

INFLUENCE OF RADIO HEALTH PROGRAMMES TOWARDS AWARENESS CREATION OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC OUTBREAK: A SURVEY OF RESIDENTS OF OWERRI MUNICIPAL

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Abstract

Undoubtedly, radio as one of the foremost mass media has proved to be potent and effective in raising the public awareness on the new developments and trends. One of such developments is the coronavirus pandemic, (COVID-19); a recent grave medical and socio-economic challenge that has held the world prostrate. This study therefore, sought to examine the influence of radio health programmes in the creation of awareness on Covid-19 pandemic among residents of Owerri municipal. The study was theoretically supported by the Agenda setting theory. Survey research design was employed, while non-proportionate quota sampling and purposive sampling approaches were used in selecting the respondents. The instrument for data collection was questionnaire. In analysing the data gathered, descriptive analysis and simple percentages was used. The study found that 31.5% of respondents confirmed that radio health programmes had a very large influence on their attitude toward the Covid-19 virus in relation to their health because the programmes had made them practice some healthy behaviours, such as hand washing, during the Covid-19 era. The researchers therefore, recommended that efforts by radio stations to produce health programmes that concern Covid-19 should be sustained in order to keep informing people about the need to stay healthy by practicing healthy behaviour towards Covid-19.

Keywords: COVID -19, Radio, Programmes, Creation, Awareness, Pandemic, Outbreak

Introduction

On the 31st December, 2019, the world was hit by the disturbing news of the outbreak of a strange malignant disease in the city of Wuhan, Hubei Province in the Asian Country of China. The World Health Organization (WHO) had been alerted of a cluster of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause being experienced in the city of Wuhan, China (Umaru, Suleiman & Aonover, 2020).

In January 2020, a strange and new virus was discovered, and subsequently called 'the 2019 novel Coronavirus'. However, samples collected from cases and analysis of the virus 'genetics revealed that this was the cause of the outbreak. Interestingly, on January 30, 2020, the apex global health organization, otherwise known as World Health Organization pronounced this outbreak (COVID-19) a 'global health emergency'. The virus continued to spread across the globe at a frightening speed, prompting the World Health Organization (WHO) to on March 11, 2020, declare it a global pandemic, its first such designation since declaring 'H₁N₁ influenza, a pandemic in 2009 (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020).

In Nigeria, today, radio as a mass medium is very important. It has been a veritable channel through which the people are informed new development and happenings in society. In fact, without radio, a sizeable percentage of the masses will be kept in the dark of what is happening in their environment. The threat pose by Corona virus has made it very important for people to be conscious of their health. For people to be conscious of their health as regard Corona virus they need to be aware of the deadly disease. This is where radio programmes on Corona virus becomes invaluable (Priya & Sherkhane, 2020). Through this programmes people may likely become aware and know the need why they need to protect themselves against the deadly virus.

Given the importance of awareness and knowledge of precautionary activities in curtailing the wide spread of infectious diseases like the novel Corona virus radio programmes on Covid-19 is essential. Because the virus is lethal, Azlan, Hamzah, Sern, Ayub and Mohamad (2020) emphasize the need of public awareness, reactions, adherence to, and acceptance of such steps that affect daily life in a variety of ways, particularly psychologically, socially, and physically. The information generated from such programmes could help in the fight against Covid-19 and similar future threats by improving the awareness level of the citizens and encourage positive attitudes, which are necessary to beat the pandemic Sauer, (2020). It is against this

backdrop, this study sought to examine the influence of radio health programmes towards awareness creation of the covid-19 pandemic outbreak in Imo State.

Statement of the Problem

The potency of radio as a mass medium for creating awareness and sensitizing the populace on new developments and occurrences in the society cannot be over-emphasized, especially, when compared with other channels of mass communication. Due to the attachment people have to the radio, not carrying out awareness programmes about Covid-19 on radio to cause awareness and sensitization on crucial developments and trends, especially in the health sector such as the Covid-19 era, may affect the awareness level, thereby exposing people to the danger of covid-19 because of their lack of information about the deadly disease.

Whereas many research studies have been carried out on the role of the other mass media in the creation of awareness on political, economic, religious developments, not much study at the disposal of the researchers has been done on the role radio played in bringing awareness on the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak; a grave health challenge that so much threatened the existence of mankind.

It is therefore, against this backdrop that this study is embarked upon, to examine the influence of radio health programmes in creating awareness on the outbreak of the pandemic among the residents of Owerri Municipal, of Imo State.

Research Questions

For the purpose of this study, the following formed the research questions:

1. To what extent are residents of Owerri Municipal exposed to health programmes on the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak on the radio?
2. To what extent do exposure to radio programmes play a role in creating awareness of the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak among Owerri municipal residents?
3. To what extent do radio health programmes influence residents' attitude towards the Covid-19 virus?

