
**TRADITIONAL COMMUNICATION AND COVID-19 SAFETY
PROTOCOLS IN AFAHA OKU GROUP OF VILLAGES IN
AKWA IBOM STATE NIGERIA.**

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Abstract

This article explores the traditional communication and adoption of Covid19 safety protocol in Afaha Oku group of villages in Akwa Ibom State, South South Nigeria. It questions the effectiveness of traditional communication in information health delivery among residents, the traditional communication medium that was used to disseminate the information, the extent to which traditional communication was adopted, the factors that militated against traditional communication. It uses ethnographic descriptive data sourced through participation, observations, metalinguistic conversations based on simple random sampling by balloting. 180 participants were interviewed. 54 males and 126 females respectively. A self-development instrument on: traditional communication and adoption of Covid-19 safety protocol in Afaha Oku group of villages in Akwa Ibom State (TCACSPAOGVAIS) was used

for data collection. The reliability co-efficient of the instrument stands at 0.89. Mean scores are used to answer the research questions while t-test is used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Results indicate zero traditional communication due to poor education of town criers on Covid-19 protocols resulting in wider spread of pandemic. There was no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female respondents of Afaha Oku group of villages on traditional communication and adoption of Covid-19 safety protocol. The calculated t-value of 1.70 is less than the critical value of 1.980. Therefore, gender was a nullity and the null hypothesis was retained. Thus, it concludes that to avoid lapses in information and wider spread of pandemic, town criers should be adequately educated and funds made available for to cater for future exercises.

Key words: Traditional communication, covid19, Safety protocol, Lexicon, supervision

Introduction

Background of the study

Traditional communication media are vehicle which are rich in variety, and are readily and economically viable. They are tools or channel used in passing information or message to the people in rural communities. Traditional communication media include the following; talking drums, wooden gongs, folk table drama presentation in village square, storytelling, wrestling contest (most especially when wrestler dies, there will be a wrestling contest during his burial signifying that he was a wrestler), dancing, religious ritual, myth, theatrical elements, songs, proverbs, puppet theatre etc. Majmudari (2012) opined that these traditional communication media have capacity to change and adopt the socio-political situation in the rural community as they are the most effective tools in information dissemination in rural area, tribal area, and among illiterates as they do not understand the language of modern communication.

Traditional modes of communication involve using basic local resources, such as poems, storytelling, singing, dancing and games to convey realistic message that citizens can relate to. It serves the purpose of delivering a concise and effective message to a small group of people usually those people who live in villages and small communities.

Traditional modes or media of communication are generally more simplistic and basic than alternative form of communication. Traditional modes of communication also help in communication interventions addressing issues relating to improving agricultural productivity, natural resources and environmental management, human issues and other developmental problems, to sensitize and mobilize community members for productive development.

According to Onwubiko (2011) oral tradition as part of traditional communication is the culture of the people, the way of life of the people that is being transmitted from one generation to another by mere words of mouth. Oral tradition being the totality of the people's way of life and the people's tradition includes; their native political system, fashion, teaching, farming system, the worship of their God, festival and their ceremonies. Forms of oral tradition are; poetry, prose narrative, drama, tales, songs, etc. This traditional communication media serves as a reliable channel of news and information gathering, processing and dissemination in many rural communities, and often address local interest and concerns in local languages and cultural contest which the community members can easily understand and identify with, affirming Lilian and Christopher's assertion (2022) that "Nigeria as a heterogeneous society with different ethnic groups measured by different languages has its own different way of life and means of sustaining their rich cultural heritage".

In view of the fact that traditional communication has great effect on people living in rural areas, this work seeks to examine traditional communication and adoption of Covid-19 safety protocol in Afaha group of villages.

Statement of Problem

Despite the importance of traditional communication media, one cannot deny the fact that they do have challenges which relegates them to the background in the modern age. Traditional communication media like other communication and information media have their weaknesses and limitations in time and space. They are particularly deficient in simultaneous dissemination of information about developmental issues across wide and geographical disperse population. Gohla (2010), observes that only a small number of traditional communication media still exist, as their survival is dangerously threatened by the ever-

increasing advance of modern civilizations, but in order to remedy this, there should be a means of authentically portraying and preserving the elements of traditional culture.

