



Relevance Of Covid-19 Media Message Protocols Among Rural Dwellers in South, West, Nigeria.

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine COVID-19 media message protocols among rural dwellers in South West Nigeria. It ascertained the influence of the media messages on the people of South West, Nigeria after the pandemic in 2020 and also accessed the types of media messages the rural dwellers are exposed to for the government protocols. The study was anchored on three theories: diffusion innovation theory, development media theory and modernization theory. The study adopted the mix methods approach by using survey design with in-depth interviews to administer questionnaire to respondents which cut across three Senatorial Districts of Ondo, Osun and Ekiti states. These include Elegbeka from Ondo North, Jegele from Ondo Central and Aiyede for Ondo South, Akoda from Osun West, Obaloja from Osun Central and Ipole from Osun East, Ugbo-Aro from Ekiti South, Orin from Ekiti North and Ogotun from Ekiti Central Senatorial Districts. Out of a total population of 13,344,600, a sample size of 900 questionnaires was administered to the respondents out of which 722 were returned and used for data analysis. The finding shows that the respondents were aware of COVID-19 and believed it was a real pandemic. This showed that government and health authorities were successful in creating awareness on the disease even in hard-to-reach areas like the rural areas. Results also revealed that radio was the most accessible medium useful in disseminating health information to rural areas. Another finding revealed that most rural dwellers accepted media message on COVID-19 but had little attitude towards adopting the media messages protocols on COVID-19. The study concluded that Nigerians are highly desirous of information pertaining to the novel COVID-19 virus messages on treatment protocols and home remedies for prevention/treatment of the pandemic should be disseminated through relevant media.



It was also concluded that media messages and health information are essential tools to fight against pandemic among the rural dwellers and the government need to give more attention to the health situation of rural areas. It therefore recommended among others that the culture of the various rural communities should be considered before arriving on which protocols to be introduced to the rural dwellers and that with the easing of the pandemic, people are now living a care free life, ignoring CO VID-119 protocols in spite of the worries about the second wave of the disease, the enforcement team should be constituted not only at the urban centers but also in every rural area of the country.

Keywords: covid-19, media, messages, rural, protocols

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Introduction

Background to the Study

The advent of COVID-19 pandemic which was caused by a novel human coronal virus (SACS COV-2/ in November 2019 led a major challenge to the entire global village, especially for Scientists and Medical Practitioners. It threw the world into pandemonium when it first emerged in Wuhan, China before spreading across globally. Jay etal (2020) posits that within three months when the virus was discovered, it spread to more than 118,000 Countries and caused 4,291 deaths in 164 Countries in both Developed developing continued and South American Countries. Europe, Asia and South American continents were badly hit, (Omini &Ofre, 2020). Zhing (2020) avers that ignorance:

Orchestrated by lack of awareness, poor or negligence of personal health were the main reasons for the numerous deaths recorded across the globe.

Nigeria, among other countries was not spared of the deadly pandemic as an Italian man who returned to Nigeria from Milan was tested positive to COVID-19. The second case was also confirmed on March 9th 2020 in Ogun State when a Nigerian citizen who had contact with the Italian man was diagnosed positive to the disease. Since then, many cases of the diseases have been reported in most of

the major cities in Nigeria, such as in Lagos, Ogun, Abuja, Kaduna etc. (WHO,2020, Amazon etal, 2020 NCDC 2020).

The media, (print, electronic and internet) has an prominent role to play as an imparting appliance to the Community, especially the rural dwellers. The media is heavily relied upon for information and updates about the virus. The great influence of the media was instrumental to the amount of information available to the masses especially in the areas of COVID-19 and its safety measures protocols.

According to Sharma, (2020) it is conscientiously, realized that the media in numerous ways as channel for the transmission of scientifically precise details about health and medicine is susceptible to aggrandizement, the transgression of exclusion, and absolute inaccuracy. Consequently, it is important that communities, governments at all levels, and professionals activate effective communication, channels in other to inform and educate the public, especially the rural dwellers in the face an outbreaks like coronal virus.

The outbreak of corona virus brought forth a large demand for information. There is the need for a field- tested communication that can promote public health during an outbreak, using trusted channels and sources to inform the public, announcing the outbreak early, being transparent in the dissemination of information, listening to the public, planning and evacuating the communication,(WHO 2008). The media, particularly social media, radio and television are used as veritable instruments for creating the needed awareness COVID-19 health education. The government of Nigeria adopted media institution with other traditional means of mass mobilization, like television, radio station, adopted native vernacular or language as their means of communication. These media have been giving coverage on the issues using different frames to inform the people about the pandemic and influence behavior positively.

