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Evaluation of Communication Strategies by the National Orientation Agency in the Fight against Covid-19 Vaccine Resistance in Jalingo Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study aims to unravel the communication strategies used by the national orientation agency in the fight against covid-19 vaccine resistance. The two-step flow theory was adopted to provide a basis for analysis for the study. A descriptive survey method was adopted as the research method. Simple random sampling was used to sample respondents from the study area. This involved the use of balloting. Data obtained from the respondents, in this regard, was collected through the instrument of a questionnaire. The analysis of the data for the study was done quantitatively. The finding reveals that people in Jalingo, the study's focus area, have a high level of awareness about the Covid-19 vaccination. The findings also show that the NOA employed various communication approaches, including advertising to people at work places or markets, holding town hall meetings with people, reaching people through traditional or religious leaders and other stakeholders, using or sponsoring folk music, sponsoring secular music, persuading people through corporate advertising or public service announcements, and holding press conferences, among others. The study concludes that effective communication plays a vital role in dispelling misinformation, building trust, and promoting vaccine acceptance among the population. It therefore recommends, among others, continuing to leverage multiple communication approaches, such as advertising in workplaces and markets, town hall meetings, engagement with traditional and religious leaders and stakeholders, sponsorship of folk and secular music, corporate advertising, public service announcements, and press conferences.

Keywords: Communication Strategies, National Orientation Agency, Covid-19 Vaccine Resistance

Introduction

In the wake of the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, getting credible information has been a challenge world over (Amino, 2020). This has been complicated further by the fact that this strain of virus is new and even scientists and health professionals are struggling to understand it, including its impact. On February 2nd, 2020, the World Health Organization described a “massive infodemic”, indicating that an over-

abundance of reported information, both accurate and false about COVID-19 was

making it difficult for people to find trustworthy sources of information and reliable guidance on how to prevent catching and spreading the virus (Duncan, 2020).

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19, a lot of news and misinformation emerged regarding the origin, scale and various other issues about the disease. Some information in online sources claimed that the virus was a

biological weapon with a patented vaccine (Duncan, 2020), others claimed it was a population control scheme. Before the first case was reported in Africa, there was misleading information that African genetics was resistant to the coronavirus. This was also after news spread on social media that a Cameroonian student in China had been completely cured of the virus (Vincent, 2020). In the same month, there were misleading information on untested cures and treatments in Nigeria on platforms such as WhatsApp.

Texts, images, audio-visual recordings, and all sorts of other media innovations have been created and disseminated all over the world on COVID-19 pandemic. Since the media, especially social media platforms play supposedly a neutral political role; they are accessible to users without discrimination in addition to being a lure and target for certain/targeted constituencies. In an article on lessons Italians have learnt in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic by the BBC, Coughlan (2020) indicates that fake news posed a huge social challenge. As there was a huge spread of hoaxes, false cures and conspiracy theories which were being spread on WhatsApp groups. Coughlan (2020) adds that there was an instinct to spread news without verifying it which created panic and lowered the level of trust. It is clear that the spread of fake news and misinformation had the potential to disrupt authentic public health advice and even more difficult to counter the fake information after it began to spread.

Despite all these downsides of digital media, studies have shown that they are an important part of personal and professional lives of billions of people around the world. A growing number of

online users prefer to read their Facebook and Twitter feeds for news, information, and even for health purposes. In fact, many get their news and other information solely through what their friends or news agencies they follow choose to post on social media. This has made the use and popularity of social media to throw open the doors of health-related events. But the question is, even as the social media took the lead in the spread of information about coronavirus especially in Nigeria, how did it succeed in changing people's negative perception about the disease? Studies by Chiakaan and Orounye (2021) and other have shown that many Nigerians did not believe in the existence of Covid19. Chaikaan and Orounye (2021) and Lucas et al. (2020) have still shown that the misinformation people had about the pandemic has not subsided as it is trailing the vaccine which has been manufactured to prevent contracting or reducing the chances of people contracting and spreading the disease. Records from the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) have shown that since the introduction of the Covid19 vaccine, only 37 percent of Nigerians population has been vaccinated. Majority if the Nigerians appeared to be resisting the vaccine.

In addition, Nwuko (2022) in support of the ongoing discourse declares: misinformation like that go to the Nigerian social media and that continued to stir up panic about the virus even before the arrival of the vaccines in Nigeria, the false assumption that hydroxy chloroquine and salt water bath could provide a solution was also another concrete bullshit of an information that was widely spread by people, as indeed, fake news spread like wildfire

Nigerians, as a result of several factors fundamentally caused by misinformation about the disease, are not willing to take themselves to health centres to be vaccinated against Covid19. Lamenting this situation, Nwuko (2022) further note that the primary health centre which happened to be a vaccine point close to my vicinity is experiencing a low turn up for vaccination because of misinformation.

