

# Jamaican Daily Newspapers Coverage of a Chikungunya Outbreak: Reporting Trends and Audience (Non)-Responses

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## Abstract

*The outbreak of vector borne diseases like Chikungunya presents significant challenges to developing countries like Jamaica who, despite their limited resources, must deploy effective strategies for disease control. The threat to individual and national well-being suggests a vital role for news media, especially newspapers which enjoy significant status as information providers on the island. This study examines daily newspaper coverage of the current Chikungunya outbreak in the island. The study further examines reader use of online facilities for feedback and sharing of the content provided on the disease. From the official announcement of a regional outbreak in December 2013 until September 2014, after Jamaica acknowledged its first cases of locally transmitted Chikungunya, the daily newspapers on the island offered varying degrees of coverage of the public health situation. The study finds dramatically different responses among the three papers to the evolving regional health crisis. The content of news reports and articles, however, are similar with primacy given to government and expert information on the disease. Audience use of facilities for sharing and feedback were generally limited.*

**Key Words:** Newspapers, Chikungunya, Public Health, Epidemic, Outbreak, Media

Newspapers have an important role in an emerging public health crisis. The extent to which they focus on emergent health crises affects their usefulness in keeping the public informed about risks and prevention strategies (Smith, et al 2012). Emergency public health plans typically acknowledge the importance of public information as among the most important considerations in dealing with public health crises (Holmes, 2008). Effective public communication long before the outbreak occurs and continuing after it appears to subside is the recommended strategy for successful management of an outbreak (Smith 2006, Reynolds & Seeger 2008). Media information before or during an outbreak is understood to be the urgent transmission of facts from experts to the public so that the public will not panic and will know what to do (Holmes, 2008). Trumbo (2012) found a tenable relationship between the extent of newspaper coverage of an influenza outbreak and the rate of physician visits. Holmes et al (2009) report that persons with responsibility for communication during health crises—public health officials, scientists and communication professionals—consider media coverage as the means to achieving effective communication during emerging health crises (797).

Media coverage gives significance to an issue. Frequency of coverage is a further indicator of importance and value. Timely, regular and fact-based information on an emerging health crisis is an essential feature of effective newspaper coverage. The agenda setting function of media is most

commonly attributed to frequency of coverage. Beyond the transmission of releases from official health agencies and press services, the involvement of senior reporters and staff writers in generating articles on a potential outbreak strengthens the agenda setting and surveillance function of media in the pre-outbreak period of a health crisis especially when the disease is new to the region.

Newspaper coverage in a health crisis empowers the collective (Holmes et al 2009) "providing information to the public so they can make informed decisions" (796). The relationship between newspaper coverage and public awareness of and engagement with health issues is of particular concern in a health crisis (Shih et al, 2008). The facility that internet based and digital newspaper services provide for public sharing of newspaper content extends the usefulness of newspaper coverage in a health crisis. The more coverage a paper generates on an emerging health crisis, the greater the opportunity for audience engagement with the issue.

This paper examines Jamaican newspaper coverage of the recent threat of a Chikungunya outbreak. Analysis and study of newspaper coverage typically looks at the content of articles (Elvers et al 2009; Krieger et al, 2011) and the number of stories dedicated to a particular issue over time (Strand, 2010). The effectiveness of news media coverage in health crises is determined by timeliness, frequency of coverage and the provision of fact-based information. This study sought to determine the timeliness of the coverage, relative to the outbreak in the region, the number of articles/reports generated on the disease during the pre-outbreak period in the island and the kind of information provided. As Chikungunya was new to the region and the public and health officials had no prior

experience with the disease, the role of newspapers in providing information on the disease in the pre-outbreak period is considered critical.

#### *Chikungunya*

Chikungunya is an arboviral disease caused by the chikungunya virus (CHIKV). The disease manifests as an acute illness with fever typically accompanied by a rash. Sufferers present with severe arthralgia, the pain and swelling focused in the hands, wrists, ankles and feet. (Weaver, S. 2014). Although not considered life-threatening for most patients, Chikungunya can leave its victims with arthritic pains for many years and exacerbate underlying health issues in the elderly. The first two documented outbreaks of the disease took place in South-east Asia and Kenya in 1952 and 2004 respectively with cases appearing in Europe and the Americas from infected travelers. The gradual subsidence of epidemic transmission in Asia led health authorities to believe that the risk of the disease spreading globally had declined.

