

Assessment of the Role of Mass Media During COVID-19 and Lockdown in Nigeria.

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Abstract

More than before, Nigerians are confronted with lots of plethora of COVID-19 pandemic. Mass media role has its applied on the people during the lockdown intervention, been used by the governments to restrict the spreads of COVID-19 pandemic among the people. The role of mass media and the impact of lockdown on Nigeria health system over the sudden death are significantly proven and it is vital to everybody to take serious measures to prevent future occurrences of COVID-19 pandemic and other similar diseases that may surface on the geographical land of Nigeria. This study adopted the qualitative research by explicitly exploring the roles of mass media during the lockdown of COVID-19 pandemic and its collective factors. The venal attitudes of exploiting others through ignorance and the danger of rejecting pharmaceutical drugs and over rating the herbal drugs must not be harnessed. This study therefore discovered entrepreneurial opportunities and research development that will be benefitted to Nigeria for further studies.

Keywords: Mass media roles, Lockdown, and COVID-19

Introduction

In the last few years, the roles of mass media have become an eye-opener to Nigerians as one of the sources of getting information on protection, prevention, technological advancement, entrepreneurial opportunities, health management, and lives saved, as it occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. These roles of mass media during the lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic are two sides of a coin, one is good and the other is bad. Anwar et al. (2020) described mass media as a collective name for all media with the techniques of using all kinds of old and modern technology to acquire some resourceful information that brings opportunities and important effects to large numbers of people at once. The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2020) described mass media as a lifesaver that gives prior information against unexpected situations.

The mass media is a general name that is used to group all the media from a single medium to mass media. The print media are saddled with the responsibility of printing newspapers, magazines, journals, pamphlets, and books. The electronic/digital media include mobile phones,

mobile network providers, satellite, DSTV, GOTV, faxing, text messages, television, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google Meets, WhatsApp, radio, and the internet. Traditional media include local town criers, house-to-house information, town hall meetings, local chiefs' influence, market women and men. These mass media carriers are greatly utilised and rely on the use of internet providers in one way or another. Some of these single media are there to copy already known information, while some of these print media also have their personal websites where new information and ideas are put for interested users to read their write-ups on the COVID-19 pandemic in their organisation without any interference from other media.

Some of these mass media were found with the role of spreading fake news (Aondover et al., 2022), manipulating figures, and spreading unverified rumours to the people during the lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic. Lots of fake drugs, unhygienic sanitary materials (Marius Schneider & Nora Ho Tu Nam, 2020; NCDC, 2021), and substandard protective materials were supplied into the markets, which

people were buying ignorantly (Aondover & Philips, 2020) for their protection. Some unpatriotic Nigerians used the COVID-19 pandemic media news to spread fake news (Okorie, 2022) they had from mass media stations, and these effects led to the sudden death of some people by taking wrong drugs that were not scientifically approved by NAFDAC and WHO. Some Nigerians died before they saw death, most especially in some hospitals, where there was an absence of doctors (WHO, 2020) and nurses to attend to the affected people and the sick patients. Some mass media (televisions and radio stations) reported that most of these health workers had absconded from their duties, some resigned from their duties, and some did not even bother to work in hospitals again, citing their reasons as stemming from their horrific experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There were reports from electronic media that there were no bed spaces for people to be accommodated in some hospitals. Some buildings that are used for IDP (internally displaced people) from the effects of Boko Haram were converted into COVID-19 hospitals. Some COVID-19 patients were placed on the floors to sleep, there was insufficient water to drink in some places, there are shortage of food items from the government to feed the COVID-19 patients, and COVID-19 drugs were also sub-changed to Vitamin-C (Juneja et al., 2022), Paracetamol, Chloroquine (Goodman & Giles, 2020), and Chloramphenicol to replaced COVID-19 drugs in some places. Herbal drugs were given in some places; oxygen that COVID-19 patients needed was not available, and it was expensive for average Nigerians to buy the drugs in some states. The Nigerian government also announced that they could not provide for everybody's needs in terms of drugs and bed space due to the number of infected people, and mass media was used to report the news to Nigerians about government decisions.