Review of Related Literature

At the twilight of the year 2019, like a thunder storm, there emerged a new public crisis that threatened heavily the existence of mankind. Precisely, on December, 31, 2019, a cluster of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause in China was reported to the World Health Organization (WHO). The rapid spread of the 2019 novel corona virus (2019-nCov), also known as the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-COV2), around the globe caused panic among health specialists.

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is defined as illness caused by a novel coronavirus called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-COV-2; formerly called 2019-nCov) which was first identified amid an outbreak of respiratory illness cases in Wuhan city, Hubei Province, China (Cennimo, Bergman & Olsen, 2020).

Furthermore, according to Cennimo et al. (2020), the pandemic was first reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) on December 31, 2019, and was dubbed 'COVID-19' by WHO, with the moniker derived from "Coronavirus illness 2019." To avoid stigmatizing the virus's origins in terms of communities, location, or animal connotations, the name was chosen. According to a report provided by the World Health Organization (W.H.O.), there had been roughly 96,000 recorded cases of corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-2019) and 330 documented deaths by March 5, 2020. The above shows the frightening rate of its spread.

On how COVID-19 virus spreads Kandola (2020) notes that SARS-COV-2 (COVID-19) spreads from person to person through close contact(s). According to him, when people with this deadly virus breathe out or cough, they expel tiny droplets that contain the virus. These droplets can enter the mouth or nose of someone without the virus, causing an infection to occur. Close contact is usually within around 6 feet (Kandola, 2020).

Furthermore, virus-carrying droplets can land on neighbouring surfaces or objects. By contacting these surfaces or objects, other people can become infected with the virus. If the person then touches their nose, eyes, or mouth, they are likely to become infected. When a person's symptoms are at their worst, the disease is most contagious. It is conceivable, however, for someone who is symptomless to transfer the virus. According to a new study, 10% of infections are caused by persons who have no symptoms (Kandola, 2020).

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country; and biggest economy had its first confirmed COVID-19 case on the 27th of February 2020. The patient was an Italian national working in Nigeria and had returned from Milan, Italy to Lagos, Nigeria and the 25th of February 2020. He was confirmed by the Virology Laboratory Centre of Lagos of Lagos University Teaching Hospital Umaru, et al, 2020).

The negative impact of COVID-19 pandemic has been incalculably and unimaginably grave on the

world and her population. No area or facet of her life was spared by this unwanted visitor (COVID-19). Its appearance resulted in various countries imposing travel restrictions, the impact of anxiety on the stock market and the impact of people not attending work, food insecurity, and many other things (Hutt, 2020).

Hutt (2020) reported on the devastating economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic around the world, revealing that businesses are dealing with lost revenue and disrupted supply chains as factories close and quarantine measures are implemented to relieve the financial burden on citizens and shore up struggling economies. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the coronavirus epidemic has triggered a global economic crisis unprecedented since the Great Depression (Hutt, 2020).

The economic effects of the disease are felt throughout Africa; however, they are not as severe as they are in other regions of the world. The COVID-19 pandemic, according to Nirsal Microfinance Bank (2021), will result in a sharp drop in global crude oil prices, turmoil in global stock and financial markets, massive cancellations of sporting and entertainment events, lockdown of large swaths of person movements in many countries, and intercontinental travel bans/restrictions across critical air routes around the world. As a result of the drop in global demand, decreased consumer confidence, and production slowdown, these developments have had significant implications for people's livelihoods and company activity.

To Alozie (2012), radio belongs to the electronic or broadcast media just like sister medium (television); but the difference between them is that while television's signals appeal to the senses of sight and hearing (audiovisual) the radio messages are for the senses of hearing (audio) only.

Radio as a popular medium of mass communication has some distinct characteristics. These characteristics distinguish it from other channels of mass communication. Radio has over-riding advantages over other media of mass communication for example, it appeals to illiterate audience; breaks the barriers of distance it breaks the barrier of power outage etc. (Nwodu & Fab-Ukozor, 2003; Nworgu, 2011).

Radio just like other mass media has some functions/roles in the society. These roles undoubtedly, have remained the basis for its existence, relevance and popularity. Broadly, speaking, there are three major functions of radio. They include: Information, Education and Entertainment. The information function is the most important and fundamental function of radio; as we daily witness this great power of the mass media (radio) (Baran, 2009; Nwanze, 2003).

In a research titled "The Potentials of Radio in Combating Misinformation about COVID-19 in Nigeria," Ephraim (2020) stated that radio has the ability to build citizen resilience during times of health crisis. Radio, he believes, has the power to change people's minds, modify their behaviour, and truthfully tell the public about the COVID-19 pandemic.

