

Influence of Radio Messages on Adoption of COVID-19 Preventive Measures among Residents of Owerri Municipality using Hot FM

Alexander C. Onyebuchi, PhD; Chisom Ebube Onwubiko; Oluchi Vera Anukam & Laretta Chinenye Nwosu

Department of Mass Communication

Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria

greatoneyebuchi@gmail.com, barrychisco@yahoo.com, anukamvera@gmail.com,

laurettachinenye16@gmail.com

+2348034780385, +2348034010533, +2348063303115

Abstract

The researchers examined the impact of radio messages on adoption of COVID-19 preventive measures among residents of Owerri Municipality using Hot FM. A cross-sectional survey research method was adopted for this study. The study was restricted to Hot FM Owerri; its messages through news, jingles and other public enlightenment programmes during the pandemic outbreak in 2019. The researchers adopted agenda setting theory. The researchers used a total population of 5600, who were majorly traders and artisans. A sample of 360 residents of Owerri Municipality was used for this study derived using Roger Wimmer sample size calculator. The simple random sampling technique was used to select respondents for the study. Copies of questionnaire were developed and used to obtain data for the study. The findings showed that the level of radio listenership in Owerri municipality is high (86%). It also found that (57%) of the respondents often heard messages, public announcements and jingles aired on Hot FM on measures to curtail the spread of COVID-19. These messages to a large extent (65%) helpfully influenced the adoption of COVID-19 preventive measures among residents of Owerri Municipality using Hot FM.

Keywords: Radio, Messages, Electronic Media, COVID-19, Pandemic

Introduction

In developing countries including Nigeria, radio still remains a significant channel of communication (Ephraim, 2020). Media scholars such as Carey (2003), Rodero, Pérez-Maíllo & Tamarit (2009) as cited in Rodero (2020) are of the opinion that radio is a veritable tool for communication in crisis situations. Radio has been dubbed a lifeline in times of crisis and emergency by former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon on the World Radio Day in 2016 (Ki-Moon, 2016). Recently, Rodero (2020) avers that the radio conveys lifesaving information to citizens in shattered societies, who may be caught in catastrophe, or desperately in need of news and updates about topical issues.

Of concern, in case or situation where a global disaster occurs like coronavirus, media specialists adopt the radio as a medium of communication (Barrantes, Rodríguez & Pérez, 2009). Although, people may argue that this media is fast facing out, the simplicity of radio allows direct response to measures to be taken in these situations (Rodero, 2021). The affordability of radio as well as its accessibility makes citizens to have trust in the medium (Famulusi & Owoeye, 2014). For this reason, radio is regarded as the most credible among other media. In 2013, Ofcom, stated categorically that the radio still prides as “an accessible medium, on a ubiquitous platform; a

dependable companion; a deliverer of timely national and local information; and a source of a variety of entertaining and stimulating music and speech” (Ofcom, 2013, p. 3).

Based on the effectiveness of the radio, it was used as one of the media of information at the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 is the abbreviation for the new coronavirus disease which is a respiratory infection. It begins like mere cold but gradually becomes severe causing respiratory difficulties (WebMD, 2021). According to Obi-Ani, Anikwenze & Isiani, (2020), coronavirus was first discovered in a small town in China called Wuhan in December 2019. To be specific, it began from the Wuhan seafood market, where wild animals like bat, snakes, raccoon dogs and other wild animals were sold as meat. As a result, the consumption of this rare seafood triggered what was today described as a pandemic in the world (WHO, 2020).

The virus spread like wildfire, a virus which started in December 2020, became a global pandemic in barely six months. In April 2021, the World Health Organisation (WHO) reported that over 136 thousand people were infected; 2, 951, 832 people were confirmed deaths as a result of the virus globally with daily rapid increases (WHO, 2021). In Nigeria, the first index case of the virus was recorded on the 27th of February, 2020 in Lagos. The virus was brought into the country by an Italian immigrant (NCDC, 2020). As at the time of this study, specifically 13th April 2021, “74 new confirmed cases were recorded in Nigeria; 163,911 cases have been confirmed, 154,225 cases have been discharged and 2,061 deaths have been recorded in 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory” (NCDC, 2021).

In order to control the rapid spread of the virus, David & Obiwulu, (2020) stressed that media organisations, civil societies and government agencies saw the necessity to embark on aggressive enlightenment programmes for good hygiene and social distancing. In addition, the government according to Duddu (2020) also initiated temperature screening, conducted at airports and for those returning from countries with known and confirmed cases of the virus, where carefully screened in the airports before allowing them entry into Nigeria. Those with physical symptoms of COVID-19 were advised to self-isolate. Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) collaborated with state governments and organisations as well as the media in order to inform and update the masses about the potential risks of infections in order to adopt the right precautionary measures (Brug, Aro & Richardus, 2009).