Mass media also reported that the Nigerian government relied on foreign drugs from WHO recommendations, which at the end, some of these drugs were not efficient to cure the deadly disease of COVID-19 pandemic because the manufacturers themselves did not take more time to test the reliability and validity of the

drugs on animals before they were recommended for human consumption. This was due to the immediate need for drug intervention to cure the global epidemic of the COVID-19 pandemic. In some states in Nigeria, the mass media were wrongly used to mislead people about information about their health, claiming that anybody with malaria and body coldness had already contracted COVID-19 (Egbuniwe, 2020). So, the sick people were put together in COVID-19 patients' rooms. Some of the causes of COVID-19 pandemic are infodemic and being misled, and the death rolls of COVID-19 numbers were pronounced through BBC News (Coleman, 2020) to create records (Adebowale, 2020) and feedback to Nigerians, but it turned to create fear of abnormalcy to some people that are really sick or having one or two body health problems, which they could not go to hospitals to treat themselves for fear of being infected with COVID-19 pandemic, and while their own sickness later killed people in silence since they had no doctors to attend to them at home.

Mass media information was not properly checked and verified by the Nigeria Broadcasting Commission (NBC) before the media under their governance transmitted it to the public, and these consequences turned to be the instrument that was used by some Nigerians that developed some ways of livelihood and income earning over other people through the spread of unverified information (Ephraim, 2020; Obokoh, 2020), and government weaknesses also gave an edge to the perpetrators. Other scenes that caused more problems during the lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic to Nigerians are the negligence to believe that human beings are one of the carrier agents of the COVID-19 pandemic (Okonoboh, 2023). Nigerians showed their preferences for the use of herbal drugs over pharmaceutical drugs, prevention methods, symptoms, and signs of infection in the body, religiosity attachment, and ethnicity perspectives. All these factors made the COVID-19 pandemic stronger and more widespread in rural and urban areas of Nigeria (Nwokoro and Eharisi-Ayomah, 2022).

In most places, the experience of the lockdown

was extremely dreadful in nature (Agusi et al., 2020). Nigerians had never in history experienced nor prepared for something like this, where everybody was asked to lockdown forcefully (Ehijiele, 2020), with no movement, staying at home, and not going to work. The only thing required of everybody was to take from their savings at home to buy food and eat. If such a person or family was working with private organisations, especially secondary school teachers, traders, artisans, and labourers, and there was no money to buy food, then it was another story to tell because hunger also made some people to suffer starvation, and it also led to broken homes. Some even committed suicide. On the other hand, the role of mass media in Nigeria is good. Nigerians have experienced the role of mass media as an alternative measure that teaches individuals from unknown to known about the consciousness of their health status, emotional well-being, present status of science and technology in Nigeria, entrepreneurial opportunities, and the development of research in Nigeria. Mass media teach Nigerians about lots of education (Zartasha et al., 2020) on the COVID-19 pandemic through oral teaching. Mass media were used to disseminate health education and awareness on the practice of body hygiene as a basic rudiment against any infectious diseases that may threaten their psychological well-being. Mass media also played the role of behavioural change by promoting the practice of safe health measures such as washing hands regularly, using face masks, using soaps, hand sanitisers, and social/physical distancing towards another person. The media played the role of sensitising Nigerians on the devastation and implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, and some media outlets gave updates throughout the period with large coverage. In some places where there are no internet facilities, no mobile network and no technology gadgets usage. Some mass media went to the rural areas with megaphones, loud speakers and sharing of pamphlets to orientates the people against the spreads of COVID-19 pandemic.

