



## FUW CENTRE FOR RESEARCH JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES (FUWCRJH)



### Exploring the Role of the Media in Health Communication Strategies for the Management of Epidemics and Pandemics in Awka, Anambra State

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#### Abstract

This article examines media's role in health communication strategies for the management of epidemics and pandemics in Awka, Anambra State. The study explores the challenges of effective health communication strategies in the management of epidemics and pandemics in Awka, determines the benefits of health communication strategies for management of epidemics and pandemics in Awka, Anambra State. This study is anchored on the Attitude Change Theory which aims to affect behaviour of the people as regards health communication approach; health promotion supports personal and society development by providing information which improves health and enhance wellbeing. The study adopts the survey research method alongside simple random sampling technique to select the sample population within Awka metropolis. The sample size used was 400 to elicit responses from the respondents within Awka city. Findings revealed that some of the strategies adopted by the health educator include: health campaign, newspaper/journals, bill board, and radio / television and social/internet media. The study also identifies benefits of health communication which include increasing audiences' knowledge and awareness on health related issues. It further revealed barriers to effective health communication such as low health literacy and poor communication. The study concludes that in Nigeria, health communication has become an essential and effective technique for management and control of epidemics and pandemics. Hence, the paper recommended that to enhance the effectiveness of health communication as a viable tool in the control and prevention of epidemics and pandemics in the State, the multi-channel communication approaches should be strengthened. This will involve utilizing a combination of traditional and digital communication channels to reach a broader audience and ensure the dissemination of accurate and timely information.

**Keywords:** Health Communication, Mass Media, Management, Epidemics, Pandemics, Strategies

## Introduction

The goal of mass media health campaigns is to convey messages that inform, influence, and persuade target audiences' attitudes toward changing or upholding healthy behaviors in a direct or indirect manner (Ogbodo et al, 2020). Although there are several ways to deliver the messages, the focus of this study is to explore health communication strategies in Anambra State. To limit or stop the spread and transmission of COVID-19, the World Health

Organization (WHO), the Nigerian Center for Disease Control (NCDC), and other related health agencies released a variety of procedures and guidelines. According to Ayekale (2010), communication is a two-way interactive activity that entails the exchange of thoughts and experiences. It is the essential lubricant that turns human relationships into a machine. The creation and sharing of health information is the focus of health communication. It is centered on the mass media's distribution of health information to specific audiences (Nwakpu et al, 2020). A subset of communication known as "health

communication" focuses on topics related to health, including disease prevention, health promotion, healthcare policy, and the business of healthcare. It also aims to improve community members' quality of life and general health (Healthy people, 2010). This suggests that there is a higher percentage of creating and influencing public policy through health communication, as well as advocating for behavior change.

In addition, Communication creates meaning to any information or message given. Health communication is transferring or giving information, persuading, influencing or warning clients/patients about risky behaviour. According to Achalu (2010), Health communication is an art and technique of informing influencing and motivating individual or groups about important health issues. He further observed that in Health communication encompasses the study and use of communication strategies to inform and influence Individual and community decisions that enhance health. Health communication strategies are those plans adopted by the health educator/giver to inform and influence people to bring about behavioural change (knowledge, attitude) The ability of the health educator to efficiently implement these plans paves way to healthy life as miscommunication gives rise to risky behavior (Insel & Roth, 2014).

Mass media outlets are renowned for dispelling myths, rumors, and misinformation that are inherent to rural areas. They also have the power to induce and promote the adoption of the knowledge, abilities, and practices that rural residents need to adopt in order to improve their health-related behaviors. When it comes to access and participation,

the mass media ensured motivation and general mobilization and helped to create awareness towards achieving the set rural development objective (Owolabi et al, 2016). The adoption of mass media channels in rural health messaging has enabled literacy barriers to be crossed and distances to be eliminated. Mass media can intervene in changing health behaviors at times of health risk by raising public awareness and encouraging preventative and remedial measures (Oparaugo & Salihu, 2020). In order to encourage the learning of appropriate health behavior and the modification of health attitudes and values, mass media are crucial to health messaging at all levels. This is especially true for rural residents whose health practices have been deeply ingrained with myths, superstitions, and misinformation.