The detection of Chikungunya in St. Martin in October 2013 preceded a rapid spread of the disease in the Caribbean with more than 15,000 cases at the end of March 2014 (PAHO Fact Sheet, April 2014, www.paho.org) and over half a million by the start of August 2014 with a death toll of 32 (The Observer, *Caribbean records big jump in Chikungunya cases*, August 6, 2014).

#### *Jamaica's Public Health Response*

Jamaica has a reasonably well-developed response tradition to outbreaks of vector-borne diseases e.g. malaria (which is still considered eradicated despite the outbreak of *Plasmodium falciparum* in 2006). Local public health response combines early case identification, surveillance, prompt treatment, vector control, public education and interagency collaboration (Webster-Kerr et al, 2011). Definition of the disease, updates on its spread and methods of protection are typical components of expert/official messages transmitted to the public along with the use of community based groups and organizations (Webster-Kerr et al, 2011) to facilitate face to face communicative exchange. Public education and information is an important part of the response strategy: health officials use a variety of media to disseminate prevention and treatment strategies and disease updates for public information. Community based organizations become a prime conduit for localized information and education interventions.

#### *Daily Newspapers in Jamaica*

The Gleaner is the Caribbean's oldest surviving daily newspaper. Started in 1834 as a family owned paper, the name "Gleaner" has become synonymous for "newspaper" among many Jamaicans. The enormously popular Sunday Gleaner is unchallenged by the competition in the Sunday newspaper market with a circulation of over 500,000 (2008 All Print Media Survey—Johnson Survey Research Ltd.). The Star started publication in 1951 as the Gleaner Company's afternoon publication.

Considered the "people paper" The Star targets a less formal readership with a "tabloid" aesthetic distinct from the more traditional and formal offering of the morning paper. The Star is published from Monday to Saturdays.

The Observer began in 1993, a venture owned and operated by wealthy commercial interests in the island, and has the distinction of being the only national daily to have survived competition with the "grand old lady of North Street" the Daily Gleaner.

The All Print Media Survey proffers circulation figures that put The Gleaner and The Star as having a circulation of just under 200,000 daily, with The Observer lagging just behind with circulation figures between 150,000 to 180,000. All three papers are circulated across the island.

Although radio has been the medium of choice for Jamaicans since the mid twentieth century, newspapers have continued to enjoy high status and relative popularity as the final authority on important events and the source of details not provided by broadcast media. The Gleaner, The Star and The Observer all offer online access to digital versions of their hardcopy stories along with online news reports and updates available throughout the day on their websites. The Gleaner and The Observer provide the only national daily newspaper service on the island. Smaller papers offering weekly and community based publication exist but do not enjoy the reach of the two commercial giants.

#### **Method**

Two main methods were employed for the search for articles that mentioned Chikungunya or ChikV. The first was to use the newspapers' digital archives. The second was a google search. Search terms used were "Chikungunya" "ChikV" and for the google search, the name of the paper and the terms "Chikungunya" and "ChikV". Although the study focused on the period December 2013- September 6, 2014, a general search was done in the archives to see if there had been any prior report on global incidence of this disease that was new to the region. The digital search was expected to provide information on frequency of coverage.

As the pre-outbreak and outbreak period are marked by specific dates, the dates of the stories are important for analysis and discussion as it relates to the key factor of timeliness of coverage.

After the material was collected, articles were categorized e.g. press service release, health agency release, article written by staff writers/reporters, editorial, letter to the editor, columnist, and guest columnists/contributors. The core information the article provided was identified for the purpose of determining whether coverage was fact-based: information on the disease, updates on the spread of the disease, methods of prevention. Core information was not quantified, but was used to construct a general descriptive content overview.

#### **Audience Feedback and Sharing of Newspaper Content**

The Gleaner online and The Observer online record the number of shares and comments for each article/report. The study noted the number of audience

comments and “shares” recorded for each article which mentioned Chikungunya or ChikV. The Star online allows for readers to email articles but does not indicate how many readers actually emailed/shared the articles. The researcher was therefore not able to determine the extent to which audiences were sharing the articles.

**Limitations**

The study was restricted to the three largest papers which are distributed island-wide and are available online. The study did not look at the coverage of smaller community based papers or weekly papers which have much smaller circulation than the three “giants” in the local newspaper industry. Findings therefore speak to the editorial decisions of the three papers under study and do not attempt to determine the extent to which the Jamaican public’s awareness of the disease was affected by this coverage.

