

Influence of COVID-19 Broadcast Media Campaigns on the Health Consciousness of Owerri Residents

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Abstract

The researchers investigated the influence of COVID-19 broadcast media campaigns on the health consciousness of Owerri residents. Perception and agenda setting theories served as the theoretical underpin of the study. The researchers employed the survey method. From the population of 555,500 of Owerri urban residents, 384 sample size was derived using Survey monkey online sample size calculator. The multistage sampling technique was used and questionnaire served as instrument for data collection. Findings revealed that at an average of 85% the Imo State residents to a large extent are exposed to broadcast media campaigns on COVID-19 as it relates to their health. Further finding indicated that at an average mean of 3.0 (N=370) respondents are of the view that broadcast media campaigns on COVID-19 have caused a lot of panic, though, through the media campaigns on COVID-19 they are made to believe that unhealthy exposure to infected person they can contract it. It was recommended that, given that large percentage 85% of respondents are exposed to broadcast media campaigns on COVID-19 the channel of communication could be a veritable platform where authorities can leverage on in educating the masses on COVID-19 and other health issues. And broadcast media should package their campaign content in way it will not cause panic among people. They should maintain their efforts in shaping the perception of people to be conscious of their health in the wake of COVID-19 in order to curtail the spread.

Keyword: Broadcast Media, Coronavirus, COVID-19, Campaign, Perception

Introduction

Over the years, media campaigns have been employed to influence several health behaviours among the public. Typical campaigns have placed messages in media that reach great numbers of people, most frequently via television or radio, but also through outdoor media, such as billboards and posters, and print media, such as magazines and newspapers (Wakefield, Loken & Hornik, 2014). Broadcast media campaigns have high tendency to change the behaviour of the public either directly or indirectly concerning particular health behaviour (Hornik & Yanovitzky, 2003).

Mass media health campaigns are aimed at delivering messages designed directly or indirectly to inform, influence, and persuade target audiences' attitudes about changing or maintaining healthful behaviours (Centre for Disease Control (CDC), n. d). Messages can be transmitted through a variety of channels, such as traditional mass media, the new media, brochures, posters, fliers; group interactions and one-on-one interactions (Baron, Melillo & Rimer, 2010; Weinreich, 2010). However, according to Whitney & Viswanath (2004), as cited in Robinson, Tansil, Elder, Soler, Labre, Mercer, Eroglu, Baur, Lyon-Daniel, Fridinger, Sokler, Green, Miller, Dearing, Evans, Snyder, Viswanath, Beistle, Chervin, Bernhardt, Rimer & the Community Preventive Services Task Force (CPSTF) (2014) note that the use of traditional mass

media in health communication campaigns has the potential to transmit a behaviour change message faster and farther than most other communication approaches.

Furthermore, researches have revealed that the mass media have enormous potential to influence health-related behaviours and perceptions (Leask, Hooker & King, 2010). For instance, in Nigeria, the mass media are used in health promotion activities to achieve positive lifestyle changes. Therefore, the role of mass media in health promotion and intervention goes beyond just creating awareness on a particular health issue or disease outbreak such as COVID-19; it also entails placing emphasis on the style of report of such issue or outbreak. The pattern of framing the media takes in presenting health issues go a long way in influencing public perception and induce attitudinal response, leading to positive behavioural changes (Wogu, Chukwu, Nwafor, Anikpe, Ugwuoke & Ugwulor-Onyinyechi, 2020).

When issues of national concern arise the mass media are always resort to, in order to create awareness through various campaigns as in the case of Coronavirus. This virus first broke out in China in 2019 and spread rapidly to the rest of the world, impacted and changed lives. Over a million deaths have been recorded since the outbreak of Coronavirus globally (Google news, 2020). According to World Health Organisation (2020) Report, the presence of unknown causes of pneumonia disease in Wuhan, China, was later, confirmed as a novel coronavirus disease and as such it was declared as a public health emergency on January 30th, 2020. The novel virus was later renamed by the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses, as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) that causes the 2019 coronavirus disease (World Health Organisation, 2020).