Similarly, Nwasum (2022) media campaigns, especially radio campaigns, are used to change the public's health-related behaviors and attitudes; the underlying idea is that during a health emergency such as the COVID-19 epidemic, the media must provide the public with timely and important information. Media campaigns on public health emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ebola outbreak, have been shown to have a modest impact on health behavior and to aid in disease prevention, example, during the Ebola outbreak, the public's knowledge of the disease and the adoption of preventive measures were affected by the media.

## Statement of the Problem

Despite increased health communication strategies in the control and prevention of epidemics and pandemics in Nigeria, a lot of persons are

not fully aware of the challenges of a pandemic. Despite the widespread information about the global pandemics, there is a strong lack of awareness in some parts of the State. The role of health communication for public health development cannot be overemphasized as it remains a very important instrument for health campaigns strategies geared toward behaviour change.

Several scholars such Nnamdi (2019) and Nkanunye & Obiechina (2017) pointed out the various health communication campaigns strategies have been effectively utilized in Nigeria to promote healthy lifestyle, population control and management of epidemics and pandemics. Health communication emphasizes societal responsibility for improved health conditions; educating the population about risky behaviors, vulnerability, prevention and treatment of some diseases. Communication thus creates awareness, increases knowledge, builds approval, and encourages healthy attitudes and behaviors. Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) motivates the adoption and sustenance of healthy behaviors and lifestyle. An intervention strategies must therefore be clear about whose behavior is intended to be influenced, which aspects of behavior are targeted for change and the best communication strategies for achieving these goals.

A lot of factors have been outlined by various scholars as the reasons health communication and management of epidemics and pandemics in Nigeria. Besides, it has been observed that there is inadequate literature on health communication strategies for the management of epidemics and pandemics in Nigeria. In order to bridge this gap in

knowledge and extend the frontiers of empirical discussions, this study is designed to assess or examine the health risk communication strategies for the management of epidemics and pandemics in Awka, Anambra State by identifying those health communication strategies for the control or management of epidemics and pandemics in Awka, Anambra State through the identified objectives below.

## **Objectives of the Study**

The study is guided by the following objectives.

1. Find out the health communication strategies adopted for the management of epidemics and pandemic in Awka
2. Examine the challenges of health communication strategies for the management of epidemics in Awka
3. Determine benefits of health communication strategies for the control of epidemics in Awka.

## **Conceptual Clarification**

### **Concept of Health Communication**

Health communication is an area of study that examines how the use of different communication strategies can keep people informed about their health and influence their behavior so they can live healthier lives. It draws from many theories and disciplines, including social cognitive and communication theories, marketing, and public relations. Public health experts recognize health communication as vital to public health programs that address disease prevention, health promotion, and quality of life. It can make important contributions to promote and improve the health of individuals, communities, and society (Finset et al, 2020).

Scholars in the field of health communication such as Nnamdi (2019) aver that the same way Information Communication and Technology (ICT) are revolutionizing the way that information is distributed in our daily lives, numerous new health technology frontiers are also being discovered and breaking ground. Undoubtedly, one of the most significant aspects of our society today is healthcare. Healthcare progress is made possible by advancements in fresh research, knowledge gained, and illness treatments, cures, and prevention. It is stated that the use of ICT in health communication is essential to providing appropriate, affordable, and customized medical treatment. He further observes that people believe in the internet health information for quality of information to manage epidemics and pandemics in their communities. This demonstrates that people will utilize social media and online communities as a platform to increase their health-related knowledge and spread health-related information. In addition, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are among those that have ushered in a new era in health communication appears to be effective in managing epidemics in their localities.

According to Finset et al (2020), health communication is an essential part of healthcare provision and effective information delivery is critical for related agencies and health professionals to prevent the spread of diseases. In the era of rapidly disseminating information, it is crucial that scientists and healthcare providers can seamlessly communicate accurate health messages.<sup>1</sup> At the individual level, communication is vital to establishing a trustful relationship between patients and providers.<sup>4</sup> Studies have

shown that inadequate medical care communication is a leading cause of preventable death and is responsible for a significant amount of mortality. However, despite numerous communication and strategic evaluation methods, the accuracy or veracity of presented health information is increasingly being challenged in healthcare fields.<sup>4</sup> Information from health professionals is undermined by other sources despite established evidence for epidemic and pandemic control across resource-diverse countries (Nazir et al, 2020). To promote and sustain healthy behaviour, communication is very important. Health communication serves as the medium that is used to create awareness to the individual group and communicate on health related issues. Health communication provides knowledge, skills and capacity to assist individuals, groups and communicate in other health needs (Nnamdi, 2019).

