

Chapter 13

COVID–19 Messages and High Risk Areas: Interrogating the Role of Radio in Disseminating Health Information to Refugee Camps in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the views and perspectives of journalists on the role played by Radio Zimbabwe in informing refugee residents at Tongogara Refugees Camp in Zimbabwe about COVID-19. Also, the chapter examines their views and perspectives on the potential of Radio Zimbabwe and its COVID-19 message in creating a sense of belonging for the refugees. Its theoretical toolkit is drawn from the social responsibility theory and public sphere theory. Empirical data were drawn from in-depth interviews with 12 purposively selected radio journalists from Zimbabwe. The chapter established that Radio Zimbabwe's jingles, news, and announcements on COVID-19 were not directed at refugees; thus, it was argued that the radio station did not adequately inform refugees residing at Tongogara Refugee Camp. Also, the chapter fleshes out Radio Zimbabwe's mediation of COVID-19 failed to fan a sense of belonging in refugees. Instead, the way Radio Zimbabwe handled COVID-19 strengthened the minority and marginalised identity in Zimbabwe.

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INTRODUCTION

Refugees make up the world's most vulnerable people (Vonen et al., 2021: 27). Their vulnerability stems from the socio-political and environmental quandaries ranging from wars, genocides, climate change, dilapidating economies in their original countries among other things. Due to these consequences, they migrate to other countries where they are placed in refugee camps which are meant to temporarily house them. However, in some instances, refugees have stayed in these overcrowded camps for many years (Raju and Ayeb-Karlsson, 2020:515). Consequently, Harmen et al (2017) aver that staying in overcrowded and less-resourced refugee camps has had a toll on the refugees' health. In the same vein, Montgomery et al., (2019) state that by virtue of mostly being a minority and located away from city centres refugees' access to medical care and medical information is restricted. Against this milieu, the chapter grapples with the role of *Radio Zimbabwe* which is the leading radio station in Zimbabwe in terms of listenership and reach, in propagating Covid-19 messages to minority groups, precisely refugees staying at Tongogara Refugee Camp. There is mature scholarship on the interplay between Covid-19 and radio. Some studies have delved into the framing of Covid-19 in radio programmes (Abubakhar et al., 2022), the pivotal role of radio in responding to crises induced by the Covid-19 pandemic (DoSantos and Brasil, 2020), the perceptions of audiences regarding radio-delivered Covid-19 messages (Talabi et al., 2022), the utilization of radio in educational contexts during the Covid-19 pandemic (Ayanwale et al., 2023), and, closely related to the focus of this chapter, the examination conducted by Chibike and Ncube (2023) concerning the mediation of Covid-19 by *Radio Zimbabwe* and its impact on the broader narrative of nationalism in Zimbabwe. In sum, the collection of studies presented above underscores the multifaceted role of radio during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. These scholarly contributions collectively emphasise the pivotal role of radio in framing the pandemic, responding to crises, conveying critical information, delivering education, and shaping national narratives. The comprehensive examination of these studies offers a nuanced understanding of the intricate dynamics between media, public health, education, and national identity in times of crisis, ultimately contributing to the broader discourse on the role of media in contemporary society. However, the brief overview of the literature exposes the fact that there is a dearth of scholarship on the effectiveness of radio in disseminating Covid-19 messages to refugee camps hence, the study grabs an opportunity to fill this glaring gap. Also, against the background that Zimbabwe is a multi-ethnic, multi-racial and multi-lingual this chapter interrogates the potential of health communication in enhancing the belonging of refugees who have stayed in Zimbabwe for a very long time. In light of this, the chapter, through the views of selected journalists, tackles the following objectives:

- To examine the role of *Radio Zimbabwe* in aiding refugees' understanding of Covid-19
- To examine the role of *Radio Zimbabwe* in helping facilitate a sense of belonging among refugees through Covid-19 messages.

This chapter holds noteworthy significance as it provides valuable insights into the potential of radio as a medium for conveying critical health information to marginalised minority groups. Furthermore, it sheds light on radio's role in engendering a sense of belonging among individuals who often find themselves on the periphery of society. This is against the backdrop that radio in Africa has been celebrated as a penetrative channel of communication reaching a far wide geographic boundary and easily accessible to a lot of people. The chapter's novelty is drawn from the fact it interrogates the interlink between health communication and the issue of belonging and nation-building in Zimbabwe, something prior studies

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