Since it is evidently clear that there is Covid19 vaccine hesitancy, in Nigeria, it is important for the government to stand up with serious campaigns aimed at changing people's attitude towards the disease. The government, no doubt, has been making efforts towards this direction. The National Orientation Agency which has been purposely set up by the government to be informing, persuading and mobilizing Nigerians towards accepting government policies for programmes for their successful execution, it is believed, has been aware of this challenge facing the Covid19 vaccine (Amino, 2020). What effort it is making in taking the challenge in what is not yet been known. This is the crux of this study. Specifically, the study is concerned with unraveling the communication strategies and tools used by NOA in the fight against Covid19 vaccine resistance in Taraba State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The major motive behind the establishment of the National Orientation Agency (NOA) by the federal government is to "raise awareness, provide timely and credible feedback, positively change attitudes, values, and behaviours accurately and adequately inform, and

sufficiently mobilise citizens to act in ways that promote peace, harmony, and national development" (Chiakaan & Tsafa, 2021 p.123). If NOA is established to use communication in changing the attitude of Nigerians towards policies or programmes that can improve their welfare, promote peace, and bring about development, as noted here, it becomes important to find out what the agency is doing to change the negative attitude of Nigerians against Covid19 vaccination.

Nigerians, no doubt, are resisting the vaccine available at health centres aimed at preventing them from contracting Covid19 and preventing spreading the disease at the same time. Similarly, Nwuko (2022) and many other researchers have attested to the low turn up of Nigerians at health centres for vaccination against Covid19. This situation means that the menace, if not checked, has the ability of resuscitating the disease in Nigeria. Since NOA exists as a body charged with the responsibility of informing, creating awareness, and persuading Nigerians towards accepting policies aimed at improving their welfare, this study becomes, necessary in order to unravel the communication strategies by the agency in this regard. This study, therefore, seeks to determine the communication approaches by the National Orientation Agency in the fight against Covid-19 vaccine resistance in Taraba State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Find out the extent to which people are awareness of the Covid19 vaccination in Taraba State;

2. Examine the communication strategies/tools adopted by NOA in the fight against Covid19 vaccine resistance in Taraba State, Nigeria;
3. Determine the impact of the communication strategies/tools by NOA on the attitude of people of Taraba State towards Covid19 vaccination.

Literature Review

Communication Strategies as a Concept

Communication as a word is used every day across different fields of life. The word “communication” has a rich and complex history. It first appeared in the English language in the fourteenth century, taken from the Latin word “communicare”, which meant to impart, share or make common (Okunna & Omenugha, 2012). However, Ajala (1992) cited in Chiakaan and Ahmad (2014) opined that etymologists trace the origin of communication to the Latin prefix “communis”, a word that shares same with family, with “communism” and “commune” which simply means “in common”. Nevertheless, the term communication has attracted a plethora of definitions from various authors.

Mefalopulos (2008) defined communication as the transmitting of information and messages from a source to a receiver. O'Reilly and Pondy (1979) cited in Owusu (2014) who defined communication as the sharing of information between two or more individuals or groups to reach a common understanding. Warnock (2007) introduced a new dimension by viewing communication as the ability to give

information, to make one's voice heard and to participate in discussion and debate. Keyton (2011) also viewed communication as the process of transmitting information and common understanding from one person to another. Communication has been widely accepted by scholars and academics as the life blood of an organization because communication is needed for exchanging information, exchanging opinions, making plans and proposals, reaching agreement, executing decisions, sending and fulfilling orders and conducting sales.

The Government Communication Service (2014) defined a communication strategy as a single, coherent narrative that describes a communication solution to a problem or bundle of problems. Working at a strategic level, it sets out: the nature of the problem or challenge, the key considerations in addressing it, the choices that have been made, the key drivers of those decisions and the resources required. According to Spacey (2015) communication strategy is a plan to achieve communication objectives. Kibe (2014) concurred that communication strategy articulates, explains and promotes a vision and a set of well-defined goals. It creates a consistent, unified “voice” that links diverse activities and goals in a way that appeals to your partners, or stakeholders.

Based on the definitions above, it can be deduce that Communication strategies are plans for communicating information related to a specific issue, event, situation, or audience. Communication strategies serve as the blueprints for communicating with the public, stakeholders, or even colleagues. Communications strategy is therefore, primarily a guiding document such that

while communications objectives might change over time, its guiding principles will remain the same (Hambrick & Fredrickson, 2001). However, communication strategy links communication to the organization's mission, vision and values (Ekwueme & Gever, 2015). In this regards, communication strategies should be perceived as the communication principles, approaches or gimmicks which are employed by an organization or agency in achieving its goals. Organization, based on this, does not apply a single communication strategy; it has many and different approaches which it applies in communicating to its publics, creating awareness about its operations and so on. Underscoring the importance of communication to an organization, Chiakaan (2016) in appreciation of Kechku (2006) submission, states that no organization that is after goal-attainment underrates communication.

Causes of Covid19 Vaccine Resistance in Nigeria

The WHO has stated that one of the greatest threats to global health is the risk of vaccine hesitancy (Dhama et al., 2021). To build herd immunity against COVID-19, at least 70 percent of the population must be vaccinated. As the COVID-19 situation changes frequently, so does the perception of COVID-19. The COVID-19 vaccine was launched by Pfizer after the company announced in November 2020 that the vaccine was 95% effective in preventing the disease (Badiani et al, 2020). As reports of adverse effects of the Pfizer vaccine flooded social media platforms, people became more skeptical of the COVID-19 vaccine. Given the increase in information and

misinformation about vaccination, it was important to acknowledge people's concerns and aggressively target vaccine-shy populations with campaigns that emphasized risk-benefit analysis to build trust and overcome fear (Lentzen, 2022). Importantly, the COVID-19 vaccine acceptance studies were conducted primarily prior to vaccine introduction. The federal government of Nigeria has launched campaigns through various media platforms to promote acceptance (Mondal et al., 2021).

