IMPACT OF MASS MEDIA MESSAGING ON COMPLIANCE WITH COVID-19 SAFETY PROTOCOLS AMONG RESIDENTS OF OSOGBO, OSUN STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study seeks to investigate the efficacy of media information dissemination during a pandemic. The study adopted the survey method with the questionnaire as research instrument. A sample size of 300 Osogbo residents was drawn through non-probability convenience sampling techniques. Descriptive analysis was employed in the analysis of the obtained data. Findings from the study shows that 60% of respondents are persuaded to comply with the COVID-19 safety protocols as a result of mass media messaging on the pandemic and that wearing of facemask is where the media placed emphasis. Another major finding of the study is that 195 respondents (65%) were not vaccinated compared to 105 (35%) vaccinated. The reason for non-vaccination ranges from non-belief in the efficacy of vaccine to non-availability. The study recommends reinforcing COVID-19 safety campaign messages on other platforms and urges the government to devise means of curtailing news and misinformation on COVID-19 pandemic, especially on the social media.

Keywords: Advocacy, Behaviour change, COVID-19, Framing, Media effects

1.0 Introduction
The coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) is one of the latest global threats that have afflicted humanity. From its known outbreak in the city of Wuhan in China in 2019, the virus has since spread to virtually all the countries of the world and with millions of people dead as a result of its ravaging scourge. As pointed out by experts, COVID-19 is a fast-spreading virus which affects the lung of the infected and makes it difficult to breathe (Wilder-Smith, 2021). In general, the novelty of COVID-19 makes information a crucial aspect of its curtailing and control. The need to understand the disease and its dimensions, that is, aetiology, transmission, as well as creative awareness about key elements of public health safety have become essential to curtailing it.

The World Health Organisation (WHO), which declared COVID-19 a pandemic on March 11, 2021, relied easily on public communication to achieve its goal of global safe health. The
International Health Regulations (IHR, 2005), an arm of the WHO saddled with the task of providing a network of response to the international spread of diseases, explicitly states the role of information in Article 4 (2b):

> disseminating information to, and consolidating input from relevant sectors of the administration of the State Party concerned, including those responsible for surveillance and reporting, points of entry, public health services, clinics and hospitals and other government departments.

Moreover, Article 7 also states, among others:

> If a State Party has evidence of an unexpected or unusual public health event within its territory, irrespective of origin or source, which may constitute a public health emergency of international concern, it shall provide to WHO all relevant public health information.

These two assertions highlight the role of media as the main platform for public communication in disseminating information to prevent and curtail the virus. First, there is a designed role of media in surveillance to public health authority (World Health Organisation, 2005; Parvin, Ahsan, Rahman & Abedin, 2020). As pointed out by Santas and Kente, (2020), the media’s roles stem from the fact that they are the channels which the public relies on for information during health emergencies. Secondly, the media have significant framing impact in deterring behaviours which are likely to increase the spread of the virus (Saunders & Goddard, 2002; Anwar, Malik, Raees & Anwar, 2020). It can therefore be argued that the major challenge at the heart of coronavirus safety protocol compliance lies in the adequacy or otherwise of information in engendering adherence to COVID-19 protocols.

A pandemic, as deadly as COVID-19, requires different information framing to reach the different segments of society. For every pandemic, there is always health, economic, social, political and cultural implications. There are also dimensions of framing that appeal to the emotion of people (Lecheler, Schuck, & De Vreese, 2013). Information can come either in positive or negative tone. Positive tones or information are optimistic information that seek to provide convincing statements, about measures put in place for controlling a devastating health incident such as that of the COVID-19 crisis (Rivas, Jaldin, Canaviri, Escalante, Fernández, et al., 2021). On the other hand, what is considered is information that highlights loss of lives arising from non-conformity with COVID-19 protocols. However, many experts hold that the best way the media can serve the public good is to present information about the virus honestly and professionally, with accuracy and fairness as watchwords. Many media outlets in Africa, and particularly in Nigeria, are reported to have been limited in applying professionalism in crisis information management (Anwar, Malik, Raees, & Anwar, 2020).

