeh et al., 2023). Comparatively little attention has been devoted to examining how broadcast media health programmes themselves construct, frame, and communicate anti-drug messages (Orekyeh et al., 2023; Okedi et al., 2024; Adediran, 2023). Consequently, there is limited documentary evidence on the nature, thematic focus, communication strategies, and programme formats employed in broadcast media campaigns addressing illicit drug use in Nigeria (Adediran, 2023; Orekyeh et al., 2023; Okedi et al., 2024). This represents an important gap in the health communication literature because understanding the content and presentation of anti-drug messages provides valuable insight into the communication approaches adopted by media organizations and public health stakeholders.

Given this gap, a qualitative documentary research design is appropriate because it enables a systematic examination and interpretation of existing broadcast media materials and related documentary sources. Through documentary analysis and qualitative content analysis, the study investigates how health programmes on broadcast media present information on illicit drug use, the dominant themes emphasized, and the communication strategies employed in anti-drug campaigns. Rather than measuring audience influence or behavioural outcomes, the study focuses on analysing the content and characteristics of broadcast media health programmes as documented in existing media materials and relevant institutional publications.

Against this background, this study examines broadcast media health programmes on illicit drug use through a qualitative documentary analysis. Specifically, the study identifies the dominant themes communicated in anti-drug programmes, examines the broadcast programme formats employed in disseminating anti-drug messages, and analyses how these programmes frame information on the health and social consequences of illicit drug use. The findings are expected to contribute to the literature on health communication by providing a deeper



understanding of media-based drug prevention messaging and by offering evidence to inform policymakers, media practitioners, public health agencies, and other stakeholders involved in the design and implementation of drug prevention communication strategies.

Literature Review

Broadcast Media Health Programmes

Broadcast media health programmes refer to organized health communication initiatives disseminated through radio and television to provide information, educate the public, and promote awareness of health-related issues (Rimal & Lapinski, 2009; Oyo-Ita et al., 2016; Adebayo et al., 2023). These programmes are delivered through various formats, including documentaries, public service announcements, health talk shows, interviews, news features, and educational dramas. According to Schiavo (2014), health communication involves the strategic use of communication processes and media channels to improve public understanding of health issues and support informed decision-making. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) similarly recognizes mass media communication as an important component of health promotion because of its capacity to disseminate health information to large and diverse populations.

Broadcast media possess several characteristics that make them suitable for public health communication. Their extensive geographical coverage, accessibility, credibility, and ability to reach heterogeneous audiences simultaneously have made radio and television indispensable tools for communicating public health messages, particularly in developing countries. Rather than merely transmitting information, broadcast media also determine the prominence given to particular health issues through repeated coverage and message emphasis (source?). Consequently, broadcast media health programmes have become an integral component of public communication strategies on immunization, HIV/AIDS, COVID-19, malaria prevention, and substance abuse.

Despite this recognized role, scholars such as Kreuter and McClure (2004) and Kreuter et al. (2003) have argued that the effectiveness of health communication depends not only on message frequency but also on message content, presentation, audience relevance, and cultural appropriateness. This suggests that analysing the content and communication strategies employed in broadcast health programmes is essential for understanding how health messages are constructed and disseminated.

Broadcast Programme Formats in Anti-Drug Communication

Broadcast media employ diverse programme formats to communicate anti-drug messages. Common formats include documentaries, public service announcements (PSAs), panel discussions, interviews with health professionals and recovering drug users, news reports, educational dramas, and phone-in programmes (Adenekan et al., 2024; Aniukwu, 2024; Adediran, 2023). Each format serves different communication purposes and appeals to different audience segments (Adenekan et al., 2024; Aniukwu, 2024). Public service announcements are generally short, persuasive messages intended to raise awareness and encourage preventive behaviour (Adediran, 2023). Documentaries provide detailed explanations of drug-related issues using factual evidence, expert opinions, and real-life experiences (Aniukwu, 2024). Health discussion programmes and interviews create opportunities for experts to explain the causes, consequences, and prevention of illicit drug use, while educational dramas employ storytelling to illustrate the social and health implications of substance abuse (Adenekan et al., 2024). News reports, on the other hand, provide current information on drug-related incidents, enforcement activities, and policy developments (Adediran, 2023).



Communication scholars argue that the selection of programme formats influences the clarity, credibility, and accessibility of health messages (Kreuter & McClure, 2004; Oyo-Ita et al., 2016). Consequently, examining the programme formats adopted in anti-drug campaigns provides useful insights into the communication strategies employed by media organizations and public health institutions (Adediran, 2023; Aniukwu, 2024; Orekyeh et al., 2023).

