RESEARCH ARTICLE

Communication and Crisis Information Campaigns: Perspectives of Constructivism, Conspiracy and Misinformation of Coivid-19 messages in West Africa

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Abstract

The research centers on crisis communication campaigns against audience constructivism, conspiracy and misinformation in two West African countries in the coronavirus pandemic era. The setting is Nigeria and Camerouns to find out the main media of information from the government, the major theme of coronavirus messages and the perception about coronavirus messages by Africans. The study adopted ex post facto quantitative survey method with questionnaire administered on a population of 6,269,945 sampled at 600 persons. It applied the media constructivism and information manipulation theories. Findings revealed that 84% of the respondents got coronavirus messages from traditional media of group meetings, radio and television rather than from social media interface with government agencies. Data further revealed that 96 % of the residents accepted the message of coronavirus control of hand washing more than on social distancing and face-masking. Responses indicated that 81 % of the residents regarded coronavirus messages as mere romours, fake media propaganda and anti – religious campaign from the government. Recommendations are: government should adopt regular group discussions and social media to conveying vital messages rather than reliance on transient old information sources. Additionally, messages must be motivating, convincing and persuasive to influence positive attitude.

Keywords: Crisis; Communication; Management; Misinformation

Introduction

In crisis situations, the nature and styles of obtaining, processing and delivering of information can determine the success or failure of projects and programmes. This is irrespective of finest ways in the packaging of proposals. It can be reasoned that the technological concept of garbage in and garbage out makes meaning considering that the knowledge which a source of information learns from field investigations, teachings, indoctrinations and experiences influences the output of the information to listeners, readers, viewers. It goes to indicate that the management of information or campaigns about any crisis defectively gathered also end up being poorly delivered. The style of sending information during non-crisis period cannot be same with crisis periods. Any institution, community or government that rely in one form of communicating goals to citizens at all moments may face resistance and end up with failed programmes.

Thus, the processes of using appropriate communication steps to handle crisis moments can be described as crisis communication management and campaigns. Without being immodest, during crisis, information delivery faces distortions and falsifications from the original source through the channels to the receivers. The crux of the matter is that information ought to be redefined and edited adequately from the raw form to reach the intended receivers. The releasing of information without going through the professional process can be counterproductive and may cause stagnation in development of countries. In all senses, countries particularly in the African continent face crisis of poverty, healthcare and are desirous to come out of acute underdevelopment. The countries like Nigeria yearn to come out of the grips of health pandemics particularly the novel corona virus. The onus of bailing out countries from health crisis and to stand squarely on the platforms of development requires effective communication techniques of combating crisis through media channels. This is contrary to the position of Saleh and David (2022) that more attention should be given to hospital workers in terms of policy formulation being that they are at the forefront in the fight against corona virus.

It is assumed that life, businesses and governance may be much easier if emergencies or crisis arrive with fair warning. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Such existence and operations of organizations and governments would require no need to prepare for disasters in advance. Crisis is inevitable. It is everywhere, any moment and affects every person and government. Crisis is associated with perplexity,

uncertainty, emotional reaction and fear. As far as there is existence, crisis has turned out to be part and parcel of all individuals, groups, institutions and governments. Olukunle (2018) states that crisis refers to an unexpected, unplanned circumstances or rather a risk that suddenly dawns upon a business, institution or government from nowhere. It means an occasion that threatens the steadiness of any society ororganization. A crisis is any happening that prompts a dangerous state of affairs among human beings, groups, communities, or the entire country or nation. Crises are deemed to be unhelpful events in the security, economic, political, societal, or ecological relationships. Crisis gives little or no notice. More liberally, it is a connotation of an emergency.

Bernstein (2015) states that crisis is any condition that could threaten, harm people, property and seriously interrupts economic and social businesses. It can involve a nation, its territories, citizens, or vital interests to create a condition of national emergency. A crisis can be critical and may even completely knock down a government and inject pain, distress, or disordered functions.