Due to the danger Coronavirus poses to human, there were several campaigns lunched by civil societies and government agencies among others to awaken the conscious of people towards protecting their health, some of these campaigns were COVID-19 and your health of Groove 98.1 FM Owerri and some other public enlightenment jingles on COVID-19 aired by broadcast stations such as Channels, TVC, NTA, Imo Broadcasting Corporation (IBC), etc. All these are aimed at curtailing the spread of COVID-19 among the people (Olapegba, Ayandele, Kolawole, Oguntayo, Gandi, Dangiwa, Otu & Iorfa, 2020). To this end, this study sought to investigate public perception of broadcast media campaigns of COVID-19 on the health consciousness of Owerri residents.

Statement of the Problem

Consciousness of the people as it relates their health needs to be drawn due to the devastating effects of COVID-19. The poor health system in Africa makes it even more imperative for the media to keep reminding the people through their campaigns to be conscious of their health especially in this era of COVID-19 that is holding the global community on a rampage. According to Odorume (2015), a healthy nation is a wealthy nation, as such, people's consciousness on health need to be reawaken by the media in order to reduce the chances of COVID-19 spread. With the rate of information coming from different angles as it concerns COVID-19 some may seem true why some may not, be that as it may, one may ask how do Imo State residents perceive the campaign messages about COVID-19 from the broadcast media? From the foregoing, this study sought to examine public perception of the broadcast media campaigns of COVID-19 on the health consciousness of Owerri residents.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. To what extent are Owerri residents exposed to broadcast media campaigns on COVID-19 as it relates to their health?
2. What is the perception of Owerri residents on broadcast media campaigns on COVID-19 towards their health consciousness?
3. Does the exposure to broadcast media campaigns responsible for some healthy behaviour of Owerri residents such as hand washing, use of nose mask, etc?

Conceptual Review of Broadcast Media Campaign and COVID-19

One of the most important sources of knowledge about natural disasters and extreme events is the media. Much of the time, the media has an impact on how society, including the government, reacts to threats, dangers, and disasters. The media is responsible in informing and providing the public with vital information in order to survive in time of crisis such as COVID-19 (Pasquare` & Pozzetti, 2007; Ndonima, Hembantor & Dansoho, 2020). In the same vein, Asaolu, Ifijeh & Iwu-James (2016) note that the mass media is undoubtedly, an essential source of health information. More so they contribute great deal in shaping people attitude and the way they respond to certain health issues. It is important to stress that the broadcast media play significant role in helping to create awareness and mobilise the masses to work hand-in-hand with health authorities in the fight against pandemic at any given time (Vasterman & Ruigrok, 2013). Broadcast media reports as well as campaigns about the COVID-19 may influence the attitude of the public towards the disease and enhance their self-protecting awareness. People who are exposed to the media contents on COVID-19 are likely to change their behaviours. This will make them to take precautionary measures such as frequent hand washing, wearing protective masks and keeping social distances. The extent of relevance the broadcast media give to COVID-19 issues will definitely inform the masses on the severity of the outbreak. Be that as it may, the mass media has over time been considered as a strong force for shaping how we perceive the world (Zhou, Wang, Xia, Xiao & Tang, 2020).

Supporting the above submission wakefield *et al* (2014) opine that the past few years, there is no doubt that media campaigns have been used tremendously in an attempt to affect various health behaviours in the public. Due to the risk associated with the COVID-19 broadcast media constantly churn out several COVID-19 campaigns all in the name to inform the people on how to stay safe from the virus. Of course, the mass media cannot cure virus but can cure its spread. This statement explicitly underscores the role of mass media in health reporting, and health related campaigns especially in curbing spread of infectious disease outbreak (Adelakun, & Adnan, 2016; Nwakpu, Ezema & Ogbodo, 2020).

