

AN ASSESSMENT OF PUBLIC RESPONSE TO MEDIA CAMPAIGNS ON COVID-19 PREVENTIVE MEASURES IN SOUTH EAST, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study assesses public responses to media campaigns on preventive measures of covid-19 pandemic in South East, Nigeria as advised by government and other health officials aimed at curtailing the spread of the disease since there is no clinically known vaccine or drugs for the treatment of covid-19. The population of this study was drawn from the South East states of the country with four hundred copies of questionnaire administered to respondents across the five states that make up the geo-political zone. Health belief model was used as the main theoretical framework for the study. The study found that the media campaigns on preventive measures of covid-19 has been successful to some extent. The study also found that majority of the respondents are aware of the various media campaigns to curb the spread of the disease but the level of compliance is poor despite the intensity of these various media campaigns. But it is appalling that majority of the respondents still move about without wearing facemasks, not avoiding crowded places as well as not maintaining social distancing as advised in the various media messages. Thus, this study recommends the use of mixed media strategy in disseminating the messages so that the different medium will complement each other. Also, the government should enact law that would make it mandatory for people to wear facemasks and also adhere to the covid-19 safety protocols.

Keywords: Public, response, covid-19, health protocol, pandemic and media campaigns.

Background of the Study

The outbreak of covid-19 pandemic has been regarded as a public health problem threatening the lives of many people across the globe, especially in the developing nations with a well-documented history of weak public health care system, shortage of medical staff and poor funding. The outbreak of covid-19 pandemic in

2019 in China and its spread has shown that the disease has no respect for territorial landscape due to the high number of infected cases and deaths reported across the globe.

The covid-19 pandemic is a devastating disease caused by a novel human coronavirus (SARs-Cov-2) formerly referred to as 2019-nCov (WHO, 2019). The index case of the covid-19 pandemic was first reported in December 2019 among people with viral pneumonia symptoms in Wuhan, China (Li, Guan, Wu, Wang, Zhou, Tong, 2020). Available literature about the origin of the virus has it that it was found to be related with the Huanan seafood market in Wuhan, in the Hubei province of China where most non-aquatic animals are also being sold for human consumption before the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic (Cascella, Rajnik, Cuomo, Dulebohn & DiNapoli, 2020).

There was an exponential rise in the number of covid-19 pandemic related cases within a month when the index case of the virus was first reported in China; the disease spread across countries causing so much panic and deaths. As of August 11, 2020, the total confirmed cases of covid-19 pandemic across the world is 20, 119, 511, while the number of recovered cases stood at 12, 366, 115 with 737, 022 being the total number of deaths recorded. The United States of America has the highest number of confirmed cases in the world with 5, 182, 177, while the figure of recovered cases is 2, 523, 022 and the number of reported deaths is 165, 286 (The New York Times, 2020).

In Nigeria for instance, the first index case was reported in February, 2020 by an Italian who arrived the country and tested positive to coronavirus. This case marked the rise of reported cases of covid-19 pandemic in the country. As of August 11, 2020, available statistics has it that the country has a total confirmed cases of 46, 867 with 33, 346 as the total number of recovered cases while deaths stood at 950 (<https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/faq/>). It is instructive to note that more confirmed cases were recorded in Nigeria during the period of the nationwide lockdown announced by President Muhammadu Buhari on March 30, 2020.

Since there is no specifically known cure yet for covid-19, the only option left for countries was to devise strategies of curtailing the spread of the disease. To this effect, different countries mapped out public health protocols to control the spread of the virus, most of these preventive mechanisms focused on social distancing, hand wash, wearing of facemasks, avoiding crowded places and lockdown of cities. The global lockdown raised a lot of reactions among the population based

on its multiplier effects on the economy, particularly in developing nations (Deblina, Sarvodaya, Sujita, Nivedita & Sudhir, 2020).

In Nigeria, the Federal Government of Nigeria initiated a Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 to provide high-level strategic national response to the disease in Nigeria. The Federal Ministry of Health also activated the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC)-led national COVID-19 Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) to coordinate the national public health response. At state-level, preparedness and response activities are also been coordinated through Public Health EOCs in each State (<https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/faq/>).