### Concept of Mass Media

The mass media are a "technical, psychological, and organized process of communication designed to reach and influence large number of people simultaneously without the necessity of personal contact," according to Ugande (2012, p. 109). All mechanical or technological tools used by a source to disseminate messages to a diverse and heterogeneous audience at the same time are considered mass media (Odorume, 2015). Therefore, it is possible to view mass media as a technical conduit for the simultaneous dissemination of public and private health messages to sizable, diverse, and anonymous audiences. They make up a range of avenues by which mass communication occurs. Radio, television, print magazines, movies, books, and audio recordings are examples of mass media

channels. They are set apart from new media, which includes real-time interactive features, including the internet, video games, and iPhone. Even if mass media outlets are effective means of communicating in rural areas, not all of them can further the objectives of rural development. This is a result of the majority of the networks' unreal-friendly features.

## **Review of Related Literature**

### **Health Communication Strategies in Nigeria**

Several scholars such as Nnamdi, (2019) and Nkanunye & Obiechina (2017) aver that some health communication strategies include campaigns, entertainment advocacy, media advocacy, new technologies and inter personal communication. Health communication campaign directly provides information to people who are expected to adopt or change to a healthier behaviour. Campaign achieves large audience and audience population to maintain and improve their health status. They also pointed out the health communication strategies to include; Radio, Televisions, Newspaper, Flyers, Brochure, Internet and Social Media. Other effective Health information communication strategies include; use of Research Based Strategies. In this, the peoples' cultures, setting and languages are given priorities.

Furthermore, development of materials such as brochures, bill board radio commercials, television broadcast, newspaper articles, public service announcement, newsletters, pamphlets, videos, digital tools, case studies, group discussions health fairs, field trips and workshops helps to increase, influence social norms, increase availability of

support or improve their health condition (Nnamdi, 2019).

Similarly, Nkanunye & Obiechina (2017) pointed out that health communication strategies are classified under traditional/rural based communication and broadcast media (radio/television).

#### **1. Traditional and rural based Communication**

According to Nkanunye & Obiechina (2017), it is however, important to note that some of these rural communities have evolved in terms of embracing certain aspect of modern media for community mobilization for health campaign. Example is children immunization, political sensitization and others. Examples of traditional communication are town crier, age grade meetings and many more.

**Town crier:** It is a form of communication that had transcended generation of rural dwellers. The town crier is a significant village "broad caster" who summons villagers or decision maker on issues concerning the community." Even in the modern age town crier still plays a pivot role in health advocacy and sensitization (Nnamdi, 2019).

#### **2. Broadcast Media tools (Radio and television) Strategy**

According to Nkanunye & Obiechina (2017), broadcast media is used to capture wide audience within a defined time frame. Broadcasting is transmission of audio and video messages via electro-magnetic waves to reach millions of homes almost the same time.

**Radio broadcast:** Radio programmers are less expensive than most television program and so a great choice for low cost budget. Large number of audiences turns and listens to their radios every day. These are:



**(a) Television:** Television has a wide geographic coverage and broad audience reach. It records success for promoting health campaign and health advocacy messages. Television programmes are always very expensive especially for those considering a low cost campaign, no immediate feedback especially with news programmes or documentaries, because they are always pre-recorded and there is no way to determine how the larger population or audience will absorb the message

**(b) Bill boards/posters:** They cover a great population. They serve as a great medium to cover health message. Messages on bill boards/posters give audience the opportunity to reach target audience on the move.

**(c) Social media/internet:** The internet has brought us several new mainstream communication tools and changed the communication landscape. It is described as the communication revolution internet has saved us time in creation and development of messages. Examples are e-mail, SMS, instant messaging (yahoo, MSN messages), video conferencing, face book, whatsapp, twitter among others (Nnamdi, 2019).

