



PUBLIC PERCEPTION ON GOVERNMENT INFORMATION ON COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Covid-19 is a disease that has devastating impact on public health in the world. Above all, it has crippled economic activities of people as a result of persistent lockdowns imposed at various regular intervals. Against this paper explores the level of government information on Covid-19 in Northern Nigeria. Information on Covid-19 is incumbent responsibility of government; therefore, the way people perceive it and act on it depends on trust established between government and the people. The paper used purposive sampling technique selecting four states in northern Nigeria, namely Kano, Katsina, Sokoto and Kaduna. The choice of them is informed by the fact that they are the

most populous states in the region. Seven key questions were slotted in the questionnaires and one hundred and forty respondents (140)

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were randomly given the questionnaires to offer their responses as regard to the way they perceived government information on Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, some of the respondents were interviewed to elicit their responses in narrative form.

INTRODUCTION

The Coronavirus popularly known as Covid-19 is an infectious disease, which causes respiratory infections, such as common cold and severe respiratory difficulties. The disease came into being from the Hunan seafood market at Wuhan, China where live bats,

snakes, raccoon dogs, wild animals among others were sold in December 2019 (Shereen et al., 2020, pp. 91–98). The World Health Organization (WHO) declared it a pandemic on 11th March, 2020 following its devastating effects on the global health of people. The virus caused untold deaths of people in the world. Unfortunately, Nigeria had experienced its first woes of the virus when an Italian man who arrived in the country on the 25th February, 2020 was tested positive (NCDC 2020).

As COVID-19 outbreak posed significant challenges for the public health, research and medical communities, governmental policies and processes were introduced to curtail the spread of the virus across the nations of the world. This included instituting temporary restrictions on travel with dramatic reduction in the number of travellers, self-distancing, self-isolation, regular hand washing and the use of face masks. This compelled the Government of Nigeria deployed a number of information dissemination channels to keep people informed about inherent danger posed by the virus. The president of Nigeria, General Muhammadu Buhari took the bull by horn by constituting different committees and charged them with task to formulate policies, new guidelines to curtail the spread of the virus. For example, Presidential Task Force on Covid-19 headed by the Secretary to State Government Boss Mustapha used different media forum to enlighten people about safety measures regarding Covid-19. Against this background, this paper explores the level of public perception on government information on Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The general public gets information from mass media reporters, because government relies on them to pass information.

Mass media reporters gather authentic information about the number of persons affected by the virus Covid-19 as well as the specific locations of the people. The method of news reporting modifies the behaviour of people and their attitudes towards Covid-19. Media reports of the Covid-19 have undoubtedly raised fear and awareness among people. On the one hand, it helped people to adopt essential protective measures. At the eve of nationwide lockdown in Nigeria, a barrage of news on the devastation of Covid-19 was at play. Such news often impact greatly on people`s life and livelihood

Media and Covid-19 in Nigeria

As the pandemic encroaches on and emasculates world activities, social media platforms have been utilized as an information outlet to citizens. Its significance has gained more recognition owing especially. Media houses or forums became invaluable means of disseminating information to the citizenry in Nigeria through different Task force committees constituted by Federal Government and state government and down to local governments. The Nigerians are fully informed of the impact of Covid-19 through electronic and print media. However, the Federal government through Presidential Task Force on Covid-19 used optimal utilization of NTA Television, AIT television and Channel TV to pass information to general public concerning the latest updates on Covid-19 on daily basis. The information is always delivered on those channels in English. This underscores that the media acts as an information hegemon in terms of determining what information is made available to people as well as the impression people have on issues (Savrum & Leon, 2015).

However, from state government a level, the information on Covid-19 is relayed over local radio and in indigenous language for mass consumption of people. For example, in Katsina and Sokoto Farin wata Radio was used to propagate information on Covid-19 for public awareness in Hausa language. In the same vein, Kano State Government used radio stations, such as Freedom Radio, Rahma Radio and Dala Radio to keep people informed of updates on Covid-19. The Task Force on Covid-19 response, headed by the deputy governor, Dr. Yusuf Gawuna keeps the general public informed about the safety measures and progress earmarked by Kano State Government in curbing the spread of Coronavirus pandemic.

Review of Literature

Brandt et al. (2011) investigated the effect of Pandemic on attitudes of Healthcare workers toward seasonal Influenza vaccination. His finding revealed that the risk in communication is a challenge in the attempt to curtail the spread of infectious diseases. According him, almost all people rejected the vaccination required of them to prevent the spread of the flu due to ignorance and hysteria. The challenge posed by this implication

lies in way with relevant information on health matters are not effectively relayed or disseminated. This study has strong bearing on the present study since it is based on issue of covid-19 and information dissemination.

