

CHALLENGES OF UTILISING THE KEY MESSAGES OF CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC CAMPAIGNS IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *This study investigated the challenges of utilising the key messages of coronavirus pandemic campaign in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Survey research design was adopted for the study while questionnaire was the instrument of data collection. The study was anchored on social cognitive theory and Health belief model. The population of the study comprised of residents of Akwa Ibom State, which according to 2018 projection of the National Population Commission census figure of 2006 was 5,828,267. The sample size of 400 was drawn using Taro Yamane's sample size formula. The study found out that the level of awareness of the coronavirus pandemic campaign was high in the metropolis but low in rural communities. The study also found out that the level of compliance was very low. Moreso, the study found out that majority of respondents did not believe that coronavirus exist in Nigeria. The study recommends that awareness should not be left alone in the hands of government, individuals should be ready to save lives by promoting the campaign of coronavirus in the society.*

KEYWORDS: challenges, coronavirus, campaign, pandemic, messages.

INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus otherwise called (COVID 19) was discovered in Wuhan, Hubei, China, in December, 2019. The disease was tagged an epidemic in 2019 but later upgraded to a pandemic by the World Health Organization because of the global outbreak in January, 2020. According to the World

Health Organization (2019), the symptoms of the disease include high fever, respiratory problems, unceasing cough. According to Dr. Peter Dazzak in a BBC interview, all known coronavirus comes from animals. The Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC) say that COVID 19 and malaria may have similar symptoms but are caused by different agents. COVID 19 can spread from persons to persons, malaria cannot. The COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria is part of the global pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS COV-19). The first confirmed case in Nigeria was in 27 February, 2020 when an Italian citizen in Lagos state tested positive for the virus. On 9th March 2020, a second case of the virus was reported in Ewekoro, Ogun State, a Nigeria citizen who had contact with the Italian citizen.

According to NCDC, samples treated so far were 96, 402, confirmed cases 11,643, discharged cases 5,623, death 459 as at June 17, 2020. According to the chairman of Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 (PTF) (COVID-19) Boss Mustapha, the rise in COVID-19 cases in Nigeria is as a result of rapid testing and community spreading of the disease. On April, 2020 the first case of Coronavirus was reported in Akwa Ibom State and on May, 2020 Government House Press Corps Akwa Ibom State reportedly tested positive for the dreaded COVID-19 disease. (<http://all africa.com>). According to NDDC the total number of confirmed cases in Akwa Ibom State stands at 48, 18 persons are said to have recovered from the coronavirus pandemic and 2 persons are confirmed dead. (Wikipedia.com). COVID-19 affects different people in different ways, most infected people will develop mild to moderate illness and recover without hospitalisation. According to NCDC most common symptoms are fever, dry cough and tiredness, while the less common symptoms include aches and pains, sore throats, diarrhea, conjunctivitis, headache, loss of taste or smell, a rash on the skin, or discoloration of fingers or toes.

According to NCDC to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

- Clean your hands regularly. Use soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Maintain a safe distance from anyone who is coughing or sneezing
- Don't touch your eyes, nose or mouth
- Cover your nose and mouth with your bent elbow or a tissue paper when you cough or sneeze.
- If you have a fever, cough, difficulty breathing, seek medical attention.
- Follow the directions of your local health authority.

To date, there are no specific vaccines or medicines for COVID-19. Treatments are under investigation and will be tested through clinical trials, (WHO, 2020).

However there have been a coronavirus trial breakthrough according to scientists in the United Kingdom. The drug is called steroid Dexamethasane. According to scientists, the drug reduces the risk of dying in patients with COVID-19, improves survival rate of patients on oxygen, not effective for patients with mild symptoms, effective in patients on ventilators and reduces dead risk by one third. (BBC breaking news).

The mystery surrounding the treatment of COVID-19 patients in Nigeria remains with the officials of NCDC. Albeit, there are speculations of the use of chloroquine, Zinc and vitamin C in the

treatment of COVID-19, Nigerians are not on the know as in the case of the treatment of other dreaded disease like HIV/AIDS, Ebola, SARS among others. However, the concern of this study borders on challenges of utilising the key messages of the coronavirus pandemic disease (if any) by residents of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Coronavirus remains a major pandemic that has ravaged global public health. The first outbreak of coronavirus was in Wuhan, in China. In Nigeria, the scourge was discovered on the 27th of February, 2020 when an Italian citizen in Lagos state tested positive for the virus. This is despite the efforts made by the World Health Organization (WHO), international aid agencies and Nigerian government towards the reduction in cases of the coronavirus pandemic.

