

Reviewing the Pros and Cons of Practising Ceramics and Pottery Production in the Coronavirus Era

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Abstract

Several challenges inhibit the effective practice of ceramics/pottery production, distribution, and marketing. The emergence of the Corona virus pandemic has aggravated these challenges. The consequent reduction in the pace of ceramics/pottery production has also affected allied organizations like health, energy, and other companies that require the use of ceramic products to complement their products. The objective of this research is to list and discuss the "pros and cons" created by corona virus as it affects the practice of the ceramists and potters. It is observed that the emergence of corona virus which created health challenges as well as led to full or partial lockdowns also slowed down the functions of the ceramic / pottery Industry. The essence of this article is to draw attention to the observed "pros and cons" to enable Ceramists and Potters better position themselves for safer health environments and end up with better quality or greater outputs in terms of production of wares as well as distributions and sales of ceramic wares despite the existing challenges of corona virus. The paper suggests that necessary guidelines to be put in place for greater success in the running of ceramic/pottery outfits (companies) even in the era of the corona virus pandemic.

Introduction

Currently, the entire world is experiencing serious health challenges. Some of such challenges include Ebola, Monkey Pox and Corona virus (alternatively referred to as covid-19) being a more widespread and devastating pandemic. The official names of COVID-19 and SARS-CoV-2 (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Corona virus 2) were issued by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 11 February 2020 (Wikimedia Foundation: 2022). Covid-19 was first discovered in China. According to a *Wikipedia* source, the first known infections from SARS-CoV-2 were discovered in Wuhan, Hubei, China. The World Health Organization (WHO) however, declared the outbreak of the virus a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020 and declared the same a pandemic on 11 March 2020.... The source of viral transmission to humans remains unclear as does whether the virus becomes pathogenic before or after the spillover event (Wikipedia source: 2022). In an attempt to provide information on the symptoms of the virus, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), USA opined that people with Covid-19 have had a wide range of symptoms reported – ranging from mild symptoms to severe illness. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. Anyone can have mild to severe symptoms. People with the following symptoms may have Covid-19:

- *Fever or Chills
- *Cough
- *Shortness of Breath or Difficulty breathing
- *Fatigue
- *Muscle or Body Aches
- *Headache
- *New loss of Taste or Smell
- *Sore Throat
- *Congestion or Runny Nose
- *Nausea or Vomiting
- *Diarrhea.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), USA also presents the following as the emergency warning signs for Covid-19 that would enable infected persons to seek “Emergency Medical Attention”:

- *Trouble Breathing
- *Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- *New confusion
- *Inability to wake or stay awake
- *Pale, grey, or blue-coloured skin, lips, or nail beds, depending on skin tone.

The CDC also opines that the above list does not include all the symptoms. The CDC hopes to continue to provide updates as its office learns more about Covid-19 (CDC: 2022).

Irrespective of countries and variants of the covid-19 virus, the effect and strategies adopted to ameliorate the sufferings caused by the pandemic differ from country to country. At some points, governments of various countries imposed either full or partial lockdowns on their populace. The dreaded virus created tension and stress on governments at various tiers and countries as well as the populace alike. The mention of the Covid-19 was a constant source of worry to governments and citizens of the world. These worries cut across age and social status.

Arising from the foregoing, it became very necessary for governments and non-governmental organizations to engage in an extensive awareness campaign on symptoms, prevention and cure for the covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, the virus continues to mutate and evolve causing new variants to continue to torment the populace of the entire world. Examples of these variants or sub-variants include Delta, Omicron and according to Ghebreyesus, T. A. (2022), among the variants and sub-variants being tracked by WHO is BA.2.75-nicknamed the Centaurus- which was first discovered in India in May (2022)... He also outlined Omicron sub-variants and discussed reduced testing and sequencing. He argued further that there is a major

disconnect in Covid-19 risk perception between scientific communities, political leaders and the general public. It, therefore, became expedient to adopt several means of awareness campaigns to alert the population of the world about this devastating virus. The major objective of this awareness campaign effort is considered to be the need to reduce the spread of the corona virus and in the process reduce the death toll caused by this disease.