Humphrey (2018) conducted his study on the effect of influenza and social behaviour of people in the metropolitan. His findings revealed the risks of infections resulted from downplaying of safety measures. As such, this compelled the government to isolate sick persons, close schools and ban public gatherings. It was also discovered that several persons misused the facemask as some were improperly made. Humphrey`s observation or findings is similar to our present study in a slightly nuanced manner. However, the major concern of the research finding hinges on the failure of people to observe safety measures in the best way. Our present study aims at exploring the impact of G.

Bobby (2020) argued that media is the primary source of information and plays a vital role in educating the masses on health matters. He further posed that social media usage has increased manifold and thus, has a number of available platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, which people access to be well-intimated or informed of their health matters. Bobby`s observation is apt on the basis that it tunes to our present study on grand scale.

Sharu (2020) pointed out the vital roles played by media in passing out information and safety measures on Covid-19. He reiterated the fact that media forums play a key role promoting physical and psychological health measures, social distances, wearing face masks. The media, according to Sharu, prevails on government to provide face masks rather than leaving people to pay them.

Muhammad (2021) observed that the novel Covid-19 is worth-reporting, given its devastating impact on people`s socio-economic and political life. It is factually based following its realities. The news must account for how many people are affected by it vis-à-vis the way it undermines their socio-cultural and economic plight.

Observing the impact of media on Coronavirus in Nigeria, Muhammad (2021) further argued that the radio and television, especially private-based have contributed a lot in relaying Covid-19 related news to a large audience. Typical example of such radio stations, are Alheri Radio

Kaduna, Farin wata Radio Katsina, Freedom radio Kano, Rahama Radio Kano to mention but a few. This underscores the role of government to make optimal utilization of the media forums to pass across their messages on precautionary measures to general public.

Faruk (2020) observed that the governor of Kano Dr. Abdullahi Ganduje had shown deepest commitment in enlightening the general public on Covid-19 updates on daily basis. According to him, the governor used many private radio stations and state-owned television Abubakar Rimi Television (ARTV) to relay covid-19 information to public. He further appraised the effort of governor in the way he sponsored several billboards and posters aimed at educating people to observe Covid-19 non-pharmaceutical measures.

In the same vein, Samuel (2020) assessed the level of public perception of Government information on Covid-19 in Kaduna state which he pointed that the majority of the masses received the information with mixed feelings or reaction following the insistent lockdowns imposed on them. The majority of people didn't believe of the reality of the disease as interviewed, because the lockdowns imposed on them made their live and livelihood hashers. However, the educational icons in the state believed the disease as real in that the praised the governor Nasiru El-Rufa`l on that. The educational elites were said to be the people that receive government information on Covid-19 wholeheartedly and observe all measures to curtail the spread of the virus. The educational elites, as observed by Samuel were the person that bought newspaper in order to be informed on Covid-19 updates in not northern Nigeria in particular but the whole country in general.

Research Methodology

Methodologically, the researcher adopted descriptive survey method of research. The choice of the descriptive design is guided by the act that it is a systematic method of collecting and analysing responses gathered from a large sample of respondents with questionnaire and interview developed in order to seek their opinions and attitudes about the level of public perception of government information in Northern Nigeria. Nworgu (1991) observed that in this type of research, a group of people or items are studied by collecting and analysing the responses collected

from some people or items being considered, as representatives of the entire groups are analyzed. This gave the researcher the opportunity to obtain the necessary information required about the targeted population.

Sampling Technique

The population were drawn from four major states of northern Nigeria, namely Katsina, Kano, Kaduna and Sokoto, using purposive sampling. The choice of the techniques was informed by the fact that the states the most prominent in Northern Nigeria.

Data Analysis and Results

The results presented in the tables in this section emanated from the analysis of the data generated from field work with the use of questionnaire in Katsina State of Nigeria concerning the perception of Government information on Covid-19.

