

EVALUATION OF MEDIA CAMPAIGNS AND ADHERENCE TO REGULATIONS AGAINST PUBLIC SMOKING IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The issue of smoking in public places remains prevalent in Nigeria, despite growing public outcry and condemnation. A recent World Health Organization (WHO) report highlights the rising number of deaths and severe health conditions, including cancer and heart diseases, linked to second-hand smoke and tobacco use in the country. As part of the efforts to tackle this public health challenge, the media is expected to play a pivotal role in raising awareness and shaping public discourse through campaigns that emphasize the dangers of smoking, particularly in public spaces. This study, using a survey research method and a questionnaire for data collection, evaluates the effectiveness of media campaigns in discouraging public smoking in Cross River State. The findings indicate that media efforts have been insufficient, with a significant portion of the population unaware of the smoking regulations in place for public spaces. The study suggests the need for more robust media advocacy and public education programs to combat smoking in certain public areas.

Keywords: Media, campaigns, adherence, regulations, public smoking, public health, public smoking.

1. INTRODUCTION

The menace of public smoking persists unabated in Nigeria, despite increasing public criticism and condemnation. This troubling situation is compounded by alarming statistics from the World Health Organization (WHO), which report a significant number of casualties, including deaths and critical health conditions, due to cancer and severe heart diseases linked to the toxicity of second-hand smoke and tobacco consumption. These findings highlight the urgent need for effective interventions to mitigate the health risks posed by public smoking.

The mass media serve as invaluable tools for driving positive social changes, employing

principles and strategies designed to improve societal well-being. One of the most effective communication approaches in this regard is media advocacy, the strategic use of mass media and community-based advocacy to promote environmental changes or public policy initiatives. Media advocacy focuses on addressing social problems at the community level in order to influence policy formulation and societal transformation (Adel, 2013).

Globally, tobacco use and exposure have been identified as the leading causes of premature deaths. In Nigeria, the consumption of tobacco and exposure to second-hand smoke remain significant risk factors for preventable deaths from cancer and other chronic diseases (Adejuwon, 2009). This reality underscores the critical role of mass media and community advocacy in promoting policies that mitigate the health and environmental challenges posed by smoking in public spaces. Wakefield, et al. (2010) asserted that mass media campaigns are essential for disseminating messages aimed at fostering positive behavioural changes and preventing health-related risks.

Public smoking has been widely recognized as a major contributor to cancerous infections and severe heart diseases, posing a serious threat to public health worldwide. According to the World Lung Foundation (2015), tobacco-related deaths could rise to one billion in the 21st century if current smoking patterns persist. Furthermore, a report by the WHO (2013) revealed that tobacco use and second-hand smoke exposure negatively affect all stages of human reproduction, causing significant harm to both male and female fertility.

In Nigeria, the situation is exacerbated by a relatively low level of public awareness regarding the health consequences of tobacco use and second-hand smoke. Despite the enactment of anti-smoking laws in 1990, including the prohibition of smoking in certain public places and restrictions on tobacco advertising, enforcement has been weak, allowing the menace to persist (Olowookere, et al., 2014).

This raises concerns about the role of mass media in drawing public and policymaker attention to critical issues such as public smoking, which poses severe health and environmental risks. Through their agenda-setting function and social responsibility, the media are expected to prioritize such issues to safeguard societal well-being.

As part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR), the media are expected to set the agenda for public discourse and educate the populace about the dangers of smoking, particularly in public places. However, several challenges impede these efforts, including the poor enforcement of anti-smoking laws, the limited public awareness of the health risks and legal implications of public smoking, and the inadequate reach of media campaigns, especially in rural and underserved areas. Socio-cultural norms, peer influences, and weak collaboration among health agencies, media practitioners, and law enforcement further exacerbate the problem.

The present study seeks to evaluate the impact of media campaigns on public smoking behaviours and assess the level of adherence to smoking regulations in Cross River State, Nigeria. By identifying gaps in awareness, compliance, and enforcement, the study aims to provide actionable insights for improving public health outcomes and promoting the effective implementation of anti-smoking laws.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the existence of laws and regulations prohibiting smoking in public places in Nigeria, including the provisions of the National Tobacco Control Act (2015), public smoking remains a persistent issue. In Cross River State, the prevalence of public smoking in spaces such as

restaurants, markets, parks, schools, public transportation, and other shared environments poses significant public health risks. Non-smokers, including vulnerable groups such as children, pregnant women, and the elderly, are exposed to second-hand smoke, leading to various health complications such as respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular diseases, and cancer (Ike & Onyema, 2020; Ogah, et al., 2023; Ojo, et al., 2024).