**Findings**

The study found a relatively small number of articles on Chikungunya during the pre-outbreak period. Only 134 articles mentioned Chikungunya or ChikV in the period under study (December 1, 2013 – September 6, 2014). The Observer had more articles on the disease than either The Gleaner or The Star, a total of 102 reports and articles. The Observer had a reference to the disease before the outbreak period in the Caribbean, a release from AFP (Agence France-Presse) dated February 3, 2006 on the Chikungunya outbreak in the Seychelles.

The outbreak of the disease in the Caribbean, on the French side of St. Martin, was reported by both The Observer and The Star on December 17, 2013 and December 20, 2013 respectively.

Table 1 presents the total number of articles in each paper that contained references to Chikungunya from December 2013 when an outbreak was officially reported in the Caribbean to September 6.

**Table 1** Newspaper Content Mentioning Chikungunya in The Gleaner, The Star and The Observer in Jamaica From December 2013 Until September 6, 2014

Name of Newspaper	Number of Articles /Reports Making Reference to Chikungunya
The Gleaner	25
The Star	8
The Observer	101

The articles making reference to Chikungunya included news reports, editorials, letters to the editor, opinion columns and articles from contributors as well as reports attributed by the papers to releases from press services e.g. the Caribbean Media Corporation (CMC), the Associated Press (AP) the Agence France-Presse (AFP) etc. Most of the articles were releases from press services.

*Pre-Outbreak Reports*

The Gleaner and The Star made minimal

references to Chikungunya before the outbreak in Jamaica was announced. The Observer carried regional and international press service releases on the disease in the region before it reported the announcement of a Jamaican outbreak by government health officials. Updates attributed to the Observer’s staff reporters and writers also appeared in the pre-outbreak period. The first reference to Chikungunya in The Gleaner in the pre-outbreak period was an online report posted at 10: 44 a.m. on May 2, 2014.

Table 2 shows the number of items making reference to Chikungunya in the Jamaican pre-outbreak period, December 2013 to July 15, 2014.

**Table 2** Newspaper Content Mentioning Chikungunya in The Gleaner, The Star and The Observer in Jamaica during the island’s pre-outbreak period ( December 2013 Until July 15, 2014)

Newspaper	Number of Articles /Reports Mentioning Chikungunya
The Gleaner	3
The Star	1
The Observer	47

The newspaper reports during the pre-outbreak period were typically information from regional press services on new cases of Chikungunya in the region. Visually the articles were largely textual, with the most common visuals being photographs of the Director of Emergency, Disaster Management and Special Services in the island’s Ministry of Health , the

Minister of Health and file photographs of the mosquito which carries the disease.

In the pre-outbreak period, The Observer carried predominantly information from the regional media service, The Caribbean Media Corporation (CMC), supplemented by its own news reports on the disease. Content on the disease was comparatively sparse in The Gleaner and The

Star during that period. Letters to the editor and, articles from contributors supplemented focus on the outbreak in The Gleaner.

Table 3 provides details on types of

newspaper content that made reference to Chikungunya in the three papers during the pre-outbreak period.

**Table 3** Categories of Newspaper Content Mentioning Chikungunya in The Three Major National Dailies in Jamaica during the island's pre-outbreak period ( December 2013 Until July 16, 2014)

Category of Newspaper Content	Gleaner	The Star	The Observer
Press Service—Caribbean Media Corporation (CMC)			26
Press Service—Jamaica Information Service (JIS)			1
Press Service—Associated Press (AP)			1
Press Service—Agence France-Presse (AFP)			1
Public Health Agency of Canada			1
Other Newspapers			0
Reports attributed to specific Staff Writers/Reporters			4
Letters to the Editor			1
Editorial			0
Contributors	1		0
Columnists			0
News Reports	2	1	12

*The Beginning of the Chikungunya Outbreak in Jamaica*

The Gleaner and The Observer reported the first suspected case of Chikungunya in the island on July 15, 2014. A day later, July 16, The Star reported the suspected case. The first confirmed case of Chikungunya in Jamaica, was reported in The Gleaner and The Observer on July 17, 2014 at 10:44 a.m. and 12:02 pm respectively. Both articles quoted the island's Chief Medical Officer and attributed this first confirmed case to an individual who had recently travelled to an "affected" country. Both articles detailed symptoms of the disease, methods for vector control and a summary of the incidence of the disease in the region. The Star reported the suspected case on July 16. Both The Gleaner and The Observer had reported the "suspected" case two days before in online news updates.

