

**MEDIA SENSITIZATION AND CITIZENS' AWARENESS OF
CORONAVIRUS INFORMATION IN AKWA IBOM STATE,
NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This study examined the level of media sensitization and citizens' awareness of coronavirus information in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The study adopted the survey method. The instrument for the survey was the questionnaire. Using the 2018 projection figure by the National Population Commission, the population of Akwa Ibom State is 5,828,265 (NPC 2018). A sample size of 500 was determined using Comrey and Lee 1992 guideline for sample size selection. The study anchored on Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) model. Findings show that, majority (98%) of respondents were aware

of the coronavirus information, and that majority (75%) of respondents were satisfied with the level of media sensitization of the coronavirus pandemic information, though the level of compliance was very low. The researchers recommend that media sensitization alone is not enough to guarantee compliance rather, government should explore the traditional channels of communication in order to create a kind of media mix that will permeate the rural communities.

Keywords: Health Communication, Media Sensitization, Awareness, Coronavirus, and Pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus Pandemic remains a major scourge that has shaken global public health. The virus was first discovered in Wuhan, China in December, 2019. Coronavirus is caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS covid-19). The first case of the dreaded disease was confirmed in Nigeria in February, 27, 2020, when an Italian citizen in Lagos state tested positive for the virus (National Center for Disease Control 2020). The second case was reported in Ewekoro, Ogun State in March, 9, 2020, a Nigerian who had contact with the first confirmed case. In Akwa Ibom State, the first confirmed case was reported in April, 2020, with another case reported in May, 2020 where a Government House Press Corps was reported to have tested positive ([www.http//allafrica.com](http://allafrica.com) retrieved June 17, 2020).

According to the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) the total number of confirmed cases in Akwa Ibom State as at June, 2020 stands at 48, 18 persons are said to have recovered and 2 persons are confirmed dead. Often times, government, groups, organizations, individual are faced with an uphill task of creating awareness on health issues (Akarika, 2019). This to a large extent is dependent on the

dynamics of messages in the communication process conveyed through mass media sensitization exercise. The media could be a veritable instrument through which sensitization, mobilization and education are achieved. By means of information they provide, they broaden our mental, economic outlook (Ukpe & Akarika 2019).

The daily global updates on coronavirus pandemic information is trending immensely, broadcast on radio stations, scrolled on television screens and the social media (Akarika, Kierian & Ikon 2020). Moreso, with the liberalization of the telecommunication sector in Nigeria, which result in over 139 million active mobile phone users and an installed capacity of over 180 million lines (Monye, 2015), the media dependency level of Nigerians during Covid-19 Pandemic increased tremendously (Akarika, Kierian & Ikon 2020).

The mass media have an immense duty to sensitize the citizens by way of information and education in issues of public Health. Media sensitization provides awareness to citizens on health communications. It is against this backdrop that this study examines the level of media sensitization and citizens' awareness of coronavirus information in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In the quest to minimize the spread of the coronavirus, government at all levels have outlined several measures to curb its spread. In spite of these measures put in place by various governments and relevant agencies in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic, the virus appears to be on the increase. According to NCDC, a total of 11,643 Nigerian have contracted the virus as at June, 17, 2020, with a total of 5,623 discharged and 459 death recorded (NCDC 2020).

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 (Akarika, Umoren & Iwok 2020). 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 (Akarika, Umoren & Iwok 2020).

The availability of health information and enlightenment campaigns are obligations of the mass media. The rapid spread of diseases, most times, is as a result of lack of awareness of its early symptoms which can be treated at its early stage when detected (Akarika, 2019). In lieu of this alarming figure reported by NCDC, to what extent have the media sensitized the citizens of Akwa Ibom State and what is the level of awareness of coronavirus information in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Find out the level of awareness of the coronavirus information among the citizens of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.
2. Identify media channels that provide the awareness on the coronavirus information.
3. Determine citizens' perception of media sensitization of the coronavirus information.
4. Determine the level of compliance with the coronavirus pandemic information.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study made use of Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) Model. This model was developed by health communicators at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) the model was developed as a tool to educate and equip public health professionals for the expanding communication responsibilities of public health in emergency situations. Although critics have expressed concern about a lack of strong theoretical underpinnings and an a

theoretical focus in too many health communication studies (Kreps, 2001, p. 238), health communicators have relied on a variety of theories, concepts, and frameworks to plan, test and explain campaigns. As noted, the CERC model was developed based on the experiences of health communicators at the CDC. The communicators were informed by health communication theories; however, the model was not developed to test any one theory but as a tool to address the evolving challenges of public health.