Mikusova and Horvathova (2019) say that three elements that must be present when deeming a crisis situation are that the situation appears very stressful; there is very short time for interventions while individuals have uncertainties about the situation. Since crises comes when least expected, organizations and governments are not expected to wait until it hits. There has to be plans to control and manage crisis. A planned campaign of mitigating any form of crisis has to be initiated to enlighten the internal and external public about threats. Fragouli and Ibidapo (2015) indicate that crises require leaders who do not follow the norms and are able to take advantage of the negative situation to bring about change and growth of the society. This is why crisis communication is a necessity for all organizations and governments. Crisis of whatever nature can be properly managed or handled with effective communication applied or directed to the causes of the problems.

Crisis communication is an initiative which aims at protecting the reputations of organizations and the government by maintaining positive public image. Various factors such as crime, fraud and false media reports can tarnish the image of governments and countries. So, crisis communication specialists are usually set aside to fight against challenges which tend to harm the reputation and image of governments. Crocetit (2008) says that crisis communication is a strategic approach that draws people closer to the governments or organizations during a disruptive event. When a crisis occurs, practical, swift and detailed communication is vital. Crisis communication refers to the dissemination of information to address factors or causes of negative impacts on the society (Amaresan, 2021).

It is worth saying that information diffusion by people are subject to the mind construction of beliefs, and can be affected by the conspiracies of many factors ranging from the level of literacy, poverty, peer groups, culture, interest of the media channels including and biases of media institutions proprietors. These elements propel the level of accurate or inaccurate information towards acceptance or rejection by the society. In the case of the corona virus pandemic, it was not different that the level of literacy, ignorance, scarcity of needs and even the rules of media institutions and proprietors acted to affect the extent of public acceptance and rejection of messages. Social belief and mind constructions formed conspiracy platforms of taking the messages accurately or inaccurately. Udende, Akpade, Omoloso and Abubakar (2022) remarked that even as sustained advocacy was made, recorded cases of infections and deaths were on the rise, since many persons refused to comply with stipulated rules and directives. In addition, the authors mentioned that due to the enforced lockdown, the outbreak of corona virus pandemic made it easy for people to freely and quickly access messages, create contents and disseminate misleading information particularly from the social media platforms. Consequently, the mind construction of the people was largely manipulated through false messages and conspiracies in the public sphere making it to adequately take right decisions of control or manage the proper information from the distorted versions.

With right information management, governments can improve decision-making and demonstrate accountability and openness. The public sector gains insights from information for better decisions for citizens' economic and health care. Properly managing public sector information can ensure reliable, trustworthy and dependable use and reuse of data by both public sector institutions in the general public interest (Liew, 2021).

To say the least means that without information from a specific or known channels of the mass media, a specific theme there can be poor perception and unsuccessful implementation of objectives and intentions of the government no matter the strength of personnel and equipment. Consequently, in it is a truism that the primary objective of media institutions lie in providing information, enlightenment, education and entertainment. This shows that media activities are primarily social services before thoughts of profit. In essence, the method and form of taking information from governmental and non-governmental institutions to communities deserve a strong cord of media campaigns. This is against reliance on faith and beliefs to solve fundamental social problems of health care particularly such as the processing of information about the corona virus outbreak.

Statement of the Problem

On December 31, 2019, the first case of coronavirus was reported and the source of the outbreak was linked to a wet market in Wuhan (Hubei province, China). Human-to-human transmission of the virus was confirmed in countries and territories worldwide. The pneumonia symptoms included dry cough, chest pain, fever, and trouble breathing (Wu, Chen and Chan, 2020).

In the campaign by governments and organizations to reduce the risk of transmission, individuals were advised to abide by

frequent cleaning of hands, applying an alcohol-based hand rub or washing with soap and water; covering mouth and nose with a flexed elbow or tissue when coughing or sneezing; throwing tissue away immediately; if experiencing fever, cough, difficulty breathing, or any other symptoms suggestive of respiratory illness, including pneumonia, emergency call services were expected before going to the doctor or hospital.

Consequently, on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization, WHO declared the corona virus outbreak other-wised called the Covid 19 a global pandemic. On the heels of this, many nations including Nigeria announced a lockdown with information on all individuals to stay at home as much as possible for two weeks and only be permitted to leave homes for essential items such as food, medicine, water, banks and public toilets. Additionally, inter-city travel for private and commercial purposes, except for essential goods and services, were suspended. All intra-city travel vehicles were equally ordered to reduce number of passengers to observe social distancing.

