

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE USE OF TRADITIONAL NEWS MEDIA FOR COVID-19 ENLIGHTENMENT CAMPAIGN IN BONNY L.G.A, RIVERS STATE

Ibituru Iwowari PEPPEL¹, Ijeoma Jaquelyn ACHOLONU²,
Uzomma Chukwuemeka OKUGO¹, Reginald KOKO³

¹PhD, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

²PhD, International Institute of Journalism, Abuja, Nigeria

³PhD, Ignatius Ajuru, University of Education, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Corresponding author: Ibituru Iwowari Pepple; e-mail: peppleibituru@gmail.com

Abstract

This study is An Assessment of the use of the traditional news media for COVID-19 enlightenment campaigns in Bonny L.G.A of Rivers State. The COVID-19 pandemic is an infectious disease caused by a new virus which originated from Wuhan, China in December, 2019. It causes respiratory illness (like flu) with symptoms such as cough, fever, and in more severe cases, difficulty in breathing. Thus, the traditional newsmen, through the assistance of social Health workers, were able to sensitize and enlighten the rural populace on the dangers of the COVID-19 pandemic, using mother tongue which is a language familiar to them to enlighten the ruralites on the dangers of the pandemic. Through the enlightenment of the traditional newsmen, the ruralites were taught that regular hand washing for 20 seconds and the use of alcohol based sanitizer can help prevent the pandemic as there is no known cure for the COVID-19 virus but clinical diagnosis shows that infected patients can be given immune boosting therapy and drugs such as Hydroxy-chloroquin, Azithromycin, Icvemectin and zinc which can help reduce its effects on the patient. The ethnographic and survey method of research (use of personal interviews) aided the study. The perception theory of the media, formed the theoretical framework of the study. It was concluded that the traditional newsman should be exposed to trainings to improve on how to sensitize, mobilize and enlighten the rural populace, since the rural areas are bereft of amenities that can be used to better the lot of the people. It was also recommended that the traditional newsman should be trained in the art and science of reporting the rural areas, especially, on issues such as COVID-19 and other related issues. More proactive measures need to be taken by the government at all levels in order to ensure that health-care facilities are provided for the people as more people will be infected and die if health-care facilities are left unattended to by the government.

Keywords: *Coronavirus, traditional, newsman, COVID-19, enlightenment, awareness.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The traditional newsman is the Chief information purveyor in his clime. For any

information to be effective and efficient the media must play a critical role in its information dissemination to the needed destination of choice.

As an agent of mobilization, sensitization and enlightenment, the media plays vital roles in ensuring that information is disseminated to audiences through its varied channels. Thus, the traditional information dissemination mechanism is not left out in the role of sensitization, mobilization and enlightenment.

Esuh & Pepple note that the traditional newsman in every clime is the chief messenger, since his job entails disseminating information as passed to him by the chief or council of chiefs (ESUH & PEPPEL, 2016). Wilson as cited in Esuh & Pepple posits that traditional communication is perhaps the most important way by which ruralites communicate among themselves in effect with others. According to Esuh & Pepple in some rural societies, this is for a large majority the only means of getting information about events the around them (WILSON, 2013; ESUH & PEPPEL, 2016).

The Coronavirus pandemic which took the world nearly unawares and ravaged America and Europe, also had its scourging effect on Africa and Nigeria in particular. Thus, there was need for sensitization, enlightenment and mobilization of health and media personnel to intimate people on the ill effects of the Coronavirus, code named COVID-19

Coronavirus is an infectious disease (COVID-19) caused by a new virus. According to the World Health Organization WHO (2020), the disease causes respiratory illness (like the flu) with

symptoms such as cough, fever, and in more severe cases, difficulty in breathing. Thus, the media, both conventional, traditional and new media were used in a bid to sensitize and mobilize the people, both in the city and in the countryside. The people of Bonny Local Government Area were mobilized, sensitized and enlightened through the help of the traditional newsman also known as the town crier.