The second confirmed case of Chikungunya in the island was reported in The Gleaner online on July 28 at 6:26 p.m. The Observer confirmed the second case of Chikungunya in the island in its hard copy paper on July 29. This case was also attributed to someone who had travelled to affected countries

and again persons were given information on prevention, symptoms of the disease and an update on the spread of the disease in the region. The reports on both "imported" cases in both newspapers provided detailed information from the Ministry of Health release on the government's efforts at vector control including fogging and increased surveillance.

*Imported vs. Local Transmission*

Government reports on the disease transmitted by the newspapers distinguished between imported cases of the disease, cases brought in by travelers from affected countries and local transmission. The first confirmed cases of local transmission were reported by The Gleaner and The Observer through news updates posted online on August 7, the day after the island celebrated its 52nd Independence. Both reports referenced a release from the island's health minister.

Reports on the disease during the outbreak period, July 17 onwards, showed a marked increase in the local daily newspapers' presentations of their in-house reports on the disease.

Table 4 provides details on coverage during the outbreak period according to category of newspaper content.

**Table 4** *Categories of Newspaper Content Mentioning Chikungunya in The Three Major National Dailies in Jamaica during the island's outbreak period (July 17, 2014- September 6)*

Category of Newspaper Content	Gleaner	The Star	The Observer
Press Service— Caribbean Media Corporation (CMC)	1		7
Jamaica Information Service (JIS)			2
Press Service—Associated Press (AP)			2
Press Service—Agence France- Presse (AFP)			1
Public Health Agency of Canada			0
Other Newspapers			1
Reports attributed to specific Staff Writers/Reporters	4		7
Letters to the Editor	0		1
Editorial	1		0
Contributors	0		1
Columnists	1		2
News Reports	15	7	30

#### *Content Overview*

The newspaper content during the outbreak period was similar to the content in the pre-outbreak period. In both periods, the newspapers made extensive use of unmodified expert information. The main difference in coverage during the outbreak period was that reports lead extensively with information on the outbreak in Jamaica. Typically the information in both periods was drawn from government releases on new cases of locally transmitted Chikungunya, efforts to control the spread of mosquito breeding sites, advice to the public on protection, symptoms, and protective health measures to be taken by the public and the absence of a vaccine. Where articles were attributed to staff writers/reporters, interviews with non-governmental medical experts were usually included, along with focus on specific instances of threat e.g. non-collection of garbage, stagnant water in communities etc.

#### *Regional vs. Local Surveillance*

The Observer provided more coverage of the spread of the disease in the region during the pre-outbreak period in Jamaica. The coverage, primarily release of the Caribbean news service reports, provided updates on the growing risk in various territories. Although The Star reported on the outbreak in St. Martin through the report on a US travel advisory for the island in December, 2013, The Star carried no further report on the disease until the announcement of the first "imported" case in Jamaica in July, 2014.

Gleaner reports on the spread of Chikungunya in the region were not evident until May 2 when the Caribbean Public Health Agency, CARPHA (a regional intergovernmental health agency) announced that the disease had reached epidemic proportions in the Caribbean. Two days later The Gleaner reported a statement from the Director of Emergency, Disaster management and Special Services in the Ministry of Health which indicated that the island was on alert as Chikungunya spread rapidly through the region. The Gleaner returned to a focus on Chikungunya a month later, June 7, 2014, when it published an article by a medical doctor, a contributor. The article was headlined "Chikungunya, An Imminent Health Threat." The article gave the history of the disease, a detailed update on its spread in the Caribbean and the USA and medical details on prevention, symptoms and treatment. The Gleaner's third mention of the disease, since its first report on the Caribbean epidemic on May 2, 2014 was its report on July 15, 2013, on the first suspected case of Chikungunya in Jamaica.

#### *Delayed Announcement?*

On August 6, Jamaica celebrated its 52<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of Independence. On that day, The Observer reported that the Caribbean had big "jump" in Chikungunya cases. PAHO had reported 513,393 cases, compared with 473,523 cases a week earlier. On August 7, the day after the island concluded several weeks of public activities and celebration, both The Gleaner and The Observer carried the government's official announcement of the first case of locally transmitted Chikungunya. The Observer's report was brief, presented the two new cases of locally transmitted Chikungunya as "two more cases". The

Gleaner's reports was comparatively more extensive, identifying the three parishes most affected, referencing the government's efforts to heighten surveillance systems in response to the two previous cases of imported Chikungunya, to encourage Jamaicans to destroy breeding places and protect themselves from being bitten and to take precautions when travelling. Gleaner reports also gave details of the symptoms and the groups at greatest risk, the very young and the very old.