Media campaigns are intended to raise awareness, educate the public, and encourage compliance with public health regulations. Platforms such as radio, television, newspapers, social media, and community engagement efforts have been employed to disseminate anti-smoking messages. However, the effectiveness of these campaigns in reducing public smoking and fostering adherence to regulations in Cross River State remains questionable and raises critical concerns about the impact of media interventions and the strategies employed to ensure compliance.

It therefore becomes imperative to evaluate the effectiveness of media campaigns in raising awareness and influencing behavioural change among the residents of Cross River State. Understanding the gaps in media messaging, enforcement mechanisms, and public adherence to anti-smoking laws is crucial for developing more effective strategies in order to address this public health challenge. This study, therefore, aims to assess the impact of media campaigns on public smoking behaviours and evaluate the level of adherence to smoking regulations in Cross River State, Nigeria. How effective are these media campaigns in driving behavioural change and fostering compliance with anti-smoking laws in the state?

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Social Learning Theory, developed by Albert Bandura (1977), emphasizes that individuals learn behaviours through observation, imitation, and modelling. It highlights the role of social interactions, media, and environmental factors in shaping behaviour. This theory is particularly relevant in the context of this study as it underscores the importance of

media campaigns in influencing public attitudes and behaviours regarding smoking.

The key constructs of Social Learning Theory relevant to this study include the following:

1. **Observational Learning:** Media campaigns provide models of desirable behaviour, such as avoiding smoking in public places. When individuals observe these behaviours in advertisements or public figures, they are more likely to emulate them.
2. **Reinforcement:** Positive reinforcement, such as showcasing testimonials from individuals who have quit smoking or avoided public smoking, can encourage compliance. Conversely, highlighting penalties for violating smoking regulations serves as negative reinforcement to deter non-compliance.
3. **Reciprocal Determinism:** This principle emphasizes the interaction between personal factors (e.g., beliefs and attitudes), behaviour, and environmental influences. For instance, media messages (environmental influence) can shape public attitudes (personal factors), leading to changes in behaviour.
4. **Self-Efficacy:** Similar to the HBM, the Social Learning Theory underscores the importance of self-efficacy. Media campaigns that present relatable stories or step-by-step strategies for avoiding public smoking can empower individuals to take action.

By applying the Social Learning Theory, this study examines how media campaigns utilize observational learning and reinforcement to shape public attitudes and behaviours concerning anti-smoking regulations. The theory offers a robust framework for analysing the effectiveness of media campaigns in influencing public smoking behaviours and provides insights into the mechanisms through which these campaigns enhance public awareness, shift attitudes, and promote adherence to anti-smoking regulations in Cross River State.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary aim of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of media campaigns and adherence to regulations against public smoking

in Cross River State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. Assess the level of public awareness of anti-smoking regulations and the dangers of public smoking in Cross River State.
2. Assess the effectiveness of media campaigns in promoting adherence to public smoking regulations
3. Ascertain the level of compliance with anti-smoking regulations in Cross River State.

5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guide the present study:

1. What is the level of public awareness regarding anti-smoking regulations and the associated health risks of public smoking in Cross River State?
2. To what extent have media campaigns been effective in promoting adherence to public smoking regulations?
3. What is the level of compliance with anti-smoking regulations in Cross River State?

6. LITERATURE REVIEW

Exposure to tobacco smoke causes numerous health problems and imposes significant economic, morbidity and mortality burdens on populations. To mitigate these health risks, most governments have enacted a comprehensive tobacco control legislation (Verma et al., 2024). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2024) emphasizes that the legislation is central to effective tobacco control, institutionalizing a country's commitment, regulating public and private conduct, and focusing tobacco control activities in ways voluntary measures cannot achieve. A successful legislation requires effective implementation, enforcement, compliance mechanisms, and public awareness strategies.