He went on to mention strategies that could be adopted to effectively position radio to debunk misinformation about COVID-19 in Nigeria. These strategies according to him include: using credible sources, broadcasting statistical updates at community level, use of radio jingles, dedicated segment and radio drama. He however, condemned the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) for not adequately using radio in its daily updates/press briefings on COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.

Furthermore, according to the study, while efforts were being focused on social media and television, the potentials of radio in bringing awareness on the scourge (COVID-19) downplayed (Sharecast, 2018).

In the wake of COVID-19 crisis across the globe, where social distancing was vital radio had enabled 'World Vision' (an active and reputable international development and humanitarian agency) and partners to effectively reach a wide audience with critical information COVID-19 pandemic and other vital information that can be life-saving. Radio was also used (W.V) to inform change in behaviour, and provide a platform for discussion of the pandemic. (World Vision, 2020; United Nations, 2020).

In a study on Nigerian media, coronavirus pandemic, and audience response, Nwakpu, Ezema, & Ogbodo (2020) discovered that continuous reporting of COVID-19 has proven effective in raising awareness about safety and preventive measures, thereby helping to 'flatten the curve' and contain the virus's spread. Umaru et al (2020) did a study on covid-19 awareness, perception and knowledge and it was revealed that the Covid-19 is well-known among responders, according to the survey. Covid-19 is known by 23.4 percent of the people in the two local administrations. Furthermore, the majority of respondents did not believe that Covid-19 exists, according to the survey. The study reveals that in Tarauni LGA and Kano Metropolitan Area of Kano State, there is a gap in public awareness, knowledge, and perception of Covid-19. Covid-19: Public Awareness, Knowledge, and Perception in Tarauni LGA and Kano Metropolitan Area, Kano State. Ngonso & Chukwu (2020) investigated the impact of Covid-19 pandemic broadcast media messages on rural community behaviour change. The outcomes of the study demonstrated that many members of the community are exposed to COVID-19 media messages via television. The findings also revealed that members of the community, particularly the educated, watch television. In a study conducted by Anietie, Nseobot, Ime, Akpan, Mfreke, Edidiong, Abere, Abraham, Essien & Ukpong (2020) on Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) awareness campaigns on Covid-19, it was discovered that NTA created awareness of Covid-

19 through their programs.

Theoretical Framework

The Agenda setting theory served as the theoretical foundation of this study. The word Agenda setting was first used by Walter Lipman in 1922 in his book *Public Opinion*. The concept was later developed into theory by McComb and Shaw in 1960 Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma (2017). This theory proposes that the facts which people know about public issues tends to be those which the mass media have presented to them or have given prominence in their coverage. Experts in communication have always agreed the audience will always attach importance to issue(s) in the domain of public discussion because the mass media have brought them to public focus. It therefore, implies that the media set agenda for public discussion(s). Cohen as cited in Asemah et al (2017) did note that the media may not be successful in telling what the people should think but what to think about. In this scenario the radio through its health programmes will influence what audience will think about rather on what to think.

This theory is relevant in the sense that it helps us to understand that the radio which is among the mass media has the propensity to tell the people on what to think about especially as it has to do with Corona virus pandemic outbreak and their safety.

Research Methodology

The survey research design was used, and the data gathering instrument was a questionnaire. Residents of Owerri Municipal, which had 127,213 residents according to the 2006 population census, make up the study's population. However, it was projected to grow at a pace of 2.28 percent for 14 years, resulting in a population of 168,176 residents. A sample size of 399 was calculated using the Taro Yamani formula. For this investigation, non-proportionate quota sampling and purposive sampling approaches were used. The sample size (399) was divided by the number of communities in Owerri local government using the non-proportionate quota sampling procedure (5). 399/5 80, for example. Following the division, the researchers took a random sample of 80 people from each community. The data was analysed using simple percentages and descriptive analysis.

Data Presentation and Analysis

A total of 400 copies of questionnaire were distributed on the 400 respondents but, only 380 copies were returned and found useful for analysis, thus, giving a return rate of 95%. Therefore, the analysis of the data was based on the 380 copies returned.

The sex distribution of respondents, shows that 246 of the respondents, constituting 64.7% of the total number of the respondents were males, while 134 respondents (32.2%) were females. Therefore, there were more male respondents than females.

In the age distribution, 89 respondents, representing 23.4% were within 18-30 years age bracket, while 291 respondents representing 76% were within 31 and above of age. On marital status of respondents, 276 respondents representing 72.6% were married while the remaining 104 respondents representing 27.4% were unmarried or single. When asked, if they are aware of COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, 372 respondents representing 97.9% admitted being aware of the outbreak.

Research Question one: To what extent are residents of Owerri Municipal exposed to health programmes on the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak on the radio?