Given the importance of traditional communication, it becomes imperative to examine to what extent residents in Afaha group of villages have been sensitized on the adoption of Covid-19 safety protocol and to examine if there is a relationship between traditional communication and the adoption of Covid-19 safety measure in Afaha group of villages.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study aimed to:

1. Find out the effectiveness of traditional communication in information health delivery in respect of Covid-19 safety protocol to resident of the area studied.
2. Ascertain the traditional communication medium that was used to disseminate the adoption of Covid-19 safety protocol in the areas studied.
3. Find out the extent to which traditional communication was adopted as regard covid-19 safety protocol in the area studied.
4. Find out the factors that militated against traditional communication as regards Covid-19 safety protocol in the areas studied.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the attainment of the objectives of this study;

1. To what extent traditional communication was adopted as regards Covid-19 safety protocol in the area study?
2. How effective was traditional communication in information health delivery in respect of Covid-19 safety protocol to residents of the area studied?
3. Which traditional communication medium was used to disseminate the adoption of Covid-19 safety protocol in areas studied?
4. What were the factors that militated against traditional communication as regards Covid-19 safety protocol in the area studied?

Research Hypothesis

One null hypothesis (Ho) was formulated to guide the study and to be tested at 0.05 level of significance.

There is no significance difference between the mean responses of male and female residents of Afaha group of villages on their attitude towards traditional communication and its adoption of Covid-19 safety protocol

Justification of the Study

Communalism and social interaction which are major characteristics of an African rural community was at the fore during the Covid-19 lockdown in Afaha Oku group of villages. In all the major communication channels like markets, age grade settings, village square, churches etc; the residents of Afaha Oku group of villages disregarded the Covid-19 safety protocols, continued to socialize among themselves, thereby endangering their lives and those of their loved ones. The quest to find out why and to proffer solution gave rise to this study.

Review of related literature

Traditional Communication Systems

Before the introduction of modern mass media in Africa, there exist other channels of communication that enabled our forefathers to interact and maintain a stable system of living. Information from the traditional leaders was passed freely to the members of the community (Abas, 2012).

Today, in most of our rural communities where modern media of communication are completely or partially non-existent, information is still shared among the people. It is very common in our rural communities to witness that when a person dies in the early hours of the morning, before mid-day almost half of the village or community have heard about the death. One may begin to wonder what makes this possible without the death being announced over the radio, or television, or published in the newspaper. Also in times of an emergency, like war, able bodied young men were summoned through traditional channels of communication.

Dina (2012) in tracing the origin of communication says:

Communication is as old as humanity.

The first human beings to inhabit the earth lived in caves; they looked and

behaved more like apes. Even during these prehistoric times, some forms of communication existed. Before the development of language, this communication was mostly through touch (tactile communication) and local signal.

It is in the light of the above that this study looks at the role of Traditional communication in the control of the spread of covid-19 pandemic

Communication and the spread of covid-19

According to Reddy and Gupta (2020), The impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups would rely in part on the quality of communication regarding health risk and danger. This is correct as communication played a vital role in the control and eradication of the covid-19 pandemic.

In many developed cities, government and non-governmental organizations used various communication media to educate their citizens on the nature and general health protocols of covid-19, these institutions also helped to control the quality of information sent out on the pandemic. For instance Mheidly & Fares (2020) discussed the implications of the COVID-19 infodemic which apart from inadequate information on the virus, affected people's attitude towards observing safety protocols and measures put in place by government and other health agencies.

Social media also played a vital role in the spread of misinformation on the virus and negatively affected people's attitude towards preventing the spread of the virus. Del et al (2016) also amplify the rate at which false information is spread through social media.