Several mass communication means were used and are still being used to carry out an urgent and widespread awareness campaign about Corona virus. Some of such means used for the massive campaign on Corona virus include radio, television and billboard adverts. Others include the application of various social media means such as Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Wechat, Instagram et cetera. In addition to the awareness campaign avenues already discussed, various disciplines also get involved to effectively reach the global population with the necessary information with the sole aim of reducing the spread and distress caused by the virus with greater emphasis on reducing death tolls. Such disciplines include Medical and Health Studies, Music, Drama (Theater Arts), Poetry, psychology and sociology as well as Fine and Applied Arts to mention but a few. Most of these disciplines presented and still present their awareness campaign on coronavirus in visual forms- visual demonstrations or billboards as well as through graphic illustrations, flyers and one-on-one discussions whenever it becomes necessary (see Obiora, 2021; Maledo and Ativie, 2022; Emama, 2017).

These were and are still being complemented with the efforts of governments and non-governmental organizations, especially the World Health Organization (WHO) which has been championing the entire awareness campaign and providing necessary information about the coronavirus. Even as of July 13, 2022, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the head of the World Health Organisation (WHO), continues to seek a return to face mask mandates as Covid-19 drives new cases (2022).

Several countries' governments could not (and still cannot) provide the required health care services in the form of space, facilities and manpower required in the hospitals to cope with the pressure on the populace created by the emergence of the Corona virus Pandemic. In fact, Ghebreyesus opines that he is concerned that cases of Covid-19 continue to rise – putting further pressure on stretched health systems and health workers and indicating "concern about the increasing trend of deaths"(2022).

It is in view of these important efforts aimed at creating adequate and effective awareness on the breakout as well as for prevention and reduction of the spread of the coronavirus that several governments of countries of the world imposed full or partial lockdowns on their citizens. Despite the fact that the governments also recognize the need to provide urgent or emergency requirements to beef up the functions of the hospitals, the insistence on full or partial lockdowns became necessary due to the speed and wide coverage of the spread of corona virus. In addition to the health hazards of corona virus, other challenges emerged due to the imposed full or partial lockdowns. Some of such challenges include loss of lives due to trauma, poor and dwindling economy of countries, and poor production and utilization of human and natural resources. Others include the strains on the economy of nations and individuals and socialization challenges occasioned by the need for social distancing to prevent the spread of Covid-19. These situations caused governments of various countries to consider alternative means to render services to the citizens such as the use of online studies to continue to provide educational training to students and online banking services for financial transactions. Individuals also had to devise alternative means of practicing their various professions in order not to completely short down their sources of income during and after the full or partial lockdowns imposed by the governments.

One of the disciplines affected by the decisions of governments to enforce full or partial lockdowns is ceramics or pottery. Several challenges inhibit the effective practice of ceramics/pottery productions and distributions, including marketing as well as affecting allied companies or organizations that require the use of ceramic products to complement their products and rendering of services. The objective of this research effort, therefore, is to list and discuss the “pros and cons” experienced by practicing “Ceramists” or “Potters” with the emergence of coronavirus which created health challenges as well has led to full or partial lockdowns. The idea is to draw attention to these “pros and cons “to enable Ceramists and Potters better position themselves for safer health environments and better productions, distributions and sales despite the challenges of coronavirus.

Observed Pros and Cons Associated with Ceramics and Pottery Production in the Era of Coronavirus

Already, the practice of ceramics and pottery production requires the consideration of certain conditions associated with the collection of raw materials and processing of such raw

materials for use, provision of space and skills for various segments or steps of ceramics/pottery production, prevention of health hazards on the practitioners during and after production, prevention of hazards on the pottery wares during and after production. Others include advertising, distributions and sales of processed raw materials as well as finished ceramics and pottery wares. With the current experiences associated with Covid-19, all of the above-listed steps are affected in such a manner that it either improves or reduces performances of the ceramic or pottery practitioners at small scale or large scale levels.

This article, therefore, concerns a review of the “pros and cons” of the effect of corona virus on the practice of ceramics and pottery productions. For clarity, the review is discussed along the lines of the various aspects of production and management as well as distribution and sales of processed raw materials and finished ceramics/pottery wares.

Despite the health challenges associated with Covid-19, its emergence and the urgent attention given to it led to some improvements in the practice of ceramic/pottery raw materials and productions. No matter how minimal, there are some observable advantages gained by the various countries, state and local governments due to imposing partial or full lockdowns and these are discussed in the following aspect of the paper as “PROS”.