In a bid to examine the role of the media, especially radio, in influencing the adoption of measures to stop the spread of the virus led to this study. Consequently, against this backdrop, the researchers examine the influence of radio medium during the pandemic; whose impact in 2019 was both tragic and regrettable. The researchers understudied Hot FM Owerri.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were to:

1. Determine the level of listenership of residents of Owerri municipality to Hot FM.
2. Ascertain how often Hot FM aired messages, public advertisements and jingles on the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Find out the extent to which these messages influence the adoption of COVID-19 preventive measures among residents of Owerri Municipality.

Coronavirus in Nigeria: Measures of curtailing its Spread

After the index case was confirmed in the country on the 27th of February, 2020 in Lagos, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control in partnership with State governments also started tracing and tracking of possible victims and their contacts. To further control the spread, the Lagos State government, on March 18, 2020, suspended all gatherings of people above fifty for four weeks and ordered all lower and middle level public officers to stay-at-home (Ewodage, 2020). Similarly, the Federal government, on March 30, 2020 introduced various containment strategies such as closing of the national borders and airspace, schools, worship centres and other public places, cancelling of mass gathering events and placing the Federal Capital Territory, Lagos and Ogun states on lock down for an initial period of fourteen days (Radio Nigeria, 2020). COVID-19 testing laboratories were set up in Lagos, Abuja and Irrua in Edo State while State governments opened isolation centres and imposed dusk to dawn curfews in their territories.

In an effort to arrest the pandemic, the Nigerian government through the Centre for Disease Control, (NCDC, 2020), have placed immediate lockdown on the nation's commercial city centres of Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt, Kano, Kaduna and Onitsha, which are the epicenters of both local and international trade centres of Nigeria. Prior to this effect, a proactive measure was taking by most of Nigerian state governors to curtail the spread of the virus in their states, (Gardaworld, 2020). These governors, according to Nwakpu, Ezema&Ogbodo (2020), put up a combative approach by forcefully denying people from assembling in places like schools, churches, parties, clubs, meetings and every kind of sporting activity.

In addition, the knowledge of COVID-19 infection has become relevant, and precautionary measures are needed to control the pandemic. Knowledge such as regular hand washing, using hand sanitisers, wearing face masks, respiratory etiquettes, social distancing and self-isolation when sick are vital to reducing widespread infection (Leppin&Aro, 2009). Various scholars such as (Choi & Yang, 2010; Hussain, Hussain&Hussain 2012) carried out studies that showed that the level of knowledge of individuals about an infectious disease can help them adjust their behaviours in ways that may prevent infection. Consequently, the mass media as well as the digital media were adopted in order to meet the information need of the people about the potential risks of infections in order to adopt the right precautionary measures (Brug, Aro & Richardus, 2009).

Radio as an Instrument of Enlightenment

Bittner (2005) is of the opinion that radio is an active and operative means of mobilisation and enlightenment especially in developing countries such as Nigeria, where the rural communities seems to be left out of digital evolution. According to Enyioko (2016), the use of radio as a means of enlightenment continues to contribute effectively in encouraging the public to get updated on the activities of government and issues concerning the society, they find themselves. Enyioko goes further to opine that radio has largely been used as a tool for enlightenment and integration for rural development.

In the same vein, Damaris, an academic writer for www.eduprojecttopics.com, avers that radio was used as a reliable source of information on HIV/AIDS. According to Damaris (2021), the radio was used to highlight common causes, effects, symptoms of HIV, ways of contacting it and various measures to prevent its spread; adding that series of enlightenment programmes have been aired on radio to reduce the way people stigmatise those living with the disease. Moreno,

Fuentes-Lara and Navarro (2020) listed radio as one of the key media that was used for public enlightenment at the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic.

Effects of Coronavirus in Nigeria

According to Chukwuorji & Iorfa (2020), the advent of coronavirus in Nigeria was an “unanticipated disruption” of activities in the country. Andam, Edeh, Oboh, Pauw & Thurlowc (2020), in their opinion, frowned at the outbreak of the virus, which impact affected the country and its citizens. In addition, Chukwuorji & Iorfa (2020) opined that the country’s borders were closed, major cities were locked down and even academic or professional advancements programmes, including schools were put on hold.

Within this period, Li & Lalani (2020) and UNESCO, (2020), revealed that two suicide deaths occurred during the lockdown, poverty, lack of trust in the government, ignorance, denial and misplaced religious zeal were part of the negative impacts of the virus on the behaviour of Nigerians. Also, in Ozili (2020), fear-induced behavioural changes such as consuming lemon, ginger, garlic, local herbs and other substances for protection have also become rampant. Loss of income due to the lockdown and the accompanying destitution can also be a pathfinder for numerous other sicknesses and deaths (Chukwuorji & Iorfa, 2020).