Table Katsina State

	Questionnaire	Yes	No	Percentage (%)
<i>Has government provided face masks for free to the masses?</i>	05	15		
<i>Do you wear face mask in public gathering as directed by government?</i>	08	12		
<i>What is your perception concerning Covid-19? Is it real or not</i>	03	17		
<i>Do you often receive information on safety measures from government to curtail the effect of the virus over the radio stations?</i>	20	0		
<i>Do you wash your hands frequently?</i>	04	16		
<i>Do you observe social distance as ordered by the government?</i>	03	17		
<i>Are you satisfied with way palliatives are distributed to less-privileged people?</i>	0	20		

Table 1 shows that the government does not show serious concern in curtailing the devastating effect of coronavirus given the part that majority of people in the katsina state are poor and are not able to afford the face mask. The figure-17 persons aired their views concerning non-availability of face masks provided by the government.

Equally, concerning wearing the face masks, the majority of people (12 respondents) responded that they were wearing facemask while other respondents (08) said were not wearing it. This reveals the positive level of public perception in wearing face masks, as the government imposed fines for defaulters. In this way, government has done a great job to curtailing the spread of coronavirus.

In the same vein, concerning the level of perception on reality of Covid-19, many respondents (17) said they didn't believe in the disease in that they go about their business while downplaying the covid-19 safety measures. Most of such people believed that the disease is foreign-based in that it would not affect them in anyway. Most of the people according to the interviewed posed on them expressed their view that the disease has western-plan nuance aimed at threatening the life and livelihood of Nigerian people. In this way, they said that they would not follow or observe guiding principles imposed by government.

In this way, concerning information on safety measures from government to curtail the effect of the virus over the radio stations, the respondents said that they constantly receive messages on Covid-19 from government over local radio, such as Farin wata radio and Alheri. From response garnered all the people interviewed express optimism that the government did a lot in passing safety or non-pharmaceutical measures to curtail the effects of virus.

In addition, concerning regular washing of hands frequently, the respondents expressed pessimism about washing of their hands. Fourteen (14) out of twenty (20) people forming the full representation of the respondents interviewed said they didn't see any significant impact in washing their hands, because the disease could not do any harm to African. However, it has imposing impact on Whitemen, as argued by them.

On the rate on observing social distance as ordered by the government, the majority of respondents representing the general public said that

they didn't observe social distance. They interacted with people without observing any social distance. When interviewed, they held pessimistic view those social distances is western-based policy. It has no space in African cultural context. According to them, it is schemed to disrupt the social cohesion that bound them together.

In the whole, concerning the satisfaction on the way the palliatives are distributed to less-privileged people to alleviate their sufferings resulted from lockdown, the respondents (20) posited that they were not fully satisfied, as the goods were diverted by unscrupulous politicians who outwardly bombarded people over the radio that they distributed the items. This revealed the deficit trust between people and government. This is one of the driving forces that make people not believing of the reality of the pandemic. They lost confidence in government while deep down the governor of Katsina was fully concerned about people's suffering but the agency constituted to distribute the palliative behaved out turn.

Table 2

The data and results presented in the tables in this section emanated from the analysis of the data generated from field work with the use of questionnaire in Kano State of Nigeria concerning the perception of Government information on Covid-19.

	Questionnaire	Yes	No	Percentage (%)
<i>Has government provided face masks for free to the masses?</i>	02	17		
<i>Do you wear face mask in public gathering as directed by government?</i>	02	18		
<i>What is your perception concerning Covid-19? Is it real or not</i>	0	20		
<i>Do you often receive information on safety measures from government to curtail the effect of the virus over the radio stations?</i>	20	0		
<i>Do you wash your hands frequently?</i>	0	20		

<i>Do you observe social distance as ordered by the government?</i>	02	18	
<i>Are you satisfied with way palliatives are distributed to less-privileged people?</i>	02	18	

Table 2 shows that the government does not show serious concern in curtailing the devastating effect of coronavirus given the part that majority of people in the kano state are financially bankrupt resulted from effect of lockdowns. The figure of 18 said that the face masks were not adequately provided by government.

Equally, concerning wearing the face masks, the majority of people (18 respondents) responded that they were not wearing facemask while other respondents (02) said were wearing it. This reveals the negative perception of public of government information on wearing face masks. In this way, government has done a great job to curtailing the spread of coronavirus over different local radio station broadcast in Hausa language. However, the general public ignore government order or information because of their deep-rooted belief that Covid-19 is more potent in the West than in Africa.

