

THE MASS MEDIA SENSITIZATION OF CITIZENS ON CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC IN AKAMKPA AND BIASE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OF CROSS RIVER STATE NIGERIA

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Abstract: The study investigated the mass media sensitization of citizens on coronavirus pandemic in Akamkpa and Biase local government areas of Cross River State, Nigeria. Three research questions were formulated to direct the study. The population of the study was 1050 of respondents. Descriptive survey design was used in carrying out the study with a sample of 889 respondents adopted for the study. An instrument titled; Mass Media Sensitization of Citizens and Coronavirus Pandemic Questionnaire (MMSCCVPQ) was used for data collection with a 23 items structured. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha method at 0.79. Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation. The results of the study revealed that there is a low level of covid-19 symptoms, transmission and prevention awareness through different mass media sensitization among the citizens in the study area. It was recommended among others that citizens should avoid crowded social activities such as weddings, churches and burial places and also the citizens should avoid unnecessary visits.

Introduction

Towards the end of 2019, the world at large witness the appearance of deadly virus known as coronavirus disease COVID-19. The virus was first discovered in Urban city of China in December, 2019. Abid, Mohammed and Raju (2020) stated that coronavirus belongs to a family of virus that can cause illness such as common cold, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERs). The virus spread to every country of the world including Nigeria. It was imported to Nigeria by an Italian citizen who works in Nigeria and returned from Milan, Italy to Lagos, Nigeria on 27th of February, 2020 (National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC); 2020). Statistic retrieved from the World Health Organisations (WHO) showed that in Nigeria about 265, 937 confirmed cases of Covid-19 with 3,155 deaths and in Cross River State 385 confirmed cases of Covid-19 with 8 deaths (WHO, 2022).

Similarly, World Health Organisation (WHO, 2020), noticeable symptoms of Covid-19 disease include fever, cough, respiratory symptoms, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. World Health Organizations (2020) also explains that; fatal outcomes can include lower respiratory tract illness, such as pneumonia and

bronchitis, or Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS) and severe diseases. These complications are more pronounced in patients with underlying health conditions such as cardiopulmonary disease, immune compromised individuals, infants and the elderly Centre for Disease Control Prevention (CDCP, 2020. Alazat, Aminu, Bolo, Akinyele, Ogundairo and Danjibo (202) reported that the index case, before diagnosis, visited some other states including Ogun in which thereafter the virus spread across the nation sending the government into crises mode.

The number of people infected by the invisible disease is quite dynamic. This is because some of infected persons are asymptomatic, meaning that they show no symptoms. Meanwhile, others have mild to severe to critical symptoms. NDCC (2020) outlined the reasons for this. According to them, there are people considered vulnerable and at high risk of complications from Covid-19. They are persons 50 years and older with or without underlying illness, persons with critical underlying medical conditions such as diabetes, moderate to lung disease, liver disease, moderate to severe asthma as well as persons who have been medically assessed as vulnerable .

In other words, people outside the aforementioned may not experience serious symptoms or may experience zero to mild symptoms. This could be linked to the reason why the deaths in Nigeria due to Covid-19 are predominantly among persons over sixty although people between 31 to 40 years are also susceptible to contracting the virus (Elechi, Ukwuaba and Oboqua 2021). The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control NCDC (2020) outlined the following symptoms of Covid-19: cough, chills, body pain, headache, sore throat, recent loss of taste or smell, difficulties in breathing/shortness of breath, diarrhea/abdominal pain, running nose/catarrh and fatigue.

They also stated that Covid-19 is spread when there is close contact (less than two metres) with an infected person either through their oral and nasal secretions or by touching already infected surfaces. Due to these, scientists advice strict maintenance of social (physical) distancing with persons at least two (2) metres apart from each other, regularly hand washing with soap under running water or the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer; avoidance of contact breathings and crowded places. According to (Abari 2020), wood ash can be used in the absence of water and hand sanitizers. As a result of this outbreak of the virus, government in different countries across the world imposed what is now popularly known as “lockdown”. These are: stay at home orders, curfews, quarantines and shutdown of public places such as workplaces, religious centres, hospitality centres, markets and educational institutions.

Concurrently, massive media campaigns have been ongoing in order to sensitize the public on Covid-19 in order to curb its spread. Different media channels and platforms such as radio, television (TV), newspaper, magazine, bill board and the news media (internet) are being utilized in sensitizing the public about Covid-19 in Nigeria. Given the fact that Nigeria population is predominantly in rural areas, traditional means of communication like town criers and interpersonal (face to face) contact could, also be employed in further passing of the messages.