Empirical Review

Damaris (2021) conducted a study on the effectiveness of radio as a tool for public enlightenment on HIV/AIDS using students of Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti. The study’s finding revealed that people got reliable information on HIV/AIDS via radio, radio highlighted the common causes, effects, symptoms of HIV and how to contact it and various measures to prevent its spread while radio enlightenment programmes also help in reducing the level of stigmatisation among the people. In addition, Moreno, Fuentes-Lara & Navarro (2020) conducted a study to assess how information forms and sources influence the public’s information-seeking behaviours and the perception of government’s crisis response strategies during the pandemic. Their findings show that radio was the fourth most frequently used media for information gathering and enlightenment with (42.6%), following after television (86.2%), WhatsApp (77.6%), and online newspapers (75%).

Also, Chaoa, Chenb, Liu, Yanga & Hall (2020) conducted a study to examine the effect of state boredom on psychological outcomes and the role of media use and meaning in life among the indirectly exposed Chinese adults in the initial phase of the COVID-19 outbreak. Their study found that radio was one of the media that was actively used as a mean of public enlightenment during the outbreak of the virus. From an African perspective, Anjorin (2020) reviewed the cases of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic in Africa. The study provided updates that showed that the media, including the radio, played an active role in spreading the message on measures to curtail the spread of the virus.

Theoretical Framework

The agenda setting theory holds the belief that media can recommend or inform audiences on issues that are major and relevant. As a result of this, media sets the agenda for topical issues in the society. The media achieves this by selecting the stories deemed news worthy. The media also conveys prominence and space to these stories (Folarin, 1998). This theory which was proposed

by Max McCombs and Donald Shaw in a study on the 1968 can be used to explain the ability of the media to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda. For instance, the media can decide the topic it wants the audience to focus its attention by covering the topic frequently and prominently. With this, the audience will regard the issues as more important.

At the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria, the media adopted the agenda setting theory to ensure that messages on measures citizen should take to curtail the spread of the virus were frequently aired by the media. A number of media scholars are of the opinion that when individuals sufficiently listen to convincing messages, there are great tendencies that their behaviours can be influenced – positively. This is the belief that makes the researchers to select this theory as a background for this work. This theory gives the researchers backing to explain their assumptions that the frequency of messages on measures to curtail Coronavirus coupled with the level of audience exposure has a tendency to influence the adoption of the COVID-19 preventive measures by Owerri residents in Imo state too.

Methodology

The quantitative research method was adopted for this study using the cross-sectional survey design. The population of this study consisted of majorly traders and artisans in Owerri Municipality purposively estimated as 5600. A sample of 360 residents of Owerri Municipality was used for this study. This sample size was derived using Roger Wimmer sample size calculator (See figure 1 below). The simple random sampling technique was used to select respondents for the study, who are mostly traders and artisans in Owerri Municipality based on their listenership of messages, public enlightenment programmes, jingles and influence in the reduction of COVID-19 during the pandemic. The researchers selected Hot FM as the radio station being studied. Copies of a structured questionnaire were administered on the respondents by the researchers to gather opinion which served as data for the study. Data collected was presented using table distribution and analysed using percentages.

Figure 1: Sample Size Determinant

Sample Size Calculator

Confidence level: 95% 99%

Margin of error (%):

Population size:

Sample size needed:

Steps

1. Confidence level: Click desired level
2. Margin of error: Enter desired %, such as 4.9 or 5.0
3. Population: Enter size if finite; otherwise, leave blank
4. Hit calculate button

(Source: <http://rogerwimmer.com/samplesizecalculator.htm>)

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section shows the presentation of data collected from the online survey conducted for this study. The presentation was one using tables, while the analysis one using frequency distribution and calculation of percentages.

Table 1: Level of Listenership of Residents of Owerri Municipality to Hot FM

| Responses | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--------------|------------|----------------|
| Very high | 25 | 7 |
| High | 309 | 86 |
| Low | 25 | 7 |
| Very low | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 360 | 100 |

Table 1 showed the level of listenership of residents of Owerri to Hot FM which is used as a case study. The findings that there is a high level of listenership of the station (86%). This implies that the respondents are conversant with the programmes and messages aired on the station. As a result of this, they will be able to provide reliable and accurate opinion based on their high level of exposure to the station.

Table 2: Frequency of Messages, Public Announcements and Jingles aired on Hot FM on Measures to Curtail the Spread of COVID-19

| Responses | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|----------------|------------|----------------|
| Very often | 79 | 22 |
| Often | 205 | 57 |
| Not very often | 76 | 21 |
| Did not air | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 360 | 100 |

Table 2 revealed that the majority of the respondents (57%) often heard messages, public announcements and jingles aired on Hot FM on measures to curtail the spread of COVID-19. Thus, the radio, particularly Hot FM, contributed its quota to the struggle of curtailing the spread of the COVID-19 virus in Imo State.