Several study conducted by different scholars such as Lazarus et al. (2021), Fisher et al. (2020) and Popa et al. (2020) argued that COVID-19 vaccines were rejected because of mistrust in their efficacy and lack of confidence in the health care system, the government, and the vaccine manufacturers. Moreover, those who believed in sociopolitical conservatism were more likely to oppose the COVID-19 vaccines. On the other hand, those who trusted their (institutional) health care system and the government were more willing to accept the vaccine (Lazarus et al., 2021). The content and/or type of COVID-19 vaccine had previously influenced its acceptance or rejection. In particular, the use of different types of COVID-19 vaccines in countries with different safety profiles has led to public rejection (Dubé & MacDonald, 2020). However, it could be argued that people are more likely to accept vaccines if competent authorities increase their confidence in the safety and efficacy of vaccines by providing them with adequate information in a language they understand.

Certain characteristics of the COVID-19 vaccine, such as efficacy, safety, side effects, and adverse effects,

influenced public opinion about acceptance or rejection. Some may have accepted the vaccine because of uncertainty about the outcome in case of COVID-19 infection (Al-Jayyousi et al., 2020). In addition, doubts about the technology used to produce COVID-19 vaccines, as well as fear about unforeseen adverse effects and their efficacy, had led to hesitation and rejection. The perception of premature usage of the vaccine because of questionable reliability and other vaccine-specific concerns may have contributed to the hesitancy and rejection (Akarsu et al., 2021).

In addition, those who fear that the COVID-19 vaccine could lead to infection and other health risks are likely to reject it (Alqudeimat et al., 2021). Because of inadequate education and myth-busting in public health campaigns, conspiracy theories, misinformation, and disinformation may have contributed to a reluctance to be vaccinated. Misconceptions or misinformation, such as conspiracy theories or general anti-vaccine beliefs, as well as rumors that vaccines might benefit people who produce the virus or that people might get COVID-19 from the vaccine, are known to affect the acceptance and distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine (Coustasse et al., 2021). Other factors, such as biased information about vaccination messages, inadequate health literacy or poor knowledge about vaccines, poor quality of vaccine components, and the belief that vaccines are intended to inject recipients with microchips or cause infertility also contribute to hesitancy about COVID-19 vaccines. Nigerian authorities may have failed to inform the public that the COVID-19 vaccines under development

will not contain microchips or tracking software.

According to Popa et al. (2020) and Puri et al. (2021) anti-vaccine messages disseminated via the Internet and traditional media channels could influence hesitation or rejection of COVID-19 vaccination. This is likely due to unchecked social media reporting and the unfettered operation of the Internet, where people promulgate stories that could harm social security and public health systems. In addition, a belief in conspiracy theories and reaction to new information is likely to influence acceptance or rejection of COVID-19 vaccines (Robles et al. 2021). The above factors indicate that vaccination refusal in Nigeria must be viewed as a multifaceted phenomenon that requires the implementation of interventions to promote vaccination rates.

Agreeing with the above submission, Fakule et al (2022) attested that there are socio-cultural factors that hindered and is still hindering the acceptance of Covid19 Vaccine. These include:

- **Religious Belief:** Many people in Nigeria rejected Covid19 vaccine because of their religious beliefs. Due to a variety forms of beliefs, especially as attached to Christianity and Islam. For instance, many people considered the outbreak of the disease as the resultant calamity of the abundant and uncontrollable sins of people against a supernatural being that in return punishes people with the outbreak of the disease. While some opined that the pandemic is one of the signs indicating the end of the universe. Other people also emphasized predestination, which

means a supernatural being created the whole universe with allotted time for happenings to manifest and the appropriate time has come for the universe to cease to exist for the Saints to be taken to another universe. The notion here is that the vaccine is ineffective to cure or curb the spread of the disease except that the Supreme Being willingly averts the pandemic. The convergence of these diverse but related beliefs by people is that the COVID-19 vaccine is not the antidote to curb the spread of the disease; hence, their refusal to be vaccinated.

Moreover, Fakule et al (2022) further revealed a link between some religious teachings and the erroneous belief that the introduction of the COVID-19 vaccine is an attempt to insert microchips into the body of the acceptor in fulfillment of the prophecy that people would receive a sign that enables the authorities to remotely control them. Also, people erroneously believe that the vaccine is a way to control their birth rate, which is against the doctrine of their religion.

- **Cultural factors:** The significance of culture in the acceptance of a newly introduced idea cannot be overemphasized. Therefore, the current study explored the influence of culture on the popularity of the COVID-19 vaccine. Cultural practices of people for their refusal to accept the vaccine. For instance, the popularity of trado-medical practices is observable in the region. Therefore, belief in the efficacy

of traditional medicines has affected the acceptance of COVID-19 that is imported from foreign countries among the residents of the region. Moreover, many believe that people in foreign countries are ethnocentric, and therefore, the producers of the vaccine in foreign lands might have the intention of using Africans as specimens to test the new vaccine.

