



INFLUENCE OF TELEVISION AWARENESS CAMPAIGN ON COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOUR OF PORT HARCOURT RESIDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study is to find out the influence of television awareness campaign on Coronavirus disease amongst Port Harcourt residents. The objectives of the study are to; ascertain whether the frequency of the television awareness campaign on Coronavirus pandemic has made the residents knowledgeable of the virus, determine the level of influence of television awareness campaign on Coronavirus pandemic amongst Port Harcourt residents, and establish whether their change in attitude and behaviour were influenced by the television awareness campaign. The survey research design was adopted for the study with the questionnaire used as the instrument for collection of data. Using the Taro Yamane statistical formula, the sample size for the study is approximated at 400. The study found out that the level of influence was high and occasioned by constant exposure to Coronavirus awareness campaign. It was also found out that the daily airing of the campaign severally brought about the change in attitude and behaviour towards preventing the spread of the disease. The researchers therefore, concluded that television is effective in disseminating awareness campaign to curb the spread of the deadly Coronavirus. As such, it is recommended that government and other well-meaning individuals should continue to partner television stations to up the tempo of the campaigns, since it appears to be educative, informative and influencing the desired change.

Keywords: Influence, Television, Campaign, Coronavirus, Behaviour, Residents.

Introduction

The outbreak of the deadly COVID-19 pandemic is one that has placed heavy demands for behavioural change in the way individuals relate with one another, thus requiring everyone to adopt precautionary and preventive measures to help contain the spread of the virus. Some of the preventive measures, particularly, the need to keep social and physical distance is quite demanding. Nigerians have grown to embrace one another in the spirit of communal habitation, which is one of the reasons why Abati (2020) asserts that many Nigerians have devised myths about the measures to contain the spread of the virus; some describing the precautionary measures as alien to African culture. However, they were needed to contain the spread of the virus. For instance, the governments at all levels have introduced measures to help people keep distances by imposing lockdown measures.

The novel Coronavirus disease started in December 2019. Bryner (2020) records that the first case of the virus was detected in the province of Wuhan, China in December 2019. As at 10th August 2020, the Coronavirus disease has spread to most parts of the world, with 20 million people globally infected, and total of 700,000 deaths recorded globally (World Health Organization, 2020). According to Young et al. (2020), the Coronavirus disease is spread through respiratory droplets which invade the oral and respiratory organs. By implication, possible method of spread includes coughing, sneezing, physical contact with an infected persons or contaminated surfaces. The World Health Organization highlights that an infected person will display symptoms such as mild or sometimes moderate respiratory illness such as coughing, pneumonia, difficulty in breathing and a high fever amongst others (WHO, 2020).

Nigeria recorded its first case of Coronavirus disease in Lagos State on 27th February, 2020. According to the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), the infected index case was an Italian who works in Nigeria. The Italian returned from Milan in Italy to Nigeria on the 25th February, 2020 (NCDC, 2020). The Rivers State government has been proactive in preventing the spread of the virus as it introduced similar measures such as border closure, a ban on social and religious activities in the state and compulsory use of facemasks at any public outing. However, despite these measures, the state has continued to record cases of the virus steadily. This compelled the Rivers State government to impose lockdown measures in Obio/Akpor and Port Harcourt City local government areas of the state. The two local government areas are the commercial nerve centres in the state. As at 10th August 2020, the total number of infected persons in Rivers State is 1944 with 1675 discharged cases and 54 deaths (NCDC, 2020).

There is no scientifically acceptable drug for treatment of the virus for more than eight months of the spread of the pandemic. The only way to control the spread of the disease is by heightening awareness creation about the virus and preventive measures. The WHO guidelines recommend that individuals keep social and physical distance, use protective facemask to cover the mouth and nose, adopt hygienic practices such as washing of hand and using alcoholic based-hand sanitizers and sneezing or coughing into the elbow.