Analysis of data revealed that respondents representing 360 (94.7%) confirmed that they are exposed to health programmes about the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak on radio to a large extent. Meanwhile, 20 respondents representing (5.3%) indicated that they were not exposed to health programmes about the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak on radioto a large extent. By implication, it means residents in Owerri Municipal were largely exposed to health programmes on radio that is focus on Covid-19 pandemic outbreak.

Research Question Two: To what extent do exposure to radio programmes play a role in creating awareness of the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak among Owerri municipal residents?

Analysis of data further revealed that 363 respondents representing (95.5%) confirmed to the fact that their exposure to radio programmes play a role in creating awareness of the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak. Further 15 respondents representing (3.9%) could not say, if it has played a role or not in the creation of awareness on the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak. Meanwhile, 2 respondents representing 0.6% were of the view that radio health programmes on Covid-19 has not played a role in the creation of awareness on the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. This means that radio heath programmes on Covid-19 has played a role in creating

awareness of the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak among Owerri municipal residents.

Research Question Three: To what extent do radio health programmes influence residents' attitude towards the Covid-19 virus?

Analysis of data revealed that 120 respondents representing (31.5%) confirmed that radio health programmes influence their attitude towards the Covid-19 virus in relation to their health to a very large extent as the programmes have made them to practice some healthy behaviour such as hand washing in the Covid-19 era. While 94 respondents representing (24.7%) indicated that radio health programmes have largely influence their attitude towards healthy behaviour. Meanwhile, 69 respondents representing (18.2%) indicated moderate extent. Further 60 respondents representing (15.8%) said low extent, while 37 respondents representing (9.7%) were indifferent to the question. This implies that radio health programmes influence respondents attitude towards the Covid-19 virus in relation to their health to a very large extent.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from data analysed revealed that 94.7% of respondents confirmed that they were exposed to health programmes about the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak on the radio to a large extent. This high level of exposure implies that the majority of respondents have an advantage in obtaining firsthand information about the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak from the media. This is in line with the finding of Umaru et al (2020), whose study revealed that respondents in the locality where the study was conducted were aware of the Covid-19 outbreak and that their awareness shaped their perception. In line with the Agenda setting theory, this research was anchored. It is clear that awareness of radio health programmes on Covid-19 will definitely influence what people think about, even though it may not tell them what to think about.

Also, the findings equally revealed that 95.5% of respondents are of the view that their exposure to radio programmes has played a role in creating awareness of the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak. This discovery confirmed that radio health programmes had kept them informed about Covid-19 issues. In agreement with this finding, Anietie, et al. (2020) revealed that the mass media, such as the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) have the propensity to raise awareness of Covid-19 through their programmes and campaigns on Covid-19. As a matter of fact, in their study, they revealed that NTA created significant awareness of Covid-19 through their programmes. From the theoretical perspective, the media can influence public opinion through their programmes, as postulated by the Agenda setting theory.

The data analysis revealed that 31.5% of respondents confirmed that radio health programmes had a very large influence on their attitude toward the Covid-19 virus in relation to their health because the programmes had made them practice some healthy behaviours, such as hand washing, during the Covid-19 era. In line with this finding, Ngonso & Chukwu (2020) discovered in their study that broadcast media messages about the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak had a significant impact on rural community behaviour changes as a result of their exposure to broadcast media messages about the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak. Also, the findings of Nwakpu, et al (2020) resonate well. Their findings revealed that continuous reporting of COVID-19 has proven effective in raising awareness about safety and preventive measures, thereby helping to 'flatten the curve' and contain the virus's spread. Respondents may have taken precautionary measures against the Covid-19 pandemic as a result of their exposure to Covid-19-related radio content, which may have influenced them on what to think about in order to slow the spread of Covid-19.

Conclusion

Since the upsurge of the Corona virus pandemic, the world has been on its heels. Virtually all aspects of human endeavour have been affected by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. When a deadly disease such as this breaks out, the mass media takes centre stage in informing people about what to do. In doing this, the radio, as the mass media, has a great role to play. Based on the findings, there is no doubt that radio, through its content, plays a critical role in raising public awareness of disease outbreaks such as the Covid-19, influencing their attitude toward healthy practices that can help curb the spread of the Corona virus pandemic.

Recommendations

It was recommended that:

1. Radio stations (both public and private stations) should give greater attention and coverage to COVID-19 pandemic in their broadcasts due to the fact that great numbers of people are exposed to it.
2. The government authorities and public health concerned agencies such as NCDC, should make greater use of radio in informing and sensitizing the populace on the pandemic and its attendant consequences because radio over the years has prove to be a veritable platform to disseminate

information.

3. Efforts by radio stations to produce health programmes that concern Covid-19 should be sustained in order to keep informing people about the need to stay healthy by practicing healthy behaviour towards Covid-19.

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