Empirical Review

Oberiri & Omar (2020) conducted a study on newspaper reports of COVID-19 and how it contributed to awareness and prevention. It was revealed that the Nigerian media did well regarding coverage of the pandemic, which then contributed in creating awareness. Though, there efforts in coverage were not in-depth as most of the reported stories were short and were predominantly straight news. Result also indicated that stories reported were frightening and it caused panic. Umaru, Suleiman & Aondover (2020) carried out a study to ascertain awareness,

knowledge and perception of people on COVID-19 in two LGAs in Kano and it was revealed that respondents are aware of the COVID-19, however, their knowledge was low which stood at 23.4% and majority of the respondents did not believe that COVID-19 exists. Anietie, Nseobot, Akpan, Mfreke, Edidiong, Abere, Abraham, Essien & Ukpong (2020) conducted a study on Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) awareness campaigns on COVID-19 in Nigeria and it was revealed that NTA created awareness of COVID-19 through their programmes.

Wakefield *et al* (2014) carried out a study on how the mass media is utilised in the campaign to change certain health behaviour and it was revealed that mass media campaigns can cause positive changes or prevent negative changes in health-related behaviours among people. Robinson *et al* (2014) conducted a study on mass media and health communication campaigns and it was revealed that health communication campaigns that made use of mass media and other communication medium with distribution of free or reduced-price health-related products are effective in improving healthy behaviours. Olapegba *et al* (2020) conducted a study on COVID-19 knowledge and perceptions in Nigeria and the result showed that the traditional media (TV/Radio) are the most common source of health information about COVID-19. It was also revealed that Nigerians have relatively high knowledge, majorly gotten from the mainstream media, about COVID-19. Their perceptions of COVID-19 bear implications across public health initiatives, compliance with precautionary behaviour as well as bilateral relations with foreign nations. Ngonso & Chukwu (2021) carried out a study on COVID-19 broadcast media messages and behavioural change in rural areas. It was revealed that many community members are exposed to media messages on COVID-19 through the television. The results also showed that the community people, particularly the educated ones, watch TV on cable (GOTV and Startimes), and these are the people who shared information with family members, interpret it and take positive actions. Finding also revealed that broadcast media messages have helped in shaping their behaviour by their interpretation of the messages received.

Levinger & Hill (2020) conducted a study on mass media campaign on physical activity during the pandemic and it was revealed that TV and radio were effectively used to promote health communication messages and that it was utilised to promote the importance of physical activity to maintain people's health during the pandemic. It was also found that the positive influence of such a campaign considers exercise to be more relevant than ever during the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak, with the majority of people (65%) believing that exercise practices promoted by mass media campaigns were helping them with their mental wellbeing during the outbreak. Anorue, Ugboaja, Ayogu & Okonkwo (2020) carried out a study on public response to media campaigns on COVID-19 preventive measures and it was revealed that media campaigns on preventive measures of COVID-19 has been successful to some extent and that a good number of 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.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpin of this research work were on perception and agenda setting theories. Perception Theory was proposed by Berelson & Steiner in 1964. The theory holds that the sense organs of human plays significant role in helping to shape their behavioural responses to issues (Osuaagwu, 2020). Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifeso (2008) note that human sense organs help them identify and interpret information in the environment and that these organs act as information

processing inputs to the brain. Perception, according to its proponents, is a dynamic mechanism in which people choose, organise and perceive sensory stimuli to form a meaningful and coherent image of issues in the environment.

Perception, according to Osuagwu (2020), is the process by which humans perceive sensory data that is made available by their five senses. These meanings have clearly shown the importance of sensory organs in the perception process. Perception is influenced by two forms of influences: systemic and functional influences. The direct effect on perception resulting from physical exposure to such stimuli (broadcast messages) is known as structural influence; while indirect factors such as belief systems and other variables that affect exposure and introduce bias have a functional influence (Anaeto *et al* 2008).

The relevance of this theory to the study is hinged on the fact that the level at which people will take the campaign message from the broadcast media will depend on the perception they have concerning the message. In a nutshell, people perception of broadcast campaign messages on COVID-109 will go a long way in influencing their behaviour towards healthy practices that will keep them safe from COVID-19.

