



INDIGENOUS MEDIA AND CORONA VIRUS INFORMATION DISSEMINATION IN THE NIGER DELTA OF NIGERIA

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Abstract: The study examines the impact and the role of indigenous media on Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID 19) in Niger delta region of Nigeria. It identifies types of traditional communication channels for the rural communities in Niger delta. It describes the effectiveness of the channels of communication and stated how messages are presented and packaged. The study also attempts to provide brief history of Niger delta region and its present socio-economic state and that of corona virus and media. The study points out the viability and importance of traditional media as an effective means of sensitization and dissemination of information. The study therefore recommended among others, that the government through the Ministry of Information and Culture should encourage the people on the importance of traditional folk media through organizing workshops, seminars and other man power training for the stakeholders in the industry.

Key words: Indigenous Media, Corona virus, Niger Delta

Introduction

Traditional folk media has been very significant among rural settlers since life immemorial. Every human society has developed its traditional modes and channels of communication which characterize its existence, organization and way of life. According to Orewere (1991), Communication modes and channels form the basis upon which the communities, especially the rural community, progress. Transmission of information from a sender to receiver that is communication is the basis for the existence of every society. This is what made African traditional folk media a unique one. There are rural dwellers that are cut off from the western or modern media that need to be communicated with the new trend especially the issue with this corona virus disease. Print,

electronic and social media have played significant roles as sources of information to humanity but many are yet to be reached with these technologies. The extensive impact of media on society can easily be seen these days. Media reflects our society, how it works and what it constitutes. With the advancement in technology, our society has also observed the expansion in the thoughts and ideas of people. The invention starting from the printing press to the latest social media our society has accepted but not all are still reached. The only source of reaching the majority of the populace which dwell in the rural communities in Niger Delta remains the traditional folk system of communication.

Niger delta region is an oil rich region of Nigeria; it has contributed to the economic growth of the country

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since the discovery of oil over some decades. But the area is made of rural dwellers and full of challenges that accounted to its deplorable conditions. According to Akpoveta, (2006), the area is characterized by a complex social system with different classes and ethnic groups with 80% of her population residing in the rural areas. The oil and gas exploration in this region have caused a huge amount of pollution of water and land because of the mismanagement of the oil and gas industry in the area. Some of these rural dwellers are cut off from the modern facilities like electricity, internet services or modern media technologies, good roads and other social amenities. Then, the need to reach them with conventional media seems to be a mirage because indigenous communication in Nigeria has a unique network which may not be easily understood. To appreciate this network, one has to live in the village and study its culture and effective means of communication.

There are several channels of communication among the village sitting which includes village criers otherwise known as town criers, beating of special drum, village hall meeting messaging, door to door messaging, storytelling etc. The uniqueness of these rural people, made the mass media to be foreign and strange in comparison with the tradition always of passing information which they could see and hear and even touch emotionally. Stichele, (2000), opines that the traditional media is the right choice of media to carry messages to the rural community. The traditional media are close to the hearts and mind of the people. They are more personal and intimate. And different folk media can be used to cater to different regions. Every village or settlement has its relevant music, dance or theatre. This can be used to reach the people in the process of change and development of the country. So for the purpose of effectiveness in the reaching these rural dwellers on control and prevention measures in this coronavirus

disease 2019 (COVID 19) pandemic the best option is the indigenous system of communication.

Coronavirus disease is a novel disease started at a region of Wuhan, China that is ravaging human race since December 2019. COVID 19 has caused the death of over 4million people and has affected over 9million and spread almost all over the countries of the world within the space of 6months (worldmeters.info). The danger is the vaccine to handle the deadly disease is yet unknown. Therefore, the best option is to take a personal responsibility by controlling and preventing the spread of the disease, which dependson adhering to protective measures prescribed by the World Health Organisation, and other Health Professionals. These measures cannot be put into use without adequate awareness, sensitization and information to the populace. Some of these common prevention tips are: Staying home, keep a safe distance from others, clean hands often and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at home, don't touch your eyes, nose, or mouth, cover coughs and sneezes with your elbow or tissue. Others are self-isolation from friends and family, practice frequent hand hygiene, wear a face mask and obey the regulations recommended by Federal Ministry of Health Nigeria and Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC).

These ought to be communicated to the people especially the rural dwellers. Mass media like radio, newspapers, social media and television are doing great work in passing the information to the people. But the majority of the people are not yet reached by all these modern channels. Sensitive information to the indigenous people must be conveyed through their traditional channels of town crying, hall meetings messaging, door to door messaging storytelling etc. No other channel have proved effective than these to the rural dwellers. These communication channels should be adopted to pass the information to the people in order to prevent and control



the spread of this COVID 19 pandemic among the rural dwellers in Niger delta region of the country.

Clarification of concepts.