Table 3: Extent to which Messages, Public Announcements and Jingles aired on Hot FM influenced adoption of COVID-19 preventive measures among residents of Owerri Municipality using Hot FM

| Responses | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------|----------------|
| Very large extent | 29 | 8 |
| Large extent | 234 | 65 |
| Low extent | 76 | 21 |
| Very low extent | 21 | 6 |
| Total | 360 | 100 |

Given the timely airing of messages, public announcements and jingles aired on Hot FM on measures to curtail the spread of COVID-19 (as seen in table 2), table 3 established that these

messages to a large extent (65%) helpfully influenced the adoption of COVID-19 preventive measures among residents of Owerri Municipality using Hot FM as opined by a majority of the respondents.

Discussion of Findings

From the data presented and analysed in table one, this study found that the level of radio listenership in Owerri municipality is high (86%), using Hot FM as a case study. This finding is supported by (Broadcasting Board of Governors, n. d.) who also found that radio is the main mass media platform in Nigeria for information gathering, with 77.4%. The board added that more than seven in 10 across all major demographic groups saying they listen to the radio for news at least weekly. Ajaegbu, Akintayo & Akinjiyan (2015) also found a majority of the respondents listen to radio. In addition, Enyioko (2016) revealed that the majority of their respondents (90 respondents with 45%) listen to FM radio programmes on daily basis. The high level of listenership to radio, in the midst of a century where the social media tends to be dominant might be as a result of the affordability of the medium. Radio does not require data subscription; with a phone and an earpiece anyone can have access to radio.

This study revealed that Hot FM air messages, public advertisements and jingles on the COVID-19 pandemic. This is because 57% of the respondents who participated in the study said that they often heard messages, public announcements and jingles aired on Hot FM on measures to curtail the spread of COVID-19. This finding is supported by other scholars who carried out similar studies. In 2021, Damaris (2021) found that the radio was effective in enlightening the public on HIV/AIDS. In the same vein, Moreno, Fuentes-Lara and Navarro (2020), revealed from their study that radio was the fourth most frequently used media for information gathering and enlightenment (with 42.6%). This finding is supported by the agenda setting theory that states that the frequency of the messages aired on the mass media, radio inclusive, can make the message prominent as well as the talk of the town. The involvement of the radio, using Hot FM as a case study, set the agenda for COVID-19 to become a topical issue in Imo state.

The findings showed that these messages to a large extent (65%) helpfully influenced the adoption of COVID-19 preventive measures among residents of Owerri Municipality using Hot FM as opined by a majority of the respondents. Chaoa, Chenb, Liu, Yanga & Hall (2020), in their study stated that radio was one of the media that was actively used as a means of public enlightenment during the outbreak of the virus. Anjorin (2020) also substantiates this finding when he states that the media, including the radio, played an active role in spreading the message on measures to curtail the spread of the virus. With this high level of radio participation in sharing messages on how to curtail the spread of the virus, it is substantial to opine that it made people curious and careful; thereby leading to a reduction in the spread of the virus.

Furthermore, Sharma (2020) asserted that community radio was an essential tool in informing people about the measure to take to curtail the spread of the virus. The agenda setting theory supports this finding which states that the media, radio to be specific, influenced the behaviour of Owerri Municipality residents by making them more aware of measure to take in reducing the spread of the virus. This led to a low level spread of the virus in Imo state, making it one of the states with the lowest number of cases (22nd on the list made available at <https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/>, Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), 2021).

Conclusion

This study holds the belief that in as much as the social media is trending in usage in the 21st century, when important societal issues are raised that are intended to be trans-generational, radio still remains significant. This is clear as it was selected as one of the media of information at the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Guided by the agenda setting theory, radio frequently aired messages that are geared towards citizens being aware of preventive measures that should be taking to curtail the spread of the virus.

Accordingly, this study found that the level of radio listenership in Owerri Municipality is high (86%), using Hot FM as a case study. In addition, it was revealed by this study that Hot FM air messages, public advertisements and jingles on the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of this, the level of listenership to messages, public advertisements and jingles about the COVID-19 has helpfully influenced the adoption of COVID-19 preventive measures among residents of Owerri Municipality using Hot FM as opined by a majority of the respondents.

Recommendations

The researchers recommend that:

1. Radio should not be sidelined when preparing communication strategies that are inclusive of a wider audience as well as rural communities especially in health risk situations because the radio is still relevant today as it was yesteryears.
2. Radio stations, private and/or state owned, should be proactive and involved in ensuring that the masses are properly and timely updated on pivotal societal issues, especially on health risk situations.
3. Government should not only use state-owned radio stations in its information strategies during health crises situations. Rather, private radio stations should be involved in order to balance the reportage of state-owned radio stations and trigger public trust.

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