The local dialects were used with the composition of drama for enlightenment purposes. The traditional newsman had to use gong and drums which it beats to attract the attention of passers-by in order to enable them to listen to his message. Markets, churches and village arenas were the major contact points.

People were made to understand the deadly nature of the virus, through enlightenment campaigns by the traditional council and the Local Government authorities.

The use of mother tongue also known as vernacular helped in the dissemination of information to the ruralites who were unaware of the pandemic due to ignorance and lack of exposure and sensitization about the harmful nature of the virus.

The traditional newsman had to use the mother tongue to interpret the dictates of the Coronavirus pandemic message, thus, you can protect yourself by washing your hands frequently, avoid touching your face, avoid close contacts (1 metre to 3 feet) with people who are unwell. The traditional newsmen further instructed audiences that the virus spreads primarily through contact with infected people who cough or sneeze. They also made their audiences know that it also spreads when a person touches a surface or object that has the virus on it, then touches his eyes, nose or mouth. And he warned them that staying at home would be safer than mingling with people, as there is no available vaccine currently to prevent the spread.

Pepple adds that traditional forms of communication are composed of mythology, storytelling, language songs, proverbs, religious customs, arts work, music dance, cultural and theatrical elements as well as pottery, textiles and other art forms, thus, it was easier for the traditional newsmen to communicate COVID-19 related issues to the ruralites (PEPPLE, 2017).

Pepple adds further, that the indigenous Nigerian society had no newspaper, radio and television, but had institutions which performed the functions that the newspaper, radio and television of today's world perform (PEPPLE, 2017).

Hence, it was easier for the traditional newsman to carry out this functions with dispatch which enabled the easy dissemination of information regarding the Coronavirus to the people of Bonny Local Government Area of Rivers State, especially with the scare of a recorded index case of a 19 year old girl who was said to have travelled to Italy, France and Germany before returning to Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State, Nigeria.

The fear caused the state Government to restrict movements by imposing dusk to dawn curfew in some parts of the city and also closed down all land, and sea boarders within the state. Markets, cinemas, bars and social gatherings were banned.

This generated panic in some quateres within and outside of the Government Circle as Public and Social life were put on hold. This very scare, informed the need to sensitize and mobilize the rural populace to be aware of the COVID-19 pandemic and to stay safe from being infected with the virus.

Therefore, since the ruralites and some rural-urbanites do not understand English language to a great extent, there is the need to use an acceptance code, which will send the desired message to them. Therefore, the traditional newsman, was the channel through which the ruralites were sensitized and mobilized for safety from the dreaded COVID-19 pandemic.

2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The fear and scare which the COVID-19 virus generated to the mind of people, both medical personnel and journalists, made them want to keep their distances of course, one of the dictates for avoidance of the disease being social distancing. Though, some people are willing to go all out to sensitize people to be conscious of the COVID-19 pandemic, fear remains the major scare and the fact that there is no known cure or

vaccine, sufferers were left at the mercy of their various immune system's ability to fight the virus. This made so many people, especially, volunteers to abandon the course of mobilizing people to help in informing more ruralites on the dangers of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, to what extent were the traditional newsmen able to sensitize, mobilize and create awareness on the pandemic code named COVID-19?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

This study aims to:

1. Determine the coverage extent of the COVID-19 pandemic by the traditional newsman.
2. Find out if the traditional newsman was able to mobilize, sensitize and enlighten ruralites on the dangers of the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Determine also if the extent of mobilization, sensitization, and enlightenment was adequate to drive home the message of the traditional newsmen to ruralites.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the coverage extent of the COVID-19 pandemic by the traditional newsman?
2. Was the traditional newsman able to mobilize, sensitize and enlighten the ruralites on the dangers of the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. Is the extent of mobilization, sensitization and enlightenment adequate to drive home the message of the traditional newsman to ruralites?

3. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The traditional newsman is the chief information purveyors in his clime. Mc Brides, as cited in Esuh & Pepple (2016), posits that the role of the traditional newsman in modern communication cannot be overemphasized, as he uses a subtle form of persuasion by presenting the required message in local popular artistic forms. Thus, Bonny Island, in spite of its metropolitan nature, still enjoys the services of the traditional newsman as compositions in vernacular or mother tongues were developed to sensitize and mobilize the rural forks on the dangers of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Esuh & Pepple add further that the traditional newsman has been well cultured and exposed to perform his duties with utmost dispatch, hence his ability to interpret, mobilize and sensitize the people to be aware of the dangers of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Esuh & Pepple posit further that in terms of mobilization, his instruments like the local gong, flute and skin drums, which serve as attention catching devices, aid him to disseminate information readily to the people. The tone of his gong, when struck, sends the message to the consumers depending on the mood of the immediate environment in which he operates. The COVID-19 which brought scare to many ruralites due to the exposure to the effects of the pandemic, made people to engage in the rules of social distancing and isolation by staying at home (ESUH & PEPPLER, 2016).

The message which the traditional newsman puts across to the ruralites is mostly, hand washing, and isolation. Knowing that Africans and Nigerians in particular, live a communal life, the doctrine of isolation left so much to be desired as visitations and sharing, is the hallmark of Africans, especially, of the rural folks.

The sudden emergence of the new Coronavirus, also posed a problem to the traditional newsman, as he had to look for a name which can best describe the virus but to no avail. Coronavirus makes him to offer explanations based on the enlightenment and exposure he was given about the disease, which he in turn, had to also communicate to the rural folks. Thus, the understanding of the concept of Coronavirus is dependent on the level or depth of explanation offered to the ruralities by the traditional newsman. This is why training and exposure to trainings for the traditional newsman is very necessary (HARTLEY, 2002).

Anaeto, Onabanjo and Oaidwao, as cited in Esuh & Pepple, describe perception as the process by which people interpret sensory data which are received through the five senses of sight, sound touch, taste and smell.

Serverin and Tankard, as cited in Esuh & Pepple, labelled the message and the process of its encoding and decoding respectively. Therefore, the depth of understanding the message regarding the Coronavirus by the

traditional newsman will influence his ability to disseminate the same information (ESUH & PEPPLÉ, 2016).

Since the word Coronavirus does not exist in the local lexicon, the traditional newsman had to use it in such a manner that offers a very valid explanation to drive home his points. Apart from the problem of interpreting the Coronavirus, offering explanations regarding the causes and the preventive measures was not difficult for the traditional newsman, since the disease causes respiratory illness and that is available in the local dialect or lexicon of the traditional newsman.

4. THE TRADITIONAL NEWSMAN

The traditional newsman is the chief information purveyor in his domain. Information about happenings, events, ceremonies and commercial activities are all anchored by him. His role is akin to that of the conventional newsman, as he ensures that information as presented to him by the Chiefs or the elders' council concerning happenings or events are delivered to his folks with dispatch.

Esuh & Pepple posit that the traditional newsman has been well cultured and exposed to perform his duties with utmost dispatch. They add that in spite of the accolades which the traditional newsman enjoys, reporting the rural has been problematic overtime. This is due to the fact that 49.66% of Nigeria's population is rural, according to the Global Economy.com, a projection of the World Bank, April, 2020.

Esuh & Pepple account that the traditional newsman though credible, still has some limitations in terms of reach, voice amplification, modernity of implements, as well as regular training programmes for greater efficiency and effectiveness. It lacked the frequencies used by radio or television, and hence, it cannot reach out to people distant from him. Thus, reporting the COVID-19 pandemic to the rural populace by the traditional newsman was not an easy task. To help amplify his voice, the traditional newsman in Bonny island made use of a megaphone as an additional aid to amplify his voice. This enabled him to reach a greater percentage

of people and cover a much longer distance than ever before (ESUH & PEPPLÉ, 2016). According to Pepple one factor that made it possible for the traditional newsman to still appear very conspicuously in Bonny Town, is the homogeneity of the language and culture (PEPPLÉ, 2017).