**(d) Public service announcement (news programmes):** Most health communication are aired during prime time news programmes. In this way, the campaign about health communication gets to the target audience within stipulated time. This applies to both television and radio stations. Example is the breaking news about the Monkey pox out- breaks in Bayelsa state and suspected persons on Rivers state.

## Challenges of Health Communication Strategy

Several authorities such as Nkanunye & Obiechina (2017) have identified some factors responsible for barriers in effective health communication strategy which includes:

**(a) Poor Research:** The developing countries find it difficult to carry out research. Therefore, to design, develop and implement health programmes becomes difficult. Some barriers of health communication as identified by the aforementioned scholars, includes: Wrong person sending messages. Lack of receivers. Unclear messages. Inappropriate channel. Inadequate feedback and noise distorting the message

**(b) Poor Communication:** Hospitals are made up of different ethnic groups with socio-cultural difference, languages, religion and economic difference thus affect communication link between the health workers and the communities.

**(c) Low health literacy:** There may be difficulty in understanding the message hence; literature should be used for the impartation of knowledge.

**(d) Inadequate Knowledge on Social Media platforms:** In ability to operate social media tools to access information on safety tips to health communication still remains a challenge in some rural communities where members of the public are to be familiar with modern communication gadget to know what is happening in the society.

**(e) Poor research :** The developing countries find it difficult to carry out research. Therefore, to design, develop and implement health programmes becomes difficult. Some

barriers of health communication as identified by Nkanunye & Obiechina (2017) include:

- Lack of receivers.
  - Unclear messages
  - In appropriate channel.
  - Inadequate feedback and noise distorting the message
  - Wrong person sending messages
- (f) **Poor Communication Link:** Hospitals are made up of different ethnic groups with socio-cultural difference, languages, religion and economic difference thus affect communication link between the health workers and the communities.
- (g) **Low health literacy:** There may be difficulty in understanding the message hence; literature should be used for the impartation of knowledge.

### Benefits of Health Communication in Nigeria

According to Nkanunye & Obiechina (2017), health communication promotes and maintains healthy behavior. They went on to say that efficient health communication is the key to achieving a high evaluation of the healthcare system. Health communication uses behaviour change communication initiatives to raise family planning awareness, encourage people to seek out services, and assist them in effectively using the contraceptive methods of their choice. However Centre for Disease Control stated that health communication increases audience knowledge and awareness of any health related issues.

Also, behaviours and attitude are influenced towards health issues. Health communication demonstrates the benefits of behaviour changes to public health outcomes. It advocates a position on a health issues or policy. Health communication causes increase demand and support for health services as well

as removal of misconception on health related issues (Su et al, 2021)

### Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Attitude Change Theory. The theory according to Baran and Davis (2012) was developed in the 1940s during World War II. This theory emphasizes that there are some pre-existing attitudes, which have to be changed for a selective message to be able to have effect on an audience. It further explains that these pre-existing attitudes can be an obstacle to effective dissemination of a desired message. According to the theory, in order for a change to happen, the target audience must be appropriately targeted and emotional and intellectual communication techniques must be developed to persuade them. A person's view can, however, be changed if the message only fulfills his or her expectations, if it is associated with an individual he looks up to, or if it is certain to be helpful to him (Wood, 2000).

This approach also explained the three bases for changing one's attitude: internalization, identification, and compliance. The various stages of attitude change are illustrated by these three procedures (Wood, 2000). In a nutshell, this theory demonstrates that an intellectually and emotionally compelling approach is required to modify an individual's preexisting attitudes or mental predispositions or to direct them toward a specific cause (Baran & Davis, 2012).

Relating the theory to this study, for a positive attitude and effective health communication campaign on the control and prevention of an epidemics or pandemics to take place, there must be emotional, physical and psychological appeal in the campaign messages. Since the attitude change theory is a psychological

framework that explains how people's attitudes towards a particular issue or behavior can be influenced and changed overtime, the theory can be applied to understand the factors that influence people's attitudes towards a pandemics or epidemics, which is one of the most effective ways of preventing any form of pandemics in the State. Research has shown that hesitancy in taking preventive measures is a common phenomenon in Nigeria, with many people expressing doubts and concerns about the safety and efficacy of global pandemics. Attitude change theory suggests that these attitudes can be modified through persuasive communication that addresses people's beliefs, values and emotions.