Udodo and Nwosu (2019) assert that for any human activity to be successful, effective communication is important. Accordingly, Adejimore, Ayenigbara and Orimogunje (2010) opine that communication, be it from family, community and mass media plays an important role in the decision-making process and the mass media have been adjudged as the most effective way to reach a large heterogeneous audience. This advantage of the mass media has been recognised by government, private individuals and organisations as they have continued to use the mass media to create awareness. Kayode and Thanny (2000) explain that the influence of the mass media can be found everywhere around us today, as hardly will you find an individual who will say that information

provided by the media is not beneficial to him or her and that such information has not influenced him or her in one way or another.

Supporting this view, Bitner (2002) states that the mass media have brought about changes in the way people think what they think about, how they interpret information and contribute in their own way to the changing world scenario. It has equally been responsible for making the world a smaller place to live by shaping attitude, opinions and belief through its content.

Consequent on this, the media particularly the electronic media; television and radio have been agog with advertisements and campaigns aimed at educating the people and keeping them abreast of the Coronavirus pandemic. Due to the human nature of the electronic media, particularly the television which according to Wragg (1992) has the audio and visual advantage combined with its ability to reach a large heterogeneous audience simultaneously, television has become indispensable in the campaign on the Coronavirus disease. The television as a medium of mass communication is very beneficial in reaching the right audience.

Oshoke (2019) is of the view that television can affect attitudes and behaviour both positively and negatively. However, when it comes to health communication and advocacy for social and behavioural change, Abone (2008) cited in Essien and Yusuf (2016) explains that the television as a medium of communication has the power to imprint information on the minds of its audience and bring about a change in attitude or behaviour, such that will promote healthy living. Thus, the television is a veritable tool in creating awareness and advocacy campaign against the Coronavirus pandemic by providing health-related information and precautionary steps to contain the spread. Azubiike (2019) explains that the television medium encourages believability due to its audio-visual ability and thus can cause its audience to cultivate opinions, beliefs, attitude and behaviour. Through the television campaign, the attention of the public can be drawn to the pandemic, to keep them abreast of the developments and to influence the audience into changing their attitude and behaviour to help contain the spread.

In Port Harcourt, the Rivers State government alongside other private and corporate organisations have utilised the television medium to create awareness and sensitise the people. A look at campaigns aired by some television stations, such as the Rivers State Television (RSTV), Silverbird Television (STV), Wazobia Television and the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), show that various campaigns in commercials, jingles and discussions both in English and the indigenous languages have been aired to continually inform, educate and remind the people on the need to adopt hygienic practices and keep a reasonable distance from one another.

However, despite the television campaigns, some individuals seem to have continued brewing myths and misconceptions about the existence of the disease in Nigeria. Is it that the media is not doing well enough or are there people who have not been exposed to media messages? It is against this backdrop that this research seeks to find out if the various television awareness campaigns on Coronavirus have influenced the attitude and behaviour of citizens towards controlling the spread.

Statement of the problem

The growing rate of the spread of the Coronavirus disease is one that calls for concern. At present, there is no globally acceptable vaccine for the cure of the disease, however for its impact to be minimal, the federal, state and local governments in Nigeria have adopted the World Health

organization's guidelines of physical and social distancing, hygienic practices such as washing of hands, making use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers, sneezing or coughing into the elbows.

The mass media, particularly the television medium have devised campaigns aimed at educating and informing the people about the best practices to control the spread of the disease through various television awareness programmes. However, despite these campaigns some persons have continued to live as though they are not aware of the dangers the virus poses to them and society in general. Abati (2020) states that some Nigerians have different opinions about the disease as some persons hold the view that self-isolation, lockdown, physical and social distancing are alien to African culture. Many others have flouted the use of protective masks and have shunned the hygienic practices as advocated by the World Health Organization to help curb the spread of the disease. Some of the defaulters have turned to various social media handles offering fake news, and fake cure, thus undermining the medical and precautionary advice given by the health organisations (Hassan 2020).