Bobadilla et al. (2014) highlighted the pro-inflammatory, oxidative, and thrombotic effects of tobacco smoke, which contribute to atherosclerosis and increase cardiovascular risks. Both active and passive smokers have elevated leukocyte levels, leading to endothelial damage

and heightened risks of conditions such as vasospastic angina and ventricular arrhythmias. Nicotine and smoke further exacerbate these risks by harming endothelial cells and increasing sympathetic activity.

Various studies affirm the necessity of comprehensive smoking bans. For example, Sari (2013) found that such bans reduce smoking by 4.6% immediately and by an additional 1.2% annually as the ban persists. Bobadilla et al. (2014) showed that laws restricting public smoking reduced acute coronary syndrome incidences in Spain. Similarly, Bhat et al. (2015) discovered high local support for smoking bans in Udaipur, though enforcement mechanisms were lacking.

The effectiveness of smoking bans is further corroborated by reports like the BBC (2024), revealing that over 70 countries have implemented 'smoke-free' policies in indoor public spaces, including workplaces and entertainment venues. According to the CDC (2024), these smokefree policies do not harm the hospitality industry's economy, as evidenced by a comprehensive review of studies from eight countries.

Despite these successes, challenges persist in implementing tobacco control laws. For instance, Olowookere et al. (2014) found poor awareness and attitude towards the prohibition of public smoking in Osun State, necessitating increased public sensitization and law enforcement. Media campaigns play a vital role in tobacco control. Bala (2017) suggests that media-supported cessation campaigns can complement tobacco control programs, directly influencing individuals' knowledge and behaviour. Durkin et al. (2012) and the National Cancer Institute (2017) argue that mass media campaigns are crucial in shaping public attitudes, promoting quitting, and reducing smoking prevalence when integrated into comprehensive tobacco control programs.

The World Economic Forum (2023) underscores the global shift towards raising a "smoke-free" generation through smoking bans and sales restrictions. This is part of a broader strategy outlined in their Global Health and Healthcare Strategic Outlook 2023 to enhance healthcare by 2035.

However, enforcement and compliance remain challenging. Fagbule et al. (2023) noted poor compliance with tobacco laws among vendors, largely due to a lack of awareness and enforcement. Udokanma *et al.* (2021) identified gaps in Nigeria's National Tobacco Control Act, including inadequate health warnings on cigarette packs and insufficient regulatory autonomy for the National Tobacco Control Commission.

In summary, a comprehensive tobacco control legislation, supported by media campaigns and effective enforcement, is crucial in order to reduce tobacco use and its associated health risks. Despite challenges, such measures have demonstrated significant public health benefits worldwide.

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design to evaluate the role of media campaigns in promoting adherence to anti public smoking regulations in Cross River State. The area of study is Cross River State with a projected population of 4,406,200 (City Population, 2022). This is comprised of Cross River State residents (both urban and rural areas), media practitioners, health professionals and officials from regulatory and law enforcement agencies etc. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to ensure the comprehensive representation of the population. This approach allowed for a diverse and balanced sample. A sample size of 400 was drawn across the study area. The study employed a structured questionnaire as the primary instrument for data collection. Data from the questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics presented in tables for clarity.

8. DATA PRESENTATION

Table 1. Frequency analysis of responses to item on Assessing the level of public awareness of anti-smoking regulations and the dangers of public smoking in Cross River State

Responses/ Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1.1 Are you aware of the anti-smoking regulations in public places in Cross River State?		
Yes	278	70.3%
No	86	21.6%
Maybe	32	8.1%
Total	396	100%
1.2 How did you first learn about the anti-smoking regulations?		
Media	102	25.7%
Discussion with friends, colleagues, or relatives	147	37.1%
Public Awareness Campaign	79	20%
Others	68	17.2%
Total	396	100%
1.3 Do you believe smoking in public spaces poses a danger to health?		
Yes	375	94.6%
No	11	2.7%
Maybe	11	2.7%
Total	396	100%
1.4 How frequently do you see public awareness campaigns about smoking regulations?		
Very Often	21	5.4%
Often	96	24.3%
Rarely	214	54.1%
Never	64	16.2%
Total	396	100%
1.5 In your opinion, how effective are these campaigns in informing the public about the dangers of smoking in public places?		
Very Effective	107	27%
Somewhat Effective	128	32.4%
Not Effective	161	40.5%
Total	396	100%

Source: Fieldwork (2024).