In respect of reality of Covid-19, all respondents (20) unanimously agreed that disease was not real in that they didn't bother to observe all the necessary non-pharmaceutical measures enlightened or presented by the chairman Covid-19 Task Force, Dr. Nasiru Gawuna and the Governor Abdullahi Ganduje. As interviewed, the all respondents argued that the disease is foreign-based and not African in that they would not infected. More So, concerning information on safety measures from government to curtail the effect of the virus over the radio stations, the respondents said that they constantly receive messages on Covid-19 from government over local private radio, such as Freedom Radio, Rahma Radio, Vision and Dala FM all in Kano state of Nigeria. Media helps to access the situations by bringing information to managers, policy makers and citizens, and speed is increased with the help of which information are collected, accumulated and supplied. However, they argued that the disease was not real; the weather condition of the Kano would drastically derail the looming impact of Covid-19. They posed that the insignificant figure of

covid-19 infected persons were just manipulated by government in order to get financial aids from Federal Government.

Concerning regular washing of hands frequently, the respondents expressed pessimism about washing of their hands. All the twenty (20) respondents didn't wash their hands, because, according to them, the disease could not do any harm to African. The muslim faithful, among the respondents, said that they wash their hands five times daily while performing obligatory ablutions in that the government could not tell them for the first time to wash their hands.

On the rate on observing social distance as ordered by the government, the majority of respondents representing the general public said that they didn't observe social distance. They interacted with people without observing any social distance. When interviewed, they held pessimistic view those social distances is western-based policy. It has no space in African cultural context. According to them, it is schemed to disrupt the social cohesion that bound them together.

Unanimously, the responded received in negative nuanced light the way palliatives are distributed to less-privileged people to alleviate their sufferings resulted from lockdown. This is because the palliatives announced by government over radio are dragged somewhere. In other words, hardly one tell you who and who access it, as the respondents said.

Table 3

The data and results presented in the tables in this section emanated from the analysis of the data generated from field work with the use of questionnaire and interview in Sokoto State of Nigeria concerning the perception of Government information on Covid-19.

Questionnaire	Yes	No	Percentage (%)
<i>Has government provided face masks for free to the masses?</i>	15	03	
<i>Do you wear face mask in public gathering as directed by government?</i>	05	15	

<i>What is your perception concerning Covid-19? Is it real or not</i>	07	13	
<i>Do you often receive information on safety measures from government to curtail the effect of the virus over the radio stations?</i>	20	0	
<i>Do you wash your hands frequently?</i>	14	06	
<i>Do you observe social distance as ordered by the government?</i>	05	15	
<i>Are you satisfied with way palliatives are distributed to less-privileged people?</i>	10	10	

Table shows that the government shows some level of concern in curtailing coronavirus, because half of the respondents (10) said that they receive face mask from government. The government, according to them, stressed more emphasis on wearing face masks in its daily briefing or Covid -19 updates, which they listen over radio stations of Sokoto States. Equally, concerning the ten respondents who answered in negative that they were not wearing the face masks revealed that they are not used to it or the weather condition of the state, which was extremely hot made them feel uncomfortable wearing it.

In respect of reality about the looming impact of pandemic, 15 respondents said the disease was not real in that they didn't bother to observe all the necessary non-pharmaceutical measures enlightened or presented by the Covid-19 Task Force, constituted by the governor of the Sokoto state, Aminu Tambuwal.

Concerning information on safety measures from government to curtail the effect of the virus over the local radio stations, the respondents said that they always listened to the government but the economic recession induced by the Covid-19 prevent them from practicing safety measures even though lockdown was not imposed on them as it was in Kaduna, Kano and Katsina. It was more hasher in Kano throughout northern Nigeria as a result of rising figures of infected persons coupled with government perception level of the pandemic. over local private radio,

such as Freedom Radio, Rahma Radio, Vision and Dala FM all in Kano state of Nigeria. This underscores the fact electronic media has the power to calm the people as well as encourage people for positive action, and vice versa. However, they argued that the disease was not real; the weather condition of the Kano would drastically derail the looming impact of Covid-19. They posed that the insignificant figure of covid-19 infected persons were just manipulated by government in order to get financial aids from Federal Government.

Concerning regular washing of hands frequently, the respondents expressed optimism about washing of their hands. The fourteen (14) respondents said that they wash their hands five times daily while performing obligatory ablutions in that the government’s information on washing hands tunes to their religious obligation in all respect. This reveals the fact that the people of Sokoto state registered their confidence in acting on Covid-19 related information.

On the rate on observing social distance as ordered by the government, the majority of respondents representing the general public said that they didn’t observe social distance because it is anti-human. They received government information regarding social distances but they didn’t act on it accordingly.

Unanimously, the respondents received information on the distribution of Covid-19 palliatives brought by the Federal Government of Nigeria under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari. The Palliatives were distributed but not according to satisfaction of people.