In the quest to reduce the coronavirus pandemic, federal and state governments in Nigeria have outlined several measures to curb the spread of the pandemic. Such measures include closure of borders (both international and national borders) closure of businesses, transportation systems (land, water and air travels), total lockdown, health tips on frequent washing of hands, cleansing of hands with alcohol based sanitizer, use of face mask, coughing into the elbow or into tissue paper and disposing the tissue properly, social distancing among others.

In spite of these strategic measures put in place by various governments and relevant agencies in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic, the scourge appears to be on the increase. According to NCDC, a total of 11,643 Nigerians have contracted the virus as at June 17, 2020, with a total of 5,623 discharged and 459 death recorded. With these high figures what are the possible challenges of utilising the key messages of the coronavirus pandemic campaign in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. Identify the key messages of the coronavirus pandemic campaigns which residents are exposed to.
2. Identify the channels of communication through which residents of Akwa Ibom State became exposed to the key messages of the coronavirus pandemic campaign.
3. Determine the level of awareness of coronavirus pandemic campaign by residents of Akwa Ibom State.
4. Determine the level of compliance with the coronavirus pandemic campaign messages by residents of Akwa Ibom State.
5. Identify possible challenges in utilising the key messages of the coronavirus pandemic campaign by residents of Akwa Ibom State

Theoretical Framework

The study made use of two theories: Social Cognitive Theory and Health Belief Model.

The social cognitive theory was developed by Albert Bandura during the 1960's. According to Bandura (1989), the theory describes a dynamic process in which a number of factors interact and influence each other, thereby provoking the individual to undertake an action or inaction. Such

factors include: personal (instincts, drive, traits and other motivational forces), environmental (events, happening, hazards, change, etc) and social (culture). What happens is that the interaction of these factors exerts certain influence on the individual resulting in some pattern of learning, the consequence of which is the demonstration of some behavioural pattern.

The Health Belief Model (HBM) was propounded by Hochbaum, Rosenstock and Keges in 1950 while working in the U.S. health screening programme. It is a psychological model that attempts to explain and predict health behaviours. This is done by focusing on the attitudes and behaviours of individuals. The HBM was first developed in the 1950's and has been adopted to explore a variety of long and short term health behaviours.

The theory proposes that:

1. Health behaviour preventive or curative is determined by internal use (perceptions, beliefs, knowledge) or external reactions (mass media or interpersonal communication) that trigger the need to act.
2. Once an individual is motivated to act, the actual behaviour will be determined by personal perception of "cost benefit". In other words, an individual weighs the benefits of an action before deciding to act.
3. Individual beliefs or personal perception of his ability to undertake a particular action can affect his motivation to take such action.

These theories are relevant to this study because individuals are likely to respond either positively or negatively to health communication messages because of an interplay of various factors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this era of COVID-19 pandemic, information has become a social, economic, educational, political and health necessity. Often times, individual, groups, government and organizations are faced with the immense task of creating awareness on health issues. This, to a large extent is dependent on the key messages in the communication process.

In time of emergency like the global pandemic, information is very vital to the existence of any nation.

Akarika, Iwok and Ikon (2019) citing Olawu (2003) state that information entails data, facts, imagination, ideas, opinions, cultural values in a variety of media which include print, audio-visual materials and electronic processes. Akarika, Ekanem and Ukpe (2017) citing Wenberg and Wilmont (1973) note that all persons are engaged in sending and receiving messages simultaneously. Akarika (2020) citing Baran (2007) sees communication as the transmission of a message from the sender to the receiver. Updating the purpose and function of messages, Milner (2006) cited in Akarika (2020) explained the purpose to include tasks, maintenance, human and innovation communication. Public communication campaigns is the deliberate attempts to inform or influence behaviours in large audience within a specified period using an organised set of communication activities and featuring an array of messages in multiple channels generally to produce non-commercial benefits to individuals and society (Rice and Atkin 2012).

The NCDC has embarked on several public communication campaigns using the mass media since the COVID-19 pandemic, to get the attention of all Nigerian at all levels to the key messages of the coronavirus pandemic.

Howbeit, in spite of the coronavirus campaigns in Nigeria, there are still reports of failure of citizens to abide by instructions from WHO, NCDC, Ministry of Health and other health related agencies. According to Marshall, Owen and Bauman (2004) mass media campaign cannot cause significant behaviour change in subjects. It therefore becomes imperative that appropriate channels that foster effective and efficient communication must be encouraged (Akarika, 2020).