- **Stigmatization:** People attested to the stigmatization of victims of diseases such as leprosy, measles or smallpox, chickenpox, and HIV/AIDS in the study location. The diseases whose victims are stigmatized vary among different ethnic groups. Before the advent of the novel coronavirus disease, victims of HIV/AIDS and leprosy in the study location mostly attracted stigmatization. On top of that, as a result of the rate at which coronavirus disease spreads, stigmatization attached to coronavirus disease is alarming, and the current study found that several people under this study (that are vaccine acceptors) are faced with stigmatization, mockery, and, on several occasions, discrimination from some of their peers.
- **Personal and family protections:** Personal and family protections according to Tobin et al. (2021) were popular reasons given by respondents for accepting a vaccine. Public health authorities can build on this

information to develop intentional messaging to the public. Accessibility and affordability were identified as significant predictors of willingness to accept a vaccine and should be considered when planning to introduce the vaccine into the country.

- **Trust in government and public health authorities** were lower than was reported in other studies (Dodd, 2014) and was a predictor of acceptance of a vaccine, with higher trust in government significantly increased likelihood of vaccine acceptance (Padhi & Almohaithef, 2020). The country has been plagued in recent years with growing distrust in government, manifested in the disbelief in COVID-19 and insinuations that the disease was a government scam (Omaka-Amari, 2020). Building public confidence in government and health authorities will be crucial for successful vaccine uptake in the country and should include targeted messaging and community engagement.

Functions of National Orientation Agency (NOA)

The Agency's main job is to encourage and reorient Nigerians to participate freely and actively in conversations and decisions that influence their overall and collective welfare. Health, collaboration with non-governmental groups, and election violence prevention are just a few of the subjects that the National Orientation

Agency has focused on. According to Enang (2022), the functions of National Orientation Agency (NOA) in accordance with the Act include:

- i. Enlightenment of the general public on Government policies, programmes and activities;
- ii. Mobilization of favourable public opinion and support for Government policies, programmes and activities;
- iii. Collection, collation, analysis and provision of feedback from the public to the Government on its policies, programmes and activities;
- iv. Establish social institutions and framework for deliberate exposure of Nigerians to democratic norms and values for a virile, peaceful, united, progressive and disciplined society;
- v. Arouse the consciousness of all categories of Nigerians to their rights and privileges, responsibilities and obligations as citizens of Nigeria;
- vi. Propagate and promote the spirit of dignity of labour, honesty and commitment to qualitative production, promotion and consumption of home-produced commodities and services;
- vii. Re-orientate the populace about power, its use and the proper role of Government in serving the collective interest of Nigerians;
- viii. Propagate the need to eschew all vices in public life including corruption, dishonesty, electoral and census malpractice, ethnic parochial and religious bigotry;
- ix. Mobilize Nigerians for positive patriotic participation in and identification with national affairs

and issues; and sensitize, induct and equip all Nigerians to fight against all forms of internal and external domination of resources by a few individuals or groups.

National Orientation Agency and the Fight against Covid19

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus in the country, the National Orientation Agency has continued to educate and enlighten members of the public on how to contain and curtail the spread of the disease. The Agency has organized a nationwide publicity and enlightenment campaigns to galvanize support and create awareness on the precautionary measures announced by federal government and health institutions in the country. The campaign is still ongoing. The Agency's structure which makes it a grassroots organization enhances quick and effective enlightenment (Aminu, 2020).

The Agency is an official advocacy organ established by Federal government for grassroots communication. It has the mandate to inform, educate, and enlighten citizens on policies, programmes, and activities of the government. The Agency possesses the necessary expertise for advocacy and has a robust history for highly successful programme implementation since its establishment. It enjoys the confidence of both rural and urban people and it is regarded as a credible source. The strength of the Agency lies in the fact that it is the only organization of government with the capacity and capability to simultaneously reach all nooks and crannies of Nigeria with public information on all issues of national relevance (Aminu, 2020).

It was not surprising therefore that following the outbreak of the coronavirus in the country and in order to arrest the situation, the Agency mobilized all its resources and publicity machineries into swift action. An in-house training of staff of the Agency nationwide was the first step taken to properly prepare and equip them for the public enlightenment to be carried out. The in-house training of staff preceded nationwide grassroots orientated awareness creation and sensitization campaign by the thirty six state Agency's Directorate offices and Federal Capital Territory and the seven hundred and seventy four local government areas offices in the country.

The focus of the campaign was on thoroughly explaining the safety measures for the curtailment of the Covid-19 pandemic through inter- personal channel of communication. The Agency has also issued several press statements and public announcements on the need to stay indoor during lockdown and embrace safety measures. Considering the vastness of the country and the limitations of both the electronic and print media in reaching out to some of the remotest areas, the Agency undertook massive production and distribution of information and educational materials such as posters and handbills as an effective strategy of enlightenment. The Agency's social media platform like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and Twitter were equally massively used to educate Nigerians on the scourge of the disease. The efforts of the Agency has been appreciated by the presidential committee on Covid-19 through the Honorable Minister of Health during the committee Press briefing in Abuja recently when the Minister said that

the Agency has performed up to expectation (Aminu, 2020)

Despite the proactive efforts of the Agency, there is negative propaganda by some persons on the media against the Agency. These critics believed that the Agency has not really done much with regards to the on-going campaign against the Pandemic. It is no longer news that when husband and wife fight, the Agency is accused of not carrying out enough re-orientation to avert such incidence. The Agency does not believe in propaganda and would never resort to using its meager resources to inform Nigerians on what it has done or doing, taking into consideration the fact that media publicity is expensive. It would rather prefer to use such meager resources to implement programmes and activities for the benefit of Nigerians (Aminu, 2020). The critiques of the Agency have also failed to realize that the Agency is unlike the defunct Directorate for Social Mobilization (MAMSER) that was well funded by the three tiers of government and was equally a parastatal under the Presidency. The scenario is completely different now.