## Research Design

The study adopted the survey research method which is suitable for examining people's perception and opinion towards issues (Asemah & Okpanachi, 2017). The population of study comprised residents of Awka metropolis. The population of Awka metropolis according to National Population Commission report is

estimated at 654,183 people. To get a truly representative sample, a simple random sampling technique was used to select the sample population from each area within Awka metropolis where data was elicited for the study. A total of eighty one (81) participants both male and female were drawn from the five (5) communities making it four hundred and five (405) respondents drawn from five (5) communities which made up the sample size for the study. The research instrument was the structured questionnaire designed to capture all relevant information using a variety of question types. The questionnaire items were constructed based on the information gathered from the review of related literature and objectives of the study. It contained fifteen (15) questions content validated by experts in the field of mass communication. A total of 405 copies of the questionnaires were distributed to the participants who made up the sample population. A total of four hundred (400) questionnaires duly completed were, therefore, analyzed using frequency, tables and percentages. The study adopted a Likert modified five (5) point response scale.

## Section A: Demographic Data

**Table 1: Age of Respondents**

Age	Frequency	%
18-24	100	25
25-34	108	27
35-44	92	23
45-54	72	18
55 above	28	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>

Sex	Frequency	%
Male	220	55
Female	180	45
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>

### Occupation Frequency %

Students	46	11.5
Employed	77	19.25
Self employed	65	16.25
Unemployed	101	25.25
Business	39	9.75
Farmer	64	16
Others	8	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Study, 2024*

Table 1 above showed the respondents age bracket, findings revealed that 100 (25.0%) of the respondents were

between 18-24 years of age, 108 (27%) were between ages 25-34, 92 (23.0%) were between 35-44 years of age, 72 (18.0%) respondents were between ages 45-54 while 28 (7%) were between 55 years and



above. The findings therefore implied that respondents were old enough to provide valuable responses on the subject matter. Also from the table, it is evident that the dominant gender among the respondents was male, with 55.0% (220) while 45.0% (180) were female. Besides, the table further indicate that unemployed with 101(25.25%) were the highest respondents on health communication strategy

1. Town crier, age grade village meetings and many more are traditional and rural based health communication strategies.

SA=(32.0%) 159

A=(39.8%) 12

N=(3.0%) 72

D=(18.0%) 29

SD= (7.2%) 19

2. New technologies communication aids health communication strategies.

SA=(29.3%)174

A=(43.5%) 11

N=(2.8%) 63

D=(15.8%) 35

SD=(8.8%)

3. Radio, television, newspaper pamphlets facilitates health communication strategies

SA=(42.0%) 09

A=(2.3%) 67

Table 2 above presents the responses of respondents on health communication strategy. 187(71) affirm that town crier, age grade village meetings and many more are traditional and rural based health communication strategies. 291(72%) strongly hold that new technologies and inter personal communication aids health communication strategies. 289(72.3%) also supports the claim that radio, television, newspaper pamphlets facilitates health communication strategies.

Also, 213(53.3%) affirm that most health communication contents on social

followed by employed respondents with 77(19.25%), self-employed had 65(16.25), students had 46(11.5%), business had 39(9.75%) while farmers and others had 64(16) and 8(2%) respectively.

## SECTION B: Thematic Information

Table 2: Showing health communication strategies adopted for the management of epidemics and pandemic in Awka

N(16.8%) 35

D(8.8%)

SD=

4. Most health communication contents on social media are false

SA=(19.0%) 96

A=(24.0%) 15

N=(3.8%) 118

D(29.5%) 95

SD=(23.8%)

5. Videos, digital tools, group discussions, health fairs, field trips and workshops improve health condition

SA=(22.3%)108

A=(27.0%) 11

N=(2.8%) 101

D=(25.3%) 91

(22.8%)

*Source: Field Survey, 2024*

media are false and unreliable. 197(49.3%) agree that videos, digital tools, group discussions, health fairs, field trips and workshops improve health condition.