The lack of social restraint and generally low compliance with COVID-19 protocols among many Nigerians indicate limited success of the country’s efforts to contain the spread of the virus. The media had, for instance, reported cases where crowds of voters wore no face masks and did not observe social distancing (Oladoyin, 2021). Agusi et al. (2020) asserted that non-
compliance with COVID-19 protocols remains a major concern for the Nigerian government. Some of the factors attributed to non-compliance include lack of adequate information on the pattern of spread of the virus or the failure to debunk the belief by many about potential homemade remedies for the disease. Experts’ analysis of Nigerian major newspaper outlets showed that straight news report dominated information dissemination on the COVID-19 with few explanatory features and editorials (Nwakpu, Ezema & Ogbodo, 2020).

So far, the effects of limited compliance with COVID-19 safety protocols have seen increasing high rates of transmission and casualties among Nigerians over the last few months. As stated by the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), more than 190,000 COVID-19 cases and 2308 deaths have been recorded in the nation’s 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory as of September, 2021. In Osun State, more than 3,024 cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed while more than 86 individuals have died of the virus as of 20th December, 2021 (NCDC, 2021).

The scourge of COVID-19 pandemic and its evolving variants -Delta and Omicron - is still biting hard in many countries of the world, leading restrictions in some countries. In order to contain its spread, several policies and measures, including social distancing, wearing facemasks and frequent hand washing, have been adopted worldwide, including Nigeria, to mitigate the continuing fatalities from the virus. In spite of these measures and given the recent resurgence of variants of the virus, COVID-19 still portend negative socio-economic and health outcomes for the public. The NCDC has raised alarm on the devastating impact of the new Delta variant of COVID-19 and expressed worry at the poor level of compliance with COVID-19 safety protocols. Nigeria’s Minister of Health, Dr. Osagie Ehanire, at a briefing by the Presidential Steering Committee (PSC) on COVID-19 in Abuja on September 27, 2021 had lamented: “There is fatigue in wearing face mask and observing social distancing in various countries, including Nigeria” (Guardian, 27th September, 2021).

Many attribute poor compliance with COVID-19 safety protocols to conflicting information about the pandemic, which fuels suspicion about the disease, the relevance of safety protocols and the promotion of forced vaccination as an anti-dote. For instance, as against the projected impression that COVID-19 vaccination is preventive of controlling the virus, Minister Ehanire had at his press briefing admitted that “the vaccinated can be COVID-19 infected… and can infect others” (Guardian, 27th September, 2021). In all of these, the media of mass communication play a significant role in the formation of public attitude about any emergent crisis, including public health crisis, which the COVID-19 pandemic constitutes. Therefore, given the negative attitude and increasing resistance among residents to observing COVID-19 safety protocols, as attested to by the Health Minister, this study seeks to find out the impact, if any, of mass media messages on COVID-19 have impacted compliance to safety protocols, using residents of Osogbo, Osun State, as the population of the study.

1.1 Research Objectives
This study aims to examine how mass media messages impacted respondents’ compliance to COVID-19 safety protocols and examine the most common media platforms for COVID-19 information dissemination accessed by respondents.

1.2 Research Questions
The following research questions guided the conduct of the study:

(i) What are the most common media platforms for COVID-19 information dissemination accessed by respondents?

(ii) How has mass media messages impacted respondents’ compliance to COVID-19 safety protocols?

2.0 Review of literature
While research on the effectiveness of media messaging on compliance to COVID-19 safety protocols are inconclusive, there is widespread agreement on the relationship between the impact of media on adherence to safety protocols. Studies by Smith et al. (2020) and Obi-Ani et al. (2020) reveal that news and social media reports on the COVID-19 pandemic were high. These studies have shown that the media has played a great role in the reportage of COVID-19. It is a generally agreed notion that the media creates and propagates fear in the public (Morland, 2000, Collimore et al., 2008; Galea & Resnick, 2005; Jarolmen & Sisco, 2005; Schlenger et al., 2002). Ahmad and Murad (2020) determined how social media affects self-reported mental health and the spread of panic about COVID-19 in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. This study found out that social media, especially Facebook, has a significant impact on spreading fear and panic related to the COVID-19 outbreak in Iraqi Kurdistan, with a potential negative influence on people's mental health and psychological well-being in Iraq. The study also found a significant positive statistical correlation between self-reported social media use and the spread of panic related to COVID-19.