Media

Media as a matter of fact are communication channels through which news entertainment, education; promotional messages are disseminated to the people. The word media is a plural form of the Latin word “Medium” which means middle ground or intermediate. It is used to describe newspaper, radio, and other channels of information likely derive from the term mass media. It includes broadcasting and narrowcasting medium such as newspapers, magazine, radio, billboard, television, fax, direct mail, and internet. It can also be referred as mass media because it is used to reach or communicate to general public. It is a technology that is intended to reach a mass audience on latest news regarding to politics, social issues, entertainment, and other information.

Mass media since ages have played a significant roles in information dissemination. The first media that originated was print media via newspaper, later around 1890 radio was invented, later the television till this period of web media or social media where the world is almost turned into a global village. It is a thing of note that all these media have affected human life in different ways. According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2012) , a radio is a piece of electronic equipment, which is used to listen to programmes that are broadcast, such as, music news, drama, lectures and other bits of information. The radio is the most popular and commonly used of all the electronic media. Many automobiles have installed radio sets, so that information can reach the user even as he is travelling. It is worthy to assert that radio has even being translated into local dialects and languages in order to reach the local populace.

Today, social media is playing much impact especially in urban society. It is a platform that lets people participate in social networking. It is also the best source for news updates, marketing, education, entertainment etc. This latest communication channel has made television and news paper from being king when it comes to filtering and sharing news. People can get news by reading trending topics on twitter, and they are more likely to share a link to a friend’s blog than MSN’s homepage. Other type of social media is Face book, YouTube, Instagram, Print rest, Google+ etc. These media have increase human communication and interaction, and indeed made the world small by reducing the space or gap between sender and recipient of the information.

In all these advancement in modern media industry, the need to use the indigenous media to reach the indigenous people of Niger delta cannot be compromised if effectiveness and adequate information dissemination should be achieved. Mass media seem to be superficial, glamorous, impersonal and unbelievable in comparison with the familiar performance of traditional crier or artist whom the villagers could reach physically and touch emotionally. Obviously, the traditional media is the right choice of media to carry messages to the rural community for the purpose, and process of change and development (Stichele, 2000).

Indigenous media

The traditional or folk media is the medium through which the cultural traits passed from generation to generation. Traditional media are based on indigenous culture, produced and consumed by members of rural communities. Adoyo2004 notes that many rural people utilize folk media for communication of culture messages. Folk media are the most important vehicle the common or indigenous people use for the delivery of their messages, which have to do with folk dance, painting, music, sculpture etc. It is also use for enlightenment and



awareness campaign among the indigenous people. Mundy and Compton (1991), state that the media are equivalent to mass media which are used primarily for entertainment, but also to promote education, values and cultural continuity, which include plays, storey telling poetry and puppet show. Indigenous in this context means “born of the land” or “come from the land”. It can mean people shaped with their traditions and customs that has emotional, spiritual and physical tie with the land that forms their way of life which is passed from generation to generation, usually by cultural rituals and word of mouth which convey messages through entertainment, costume, music, dance etc. Therefore, folk media is a system tied to the culture which existed before the advent of modern media and continuous to exist as a mode of communication in the world. The first significant recognition of the traditional media in the communication and development strategies of the developing countries came in the year 1972 when the international parenthood federation and UNESCO organized a series of meetings in London relating to integrated use of traditional folk media in family planning communication programmes. The interest generated by this meeting and the continued efforts to highlight the folk media as effective form of conveying developmental messages resulted in a number of seminars and workshops around the world (Mohanty and Parhi, 2011). UNESCO, (1999), also organized a seminar to provide a forum for the discussion and formulation of strategies for promoting and enhancing the development of traditional media in African countries. The importance of the seminar resided in the priority given by UNESCO, in its communication strategy and programmes in Africa, to encourage and support the development of folk media which help to expand access to news and information and provide more opportunities for communities to express themselves.

In African context, sensitive information is never passed in a straightforward manner but through songs,

dances, drum, town crier, special meetings and plays using proverbs and poems. The most channels of communication in this media system are Village hall meeting messaging. Village/town crying, door to door messaging, drums messaging, storytelling etc.

The town crier is a source of news and information. He is a major social and cultural facilitator helping to form attitudes, values and develop a climate of change through information disseminations. However, the reality of town crier is that he serves only rural areas and largely the illiterate populace by using the tradition gong to arouse the interest of the audience before giving the message. Again, the village meeting or town hall meeting messaging is a special meeting that allows members of the community to share ideals together and discuss matter of common interest. Because of the participatory nature of this kind of meeting, implementation of the resolutions are always easy, this is one of the advantages of indigenous channel of communication over its counterpart (modern media) which seem to be imposing.