Framing of Illicit Drug Use in Broadcast Media Health Programmes

Media framing refers to the process through which communication messages emphasize particular aspects of an issue while downplaying others, thereby shaping how audiences interpret that issue (Entman, 1993). Within the context of illicit drug use, studies have shown that media coverage can frame substance abuse as a public health concern, a criminal justice issue, a moral problem, or a broader socio-economic challenge (Orsini, 2017; Addie & Lee, 2024; Mabokela & Muswede, 2024). Studies of media representations of substance use have identified recurring frames involving health consequences, psychological and social effects, criminality, governance, treatment, rehabilitation, and prevention. In Nigeria, Addie and Lee (2024), for example, identified causal, consequence, and solution frames in newspaper coverage of opioid abuse, including trauma coping, poor governance, criminality, pharmacovigilance, rehabilitation services, and strengthening societal values. Similarly, Orsini (2017) found that U.S. television news coverage of heroin and cocaine emphasized particular narratives and frames that constructed drug use as a social and policy problem. These findings indicate that media representations can give greater prominence to particular explanations, consequences, and solutions while giving less attention to others (Addie & Lee, 2024; Orsini, 2017; Mabokela & Muswede, 2024).

The way anti-drug messages are framed may therefore influence public discourse by giving prominence to particular solutions, policy priorities, and intervention strategies. Addie and Lee (2024) demonstrate this through their identification of solution frames centred on pharmacovigilance, policy responses, drug rehabilitation services, and societal values, while Mabokela and Muswede (2024) similarly examined the dominant frames used in South African press coverage of illicit drugs. Documentary analysis of programme content can therefore be used to identify the dominant perspectives, themes, and communication approaches through which drug-related issues are presented (Addie & Lee, 2024; Orsini, 2017).

The reviewed literature demonstrates that media remain important channels for communicating information about substance use through different communication approaches and formats. Existing studies have examined drug-use prevalence, audience responses, campaign effectiveness, and media representations, although the methodological approaches and media platforms differ across studies (Ajayi & Somefun, 2020; Orekyeh et al., 2023; Okedi et al., 2024; Addie & Lee, 2024). For example, Orekyeh et al. (2023) examined the effectiveness of radio stations in creating awareness about drug abuse, while Okedi et al. (2024) investigated the impact of radio advocacy on drug abuse among youths in the Niger Delta. In contrast, Addie and Lee (2024) used qualitative framing analysis to examine Nigerian newspaper coverage of opioid abuse and identified multiple causal, consequence, and solution frames.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Agenda-Setting Theory, developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972. The theory emerged from their landmark study of the 1968 United States presidential election and was first published in *Public Opinion Quarterly*. Agenda-Setting Theory posits that the mass media influence the prominence of issues in public discourse by



selecting, emphasizing, and repeatedly presenting certain topics over others. Rather than determining what people should think, the media influence what issues people perceive as important by the amount of attention devoted to them (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

The central proposition of the theory is that media organizations perform a gatekeeping function by determining which issues receive coverage, the frequency of that coverage, and the manner in which issues are presented. Through repeated reporting and strategic placement of particular issues, the media establish a public agenda by assigning greater visibility to selected topics. Consequently, issues that receive sustained media attention become more prominent in public discourse than those receiving little or no coverage (McCombs, 2005).

Despite its wide acceptance, the Agenda-Setting Theory has been criticized on several grounds. First, critics argue that the theory assumes that media emphasis translates directly into public priorities without adequately recognizing that audiences actively interpret media messages according to their educational background, personal experiences, cultural values, and social contexts (Katz et al., 1973; Blumler, 1979; Ruggiero, 2000). This criticism is advanced particularly by proponents of the Uses and Gratifications Theory, who maintain that media audiences are active participants rather than passive recipients of information (Katz et al., 1973; Blumler, 1979). Second, scholars have argued that Agenda-Setting Theory places insufficient emphasis on other influential sources of information, including interpersonal communication, social media, family, religious institutions, and educational systems, all of which may shape public discourse independently of traditional broadcast media (Wanta & Wu, 1992; Weimann & Brosius, 2017; Almakaty, 2025). The rapid expansion of digital communication platforms has further challenged the theory's original emphasis on conventional mass media as the primary agenda setters (Weimann & Brosius, 2017; Almakaty, 2025).

Notwithstanding these criticisms, Agenda-Setting Theory remains relevant for studies examining media content because it provides a useful framework for understanding how media organizations prioritize and present issues of public concern (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; McCombs, 2004). The theory has been widely applied in media and communication research to analyse patterns of media coverage, issue salience, news selection, and message emphasis across different communication platforms (Kim et al., 2017; McCombs & Reynolds, 2009).