Mass media refers to a diverse array of media technologies that reach a large audience via mass communication. The technologies through which this communication takes place include a variety of outlets. Broadcast media transmit information electronically via

media such as films, radio, recorded music, or television. Digital media comprises both internet and mobile mass communication. Internet media comprises such services as email, social media sites, a websites and internet – based radio and television. Mass media could be in the form of electronic media, radio, television, video, computer projector and printed media, posters, hand bill, newspapers, photograph etc. Mass media can be used dissemination information through news bulleting and radio/television jingles and advertisements. It is an important tool for communicating skills, knowledge and experiences to the general public including those who cannot read and write because it captivates the mind interest of the viewers due to its multi – sensory nature. Likewise, printed materials can be useful to those who can read and write but can also be translated in pidgin English and in the native languages of the users (Tommy and Mbalisi, 2020).

Mass media are channels of communication employed to disseminate information to large, heterogeneous and scattered audience at the same time (Ijah, 2020). Communication is vital in any society hence man needs to interact with his fellow human being for the advancement of the society, in this case, the awareness of covid-19 nothing can influence the lives of citizen in modern times like the mass media. To this end, the mass media plays an essential role in enlightening the public on developmental issues. Its role of educating, informing and entertaining the audience greatly influence their attitude and behaviour either negatively or positively. With the outbreak of this novel virals, many media outlets have taken up the responsibility of informing and educating the audience.

Majority of Nigerians live in rural areas without regular power supply needed to consume message from more advanced media channels. They rely on radio and traditional communication systems to access information. Akampka and Biase local government areas of Cross River State are one of the many rural settlements in Nigeria. Many of its residents are fisher’s folks and farmers. This means their access to mass media might be limited. In addition, the media seeks facts (News) and disseminate same to the public. Such messages are mostly one way without immediate feedback. In view of the ravaging effects of the covid-19 as relayed through various media channels which is no respecter of space,

people, age and sex, it is imperative to find out the level of sensitization of the people in the communities about Covid-19 as relayed through mass media channels.

Mass media are powerful channels of communication that inform, educate and entertain the public. The first and foremost function of the media is to provide news and information to the masses because people need information for various reasons. Lev (2008) state that it is not a surprise to see people devote many hours during their daily schedules to media consumption. Furthermore the media in this context is portrayed as a strong link between the government and the public because they transmit all government policies and activities to the masses. Similarly, Ijah (2020), emphasis that the media educate the people to know about their basic rights and how to use them. It s also a link between the government and people because all the policies and activities of government are conveyed through the media.

People therefore impulsively tune into available media channels in other to avail themselves of daily occurrences around the world. The media therefore is enormously influential in shaping public opinion. Different forms of media such as radio, television, newspaper, magazines, bill-boards, hand bills and the internet are some popular media channels regularly consumed in our society. Message relayed through this channels posses the capability of influencing the thoughts and the attitude of consumers. According to James and Akintunde (2018) state that radio is the favourite moat loved media channels among rural dwellers in Nigeria. However they warned that message from radio are not well crafted enough to orient, re – orient, educate, enlightening and mobilize the rural area.

Moreover, in a campaign such as awareness creation on covid-19, the adoption of multi-media approach is of essence. These are various forms of media channels like broadcast and print media etc, in conjunction with radio – media such as town – criers, interpersonal contact, drama, songs and symbols to relay development message. This approach has the potential to penetrate the communities through markets places, literate and semi literate persons, town halls and other informal gatherings in rural areas (Ijah, 2020). This is because radio is cost effective, ubiquitous and less demanding of the sole attention of its consumers. This approach had been widely utilized successfully worldwide to sensitize rural lites to

participate in communities development programmes. The problem of this study is therefore to ascertain the mass media sensitization of citizens on covid-19 pandemic in Akamkpa and Biase local government areas of cross rivers state, Nigeria

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the mass media sensitization of citizens on Coronavirus pandemic in Akamkpa and Biase local government areas of Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically the study sought to ascertain

1. The level of covid-19 symptoms awareness creation by different mass media among the citizens.
2. The level to which covid-19 transmission awareness creation by different media among the citizens.
3. The level of covid-19 prevention awareness creation by different media among the citizens.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What is the level of covid-19 symptoms awareness by different mass media among the citizens?
2. What is the level of covid-19 transmission awareness by different mass media among the citizens?
3. What is the level of covid-19 prevention awareness creation by different mass media among the citizens?