Improved / Effective use of Social Media means for Advertising and Online Sales of Ceramics and Pottery Products

As a result of partial or full lockdown, effective use of media means, especially the use of social media advertising opportunities and utilizations are drastically improved upon. Also, online sales of ceramic products (whether raw materials or finished products) were perfected during the Covid-19 lockdowns. This situation of advertising using the media means and getting involved in online sales eliminated the boringness of staying idle during lockdowns and creates avenues for income generation. Clients in urgent need of items to complement the production of their wares and rendering of services could call the Ceramists for raw materials or ceramic items to be supplied. Also, the delivery of processed raw materials or ceramic wares could be sent through the process of online sales.

Additional and more Purposeful Research Opportunities were created

The lockdown imposed by Governments due to Covid-19 created opportunities for greater and more purposeful research concerning Ceramics / Pottery raw materials, productions

and management of facilities and processes to be carried out. This obviously leads to greater diversity in terms of functionality of products and meeting the individual demands of clients are also achieved. This experience is also capable of increasing demand and supply as soon as the partial or full lockdown is lifted because a greater number of purposeful ceramic designs and products are achieved and delivered to clients or sold. This kind of research effort is also capable of bringing about better improvement of the working environment and safety of both staff and finished products. The need for Ceramists to think out of the box in terms of the direction of popular items in demand as it concerns ceramic products, best approaches for delivery/distributions, marketing and better avenues for sales of ceramic processed raw materials and products can be improved upon or achieved in the period of lockdown.

Improved Precautionary Measures are Practiced

The strict adherence to Covid-19 guidelines created room for ceramists and unskilled workers to ensure that they adopt safe practices within the production environments and while holding discussion sessions with clients. For instance, the actions practitioners and other workers used to take for granted such as touching surfaces and working in close proximity to each other are now issues of concern that must be taken seriously.

On the other hand, the emergence of Covid-19 presents some inhibitions to the smooth practice of ceramics/pottery productions. These inhibiting circumstances are disadvantageous to the successful production of ceramic wares and are discussed below as “Cons”:

Collection and Processing of Raw Materials

The processes associated with the collection of raw materials for ceramics/pottery production can be very challenging in Nigeria, depending on the communities where such materials - clay types and oxides for glaze compositions are found in abundance. The difficulties associated with searching, collecting and preliminary or full testing of the raw materials, including glaze forming materials pose some concern. Most of the clay types found in Nigeria can conveniently be classified as secondary clay types and sometimes, the clays contain more than one oxide, depending on the source of collection and would need both preliminary or sport testing as well as sending same for laboratory testing later. Depending on the locations of the Ceramists or Potters, there may be the need for short or long journeys to be made for the collection of the required raw materials for ceramics and pottery production. With the presence of coronavirus leading to lockdowns, searching and collecting the raw materials and of course, performing the preliminary testing as when due become challenging. Travelling, working closely

with people on collection sites and finding functional and open laboratories to send the samples become difficult. Even suppliers of such raw materials face the same level of challenges. More so when the Center for Disease Control(CDC) gives the following as guidelines to prevent Covid-19 (for individuals) and reduce its spread:

- *Wear a facemask/covering when out in public
- *Wash your hand frequently with soap under running water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based sanitiser if water is not available.
- * Maintain a physical distance of at least 2 meters from others in public spaces. (CDC: 2022)

The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) through the National Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) agrees with the above-listed measures and has continued to lead the national public health response in Nigeria with oversight of the Presidential Task Force on Covid-19 (PTF-COVID-19). As a result of the emergence of Covid-19, part of the activities of the PTF-COVID-19, the Federal Ministry of Health and the Federal Government of Nigeria was to institute an initial lockdown of non-essential activities; closure of schools; a ban on international flights et cetera (NCDC: 2022). This unhealthy situation occasioned by the presence of Covid-19 leading to partial and full lockdowns reduces or delays collection, processing of raw materials and production of ceramic or pottery wares and therefore affects demand and supply of the processed raw materials and ceramic or pottery wares.

Also, the processing of raw materials for ceramic and pottery production can cause the environment to become dusty. Even the production environment is usually dusty, especially once the raw materials on the floor are dry. This dusty situation can aggravate the symptoms of anyone in close proximity to ceramics or pottery production environment infected with covid-19 and already experiencing shortness of breath or having difficulty in breathing. Especially as ceramic and pottery production practitioners are already prone to suffering from “silicosis” – a disease one can safely describe as "permanent catarrh", if safety precautions are not strictly practiced during and after production exercises.

