

The coverage of health related programmes by radio stations operating in Port Harcourt Local Government Area

By

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Abstract

This paper set out to find out if health programmes were broadcast by radio stations operating in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers state. Rhythm FM, Wave FM, Radio Rivers and Garden City FM are the four radio stations operating in this local government area. Some objectives of the study were to ascertain if the radio stations do broadcast health related programmes and also to know the constraints that that faced in their effort to do so. The agenda setting theory was used for the study. Observation of the programme schedule of the station and interview of respondents provided the needed data. The census sampling technique was adopted because the population of study was small. The results showed the radio stations do broadcast health programmes; they were mostly the source of their programmes and also faced the issue of lack of funds to do more. The study recommends among other things that more health programmes should be added to their schedule and that various organisations should join them make health programmes them financially.

Introduction

Information is very important in the society. It is a veritable tool for the realisation of goals at any level in life. The media as the fourth estate of the society is expected to inform members of the public about whatever is happening in the society, which also includes what happens in the corridor of powers. People often rely on the media for information regarding any aspect of their lives. Information exchange is an important aspect of man's life and it forms the basis of the human communication process. Communication is the live wire of human existence (Ndimele and Innocent, 2006). People often have different things to with others ranging from knowledge, feelings or ideas they deem necessary. Information exchange that is concerned about health is often treated under health communication. It is important to discuss or talk about health related issues, because people die daily as a result of preventable causes. These deaths would have been averted if they had access to vital information (health information).

Access to reliable health information is a cornerstone of improved sustainable health and social economic growth and development.. In lieu of what was said above, the media are expected to provide information capable of creating awareness and educating members of the public.. The broadcast media according to Usua (2006) are tools that can be used sharing ideas ,opinions, exchange of views and evaluation of alternatives. Corroborating the above view, Nwanze (2003) opines that radio is one of the most effective tools of mass communication today in Africa and the third World countries generally. He feels radio is a very effective medium of reaching the masses. Orlu-orlu (2013) asserts to this by saying that radio is one of the appropriate means of communicating in the society, beating literacy barriers. Consequently, we can infer that radio has tremendous societal impact and can affect attitudes and behaviour of its audience. A radio has potential for significant positive impact on the health of a society by providing important information about health and its listenership.

Radio is one of the medium that can be employed in communicating health related messages. Health communication is most often defined by scholars as the use of various strategies of communication, the mass media, collective activities that takes place at the community level, and interpersonal communication to influence the health behaviour of individuals and groups alike. On their part, Rimal and Lapinski (2009), believe that health communication is seen to have relevance for virtually every aspect of health and well-being, including disease prevention, health promotion and quality of life. For this reason, health communication is often used as a method by those who wish to influence the behaviour of health professionals and community members. They added that health communication encompasses campaigns which include public service announcements delivered through a diverse mix of communication channels such as radio, road shows, posters, booklets and brochures.

Over the past few decades, health communication campaigns and programmes have been used in an attempt to affect behaviors related to general health topics or specific diseases, such as reproductive health, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), malaria, child survival, sex related behaviours, etc.

Radio has been a unique medium for relaying information and a tool used to influence the perceptions and attitudes of people. However, health which is an important aspect of human existence has been neglected or given little or no attention by mass media experts whom the masses look up to for vital information. The study therefore seeks to find out if health related programmes are broadcast by radio stations in Port Harcourt Local Government Area.

Aim And Objectives

The aim of the study was to examine health communication programmes on radio stations in Port Harcourt Local Government Area. The following are the specific objectives of this paper:

- i. To ascertain if radio stations in Port Harcourt broadcast health related programmes
- ii. To verify the health-related programmes broadcast by radio stations operating in Port Harcourt Local Government Area.
- iii. To identify the sources of health programmes broadcast by radio stations operating in Port Harcourt Local Government Area.
- iv. To find out the constraints faced by radio stations operating in Port Harcourt Local Government Area in their broadcast of health programmes.

1.2 Research Questions

The following questions were posed to guide the study:

- i. Do radio stations operating in Port Harcourt local Government Area broadcast health related programmes?
- ii. What are the health related programmes that are broadcast by radio stations operating in Port Harcourt local Government Area?
- iii. What are the sources of health related programmes on Port Harcourt local Government Area Port Harcourt?
- iv. What are the constraints faced by radio stations operating in Port Harcourt Local Government Area towards the broadcast of health communication programmes?

Literature Review

Agenda setting theory was propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972. It simply states that the mass media has the ability to mentally order or organize the world for people (Daramola 2003, p. 61). The theory posits that the media may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is successful at telling them what to think about. One can therefore conclude that the media not only informs us, but can also influence us depending on what they portray as important. That is to say, that the amount of attention given to an issue in the media determines the degree of importance attached to it. The main

argument of the agenda setting theory is that, even though the media may not completely change one's point of view on a particular issue, but it can tend to change his perception about what is good.