5. HISTORY OF BONNY ISLAND

Bonny Island is located at the southern edge of Rivers State on the Atlantic coast of the Niger Delta, Nigeria. It hosts the liquefied Natural Gas Company, NLNG, shell petroleum Development Company, Saipem, Agip Oil Company etc. Bonny Island is a natural harbour, with 34 villages, and over eight fishing settlements. The main occupation of the people is fishing. Bonny has a population of 302,000 (projected figure as at April, 2020, National Population Commission of Nigeria).

6. HISTORY OF CORONAVIRUS

Public health experts around the globe are still unravelling, tracking and scrambling to understand the new virus which appeared in Wuhan, China in December, 2019. The World health Organization named the virus, COVID-19, which references the type of virus and year it emerged. The World Health Organization declared the virus a pandemic. The pandemic is still ongoing and it is still ravaging the world. COVID - 19, causes severe acute respiratory syndrome. The pandemic has led to severe global socio-economic disruptions, the postponement or cancellation of sporting, religious, and cultural events and the wide spread fears of supply shortages. Schools, primary, secondary and territory institutions, all shut down nationwide. Misinformation about the virus has spread online. Yet lots of ruralites still don't believe the reality of the virus, some see it as a rich men virus.

Hence, the use of the traditional communication systems for enlightenment. The traditional newsman also known as the town criers comes in readily to bridge the information gap to the ruralites on the deadly nature of the COVID-19 virus.

7. THEORETICAL PRESENTATION: PERCEPTION THEORY OF THE MEDIA

The perception media theory is apt for this study. Perception theory attempts to explain how human beings respond to media messages. It asserts that the content mass that sets to the public through the mass media is intended to be learned by its receivers in order to affect behavioural change.

Larhly, as cited is Anato, Onabanjo and Oaidwao describes perception as the process by which people interpret sensory data, which in the case of mass media messages, reach receivers through the five senses of sight, sound, touch, taste and smell (ESUH & PEPPE, 2016).

He postulates that two types of influences underline human message perception. These are structural and functional influences which respectively refer to the physical message or stimulus to which receivers are exposed and the psychological factor of perception. Serverin and Tankard, as cited in Esuh & Pepple, labelled message and the process of its interpretation as encoding and decoding respectively (ESUH & PEPPE, 2016). The structure of the process of its decoding into a perception mechanism consisted of four selectivity which individually and collectively work in a "stop-gate" sequence for message acceptance or rejection. The component parts are selective perception, selective exposure, selective attention and selective retention. Thus, the perception theory of the media is quite apt for this study which is, An Assessment of the use of the traditional news media for COVID-19 Enlightenment-Campaigns in Bonny Local Government Area, Rivers State (CITYPOPULATION, 2020).

8. METHODOLOGY

The ethnographic research method and survey formed the basis of this study.

Ethnographic research is a qualitative method where the researchers observe and/or interact with the study participants in their real-life environment.

Griffins says that ethnography is "not an experimental science in search of law, but an

interpretative (approach) in search of meaning". For the survey research method, interviews were conducted to seek the opinion of the respondents (GRIFFINS, 1994).

Indigenes of Bonny constituted the population of this study. According to the 2020 projected population census figure as at April, 2020, the population of Bonny is 302,000 people. According to different studies, the population for a study refers to all those people or things that fall under the umbrella of the topic or that can be examined in order to address the research problem or meet the research objectives. The study adopted a sample size of 20 respondents. These include, the traditional newsman, people assumed to be knowledgeable in the subject matter that constitutes the variables of the study and the medical personnel.

The purposive sampling method of research was adopted in the selection of samples to be studied, some communities in Bonny such as: Finima, Abalamabie, Iwo-Ama and Orosikiri were mapped out for the study, the indigenes and paramount heads of each of the four communities were selected for one-on-one interview, having observed and participated in the information dissemination process and enlightenment about the Coronavirus by the traditional newsman. However, since social distancing was proposed because of the Coronavirus pandemic, an interview schedule was used to support the observed phenomenon as an instrument for data collection. Therefore, to eliminate bias and ensure the objective collection of data, a tape recorder was used to gather information from the respondents, thereafter, the content of the recorder was transcribed into a written document with each of the participants views, well represented in their order of presentation, since people cannot be interviewed in clusters in order to avoid contact with one another.