However, despite the potential benefits of mass media in public health crises, there is a gap in understanding how mass media can be

effectively utilised to promote public health while minimising the spread of misinformation, particularly in the Nigerian context. This gap highlights the need for further research to explore the role of mass media in public health crises and identify strategies for improving mass media's contribution to public health.

Concept of COVID-19 Pandemic

According to World Health Organisation (WHO, 2021) COVID-19 is described as a highly infectious disease caused by the novel coronavirus. It is seen as the most highly spread and faster contagious viral infection that causes respiratory illness. The virus called 'SARS-CoV-2', meaning (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2) causes coronavirus disease which was later named as COVID-19. The COVID-19 is a global infectious disease that emerged from Wuhan in the Hubei province of China in December 2019. The epidemic has proved far more deadly than other coronavirus family members, with a death ratio of 1.4% (varying slightly among countries). The contributory agent was not earlier identified and reported in the first instances. Afterward, the novel coronavirus was later identified on January 7, 2020, and its genomic sequence was shared with the world by WHO.

Causes of COVID-19 pandemic

The causes of COVID-19 pandemic is from the 'SARS-CoV-2' of Feb 11, 2020. The epidemic has a genetic resemblance to the coronavirus that caused the SARS outbreak of 2003. The other members of the family include SARS coronavirus SAR-CoV and MERS coronavirus MERS-CoV.

Spreads/carrier of COVID-19 pandemic

The virus is primarily spread through human respiratory, from the mouth droplets (saliva), coughing, and sneezing. The disease is basically transmitted from infected person to another person through the following.

The means of spreads/carrier of COVID-19 pandemic are:

- I. through hand shaking from the infected person
- II. through the human being saliva droplets, from the mouths of the infected person to the skin of another person

- III. through the body closeness from the COVID-19 infected person to another person
- IV. through the means of inhaling the sneezing of COVID-19 patient
- V. through poor body hygiene and uncleanliness from the infected person's house

Signs of COVID-19 infections in human beings' body

The infected person would show the sign of fever, dry cough, fatigue, sneezing, loss of taste or smell and difficult breathing that ranges from acute to mild shortness of breath to severe desaturation, causing respiratory failure.

How COVID-19 pandemic kills its victims

COVID-19 pandemic kills its victims by blocking the arteries of the lungs and respiratory system of the veins that connected from the nose to the lungs, and to the heart that uses the oxygen to pump blood and water into all parts of the veins in the body. The COVID-19 victims described their experience as deadly and horrified to explain. Once the arteries that bring oxygen are severely blocked, then the victims of the COVID-19 will die immediately. Most of the older adults are vulnerable, because their body system is already weak or when having one or more health problems before being infected with COVID-19, and it gives chances to COVID-19 pandemic and easily damage the older adults' respiratory organs than the other age group.

Statement of the Problem

The detrimental roles of mass media during the COVID-19 pandemic, characterised by the dissemination of misinformation, unverified reports, and unprofessional broadcasting practices, significantly exacerbated the crisis in Nigeria. This led to widespread fear, confusion, and anxiety, ultimately destabilising families and contributing to increased mortality. The situation was further complicated by mass media's failure to provide clear and accurate information, including the confusion of COVID-19 symptoms with those of malaria, leading to misdiagnosis and inappropriate treatment.

The pandemic's effects were further

compounded by mass media's failure to adhere to broadcasting ethics and standards, resulting in the spread of false information that put human lives at risk. The consequences of this toxic mix of pandemic and mass media mismanagement were far-reaching, with families experiencing emotional distress, separation, and divorce due to financial strain and fear of the pandemic. The unwholesome role of mass media in Nigeria during the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the need for effective regulation, monitoring, and management of mass media to prevent similar crises in the future.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, utilising an exploratory design to investigate the role of mass media during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The study draws on multiple data sources, including personal observations, Journals, Newspapers, Documentaries from media Television Stations, and relevant Literature Books. These sources provide a rich and nuanced understanding of the pandemic's impact and the roles of mass media. The exploratory design allows for an in-depth examination of the lockdown's outcomes and the mass media's roles, shedding light on the complex dynamics as it happened in Nigeria. The qualitative nature of this study, enables the investigation of religiosity attachment, entrepreneurial opportunities, assessment and research development that inform our understanding of the pandemic's impact. This study aims to explore and describe the phenomenon, generating insights and research questions for future study.