The theory is particularly appropriate for the present study because it provides a conceptual basis for analysing how broadcast media health programmes give prominence to the issue of illicit drug use through their content (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; McCombs, 2004). Specifically, the study examines the dominant themes emphasized in anti-drug programmes, the programme formats employed to communicate anti-drug messages, and the ways in which these programmes frame the health and social consequences of illicit drug use (McCombs & Ghanem, 2001; McCombs et al., 1997). Rather than assessing whether these programmes influence the awareness, knowledge, or behaviour of youths, the study focuses on analysing the nature, organization, and presentation of anti-drug messages contained in broadcast media programmes (Kim et al., 2017).

Accordingly, Agenda-Setting Theory offers an appropriate analytical lens for interpreting the documentary evidence examined in this study. It enables an understanding of how broadcast media prioritize illicit drug use as a public health issue, the communication strategies employed in presenting anti-drug messages, and the extent to which the issue is accorded prominence within broadcast health programming (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; McCombs, 2004; McCombs & Reynolds, 2009). The theory therefore aligns with the study's qualitative documentary research



design and its emphasis on content analysis rather than the measurement of audience effects (Kim et al., 2017; McCombs & Reynolds, 2009).

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative documentary research design, employing thematic content analysis to examine the representation of illicit drug use in broadcast media health programmes. Documentary research involves the systematic identification, selection, examination, and interpretation of existing documents to generate evidence relevant to a research problem (Bowen, 2009). The design was considered appropriate because the study sought to analyse the content, themes, programme formats, and framing of anti-drug messages in broadcast media rather than measure audience awareness, attitudes, or behavioural outcomes.

Population of the study

The population of the study comprised documentary materials relating to broadcast media health programmes on illicit drug use in Nigeria. These included recorded radio and television health programmes, public service announcements (PSAs), documentaries, expert interviews, health discussion programmes, news features, and institutional publications on anti-drug communication. In addition, policy documents, reports, and publications produced by relevant organizations such as the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), the Federal Ministry of Health, the National Orientation Agency (NOA), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) constituted part of the documentary population because they provide contextual information on anti-drug communication strategies.

Sampling Strategy

The study employed purposive sampling to select documents that were directly relevant to the research objectives. Purposive sampling is appropriate in qualitative documentary research because it enables the selection of information-rich documents capable of providing comprehensive insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015). Only documents that specifically addressed illicit drug use prevention through broadcast media health communication were selected for analysis.

Sources of Data

Data were obtained exclusively from secondary documentary sources. These included selected anti-drug programmes aired by Nigerian broadcast stations, documentary recordings available through official media archives and verified online platforms, and publications from organizations involved in drug prevention and public health communication, including the NDLEA, WHO, UNODC, Federal Ministry of Health, and NOA. Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and policy reports were also consulted to provide contextual understanding and support the interpretation of findings.



Method of Data Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic content analysis, following the procedures proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Table 1. *Documentary Sources Reviewed and Analysed*

S/N	Documentary Source	Institution/Media Organisation	Publication/Broadcast Year	Type of Document	Rationale for Selection
1	War Against Drug Abuse (WADA) Campaign Reports	National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA)	2020–2025	Campaign Reports	Provides official documentation of anti-drug communication strategies and campaigns.
2	National Drug Control Master Plan	National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA)	2021	Policy Document	Explains national drug prevention communication framework.
3	Drug Prevention and Mental Health Campaign Reports	Enugu State Ministry of Health	2020–2025	Government Reports	Documents state-level health communication interventions.
4	Public Enlightenment Campaign Reports	National Orientation Agency (NOA)	2020–2025	Government Reports	Provides evidence of community-based anti-drug awareness activities.
5	School-Based WADA Programme Reports	Enugu State Post Primary School Management Board	2021–2025	Institutional Reports	Documents school anti-drug awareness initiatives.
6	Anti-Drug Public Service Announcements	Nigerian Television Authority (NTA)	2020–2025	Television Programme	Examined for message content and communication strategies.
7	Anti-Drug Radio Programmes	Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN)	2020–2025	Radio Programme	Reviewed to identify programme formats and dominant themes.
8	Drug Abuse Awareness Broadcasts	Enugu State Broadcasting Service (ESBS)	2020–2025	Radio/Television Programmes	Analysed for framing of anti-drug messages.
9	World Drug Report	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)	2024	International Report	Provides global context on illicit drug communication.
10	Drug Prevention Guidelines	World Health Organization (WHO)	2021–2024	Health Communication Documents	Provides international health communication guidance.