However, a lot of deaths were recorded all over the World as a result of the pandemic Many deaths were due to lack or power awareness about the virus. Many citizens, especially the rural dwellers are ignorant of how COVID-19, Virus spreads, some other are in the dark as respond safety protocol measures against COVID-19.

Even with the introduction of some message protocols like the introduction of lockdown, boarder closure and so on by the government many people became dependent or regular information sharing (Erinoso etal 2020). There was proliferation of false news, creating anxiety, mental breakdown, panic among citizen and even deaths, especially for individual with comorbidities (Omig bodun &



Abdulmaik 2020, Itoanides 2019 Vigdor 2020). Deliberate efforts were made to debunk some myths or rumors about COVID-19 and more efforts required to reach rural dwellers and non-literate communities (Akimayowa & Amzat 2020).

Hence this study was a review of how the relevance of media messages protocols can be used to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on rural dwellers in the South West and how such measures impacted their livelihoods.

Empirical Review

Concept of Health Communication

Communication is the process of exchange ideas, information, feelings, thoughts and messages among the people. The message is so central to human existence and all human activities. According to Wikipedia (2023), Communication is commonly defined as the transmission of information. Health is the general condition of the body or mind in terms of soundness vitality and proper functioning and the presence or absence of illness, injuries or impairments(Microsoft Encourta 2009). Akinboye and Owolabi (2011) avers that health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or Infirmity. Health Communication therefore is the science and act of using communication to advance the health and wellbeing of the people. (SHC, 2017). Health communication is the central social process in the provision of health (Kreps 2020). The mass media services as effectives channels in health communication campaigns. Supporting the above assertion, Wogu, Chukwu, Nwafor, Wgwuoke & Ugwulor- Onyinyechi(2019) did a study to assess the role of the media in the prevention and control of meningitis in Nigeria.

The study found that the role of the media in Nigeria during the period of meningitis outbreak was positive and collaborative, leading to the reduction in the number of cases of those infected by the diseases. The study also revealed that the media have the capacity to play an educative, supportive, promotional and complementary roles in the fight against any disease in the world. (Anorue, Ugbo aja, Ayogu & Okonkwo (2019).

Concept of COVID-19 in Nigeria

The emergence of COVID-19 pandemic threatened the health economy and social relations of the entire world. The rapid spread of the virus globally was a source of worry when we consider the high member of deaths recorded within the shortest time. Jay etal (2020),



within three months when the virus was discovered, it had spread to more than 118,000 cases and caused 4291 deaths in 114 Countries, causing the World Health Organization (WHO), to declared it a global pandemic.

The spread of the pandemic across major cities in Nigeria compelled Nigeria authority to impose various restriction measures, beginning from Lagos, Ogun and Abuja on 30th, march 2020, with a view to curtailing the spread of COVID-19 pandemic (Kola, 2020, Mbah 2020). The government's lockdown measures to curtail the pandemic's spread in Kano and neigh boring states greatly affected almost all business.

The pandemic greatly affected Nigeria economy, Gavi (2020) analyze the economic impact of the pandemic that negatively affected the sale of crude oil since the entire world was locked down. The reduction of the prices of crude oil affected the implementation of the 2020 budget as more than 3.8 million people monthly working in the informal sector, lost their jobs and these rose to 13 million as a result of movement restrictions. (IMF 2020).

COVID-19 Transmission in Rural Area in Nigerians

Rural dwellers in Nigeria are the most deprived set of people in our society with inadequate access to health care services and basic amenities. The rural areas have suffered neglect from the Nigerian government in the past, thereby do not have access to basic amenities. They live in an environment which can trigger the spread of COVID-19. Many do not have access to quality education which is hindrance to comprehending the advanced English Language used for enlightenment and campaign against COVID-19 in the media. Some areas cannot access radio and television signals; it makes the people bereft of vital information. The issues that (Omini,2020). Most of the rural communities in Nigeria do not have testing centers to a certain people COVID-19 status, Asymptomatic patient can live with virus without displaying any symptoms. These categories of people who spread the virus without showing symptoms, spread virus fast through regular hand shake and other contact.

A reasonable number of persons in rural areas in Nigeria do not believe in the existence of COVID-19, they rather believe that the virus was artificially created by government officials in order to loot public funds. There is no doubt that corruption as endemic in Nigeria which is one of the reasons for the neglect to develop the area. Therefore, whatever the government is trying to tell them the people tend to



misbehave and rather behave the way they like which made them vulnerable (Omini & Ofre 2020).