Door to door messaging is another channel of communication in the rural area, where the serving age grade is directed by the chief or elders in-council to go to each family on door to door basis to deliver a message relevant to the subjects especially in the time of emergency for urgent action or response. This kind of medium sensitizes the people more than any other channel because the recipient's doubts are cleared on the process by the senders. Also, beating of special drum is one of the channels of communication in the rural area. Drum beating is so significant in the rural area. There are some sounds of drum for war, emergency, gathering together, dangers, festivities and others. These are ways of communicating to the rural people which mean much for them. These are part of their culture that have being handed over to them from generation to generation. It has formed part of their existence and lifestyle and has being tested and proved effective in passing messages.



Therefore other channels that do not conform to these patterns are highly doubted of its authenticity.

Furthermore, Messages are also communicated through songs (dance, work songs), composition of dances, songs and special speeches are used to grace festivals and ceremonies. This kind of song or dance may be staged for some times to draw the attention of the people before passing the message.

The place of storytelling as a channel of communication in a rural community cannot be overemphasized. Storytelling describes the social and cultural activity of sharing stories, ideas, and information with improvisation, theatre or embellishment. It is believed that every culture has its own stories or narratives, which serves as a means of entertainment, education, cultural preservation or instilling of moral values (en.m. Wikipedia.org.). It means that storytelling is a process of using facts and narratives to communicate something to your audience. The efficacy of this communication channel cannot be disputed, because it could be employed anywhere and at any time to pass a vital message to the intended audience at ease. As you go to farm, market, stream, at home it could be employed. So it makes the audience interesting and informed to make a useful decision. It could be in form of fairytales, folktales, mythology, legends, fables etc. In indigenous communities, stories are ways of pass knowledge from generation to generation and bridge gap for knowledge and understanding, allowing values of “self” and “community” to connect and be learned as a whole. It also aid in identity formation because every community is known by its culture. This mode or channel of communication in indigenous Niger Delta communities could be used to inform the inhabitants of the danger of the COVID19 pandemic and the preventive measures to curb the spread in the region.

Over View of Niger Delta Region

Niger Delta is the delta of the Niger Rivers situated in the Gulf of Guinea on the Atlantic Ocean in Nigeria. It is a populated region of around 30 million people. The core states that made up of the region are Delta, Rivers, Bayelsa, Cross River, Akwa Ibom and Edo. Sometimes the states of Imo, Abia and Ondo are included in the Niger Delta region. It is an oil rich region which has contributed to the highest income to the country since the discovery of the oil in 1950s. Petroleum exports account for 87% of Nigeria’s exports, and therefore a large amount of its foreign exchange. The mismanagement of the oil and gas industry over decades in the region have caused huge amount of water, land, air pollutions, oil spill and gas flaring have being the order of the day. This region is a home of extraordinary variety of people; mainly fishers and farmers with history of rich cultural heritage.

The effect of pollution and oil spills have cost destruction of wildlife, air and water pollutions, degradation of farmland and damage to aquatic ecosystem. These have left the people in abject poverty and suffering. Many part of Niger delta communities lack access to basic services, such as sanitation, primary health care, electricity, network services, and education (Africapolis Team 2008). According to Agbola and Olurin (2003), the region has experienced significant outbreak of conflict since 1990s. This has included waves of militancy, and serious violence during elections, groups competing for the oil and gas revenues, high level of illiteracy, very high number of illicit small arms and light weapons in circulation, criminal, intra-communal conflicts are common in this region. These factors have made the region impoverished socio-economically, inaccessible with the modern media and communication (Akhionbare and Osuji 2013).



The History of Coronavirus Disease 2019

The Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a highly transmittable and pathogenic viral infection caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The recent outbreak was first published in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China in December 2019 and spread around the world. Coronaviruses are a large family of zoonotic viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to severe respiratory diseases. The intermediate source of origin and transfer to humans is not known, however, the rapid human to human transfer has been confirmed widely. These viruses are able to be transmitted from animals to humans.

There are several coronaviruses known to be circulating in different animal populations that have not yet infected humans. COVID-19 is the most recent to make the jump to human infection. Common signs of COVID-19 infection are similar to the common cold and include respiratory symptoms such as dry cough, fever, shortness of breath, and breathing difficulties. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure, and death. The COVID-19 infection is spread from one person to others via droplets produced from the respiratory system of infected people, often during coughing or sneezing. According to current data, time from exposure to onset of symptoms is usually between two and 14 days, with an average of five days. There is no clinically approved antiviral drug or vaccine available to be used against COVID-19. However, few broad-spectrum antiviral drugs have been evaluated against COVID-19 in clinical trials, resulted in clinical recovery. It has now been confirmed on six continents and in more than 100 countries. As the world's health systems through the world Health Organisation (WHO) funnel resources into learning about, treating, and preventing infections in humans, new information is released daily, protective and controlling measures are made available to curb the spreading of the

pandemic. The treatment of the victims are mainly on the symptom and applying malaria or fever related drugs, using antibiotics and immune building supplements. Some other countries in the world use herbal syrups for the treatment. This viral disease has caused the death of over 400,000 people and over 9,000,000 confirmed cases within six month of its outbreak.(dailypost.ng).