Communication Strategies/ Approaches by Organizations

Benson-Eluwa (1998), Black (1990), Gregory (2010) in Chiakaan (2016), Okeke and Nwosu (2020) have identified the following activities of public relations aimed at communicating with members of the public as follows:

- **Press Conference:** Press conference is a planned and organized meeting between an organisation and journalists. Black (1990) cited in Chiakaan et al. (2022) stated that press conferences are usually held with

the aim of discussing policies or debating matters of mutual interest. It can also be held to convince media for a specific purpose.

- **Newsletters:** News letters are used to disseminate relevant information about the activities or to ensure that services of an organisation can directly reach its target audience. This has the capacity to create and maintain strong strategic relationships.
- **Press Release:** This is also referred to as news release. It is usually a piece of information written in form of news concerning a topical issue or subject that as to do with an organisation generally or its reputation sent to the press for publication. Such information is usually communicated or published, not as commercial but as part of the regular news.
- **Media Relations:** This entails working with the mass media in seeking publicity or responding to their interest in the organisation. It is also the interaction that exists between an organisation and members of the press. The aim is to enable an organisation gain effective coverage from the press for presentation to its external publics.
- **Research:** This area determines the attitudes and behaviours of the publics through research in order to have effective and efficient public relations plans. This type of research can be used to generate mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics. It can also help to influence or persuade

the public to key into certain public relations activities that will be beneficial to the organisation and the public.

- **Sponsorship:** As a way of demonstrating Corporate Social Responsibility to their communities, organisations embark on sponsorship of events or projects. Programmes like arts, sports, educational programmes, exhibitions, charities, professional awards among others are usually by the organisation for the benefits of the hosting community.
- **Crises management:** Crises management is one of the techniques deployed in public relations to ensure that organisations are in harmony with their public. When crises are allowed to exist in an organisation without any deliberate effort to curb such, the crises can disrupt the progress of that organisation and bring the activities to a halt. It is therefore, expedient for public relations personnel to manage crises whenever they occur in order to sustain good relationship between an organisation and its public.
- **Advertising:** Public relations personnel make use of advertising as a strategy of reaching members of the public of an organisation with information. According to Baran (2002) cited in Chiakaan et al. (2022), public relations professionals often use advertising but advertising and public relations are not the same. The kind of advertising used by public relations is referred to as image or

institutional advertising.

- **Employee Relations:** Here, public relations managers, as much as possible try to respond to concern, informing and motivating organisations employees. Employees of an organisation constitute the internal public of that organisation. The field of employee relations coincides with personnel welfare, labour relations, and training of workers. When organisations create and sustain a peaceful and motivating atmosphere for their workers to be very effective in their output for ultimate goal attainment, it is referred to as employee relations.
- **Community Relations:** When workers of an organisation attend events, attend events that occur in the community in which their organisation exists, when they get involved in projects or events in communities their organisations exist through sponsorships, donations, gifts etc, they are into community relations. Chile (2005, p.53), notes that the concept of community relations evolves because of the inter-relationship that exist between an organisation and the community where it is established. When this relationship is sustained over time, it enables the organisation to carry out what is referred to as Corporate Social Relationship to the host community.
- **Attendance to Public Events:** By attending events or occasions that occur in the societies or environments in which organisations operate, their managements have opportunities

for direct contact with their publics and it is also a way of showing solidarity to whatever the community is doing. This kind of interaction has the advantage of establishing and sustaining cordial relationship between organisations and their publics.

Theoretical Framework

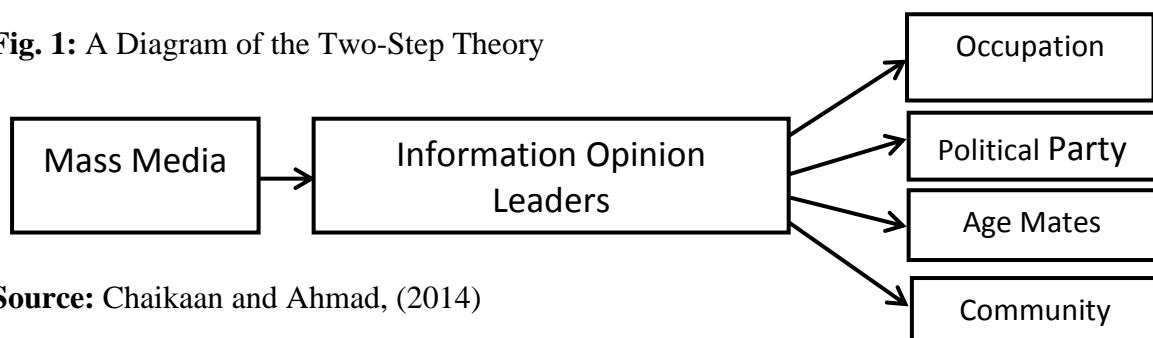
Two Step Flow Step Theory

The two-step flow of mediated information dissemination was introduced by Lazarsfeld (1940) when he challenges a popular and widely held assumption that media messages extended from a content producer directly to the ears (or eyes) of individuals in an audience. Instead, Lazarsfeld argued that influencers actually moderated messages and acted as filters for mass media message dissemination.