This serves as a valuable explanation for greater exposure to media concerning the pandemic leading to increased tendency for fear and general compliance with pandemic preventive measures, as indicated by the results of Atchison et al. (2020) and Bruine-de-Bruin (2020). It was explained by these studies that people were afraid that they were more likely to contract the coronavirus if they did not comply with its preventive protocols.

Quite interestingly, that same fear propagated by the media can yield adverse effects against the adherence to COVID-19 preventive protocols. The findings of Togun (2020), Paykani et al. (2020), Ladan, Haruna & Madu (2020) and Apuke & Omar (2021) reveal that, best explained by the widespread of panic and fear, the media, and especially the social media, played an unforgettable role in the dissemination of false COVID-19 related information. One valuable example can be seen in the widespread dissemination of the potency of Chloroquine (a drug used to treat malaria) in treating COVID-19, across social media. Within a short period of time, Chloroquine was portrayed to be a wonder drug for the cure of the coronavirus, which misled the general public about its effectiveness and led to a myriad of negative effects (Anwar et al, 2020). Such spread of false information concerning the pandemic via social media has
the tendency to negatively impact compliance with the pandemic preventive protocols Apuke & Omar (2021).

Similarly, there were instances where people seemingly trivialised the pandemic on social media, claiming it was inexisten, and some doing as much as prescribing local and herbal mixtures to cure the ‘severe common cold’ that is COVID-19 (Hamzat & Otulugbu, 2020; Casero-Ripollés, 2020; and Mourad et al., 2020). These findings reported a significantly reduced tendency to comply with COVID-19 preventive measures due to downplay in the severity of the coronavirus as propagated by the media.

Wu & Shen (2021), Li & Qinliang (2020), Piltch-Loeb, et al. (2021) and Liu, et al. (2020) provide evidence for the increased compliance with COVID-19 preventive protocols due to media coverage. Wu and Shen (2021) results showed that the use of central government media and the use of WeChat are positively related to compliance with health behaviours, while the use of local media and the use of Weibo are negatively related to the levels of compliance. In addition, trust in the media amplified the effects of media use on levels of compliance. Similarly, the results of Li and Qinliang (2020) revealed that social media use frequency rather than time significantly predicted preventive behaviours for COVID-19, as Piltch-Loeb, et al. (2021) found traditional channels of information, especially National TV, National newspapers, and local newspapers increased the likelihood of vaccine acceptance.

The current study, taking a cue from the above highlighted studies, sought to investigate and provide indigenous data on how the media messaging influences compliance to coronavirus safety protocols among residents of Osogbo.

3.0 Methodology
The study adopted a descriptive research design, using quantitative survey with structured questionnaire as research instrument.

Residents in Osogbo, Osun State, (Southwest) Nigeria, constituted the population of the study. According to the 2006 Population and Housing Commission Census, the city has a population of 238,854 people. The choice of Osogbo, capital of Osun State, as the location of the study, is based on its cosmopolitan nature and diversity of residents.

The sample size of 300 participants for the study was drawn through non-probability convenience sampling technique. The sample of 300 respondents were drawn from the Osogbo Local Government Area. The sample is made up of 132 males (representing, 44%) and 168 females (representing, 56%) adults whose age is equal or above the voting age. To improve on the representation of the study, the researcher drew respondents across different strata that included: Schools (private and public); religious organisations and civic centres.

To ensure the reliability of the instrument, a pilot test was conducted to ascertain the level of understanding of the items in the questionnaire, and subsequent reviews were made according to the outcome of the pilot test. An internal consistency coefficient of 0.80 was obtained for the instrument. To ensure the validity of the research instrument, the instrument was assessed
two mass communication experts to confirm its validity to the variables to the variables under study.

Descriptive analysis was employed in the analysis of the obtained data.