Communication strategy is the approach programme planners and implementers use to overcome internal and external factors and barriers in order to successfully convey their intended messages and meanings to the target audience (World Health Organization, 2005). The sense of urgency inherent in a message does not imply compulsion, even if refusal to comply with the message could produce some negative effect on the target audience. For social products marketed by non-profit organization, agencies, government among others, what is important is not the creation of awareness but ensuring that the target audience adopts and uses the idea being projected (Wells, Burnett and Moriarty 2000). Changing people's attitude requires the injection of high volumes of persuasive messages than mere dissemination of messages.

Wilson (1990) cited in Neku, Okon and Oke (2019) observes that deep-rooted attitudes cannot be easily changed by mere exposure to the mass media alone. The broadcast media should be reinforced by word of mouth or by campaigns of personal intervention, literacy corps, health officials. The wellbeing of the society is an important requirement to any nations development. According to Okpokpo (2013:122) cited in Asogba and Oluwakemi (2017) health is essential for the satisfaction of human needs and to improve the quality of life. When transmission of infection is not prevented, it kills like the silent dreadful killer disease 'coronavirus'.

In preventing the widespread of coronavirus pandemic, adequate enlightenment campaign is needed to inform, educate and protect the masses. Health communication campaigns are arguably the most utilised and effective method for spreading public health messages, especially in endorsing disease prevention (COVID-19) and general health promotion and wellness. In Nigeria, government communication interventions messages are targeted at creating awareness on the seriousness of the coronavirus pandemic, foster behaviour change, build support for health workers, produces information on where to go for help when noticing the symptoms, provide prevention tips and demystify the myths associated with the coronavirus.

Despite the seeming lack of interest in the communication messages on coronavirus pandemic by some Nigerians, there were others who accepted the messages and shunned practices that might likely promote the virus. Akarika and Umoren (2018) citing Akarika, Ekanem and Ukpe, (2017) note that through information, citizens get informed about certain trends, innovation, ideas as well as other vital information needed to make the citizens take informed decision.

According to Ofomegbe and Harcourt (2018) in the recent past Nigeria has witnessed a number of epidemic outbreaks that necessitated the need for communication intervention to create

awareness, stem the tide and create the opportunities for effective management of cases. The media have an essential role to play in communicating health promotion. Quattrin, Filiputt and Brusafarro (2015) cited in Asogba (2019) note that public health programmes may benefit from the use of mass media to promote positive health behaviours. The broadcast media have become probably the most important social institution in the construction and circulation of information in any modern society. They permeate our daily lives and senses as the main sources of information and also play a vital role in shaping people's attitude and bringing conformity to some kind of lifestyle (Ukpe and Akarika 2019). The mass media of communication are critical to the promotion of health campaigns. The mass media play a fundamental role in educating people about diseases and ailment, outbreaks, preventions, control and treatment. (Akarika, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for this study was the survey research method. The survey was chosen because it aid in the collecting of large and small samples from a given population (Osugwu 2003). The questionnaire was used as a tool to collect information from respondents. The population for this study comprised of the entire Akwa Ibom State residents based on the 2018 projection of the National Population Commission (NPC) census figure of 2006. The projection which was taken at the yearly growth rate of 3.4% gave the figure of 5,828,267 for the entire state. A sample size of 400 was drawn using Taro Yamane's sampling formula. The survey took place in three senatorial districts of Akwa Ibom North East (Uyo), Akwa Ibom North West (Ikot Ekpene) and Akwa Ibom South (Eket). The study applied proportionate representation in sampling. Thus, a total of 133 respondents were polled in Akwa Ibom North West senatorial district, and 133 in Akwa Ibom South while the Akwa Ibom North East had 134 respondents. Out of 400 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 384 were returned and found useful for the analysis. Data gathered from the study were analysed using tables and simple percentages. Table 1 shows the key messages of coronavirus pandemic campaign in Akwa Ibom State.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: key messages of coronavirus pandemic campaign in Akwa Ibom state.

Key Messages
Regular washing of hands with soap and running water
Use of alcohol based sanitizer
Use of face mask
Cough/sneeze into a bent elbow or tissue paper
Keep social distancing
Avoid handshake/enbrace
Visit government approved health facilities when infected
Call NCDC hotlines
Symptoms of coronavirus include high fever, cough, respiratory problems

Table 2: Level of awareness of coronavirus pandemic campaign messages.