Nigeria Experience

On 31 January, following the developments of COVID-19 pandemic in mainland China and other countries worldwide, the federal government of Nigeria set up a Coronavirus preparedness group to mitigate the impact of the virus if it eventually spreads to the country. On the same day, the World Health Organization listed Nigeria among other 13 African countries identified as high-risk for the spread of the virus. On 28 January, the Federal government of Nigeria assured citizens of the country of its readiness to strengthen surveillance at five international airports in the country to prevent the spread of coronavirus. The government announced the airports as Enugu, Lagos, Rivers, Kano and the FCT. The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) also announced same day that they had already set up coronavirus group and was ready to activate its incident system if any case emerges in Nigeria.

This worldwide pandemic, coronavirus disease 2019 called (COVID-19) caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), first confirmed case in Nigeria was announced on 27 February 2020, when an Italian citizen in Lagos tested positive for the virus, caused by SARS-CoV-2. On 9 March 2020, a second case of the virus was reported in Ewekoro, Ogun State, a Nigerian citizen who had contact with the Italian citizen. This became the genesis of the pandemic in Nigeria. The rate of confirmed cases has tolled more than 20,000 and the death is above 500 between February and June 2020.(w.w.w.who.int). The Niger delta region shares of this experience, on 23 March,



there were ten new cases: six in Lagos State, three in the FCT and one in Edo State followed on 25 March, a case in Rivers State. Later Edo State confirmed cases became about 800 and Rivers 930 while Cross River has zero indexes.

The Role And Impact Of Indigenous Media On Covid 19 Pandemic

Traditional media have always played a major role since the turn of century in rural enlightenment and development. It a media based on indigenous culture, produced and consumed by members of rural communities. (Adoyo 2004) noted that many rural people utilize folk media for communication of culture messages. These communication channels can be used to disseminate the message of the preventive measures on the COVID 19 in the rural areas. Observation

shows that most of the people in rural communities are not yet aware of the preventive guidelines on COVID -19. Also if the these measures should be grass root-based , the rural dwellers should be communicated through their means and channel, so that it can yield a desired result thereby able to combat with spread of this pandemic. An observation also showed that during the total lock down on the cities especially Port Harcourt, most of the urban dwellers drifted to the rural areas, and most of them had contacts with oil company workers and foreigners in their various companies, then exposing the villagers into a great danger of being infected by this deadly disease. So awareness and sensitization of the rural dwellers beforehand through community media should be of urgent priority in order to spared them from this disease. The traditional media play an important role in extension of education through the use of effective extension teaching methods. Traditional media utilize these methods to inform and educate its communities even before the advent of western education in agriculture, health care, food preparation, and wide range of other activities that sustain a society and its environment in

many parts of the world for centuries. It also uses a subtle form of persuasion by presenting the required message in locally popular artistic form. (biotecharticles.com). So this can be used to educate and create awareness in the communities about COVID 19.

It is imperative to assert that both modern and traditional communication methods could be developed to meet the needs of different social groups, particularly the disadvantaged and marginalized. Community media should involve community members in determining the kind of communication technologies which are appropriate to use and that such technologies should be compatible with the environment and respond to the needs of the community. Those community media practitioners should integrate traditional media that exist in the communities with modern especially in this era of COVID 19 pandemic. Akpabio (2000), contends that modern mass media and traditional folk media can work together to bring the desired goal of information dissemination and awareness to a success. With the combination of these two systems, what each cannot achieve single handedly, becomes achievable with the other. Traditional folk media remain relevant even with the level of technological leap of its modern counterpart in Niger delta communities.

Conclusion

This study on the indigenous media and COVID-19 pandemic in Niger delta looked at the role of the traditional folk media in disseminating information on the COVID-19 pandemic. It assessed the viability and potentiality of the indigenous media system vis-à-vis the modern system. And found out that traditional channel of communication such as village crier, village hall meeting messaging, door to door messaging, storytelling etc, are still effective way of communication today and should be employed to educate and informed the rural communities of Niger Delta region of the protective measures against the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore this



community media should not be down played with inspite of the advancement in modern media communication systems.

Recommendation

1. A special body or committee should be created to reorient the people on the need for the indigenous media industry.
2. Government should equip and empower the indigenous media both with infrastructure and other equipment as with its modern media counterpart.
3. Indigenous media should be encouraged with the need of social context in relation to custom and belief of the local people (communities)
4. Government through it ministry of information and culture should organize regular workshop and seminar for training of personnel for the indigenous media.

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