The NCDC is an agency under the Federal Ministry of Health established in 2011 in response to the challenges of public health emergencies and to enhance Nigeria's preparedness and response to epidemics through prevention, detection and control of communicable diseases. The NCDC also launched a campaign themed #TakeResponsibility across traditional and new media platforms aimed at curbing the spread of the disease in the country (<https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/faq/>).

There has been a lot of misconceptions about covid-19 disease in Nigeria with citizens describing it as just a mere hoax by government officials in the country to attract foreign grants and support from global agencies and rich countries. To discountenance this erroneous perception, the NCDC and other relevant government agencies embarked on different media campaigns to change the public perception as well as to disseminate information about the mode of transmission of the virus, how to seek medical attention when one contract the virus and other preventive measures to be observed by the citizens to curb the spread of the disease in the country.

On a daily basis, members of the public's mobile phones, social media platforms, television, newspapers and radio stations are inundated with a plethora of messages from the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and other health organizations on preventive measures to be adopted by members of the public in order to curb the spread of corona virus in the country.

The process of achieving the above health behavioural change or development cannot be achieved without effective communication. This can be attributed to the fact that any social development and behavioural change are people oriented and they can only participate mainly through communication across different media

(Anorue & Nwanguma, 2015). Media campaigns are people oriented based on the fact that media functions are mainly to inform, educate and to entertain. Over the years, the mass media have proven to be a powerful tools for the dissemination of information, especially on health related matters such as the outbreak of covid-19 pandemic.

On the impact of media in the society, Wogu, Chukwu, Nwafor, Ugwuoke & Ugwulor-Onyinyechi (2019, p. 1) opine that:

The media is a powerful instrument with which to influence health behaviours linked to viral transmission and infection. Mass media (e.g. television, radio), print media (e.g. magazines and newspapers) and new media (e.g. the Internet, mobile phones, search engine news sites and other forms of social media) have been used to convey targeted messages about health risks and raise health awareness. Media messages provide information about factors such as disease outbreaks, symptoms, modes of transmission, fatality rates, treatment centres, drugs and prevention methods.

From the above statement, it can be deduced that the media have a critical role to play in the fight against the spread of covid-19 pandemic in the country. Little wonder why the Nigeria Centre of Disease Control (NCDC) comprehensively integrated the media in its various health communication messages aimed at curtailing the spread of the disease right from the date that the first index case in Nigeria was reported.

Since the outbreak of covid-19 pandemic globally and Nigeria in particular, the NCDC and other government agencies such as the National Orientation Agency (NOA), Federal Ministry of Health and media stations have leveraged on the all-pervading influence of the mass media (traditional and new media) to disseminate information, enlighten members of the public and make them conscious of the existence and severity of the covid-19 pandemic in the country. These media campaigns were on both local and national television stations in the country, national newspapers and magazines, the social media platforms such as Facebook, twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, news blogs, websites etc. were also used to sensitize the populace about the covid-19 pandemic.

Considerable studies have been conducted by scholars in recent times across different fields to ascertain the virology features and medical threats of the covid-19 pandemic; however, not much studies have investigated the success or failure of the various mass media campaigns on precautionary measures outlined by the World Health Organization (WHO) and other local health officials aimed at curtailing the spread of the disease since there is no clinically approved vaccine or drugs for the treatment of the virus. The level of people's compliance to these health protocols as laid down by health authorities and the NCDC is important in order to flatten the curve of infections and deaths cases recorded since the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. Thus, this study tends to assess the level of public response to media campaigns on preventive measures on covid-19 pandemic in South East, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The outbreak of covid-19 pandemic has caused a lot of panic in the world due to the severity of the virus, high rate of infection cases and deaths recorded. People's fear were also heightened due to the fact that there is no clinically approved vaccine or drug known for the treatment of the disease as at the time of this study. To flatten the rate of infections and deaths, government of different countries including Nigeria came up with a series of media campaigns and advocacies based on the World Health Organizations (WHO) health protocols on preventive and control measures to inform their citizens about the inherent danger posed by covid-19.

In Nigeria for instance, the Presidential Task Force on Covid-19, the Federal Ministry of Health, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and other organizations sponsored different media campaign messages on preventive measures across both old and new media platforms to curb the spread of the disease in the country such as constant hand washing under a running tap, use of hand sanitizers, wearing of facemasks, avoiding crowded places, maintaining social distance etc.