- ❖ Data from personal interview with the traditional newsman
- ❖ Question posed to the traditional newsman on the extent of his coverage of the COVID - 19 pandemic and the enlightenment of the rural folks
- ❖ His extent of sensitization
- ❖ How his information is got.

When interviewed, the traditional newsman said, the job is basically to sensitize the people on any subject matter as he is directed. He said the COVID - 19 pandemic represents another eye opener, as he was able to relay the message to the people through the use of his gong, which he knocks, with the aid of his megaphone. He said to properly inform the people and to suppress noise, the mega phone served a much better purpose than the mere use of his mouth to disseminate information, hence, his ability to cover a very large area within a very short period of time.

On how his information is obtained, he said the paramount head or the head of the community gives him briefs on information to be delivered to the people as no other person is eligible to direct him except the chief or head of the community, hence, the credibility of his message. When asked about the level of response to his message, he said people are always ready to receive his information, but on the level of compliance, he said it is left with the enforcement officers within his domain. As according to him, hand washing before now was a tradition, enforcing it through appeals to the members of the community was not a big deal to achieve.

He said though, there is no known case of COVID - 19 in the area, yet, people have been made to be aware of the ills of the pandemic. He noted that hand washing and sanitizing had been taught to the people, as well as the symptoms of the Coronavirus pandemic.

He said that he was asked numerous questions about the disease which he said were answered through the help of some social health workers that were with him in the enlightenment process. It was easier for him to interpret in the mother tongue in order to facilitate comprehension. Interview with paramount heads and community members knowledgeable in the issue of the COVID - 19 pandemic (LI et al., 2020).

Question on The Extent of Mobilization, Sensitization And Enlightenment:

An elder in Iwo - Ama Community in Bonny, Mr. Apiri Hector Pepple, said the issue first got to him through a radio news programme, however, the traditional newsman or town crier, was able to throw more light with his team of Community

Health Educators. He said the level or rate of explanation regarding the COVID - 19 virus and the necessary preventive measures as explained and demonstrated to them were adequate.

Two other prominent sons of the community interviewed also attested to the earlier statement made by Elder Apiri Hector Pepple, that they were well exposed to the preventive measures put in place for the COVID - 19 pandemic.

Victor Ibigoni Jumbo an Opinion leader in Bonny Island attested to the efficacy and promptness of the delivery of the message of the traditional newsman to the people, especially, about the information concerning the COVID-19 pandemic. He said the new method of using a mega-phone to address the people, helped in amplifying the message and in creating effective sensitization, enlightenment and mobilization.

He said the use of the local language by the traditional newman is what makes it unique. This corresponds with Pepple's assertion that the use of mother tongue for information dissemination is appreciated more by the rural folks, than its presentation in any other medium (PEPPLE, 2017).

Elder Iwowari Hector Pepple said the lockdown of the State and Local Government Areas also helped as a means of sensitization and enlightenment, which made the work of the traditional newsman much easier as it created much awareness.

Two women from Orosikiri community attested to the efficacy of the traditional newsman in sensitizing them. They said that the issues on the COVID-19 pandemic were relayed to them by the traditional newsman, before then, they thought the virus would end at Aso Rock (seat of the Nigerian President). They also said that for the past two week they were at home, the newsman instructed them to do as he was told by the Council of Chiefs by the Government.

Assessment Parameters for the COVID-19 Pandemic: Medical Personnel and Social Health Workers:

To get the views of the medical Personnel in Rivers State on the provisions made by the State in tackling the COVID - 19 Pandemic, the following questions were fielded through a personal interview with them.