Similarly, on April 23, state governments announced subsequent ban on large gatherings, intra and interstate movements and set up task force Committees and sub committees to reach out to communities through organized groups and associations. In most African states, especially in the Western regions of Nigeria and Camerouns, one of the existing many groups for social mobilization is the Christian and Moslem communities. Consequently, the Nigerian government and other African countries targeting of the Christian and Moslem institutions for the dissemination of the coronavirus messages became appropriate group channels of communication to reach a greater percentage of the entire population.

However, in the monitoring of compliance, about 45 proprietors and Heads of faith based institutions in Nigeria and seven in Cameroons were arrested for gathering members on religious activities against directives. In addition, some of the African state governments went as far as enforcing the demolition of religious buildings which resisted compliance to messages of the pandemic control protocols. The variance between the government and the people brought moments of crisis. While government were struggling to send the information through organized media channels, the community opinion leaders were also busy distorting and misinforming the people.

By towing different paths from the government, it tended to reflect that the cord of collective social contracts of responsibilities through the media to build partnership for sensitization, enlightenment and socialization was either weak or sabotaged. Perhaps, the reluctance of most social groups to convey messages to a large population of persons was due to misinformation, the construct of minds of residents or due to outright conspiracy. The statement of the problem therefore is that either there was misinformation from the side of the government through the media or that the non compliance was the product of conspiracy or mind perception construction of residents of African countries

about coronavirus.

Objectives of the study

This work explores crisis communication campaigns management on Covid 19 particularly on issues of constructivism, conspiracy and misinformation among residents of select African countries. The specific objectives are:

1.   To find out the main media which information about coronavirus reached most residents of African countries;

2.   To find out the major theme of coronavirus messages received by residents of African countries;

3.   To find out the perception of information about coronavirus outbreak among residents of select Africa countries

Literature Review

Communicating Coronavirus: The African Countries Perspectives.

The communication of matters about coronavirus pandemic happened during a crisis moment and the pre-requisite for the achievement of results in managing it needed effective strategic communication plans. The conservative systems and models dominant in the Western World were not necessarily suited for the sub-Saharan Africa reality. This is because many sub Saharan countries are with communities that lack adequate financial resources to develop and implement immediate and effective strategic communication plans. Bruijn and Brinkman (2011) states that the most important of the methods of staying in - touch with communities revolve the use of oral messages. It has to be pointed out that in the dissemination of oral messages, group communication is central in reaching people in a - two step flow process. In this perspective, there are usually leaders expected to receive information from the sources of either the government or non - governmental institutions before taking it to others. It is one form of communication that resources can be reduced. It is also a form of communication whereby interpretations of issues can be applied for clarity to illiterate groups of persons. But apart from the advantages, group oral communication can be frustrating in the sense that distortion of facts and figures cannot be ruled out. Another, disadvantage of group communication is that of falsehood and the spreading of incomplete information. Generally, group communication is oral information that moves from mouth to mouth or from person to person in communities. The scope of this research selects Camerouns and Nigeria with a large part of the two countries having elements noticeable in rural communities. For instance, Camerouns has about 560 village communities (Amungwa and Nji, 2015) and Covid 19 messages were taken from government agencies through group discussions from government opinion leaders and media institutions to communities. There is no gain saying that in the

process, community leaders and media institutions did not undertake these responsibilities without resistance from communities.

Consequently, Kindzeka (2020) says that in Yaounde, Cameroon, a group of seven members of the Tabernacles of Freedoms Ministries took a house to house and street to street evangelism by telling people that God revealed to them that nations were wasting the time and resources in fighting coronavirus pandemic. This simply means that faith was the amour of most African countries rather than adherence to simple protocols of taking the vaccines. These were threats to government directives and the subsequent channeling of more resources to counter disobedience instead of fighting the pandemic. Notwithstanding, the action of the faith based institutions may have been a product of ignorance which the government had not tackled from the roots.