Communication and stigmatization

Communication as a social process is the means by which people influence others. It makes individual interaction possible and comprehensible. It is the basis on which man is considered a social being, able to co-operate with others and to engage in socially useful activity. Emery (2013). Research has revealed that the covid-19 pandemic altered in a negative way the the sociable atmosphere experienced by societies. This has led to fear and stigmatization as

everyone sees the other as a potential carrier and a risk to his or her well being.

Bhanot et al (2020) exposes the stigmatization caused by covid-19 in the Indian society. This experience according to the authors has affected the natural social life of the people. People now live in fear of being infected by the other. This fear has completely destroyed the communal life once enjoyed by people. Umukoro et al (2020) opine that the incessant spread of the virus and increase death from the virus especially in the western world has affected tourism to international destinations. This is also seen as a negative impact on social life and stigma on the western world

Balakrishnan (2020) also explains how those infected by the virus in India are being blamed for their calamity. According to the author their ignorance and negligence is perceived as the reason for their being infected by the virus. This situation is not different in other societies. In many cases, an infected person is discriminated and stigmatized. If the victim dies of the virus, his family is equally avoided. If the victim survives, he or she lives with the stigma for a long time.

Traditional communication system

Traditional communication is regarded here as the products of the interplay between a traditional community's custom and conflicts harmony and strife, cultural convergences and divergences, culture specific tangible, interpersonal relation, symbols and codes and moral tradition which include mythology, oral literature (poetry, story -telling, proverbs), masquerades, witchcraft, rites, rituals, music, dance, drama costumes and similar abstractions and artifact which encompass a people's factual symbolic and cosmology existence from birth to death and even beyond death (Ugboajah, 2014). They refer to the modes of communication, which are still in use today by the rurality. They have been variously called folk media or, as Frank Ugboajah would call them, Oramedia.

Folk media have survived from the earliest of times and made an adjusted transition into the electronic age. (communication Transition will be discussed later in this chapter). They have equally undergone changes of their own, although they have retained both their basic modes and significances. Taken together, both the traditional and the modern means of communication are quite vast. They include all possible ways

of attracting attention such as facial expression and gestures, music, dance and words both written and unwritten (Ugboajah 2017). Traditional communication can be divided into two major categories, namely verbal and non-verbal communication.

Verbal traditional communication system/channels

Under this category, there are several major traditional communication system or channels. According to Jeffrey 2015) they include:

- Market
- Town crier
- Visits
- Church
- Village square

These channels will now be explained, starting with the market place.

Market Place

The market place is very important in the lives of the African people. It is a place where people from different parts of the community converge for the purpose of buying and selling. In the rural areas, an average person goes to the market at least once in two days to buy or sell one item or the other. It is unlike nowadays where a person goes to the market once a month, buying everything he needs and storing them in the refrigerator or deep freezer.

The market place can be used effectively to disseminate information to the entire community. Little wonder people found guilty of falsely accusing someone are requested to denounce their false accusation at the market place for the entire community to hear.

Town Criers

The town crier can be interchangeably called the village announcer or the village gong-man. In disseminating his message in the village, the town crier stops at the most strategic places, strikes his wooden or metal gong thrice or more to draw attention to himself, then makes his announcement as directed. The effectiveness of the village gong man is mostly realized when he makes his announcement early in the morning or late in the night. This is because some quietness is recorded at these periods.

One of the good aspects of the town crier is that the audience can stop and ask him questions on his message, an opportunity that the modern mass media cannot immediately provide. One major disadvantage of the town crier, however, is that his voice is not amplified, for example through the use of public address system. consequently, his natural voice cannot carry the message across to everyone in the community. This then means that people who are living very far from the position from where the town crier makes his announcement do not partake in this type of information-sharing process since they can hear the town crier's gong but not the message. But now there is a modern town crier, with a public address system mounted on top of a car or motorcycle. The town crier whistle into his microphone to draw attention to himself before his announcement.

Visit

There is no social function the Africans practice more than paying visits. There is an understanding of brotherhood that exists between Africans which necessitates the paying of visits. During visits, conversation takes place over Kola nuts or a keg of palm wine. During this conversation, information is shared.