On the other hand, the agenda setting theory emerged from communications studies and focuses on mass media influence on setting political agenda, as presented in the seminar article by McCombs & Shaw (1972), which through content analysis of a local election documented a high correlation between media agenda and the public agenda. Their 1972 article coined the phrase “agenda setting (Ekeanyanwu & Olaniyan, 2010, p. 83). The theory establishes a connection between the rate at which a story is covered by the media and the perceived importance of that story. This implies that the media determines which problems should be prioritized by society (Gever, 2019). Baran & Davis (2006) cited in Orji-Egwu (2012, p.188), observed that in choosing and displaying news, editors and newsroom staff and broadcasters play an important part in shaping of political reality”. They maintained that through the activities of the mass media, whether modern or traditional, people attach more importance to some issues than others. Ekeanyanwu & Olaniyan (2010, p. 83), posit that agenda setting theory states that the mass media do not tell the public what to think but what to think about.

According to agenda setting theory, people not only learn about public issues and other topics from the media, but they also learn how much significance to attach to an issue or subject based on how much focus the media places on it. During a campaign, for example, the media sets the discourse's "agenda." One of the most critical aspects of the mass media's dominance is its capacity to influence human cognition (McQuail & Windfall, 1993, cited in Ekeanyanwu & Olaniyan, 2010). Therefore, agenda setting theory can help to create awareness, educate, enlighten and mobilise the people regarding a particular issue in the country by the kind of coverage or report given to it by the media. The relevance of this theory to this study is based on the fact that the relevance the broadcast media give to issue such as COVID-19 will directly or indirectly have an effect on the people hence influence them to start thinking of the ways to stay safe from COVID-19 thereby increasing their consciousness to healthy practice so that they can checkmate the spread of COVID-19.

Methodology

The survey research design was adopted using the tool of questionnaire to gather data for the study. According to National Population Census projected population of 2016, Owerri urban has a population of 555,500. Using the Survey monkey online sample size calculator 384 sample size was arrived at. Copies of questionnaire were distributed to residents of Owerri metropolis in Imo State using the multistage sampling technique. In the first stage, Owerri which is in cluster is

already divided into three namely, Owerri North, Owerri West and Owerri Municipal. In the second stage two communities from each local government area were purposively selected because they are within the reach of most of the broadcast media in Owerri and the level of literacy of people were likely high. The communities selected were Orji, Uratta, Umuguma, Ihiagwa, Umuoyima, and Umuororonjo respectively. In stage three, having six communities the researchers distributed the questionnaire proportionately to the communities selected; that is $384/6 = 64$. Then, in stage four, the researcher gave 64 copies of the questionnaire to respondents in these communities purposively.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section focuses on data presentation and analysis. Analysis of data was done based on the research questions. Questionnaire which was the instrument for data collection was distributed to respondents in the selected communities. Out the 384 copies of questionnaire distributed 370 was found usable (96%) while 14 (4%) was invalid. Hence, analysis was done with 370.

Table 1: Responses on whether they have Television or Radio Set

Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	370	100%
No	0	0
Can't say	0	0
Total	370	100

Analysis of data from table 1 above showed that all the respondents 100% confirmed that they all have television and radio set. This means that are all likely to provide the appropriate data needed for the study.

Table 2: Responses on whether they are exposed to Broadcast Media Campaigns on COVID-19

Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	321	87%
No	39	10%
Can't say	10	3%
Total	370	100

Analysis of data from the above table 2 revealed that 87% of the respondents are of the opinion that they are exposed to broadcast media campaigns on COVID-19. This implies that majority of the respondents that their opinions were sampled are exposed to broadcast media campaigns on COVID-19.

Table 3: Responses on the Extent of watching or listening to Broadcast Media Campaigns on COVID-19

Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Large extent	257	69%
Moderate	85	23%
Low	28	8%
Not at all	-	-
Total	370	100

Analysing findings of data, it was revealed that 69% of respondents watch or listen to broadcast media campaigns on COVID-19 as it relates to their health to a large extent. By implication majority of the respondents are largely exposed to broadcast media campaigns on COVID-19 as it relates to their health.