Kindzeka analyses that the evangelists before they were arrested campaigned to individuals to go on their knees and pray with claims that there was nothing as corona virus but God's punishment for wrongdoings during previous World wars. By the preaching of the Tabernacles of Freedoms Ministries that corona virus pandemic was a hoax, about 300 new converts refused to wear the nose masks and went about social activities against government directives. This anti government campaigns and messages was replicated in almost all the communities and was seen in the refusal

of several persons to adopt measures against corona virus pandemic Even with the closure of churches, members continued organizing daily prayers and meetings in front of sealed buildings while preaching the erroneous messages about corona virus pandemic.

Similarly, the case was not different in Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Lesotho and South Africa where about 84% of population are socially tied to apron strings of Christian religious beliefs and prophecies. In fact Shaban and Mumbere (2020) write that 36 African countries had rolled out strict robust measures to halt the spread and contain the pandemic by closing schools, markets, mosques churches and public gatherings.

Functions of Mass Media In Crisis

Mass media are apparatus for the conveying of information, thoughts and ideas to the public. They are essential tools to improve public health goals. Saraf and Balamurugan (2018) states that the role of mass media in the health development field is of high value and that the strength of mass media can cause a major impact on a large population. In a World facing a lot of health issues, if the issues are not presented appropriately it can cause adverse effects to mankind. It is the mass media that play the vital role to present these issues to the masses. Communicating about health through mass media is complex. This is because a greater number of mass media communicators are not well vested in health care campaign strategies. From simple ailments to endemic health matters, most journalists and communicators to tend avoid

taking up professionalism. Thus, at the outbreak of the pandemic, the case of sending out the right message brought difficulties.

The media play fundamental tasks of informing the people about happenings globally. People rely on media such as television, the radio and social media to get news and updates (Falcone, 2018). Mass media performs three key functions of educating, shaping public relations and advocating for a particular policy or point of view. As education tools, media not only pass on knowledge but also take part in the larger efforts of social engineering. As public education tools, media organizations provide credibility to information through public health opinion leaders, stakeholders and other gatekeepers. As advocacy tools, mass media assist in setting policy agenda, organizing debates about controversial issues, and gaining support for viewpoints. Generally, the mass media reach people regardless of age, gender, earnings or educational level. Sushi; Sharma;. Kumar and Kumar (2017) believe that media functions extend to dissemination of health news (or other matters) by adding value to what gets out and how it gets reported.

The mass media are capable of facilitating short term, intermediate term and long term health concepts, awareness and knowledge by altering out dated or incorrect knowledge and enhancing audience recall of advertisements or Public Service Announcements (PSAs). The objectives of mass media can change attitude, behaviours and perceptions about negative social norms and ideas. Evidence of these objectives is useful in evaluating the effectiveness of mass media.

Principally, mass media have been major sources of information in developed and developing nations like Nigeria about HIV/AIDS and other disease outbreaks like Bird flu, Swine Flu, Ebola and Monkey pox. In a 2017 study in Nigeria, 96% of 1290 men aged 22 to 26 reported hearing about these outbreaks through television advertisements, radio or magazines. For instance, a study by Ghosh (2006) shows a significant relationship between maternal health awareness and mass media exposure by women. Mass media exposure, as Ghosh opines makes women aware of the need for basic maternal and child healthcare and enables them to receive information regarding essential healthcare and recent developments in health issues. No doubt that the news media are important sources of information about health and medical therapies, but there is a level of quality of reporting the media are expected to offer the public about health care.

Essence of Media Campaign

Ordinarily, every government strives to increase legitimacy in the eyes of the people by identifying itself with institutions and communities by raising hope above fear of health hazards. Additionally, all governments recognize the principle that the public must be protected and served, since the citizens have surrendered sovereignty to the government. With the growth of technology and know-how, many governments have

provided social security and health insurance making the scope of government activities people centric (Slaughter, 2017).

In the pre independence era of most African countries, the colonial British and French governments were entirely concerned with the application of arms and might in the implementation of policies. There were conscriptions, arrests, detentions and imprisonments. Little effort and resources were channeled towards application of communication by persuasion to achieve results. The miniature persuasion through ethos, logos, pathos and kairo were applied on audiences by face to face communication without involvement of mass media technology (Barton and Tucker, 2021).

