

Chapter 18

Impact of Town Criers Using Indigenous Yoruba Language in COVID–19 Awareness on Radio for Behavioral Change Among Rural Dwellers in Lagos

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ABSTRACT

In 2020, a study was carried out to show the roles of the new fusion between the indigenous and traditional media (traditional town criers and radio) using indigenous Yoruba language in creating the awareness of COVID-19 among select rural dwellers in Lagos state, and which was published in 2023. This study revealed a novel scene where traditional town criers were brought into language radio stations to create awareness for COVID-19 using Yoruba language. However, this study did not investigate the impact these media fusions had on the minority rural dwellers in Lagos state; rather, it only revealed the roles these media played in creating awareness for COVID-19. Therefore, this chapter investigates the impact the fusion between the traditional town criers as an indigenous media and radio as a traditional media had on select minoritized rural dwellers in Lagos state during the pandemic. This study adopts the health belief model and framing theory, while the instrument for collecting data would be interviews.

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-0624-6.ch018

INTRODUCTION

Numerous studies have revealed that health messages thrive and fulfill their purpose at targeted audiences based on some sociological factors that are culturally, traditionally, religiously, and sometimes economically induced (Pew Research Center, 2020; Gallotti, Valle, Castaldo, Sacco, De, 2020; Agle, Xiao, Thompson, Golzarri-Arroyo, 2021; Bloom, Cadarette, Ferranna, 2021; Scales, Gorman, Jamieson, 2021). Most African communities are culturally, traditionally and religiously hyper active to their environment. According to Akpan (2023, p. 136), “rural Africa has a long history of failure of health campaigns where the planners do not consider the basic elements underlying the traditional communication system such as the town crier in information dissemination. The town crier is still relevant today in many rural areas.” During pandemics and epidemics, health workers rely heavily on sensitizing and creating awareness to the populace, and the rural dwellers who are sometimes the hard-to-reach and minority groups for precautionary purposes. In this article, we leverage and extend on Akpan’s (2023) study on how language radio stations in Lagos state, Nigeria, made use of the traditional newsman, popularly called the town crier to create awareness of COVID-19 among the rural dwellers in the four rural local government areas (Epe, Ibeju-Lekki, Ikorodu and Badagry) of Lagos state. These rural dwellers in these four rural local government areas in Lagos state fall within the minoritized groups in Lagos state that this study seeks to study. Akpan had observed a new development in media channel fusion. According to him:

In Lagos during the pandemic In Lagos state, the two language stations (Bond FM and Radio Lagos) employed the services of the traditional newsman popularly known as the “town crier” during their programmes (Koko Iwe Iroin, Afobata, Kokoro, etc.) to use the local language in creating awareness of the ongoing pandemic on radio to prevent deaths in these rural areas. These rural dwellers were able to identify and adhere to the messages of the town criers because they are familiar with them. (Akpan, 2023, p. 135)

Akpan’s (2023) study found out that first, the rural dwellers were fascinated and thrilled to hear their local town criers live on radio; and second, this fostered their believability because of the dual message channel (the town crier and radio) that are traditional to the majority of the rural dwellers in Africa. According to Akpan (202):

The author observed two radio stations in Lagos State (Bond FM and Radio Lagos) who used these town criers in their studio to create awareness of COVID-19. These town criers were brought from the rural areas of Ikorodu, Badagry, Ekpe and Ibeju-Lekki to use the airwaves in reaching the rural dwellers in these areas. The author also observed that these town criers were scheduled in the four major radio segments (morning, afternoon, evening and midnight) in order to reach out to these rural dwellers listening to various radio segments. Akpan (2023, p. 136).

First, let’s seek to understand the impact of health awareness campaigns on the behavioral pattern of people, why some health campaigns fail; and the influence of the application of a single (exact) message on dual media channels on people; as well as the attendant effect of the fusion of traditional media and indigenous media for the dissemination of a single message on people.

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