Table 4: Responses on the Perception of Imo State Residents on Broadcast Media Campaigns on COVID-19 towards their Health Consciousness

Variables	SA	A	D	SD	N	M	Decision
Broadcast media campaigns on COVID-19 has caused a lot of panic	170 (46%)	125 (34%)	46 (12%)	29 (8%)	370 (100)	3.1	Accept
Broadcast media campaigns on COVID-19 made me believe there is COVID-19 and I can contract it through unhealthy exposure to infected person	115 (31%)	168 (45%)	50 (14%)	37 (10%)	370 (100)	2.9	Accept
Broadcast media campaigns on COVID-19 made me to be health conscious as such I wash my hands and observed healthy behaviour to checkmate the spread of COVID-19	182 (49%)	110 (30%)	46 (12%)	32 (9%)	370 (100)	3.1	Accept
Average mean	3.0						
Variables:	SA=Strongly Agree, 1.1-1.7	A=Agree, 2.1-2.4	D=Disagree, 3.1-3.4	SD=Strongly Disagree, 3.5-4.0			

Decision Rule:

If the average mean score is lower than 2.5 (1 - 2.4), the researchers decide that of Imo State residents do not believe that broadcast media campaigns on COVID-19 awaken their health consciousness vis-à-vis COVID-19. But if the average mean score is higher than 2.4 (2.5 – 4.0), the researchers decide that Imo State residents believe that broadcast media campaigns on COVID-19 awaken their health consciousness vis-à-vis COVID-19.

Analysis of data from table above revealed that at an average mean of 3.0 (N=370), respondents are of the views that broadcast media campaigns caused panic by informing them of the existence of COVID-19 and that one can contract it through unhealthy exposure to infected person. Also, they are of the perception that broadcast media campaigns on COVID-19 reawaken their conscious to healthy behaviour to checkmate the spread of COVID-19.

Table 5: Responses on whether exposure to Broadcast Media Campaigns are responsible for some Healthy Behaviour of Imo State Residents

Variables	SA	A	D	SD	N	M	Decision
Broadcast media campaigns on COVID-19 have made me to frequently wash my hands	155 (42%)	115 (31%)	66 (18%)	34 (9%)	370 (100)	3.0	Accept

Broadcast media campaigns on COVID-19 have exposed me to the danger of COVID-19 if I don't wear nose mask in crowded places	110 (30%)	145 (39%)	85 (23%)	30 (8%)	370 (100)	2.9	Accept
Generally, exposure to broadcast media campaigns on COVID-19 have made me to be more conscious of my health	175 (49%)	125 (30%)	32 (12%)	38 (9%)	370 (100)	3.1	Accept
Average mean						3.0	

Source: Field survey, 2021

Variables: SA=Strongly Agree, 3.3-4.0: A=Agree,2.5-3.2: D=Disagree, 1.8-2.4:SD=Strongly Disagree, 1.1.7

Decision Rule:

If the average mean score is lower than 2.5 (1 - 2.4), the researchers decide that exposure to broadcast media campaigns is not responsible for some healthy behaviour of Imo State residents such as hand washing, use of nose mask, etc. But if the average mean score is higher than 2.4 (2.5 – 4.0), the researchers decide that exposure to broadcast media campaigns is responsible for some healthy behaviour of Owerri residents such as hand washing, use of nose mask, etc. Analysis of data revealed that at an average of 3.0 (N=370), respondents confirmed that exposure to broadcast media campaigns is responsible for some healthy behaviour such as hand washing, use of nose mask etc. It implies that the broadcast media campaigns greatly influenced respondent's attitude towards being conscious of their health.