The extent of compliance by citizens of the country, especially those from the South eastern states of the country to these media campaigns is still unknown. There is utmost need to ascertain the extent of compliance and success of these

media campaigns in the fight against covid-19 pandemic. Thus, this study tends to fill this gap in literature.

Objectives of the study

The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

- a) To ascertain the level of public exposure to media campaigns on preventive measures of covid-19 pandemic in South east, Nigeria.
- b) To determine the level of public awareness to the media campaigns on preventive measures of covid-19 pandemic in South east, Nigeria.
- c) To find out the extent to which the media campaigns have influenced the public towards adhering to the preventive measures of covid-19 pandemic in South east, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The research questions formulated for this study are as follows:

- a) What is the level of public exposure to the media campaigns on Covid-19 preventive measures in South east, Nigeria?
- b) What is the level of public awareness to the media campaigns on Covid-19 preventive measures in South east, Nigeria?
- c) To what extent did the media campaigns influence the public towards adhering to the preventive measures on covid-19 pandemic in South east, Nigeria?

Empirical review of related Literature

Since the outbreak of corona virus in Wuhan city, China in 2019, many scholars have carried out different studies relating to the mode of transmission, awareness, knowledge, perception, etc. in order to contribute to the body of knowledge. Kebebe, Yitayih, Birhanu, Mekanen & Ambelu (2020) conducted a study on knowledge, perception and preventive practices towards covid-19 early in the outbreak among Jimma University medical Center visitors, Southwest Ethiopia. The study used a cross-sectional method to sample 247 visitors of the University. The study found that majority of the respondents are aware of the clinical symptoms of covid-19. The respondents further identified symptoms such as stuffy nose, runny nose and frequent sneezing as some of the common and distinctive features of the virus.

In respect to knowledge of risk factors and prognosis of the covid-9 pandemic, most of the respondents asserted that old people with underlying illness are at risk of developing acute form of covid-19. It is also germane to note that majority of the respondents stated that early detection and treatment have the tendency of increasing the patient's chances of survival despite the fact that there is no medically approved drugs for the treatment of covid-19. The study also found that knowledge level about the main mode of transmission of covid-19 pandemic was very high among the sampled respondents. Also, on the preventive measures to be adopted against the spread of the virus, majority of the respondents enumerated frequent hand washing, not touching face-eye-nose without washing hands as well as ignoring crowded places. Another sterling finding of the study was that there is a vast gap between the magnitude of knowledge of preventive methods and the practices. It was also found that hand washing and avoidance of shaking hands for greeting are the two regularly observed methods of precautionary measures against covid-19 by most of the respondents sampled.

In an attempt to ascertain the level of Chinese government's preparedness on preventive measures of covid-19 pandemic, Huang et al (2020) carried out an internet- based cross-sectional survey on measures undertaken in China to avoid Covid-19 infection. The study found that most of the participants adhered to the recommendations of the Public Health Authority by opening the windows in their houses more frequently than before for more ventilation in the house. Majority of the participants also disclosed that they used facemasks in public places, avoided crowded places, washed their hands frequently and stayed at home.

The study found that gender differences played a major role in the aspect of compliance to the preventive measures advised by the government and health officials because women are more compliant with all the listed preventive measures and hygiene than men. It is also instructive to state that majority of the participants expressed optimism that the covid-19 pandemic would be tackled in China based on the proactive measures put in place by the government as well as the high rate of compliance by people. The study found that WeChat was the major source of information on the covid-19 pandemic for over 90 per cent of the participants.

The study also found that majority of the respondents played vital role in influencing their families and friends on the need to adhere to the government

listed health protocols to prevent the spread of the disease in the country. Furthermore, the study found that the innovative measures supported with traditional strategies adopted by the Chinese government which include active contact tracing of infected people or those who have come in contact with infected people, isolation and quarantine and campaigns for people to maintain social distancing contributed greatly to China's positive response to covid-19 pandemic.

Finally, the study found that the training programme organized by the government on the National Health Commission website for continued education for health officials to share newer information on prevention, diagnosis and treatment of covid-19 pandemic also played a crucial role in curtailing the spread of the virus.

