

Chapter 3

Effectiveness of COVID–19 Risk Communication Messages in Indigenous Languages and the Promotion of Safe Practices in Ondo State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examined the effectiveness of COVID-19 risk communication messages in indigenous languages vis-à-vis the promotion of safe practices in Ondo, Nigeria. The survey research design was used, and a questionnaire was randomly administered to 384 respondents in Akure, Ondo State. Findings showed that most of the respondents were exposed to COVID-19 risk communication messages and got their first information about it from social media. Furthermore, the study found that respondents were not receptive to COVID-19 messages passed across in indigenous languages. They prefer COVID-19 messages to pass across in the English language. The study recommended that there is a need to ensure that risk communication messages aired in indigenous languages are demystified in a way that the audience can easily understand and act upon. The use of indigenous languages should continue to be used and encouraged, especially for risk communication interventions such as COVID-19. This will go a long way in ensuring that the audience accepts it.

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INTRODUCTION

Since Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) was discovered in December 2019, substantial attention has been devoted to countering the wave of conspiracy theories, myths, and misinformation that are peddled about the disease (Depoux et al., 2020; Naffi, Davidson & Jawhar, 2020; Lucas, Targema, Jibril, Sambo, & Istifanus, 2020). Misinformation or lack of credible information during pandemics may affect the decision of the populace on what to do regarding daily socio-economic activities, as can be seen during the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Credible and adequate information during a pandemic is a situation where messages are shared with stakeholders including the citizens in a transparent and accountable manner, that is, everyone must understand what is going on. The reason for this is to cover the communication gap between the sender of the information and the receiver of the information so it does not generate mistrust among them. This will reduce the risk that may be attracted by the pandemic (Heras, Jambrino, Rando, & Iglesias, 2022). However, there is a need for everyone to be alert and aware of the information and disinformation they are subject to. For instance, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a lot of disinformation and misinformation that brought fear and emotional disturbance to society (Heras, Rando, Jambrino & Paniagua, 2020).

Outbreaks of diseases generally impact the socio-economic life of people across the globe as evident with the COVID-19 pandemic. Credible and reliable information in this period is vital in reducing the pandemic by encouraging individuals to keep safe. To educate the public as much as possible about the pandemic, transmission routes, risk factors, preventive measures, and treatment options, risk communication interventions are a key part of the emergency response to Covid 19 in Nigeria. These interventions are carried out through a variety of communication channels, including electronic media, interpersonal communication channels, and print media. Therefore, the risk communication messages in indigenous languages emphasize the promotion of personal and community hygiene, keeping a safe distance of one meter from others, carrying sanitiser, frequently washing hands with water and soap, and avoiding close contact with anyone who is ill or exhibiting symptoms. These warnings also stress the importance of taking the following precautions: if you feel sick, stay at home and quarantine yourself; if you have any concerning symptoms, please seek medical attention; avoid using public transportation while you're sick; and if you're at a higher risk of contracting a serious illness, it's best to stay inside.

The traditional Yoruba town of Akure has existed in Nigeria for a very long time, well before the arrival of British colonial power there. Up until the 19th century, when it became a part of the Benin Kingdom, Akure was a sovereign state. In 1894, the territory was brought under the rule of Great Britain. Ondo State, in the South-Western region of Nigeria, is where the city is situated. The current, moderately sized urban centre was established as the provincial capital of Ondo province in 1939 and as the state capital and seat of local government in 1976. The city is roughly located 50°15' east of the Greenwich Meridian and 7°15' north of the equator. The distance between Lagos, Nigeria's commercial centre, and Akure is around 350 kilometres while the distance to the Federal Capital Territory is around 700 kilometres.

The effectiveness of risk communication interventions for COVID-19 especially in Ondo State is worth investigating. Ideally, it is expected that all receivers of the risk communication messages in indigenous languages must be able and capable of understanding and decoding the meaning of the messages sent to them and the message should be able to persuade the receivers to change their attitudes or their behaviours regarding specific cause/s or threats associated with an event. However, since risk communication interventions are targeted at the public in distress situations, particularly outbreak scenarios, there has been a growing interest in the effect of tension on public understanding and interpretation of

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