This display of ignorance is certainly detrimental to the health, safety and well-being of the people. Thus, the need to find out from residents in Port Harcourt the level of their awareness and exposure to television campaign about Coronavirus.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study;

1. Has the frequency of the television awareness campaign on Coronavirus pandemic made Port Harcourt residents knowledgeable of the virus and ways to contain its spread?
2. What is the level of influence of the television awareness campaign on Coronavirus pandemic on Port Harcourt residents?
3. Was the change of attitude and behaviour of Port Harcourt residents towards the virus and measures to contain its spread influenced by the television awareness campaign?

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on cultivation media theory. The cultivation media theory is hinged on the belief that the more individuals are exposed to the media the more they are encouraged to hold certain beliefs of reality as portrayed by the media. This theory propounded by George Gerber and colleagues (1978, 1980, 1986) posits that the media particularly the television are a socialising agent and can provoke a change in behaviour based on what the media present to them.

With reference to this study therefore, the people are exposed to television messages which encourage them to adopt new practices such as washing of hands regularly for at least, 20 seconds under running water or using hand sanitizers, wearing protective facemasks and as much as possible keeping a social and physical distance to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus disease. Griffin (2012) supports this view by stating that exposure of aspect of the media content has effects in the viewers' behaviour. Hence, the theory is appropriate for the study as it buttresses the impact of constant exposure to television campaigns on Coronavirus which is capable of leading to attitudinal and behavioural changes.

Review of Empirical Studies

Quattrin et al. (2015) carried out a study in which they reviewed 10571 publications, 50 studies related to the use of mass media in health preventing campaigns and found out that a single medium was used

in most of health campaigns. Television medium with 58% was the most used media for health campaigns, while 26% utilised a mix of media and 16% all media together.

Olapegba et al (2020) in a study that assessed the perception of Nigerians about the Coronavirus disease, found out that mass media particularly the television and radio are the most common source of health information about COVID-19. The results showed that Nigerians have relatively high knowledge, mostly derived from traditional media, about Coronavirus.

Also, Mba-Nwigoh et al (2017) embarked on a study that examined broadcast media campaigns on Ebola virus disease (EVD) in Nigeria. Results from the study revealed that although the broadcast campaign on the EVD created adequate awareness about the disease, not all strata of the society were accommodated in the campaign, especially rural dwellers. The researchers concluded that the framing of the EVD by the broadcast media was that of heightened apprehension, panic and discomfort among audience members.

Wogu (2018) investigated the impact of media campaigns on the prevention and spread of Lassa fever in Ebonyi State. Findings reveal that the media campaign has rural reach but has little or no impact. The campaign failed to create appropriate awareness of the disease and preventive/curative health behaviour. It further reveals that there is no health behaviour modification among the people because of the campaign.

Methodology

This study adopted the survey research design. The survey design helps in collecting a representative picture of attitude and characteristics and opinion of a large population on a given issue. The population of the study covered Port Harcourt metropolis which has basically Port Harcourt City and Obio/Akpor Local Government Areas of Rivers State. The two local government areas have a large population and high media exposure. They are also the commercial nerve centres of the state. The population of Port Harcourt City Local Government Area as projected from the 2006 census in 2019 is 713,589 and Obio-Akpor is 612,614. The population of the study is therefore, 1,326,203.

Using the Taro Yamane formula with 0.5 error limits for sample size determination, the sample size for the study is 399.94 approximately 400. The multi-stage sampling technique was adopted for the study. At the first stage of the multi-stage, 37 wards formed the selection. Port Harcourt has twenty (20) wards and Obio/Akpor has seventeen (17) wards. At the second stage of the multi-stage, polling units in the two local government areas formed the selection. At the third stage, communities in the two LGAs were selected. At the final stage, households in eight communities were purposively selected. They are: Diobu, Borikiri, D/Line and Alakahia (Port Harcourt City) and Rumuokoro, Rumukurushi, Elekahia and Rumualao (Obio/Akpor).