Thus, Dr. Famba Daniel Famba was interviewed on the COVID - 19 Pandemic and its assessment parameters

Questions:

- (1) What are the measures put in place to curb the spread of the COVID - 19 virus in Rivers State?
- (2) Has there been any known cure for the virus?
- (3) Social distancing/physical distancing, how would this help to curb the spread of the virus?
- (4) Is your hospital equipped enough for the containment of the COVID - 19 virus?
- (5) Do you have the required man power to contain the spread?
- (6) Do you think that the traditional newsmen is doing a proper job of enlightenment & sensitization?

On the measures put in place to curb the spread of the COVID - 19 virus, Dr. Famba Daniel said that supportive treatments help reduce the effect of the virus on patients. These are immune boosting drugs which help the patient's immune system fight the virus. He also said that regular hand washing with flowing water for 20 seconds and the use of Alcohol-based sanitizer as well as social distancing/physical distancing are also means to curb the spread of the COVID - 19 pandemic. He instructed that crowded areas should be avoided. The practice of respiratory hygiene, such as coughing into the elbow and handkerchief should be practiced

On whether there has been any known cure for the virus, they admitted that there is no known cure, but the use of hydroxyl-chloroquin, Azithomycin Icemection and Zinc can help reduce its effects on a patient.

When asked if hospitals in the state are equipped enough for the containment of the disease, he said No! but the state government converted its stadium to an isolation centre with 250 bed spaces and a treatment centre at a community in the state called Eleme, which cannot boast of facilities to contain the spread of the disease. They said the level of equipment still puts doubt in their minds.

He said the traditional newsmen is doing a good job in sensitizing and enlightening the

people, but the government should do more to provide the required materials. Regarding the question on whether or not they have the required man power, he said No! in case of any uncontrollable outbreak, more people will die as personnel and facilities are inadequate. He opined that there are no test centres in the state, as the rural dwellers would suffer more harm since doctors have not been deployed to tackle cases, if they arise.

The General Hospital in Bonny town, where this study has been carried out lacked facilities, no isolation centres, no treatment centres or personnel that can handle emergency cases should there be an outbreak of the COVID - 19 virus in the area.

A Micro-biologist, Tamunobelea Jennifer Dikibo, said the situation will become worse, if there is any outbreak in the state as the virus has increased from 2-centimetre distancing to 12-centimetres currently. She said antigen presentation subsequently stimulates the body's humoral and cellular immunity, which are mediated by the virus's specific B and T cells. Similar to common acute viral infections, the antibody profile against the SARS - COV virus has a typical pattern of 1gM and 1gG production.

According to the journal of pharmaceutical Analysis (2020), the clinical diagnosis of COVID - 19 is mainly based on epidemiological history, clinical manifestations and some examinations, such as nuclei acid detection, CT scan, Immune identification technology (point-of-care testing) (POCT) of 1gM/1gG enzymes linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) and blood culture. However, the clinical symptoms and signs of patients infected with SARS-COV-2 are highly atypical, including respiratory symptoms, cough, fever, dyspnoea and viral pneumonia. Therefore, auxiliary examinations are necessary for the diagnosis of COVID - 19, as well as the epidemiological history.

Data, results and discussion of findings

Data for this study were formulated for the purpose of generating valuable information from respondents.

The questions asked were in consonant with the research questions, and they were the same,

so as to give respondents equal opportunity to address the issues raised in course of the study.

Research question 1: What is coverage extent of the COVID - 19 pandemic by the traditional newsman?

The traditional newsman said his job is basically to sensitize and enlighten the people on any subject matter as he is directed. He said that in order to properly inform people and to suppress noise, the mega-phone served a much better purpose than the mere use of his mouth to disseminate information, hence, his ability to cover a very large area within a short period of time. The lockdown imposed by the government also helped a great deal to sensitize people, which also made his job easier. Besides, some opinion moulders and elites within the locality, were also able to educate people about the dangers of the COVID - 19 virus and the stay at home, stay safe slogan of the government, further made the ruralites to feel the impact of the COVID - 19 lockdown. Again, Community Health Workers who went on a sensitization bid with the traditional newsman also helped a great deal, making the process of sensitization and enlightenment easy. Thus, the traditional newsman was able to mobilize, sensitize and enlighten the people of the rural area.