Jamar (2008) indicates that Aristotle introduced the modes of persuasion in his book *Rhetoric which emphasized* effective identification of ethos*, pathos, and* logos as personal character of the speaker; putting the audience into a certain frame of mind and the apparent proof from the words of the speech itself. This type of persuasions appear obsolete hence, the yearning of people oriented governance by the integration of mass media of communication in campaigns. Bianchi (2020) professes the use of qualitative time or the right time' to convey a particular message. The World Health Organization, WHO, (2017) recognizes that effective, integrated and coordinated communication is integral to carrying out goals of better, healthier future for people. This has no other principle than through media management campaigns and strategic communication of information, advice and guidance across a broad range of health issues. This covers chronic health issues to emerging and novel risks of corona virus through mass media campaigns. It is a connected series of operations designed to bring about a particular result. Hence, media campaigns can further be seen within the context of social projects management cycle from a specific start and end for adaptation to changes in behaviour, attitudes and perceptions of people. It calls for a new system or organisational arrangements and remodeling of objectives with a specific budget.

Types of media campaigns

Government agencies and institutions, advocacy groups, use various techniques to communicate with target audiences. Media campaign techniques fall into the broad areas of communication and focus in interpretable, persuasive, and actionable approaches. The interpretable approach is all about the use of appropriate channels of sending out the messages. Thibault(2016) says that communication between government officials and residents is vital for any democratic state, or nation to function successfully, and that there are a number of channels available for governments to use. While more traditional methods include face-to-face interactions, telephone calls, ordistributing informational flyers, the modern methods range from television sets, radio sets and the print media.

In the persuasive approaches, it is the tailoring of the message in a communication design for individuals based on information from the public demographic and psychological factors. The targeting of the message to the audience segments is important. Communication has to be designed for subgroups based on group membership or characteristics of age, gender, race, cultural, language, and psychographic characteristics or attitudes.

In the actionable approach, it carries the use of narratives of communication in the form of a story, testimonial, or entertainment and education. The framing of the message can convey the same messages in alternate ways of what is gained or lost by taking an action or making a choice.

Elena, Nicusor and Roxana (2013) posits the use of two vital methods of creating an information center and creating strategic partnerships. The thinking is that by creating and organizing an information centre, institutions can keep communication professionals to manage the flow of information to the citizens. Most European states maintain such offices for emergency information. It usually acts as the first point of information services for all-purpose information needs. Here, citizens can consult, access the official publications daily or weekly with a calendar of upcoming meetings and events. Also, the citizens can access new policy initiatives and legislative actions or receive answers to questions. Saleh, etal (2022) confirmed that there is need for setting up of psychological service centers across hospitals in Nigeria which would go a long way in not just evaluating the mental health status of hospital workers in relation to corona virus pandemic but it will be beneficial to the general public in assessing psychology services easily. The advantage is that presentations are relatively reliable. The method of creating strategic partnerships and visibility starts with the intent to meet the challenges of rapid evolution of communication techniques and technologies for public interests. This is about the importance of working in groups. It is an essential modality to promote activities; find new ways to be recognized by the citizens; and to have fulfill visibility and communication objectives using complimentary skills, capacities and experiences of partners from universities, local stakeholders; research institutions or NGO's.

Brownson, Ross; Eyler, ; Harris, Moore, and Tabak (2018) supported the strategies of One-on- one meetings, workshops and seminars. One-on-one meetings may be an effective means to communicate ideas on a particular issue. Often individual meetings consider the input made during interactions. However, time constraints may render this option impractical or infeasible while workshops and seminars on multiple formats can be short webinars to week-long in-person trainings. The objectives of carrying out a media campaign also range from public awareness, public information, public education and seeking to reinforce, change or modify the behaviour and attitude of the targeted public. The steps of mass media campaigns call for formal recognition of groups, a feasibility study and research defining the problem, broad description of the campaign, the objectives, tasks to be executed, output, deadlines, target

delivery date, the budget, risks and constraints, start and completion date (McLachlan, 2022). After the campaign is completed, it has to be evaluated. Evaluation focuses on performance of the campaign and the extent to which the campaign has met its objectives. The team needs to ask itself difficult questions about delivery, constraints, experiences, lessons and future goals. It is important that all of the above answers are captured in an exit report. The real measure of a campaign's success should be its impact on lives,

not just how well the individuals or teams performed tasks or how much media coverage the campaign received.