Therefore, the above table clearly shows that both the mass media and traditional based strategies actually improved health communication strategies among residents of Awka against epidemics and pandemics.

Table 3: Showing the challenges of health communication strategies for the management of epidemics in Awka

### Challenges of health communication strategies includes:

#### 1. Poor communication

SA= (32.0%) 159

A= (39.8%) 12

N= (3.0%) 72

D= (18.0%) 29

SD= (7.2%)

#### 2. Inadequate knowledge on social media platforms

SA= (29.3%) 174

A= (43.5%) 11

N= (2.8%) 63

D= (15.8%) 35

SD= (8.8%)

#### 3. Poor research attitude

SA=(30.3%) 168

A=(42.0%) 09

N(2.3%) 67

D(16.8%) 35

SD (8.8%)

#### 4. Inadequate feedback

SA= (19.0%) 96

A= (24.0%) 15

N= (3.8%) 118

D= (29.5%) 95

SD= (23.8%)

#### 5. Wrong person sending messages

SA= (22.3%) 108

A= (27.0%) 11

N = (2.8%) 101

D = (25.3%) 91

SD= (22.8%)

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 3 above presents respondent's views on the challenges of health communication among residents of Awka. 350(87.6%) affirm that poor communication and low health literacy were the most impediment to health communication on epidemics. 335 (83.8%) followed by inadequate knowledge on social media platforms relating to health communication. 364(91%) strongly affirm that poor research attitude constitute a major challenge to health communication campaigns. Similarly, 332(83.1%) respondents revealed that inadequate feedback and noise distorting the message

on epidemics and pandemics serves as impediment to information flow. Besides, wrong person such as untrained health personnel sending messages also revealed by the respondents as a barrier to effective information on epidemics and pandemics in the State.

Therefore, the findings shows that the public perceived that majority of the respondents engaged on social media platforms through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok.

Table 4: Showing benefits of health communication strategies for the control of epidemics in Awka

### Benefits of health communication strategies for the control of epidemics in Awka

S/N	Question Item	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	It promotes and maintains healthy behaviours	128 (32.0%)	159 (39.8%)	12 (3.0%)	72 (18.0%)	29 (7.2%)
2	It demonstrates the benefits of behaviour changes to public health outcomes	117 (29.3%)	174 (43.5%)	11 (2.8%)	63 (15.8%)	35 (8.8%)
3	It increases audience knowledge and awareness on epidemics and pandemics	121 (30.3%)	168 (42.0%)	09 (2.3%)	67 (16.8%)	35 (8.8%)
4	It increases demand and support for health services	76 (19.0%)	96 (24.0%)	15 (3.8%)	118 (29.5%)	95 (23.8%)
5	Exposure to mass media content on health communication widens scope of epidemics	89 (22.3%)	108 (27.0%)	11 (2.8%)	101 (25.3%)	91 (22.8%)

Table 4 above presents the responses of the audience on the benefits of effective health communication strategies in Awka. 187(71) affirm that it promotes and maintain healthy behaviours among residents of Awka, Anambra State. 291(72%) strongly hold that it demonstrates the benefits of behaviour changes to public health outcomes on epidemics and pandemics in the State. 289(72.3%) also supports the claim that it increases audience knowledge and awareness on epidemics and pandemics.

Also, 213(53.3%) affirm that it one of the benefits of health communication increases demand and support for health services. 197(49.3%) agree that exposure to mass media contents on health communication have widen the scope of epidemics happenings in the State. Therefore, the above table clearly shows that effective health communication strategies are significant in keeping the audience informed and abreast on epidemics or any upsurge of pandemics in the State.

## Discussion of Findings

The study addresses three objectives centered on health communication strategies among residents of Awka metropolis in Anambra State.

**Objective One:** Find out the health communication strategies adopted for the management of epidemics and pandemic in Awka, Anambra State. Findings revealed that health communication strategies

include campaigns, entertainment advocacy, media advocacy, and new technologies and inter personal communication. Health communication campaign directly provides information to

people who are expected to adopt or change to a healthier behavior. The findings further showed that the most effective health communication strategies to include; radio, televisions, newspaper, flyers, brochure, internet and social media. This finding is in agreement with Nkanunye & Obiechina (2017) who pointed out that the most effective campaign strategies on health communication is through the mass media as revealed above. The study appeared to be significant as the manner in which the health communication strategies were efficient and reliable in persuading and informing the audience of precautionary measures against epidemics and pandemics in the State.