The Gleaner reports indicated that the Minister had received confirmation on August 5 (the eve of the island's Independence Day Celebrations). The article closed with details of vector control (including fogging), "fever surveillance and symptoms of the virus.

By September 6, the official count identified twenty four cases of Chikungunya in the island. A report published by The Observer at 4:44 p.m. quoted the parliamentary opposition spokesman on Health saying that the number of cases was being under reported.

*Social Media Transmission of the Articles*

Reader sharing of articles on Chikungunya was relatively low except for isolated instances of peak sharing. Table 5 shows the rate of article sharing among readers of The Observer and The Gleaner. Only one Gleaner article was shared over 100 times. Two Observer articles were shared over 100 times. The highest number of shares in the sample studied (141) occurred with an article in The Observer, Thursday April 10, 2014, during the pre-outbreak period. The article, entitled *J'cans urged to protect themselves against Chick-V virus*, shared an update from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) on the spread of the virus in the region and a call from the minister of state in the Office of the Prime Minister with responsibility for primary healthcare infrastructure, for Jamaicans to protect themselves and assist in destroying mosquito breeding sites.

For The Gleaner's coverage of the virus, the highest number of shared articles (134) occurred with the announcement of the first suspected case of the disease in the island on July 15. The Gleaner report two days later that the case had been confirmed as Chikungunya was shared only 50 times.

**Table 5** Number of Reader Social Media Shares or Recommendations of Articles on Chikungunya in The Observer and The Gleaner December 2013 to September 6, 2014)

Number of reports/articles shared/recommended	Frequency	
	The Observer	The Gleaner
0	5	2
1-9	40	11
10-19	23	3
20-29	11	1
30-39	10	3
40-49	6	1
50-59	3	1
60-69	0	1
70-79	2	0
80-89	0	0
90-99	0	0
100-109	0	0
110-119	0	0
120-129	1	0
130-139	0	1
140-149	1	0

For both The Gleaner and The Observer the number of shares (Facebook posts, recommendations and tweets) of the articles was considerably higher than the number of reader comments. Table 6 shows the trend among audiences to have "no comment" on

articles that mentioned Chikungunya in The Observer and The Gleaner.

**Table 6** Number of Reader Comments on Articles on Chikungunya in *The Observer* and *The Gleaner* (December 2013 to September 6, 2014)

Number of reports/articles shared/recommended	Frequency	
	The Observer	The Gleaner
0	49	14
1-9	46	9
10-19	5	1
20-29	0	0
30-39	1	0
40-49	0	0
50-59	0	0
60-69	0	0
70-79	0	0
80-89	0	0
90-99	0	0
100-109	0	0
110-119	0	0
120-129	0	0
130-139	0	0
140-149	0	0

### Discussion

It is evident that factual information on Chikungunya was provided during the pre-outbreak period in the three newspapers studied: the name of the disease, its origins, updates on its spread in the region, symptoms, risks and methods of prevention. In regard to timeliness and frequency, the pattern of newspaper coverage of Chikungunya during the pre-outbreak period in Jamaica differed dramatically among the large daily newspapers. The Observer's coverage of the disease in the pre-outbreak period in Jamaica began earlier and was more frequent than The Gleaner and The Star. That coverage was, however, primarily official releases from health agencies and press services. No significant difference existed between the content of reports attributed to staff reporters and writers and reports without bylines except for the occasional interview with medical experts who were not necessarily government representatives.

The impact of a possible outbreak on the island's tourist economy could be argued as a factor driving The Gleaner's lack of coverage of the regional spread of the disease. The Observer, however, is owned by one of the island's largest hoteliers yet it maintained steady coverage of the spread of the disease in the region with reports of warnings to Jamaica.

As the one way transmission of expert information and governmental updates typifies media reporting during a public health dilemma, the readers' limited use of feedback mechanisms provided by

online newspapers for comment raises questions about the significance of these facilities for traditional mass media. It is possible that readers could be sharing the articles and discussing their content on social media sites. It may be that readers perceive online newspaper sites as spaces to receive information on a health epidemic and not as spaces to have discussions. Further study would have to look at the social media sites to see if the news content on Chikungunya was actually being discussed there.