Media campaigns Management and Corona virus Pandemic

During the corona virus pandemic across most African counties, government communication health care campaigns practitioners were confronted with changing attitudes and behaviours of diverse audiences. It was not just a daunting task to interrogate into the psychographic, demographic and geographic profiles of targeted audiences but also the behavioural profiles. The government-media communication practitioners were saddled with responsibilities of ensuring that the campaign brand was distinctive, acceptable and visible at the various contact points and in line with the audience values.

Additionally, the various government agencies of information and opinion leaders were expected to take into consideration the socio - cultural fundamentals, the identification of the preferred communication vehicles, and the audience immediate priorities and needs. This is because the outbreak of corona virus pandemic was a social problem moment. Hence, Romualdo, Arroyo, and Cristobal-Cipriano, (2022) emphasized on institutions to continue prioritizing the programmess and advocacies, and management of social problems by maintaining high standards of integration in the learning process through campaigns, incentives, partnerships, organizational resources, and equity. The reality is that almost none of these expectations are usually seen done in crisis periods even when there are ample times to conduct media campaign strategies. This has major impacts on the messages that can be developed.Theoretical FrameworkConstructivismTheory

Constructivism is focused on the identification of individual differences among people's ability to communicate effectively in social situations

(Griffin, 2012). Jesse Delia, a researcher in communication is credited for the development of constructivism theory in 1970. The theory implies that there is a difference between people who are interpersonally successful as opposed to those who are not interpersonally successful. Delia's theory of constructivism is to better understand the differences among individuals who communicate more effectively in social situations.

It states that through interpersonal contact, each person has a unique perception of the world through encounters. People construct knowledge from interactions with the physical world. Through the development of interpersonal constructs, individuals establish impressions of other people in social situations.

Information Manipulation Theory (IMT)

This is a theory that argues that when deceiving others, citizens play with and stage-manage pertinent information in many ways out of the background (McCornack 2009). In IMT, the particular ways in which people manipulate information suggest influential impact. McCornack presented an elaboration of IMT, as a propositional theory of deceptive discourse production rooted in artificial intelligence in speech production. Jung (2009) says that Information Manipulation Theory suggests that deceptive messages covertly violate the principles that govern conversational exchanges in the quantity, quality, manner, and relevance of information presented. He agrees that media information manipulation occur when a sender or senders stage-manage

information through the media to influence receivers. This means that a sender has a conditional preference of overlooking credibility in reporting accurate information and the receivers face the dilemma to make decisions according to the sender's primary preference. This extends to cases in which the sender has imperfect information without credibility, inadequate facts but embarks on reporting to favour cloudy interests.

Methodology

The research employed the ex post facto study or after-the-fact research, a category of research design in which the investigation starts after the fact has occurred without interference from the researcher. Silva (2010) states that the ex post facto research designs is often applied as a substitute for true experimental research to test hypotheses about cause-and-effect relationships in situations. Despite studying facts that have already occurred, ex post facto research shares with the research design of surveys. Survey method using questionnaire is one of the popular research methods that Barran (2004) notes that allow mass communication researchers to measure characteristics, opinion or behaviour of a population by studying a small sample from that group.

In order to be thorough, the research took the World Population Review (2020) population size of Port Harcourt in Nigeria and Duala in Camerouns which stood at 2,343,300 and 3,926,645 respectively. The combination of the two cities in both countries population which represented the entire West African countries was 6,269,945 persons

Taherdoost (2017) states that In order to generalize from a random sample and avoid sampling errors or biases, a random sample size need to be of adequate size. Consequently, the research adopted 600 persons as the sample size and proportionately spread at 224 and 376 in the two countries respectively.