Church

Churches can also serve as information sharing centers. In Africa today, so many people have turned to one Christian religious group or the other, which brings about their congregating at a place of worship. The officiating Priest or pastor can pass information during the sermon or even after the church service. Important announcement that affect the lives of worshipers are also made during or after church service.

Village Square

The village square in the rural areas is a venue for village meetings and a centre of activity during festivals. People converge at the village square for crucial meetings that concern the village. Information and announcement can be made during such occasions. Even when not in use for meeting and festival, the village square serves as a relaxation spot where big umbrella trees provide shade for people who sit on logs of wood neatly arranged for the purpose. As people relax on this locally

made and improvised seats, they converse, gossip and consequently exchange a lot of information.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Afaha Oku group of villages in Akwa Ibom State comprising three villages namely; Afaha Oku, Ibaku and Nduetong Oku. The population of the study comprised of all residents of Afaha Oku group of villages. Based on information obtained from each village head, the population of Nduetong Oku was 3200, that of Ibaku 4200 and that of Afaha Oku 400. This brought to a total of 11,400.

The sample consisted of 180 selected respondents, comprising 54 males and 126 females respectively and selection was done through simple random sampling by balloting.

The instrument for this study was constructed by the research. The questionnaire was known as; “traditional communication and adoption of Covid-19 safety protocol in Afaha Oku group of villages in Akwa Ibom State (TCACSPAOGVAIS). The questionnaire had two sections. In section A, the respondents were to give information on their personal data while in section B, they were to respond to the questionnaire items and indicate in the questionnaire their level of agreement and disagreement. It had twenty-two items which were graded on 4 points scale of

Strongly agreed	-SA (4)
Agreed	-A (3)
Disagreed	-D (2)
Strongly disagreed	-SD (1)

The questionnaire was drafted with the research objectives of the study and was given to experts of the department of statistics for professional scrutiny. A re-test method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument administered and re-administered to 15 respondents initially. The two sets of scores were compared using Spearman Rank Order. The correlation coefficient was 0.89 which was considered high to be used for the study.

The researcher administered the copies of questionnaire to one hundred and eighty (180) respondents by herself and three assistants. The respondents answered the questions and the distributed copies of questionnaire were collected within three days with a records of 100% return rate.

The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. To determine the cut-off point for acceptance values assigned to the four response options (4+3+2+1 = 10). 10 was divided by four (4) to get a mean of 2.5. The decision rule was that items with mean response from 2.5 and above were regarded as agreed item while items whose mean responses were below 2.5 were taken as disagreed.

Results

Research Question One: What were the loopholes of the Traditional Communication during its adoption of Covid-19 safety protocol in Afaha Oku group of villages?

Table 1: Mean responses on the loopholes of the traditional communication during its adoption of Covid-19 safety protocol in Afaha Oku group of villages

S/ N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	X	DECISIO N
1	Traditional communication could not reach to the entire people of Afaha Oku group of villages during its adoption of Covid-19 safety protocol	158	20	2	0	3.87	Agreed
2	The scheduling time for its adoption was not adequate	80	76	14	10	3.26	Agreed
3	The people of Afaha Oku Group of villages were not really sensitized by the traditional communication during its adoption of Covid-19 safety protocol	94	56	16	14	3.28	Agreed
4	Enough emphasis was not laid by the traditional communication about	88	72	12	08	3.33	Agreed

	Covid-19 safety protocol within the period under review						
5	The town criers were not acquainted with the covid-19 lexicon	52	46	42	40	2.61	Agreed
6	Information on covid-19 safety protocol was not practiced at different market squares	56	84	22	18	2.99	Agreed
7	Training on covid-19 vocabularies was not provided for the town criers	115	53	10	02	3.56	Agreed
8	There was neutrality on the part of the traditional authority during the exercise	136	40	04	0	3.73	Agreed
9	The town criers and those responsible for the release of Covid-19 safety measures at the market squares were not financially motivated	92	48	26	14	3.21	Agreed
10	The Akwa Ibom State government did not provide funds	86	48	30	16	3.13	Agreed
11	Supervision to ensure the success of the traditional communication message on covid-19 safety protocol in Afaha Oku group of villages was not effectively carried out	98	52	18	12	3.13	Agreed

From table 1 the mean responses on the loopholes of traditional communication during its adoption of covid-19 safety protocol in Afaha

Oku group of villages ranged from 3.87 to 3.31. All the eleven (11) items had mean scores above 2.5 which was considered the decision making point for Agreed/Acceptance. Therefore, all the loopholes were accepted by the respondents as factors that could not ease the smooth communication of covid-19 safety protocol by the traditional communication during its adoption in Afaha Oku group of villages.