Methodology

The research design utilized in this study was descriptive survey design. This design was chosen because it allowed the researchers to collect data on the phenomenon of interest as they are occurring in the population. The population of this study was 1050 respondents. In Akamkpa local government area 500 respondents were drawn from 10 political wards while Biase local government area 550 respondents were drawn from 11 political wards. There was no sample because the population was manageable. The instrument was administered to all the 1050 respondents. At the end only 889 copies of the questionnaire were properly filled and used for the study. Accidental sampling was used in selecting 889 respondents for the study. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire titled, Mass Media Sensitization of Citizen and Coronavirus Pandemic

Questionnaire (MMSCCVPQ) designed by the researchers. The instrument had two parts, A and B. Part A contained respondents demographic information, while section B had 23 items in the form of modified four point Likert type scale of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) with scores 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The facr validity was established by using three experts while Cronbach alpha was used to test the reliability and the coefficient yield 0.79. Copies of

the questionnaire were administered to the subjects and collected by the researchers with four research assistants. Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions.

Presentation of Results

Research question 1

What is the level of covid-19 symptoms awareness by different mass media among the citizens?

Table 1: Summary of mean responses on mass media sensitization on coronavirus symptoms among the citizens.

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	X	St.D
1.	Through radio, I learnt that dry cough/catarrh is symptom of covid-19	234 26.3	214 24.1	214 24.1	227 25.3	2.51	1.14
2.	Through television, I learnt that difficulty in breathing/shortness of breath is symptoms of covid-19	234 26.3	219 24.6	229 25.8	207 23.3	2.54	1.11
3.	I learnt that muscular pain is symptom of covid-19 through radio	236 26.5	230 25.9	212 23.8	211 23.7	2.55	1.12
4.	I learnt that muscular pain is symptom of covid-19 through radio.	214 24.1	244 27.4	220. 24.7	211 23.7	2.52	1.10
5.	Information on loss of taste/smell as symptom of covid-19 through television.	74 8.3	190 21.4	273 30.7	352 39.6	1.98	0.97
6.	I learnt that muscular pain is symptom of covid-19 through newspaper/magazine.	64 7.2	62 7.0	258 29.0	505 56.8	1.65	0.90
7.	I learnt that muscular pain is symptom of covid-19 through social media/internet.	34 3.8	62 7.0	220 24.7	573 64.5	1.50	0.79
Grande mean						2.18	1.09

The result of research question one as presented in Table 1 showed that there is a low level of sensitization of the covid-19 symptoms awareness by different mass media (= 2.18 ± 1.09). Specifically, there was a low level responses for seven items measuring the level of covid-19 symptoms awareness through mass media sensitization

among citizens in Akamkpa and Biase local government areas of Cross River State. However, four items (1, 2, 3, and 4) were rated high level while three items (5, 6, and 7) were rated low level by respondents.

Research 2: what is the level of covid-19 transmission awareness by different mass media among the citizens?

Table 2: Summary of mean responses on mass media sensitization on covid-19 transmission among the citizens.

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	X	St.D
1.	I learnt that covid-19 is spread by handshaking through newspapers and billboards.	331 37.2	495 55.7	28 3.1	35 3.9	1.55	0.72
2.	I am well informed that covid-19 is transmitted by handshaking with an infected person through television.	219 24.6	231 26.0	210 26.3	229 25.8	2.50	1.12
3.	Through newspaper/magazines covid-19 is transmitted by nasal/oral droplet.	78 8.8	66 7.4	390 43.9	355 39.9	1.85	0.90
4.	I learnt that covid-19 is transmitted in crowded places through radio.	26 2.9	19 2.1	424 47.7	420 47.2	1.61	0.68

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5.	I know that putting infected hands in mouth/noise fascinated the spread of covid-19 through radio.	530 59.6	24 2.7	314 35.3	21 2.4	1.48	0.67
6.	Through social media messages, I know that covid-19 is transmitted in crowded places.	230 25.9	234 26.3	214 24.1	211 23.7	2.49	1.12
7.	Through television, I know that transmission of covid-19 by nasal/oral droplet.	252 28.3	244 27.4	182 205	211 23.7	2.40	1.10
8.	Through television, I know that covid-19 is transmitted in crowded places.	306 34.4	295 33.2	21 2.4	267 30.0	2.02	0.82
9.	Through radio, I know that putting infected hands in eyes fascinate the spread of covid-19.	214 24.1	244 27.4	220 24.7	211 23.7	2.52	1.10

Grande mean

2.05

0.91.