In order to test for reliability of the instrument, this research adopted Akpan (2020) position of 10th percent as basis of

social and economic transactions. Thus, 60 copies of the 600 questionnaire was pretested on the members of the Power City International, Nwaniba road, a leading Pentecostal church having uniqueness to the population of the study. This gave room for modification of the research instrument. The research instrument was a self-administered questionnaire. The study mainly used primary data whereby both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. Quantitative data was collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of closed-ended questions in which respondents were encouraged to provide accurate information on 10 different. A total of 600 questionnaires was distributed proportionately to residents of Port Harcourt at 224 and 376 to residents of Duala. In Port Hatcourt, three major roads of Old Refinery, the Aba road and the Ikwerre roads were picked. Each road was assigned 75 copies of the questionnaire for distribution to one resident per an odd number house only. In Duala, through an assistant researcher, Nguema Bala, 376 questionnaire was distributed in three streets of Besseke, Nkomba and Mambanda using odd number houses.

Findings and Discussions

The data collected from the questionnaire per each of the questions was computed in terms of the higher and lower numbers to ascertain the totals. The totals computed in simple percentages.

It was also computed based on each of the objectives earlier selected for the study by the use of separate tables. The objectives are subsequently converted into questions to reflect the different answers.

Table 1: What was the main media which information about covid 19 reached most residents of African countries?

Media	Nigeria	Cameroun	Total	Percentage
Television	5	176	181	30
Meetings	62	73	135	23
Radio	101	85	186	31
Sub Total	168	334	502	84
New media	56	42	98	16
Total	224	376	600	100

Field Survey 2022

In the above Table 1, the data shows that the combination of television, group discussions, radio attracted 502 responses against New media responses at 98 or 16%. The implication is that African countries prefer listening to radio and television against New media. In the case of no response for newspapers, it can be reasoned that in the lockdown, vendors were restricted while residents were not allowed to go out.

Table 2: What was the most acceptable theme of covid 19 messages received by residents of African countries;

Theme	Nigeria	Camerouns	Total	%
Social Distance	15	3	18	3
Masking	---	---	----	----
Vaccination	---	7	7	1
Sub total	15	10	25	4
Hand washing	209	366	575	96
Total	224	376	600	100

Field Survey 2022

Table 2 has it to show that in the list of themes of messages about the control of Covid 19, African residents accepted Hand washing at 575 or 96% above social distancing and masking at 25 or 4 %, vaccination was out-rightly rejected. The reason is that drugs for medical cure were not discovered.

Table 3 : What was the perception of information about Covid 19 outbreak among residents of select Africa countries

Perception	Nigeria	Cameroun	Total	%

Propaganda	62	107	169	28
Rumour	10	114	124	20
Anti-Christ	94	101	195	33
Sub Total	166	322	488	81
Reality	58	54	112	19
Total	224	376	600	100

Field Survey: 2022

Table 3 shows that the perception of residents of African countries about Covid 19 was far from seeing the outbreak as a reality. The perception was that of propaganda, rumour and anti religious at 488 or 81% respondents against reality at 112 or 19 %. The responsible factor cannot be far- fetched from illiteracy and lack of confidence in the pattern of government message delivery particularly in crisis moments.

The Main Media Channels

From the focus of establishing the main media channels of information about the corona virus from the government in African countries, typically, Nigeria recoded 168 and Duala 334 responses to be 502 persons or 84% to show that the traditional media of radio and television was the major platform of information dissemination during the crisis. This was against 98 or 16% of the respondents on social media platforms. This is a reflection that the government of African countries still rely on means of communication that have challenges of real time reach - out to citizens even at moments of crisis as the corona virus pandemic outbreak. This agrees with the position of Fukui, Arderne and Kelly(2019) that despite some progress in the international connectivity of latest communication broad bandwidths, much of Africa is still unconnected and large populations cannot fully realize the benefits of connectivity. The absence of timely information from foundational information sources and even telephoning caused a lot of people to resort to using the social media of information with attendant negatives of fake, false, distorted and anonymous releases to cause fear among citizens.