The questionnaire was used as the instrument of data collection. 400 being the study sample were divided into 8 wherein 50 questionnaires were distributed equally in each of the community. The method of analysis is through frequency distribution table and the four-point Likert Scale.

Presentation of Data and Analysis

In this study, a total of 400 copies of questionnaire were administered to respondents of which 372 representing (93%) were completed and returned, a little fraction of (7%) were not properly filled.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by age

Age	No. of respondents	% of respondents
18 – 25	72	19.35
26-35	143	38.44
36-45	98	26.34
45 above	59	15.86
Total	372	100

Table 1 reveals the age range of respondents. The respondents in this study are between the ages of 18 and 45 years and above. See Table for demographic breakdown.

Table 2. Ascertain whether the frequency of the television awareness campaign on Coronavirus pandemic has made Port Harcourt residents knowledgeable of the disease and ways to contain its spread.

S/No	Items	SD4	A3	D2	SD1	Total	Total	DECISION
1.	The television campaigns run several times during the day and on different television stations made it more effective.	98	185	62	27	372	3.0	Accepted
		392	555	124	27	1095		
2.	The frequent airing of the awareness campaign on television influenced my compliance to the guidelines of NCDC.	57	158	108	49	372	2.6	Accepted
		228	474	216	49	967		
Total							2.8	Accepted

Source: Field study, 2020

Items presented in Table 3 were accepted with a total weighted mean score of 2.8 which reveals that the running of the television awareness campaign on Coronavirus several times daily and on different TV stations encouraged compliance.

Table 3. Level of influence of the television awareness campaign on Coronavirus pandemic

S/No	Items	SD4	A3	D2	SD1	Total	Total	DECISION
3.	The television awareness campaign on Coronavirus pandemic was educative and	215	112	40	5	372	3.4	Accepted

	informative.	860	336	80	5	1281		
4.	My exposure to information about Coronavirus disease campaign influences a change of attitude and behaviour.	43 172	162 486	78 156	89 89	372 903	2.4	Rejected
5.	The campaign helped douse the misconceptions about the disease.	110 440	168 504	27 54	67 67	372 1065	2.9	Accepted
Total							2.9	Accepted

Source: Field study, 2020

Items presented in Table 2 were accepted with a total weighted mean score of 2.9 which reveals that the level of influence was because of exposure to the television awareness campaign on Coronavirus pandemic amongst Port Harcourt residents. All items were accepted except for item two which had 2.4 weighted mean score and was rejected because it was below the rating scale.

Table 4. Change in attitude and behaviour towards the virus and measures to contain its spread was influenced by the television awareness campaign.

S/No	Items	SD4	A3	D2	SD1	Total	Total	DECISION
6.	The campaign contributed to change of attitude and behaviour.	70 280	200 600	40 80	62 62	372 1082	2.7	Accepted
7.	Constant exposure to the awareness campaign influenced the fast change of attitude and behaviour towards containing the spread of the disease.	67 268	139 417	122 244	44 44	372 973	2.6	Accepted
Total							2.7	Accepted

Source: Field study, 2020

Items in Table 4 were accepted with a total weighted mean score of 2.7 which is an indication that constant exposure to television awareness campaigns against the spread of Coronavirus has made them knowledgeable about the Coronavirus disease and the precautionary measures to contain its spread.