Table 4

The data and results presented in the tables in this section emanated from the analysis of the data generated from field work with the use of questionnaire and interview in Sokoto State of Nigeria concerning the perception of Government information on Covid-19.

	Questionnaire	Yes	No	Percentage (%)
<i>Has government provided face masks for free to the masses?</i>	03	17		
<i>Do you wear face mask in public gathering as directed by government?</i>	18	02		
<i>What is your perception concerning Covid-19? Is it real or not</i>	07	13		

<i>Do you often receive information on safety measures from government to curtail the effect of the virus over the radio stations?</i>	20	0	
<i>Do you wash your hands frequently?</i>	04	16	
<i>Do you observe social distance as ordered by the government?</i>	15	05	
<i>Are you satisfied with way palliatives are distributed to less-privileged people?</i>	11	09	

Table 4 shows that the government show some level of concern in curtailing coronavirus, because almost all the respondents (17) said that they receive face mask from government. The government, according to them, stressed more emphasis on wearing face masks on its daily briefing or Covid -19 updates, which they listen over radio stations of Kaduna States. They also pointed out the government has made it compulsory and insist on fining or jailing defaulters. The said that they received information on importance of wearing face masks through various health agencies.

Equally, concerning wearing face masks in their community or locality eighteen respondents answered in the positive that they were wearing face masks, because they feared being arrested by the task force committee on Covid-19, as they frequently receive information over the radio stations and on television. The message they received, according to them, was hasher than imagined. In addition, the number of respondents who do not wear face masks is insignificant. They explained whenever they were in remote areas they didn't wear it.

In respect of reality about the pandemic, the large proportion of respondents (13) said the disease was not real while (07) respondents. This shows that the educational elites mostly among the (13) respondents believed the disease is real while the (07) most from the masses argued the disease is not real but is a scheme to deprive people of the legitimate rights to move freely.

Concerning information on safety measures from government to curtail the effect of the virus over the local radio stations, the respondents said that they always listened to the messages relayed in both English and

Hausa languages because Kaduna community unlike Sokoto, Katsina and Kano, is multicultural. They are disturbed by the nagging, hash, lockdowns, which deprive Muslims from attending Friday prayers and Christians from attending church on Sunday. According to them, they listened to information on lockdowns with mixed feelings, as their economic activities are summarily crippled.

On the frequent or regular washing of hands, the respondents expressed optimism about washing of their hands. The sixteen (16) respondents said that they wash their hands five times daily while performing obligatory ablutions in that the government's information on washing hands tunes to their religious obligation in all respect. This reveals the fact that the people of Kaduna state registered their confidence in acting on Covid-19 related information. The ratio of respondents (4) who answered in positive was mostly educational elites. Kaduna is a state from northern Nigeria that has large number of élites.

On observing social distance as ordered by the government, the majority of respondents representing the general public said that they observe it, because it is one the Covid-19 priorities the government gives more emphasis on. They listened to the messages over the radio and television as well as posters posted by government. Even in the hospital social distance, as they said, was imperative.

On the perceived information on Covid-19 palliatives, the majority of respondents received information on the distribution of Covid-19 palliatives brought by the Federal Government of Nigeria under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari. The Palliatives were distributed but not according to satisfaction of people. However, the mode of distribution is more viable and equitable than in other states.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, Corona virus is a global crisis that has spread throughout the world at a faster pace. Mass media plays a key role in disseminating or relaying health-related information. The paper critiqued the way covid-19 related information is perceived by people in northern Nigeria. The finding revealed that their trust deficit between government and general public in certain states in that the people have shown nonchalant attitudes in observing non-pharmaceutical measures imposed or put in

place by government. Nevertheless, almost all the four governors in four states were committed in seeing the virus is curtailed and people strictly adhere to safety measures, the poverty level of people deter them from acting on government information. But in Kaduna the lockdown was harsher in that the people were forced to obey the safety measures in the places where enforcement was at play. Equally, in Sokoto, the lockdown was loosely relaxed. As such people did perceive the government information in a different way.

Recommendations

The paper offers the following recommendations

- (1) The government should cater for the wellbeing of the masses so that they would quickly embrace its information on health matters
- (2) The public need to recognize and observe all health-related information and shun any preconceived notion of downplaying it.
- (3) The government should commit itself to seeing that people's yearnings and aspirations, as this make people develop confidence in it and accept any information passed by government ,
- (4) Public need to adequately informed on health matters through mass media; be it printed or electronic

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