Level of awareness	Akwa Ibom North (Uyo)	Akwa Ibom East	Akwa Ibom North West (Ikot Ekpene)	Akwa Ibom South (Eket)	Total	Percentage
A very great extent	60		50	50	160	42
A great extent	50		50	50	150	39
Undecided or neutral	5		3	10	18	5
A little extent	10		15	10	35	9
A very little extent	9		10	2	21	5
Total	134		128	122	384	100

Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents 310 (160, 150) representing 81% (42% and 39%), have a very great extent and a great extent level of awareness of the coronavirus pandemic campaign messages. This implies that residents of Akwa Ibom state were aware of key campaign messages with regards to coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria.

Table 3: Channels of communication through which residents were exposed to coronavirus pandemic key messages in Akwa Ibom State

Channels of communication	Akwa Ibom North (Uyo)	Akwa Ibom East	Akwa Ibom North West (Ikot Ekpene)	Akwa Ibom South (Eket)	Total	Percentage
Radio/TV	50		50	50	150	39
Newspaper/magazine	30		20	20	70	18
Social media	30		30	35	95	25
Town criers/chiefs	5		5	5	15	3.4
Community tours/town hall meeting	4		5	5	14	3.6
Bill boards/posters	2		2	1	5	1
Worship centers	3		3	2	8	2
Social clubs	10		13	4	27	7
Total	134		128	122	384	100

The data gathered and presented in Table 3 show that majority of respondents 245 (150,95) representing 64% (39%, 25%) agreed that Radio/television and the social media were channels through which they were exposed to coronavirus pandemic key messages. This means that Radio/TV as well as the social media provided respondents with the bulk of coronavirus pandemic key messages.

Table 4: Level of compliance with the coronavirus pandemic key campaign messages by residents of Akwa Ibom State

Level of compliance	Akwa North (Uyo)	Ibom East	Akwa North West (Ikot Ekpene)	Akwa South (Eket)	Total	Percentage
A Very great extent	20		15	10	45	12
A great extent	10		15	10	35	9
Undecided/neutral	4		8	2	14	4
A little extent	50		40	45	135	35
A very little extent	50		50	55	155	40
Total	134		128	122	384	100

The data presented in Table 4 captures respondents opinion on their level of compliance with the key messages of the coronavirus pandemic campaign. Table 4 shows that majority of respondents 290 (155, 135) representing 75% (40%, 35%) said their level of compliance was a little extent and very little extent respectively. This implies that the level of compliance was very low among residents.

Table 5: Challenges in utilising the key messages of the coronavirus pandemic campaign by residents of Akwa Ibom State.

Major challenges	Akwa North (Uyo)	Ibom East	Akwa North West (Ikot Ekpene)	Akwa South (Eket)	Total	Percentage
high level of ignorance	4		6	4	14	4
Widespread corruption	10		20	18	48	13
Rarely listen to radio/watch television	5		10	10	25	6.5
Poor culture of hygiene	5		10	10	25	6.5
Do not believe coronavirus exist	40		30	30	100	26
Belief that the symptoms of coronavirus are the same with malaria symptoms	30		22	25	77	20
The use of face mask is inconveniencing	40		30	25	95	24
Total	134		128	122	384	100

The data in Table 5 indicate that the major challenges of utilising the key messages of coronavirus pandemic campaign are that many residents 272 (100, 77, 95) representing 70% (26%, 20% and 24%) do not believe coronavirus exist, believe the symptoms of coronavirus are similar to malaria and the use of face mask is inconveniencing and alien to their tradition among other challenges.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The key messages of coronavirus pandemic campaigns in Akwa Ibom state as shown in Table 1 were regular hand wash, use of alcohol based sanitizers, use of face mask, coughing and sneezing into the elbow or tissue paper, social distancing, avoiding handshake or embrace, visiting of government approved hospitals when infected among others. These messages corroborates NCDC (2020) directive on preventive measures to curb the spread of the dreaded COVID-19 disease. According to NCDC, to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

- Clean your hands regularly. Use soap and alcohol based hand rub
- Maintain a safe distance from anyone who is coughing or sneezing
- Don't touch your eyes, nose or mouth
- Cover your nose and mouth with your bent elbow or a tissue when you cough or sneeze
- If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention.
- Follow the directives of your local health authority.