Collinson, Khan & Heffernan (2015) did a study that critically looked at the effects of media reports on disease spread and important public health measurements. The study employed a stochastic agent based model to provide a quantification of mass media reports putting into cognizance the variability of important public health measurements. The study was conducted in Toronto, Canada.

The study found that the report level as well as the rate at which people relax their healthy behavior immensely affect the variability in vital public health measurements based on the fact that when the mass media reporting data are included in the mathematical model used; there is the tendency that two peaks of infection result will be the outcome.

The study disclosed that mathematical models can be used to ascertain the effects of the media during an epidemic or pandemic such as reportage on disease incidence, hospitalization, deaths rate which can also be included as part of the mass media function.

Khasawneh, Humeidan, Alsulaiman, Bloukh, Ramadan, Al-Shatanawi, Awad, Hijazi, Al-Kammash, Obeidat, Saleh and Kheirallah (2020) examined the level of knowledge, attitude and precautionary measures among medical students during the outbreak of covid-19 pandemic. The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional study design. The sample of the study was drawn from the six medical schools in Jordan and online questionnaire was used to generate data for the study.

The study found that majority of the medical students relied on online sources to get information including the use of the different social media platforms about the covid-19 pandemic as against relying on local or global news for updates on the outbreak of the disease. The study also found that most of the medical student (95.0%) believed that people with chronic illnesses are highly prone to COVID-19.

The study also found that majority of the respondents believed that an infected patient can transmit the virus to more than four people at each contact if safety measures were not given priority, and that COVID-19, unlike common cold and flu viruses, has the tendency to cause pneumonia in infected individuals. On recovery rate of infected patients, majority of the students sampled stated that infected persons would recover promptly without the need for medical treatment, and the study revealed that majority of the students sampled 75.0% believed that a functional vaccine would curtail the spread of COVID-19 across the globe. Also, majority of students agreed that infected person when identified clinically should be avoided in order to prevent the spread of the virus.

It was also found that frequent washing of hand, observing personal hygiene, and staying indoors were the three most adopted strategies by the students to protect themselves from being infected by the virus. Also, surprisingly, the study found that the student's year of study has a link with the willingness of the students to adhere to precautionary measure of wearing a protective facemasks to prevent corona virus infection.

On the role of media in the fight against the covid-19 pandemic, Mejia, Ticona, Rodriguez-Alarcon, Campos-Urbina, Catay-Medina, Porta-Quinto, Garayar-Peceros, Ignacio-Quinte, Carranza Esteban, Ruiz Mamani, Tovani-Palome (2020) evaluated media informative role in the face of the corona virus disease 2019 and its validation of fear perception and magnitude of the issue. The study employed survey research method to obtain information from the respondents.

The study observed that exaggeration of the media, generated trepidation and information obtained from health officials, family members and friends are some of the factors that influence people's level of information about the covid-19 pandemic.

The study also found that majority of the respondents sought for information from non-medical sources such as local television stations or other media that are not news oriented. The researchers attributed this to the reasons for generated fear and collective hysteria among people after the outbreak of the corona virus. To reduce the level of fear generated by the mass media about covid-19 pandemic, the study recommended that the mass media should put the present situation into cognizance particularly the situation of the public health emergency that would ensure that the available information originate from reliable sources and provide calm for the people through knowledge.

Supporting the effectiveness of the media in health communication campaigns, Wogu, Chukwu, Nwafor, Ugwuoke & Ugwulor-Onyinyechi (2019) did a study to assess the role of the media in the prevention and control of meningitis in Nigeria. The researchers used documentary method of data gathering and analysis. The study found that the role of the media in Nigeria during the period of meningitis outbreak was positive and collaborative which led to reduction in the number of cases of those infected by the disease. 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.

The study also found that majority of Nigerian media houses used variety of formats such as causes of the disease, symptoms, number of deaths, preventive measures, treatment, outbreak response strategies and preparedness as well as people's views about the disease to report on meningitis across different parts of the country. It was also discovered that most of the paid form of advertisements and announcements meant to support the media in health promotion campaigns were affected by limited knowledge level of infectious diseases by politicians and some media sponsors.

Still on the role of media in health communication campaigns, Wogu, Chukwu, Orekyeh, Anorue, Nwokedi & Chukwu (2019) conducted a study on communicating health risk in Southeast Nigeria: The case of media campaigns against viral hepatitis and its implication for health communication. The study employed survey method with 500 respondents selected across the five states in the Southeast zone.