**Objective Two:** This sought to examine the challenges of health communication strategies for the management of epidemics in Awka. Findings revealed that poor research, poor communication links, low health literacy and inadequate knowledge on mass media campaign contents on health related issues constitute impediments to health communication information flow. It found that 364(91%) strongly affirm that the aforementioned factors impedes health issues progress. This finding is consistent with previous studies of (Nkanunye & Obiechina, 2017). This finding is in line with the views of Nnamdi (2019) and Finset et al (2020) who pointed out that hospitals are made up of different ethnic groups with socio-cultural difference, languages, religion and economic difference thus affect communication link between the health workers and the communities. It further revealed that users visit and use social media platforms on a continuous basis as a result of the numerous messages that are shared with them by either their direct friends or other members of a networked group that they are involved in to access

information on healthy lifestyle of the members of the public.

**Objective Three:** This sought to determine benefits of health communication strategies for the control of epidemics in Awka. The findings indicated that respondents opined that health communication uses behavior change communication initiatives to raise family planning awareness, encourage people to seek out services, and assist them in effectively using the contraceptive methods of their choice and other means to manage epidemics or pandemics in the State. This finding aligns with the views of Nkanunye & Obiechina (2017) who observed that health communication promotes and maintains healthy behaviour. They further contended that efficient health communication is the key to achieving a high evaluation of the healthcare system. The study also revealed that behaviours and attitude are influenced towards health issues which further demonstrate the benefits of behaviour changes to public health outcomes as regards health communication strategies to manage epidemics and pandemics in the State. This finding further agree with Su et al (2021) who submitted that health communication causes increase demand and support for health services as well as removal of misconception on health related issues to control or manage the outbreak of a pandemic or manage an epidemics in the State.

This revelation also aligns with the Attitude Change Theory submitted by Barran and Davis (2012) which holds that for a positive attitude and effective health communication campaign on the control and prevention of an epidemics or pandemics to take place, there must be emotional, physical and psychological appeal in the campaign messages. Since the

attitude change theory is a psychological framework that explains how people's attitudes towards a particular issue or behaviour can be influenced and changed overtime, the theory can be applied to understand the factors that influence people's attitudes towards a pandemics or epidemics, which is one of the most effective ways of preventing any form of pandemics in the State. Therefore, it can be deduce that the health communication strategies were significant and reliable in shaping people's opinion on the preventive measures against an epidemics or pandemics in the State.

## Conclusion

In Nigeria, health communication has become an essential and effective technique for management and control of epidemics and pandemics. Pandemics pose serious problems for the nation because of its high prevalence, severity, and effects on general health. Nonetheless, Nigeria has the chance to address these issues and significantly reduce the incidence of epidemics or pandemics by implementing efficient communication techniques.

The promotion of health and avoidance of sickness are two things that health communication helps with. It is pertinent to many situations, particularly those involving people's personal and communal well-being. Health communication inspires people to take action, encourages a healthy lifestyle, prevents diseases, and enhances health by discouraging harmful behaviours like substance abuse (alcohol and cigarettes), upholds environmental and personal hygiene, and cultivates wholesome sexual relationships. These will enhance wellbeing and advance health.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- To enhance the effectiveness of health communication as a viable tool in the control and prevention of epidemics and pandemics in Nigeria, the multi-channel communication approaches should be strengthened. This will involve utilizing a combination of traditional and digital communication channels to reach a broader audience and ensure the dissemination of accurate and timely information.
- Residents of Awka should explore the health communication strategies such as broadcast media; radio, television, social media, billboard etc to facilitate the management of any epidemics and pandemics in the State.
- It is crucial to adapt health communication messages to certain regional and cultural contexts in Nigeria due to the country's numerous cultures, languages, and geographical variances. This will guarantee that the messages are clear, relatable to the intended audience, and more likely to result in a change in behavior.

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