

Chapter 3

Indigenous Language Media and Communication for Health Purposes in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

All over the world, the issues of health and ill health have generated heightened attention among health professionals and communication experts. This is expected in view of the prevalence of increasingly life-threatening ailments. It is therefore not surprising that matters bordering on health have been elevated to the front burner of policy and decision making both at the national and multinational levels. This chapter, therefore, observes that the reason most health information doesn't get to the intended audiences and produce the desired effect is because they are not communicated in the most intelligible language to the people. Indigenous language media are potential channels through which health information could reach the grassroots where more than 70 percent of the nation's populations are resident. It also perceived that health communication could be made to produce more effect in this digital era as more citizen journalists could be raised to communicate in the indigenous language.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, the issues of health and ill-health have generated heightened attention among health professionals and communication experts. This is expected in view of the prevalence of increasingly life-threatening ailments. Diseases such as cancer, hepatitis, liver cirrhosis, Ebola and other infectious diseases among others have been discovered to defy curative measures. It is therefore not surprising that matters bordering on health have been elevated to the front burner of policy and decision making both at the national and multinational levels. This is based on the recognition that it is only a healthy mind that could participate

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in and contribute to the nation's developmental growth. Moreover, it has been observed that most of these diseases are avoidable if effective precautionary measures are taken. In spite of the dissemination of health information to the people to warn them against those risk factors that can predispose them to these diseases, many casualties are still being recorded. Recent research shows that properly designed behaviour-based health communication activities can have a significant positive impact in altering negative health-related attitudes, beliefs and behaviours if communicated through the right channel. This chapter, therefore, observes that the reason why most health information doesn't get to and produce the desired effect on the intended audiences is because they are not communicated in the most intelligible language to the people (Owolabi, Ezika, Lewitt, and Beth, 2016). Indigenous language media, including newspapers, radio and television as well as other social media platforms are potential channels through which health information could reach the grassroots where more than 70 percent of the nation's populations are resident. This is because, according to Salawu (2006, p.88), "every language reflects the culture of the people thus, it is logical that people would express themselves and their cultures better in their native language".

Language is a unique human endowment, which defines human's humanity, that is, it makes man species specific (Amuseghan, 2010). It is used as an instrument of communication in all spheres of life. The home language of an indigenous group of people is known as indigenous language, it is the language that carries a people's knowledge, culture and identity. An indigenous language is a language that is native to a region and spoken by indigenous people. This language is from a linguistically distinct community that originated in the area. It is regarded as a local means of communication between members of a community because it contains within it the essence of considerable information, knowledge and wisdom of the people. An indigenous language is the language spoken within an ethnic community where the language is part of their identity and some traits of their customs are preserved through it. An indigenous language can also be a native to a country and can serve as a mother tongue to some of its indigenes. According to Oyesomi and Salawu (2019), Indigenous language is a language that is spoken by a group of people that resides in a locality or region. It is therefore not surprising that there has been significant growth in the volume of information being disseminated through the indigenous languages across the print and broadcast spectrum as most media owners acknowledge the need to be relevant to local audiences (Olaoye, 2013).

Indigenous language media, according to Wilson and Stewart (2008) is therefore, the forms of media expression that are conceptualized, produced and/or created by indigenous people and is used as vehicles for communication, cultural preservation, cultural and artistic expression, political self-determination, and cultural sovereignty. Indigenous communication includes the transmission of entertainment, news, persuasion, announcements, and social exchanges of every type (Mundy and Lloyd-Laney, 1992). Oyesomi, Salawu and Olorunyomi (2017) opine that indigenous communication enjoys high credibility because it is familiar and controlled locally. Indigenous communication has value in its own right. While contributing to the indigenous language media discourse, Olukotun (2006) also adds that indigenous language media in Nigeria include the indigenous language service of the federal, state and emerging private electronic and print media.

According to Jowitt (1987) cited by Oso (2006), about 44 Nigerian languages were used by radio and television services for daily news broadcast. However, Bolarin (2013) observed that with the deregulation of broadcast media by the Federal government in 1992, the number may be more as more private investors and governments at the Federal and states have developed interest in the sub-sector; apparently because of its potential use in reaching the grassroots with their policies and programmes. Although the

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