The study found that preponderance of respondents consume media messages but only few of the respondents were aware of viral hepatitis, its symptoms, mode of

transmission and treatment methods. The researchers also observed that poor timing, scanty or few scheduling of media health programmes were some of the challenges affecting media campaigns against viral hepatitis in Southeast Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Existing literature has it that the Health Belief Model was first developed during the early 1950s in the United States (US) of America by psychologists Godfrey Hochbaum, Irwin Rosenstock and Stephen Regels working in the US public health service (Cummings, Jette & Rosenstock, 1978). The model was postulated by scholars in response to the failure of a free Tuberculosis (TB) health-screening programme.

The HBM has its origin from psychological and behavioral theories with the foundation that the two components of health-related behavior are; the desire to ignore illness, or conversely get well if already ill; and the belief that a certain health action will prevent, or cure, illness. Ultimately, an individual's course of action often depends on the person's perceptions of the benefits and barriers related to health behavior. There are six tenets of the HBM as propounded by scholars. The first four tenets were developed as the main tenets of the HBM. The last two were added after more researchers have stretched the body of knowledge in respect to the HBM (Lamorte, 2019).

The six common tenets of the health belief model as listed by (Lamorte, 2019) are as follows:

1. Perceived susceptibility - This has to do with the person's belief of being at risk of contracting an illness or disease such as the covid-19 pandemic. There is a large variation in a person's feelings of personal vulnerability to contracting an illness or disease.
2. Perceived severity - This refers to a person's feelings on the seriousness of contracting an illness or disease (or leaving the illness or disease untreated). There is wide variation in a person's feelings of severity, and often a person considers the medical consequences (e.g., death, disability) and social consequences (e.g., family life, social relationships) when evaluating the severity.
3. Perceived benefits - This refers to a person's perception of the effectiveness of various actions available to reduce the threat of illness or disease (or to cure illness or disease). The course of action a person takes in preventing (or

curing) illness or disease relies on consideration and evaluation of both perceived susceptibility and perceived benefit, such that the person would accept the recommended health action if it was perceived as beneficial.

4. Perceived barriers - This refers to a person's feelings on the obstacles to performing a recommended health action. There is wide variation in a person's feelings of barriers, or impediments, which lead to a cost/benefit analysis. The person weighs the effectiveness of the actions against the perceptions that it may be expensive, dangerous (e.g., side effects), unpleasant (e.g., painful), time-consuming, or inconvenient.
5. Cue to action - This is the stimulus needed to trigger the decision-making process to accept a recommended health action. These cues can be internal (e.g., chest pains, wheezing, etc.) or external (e.g., advice from others, illness of family member, newspaper article, etc.).
6. Self-efficacy - This refers to the level of a person's confidence in his or her ability to successfully perform a behavior. This construct was added to the model most recently in mid-1980. Self-efficacy is a construct in many behavioral theories as it directly relates to whether a person performs the desired behavior.

This model holds sway in this study based on its underlying tenets of the health belief model. These media campaigns sponsored by the federal government and other organizations have the capacity to change people's negative behavioural mindset and make them to engage in practices outlined by the various media messages on television, radio, newspaper, magazine and social media platforms on how to curtail the spread of the deadly covid-19 pandemic. This assertion is based on the powerful influence of the mass media in changing negative attitude and behaviour to positive attitude and behaviour as the case maybe for the good of the society.

Methods

Research Design

The survey research method was employed to conduct this study in line with the topic of this work which is an audience-based study.

Population of the study

The population of this study consist of residents of the South East zone of the country. The South-East zone comprise five states namely; Imo, Anambra, Ebonyi, Abia and Enugu states.

Sample size

A size of 400 respondents was drawn from the capital of the five states for this study through the use of Australian calculator.

Sampling technique

This entails the selection of sample for a study. It is necessitated by the impracticability nature of studying the entire population in most cases (Ohaja, 2003 cited in Anorue, Ugboaja & Oknokwo, 2020). The study adopted the purposive sampling method. This method falls under the non-probability sampling technique which requires the researchers to seek certain characteristics needed from the vast majority of the respondents. It therefore helps the researchers to zoom down on the target population. The researchers purposively selected the State capitals of the five Eastern states listed above.