Table 2: Mean response on the measures that can be taken to improve the traditional communication during its adoption of similar epidemic as covid-19.

S/N	ITEMS	X	DECISION
1	Traditional institutions in Nigeria should embark on the training of the town crier and other personnel on safety messages in respect of epidemic	3.95	Agreed
2	Lexicon on epidemic in vernacular should be made available to the town criers and other personnel	3.87	Agreed
3	Information on safety measures against epidemic should be done at the appropriate time	3.75	Agreed
4	Authority concern should be involved in such exercise by showing interest	3.80	Agreed
5	Funds should be provided to the traditional personnel involved	3.66	Agreed
6	Conference and seminars should be organized to the traditional council on the need to inform the masses on safety measures against epidemic. This should be done using the local dialect	4.00	Agreed
7	The town crier and other traditional personnel involved in disseminating safety measures against epidemic should get to the reach of the masses	3.72	Agreed
8	Microphones should be used by the traditional personnel	3.85	Agreed
9	Government should involve the civil	3.63	Agreed

	society for adequate assistance to the traditional communication on safety measures against epidemic in rural areas		
10	Government should set up surveillance team so as to ensure compliance by the traditional personnel involved in disseminating information to rural dwellers on precautionary measures against any epidemic	3.90	Agreed
11	Village and clan heads should implement the traditional communication system in disseminating message of safety measure against epidemic	3.77	Agreed

From table 2, the mean response on the measures that can be taken to improve the traditional communication during its adoption of future similar epidemic as Covid-19 ranged from 3.95 to 3.77. All the item had mean score above 2.5 which is a point of acceptance. The analysis shows that none of the items was rejected as being the essential measures for effective adoption of the traditional communication during covid-19 safety protocol.

Table 3: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value result comparing Respondents by Gender

Variable	N	Mean	SD	DF	P	CV	T-value	Remark
Female	126	16.49	2.14	17.6	0.5	1.980	1.70	
Male	54	15.93	1.94					

The result presented in table 3 shows the means and standard deviation for gender, male and female residents in Afaha Oku group of villages interviewed. The degree of freedom is 18 but the t-table shows 120 as the highest degree of freedom. Under 0.5 level of significance, the calculated t-value of 1.70 is less than the critical value 1.980. Therefore, the null hypothesis is retained.

Discussion of Findings

Sensitization: Inadequate sensitization of the importance of the covid-19 protocols to the town criers made it impossible for its dissemination. Most of them did not even understand its relevance to health and general well being at the time.

Poor timing: Inadequate communication on the the appropriate time for the dissemination of information on safety protocols

Poor education: No proper education on the observance of the safety protocols eg, washing of hands, use of nose mask, social distancing, avoiding crowded places etc

Lack of motivation: Failure of government to provide the motivation and enabling environment for the sensitization of the people on the covid-19 and its safety protocols

Non chalant attitude of traditional rulers: The attitude of the clan and village heads towards the health and well being of the people was also a problem. The traditional rulers did not see the need to reach out to government to provide the adequate resources for sensitization

Conclusion/Recommendations

This study has exposed the inadequacies of the traditional communication systems during the covid-19 pandemic. It has presented the various ways and means information is traditionally disseminated in the rural areas. Using Afaha Oku as case study, the study maintains that the traditional communication system is the most appropriate means of disseminating information in rural areas, however, measures should be put in place to ensure adequate training of town criers and other traditional communication personnel on covid-19 safety protocols and other safety measures put in place to control the spread of diseases and other pandemics

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