COVID-19 Protocols

Sequel to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, the government put in place several protocols measure to curtails the spread to the disease. These protocols include lockdown of both public and private sectors, closure of schools, religious gatherings markets and other social gathering, movement restrictions to reduce physical contact as social distancing became a campaign to discourage gathering as a way of ensuring the health security of the Nigeria populace (Cecy 2020). These protocols are strange to the rural people considering the neglect, which the areas have faced from the government (Omini 2020). For instance, the social distancing protocols that forbade social interactions of farmers group and the social network of information flow in Nigeria. The closure of public and private sectors in Nigeria closed opportunities for rural farm families to access resources for their productive activities Interstate movement restrictions disrupted the transportation, distribution and marketing of agricultural produce from the rural areas to urban centers, leading to interruptions in food supply chain, wastages of perishable crops and loss of income for farm families (Wggins, 2020; world Bank, 2020)

Theoretical Framework

Health Belief model (H B M)

The study was anchored on the Health Belief Model (HBM) which was first developed early 1950s in the United States of American by Rosenstock (1966) and modified by Becker (1974). The model suggests that whether or not people change their behavior will be influenced by evaluation of its feasibility and its benefits out weighed against its cost. In other words people considering their behavior engage in a cost-benefit analysis. This may include their belief concerning the likely hood of the injury happening to them (their susceptibility), the severity of the injury, and the efficacy of the action and whether it will have some personal benefit, or how likely it is to protect the person from the illness or injury. People's perception and assessments of risk is central to the application of his model. Most people make a rough assessment about whether they are at risk (Olaigbe & Abiodun n.d)

Relating this theory to this study, residents(rural dwellers) seek health message when they know they are sick or at risk of being infected by a disease or pandemic (perceived susceptibility) and the mild symptoms can increase its severity (perceived severity) they tend to seek for quick timely treatment. An individual who does not see bodily



changes in terms of (cues to action) that occur during illness as threatening, they tend to delay seeking health messages during the manifestation of less signs and symptoms. A situation where the individual sees the benefits of seeking prompt health messages rather than perceived barriers to taking such actions, they tend to quickly seek for good professional health message, Methodology. In this study survey research design was adopted with questionnaire as the research instrument for data collection. Survey research was used because it enables has to interact with a large proportion of the respondents and obtained large amount of data from them with relative ease. The population of the study comprised rural dwellers across the South West geopolitical zones of Nigeria. The study was however limited to three states in the South-West, Nigeria. They are Ondo, Osun and Ekiti States. Samples size was drawn from nine rural communities from nine local government areas which comprises of 900 respondents Field data was obtained from the three senatorial districts of the selected States, these include Jegele, Elegbeka, Ayede, Ifedayo, Akoda, Ipole, Ugbo-Aro, Orin and Ogotun communities. Data collection was done by face-to-face administration of the questionnaire. Out of the 900 copies of the questionnaire, 722 were returned and used for analysis. Data analysis was done using simple percent and Data frequency count presentation, Analysis and Discussions, of finding took place.

Discussion of Major Findings

The summary of the major findings was presented at the end of the chapter. Out of the 900-questionnaire administered, 722 was returned and used for the analysis which made a returned rate 73.7%. The first sections contain the demographic variables of the respondents measured using items one to six in the questionnaire. The second sections contained matters relating to the administered Questionnaires. The result were presented as follows;

The study revealed that the majority of the respondents engaged were Artisans, this was followed by Traders, fishing/farmers, and workers in the public-sector white-collar jobs. The study had predominantly young literate respondents with age range 20-35 and 36-40 who were middle aged, with low level of education. This was similar to the finding in Reuben et al (2020) in which less than 1 in 10 participants had attained tertiary level of education, while a little under half had attained secondary level of education. This point to the low access to educational opportunities seen in rural areas. Participant in this study were mostly involved in informal occupations including artisans, trading and farming and they are known to provide limited access to social protections. This is especially important during



the pandemic due to the restriction of movement as those in informal jobs were forced to work through the pandemic in order to ensure their next unlike individuals in urban area working in the formal sector were still paid all of their salaries.