Research Questions

1. What role did mass media play in disseminating information about COVID-19 in Nigeria?
2. How did mass media coverage of COVID-19 impact public perceptions and behaviours in Nigeria?
3. What were the challenges and limitations of mass media in reporting on COVID-19 in Nigeria?
4. How did the spread of misinformation and fake news about COVID-19 through mass media affect public health outcomes in Nigeria?

5. What strategies can be employed to improve the role of mass media in public health crises like COVID-19 in Nigeria?

Discussion of the Findings

Answer to Research Question 1

What role did mass media play in disseminating information about COVID-19 in Nigeria?

Mass media played a dual role in disseminating information about COVID-19 in Nigeria, with both positive and negative consequences. The mass media coverage included news reports on COVID-19 cases, deaths, and recoveries in Nigeria, interviews with health experts and government officials, public health messages and awareness campaigns, and coverage of government policies and interventions aimed at curbing the spread of the virus. On the one hand, this coverage helped to inform the public about COVID-19, raise awareness about the pandemic, and promote public health measures. Mass media served as a key conduit for information dissemination and public education, reaching a wide audience and playing a vital role in Nigeria's response to the pandemic.

On the other hand, the coverage was not without its challenges. Mass media also contributed to the spread of misinformation and fake news about COVID-19, and some reports were sensationalised, potentially causing panic and anxiety for Nigerians.

Answer to Research Question 2

How did mass media coverage of COVID-19 impact public perceptions and behaviours in Nigeria?

Mass media coverage of COVID-19 had a significant impact on public perceptions and behaviours in Nigeria, with both positive and negative consequences.

Mass media coverage and its impact on public perceptions by:

1. raising awareness about the pandemic and its risks
2. shaping attitudes towards COVID-19 prevention measures, such as vaccination and social distancing
3. informing the public about government policies and interventions aimed at curbing the spread of the virus

In terms of mass media coverage, it

1. encouraged some individuals to adopt preventive measures, such as wearing masks and washing hands regularly.
2. influenced people to seek out COVID-19 testing periodically and seeking treatment immediately.

However, the impact of mass media coverage on public perceptions and behaviours in Nigeria was complex and multifaceted, reflecting both the benefits and challenges of reporting on a public health crisis.

Answer to Research Question 3

What were the challenges and limitations of mass media in reporting on COVID-19 in Nigeria?

Mass media faced several challenges and limitations in reporting on COVID-19 in Nigeria.

Some of the main challenges are:

1. limited access to accurate and timely information, particularly in the early stages of the pandemic
2. difficulty in verifying information and sources, leading to the spread of misinformation
3. sensationalism and alarmist reporting, which contributed to public panic and anxiety
4. limited coverage of nuanced issues, such as the economic and social impacts of the pandemic

Additionally, mass media in Nigeria also faced challenges related to:

1. infrastructure and resource constraints, such as limited internet access and equipment
2. safety concerns for journalists, particularly those reporting from the field
3. government restrictions and censorship, which impacted reporting on certain aspects of the pandemic

These challenges and limitations highlight the complexities of reporting on a rapidly evolving public health crisis in a resource-constrained environment.

Answer to Research Question 4

How did the spread of misinformation and fake news about COVID-19 through mass media

affect public health outcomes in Nigeria?

The spread of misinformation and fake news about COVID-19 through mass media had significant consequences for public health outcomes in Nigeria.