According to the proponent of the theory the public must feel empowered in event of a crisis to reduce the likelihood of victimization and fear (CDC, 2003). The CDC developed CERC to address the emergency risk communication training needs of the public health infrastructure (Counney, Cole, & Reynolds, 2003,p. 129).

LITERATURE REVIEW

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, prevention, control and treatment. Asogwa, (2019) citing Catalan-Matamoros (2011) note that huge amounts are expended years for materials and salaries that go into the production and distribution of booklets, pamphlets, exhibits, newspaper articles, and radio and television programmes. Such media are used at all levels of public health for three broad objectives: (1) the learning of correct health information and knowledge, (2) the changing of health attitudes and values and (3) the establishment of new health behaviour. Noar, (2006) observes that the mass media campaigns have long been a tool for promoting public health such they are significantly used to expose high proportions of large populations to messages through routine uses of existing media, such as television, radio, and newspapers.

The media have an essential role to play in health promotions. Quattrin, Filiputt and Brusafarro (2015) corroborate that public health programmes may benefit from the use of mass media to promote positive health behaviours. Mass media are communication artifacts, that enhance the transmission of information, ideas, messages to a heterogeneous audience with either implicitly or explicitly having the intention to impact and influence ones behaviour through communication channel such as books, pamphlets newspapers, Magazines, radio, television, internets etc. Nkanunye and Obiechina (2017) note that communication is essential to promote and sustain healthy behaviour because it serves as the medium that is used to create awareness to individual, groups and communities on health-related issues.

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.

Akarika and Umoren (2018) citing Akarika, Ekanem and Ukpé, (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. Kuunifa (2011) states that access to information and transparency of governance is essential to ensuring accountability and prevents corruption. In a democratic dispensation, the public is expected to have

access to information not only in how they are governed, but also on anything that is of interest to the individual or society.

The advent of mass media, for example, television, magazines, newspapers, the internet and other social networks such as facebook as well as Twitter as means of communication has become part of human life in the contemporary world (Kierian, Akarika and Ukpe, 2017):

According to James, Akarika and Kierian (2017)

“We live in an enthralling world and even more enthralling society. From the moment we wake up until the moment we go back to our beds, we avail ourselves of numerous media programmes. At the end of the day, you avail yourself of the latest news from your television and crave for your favourite music over the radio and even log on to be connected to the rest of the world through the World Wide Web. Our society is becoming more and more capable of being constantly informed, entertained, and connected to the other individuals at the click of a button. Life without the media is simply unthinkable”.

METHOD

The research method adopted for this study was the survey research design. According to Babbie (1990) cited in Akarika, Ukpe & Ikon (2019:58) survey is probably the best method available to the social scientist interested in collecting original data for describing a population too large to observe directly. Using the 2018 projection figure by the NPC, the population of Akwa Ibom State is 5,828,265 at

the yearly growth rate of 3.4% (National Population Commission 2018).

Since it is impossible to study this large population, the Comrey and Lee 1992 sample guideline for research cited in Akarika, (2019) was used to select a sample size of 500 to represent the population which states as follows: 50 = very poor; 100 = poor; 200 = fair; 300 = good; 500 = very good; 1,000 = excellent. Based on this, the researcher selected 500 respondents as the sample size which according to Comfrey and Lee is very good. Out of 500 copies of the questionnaire in 465 was found useful for the study, the data were analyzed in simple percentages and tables.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The biodata of respondents shows that 200 representing 43% were female while 265 respondents representing 57% were male. This shows that the majority of respondents were male and 165 representing 35% respondents obtained SSCE qualification and its equivalent while 300 respondents representing 65% obtained HND, BA/BSC MA/MSc & PhD and its equivalent. This implies that the majority of respondents had a higher qualification and as such were exposed to media and understood the subject of discourse.

Table 1: Level of Awareness

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Very high	240	52
High	200	43
Low	25	5
Total	465	100

Table 1 shows the level of awareness of the coronavirus information. 95% (52% 433%) of the respondents said that the level

of awareness was very high and high respectively. This implies that the level of awareness was very high.

Table 2: Major Sources of Information

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Television	100	23
Radio	230	52
Newspaper/magazines	50	11
Social media	50	11
Bill board/posters	10	3
Others	-	-
Total	440	100

From table 2, out of 440 respondents that were aware of the coronavirus information, majority of respondents 330 (100, 230) representing 75% (23%, 52%) major source through which they received coronavirus information. This means that television and radio were the major carriers of coronavirus information.

Table 3: Citizens Perception of Media Sensitization

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Very satisfactory	200	43
Satisfactory	150	32
Undecided/neutral	15	3
Unsatisfied	60	13
Very unsatisfied	40	9
Total	465	100

Table 3 shows citizens' perception of media sensitization of coronavirus information in Akwa Ibom State. Majority of respondents 350 (200, 150) representing 75% (43%, 32%) were very satisfied and satisfied respectively with media sensitization on the coronavirus pandemic.