There are various forms of communication which range from personal to impersonal forms of communication. The personal form includes intrapersonal, interpersonal, group and public communication, while all forms of mass communication fall under impersonal form of communication. According to Ndimele and Innocent (2006), mass communication is a form of impersonal communication in which the communicator (usually an organization) transmits messages through channels such as television, radio, books, magazines, newspapers, films etc. Mass media is a term that refers to the use of any mechanical device that multiplies messages and spreads or disseminates them to a large number of people simultaneously. There are two major classes of mass media ; they are print and broadcast(electronic).The print media consist of newspapers, magazines, books, handbills etc, while the broadcast/electronic media consist of the radio, television, film, etc with the internet popularly known as 'the new media.

Radio transmission is also called wireless transmission this is because there is no wire connecting a radio set to the station from where programmes are transmitted. Radio as a mass communication medium has certain features that are makes it function well as a mass medium. Radio programmes are usually produced with the aim of satisfying the needs of a group of listeners. This it can achieve by following a particular format, language, and presentation style. Ndimele and Innocent (2006) assert to the fact that radio penetrates the lives of people from all walks of life society. Some of the features of radio are ubiquity, portability affordability, adaptability, communal experience, little or no need for electricity (Asadu and Usua , 2011);

Radio programmes are broadcast to entertain, educate or inform. When radio programmes are broadcast to communicate health related messages, it is said to be communication for good health. This is done by

allocating a time and schedule for health programmes aimed at sensitizing the public about the causes of a diseases, the outbreak of a disease or illness, curbing the spread and menace of a disease, proffering preventive measures and advices tailored to living a healthy life. This was what the media was used for during the outbreak of Ebola virus and Lassa fever.

Empirical Review

Rimal and Lapinski (2009) conducted a study on “propagating health insurance; a formative evaluation of broadcast media programmes sponsored by National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) in selected Northern States in Nigeria”. It adopted survey research design in its bid to find out the preferred channel of getting information and the popularity the channels that will help NHIS reach its target audience.. The survey also sought to find out how the various media product designed to raise awareness have reached the audience and how target groups could be reached effectively. The survey however reaffirmed the need for comprehensive communication plan for all public projects that require media campaign in Nigeria. It therefore concluded that such plans should focus on situation analysis, identification of goals, detailed design of messages for channels audience appraisal, discussion of channels effective time line monitoring and evaluation strategies and all other best practices This study is also concerned about the impact of health related messages on the audience, but does not study the audience. This paper is however interested in finding out if radio stations operating in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers state broadcast health related programmes.

Methodology

Survey research design was the method adopted. It involves the use of structured and often very detailed interview or questionnaire guide in order to obtain information from large number of respondent presumed to be representatives of a specific population. It is used for the purpose of obtaining data to enable the investigator answer research questions by

providing procedural outline for conducting research. The population of this study comprise of the four radio stations situated within Port Harcourt Local Government Area. They are: Radio Rivers (99.1FM), Wave (91.7FM), Rhythm (93.7FM), and Garden City (89.9FM). The sampling procedure used in this work was the census sampling technique, which has to do with studying the entire population. According to Okwechime (2016), census technique is the collection of data from all members instead of a sample of the target population. Census technique refers to the complete enumeration of a universe under study. A universe may be a place, a group of people or a specific locality through which we collect the data. The study employed the interview schedule and personal observation of the programme schedule of the selected radio stations for the study. The interview was conducted with on air personalities in charge of anchoring health programmes in the selected radio stations. The qualitative data analysis method was adopted.

Data Presentation and Discussion of Findings

The researcher carried out an oral interview with four OAPS, each representing their radio station. They are: Mr. Boma of Radio Rivers, Mrs. Debby Diamond of Wave FM, Mr. Vitamin C of Rhythm FM and Mr. Carl Orakwe of Garden City FM.

In response to the research item one and which had to do with finding if the stations broadcast health related programmes and their names. All the stations had health related programmes that they broadcast. Their names, the time of broadcast and duration of programmes are presented as follows. Mr Boma of Radio Rivers identified two health related programmes; 'Doctors' without border' and 'Healthy living' which are broadcasted on Tuesdays and Thursdays respectively for a duration of 25mins , between 11:35-12pm and an hour from 11am-12pm. Mrs Debby Diamond admitted they had just one health related programme 'Health wise' aired on Mondays for 45mins (11am-11:45). Mr Vitamin C (radio name) of Rhythm said that they had a programme called

'Health spot' which was broadcast between 8:00am-8:30am (30mins) on Wednesdays. Lastly, Mr Carl Orakwe of Garden City FM said that the station had a programme called 'Doctors corner' broadcast on Tuesdays which last for 40 minutes from 8:20-9:00am.

The response of research item 3, showed that the four radio stations were the sources of their health. This was with the sole aim of giving back to the society i.e. to contribute their own quota in ensuring that members of the public are duly informed. As this will keep them up to date with information about their health and raise healthy practices.

In addition, the question which sought to find out the constraints faced by radio stations operating in Port Harcourt Local Government Area in broadcasting health related programmes, the researcher got the following responses from the respondents: Wave FM and Radio Rivers said that the funding of these programmes was poor, while Garden City FM stated they have issues getting health experts to turn up the programmes when invited. Whereas Rhythm FM respondent said that the station did not have any reason for not broadcasting health related messages.