4.0 Data Presentation
The study assessed the platforms in which the respondents obtain information about Covid-19 information. These sources are depicted in bar chart below:

Figure 1: Bar chart depiction of respondents’ medium of information about Covid-19 pandemic

Table 1: Frequency and percentage distributions level of compliance to COVID-19 protocol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items (N=300)</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are you persuaded to comply with COVID-19 safety protocols because of media reports?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>39.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>60.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know anyone who is similarly persuaded?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>52.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>47.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which COVID-19 protocols do you believe media emphasize most?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face mask</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>64.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand washing</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Distancing</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-handshaking</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know anyone who has contracted COVID-19?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>71.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Are you aware of COVID-19 vaccination?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>94.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reasons for not getting vaccinated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I do not believe in the vaccine</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>58.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaccines are not available in my community</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am afraid it might have negative reactions</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe local herbs will work better than vaccine</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Field survey (2021)

4.1 Discussion of Findings

Findings from Fig. 1 shows that television (117) is the most identified source of information for COVID-19 pandemic, closely followed by social media, (111); radio (70). This finding of the study is consistent with several studies that have investigated sources of information on COVID-19, especially as it regards the dominant influence of both television and the social media on respondents during the pandemic (Kim, Merrill, Collins & Yang, 2021; Ahmad and Murad, 2020; Wu and Shen, 2021; Li and Qinliang, 2020). It also further underscored the important role of the mass media in public health communication (Smith, Smith and Ajayi, 2020; Anwar, Malik, Raees, & Anwar, 2020), especially as reflected in the tracking of coronavirus disease, provision of updates through live updates dashboard and reinforcement of messages regarding preventive and safety protocols. The reason for this, as Kim, Merrill, Collins & Yang (2021) observed, is the fact that many individuals reported an increase in media consumption during the COVID-19 lockdown, specifically, tv and social media and radio usage increased. What can be deduced from this is that during the lockdown when many were forced to stay in door, television, social media and radio were the dominant media channels that engaged respondents’ attention. It is indeed quite revealing that a significant number of the respondents (52) relied on their peers (4), friends (8), family members (7), religious organisations and direct advocacy embarked upon by the government in the public space such as markets, as channels through which they got educated about the virus. This result, in many ways, underscores the importance of word of mouth as an important information channel among the respondents. It is also worth highlighting that the social media is catalytic to the spread of falsehood and misinformation on COVID-19 (Naeem and Boulos, 2021).

Result on Table 1 shows that 59.3% of respondents comply with COVID-19 safety protocols, 64.3% of them noted that they have learned to make use of their facemasks through reinforcement from media messaging. However, 195 (65%) of the respondents were yet to be vaccinated despite wide awareness of availability of vaccination, owing to not believing that
vaccines reduce their probability of contracting the virus (174) for contracting the virus, to the unavailability of the virus within the community (26), to apprehension that the virus might have negative reactions, and the consideration that herbs might work in place of the vaccine (1). This finding support the result of Ufuophu-Biri and Bebenimibo (2021) which revealed that significant relationship exists between exposure to media message on COVID-19 and compliance with its safety protocols. This means that despite claims that the influence of the media might be on the decline (Ormandy, 2017), citizens still rely on the mass media as important channels of information. The implication of this, therefore, is that there needs to be increased deployment and creative use of the mass media in sensitizing the public about the dangers of the virus and the imperative of complying with preventive safety protocols.

5.0 Conclusion
This study concludes that mass media messaging impacts positively on the compliance of COVID-19 safety protocols. The findings also revealed that respondents reported an appreciable knowledge of the virus, and this has significantly impacted on their compliance to safety protocols. The results also showed that that television, social media and radio ranked tops as dominant sources of information on the virus.

5.1 Recommendations
Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

i. the findings revealed a significant influence of mass media messaging on compliance of safety protocols among Osogbo residents, it is recommended that government and other stakeholders should reinforce media role by designing specialized campaign messages that will use other diverse platforms of media of mass communication.

ii. the finding that conflicting information on COVID-19 is a factor in reduced compliance with COVID-19 safety protocols and reluctance to get COVID-19 vaccination, efforts should be made by the government to streamline information on the pandemic to tackle the spread of fake news on the virus, especially on the social media.

References