Outstanding Theme of Coronavirus Messages

On the themes of messages to the citizens on the corona virus outbreak, 575 or 96 % of respondents which came from 209 in Port Harcourt (Nigeria) and 366 in Duala (Camerouns) answered that hand washing was communicated and largely accepted among residents of African countries above social distancing, face masking and vaccination. The remaining 25 or 4 % took to other themes. The reason is not far from the fact that African beliefs cherish cleanliness and reject uncommonness, public masking, balms and medications. This tallies with Robinson (2020) position that expressions of faith in some (African) religious services emphasize close contact, such as hand-holding and sharing communion by touching or kissing at gatherings. The themes of messages were equally confrontational rather than persuasive as the

African governments took much interest in the enforcement of lockdowns rather than in creating messages of campaigns for awareness and acceptance of coronavirus pandemic compliance protocols. Consequently, Dong, Zhou, Che and Bodomo (2020) state that the themes that emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic was a subject of nation-wide public debate over the language and styles used to urge people to stay indoors. The manner goes beyond a unidirectional path of on-site instant communication. This process is facilitated by mass media, created de-contextualization of messages and triggered need for an adaptive adjustment of the language and styles.

Perception About Coronavirus Pandemic

Considering the perception of African, it came out with data that 488 or 81% respondents which came from 166 in Port-Harcourt (Nigeria) and 322 in Duala (Camerouns) had the view that the messages from the African government healthcare outfits about the corona virus outbreak were merely taken as usual propaganda to scuttle the rise of religious institutions and particularly faith in Christianity. They felt that it was necessary to show resistance and to accept imprisonment, humiliation and harassment as did by the early Apostles. Consequently, it too African countries hard time combating some of the corona virus myths taking hold in countries as some believe coronavirus pandemic to be a divine punishment imposed on China and spreading to Africa. Barua; Barua; Aktar, Kabir, and Li, (2020) find out that in all-inclusive, the propagation of misinformation on (social) media undermines the coronavirus pandemic individual responses as credibility or misinformation can strongly predict the individual responses towards positive reaction in as much as religious beliefs as well as conspiracy general come next to influence negatively.

Recommendations

There has to be a broad based way of taking messages to Third World countries by the wide acceptance of social media rather than the existing archaic short range radio and television station service to misinform and confuse citizens.
This calls for effective regulation of social media services to reduce conspiracy against government social intentions borne out of ignorance, past frames and mind constructions.
The messages of social services in crisis moments have to be delivered with clarity, conciseness and correctness, courtesy in tones, themes, contents and contexts.

Messages of social wellbeing of the people have to be crafted by the integration of relevant segments of communities to enhance re-orientation of mind - sets from misconstruction and age- long perceptions. The limitations of this research was the restriction to West African countries, hence the suggestion to replicate it in the other regions of the African continent for generalization.

Conclusions

The study analyzed crisis communication campaigns about corona virus pandemic messages, the constructivism and misinformation among residents of West African states. With three objectives of finding out the main channels, the specific theme of the messages and the perception of the residents were explored. The methodology covered the use of survey methods through self- administered questionnaire on 600 residents. From findings, it was holistically, ascertained that corona virus happened suddenly and brought crisis which demanded for appropriate dissemination of messages to residents of states by health and government agencies. From quantitative data compilation, finding had it that multiple channels of information were applied ranging from radio, newspapers, magazines and the social media platforms. Incidentally, information to the people from the agencies were subjected to receivers' mind constructivism and there was misinformation.

In this circumstance and in the future, there is the need to ensure that the barriers for effective information delivery are overcome. Certainly, in the corona virus outbreak or similar moments of crisis deserved a refined approach of managing communication between the governments and the citizens. Crisis are periods that called for strong media campaigns management using appropriate channels, styles, steps and strategies. The citizens have to be considered as relevant stakeholders in the functioning of social services rather than the application of militarized styles of driving people into homes. Compliance to corona virus pandemic can be persuasive and result oriented. Since the global community has come to exist, it is likely that similar global pandemics may not be evitable. It is timely that the governments consider some recommendations of communication experts in taking information across to the citizens using familiar, credible media channels, precise themes to control poor perceptions of messages during crisis.

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