Provision of Space and Skills for Ceramics and Pottery Production

The already established studios and ceramics/pottery companies or small-scale outfits become minimally utilized during Covid-19 lockdowns or as Covid-19 is spreading very fast. The reason is that Ceramists (including skilled and unskilled staff) can hardly be regular at work when a pandemic such as a coronavirus is spreading very fast dealing devastating blows on the populace or during such situations as experiencing lockdowns. The alternative is to either make

arrangements to spend days and probably nights as it may not be convenient to move back and forth the venue for the production of ceramics/pottery wares during the lockdown.

In the same vein, continuous development of skills and the manner of rendering adequate and quality services by the individual upcoming Ceramists and unskilled individual staff and would-be staff becomes pretty difficult. The usual deliberate and non-deliberate attempts at training and retraining staff are slowed down by the Covid-19 lockdowns and strict adherence to the Covid-19 prevention guidelines, especially the guideline of social distancing. In essence, mobility of Trainers and Trainees becomes drastically reduced or hampered.

Ensuring the prevention of hazards on the practitioners and ceramic / pottery wares

Apart from making conscious attempts to strictly obey rules to prevent health hazards on the Ceramic Practitioners / Potters and other unskilled workers during and after production, Covid-19 presents additional stress in this direction of preventing hazardous situations. The reason is that Ceramic Practitioners / Potters and other unskilled workers have to ensure strict adherence to additional rules and guidelines for the prevention of the spread or contact of the corona virus within the ceramic studios or companies while producing.

Precautionary measures also need to be taken to prevent hazards on the already produced ceramics/pottery wares. Sometimes, in the process of offloading the completely finished wares from the kiln, whether at the bisque (biscuit) or glaze (gloss) firing levels, the wares can get damaged due to poor handling from unskilled staff. Precautionary measures must also be taken during the firing and off-loading processes. Larger wares may require more than one person to off-load the pots (wares) in close proximity to each other which is no longer possible due to coronavirus guidelines of social distancing of six (6) feet (182.88cm).

However, it must be noted that during production and movements of the finished wares, the Ceramists and Potters need to take precautionary measures to protect themselves and the wares against hazards. Ceramists and Potters, therefore, use such safety items as specialized goggles to protect their eyes during spraying of glazes and direct heat during firing of the kilns, and facemasks for protection of the nose from dusty earthenware materials used for ceramic/pottery production. Studio coats/coveralls and sometimes industrial hand gloves are worn during productions to prevent hazards to the skin and ventilators, particularly during firings. Now, the hand gloves and studio coats/coveralls also protect the practitioners and other workers from having hand and body contact with already infected surfaces or persons with

corona virus. Also, the issue of social distancing being one of the guidelines for protecting individuals from contracting coronavirus makes the production of ceramic or pottery wares difficult or slows down the processes because social distancing needs to be strictly adhered to.

In the opinion of Steve Houseman – President, Harrop Industries, USA ... in the (ceramic) plant, however, following those guidelines (including Social Distancing) has been challenging and has slowed production. ... “When we’re working on a kiln, building a kiln, there are times when people need to be close to each other”. ... “We’ve tried to adapt to that and keep people six feet from each other. That has slowed us down quite a bit” (Holthaus, D: 2022). In an attempt to tackle the challenges posed by corona virus on the ceramic / pottery Industry, Jeter J.D. (2022)- the Director of Sales and Marketing for Harrop Industries, USA, argued that best practices are ever-evolving and present the following as some of the short-term guidelines that should be helpful upon opening a ceramic / pottery outfit or re-opening an existing one after Covid-19 lockdown.

- Post signs at the entrances to your facility to remind people that social distancing protocol are in effect.
- Make hand sanitisers and water sinks available around building entry points, shop floors, office spaces et cetera.
- Ensure doors are left open (until closing hours) for better ventilation and elimination of the need to touch the handles.
- Sanitize frequently touched surfaces (light switches, remaining doorknobs and handles, photocopiers, touch pads et cetera) at least daily.
- Let employees who can continue to work from home do so, especially those with Covid-19 co morbidities such as stroke, lung, heart, or kidney conditions, or those in an age demographic representing increased risk.....
- Provide masks, gloves (industrial eye protection glasses), and hand sanitiser for employees whose role requires public contact such as field service, and those who serve as delivery/distribution, marketing and sales personnel.