Findings to research question 1.

The traditional newsman is a potent source of information dissemination for the rural area of the country. Since within the rural areas of the country which is bereft of infrastructural development as the basic amenities are absent in the rural areas, thus, the traditional newsman was able to enlighten, sensitize and mobilize the rural populace regarding the COVID - 19 pandemic.

The new lexicon, COVID - 19 or Coronavirus left the traditional newsman to plan an appropriate enlightenment code to buttress his points, which enabled his listeners to understand him better. This is because the traditional newsman is well cultured and exposed to deliver his message with dispatch.

Research question 2. Was the traditional newsman able to mobilize, sensitize and enlighten

the ruralites on the dangers of the COVID - 19 pandemic?

Results from the findings of research question 1 attest to the fact that the traditional newsman was able to mobilize the people to gather and listen to his message on the COVID - 19 pandemic, as well as to enlighten them through the assistance of the Community Health Workers who helped him in the process of the enlightenment and sensitization.

Again, the lockdown of the rural areas by the government, the doctrine of social distancing/ physical distancing as well as regular hand washing and use of hand sanitizer enabled the traditional newsman to adequately sensitize and enlighten the rural populace on the dangers of the COVID - 19 pandemic.

Findings to research question 2.

The traditional newsman, being the chief information purveyor in his domain was able to mobilize, sensitize and enlighten the rural people on the dangers of the COVID - 19 pandemic.

He was able to educate them with the use of mother tongue on how to wash their hands regularly, for at least 20 seconds with soap and water or use alcohol based hand sanitizer, cover nose and mouth with a disposable tissue or flexed elbow when coughing or sneezing, avoid crowded areas, and close distances with one another (1 metre to 3 feet) with people that are unwell etc.

This information helped the traditional newsman to properly educate the people on the dangers of the pandemic and the precautionary measures to be taken.

Research Question 3: Is the extent of mobilization, sensitization and enlightenment adequate to drive home the message of the traditional newsman to the ruralites?

The traditional newsman was able to drive home his message through the use of the mother tongue which enabled him to disseminate the information to the ruralites with dispatch. This is in line with the dictate of Esuh and Pepple (2016) who state that the role of the traditional newsman in modern communication cannot be overemphasized as he uses subtle forms of persuasion by presenting the required message in local popular artistic forms (ESUH & PEPPLÉ, 2016).

Findings to research question 3

Since the traditional newsman does his job with much suasion, it was easier to sensitize and enlighten the ruralites on the COVID - 19 pandemic which is a global emergency to enable them to stay safe and alive.

Thus, the average ruralite knows the methods reeled out for the prevention of the pandemic. The people know that they do not need to touch their faces, noses, eyes and ears as these sensitive places can be detrimental if the virus is spread in any means whatsoever.

Assessment parameter for the COVID - 19 Pandemic, findings from interview with medical personnel and Social Health Workers.

The medical personnel interviewed was of the views that the traditional newsman has the capacity to sensitize and enlighten the rural people, but the facilities for the curb of the disease is not readily available in the rural areas, as well as in the urban centres.

They believe that the government has been paying lip service to the COVID - 19 pandemic since facilities are yet to be put in place in case of an emergency.

They said that studies so far show that there is no known cure for the virus, but some clinical measures can be used to boost the immunity of a sufferer and to help give him / her a temporary relieve measure.

They advocated for regular hand washing for at least 20 minutes, the use of alcohol based sanitizers and sneezing/coughing with covered nose and mouth with disposable handkerchiefs etc.

Findings from the interview:

The medical personnel and the Social Health Workers, all agreed that, social/physical distancing is a means to avoid the pandemic, as well as regular hand washing for 20 seconds.

Avoidance of overcrowded areas would be of a great help to people. A government intervention to provide the needed amenities to help prevent and possibly fight the spread of the pandemic is very instructive (PEPPLE, 2008).