Table 4: Level of Compliance

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Very high	50	11
High	50	11
Low	15	3
Very low	150	32
A very little extent	200	43
Total	465	100

Data gathered and presented in table 4 shows the level of compliance to the coronavirus information. Table 4 shows that majority of respondents 350 (150, 200) representing 75% (32%, 43%) had a low extent and a very low extent level of compliance with the coronavirus information. This implies that in spite of the high level of awareness and satisfaction with the sensitization exercise carried out by the mass media, citizens did not comply with the coronavirus information.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Table 1 shows the level of awareness of the coronavirus pandemic information. Majority of respondents 440 (240, 200) representing 95% (52%, 43%) agreed that the level of awareness was very high and high respectively. This means that citizens' awareness of the coronavirus information was very high. The findings of the study agrees with Akarika, (2019) who note that the rapid spread of disease to a large extent is as a result of lack of awareness of its early symptoms which can be treated at its early stage when detected.

This study also corroborates Ofomegbe and Harcourt (2019) who note that in recent past, Nigeria has witnessed a number of epidemic outbreaks that have necessitated the need for communication intervention to create awareness and opportunities for effective management of cases. The mass media play a fundamental role in

educating people about diseases and ailments, outbreaks, prevention, control and treatment (Akarika, 2018).

A study by Noar, (2006) observed that the mass media campaigns have long been a tool for promoting public health such they are significantly used to expose high proportions of large populations to messages through routine uses of existing media, such as television, radio, and newspapers. In the same vein the findings of this study agrees with Nkanunye and Obiechina (2017) who note that communication is essential to promote and sustain healthy behaviour because it serves as the medium that is used to create awareness to individual, groups and communities on health-related issues.

On major source of information that provide citizens with information on coronavirus table 2 shows that out of 440 respondents who were aware of the coronavirus information, majority of the respondents 330 (100, 230) representing 75% (23%, 52%) identified television and radio as the major source of information through which they received coronavirus information. This implies that television and radio were the major channels through which coronavirus information were communicated to citizens.

The findings of this study agree with Moar, (2006) who observed that mass media campaign have long been a tool for promoting public health such that they are significantly used to expose high proportion of large population to messages through routine uses of existing media, such as television, radio and newspapers. In this global pandemic, information has become an educational, social, economic, political and health necessity.

Asogwa, (2019) citing Catalan-Matamoros (2011) note that huge amounts are expended years for materials and salaries that go into the production and distribution of booklets, pamphlets, exhibits, newspaper articles, and radio and television programmes. Such media are used at all levels of public health for three broad objectives: (1) the learning of correct health information and knowledge, (2) the changing

of health attitudes and values and (3) the establishment of new health behaviour. The media have an essential role to play in health promotions. Quattrin, Filiputt and Brusafferro (2015) corroborate that public health programmes may benefit from the use of mass media to promote positive health behaviours.

The findings of this study also corroborates James, Akarika and Kierian (2017) who observed that our society is becoming more and more capable of being constantly informed, entertained, and connected to the other individuals at the click of a button. Life without the media is simply unthinkable.

Concerning citizens' perception of media sensitization. Table 3 shows that majority of respondents 350 (200, 150) representing 75% (43%, 32%) were very satisfied and satisfied respectively with media sensitization of the coronavirus information, though the level of compliance was low. The findings of this study agrees with the CERC model used in the study.

On the level of compliance, data gathered and presented in table 4 shows the level of compliance to the coronavirus information. Table 4 shows that majority of respondents 350 (150, 200) representing 75% (32%, 43%) had a low level and a very low level of compliance with the coronavirus information. This implies that in spite of the high level of awareness and satisfaction with the sensitization exercise carried out by the mass media, citizens did not comply with the coronavirus information. The findings of this study is at variance with health communicator at the centers for disease control and prevention who developed (CERC) model as a tool to educate and equip public health professional for the expanding communication responsibilities of public health in emergency situations.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the seeming high level of awareness and citizens' satisfaction with the level of media sensitization, majority of

respondents did not comply with the coronavirus information because risk and crisis are equivocal and uncertain condition that create informational needs and deficiencies. Based on this, the study recommends that;

- (1) Though majority of respondents were satisfied with the level of media sensitization the low level of compliance calls for proactive measure by government and governmental agencies in other to reduce the risk of coronavirus infection.
- (2) In these area of digital revolution, the social media should be utilized as a major source of information on health issue since most people are tilling toward online media platform for their information needs.

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