In addition, follow up questions were used to find out if health issues has been managed as a result of exposure to health communication programmes despite challenge encountered. The four respondents gave positive remarks adding the feedback technique used to measure this message effectiveness; Radio Rivers adopted the use of phone calls during and after the programme, Rhythm applied phone-in-session and text messages technique, Wave fm, made use of social media, phone calls and text messages while Garden city fm went strictly with phone calls and text messages during live shows.

4.2 Discussion of findings

Research question 1

Do radio stations operating in Port Harcourt Local Government Area broadcast Health related programmes?

Findings from the interview conducted showed that all four radio stations used for the study, had health related programmes. The media, radio in particular has been a source of information on health. This means that the radio stations have been able to give people something to think about health. This substantiates what Daramola (2003) said about mass media having the ability to mentally order or organize the world for people. The radio stations in airing health related programmes have satisfied this criterion.

Research question 2

What health related programmes are broadcast by radio stations operating in Port Harcourt Local Government Area?

The data presented revealed the name & duration of health communication programmes thus: Rhythm FM; 'Health spot' (30mins) on Wednesdays out of 168 hours of broadcast in a week i.e. 24 hours per day, Wave FM: 'Health wise' (45mins) on Mondays out of 168 hours of broadcast in a week i.e.24 hours per day, Garden City FM: 'Doctors corner' (40mins) on Tuesdays out of 112 hours of broadcast in a week,i.e.16 hrs per day Radio Rivers FM, 'Doctors without Border' (25mins) and 'Healthy Living' (1 hour) on Tuesdays and Thursdays respectively out of 127 hours of broadcast weekly i.e 18 hours per day.

From the foregoing, we can deduce that Radio Rivers had two slots for health programmes, while the three other stations had just one slot for health communication programmes weekly. Also, it shows that Radio Rivers allocates more time for health related programmes against others. This should not be so because the masses depend on the media for accurate information and it is only through repetition and re-emphasising an issue that the media is able to set agenda or give people something to

think about. Making an issue a matter of everyday discourse makes audience to focus extra attention on the matter and subsequently adopt and practice the content of such message relayed.

Research question 3

what are the sources of the health related programmes broadcast on radio stations operating in Port Harcourt Local Government Area?

After the data analysis, it was observed that many of the radio stations produced their health related programmes themselves except for the 25 minutes sponsored programme that is called 'Doctors without border' individuals.

Research question 4

What are the constraints faced by radio stations operating in Port Harcourt Local Government Area in their bid to broadcast health related programmes?

The constraints ranged from poor funding, (Wave and Radio Rivers fm) to getting health experts or doctors to turn up (Garden City FM), while Rhythm FM, said it did not have any problem when it comes to the broadcast of health related programmes. It is obvious that the funding and getting health experts for the chosen topics were the major constraints faced by the stations. The surprising thing is that, Rhythm FM that claims not to have any reason for not broadcasting health programmes, only had 'Health spot' which lasted for 30mins on Wednesdays out of 168 hours of broadcast in a week. This contradictory, it ought to have more than one health programme running on its station. Even, though the radio stations have at least one health programme broadcast every week, this is definitely not enough for them to set agenda on health. Since, setting agenda is strongly dependent on the frequency at which an issues is talked about or reported in the media.

5.0 Conclusion

This study was carried out to examine if health related programmes were broadcast by radio Stations operating in Port Harcourt Local Government Area. The stations were Rythym FM, Radio Rivers FM, Garden City FM, and Wave FM. The objectives of the study were to ascertain if radio stations in Port Harcourt broadcast health related programmes; to verify the health-related programmes broadcast by radio stations operating in Port Harcourt Local Government Area; to identify the sources of health programmes broadcast by radio stations operating in Port Harcourt Local Government Area; and to find out the constraints faced by radio stations operating in Port Harcourt Local Government Area in their broadcast of health programmes.

The Agenda Setting theory was adopted for the study. Some of the objectives of the study were to know if the selected radio stations broadcast health related programmes and also to know the constraints they faced in doing so. The researcher studied the programme schedule of the stations as well as interviewed the respondents to obtain information. The census sampling technique was adopted, which had to do with using the four radio stations in operating in Port Harcourt Local Government Area.

The results of the study showed that all the radio stations broadcast health related programmes. It also revealed the names and duration for each of the health programmes being aired. The radio stations also served as sources of their programmes except for Doctors without Borders which is broadcast on Radio Rivers FM. Getting experts to feature in the health programmes and funding were the major constraints they had in their bid to reach the audience with health related messages.

6. Recommendations

The researcher makes the following recommendations based on the findings of the study:

1. Having established the fact that radio stations operating in PHALGA broadcast health programmes. It is important for them to increase the number of times programmes are aired, as this will give them ample opportunity to members keep members of the public always posted about such issues.
2. The radio stations should endeavour to have more programmes on health on their schedule
3. Lastly, considering the cost involved in running a radio stations, the researcher will encourage well meaning Nigerians to support the broadcast of health related programmes for the benefit of the public.

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