Table 5: What new practices have you adopted as a result of your exposure to TV awareness campaign against the deadly Coronavirus

Items	No of respondents	% of respondents
Improvement in personal hygiene	62	16.67
Adhering to social distancing	19	5.11
Wearing protective masks in public	55	14.78
Avoiding physical contacts such as hugs and handshakes	20	5.38
Sneezing and coughing into elbows	10	2.69
None of the above	32	8.60
All of the above	174	46.77
Total	372	100%

Source: Field study, 2020

The information on Table 5 is a clear indication that residents were highly influenced by their continuous exposure to mass media campaigns on the Coronavirus pandemic, more especially television was more effective as they were influenced by the visual display of all the guidelines. This implies that the various campaigns aired on the mass media to create awareness of the pandemic played significant role in improving their lifestyle in terms of personal hygiene, adhering to instruction on social distancing, physical contacts in form of hugs and handshake to avoid further spread of the virus, sneezing and coughing into bent elbow, the use of protective facemasks in public were all preventive measures adopted by constant exposure to these campaigns on television.

Discussion of findings

The frequency of the television awareness campaign on coronavirus pandemic made Port Harcourt residents knowledgeable of the virus and ways to contain its spread?

Data represented on Table 3 indicated that respondents accepted that running the television campaign against Coronavirus several times daily and on different TV station makes it more effective. If the campaigns and awareness campaign on various television stations were not intense and as frequent, then most likely it will have reduced exposure and less effective. It is therefore, clear that Port Harcourt residents are greatly exposed to television awareness campaign against the Coronavirus pandemic. Further findings reveal that they prefer television jingles and consider it very educative about the Coronavirus pandemic. It is also evident that running the television campaigns against Coronavirus on a frequent basis makes it very effective in informing and educating Port Harcourt residents. It also increases their level of exposure to the information. Wakefield et al(2010) supports this view that large-scale media campaigns create avenue for higher population exposure to the campaigns and can increase overall population response to campaigns.

The level of influence of television awareness campaign on Coronavirus pandemic on Port Harcourt residents

This study revealed that Port Harcourt residents have been exposed to information about Coronavirus. This shows that majority of respondents are aware of the trends about Coronavirus, through constant exposure to Coronavirus campaign on television and other mass media channels. The implication is that there is a high level of media exposure amongst Port Harcourt residents, which is in line with the argument of the cultivation media theory which is hinged on the belief that the more individuals are exposed to the media the more they are encouraged to hold certain beliefs of reality as portrayed by the media.

Was the change attitude and behaviour towards the virus and measures to prevent its spread influenced by the television awareness campaign?

When asked if exposure to various television awareness campaign against the Coronavirus disease has influenced a change in attitude or behaviour towards containing the spread of the virus, it was accepted with a total weighted mean score of 2.7 which reveals that their exposure to television awareness campaign on Coronavirus pandemic has provoked a change in attitude and behaviour towards containing the spread of the disease. It can be inferred from this finding that the television campaign has been effective at influencing a change in attitude and acceptance of new practices. Azubuike (2019) avers that through the television campaign, the attention of the public can be drawn to the pandemic, to keep them abreast of the developments and influence the audience into changing their attitude and behaviour to help contain the spread.

Conclusion

This study concludes that television does have influence on creating awareness, enhancing knowledge and changing attitudes which in turn provokes a change in behaviour towards what is advocated for by the television campaign. The findings from this study show that various television campaigns are yielding as the people have adapted to the precautionary practices advocated through the various television mediums to help in containing the spread. It is important to reemphasise the important role of the television, its ability to influence and command a change of attitude and behaviour amongst its viewers.

Recommendations

This study recommends that:

1. The television advocacy to help curb the spread of the deadly Coronavirus should be continued. Well-meaning organisations should continue to sponsor campaigns, particularly jingles which appear to be the most preferred, to help prevent the spread.
2. Hygienic practices such as regular washing of hands and the use of hand sanitizers and disinfectants are not only important during times of health pandemic, thus, television campaign should continue to advocate for regular hygienic practices as this will be a part of the lifestyle in and out of health crisis situations.
3. The television campaign has been effective at influencing a change in attitude and acceptance of new practices. Government should maintain constant use of television campaign since it appears to be educative, informative and influencing the desired change.

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