Table 2. Frequency analysis of responses to item on assessing the effectiveness of media campaigns in promoting adherence to public smoking regulations

Responses/ Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
2.1 Have you ever encountered any media campaign (TV, radio, social media, etc.) regarding smoking regulations in public spaces?		
Yes	204	51.4%
No	139	35.1%
Maybe	53	13.5%
Total	396	100%
2.1 Which type of media do you think is most effective in conveying messages about smoking regulations?		
Radio	128	32.4%
TV	43	10.8%
Print Media	21	5.4%
Social Media	204	51.4%
Total	396	100%
2.3 How often do you notice media campaigns related to smoking regulations?		
Frequently	32	8.1%
Occasionally	193	48.6%
Rarely	150	37.8%
Never	21	5.4%
Total	396	100%
2.4 To what extent do you feel these media campaigns have influenced your behaviour regarding smoking in public places?		
Strongly Influenced	128	32.4%
Somewhat Influenced	128	32.4%
Not Influenced	140	35.2%
Total	396	100%
2.5 Do you think media campaigns are the most effective way to promote adherence to smoking regulations?		
Yes	286	72.2%
No	44	11.1%
Maybe	66	16.7%
Total	396	100%

Source: Fieldwork (2024).

Table 3. Frequency analysis of responses to ascertain the level of compliance with
anti-smoking regulations in Cross River State

Responses/ Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
3.1 Have you personally observed people smoking in public spaces in Cross River State despite the regulations?		
Yes	326	82.2%
No	32	8.1%
Maybe	11	2.7%
Total	396	100%
3.2 In your opinion, how often do people violate the smoking regulations in public areas?		
Always	204	51.4%
Often	128	32.4%
Sometimes	43	10.8%
Rarely	21	5.4%
Never	0	0%
Total	396	100%
3.3 Do you think the current penalties for smoking in public spaces are sufficient to deter individuals from breaking the law?		
Yes	86	21.6%
No	236	59.5%
Maybe	74	18.9%
Total	396	100%
3.4 Have you ever reported someone for smoking in a public place?		
Yes	32	8.1%
No	353	89.2%
Maybe	11	2.7%
Total	396	100%
3.5 How likely are you to comply with the anti-smoking regulations when in a public space?		
Very Likely	308	77.8%
Somewhat Likely	44	11.1%
Unlikely	44	11.1%
Total	396	100%

Source: Fieldwork (2024).

8. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings reveal a strong awareness of anti-smoking regulations among respondents, with 70.3% (278 respondents) acknowledging familiarity with these laws. This aligns with the findings of WHO (2024), who highlighted the importance of legislation in tobacco control, noting that the institutionalization of tobacco control efforts is crucial for ensuring widespread public knowledge. However, 21.6% (86 respondents) were unaware of the laws, and 8.1% (32 respondents) were uncertain, pointing to gaps in outreach that need to be addressed. This gap in awareness can be attributed to the challenges identified by WHO (2024), such as insufficient educational and awareness-raising strategies to ensure public support for such regulations. Furthermore, the primary sources of awareness, discussions with friends, colleagues, or relatives (37.1%, 147 respondents) and media (25.7%, 102 respondents). This finding suggest that interpersonal communication plays a significant role in disseminating information, as noted by the National Cancer Policy Forum (2013) in their discussion on the effectiveness of mass media in shaping public attitudes and behaviour.

The data also indicates a strong consensus that smoking in public poses a health risk, with 94.6% (375 respondents) agreeing. This finding supports the widespread acceptance of public health messages regarding the dangers of smoking, as highlighted by Bobadilla et al. (2014), who noted the harmful effects of tobacco smoke, including its contribution to atherosclerosis and cardiovascular risks. This consensus also points to the effectiveness of public health campaigns in educating the public, as observed by the CDC (2024), who found that Smokefree policies significantly reduce health risks without harming the hospitality industry.

Despite this strong awareness of the health risks, the data reveals a gap in the effectiveness of public awareness campaigns, with only 27% (107 respondents) rating them as very effective and 40.5% (160 respondents) considering them ineffective. As Durkin et al. (2012) emphasized, mass media campaigns can influence smoking

behaviour, but their success depends on factors such as reach, intensity, and duration, suggesting that current campaigns may need to be more targeted and sustained.