Lazarsfeld and later his co-author, Elihu Katz introduced the two-step flow of information theory, proposing that opinion leaders who play close attention to the mass media add their own thoughts and interpretations to messages before passing them on to their eventual end audiences (Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Ukwaoma, 2017).

Similarly, Chaikaan and Ahmad (2014) posit that this theory holds that information has two steps through which it passes before reaching final receivers. Firstly, the information passes through the media. Secondly it gets to people known as opinion leaders who have access to the media. These people who belong to different groups then pass the information to members of the different groups they belong to. This can be represented the figure below

Fig. 1: A Diagram of the Two-Step Theory



Source: Chaikaan and Ahmad, (2014)

This theory has been modernized to multi-step flow theory due to the belief that opinion leaders themselves turn to have others as their opinion leaders who influence their actions. Even though critics are uncomfortable with the two-step flow hypothesis for simply offering explanation to the process of communication, it is still relevant in the modern world. In the rural areas, teachers, religious leaders, traditional leaders, retired civil servants

and those who are literate who have access to the media exercise much influence on their non-literate rural dwellers or followers. This theory, therefore, is more inclined to the rural setting Chaikaan and Ahmad (2014).

Furthermore, Asemah et al. (2017) further affirms that mass media do not operate in a social vacuum, but have an input into a very complex web of social relationship and compete with other

sources of ideas, knowledge and power. The two-step flow theory of mass communication build on the reality that it is not always possible to get your message directly to your intended audience. Because of selectivity problems, communication is facilitated by a filtering process. Rather than seek out everyone you want to get your message to, you seek out opinion leaders in society, get your message to them and they will filter it down to those who listen to them (Asemah et al., 2017). Some of those listeners are opinion leaders for others and will filter the message down to their followers.

This theory is considered suitable for this study because it is believed that for the battle against covid19 vaccine hesitancy and resistance to be won, religious leaders, traditional leaders teachers, leaders of market and other associations need to be actively involved. These people or leaders can talk to their people on the needs or benefits of the vaccine. With their influence, the vaccine will no doubt, be accepted.

Methodology

This study adopted the survey design. Thus, the method is appropriate to investigate the opinion of people in Jalingo Local Government Area regarding the communication approaches adopted in ensuring acceptability of the COVID-19 vaccine. The population of this study is Jalingo local government area with a total population of 2,300,736 based on the 2006 National Population Census. The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan Sampling Table (1974). Based on this, the sample size of the study was 350. Simple random sampling was used by the researcher in sampling of respondents from Jalingo. This involved the use of balloting. Questionnaire was used as an instrument for data collection. Data for the study were analysed quantitatively. The quantitative data in this regard were presented using tables and simple percentages, while the interpretation of the figures presented on the table is contextually done.

Data Presentation

Table 1: The extent respondents are aware of covid19 vaccination

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
To a very high extent	82	23.7
To a high extent	240	69.6
To a very low extent	23	6.7
Total	345	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Data presented in Table 1 showed the extent to which respondents are aware of the COVID-19 vaccination. 82(23.7%) of the respondents said to a very high extent, 240(69.6%) said to a high extent,

while 23(6.7%) said to a very low extent. This implies that the majority of the respondents (69.6%) are aware of the COVID-19 vaccination to a high extent.

Table 2: Respondents source of information about covid19 vaccine

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Mass media	137	39.7
Friends/other informal source	89	25.8
Social media	119	34.5
Total	345	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 2 above seeks to find out respondents source of information about the COVID-19 vaccine. Data in this regard showed that 137(39.7%) affirmed that through the mass media, 89(25.8%) of the respondents opines that through friends/others informal sources, while 119(34.5%) assert that through the social

media. This implies most of the respondents (39.7%) got their information through the mass media of radio, television, and newspapers. Another source of information about the COVID-19 vaccine is social media, as suggested by 34.5% of the respondents

Table 3: The role of National Orientation Agency in the campaign for covid19 in Jalingo

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Creating awareness about the vaccine	110	31.9
Not creating awareness about the vaccine	17	4.9
Persuading people to come out and take the covid19 vaccine	206	59.7
I do not know	12	3.5
Total	345	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The aim of Table 3 above is to find out the role of the National Orientation Agency in the campaign for COVID-19 in Jalingo. Out of the 345 sampled respondents, 110(31.9%) said creating awareness about the vaccine, 17(4.9%)

said not creating awareness about the vaccine, 206(59.7%) said persuading people to come out and take the COVID-19 vaccine, and 12(3.5%) said they do not know.

Table 4: The communication approaches by NOA in ensuring that covid19 vaccine is accepted in Jalingo

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Advertising to people at work places/markets	23	6.7
Holding town hall meetings with people	51	14.8
Reaching people through traditional/religious leaders and other stakeholders	74	21.4
Using or sponsoring folk music	15	4.3

Sponsoring secular music	09	2.6
Persuading people through corporate advertising or public service announcement	132	38.3
Holding press conferences and so on	41	11.9
Total	345	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Data collected for analysis in Table 4 above shows the communication approaches by the National Orientation Agency in ensuring that the COVID-19 vaccine is accepted in Jalingo. 23 of the respondents (6.7%) said advertising to people at work places/markets, 51 (14.8%) of the respondents said holding town hall meetings with people, 74(21.4%) said reaching people through traditional/religious leaders and other

stakeholders, and 15(4.3%) said using or sponsoring folk music. Others are sponsoring secular music 09(2.6%), persuading people through corporate advertising or public service announcements 132(38.3%) and holding press conferences, and so on 41(11.9%) respectively. By implication, the National Orientation Agency adopted different communication approaches in ensuring that the COVID-19 vaccine is accepted in Jalingo.