Discussion of Findings

Analysis of findings revealed that at an average of 85%, Owerri residents to a large extent are exposed to broadcast media campaigns on COVID-19 as it relates to their health. This could be as a result of their educational attainment as it is seen from the socio-demographic data. This finding resonates well with that of Anietie *et al* (2020) whose finding revealed that Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) awareness campaigns on COVID-19 in Nigeria succeeded in raising the awareness of people concerning the virus. Similarly, Ngonso & Chukwu (2021) in their findings revealed that many community members are exposed to media messages on COVID-19 through the television. The results also showed that the community people, particularly the educated ones, watch TV on cable (GOTV and Startimes) and these are the people who shared information with family members, interpret it and take positive actions as are result of their exposure. This gives credence to the agenda setting theory this work was anchored on. The exposure will certainly tell the people to think about safety measures against COVID-19.

Communicating findings from data it was revealed that respondents are of the view that broadcast media campaigns on COVID-19 have caused a lot of panic, though, through the media campaigns on COVID-19 they are made to believe that unhealthy exposure to infected person they can contract it. Also, the respondents' conscious to healthy behaviour to checkmate the spread of COVID-19 was predicated on their perception of the broadcast media campaigns on COVID-19. Oberiri & Omar (2020) findings confirmed the finding of this study in their work

they revealed that reports of COVID-19 were frightening and it caused panic among the people. This study is also in line with Olapegba *et al* (2020) who revealed that Nigerians relatively high knowledge about COVID-19 are majorly gotten from the mainstream and their perceptions of COVID-19 bear implications across public health initiatives, compliance with precautionary behaviour as well as bilateral relations with foreign nations. Contrary to this finding Umaru *et al* (2020) revealed in their study that people in two of LGAs in Kano studied perceive COVID-19 as not real and did not believe that it exists. This finding could be as a result of the place the study was conducted as their educational attainment could play a role in their perception. The finding of this study resonates well with the perception theory this study was anchored on. It is the perception people have about COVID-19 that will determine how they perceive it.

Analysis of findings revealed that respondents' exposure to broadcast media campaigns is responsible for some healthy behaviour such as hand washing; use of nose mask etc. respondents confirmed that generally, exposure to broadcast media campaigns have made them more conscious of their health. This finding conforms well to that of Wakefield *et al* (2014) in their findings they revealed that the mass media is utilised in the campaign to change certain health behaviour and that mass media campaigns can cause positive changes or prevent negative changes in health-related behaviours among people. Robinson *et al.* (2014) noted that mass media health communication campaigns are effective in improving healthy behaviours. In the study of Ngonso & Chukwu (2021) their finding revealed that broadcast media messages have helped in shaping behaviour of people by their interpretation of the messages received. Levinger & Hill (2020) revealed in their study that peoples' exposure to mass media campaign on physical activity during the pandemic was helping them with their mental health during the outbreak. This finding is in line with the agenda setting theory, as exposure to a broadcast media campaign on COVID-19 will definitely shape someone's thoughts as the campaign will influence what one will think about, especially as it relates to COVID-19 and their health.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The role of broadcast Media in re-awakening our consciousness to healthy practices in the wake of COVID-19 cannot be overemphasised. Based on the finding, it is quite obvious that the broadcast media campaigns played significant role in making people in Owerri urban to be conscious of their health in this COVID-19 era, this could be linked to their exposure and perception of the campaign on COVID-19. Most of the respondents attested that the attitude towards hand washing, use of nose mask etc. as a way to curtail the spread of COVID-19 was greatly influenced by the exposure to broadcast media campaign on COVID-19. Based on the finding the following recommendations are put forward

1. Given that large percentage 85% of respondents are exposed to broadcast media campaigns on COVID-19 that is to say the channel of communication could be a veritable platform where authorities can leverage on in educating the masses on COVID-19 and other health issues.
2. Broadcast media should package their campaign content in a way it will not cause panic among people. Broadcast media should also maintain their efforts in shaping the perception of people to be conscious of their health in the wake of COVID-19 in order to curtail the spread.

3. Having known that exposure to broadcast media campaigns on COVID-19 is responsible for some healthy behaviour by the people. Therefore, the broadcast media should not relent in their effort as the scourge of COVID-19 is still prevalent in the society.

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