The key messages also include symptoms of coronavirus which include high fever, cough, respiratory problems. These symptoms are in consonance with the most common symptoms of the coronavirus pandemic which according to NCDC are fever, dry cough and tiredness. The data gathered and presented in Table 2 shows the level of awareness of the coronavirus pandemic campaign messages in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents 310 (160,150), representing 81% (42% and 39%) have a very great extent and a great extent level of awareness of the coronavirus pandemic campaign messages in Akwa Ibom State. This implies that residents of Akwa Ibom State were aware of the key messages of the coronavirus pandemic campaigns. The findings of this study agrees with Akarika, Ekanem and Ukpe (2017) citing Wenberg and Wilmont (1973) who note that all persons are engaged in sending and receiving messages simultaneously. The findings also agree with the assertion by this author that the NCDC has embarked on several public communication campaigns since the COVID-19 pandemic, to get the attention of all Nigerians at all levels to the key messages of the coronavirus pandemic. To buttress this findings, Ofomeghe and Harcourt (2018) note that in recent times Nigerian has witnessed a number of epidemic outbreaks that necessitates the need for communication intervention to create awareness. The findings of this study further makes strong the notion by Akarika et.al (2017) that through information, citizens get informed about certain trends, innovation, ideas as well as other vital information needed to make citizens take informed decision. On the channels of communication through which residents were exposed to coronavirus pandemic key messages in Akwa Ibom State, Table 3 shows that majority of respondents 245 (150, 95) representing 64% (39%, 25%) agreed that radio/television and the social media were channels through which they were exposed to coronavirus pandemic key messages respectively. This means that radio/television and the social media provided residents with the bulk of the coronavirus key messages.

The findings of this study agrees with Akarika, Iwok and Ikon (2019) citing Olawu (2003) who state that information entails data, facts, imaginations, ideas, opinion, cultural values in a variety of media which include audio-visual materials and electronic processes. In an opposing view, Wilson (1990) cited in Neku, Okon and Oke (2019) observes that deep-rooted attitudes cannot be easily changed by mere exposure to the mass media alone, the broadcast media should be reinforced by word of mouth, by campaigns of personal intervention, literacy corps, health officials. Similarly, according to Marshall, Owen and Bauman (2004) mass media campaign cannot cause significant behaviour change in subjects. It therefore becomes imperative that appropriate channels that foster effective and efficient communication be encouraged (Akarika, 2020).

On the level of compliance by residents with the coronavirus pandemic key messages, Table 4 shows that majority of respondents 290 (155, 135) representing 75% (40%, 35%) said that their level of compliance was a little extent and a very little extent respectively. This implies that the level of compliance was relatively very low among residents. The findings of this study is in congruence with the social cognitive theory. According to Bandura (1989), the theory describes a dynamic process in which a number of factors interact and influence each other, thereby provoking the individual to undertake an action or inaction. In this case, inaction (low level of compliance) with the key messages of the coronavirus campaigns.

The findings of this study also agree with Marshall, Owen and Bauman (2004) who note that mass media campaigns cannot cause significant behaviour change in subjects. Similarly, the notion by this author that changing people's attitude requires the injection of high volumes of persuasive messages than mere dissemination of information, need not be ignored. Moreso, this findings corroborates Wilson (1990) cited in Neku, Okon and Oke (2019) that deep-rooted attitudes cannot be easily changed by mere exposure to the mass media. Relatively, the findings of this study agrees with the assertion by this author that the sense of urgency inherent in a message does not imply compulsion even if refusal to comply with the message could produce some negative effects on the target audience.

The challenges in utilising the key messages of the coronavirus pandemic campaign by residents of Akwa Ibom state as listed in Table 5. Include high level of ignorance, widespread corruption, rarely listening to radio/watch television, poor culture of hygiene, lack of belief that coronavirus exist, the belief that the symptoms of coronavirus are the same with malaria and the use of face mask is inconveniencing. Majority of respondents 272 (100,77,95) representing 70% (26%, 20% and 24%) do not believe that coronavirus exists, respondents. believe the symptoms of coronavirus are similar to malaria and the use of face mask is inconveniencing and alien to their tradition. The findings of this study agrees with NCDC statement that COVID-19 and malaria may have similar symptoms but are caused by different agent. Therefore, communication strategy is the approach needed by planners and implementers to overcome barriers in order to successfully convey intended messages to the target audience (WHO, 2015).

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the level of awareness created by the mass media on the key messages of the coronavirus pandemic campaigns in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, the behaviour of residents never changed. Based on the forgoing, the study recommends that:

1. Awareness should not be left alone in the hands of governments and government health related agencies, individuals should be ready to take up responsibility and save lives by promoting the campaign of coronavirus in their society.
2. Communication planners and implementers should adopt a kind of media-mix appropriate channels that foster effective and efficient communication to convey the key messages of the coronavirus pandemic campaign especially in the rural areas.
3. Interpersonal influences of family members, peer groups, social clubs, town criers/local chiefs, worship centers and opinion leaders should be explored to deal with the belief that coronavirus does not exist. This will go a long way to overcome the disbelief of the coronavirus pandemic campaign.

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