Table 5: Impact of the communication approaches by NOA on Respondents

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
I am willing to come out and take the vaccine	47	13.6
I am not willing to coming out to take the vaccine	68	19.7
I am still afraid of the vaccine	108	31.3
I believe in the ability of the vaccine to prevent me from contracting covid19	122	35.4
Total	345	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The concern of Table 5 is to ascertain the impact of the communication approaches by the National Orientation Agency on respondents. Data collected for analysis revealed that 47(13.6%) of the respondents said they are willing to come out and take the vaccine, 68(19.7%) said they are not willing to come out to take the vaccine, 108(31.3%) said they are still afraid of the vaccine, and 122(35.4%) affirmed that they believe in the ability of the vaccine to prevent them from contracting COVID-19. This implies that the majority of the

respondents, 35.4% believe in the ability of the vaccine to prevent them from contracting COVID-19. This also implies that even though most of the respondents believe in the ability of the vaccine, they are still afraid of the vaccine, as it was the submission of 31.3% of the respondents.

Discussion of Findings

There were many problems associated with the COVID-19 epidemic in Nigeria, particularly with regard to the country's situation. One such issue is vaccine resistance. Many Nigerians have resisted the vaccine, despite it being

available at health centers and aimed at preventing them from contracting COVID-19 and spreading the disease at the same time. The National Orientation Agency (NOA) under the Federal Ministry of Information is tasked with communicating government policy, staying abreast of public opinion, and promoting patriotism, national unity, and the development of Nigerian society. It is on this basis that the study was initiated to unravel the communication strategies adopted by the National Orientation Agency in the fight against COVID-19 vaccine resistance in Taraba State, Nigeria.

Results from the study as presented in Table 1 revealed that respondents (69.6%) are aware of the COVID-19 vaccination to a high extent. This is no doubt associated with respondents' source(s) of information about the COVID-19 vaccine; 39.7% in Table 2 affirmed that they got their information through the mass media of radio, television, and newspapers, while other sources of information about the COVID-19 vaccine are social media, as suggested by 34.5% of the respondents. This is in line with the submission of Chiakaan et al. (2022), who reported that every organization is expected to work with the mass media in seeking publicity or responding to their interest. There should be interaction between an organisation and members of the press. The aim is to enable an organisation gain effective coverage from the press for presentation to its external publics. Indeed, the mass media plays a critical role in transmitting information to the public, especially in crisis situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings from the study also showed that the National Orientation Agency plays a significant role in the campaign for COVID-19 in Jalingo. This was affirmed by the results presented in Table 3, where 31.9% of the respondents said the agency created awareness about the vaccine, 4.9% claimed the agency did not create awareness about the vaccine, 59.7% opined that the agency persuaded people to come out and take the COVID-19 vaccine, and only 3.5% said they did not know. This is in line with the agency's main job to encourage and reorient Nigerians to participate freely and actively in conversations and decisions that influence their overall and collective welfare. Health, collaboration with non-governmental groups, and election violence prevention are just a few of the subjects that the National Orientation Agency has focused on.

This finding corroborates the report by Aminu (2020), who submits that since the outbreak of the coronavirus in the country, the National Orientation Agency has continued to educate and enlighten members of the public on how to contain and curtail the spread of the disease. The agency has organized nationwide publicity and enlightenment campaigns to galvanize support and create awareness on the precautionary measures announced by the federal government and health institutions in the country. The campaign is still ongoing. Aminu's submission further stresses that the National Orientation Agency has the mandate to inform, educate, and enlighten citizens on policies, programs, and activities of the government. Its strength lies in the fact that it is the only organization of government with the

capacity and capability to simultaneously reach all nooks and crannies of Nigeria with public information on all issues of national relevance (Aminu, 2020).

In line with ongoing discuss, Enang (2022) further assert that the National Orientation Agency (NOA) in accordance with the Act have some functions they are made to performance which include among others: enlightenment of the general public on Government policies, programmes and activities; mobilization of favourable public opinion and support for Government policies, programmes and activities; collection, collation, analysis and provision of feedback from the public to the Government on its policies, programmes and activities; mobilize Nigerians for positive patriotic participation in and identification with national affairs and issues; and sensitize, induct and equip all Nigerians to fight against all forms of internal and external domination of resources by a few individuals or groups.

Furthermore, the role played by the national orientation agency is not unconnected with the communication approaches adopted by the agency in ensuring that the COVID-19 vaccine is accepted in Jalingo. This was the submission of respondents in Table 4. Respondents, 6.7%, attested that the agency advertises to people at work places/markets, 14.8% said the agency holds town hall meetings with people; 21.4% affirmed that the agency reaches people through traditional/religious leaders and other stakeholders; and only 4.3% said the agency uses or sponsors folk music. Others approached, as pointed out by the respondents, include

sponsoring secular music (2.6%), persuading people through corporate advertising or public service announcements (38.3%), holding press conferences, and so on (11.9%) respectively.