Misinformation and fake news:

1. contributed to confusion and mistrust among the public, leading to hesitancy in adopting preventive measures
2. caused fear, anxiety, and panic, resulting in negative emotional and psychological impacts
3. influenced individuals to seek out unverified treatments or cures, potentially harming their health
4. undermined the effectiveness of public health campaigns and government efforts to control the spread of the virus

The spread of misinformation and fake news through mass media also:

1. overburdened healthcare systems, as individuals sought medical attention for misinformation-driven concerns
2. diverted attention and resources away from evidence-based public health measures

These spreads of misinformation and fake news about COVID-19 through mass media posed significant challenges to public health outcomes in Nigeria.

Answer to Research Question 5

What strategies can be employed to improve the role of mass media in public health crises like COVID-19 in Nigeria?

In order to improve the role of mass media in public health like COVID-19 in Nigeria, several strategies can be employed for:

1. collaboration between mass media, public health officials, and government agencies to ensure accurate and timely information dissemination.
2. training the journalists on public health issues and reporting, including fact-checking and verification protocols
3. the use of clear and simple language to communicate with the complex public health information and environment.
4. incorporating diverse perspectives and voices in reporting, including those of health experts, community leaders, and ordinary citizens

5. leveraging social media and other digital platforms to reach wider audiences and counter misinformation
6. implementing robust fact-checking and correction mechanisms to address misinformation and fake news
7. promoting media literacy and critical thinking among the public to help them navigate complex information landscapes

By employing these strategies, mass media can play a more effective role in supporting public health efforts and promoting accurate information during crises.

Religiosity Attachment of Nigerians to COVID-19 pandemic

The relationship between religiosity and the Covid-19 pandemic is complex and it is multifaceted.

1. Some set of people among the Christians religion believed that prayers is the only ways to cure COVID-19 pandemic, that it is an attack from the enemy, so they rather tell their members to pray and not to use any drugs, even if they have headache they should pray only and no drugs intakes.
2. Some Christians believed that anyone who takes the Vaccines of the COVID-19 pandemic has gotten the Anti-Christ mark, so these reduces the numbers of the people who had taken the Vaccines.
3. Some people in the Northern parts of the country-Nigeria, also believed that the Vaccines of COVID-19 will reduces their sexual infertility and it will also make their women to remain infertile for pregnancy.
4. Some of the people in Islam religions did not adopt the physical/social distancing intervention, they rather stay closed, sitting and standing side by sides with their shoulders touching each other and prayed, they even do hand shaking for greetings.
5. Some religious communities and leaders restricted their members from any forms of gathering during the pandemic and advised them to obey the government orders and stay at home.
6. Some religious places switch their

programmes to online messages, in order to curtail the spread of COVID-19 pandemic.

7. Some religious leaders tell their members that it is a test of faith, describing the pandemic as a sign of angry from God, that people should forbid their sins.

It's important to note that the relationship between religiosity and the COVID-19 pandemic is not uniform across all religious groups or individuals. People's responses to the pandemic are influenced by a wide range of factors, including their religious beliefs, cultural background, and personal circumstances.

Entrepreneurial Opportunities

One of the greatest opportunities of many institutions are the adoption of using Digital media to transmits daily business transactions of their workers from their various homes. There are lots of training from the expertise on (AI, ICT) artificial intelligence, information communication and technology that were employed to teach their staffs on various tools (TEAMS, GOOGLE MEETS, ZOOMS, SNAP CHATS) for organisations to use ICT as alternatives to carry out their normal business of the day. Some unprepared higher institutions and companies were closed down, while those that have the skills and facilities were able to manage themselves during the lockdown of COVID-19 pandemic. The experienced of the COVID-19 pandemic is a clarion call to all meaningful Nigerians to be challenged, which some Nigerians have been able to developed some Apps, and software files in the play stores, where people can download the artificial intelligence on their mobile phones, for smooth running of the meeting and businesses that may be of help to them in solving some problems and workloads even if the workers are unavailable at the moment, the work will still be going on.