Results and Discussion of Findings

The findings are presented according to the objectives of the study and are based on the thematic analysis of the documentary sources presented in Table 4.1. The analysis focused on identifying recurring themes, programme formats, and message framing within selected broadcast media health programmes and institutional documents relating to illicit drug use. The findings therefore reflect patterns observed in the documentary materials rather than measurements of audience awareness or programme effectiveness.



Theme 1. Dominant Themes in Broadcast Media Health Programmes on Illicit Drug Use

The documentary analysis revealed that anti-drug broadcast media programmes consistently emphasised several dominant themes. The most recurring theme concerned the health consequences of illicit drug use, with programmes highlighting substance dependence, mental health disorders, physical illnesses, and premature mortality associated with drug abuse. These messages appeared consistently across NDLEA campaign materials, television documentaries, expert interviews, and health discussion programmes.

Theme 2. Consequences of Substance Abuse

A second dominant theme focused on the social consequences of substance abuse. The reviewed documents frequently associated illicit drug use with school dropout, youth violence, criminal activities, family disintegration, unemployment, and reduced productivity. These issues were presented as broader societal concerns requiring collective action from government institutions, families, schools, religious organisations, and communities.

Theme 3. Prevention and Rehabilitation

Another recurring theme was drug prevention and rehabilitation. Rather than concentrating solely on punishment, many of the reviewed programmes promoted counselling, rehabilitation services, peer education, early intervention, and community participation as important strategies for addressing substance abuse. Institutional publications from the NDLEA, NOA, and Ministry of Health consistently encouraged collaboration among stakeholders in implementing preventive interventions.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study show that broadcast media health programmes in Nigeria predominantly presented illicit drug use through themes of prevention and health education, health and psychological consequences, social consequences, criminality and insecurity, rehabilitation and treatment, and community participation. The emphasis on prevention and health education is consistent with Wakefield, Loken, and Hornik (2010), who found that mass media health campaigns commonly communicate health risks and preventive messages. Noar (2006) similarly identified health education, risk communication, and prevention as recurring components of mass media health campaigns.

The findings also show that the health and psychological consequences of illicit drug use were prominent themes in the analysed programmes. This corresponds with Dumbili's (2020) study of young adults in Nigeria, which documented drug-related harms including seizures, aggression, psychological problems, and other adverse health consequences. The presence of social consequences, criminality, and insecurity in the programmes further indicates that illicit drug use was presented as extending beyond individual health to wider social problems. This is consistent with the broader mass-media literature, which identifies other drug use and related social risks as recurring subjects of public health campaigns (Wakefield et al., 2010). Rehabilitation, treatment, and community participation also appeared as recurring themes in the documentary evidence. These themes correspond with Wakefield et al. (2010), who noted that the effects of mass media health campaigns are strengthened where communication is accompanied by available services and community-based programmes. Overall, the findings indicate that the analysed programmes presented illicit drug use through multiple interconnected themes, with particular emphasis on prevention, health consequences, social harms, and responses to substance abuse. This thematic pattern is consistent with previous health communication scholarship



showing that mass media campaigns address both health risks and broader responses to drug-related problems (Noar, 2006; Wakefield et al., 2010).

Conclusion

The study found that broadcast media health programmes on illicit drug use in Nigeria predominantly emphasise prevention and health education, the health and psychological consequences of drug use, social and legal consequences, rehabilitation, and community participation. Overall, the programmes present illicit drug use as a multidimensional health and social problem requiring prevention, treatment, and collective action. These findings imply that broadcast media serve as an important platform for communicating information about the risks of illicit drug use and promoting prevention and rehabilitation. The identified themes provide useful insights for media practitioners, public health institutions, and other stakeholders in strengthening the content of anti-drug health communication programmes.

Recommendation

1. Broadcast media organisations should maintain attention to the major themes identified in the study, particularly prevention and health education, the health and psychological consequences of illicit drug use, social and legal consequences, rehabilitation, and community participation.
2. Broadcast media organisations should give adequate attention to both the consequences and responses to illicit drug use by including themes relating to prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and the social consequences of substance abuse in their health programmes.
3. Relevant public health and media institutions should use the findings of this study as a reference when reviewing the thematic content of anti-drug health programmes, particularly to ensure that key issues surrounding the prevention and consequences of illicit drug use are represented in programme content.

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AI Use Disclosure

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used during the preparation of this manuscript to assist with language editing, proofreading, and improving the clarity and organisation of the text. The author reviewed and verified the content and takes full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and final version of the manuscript.