This relates with the finding of Okai and Abekah-Nkrumah (2022), who examine the level and determinants of COVID-19 vaccine acceptance among adult Ghanaians during the vaccination exercise. Okai and Abekah found that there are strategies adopted to address the issue of COVID-19 vaccine acceptance. These include educating the general public on the importance of getting vaccinated against the COVID-19 disease, providing evidence on the safety profile of the vaccines, and providing comprehensive information on the side effects of the vaccines. The results from the study further revealed that the communication approach adopted by the National Orientation Agency with respondents is effective and appropriate. Respondents (35.4%) in Table 5 believe in the ability of the vaccine to prevent them from contracting COVID-19. But despite respondents' belief in the ability of the vaccine to prevent them from contracting COVID-19, most of the respondents (31.3%) are still afraid of the vaccine.

The finding of this study validates the finding of Olawade et al. (2022), who conducted a study on Covid-19 vaccine hesitancy among Nigerian youths in Southwestern Nigeria and discovered that although 90% of the respondents were aware of the administration of the COVID-19 vaccine in Nigeria, only around a quarter were willing to take the vaccine, while 5.5% had been vaccinated.

The major reasons for COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy highlighted by the respondents were concerns about vaccine side effects (21.3%), lack of trust in the authorities (26.5%), vaccine efficacy (13.1%), and diverse mystical possibilities (39.1%).

The finding is contrary to Bono et al. (2021), who conducted a cross-sectional online survey to investigate COVID-19 vaccine acceptance across nine low- and middle-income countries and revealed that assuming vaccine effectiveness at 90% and 95%. The study found prevalence of vaccine acceptance increased from 76.4% (90% effectiveness) to 88.8% (95% effectiveness). Considering a 90% effective vaccine, Malaysia, Thailand, Bangladesh, and five African countries (Democratic Republic of Congo, Benin, Uganda, Malawi, and Mali) had lower acceptance odds compared to Brazil. Individuals who perceived taking the vaccine as important to protect themselves had the highest acceptance odds (aOR 2.49) at 95% effectiveness. Also, vaccine acceptance was also positively associated with COVID-19 knowledge, worry/fear regarding COVID-19, higher income, younger age, and testing negative for COVID-19. However, chronic disease and female gender reduced the odds for vaccine acceptance. The main reasons underpinning vaccine refusal were fear of side effects (41.2%) and lack of confidence in vaccine effectiveness (15.1%) respectively.

Also, the finding contradicts the finding of Okai and Abekah-Nkrumah (2022), who examine the level and determinants of COVID-19 vaccine acceptance among adult Ghanaians during

the vaccination exercise. Okai and Abekah found that 62.7% of the respondents indicated that they will accept the COVID-19 vaccine if provided. The regression results revealed that the decision to accept the COVID-19 vaccine was influenced by occupation, perceived susceptibility, perceived benefits, and attitudes towards the vaccines.

Conclusion

The assessment of communication strategies by the National Orientation Agency (NOA) in the fight against COVID-19 vaccine resistance is of utmost importance. Effective communication plays a vital role in dispelling misinformation, building trust, and promoting vaccine acceptance among the population. By evaluating the effectiveness of their communication strategies, the NOA can identify strengths, address weaknesses, and make necessary adjustments to ensure their messages resonate with the public. The fight against vaccine resistance requires a comprehensive and targeted approach that considers the unique cultural, social, and religious factors within Nigeria. The NOA has employed various communication approaches, such as advertising, use of social media, town hall meetings, engagement with traditional and religious leaders, and sponsorship of music, to promote vaccine acceptance in Jalingo.

However, despite the belief in the vaccine's ability to prevent COVID-19, there remains a significant level of fear and hesitancy among the population. This indicates a need for targeted efforts to address vaccine concerns, emphasize safety, and provide accurate information. It is crucial for the NOA to continue monitoring and evaluating their communication strategies, collecting

feedback, and adapting their approaches based on the evolving needs and perceptions of the public.

Overall, the study underscores the importance of robust communication strategies in combating vaccine resistance and promoting vaccine acceptance. The NOA should continue to refine and enhance their efforts, collaborate with stakeholders, and implement innovative methods to effectively communicate the benefits and importance of COVID-19 vaccination. By doing so, the NOA can contribute to overcoming vaccine resistance and protecting public health in Jalingo and beyond.

Recommendations

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

- Despite the high awareness, it is essential to continuously reinforce accurate and up-to-date information about the COVID-19 vaccines. Regularly communicate new developments, vaccine safety updates, and any changes in vaccination guidelines to ensure that the public remains well-informed.
- Continuing to leverage multiple communication approaches, such as advertising in workplaces and markets, town hall meetings, engagement with traditional/religious leaders and stakeholders, sponsorship of folk and secular music, corporate advertising, public service announcements, and press conferences.
- Maintain a comprehensive evaluation mechanism to continuously assess the effectiveness of communication approaches by collecting feedback from the public, conduct surveys, and monitor vaccination rates and trends to identify areas for improvement and fine-tune strategies accordingly.
- Address vaccine hesitancy by focusing on vaccine safety, efficacy, and the importance of immunization in preventing severe illness and protecting the community. Offer clear and transparent information about the vaccine development process, regulatory approvals, and side effects, emphasizing the overwhelming evidence supporting the vaccine's benefits.

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