Majority of the respondents (95.9%) in the study were aware of COVID-19. This shows that government and health authorities were successful in creating awareness on the disease, even in the hard-to-reach areas like the rural area. This is similar to findings in other studies (Reuben, R. Danladi M, AM Saleh D, Ejembi, (2020). Findings from question 2 on table 10 and shown on figure 10 revealed that the commonest source of information on COVID-19 reported in this study was radio and television. The use of social media was low, unlike in other studies (Lau, Hung, Go, Ferma, Choim, Dodd et al 2020). Therefore, information targeted at rural dweller should not be disseminated via means that may requires access to and knowledge of technology, but via simpler means like announcing in churches, mosques, villages meeting s, use of radio jingle etc.

Findings also revealed that most respondents are exposed to the media message protocols such as wearing of face mask, use of hand sanitizers, regular hand washing etc. This is similar to findings in other studies (Ejeh FE, Saidu AS, Owokho S, Mauke NA et al 2020, and Ilesanmi O, & Afolabi A 2020).

However, only few (2%) respondents maintained social distance. The study found out that media messages had influenced the rural dwellers towards adhering to the protocols for preventing measures against COVID-19 pandemic in several ways. These include health behavioral change after being exposed to the various media message, attitude are change, indifferent and negative perception. The study also found out that rural dwellers adopted several preventive measures to curtail the spread of the pandemic in the rural areas. These measures among others are the use of face mask, use of hand sanitizer, regular washing of hands with soap and water, maintaining social distancing, avoiding of hand shake. The findings agreed with what Lin and Glatt (2020) posited that wearing an oral-nasal mask is one of the main protective measures as it prevents healthy individuals from inhaling the infection through the respiratory tract. It is also in line with Belser, Maines and Tumpey, (2010) claim that hand need to be sanitized regularly because it may become contaminated thereby ensuring transfer of virus to the oral or nasal mucosa.

Among the findings of the study are the relevance of COVID-19 media protocols to the rural communities which include better understating



of the pandemic, saving of life of the people, measures to reduce the spread of the disease in the communities among others. The respondents greatly appreciated the programme as rural dwellers admitted that the media protocols had saved their lives, enabled them to have better understanding of the pandemic and reduced the spread of the disease. Next was the challenges faced by the rural communities in adhering to COVID-19 media messages protocols. The findings include the lack of sufficient information about the media of transmission, symptoms or drug that can be taken when affected, lack of using local languages, lack of power supply to access the media and poor timing of the media broadcast.

Similarly, there were various challenges to effective implementation of the preventive measures to curtail the spread of the virus were identified. These challenges include inadequate distribution of the protective items, among rural dwellers, poverty and poor health condition, ignorance of the people of the rural area among others. In addition, one of the village leaders, through an interview, said that there was unbelief among the rural dwellers, as many did not believe the reality of the pandemic. The findings of the study are in line with Kashirase (2020) which state that three billion people across the world do not have access to hand washing facilities.

Conclusion

The findings of this study are pivots to government, researchers and rural dwellers. The common source of media messages on COVID-19 is radio. Nigerians are highly desirous of information pertaining to the novel COVID-19 virus messages on treatment protocols and home remedies for prevention/treatment of the pandemic should be disseminated through relevant media. The media in their messages should carry out research on the relevant media so as to provide accurate and timely message protocol which will help improve health literacy and practices of the rural population as well as curb the spread of pandemic disease. The challenges militating against media message protocols among the rural dweller on COVID-19 are too many ignorance of the people of the rural areas, poverty, limited access to clean water, poor health condition, neglect of rural dwellers, unbelief among the rural dwellers among others. The government and relevant stakeholders through this study would know the best channels to use to pass relevant media message protocol on COVID-19 that will reach the people as well as mitigate some of the challenges that affect the access and use of COVID-19 information by the rural dwellers.

Recommendations

Based on the information gathered from the research link, the following recommendations were made in line with the findings of the study:

Governments accredited health agency platforms should publish COVID-19 protocols in both English and the local dialects of the rural people to ensure the message penetrate more into the society.

The rural dwellers should endeavor to use the COVID-19 messages they obtain meaningfully to stay safe and healthy.

Town criers should be employed to disseminate government's protocols on Covid-19 to the rural people to boost their awareness.

The government should improve power supply to rural areas as this will enable them to have an energy source to power their media devices to listen to radio and watch television programmes that could enhance their awareness on COVID-19.

With the easing of the pandemic, people are beginning to live a care free life, by ignoring COVID-19 protocols in spite the worries about the second wave of the disease. Enforcement team should be constituted not only at the urban centers but in every rural area of the country.

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