Advertising, Distribution and Sales of Processed Raw Materials and Finished Ceramic / Pottery Wares

Like other professions, ceramic and pottery practices allow room for diversity of skill practices and sales of items. Some Ceramists prefer to simply collect and process the raw materials for ceramic productions and package the same for sale. This means creating powder or wet raw materials out of various clay types, creating already made glazes by composing such glazes from various earthenware materials including various oxides.

On the other, there are Ceramists or Potters that go in the direction of production and selling finished ceramic or pottery wares. Ceramic wares serve various purposes and they have to

be produced along that line. For instance, a ceramist can decide to specialize in the production of Table wares, Decorative pieces or Industrial pieces such as ceramic electrical insulators.

Irrespective of the types of ceramic wares or other aspects such as processing and packaging ceramic raw materials, ceramic production that a Ceramist or a Ceramic company or small-scale outfit decides to specialize on for income generation, there is always the need to engage in advertising of the product to create wider reach and greater income generation sources. In the same vein, successful distribution of packaged processed ceramic raw materials and finished ceramic wares create opportunities for greater sales of the items. There is a wide range of possibilities for advertising ceramic products. However, it must be noted that not all advertising avenues can be effectively applied during Covid-19 lockdowns. For instance, while the use of electronic media such as radio, television and internet links / social media means of advertising can conveniently be applied during the Covid-19 lockdown, exhibitions of ceramic wares, or one-on-one discussions with clients can hardly hold. Holding ceramic art exhibitions can hardly take place physically because participants and visitors to the exhibitions are hosted in venues which are sometimes enclosed. This situation, therefore, reduces sales of finished ceramic products. Reduction of sales also bogs down processed and packaged ceramic raw materials and finished ceramic wares for too long and affects the income of practitioners as well as negatively influences the economy of the nation in the long run.

Increase Funding for the Operation of Ceramic Businesses

The presence of Covid-19 makes it necessary for all business outfits, including ceramics or pottery-producing outfits to provide additional supplies such as sanitisers for both staffers and visitors to such outfits. Also, as soon as the WHO considered and announced Covid-19 as a pandemic, it became necessary to create wash hand basins at the entrance and strategic points in the various ceramic-producing outfits. These are meant to serve both staff and visitors and they are added to already existing water collecting points within these outfits to ease production processes as water supplies are essential for ceramic production processes.

The need for strict adherence to the guidelines aimed at preventing or reducing the spread of Covid-19 led to increased ventilation in the studios and the creation of extra work tables (workspaces) in order to obey the guideline of social distancing while at work. These reactions of reorganizing the working environments as well as additional supplies to cope with Covid-19 guidelines are expected to have an increased financial impact on operations and production of ceramic wares. This also affects the prices of ceramic wares. It must also be noted that the high

cost of purchasing ceramic ware could slow the demand for ceramic ware and cause the income generated by such outfits to dwindle.

Conclusion

Despite all the efforts aimed at curbing the effect of Covid-19 on the populace, including ceramic industry workers such as instituting partial or full lockdowns as well as providing guidelines to be strictly adhered to in order to prevent or reduce the spread of the corona virus, the death of some skilful/unskilled staff dealt (and it's still doing so) devastating blows on the industry. This is a result of the gaps that have been created by the loss of such staff, causing the industry practitioners to recruit additional skilled/unskilled staff and engage in training and retraining of staff on the grounds of staff development to keep afloat. Though this training and retraining of staff could increase the cost of operation, engaging in the process is necessary, otherwise, the business outfit may shut down.

Irrespective of the “pros and cons” already discussed, there are short-term guidelines already discussed to be observed for the successful operation of the ceramics or pottery industry in this era of the corona virus pandemic. The guidelines for successful operations must be taken seriously by practitioners who must endeavour to “Think Out of the Box” always to keep afloat. For instance, visual illustrations directing visitors to the ceramic / pottery outfits (companies) to strict adherence to guidelines such as wearing of facemasks, hand sanitizing, social distancing and disposal of used facemasks, and gloves et cetera would help particularly the illiterate members of the society.

Also, Ceramists / Potters would need to continue to research trends associated with coronavirus as it affects their practices in order to keep up with the pace required to continue to protect staff and clients.

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