The concept of issue attention cycling (Downs, 1972) may offer some explanation for the lack of sharing of and comment on the newspaper reports of Chikungunya. Although applied initially to considerations of environmental issues, the idea suggests that the attention an issue receives from media and its publics fluctuates. The cycle that Downs proposed, involves five stages. At the pre-problem stage the issue does not receive significant attention from the public or the media. In the second stage, public awareness of the issue grows and is accompanied by the idea that some kind of solution is possible for the problem. At the third stage, the gravity of the problem and the implications accompanying it bring more public interest and possible involvement. Media coverage is likely to see peaks at this stage. Whether the eventual decline in public interest is a result of increased media coverage or the emergence of other "problems" is not clear but the fourth stage evinces a decline in both media coverage and public interest. By the fifth stage, the public and the media are attending to other issues with only occasional return to attention to the previous problem. Downs refers to this as the "post-problem" stage (Downs, 1972, pp. 39-40).

### Delayed Announcement?

That both The Gleaner and The Observer announced the confirmed cases of local transmission of Chikungunya, the day after the island concluded massive celebrations of its 52<sup>nd</sup> year of Independence could raise questions about the extent to which the two major cooperated with the government in foregoing a timely announcement of the confirmed presence of the disease. The declaration of a public health emergency could have negatively affected public participation in public events.

At the time of preparing this report, no considerable response was yet evident in the press to the issue of possible underreporting of the cases of Chikungunya in Jamaica. One article in The Observer, September 6, reported that the Opposition spokesperson on health had accused the government of hiding the true figures for the number of Chikungunya cases in the island. The nine comments that were posted to the article oscillated between agreement with the Opposition spokesperson that government was hiding the true figures and accusations that the spokesperson was playing politics with a critical health situation.

The Star as a "tabloid" targeting the 'grass-roots' would have been expected to play a significant role in covering the emerging Chikungunya outbreak in the island. The government health agencies do have a public education program that does not rely entirely on mass media circulation. Whether the deployment of community based organizations, paid advertisements and information campaigns should strategically exclude media coverage by a paper like The Star is debatable.

While the Gleaner's delayed response to the regional outbreak could suggest a greater regional sensitivity on the part of The Observer, another perspective could argue that prolonged coverage of a health crisis, or a potential health crisis, reduces the public's sensitivity to risk. Srinivasan (2010) suggests that health protective behaviours are in fact mediated by the anxiety that media coverage can arouse but that these behaviours are also mediated by the duration of the risk. As a health crisis becomes prolonged, persons become accustomed to living with risk and begin to develop their own perspective of the risk that often trumps official and expert perspectives (Gray & Ropeik, 2002; Jones & Salathe, 2009; Rubin et al 2009). At that point, the usefulness of panic and anxiety stimulation via the media results in minimal health protective behaviours. Audience sharing of

articles among Observer readers peaked in April, before the disease presented in Jamaica. This could suggest that their readers had entered the post-problem stage by the time locally transmitted cases of the disease were confirmed in Jamaica. That Gleaner readers appeared to show heightened interest at the point when the disease began to present on the island may suggest that the paper's limited coverage of the disease until it was a "real threat" to Jamaica may have its justification.

If one considers that readers online may in fact be reading both The Gleaner and The Observer then the extent of the effect of The Gleaner's delayed coverage, or in fact The Observer's early coverage, would have to be cautiously argued.

### Limited Use of Visuals

Except for isolated instances where pictures of uncollected garbage and stagnant water accompanied articles about the threat of Chikungunya, most of the stories across papers were accompanied by super close up file photographs of the mosquito or file photo portraits of government medical and political officials. The only significant human interest photograph that presented in the sample studied from December 2013 to September 6, 2014 came from an Associated Press story with photograph out of the Dominican Republic. It showed a five year old girl awaiting medical attention for Chikungunya. Her grandmother holds a rag to the unhappy child's forehead as they sit waiting.

While conventional wisdom speaks to the use of textual information with graphics, work in progress, work in progress suggests that especially for information requiring technical detail, valuable textual information may communicate the seriousness of the situation more effectively than the graphics and text of conventional wisdom (Miller & Barnett, 2010).

This study took place at what could be considered the "start" of the official outbreak period in Jamaica. Twenty four cases were identified at the time of writing. Media coverage continues with public debate about the seriousness of the disease and the effectiveness of the government's handling of the public health dilemma. Issues of trust—trust of government, trust of experts and trust of media—present alongside concerns for personal and collective safety. It is inevitable that study will have to continue. Discussions with reporters, editors, government officials, medical experts and audiences should advance our understanding of the relationship between media coverage decisions and audience reception of public health information during emergent health crises.

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