Media campaigns, especially through social media (51.4%, 203 respondents), were the most encountered and deemed the most effective platform, reflecting the shift towards digital platforms for reaching a broad audience, as recommended by the World Economic Forum (2023) for promoting a “smoke-free” generation. However, traditional media outlets, such as television (10.8%, 43 respondents) and print media (5.4%, 21 respondents), showed limited effectiveness in promoting anti-smoking messages, in line with the findings from the Union (2015) that emphasized the need for strong quit messages delivered through various media channels. While social media and radio play key roles in dissemination, further research and targeted strategies are necessary to optimize their impact.

The findings also highlight significant non-compliance with anti-smoking regulations, with 82.2% (326 respondents) observing public smoking violations. This is consistent with research by Bhat et al. (2015), who found that local support for smoking bans is high but often hindered by inadequate enforcement mechanisms. The frequent violations (51.4%, 204 respondents) indicate a lack of effective enforcement, as suggested by Fagbule *et al.* (2023), who found that poor compliance with tobacco laws in the retail sector stemmed from a lack of awareness and insufficient enforcement. Additionally, the perceived inadequacy of penalties (59.5%, 236 respondents) further reinforces this issue, with weak deterrents failing to curb violations, echoing the concerns raised by the National Cancer Institute (2017) about the need for robust policies and enforcement to reduce tobacco use.

Despite these challenges, a majority of respondents (77.8%, 308 respondents) indicated a high likelihood of complying with anti-smoking regulations, suggesting that with improved enforcement, awareness, and stronger penalties, adherence could be significantly increased. This is in line with the findings of Sari (2013), who found that comprehensive smoking bans could

have lasting effects on smoking behaviour over time. The findings, therefore, underscore the need for continuous efforts to improve public awareness, strengthen enforcement mechanisms, and implement effective media campaigns in order to ensure higher compliance with tobacco control regulations. Strengthening these strategies, as suggested by WHO (2024), will be critical in achieving the long-term goals of tobacco control and public health protection.

9. CONCLUSIONS

This study assessed the impact of media campaigns on adherence to anti-smoking regulations in Cross River State, Nigeria, and uncovered critical insights. Media campaigns were widely recognized as valuable tools for promoting compliance, with social media emerging as the most effective platform for reaching diverse audiences. However, the mixed perceptions regarding the campaigns' influence and effectiveness highlight the need for better-designed, culturally relevant, and engaging messaging that resonates with the target population.

Despite a commendable level of public awareness of anti-smoking regulations, this awareness has not effectively translated into compliance or adherence. Interpersonal communication, such as discussions with friends and family, surpassed public awareness campaigns and media efforts as the primary source of information. This underscores a significant gap in the strategic dissemination of anti-smoking messages, particularly through formal media and institutional channels.

The study also revealed persistent challenges, including inadequate enforcement mechanisms, insufficient public engagement, and the limited reach of awareness campaigns. Moreover, a widespread non-compliance with the anti-smoking regulations reflects weaknesses in deterrent measures, such as penalties, which are perceived by many as insufficient to curb violations.

Addressing these challenges is crucial for fostering behavioural change, ensuring higher compliance rates, and protecting public health

from the risks of smoking in public spaces. A holistic approach that combines strengthened enforcement, innovative public education strategies, and community-driven initiatives will be essential in order to achieve sustainable progress in this regard.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

Arising from the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Authorities should prioritize regularly and engage in public awareness campaigns, leveraging both traditional and digital media. Social media, identified as the most effective platform, should be used extensively in order to target younger demographics.
2. Stricter enforcement of anti-smoking regulations is essential. This can be achieved by increasing the presence of law enforcement in public spaces and introducing robust monitoring systems to ensure compliance.
3. To deter non-compliance, penalties for smoking in public spaces should be revised to be more stringent and consistently enforced.
4. Encourage community involvement through workshops, town hall meetings, and partnerships with local organizations in order to promote awareness and adherence.
5. Campaigns should focus on emotionally compelling and culturally relevant messages that highlight the dangers of smoking and the benefits of compliance. Interactive content, such as short videos and testimonials, can enhance engagement.
6. Public education programs should include information on how to report violations. Establishing anonymous reporting channels could alleviate fears of retaliation and encourage community participation.
7. Regular assessments of the effectiveness of media campaigns and enforcement measures should be carried out. This will help identify areas for improvement and ensure the sustainability of anti-smoking initiatives.

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