Another entrepreneurial opportunity that was discovered during the COVID-19 pandemic was the use of home delivery services, which some new companies that are just establishing after the expiration of COVID-19 pandemic have adopted the skills of using online transactions for their businesses. Lots of people have benefitted

from these opportunities which make them to builds some business blog that are fetching them money, there are available online schools where students can easily watch and review online videos of what their teachers teaches in their classrooms at their own pleasure.

Assessment of the Lockdown

If governments did not use lockdown as an intervention, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of people that would have been killed might be multiplied and disheartening. The effect would have metaphors into the economy by downsides. The problem of epidemiology wouldn't have been known if the roles of the mass media in Nigeria is not proactive and team played. The consequences of COVID-19 pandemic would have killed larger percentage of Nigerian population or more than the required numbers because we are counted among the underdeveloped countries where science, education and technology are not appreciated nor explore for usefulness. The assessment of the lockdown as the reports shows from the figure 1 and 2 means that, during the period of lockdown, there are many different types of interventions from the government that helped most of the Nigerians to escaped or recovered from been infected of COVID-19 pandemic.

The lockdown interventions from the governments are:

- I. Frequent mass media orientations
- II. Social distancing
- III. Physical distancing
- IV. Mask-wearing
- V. Lockdowns restriction measures
- VI. Hand-washing
- VII. Hand-sanitisers applications
- VIII. Environmental sanitations
- IX. Free testing of COVID-19 in the public places
- X. No movement measures
- XI. Quarantine

However, the assumption is that, if similar epidemiology of COVID-19 pandemic reappears in the geographical land of Nigeria in the future, it will be advisable to Nigeria governments to go back to the use of lockdown interventions to attack COVID-19 pandemic, with the addition of pharmaceutical drugs from WHO recommendation.

Figure 1: Framework of COVID-19 infected, Recovery and died during/after the lockdown in Nigeria.

Victims of COVID-19 pandemic	2019 - 2022 years
Numbers of the people infected with COVID -19 pandemic in Nigeria	255,415
Numbers of the people that are still active with COVID -19 virus in their body in Nigeria	2,672
Numbers of the people that are healed/recovered with lockdown interventions and pharmaceutical drugs in the hospitals during the period/after of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.	249,601
Numbers of people that died from COVID -19 pandemic in the hospitals, Nigeria.	3,142

Source: Nigeria Centre for Disease Control

Interpretations: From the figure 1: the framework shows that, the lockdown interventions and the pharmaceutical drugs used by the Nigerian government is good and highly recommendable to kick against COVID-19 and other epidemiology diseases that may surface in the future. The number of deaths in Nigeria is very small and it is manageable, if we are to compare it with other countries in the eastern parts of Europe and America.

Research Development

The research development will enable all a sundry to be pro-active on service delivery and prepare for future challenges. More of research development will help Nigeria government to be independent on their own, looking upward and depending on WHO should be reduced to little percentage or eradicated.

Conclusion

As a matter of fact, Nigeria universities, research institutes and other higher institutions, are producing reliable, valid and excellent research works on epidemiology and other related health

diseases of COVID-19 pandemic. The problem is that, there is no means of communicating it to the government, the research work remains in the confide of the institute, except if the researcher published it in the Journals, Newspaper, Magazines and online, then the public and government will be able to see it or else, the research work will remain dormant and unused in the institution.

Recommendations

1. Governments should prioritise vaccination campaigns, ensuring equitable access to vaccines for all segments of the population.
2. Governments should maximise their effort to creates more hospitals in the rural and urban area of Nigeria, for more on health sensitisations and management against all types of diseases.
3. Government should invest in strengthening public health infrastructure, including testing, contact tracing, and healthcare capacity, to effectively manage and respond to future outbreaks.

4. Mass media should maintain open and transparent communication with the public, by providing clear and consistent guidance on safety measures, information on public vaccination and public health updates.
5. Provisions and support for vulnerable people including the elderly people and those that have no money to buy drugs for their health challenges should be well catered for.

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