The sample size of 400 was distributed to each of the State's capital in the South East zone through the adoption of quota sampling technique. A tabular presentation of the selections were as follows:

Table 1. Showing the distribution of respondents across the five state capitals in South-East Zone

State	Capital	Allotted sample
Enugu	Enugu	80
Imo	Owerri	80
Anambra	Awka	80
Abia	Umuahia	80
Ebonyi	Abakaliki	80
Total		400

The questionnaire was used for instrument of data collection. The questionnaire had two sections; the demographic and psychographic sections. The demographic section had five questions while the psychographic section had 10 questions; 8 close ended questions and two open ended questions.

The data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The quantitative analysis tools used for this study were tables of frequencies and percentages.

Discussion of findings

Demographic Analysis

The data showed that 278 (69.5%) of the respondents were male while 122 (30.5%) were female. The age distribution of respondents revealed that those within the age bracket of 18-25 were 78 (19.5%), 26-35 were 130 (32.5%), respondents within the age bracket of 36-45 were 75 (18%) while 46 & above were 120 (30%). The respondents educational qualification shows that those with Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE) were 79 (20%), OND/HND were 49 (12%), First degree were 216 (54%) while M.Sc. & PhD were 56 (14%). Finally, the marital status of the respondents revealed the following; those single were 92 (23%), married 213 (53%), divorced 65 (16%) while others were 30 (8%).

Research question 1: What is the level of public exposure to the media campaigns on Covid-19 preventive measures in South east, Nigeria?

To find out the level of audience exposure to media campaigns on covid-19 pandemic in South East, Nigeria, the generated data revealed that majority of the respondents sampled are well exposed to the various media campaigns on preventive measures on covid-19 pandemic with 387 (97%), (9 2%) of the respondents said they are not exposed to the various media campaigns while 4 (1%) of the respondents were undecided. The implication of this result is that the vast majority of people still rely on the media for information.

To ascertain the medium or media of exposure to the various media campaigns on covid-19 pandemic, the results showed that majority of the respondents 234(58.5%) were exposed to the different media campaigns on covid-19 pandemic preventive measures through the various social media platforms , This finding is in consonance with the study conducted by Khasawneh, Humeidan, Alsulaiman, Bloukh, Ramadan, Al-Shatanawi, Awad, Hijazi, Al-Kammash, Obeidat, Saleh and Kheirallah (2020), those exposed to the media campaigns through television were 87 (21.75%), it was closely followed by radio with 45 (11.25%), newspaper 21 (5.25%) while other media were 3 (0.75%). The implication of this result is that many people are gradually relying on social media as a source of information based on its attendant influence over the old media.

Research question 2: What is the level of public awareness to the media campaigns on Covid-19 preventive measures in South east, Nigeria?

To ascertain the level of awareness of the media campaigns on covid-19 pandemic preventive measures, the results indicated that a large number of the respondents were aware of the various media campaigns on preventive measures on covid-19

pandemic in South East, Nigeria with 388 (97%) of the respondents affirming to the question. Still on awareness level, 10 (2.5%) of the respondents said they were not aware of the media campaigns on covid-19 pandemic preventive measures.

To find out if the audience understands the content of the various media campaigns on covid-19 pandemic in South East, Nigeria, the result shows that 356 (89%) of the respondents asserted that they comprehend the content of the media campaign messages, 40 (10%) of the respondents said they did not understand the various media campaign messages aimed at curtailing the spread of the disease in the region while 4 (1%) of the respondents were indifferent in their responses.

In order to ascertain if the respondents know the purpose of the media campaigns on covid-19 preventive measures in the South East geo-political zone, the results showed that 332 (83%) of the respondents stated that the major aim of the media campaigns was to curb the spread of the virus, 37 (9.25%) of the respondents disclosed that the aim of the media campaigns was to sensitize members of the public about the existence of the virus, 23 (5.75%) said the media campaign was basically to provide medical related support to infected victims while 8 (2%) of the respondents opted for other reasons as the main aim of the media campaigns.

Research question 3: To what extent did the media campaigns influenced the public towards adhering to the preventive measures on covid-19 pandemic in South east, Nigeria?