The result of research question two as presented in Table 2 showed that there is low level of covid-19 transmission awareness by different social media among the citizens (= 2.05+ 0.91). Specifically, there was a low level of covid-19 transmission awareness through different social media sensitization among citizens in Akamkpa and Biase local

government areas of Cross River State. However, two items (2 and 9) were rated high level while seven items (1,3,4,5,6,7, and 8) were rated low level by respondents.

Research question 3: what is the level of covid-19 prevention measures by different mass media among the citizens?

Table 3: Summary of means responses on covid-19 preventive measures by different mass media among the citizens

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	<u>X</u>	St.D
1.	Through social media, I learnt that covid-19 transmission is prevented by use of face mask.	258 29.0	236 26.5	192 21.6	203 22.8	1.62	1.13
2.	Through radio messages, I learnt that wearing of face mask prevent the spread of covid-19	231 26.3	229 25.8	219 26.0	210 24.6	2.50	1.12
3.	Through news papers/ magazines, I learnt that covid-19 is prevented by observing social distance	249 28.0	249 28.0	153 17.2	238 26.8	1.33	1.06
4.	Through handbills/billboards, I learnt that covid-19 is prevented by keeping social distancing of (2) meters apart	233 26.2	230 25.2	222 25.0	204 23.6	1.47	1.10
5.	Through television messages on prevention of covid-19 by regular washing of hands under running water with soap.	330 37.1	259 29.1	223 25.1	77 8.7	1.05	0.98
6.	Through radio, I learnt that using alcohol based hand sanitizer can prevent the spread of covid-19	193 21.7	203 22.8	211 23.7	282 31.7	1.48	1.07
7.	Through television message people were educated on prevention of covid-19 by maintaining physical social distancing	304 34.2	342 38.5	204 22.9	39 4.4	0.93	0.89
Grand mean						1.48	1.05

The result of research question three as presented in Table 3 showed that there is low level of covid-19 prevention measures by different mass media among the citizen (x 1.

48+ 1.05. Specifically, there was a low level responses for seven items measuring the level of covid-19 prevention measures through different social media

among the citizens in Akamkpa and Biase local government areas of Cross River State. However, one item (2) was rated high level while six items (1,3,4,5,6, and 7) were rated low level by respondents.

Discussion of Findings

The finding of this study revealed that there is a low level of covid-19 symptoms awareness by different mass media among the citizens. The low level discovered in this study is attributed to the low level by different mass media do not sufficiently sensitized the people of Akamkpa and Biase local government areas of Cross River State on the outbreak of Corona-virus pandemic disease in terms of symptoms, transmissions and prevention. This finding is in line with the study of Ijah (2020) who submitted that the mass media plays an essential role in enlightening the public on development issues. Its role of educating, informing and entertaining the audience greatly influence other attitude and behaviour either negatively or positively. With the outbreak of this novel virus, many media outlets have taken up the responsibility of informing and educating the audience. Similarly, World Health Organisation (WHO, 2020), noticeable symptoms of Covid-19 disease include fever, cough, respiratory symptoms, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties

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The finding of this study revealed that there is a low level of covid-19 prevention awareness by different mass media among the citizens. The low level discovered in this study is attributed to the low level by different mass media do not sufficiently sensitized the people of Akamkpa and Biase local government areas of Cross River State on the outbreak of Corona-virus pandemic disease in terms of symptoms, transmissions and prevention. This finding is in line with the view of (Abari 2020), wood ash can be used in the absence of water and hand sanitizers. As a result of this outbreak of the virus, government in different countries across the world imposed what is now popularly known as “lockdown”. These are: stay at home orders, curfews, quarantines and shutdown of public places such as workplaces, religious centres, hospitality centres, markets and educational institutions.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that mass media plays a vital role and has the power to influence virtually every aspect of our life. Mass media has the power to influence the thoughts of people either positively or negatively and can produce a change in behaviour and attitude. It is therefore concluded here that citizens should observe the various protocols as stated by the federal ministry of health and the Nigeria centre for disease control (NCDC). Washing your hands under running water, cover your nose and mouth properly tissue/handkerchief when sneezing or coughing, avoid close contact with anybody showing the symptoms of coronavirus disease, maintain social distancing and avoid touching your eyes.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. The citizens should avoid crowded social activities such as weddings, churches and burial
2. The citizens should observe all covid-19 protocols as stated by the national centre for Disease Control.
3. The citizens should avoid unnecessary visits.
4. Listen to our media channels to get update.

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