9. CONCLUSIONS

The traditional newsman showed great potency in the areas of information dissemination, especially, in matters concerning the dissemination of the information on the COVID - 19 pandemic, which has become a source of worry to the entire globe. The traditional newsman was able to sensitize and enlighten the ruralites on the ill effects of the COVID - 19 virus which is causing great concern to everybody. Since the COVID - 19 virus has no known cure, preventive measures were prescribed, hence, the need to wash one's hands with soap and water for 20 seconds or the use of alcohol-based sanitizer to keep the hands virus free as COVID - 19 is an infectious disease caused by a new virus. The disease whose origin is traced to have originated in China (Wuhan) caused respiratory illness (like the flu) with symptoms such as cough, fever and in more severe cases, difficulty in breathing, as it spread primarily through the contact with infected people when they cough or sneeze. It also spreads when a person touches a surface or object that has the virus on it, then touches his eyes, nose or mouth.

The traditional newsman did his bid by disseminating information about the ailment to the ruralites, but much more is desired as governments at all levels need to be proactive to curb the pandemic before it spreads, as there are no facilities on ground should there be an outbreak of the disease in Rivers State. The isolation centres created do not have enough man power to cater for the needs of the people when it arises, as there are also no test centres in the state or its local government areas where one can be tested if suspected to be infected with the virus. The index case originally noticed was tested outside the state which is a poor approach, as many others who may have been infected by the disease cannot be tested in the state. The health personnel was neither trained nor prepared for the pandemic as it is at risk of any possible occurrence or outbreak. Thus, information on containment, enlightenment and sensitization is not enough, without proactive measures to curb the menace of the COVID - 19 pandemic.

Recommendations

Since the traditional newsman is the chief information purveyor in his domain, he should be trained in the act and science of reporting, especially on issues such as the COVID - 19 and other related issues.

More proactive measures need to be taken by the government at all levels in order to ensure that health care facilities are provided for people.

Rural infrastructure such as portable water, electricity and other needed amenities should be provided for the ruralites; more personnel both medical and Social Health Workers should be trained and equipped to fight the dreaded COVID - 19 pandemic.

Social distancing/physical distancing should be encouraged to help reduce the harsh effect of the COVID - 19 pandemic.

References

ESUH, P. & PEPPLE, I.I. (2016) Depth of Coverage of the traditional newsman and mobilization of the Riverine Communities for the 2015 General Election in Rivers

State, Nigeria. *The Nigeria Journal of Communication*. 13(1), pp. 235-256.

GRIFFIN, E. (1994) *A first look at Communication*. Theory New York: Mac Grawhill, Inc.

HARTLEY, J (2002) *Communication Culture and Media Studies, the key concepts* (3rd ed.). New York: Routledge.

LI, X., GENG, M., PENG, Y., MENG, L. & LU, S. (2020) Molecular immune pathogenesis and diagnosis of COVID-19. *Journal of Pharmaceutical Analysis*. 10(2):102-8.

PEPPLE, I.I (2008) *Media and Rural Development: A study of Oloma & Geogekiri Communities*. Bonny, LGA., Rivers State. Unpublished M. A. Thesis.

PEPPLE, I.I. (2017) *The traditional Newsman and mobilization of Riverine Communities in Rivers State for the 2015 election*. Bonny, LGA., Rivers State. Unpublished Ph.D Thesis.

CITYPOPULATION (2020) *Bonny*. Available at: <http://www.citypopulation.de/php/nigeria-admin.php?adm2id=NGA033007> [April 7, 2020].

WHO (2020) *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic*. Available at: https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019?gclid=CjwKCAiAoOz-BRBdEiwAyuvA6wP-BAmmeHLRjQ9GPTsEsfiTz-fomNMwyYj1gIIYNwqet7ND39KXsxoC2ecQAvD_BwE [September 15, 2020].

WILSON, D. (2013) Mass media and Grass root mobilization. *Journal of Communication and culture*. 4(3), pp. 22-64.