The generated data showed that 349 (87.25%) of the respondents stated that their health behavioural attitude changed after being exposed to the various media campaigns on covid-19 pandemic preventive measures, 46 (11.5%) said their behavioral attitude towards the virus did not change while 5 (1.25%) of the respondents were indifferent in their answers to the question. This particular finding is in consonance with the findings of Anorue & Nwanguwa (2015) and Wogu et al. (2019).

On the influence of the media campaigns on respondents, a vast majority of the respondents stated that the various media campaign messages on preventive measures on covid-19 pandemic had positive influence on them in respect to safety measures with 370 (92.5%), admitting that they were positively influenced; 27 (6.75%) of the respondents said the media messages had negative influence on them while 3 (0.75%) of the respondents were undecided.

To find out respondents most adhering practice towards curtailing the spread of the virus as advocated by the different media campaigns, 199 (49.75%) of the respondents stated that they wash their hands regularly as advised by health officials in the various media messages, 102 (25.5%) stated that they wear facemasks more often, 21 (5.25) opted for improved hygiene, 49 (12.25%) revealed that they maintained social distance after being exposed to the media campaigns, 27 (6.75%) indicated that they avoided crowded places with 2 (0.5%) of the respondents said that they observed other precautionary measures as directed in the various media campaign.

The low infection figure recorded in the South East geo-political zone and Nigeria generally was attributed to these various media campaigns by the respondents with 363 (90.75%), 33 (8.25%) of the respondents who disclosed that the various media campaigns were not responsible for the low rate of covid-19 pandemic infection cases in the zone while 4 (1%) of the respondents were indifferent.

On the challenges of the media campaign messages, most of the respondents stated that the media messages lacks sufficient information about the mode of transmission, symptoms or drugs that can be taken when infected without going to the crowded isolation centres, others complained that majority of the media campaigns messages were in English language which they described has been too difficult for uneducated people in the geo-political zone to understand; they asserted that some of the media messages on covid-19 preventive measures should be in local language for the rural dwellers to understand easily in order to prevent community transmission of the virus and some noted that the regularity of the media campaigns messages across the conventional media is low.

Major Findings

The following are some of the major findings of this study:

1. The study found that majority of the people sampled in the South East geo-political zone of the country are well exposed to the various media campaigns on covid-19 pandemic preventive measures aimed at curtailing the spread of the disease in the zone and the country at large.
2. The study found that majority of the respondents were exposed to the various media campaigns on covid-19 preventive measures through the different social media platforms. This finding is in tandem with the finding

of Khasawneh, Humeidan, Alsulaiman, Bloukh, Ramadan, Al-Shatanawi, Awad, Hijazi, Al-Kammash, Obeidat, Saleh and Kheirallah (2020). This finding is a further demonstration of the growing importance of social media as veritable tools for information dissemination as well as its attendant benefits over the conventional media.

3. The study also found that the level of awareness of the media campaigns on covid-19 pandemic preventive measure is very high among the sampled respondents.
4. In addition, the study found that most of the respondents comprehend the content of the various media campaign messages based on its conciseness, short form and simple nature of the various media campaigns.
5. Furthermore, the study discovered that there was a noticeable behavioural change among majority of the respondents after being exposed to the various media campaigns on covid-19 pandemic preventive measures in South East, Nigeria.
6. Finally, the media campaign had a huge influence on the respondents which could be attributed to the low infection rate recorded in the South East zone.

Conclusion

Media campaign messages on covid-19 played significant role in creating awareness about the disease in addition to providing guidelines which helped in shaping the attitude and behaviour of the people towards the pandemic. Hence, the media remain a major tool in behavioural change communication.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The use of mixed media intervention strategy for the dissemination of the various media campaigns on covid-19 pandemic so that the different medium will complement each other.
2. The government should enact law that would make it mandatory for people to wear facemasks and also adhere to the covid-19 safety protocols.
3. The media campaign messages should be produced also in local languages and aired regularly on local radio stations or through the mobile town criers in various communities in the Southeast, Nigeria in order to prevent community-transmission of covid-19 pandemic.
4. There should be another version of the media campaigns that will specifically focus on the various mode of transmission of the disease so that

members of the public will have sufficient knowledge about the disease in order to prevent it spread.

5. The scheduling of the media campaign messages should be regularly and aired mostly during popular programmes on Television or radio that have huge audience.

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