PERCEPTION AND ATTITUDE OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN KWARA STATE NIGERIA TOWARDS COVID 19 CAMPAIGNS

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Abstract
This study examined the perception and attitude of young people in Kwara State Nigeria towards the COVID-19 campaigns on the basis of the campaigns creativity, portrayal of characters, message tones, and nature of information disseminated. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews among twenty students of Kwara State University and the University of Ilorin, both in Kwara State, Nigeria. The data revealed that the use of cartoons and animated characters diminished the enormity of the message, while the efficacy of human figures, including well-known celebrities, led to impacts of the messages. The study also revealed that the majority of the campaign messages were not creative enough for the target audience to grasp. The tone used in the campaign messages was more of an empathy, precaution, and fear appeal. The majority of the informants believed that speaking in a compassionate manner would have been the most effective approach for persuading people to key into the campaign and for them to embrace the messages. The obvious implication arising from this position suggests that how a health-related message is packaged and disseminated has a substantial impact on how it is perceived and that a society that lacks accurate health information and precautions is susceptible to public health problems and epidemics. In the creation and implementation of health messaging and social interventions, it was recommended to employ pertinent cues, such as recognisable faces and simple language.

Keywords: Campaign, COVID-19, Health, Youths, Perception, Attitude

INTRODUCTION

Public health efforts targeting young people during the COVID-19 pandemic have mostly made use of mass and social media because of their widespread reach and low cost of distribution (Anorue, Ugwu, Ugboaja, Nwabunze, Ugwulor-Onyinyechi & Njoku, 2021). Media campaigns raising awareness of the deadly COVID-19 virus had sprung up all over the world since the virus was first identified in Wuhan, China, in 2019 (Folorunsho, Adegboye, Adewumi & Yunus, 2021). Nigeria, which was the third African country to experience the infectious disease in Africa after Algeria and Egypt on February 27, 2020, had also pushed out campaigns leading to an increase in knowledge and awareness of the infectious disease as well as disrupting the lifestyle of young people in the country towards a COVID-19-compliant one (Chukwu-Okoronkwo, 2020). However, despite the awareness created by the campaigns in Nigeria, the perception and attitude of young people towards infectious diseases have not been significantly researched. Owing to the critical situation in Nigeria during the COVID pandemic period, in which about 3,155 people died, it was suggested that urgent steps be taken towards having a holistic understanding of the perceptions and attitudes of young people towards the message campaigns (Jaiyesimi, 2022; NCDC, 2022).

Examining the perception and attitude of young people towards COVID-19 campaigns, Jaiyesimi, Bamitale, Diyaolu and Alabi (2022) in their study on Nigerian youths and their positive attitude towards the national drive against the spread of COVID-19 found that young people, especially those between the ages of 15 and 26, have knowledge about COVID-19, which is a pointer to the efficacy and success of public health campaigns on the virus in Nigeria. Also, Chukwu-Okoronkwo (2020), in his own study on the COVID-19 pandemic media sensitization campaign in Nigeria, found that information at people's disposal has a remarkable way of shaping their perception of life and issues in their environment and their reactions to them, while also affirming that media advocacy initiatives in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic were inadequate. In another study, Anorue et al. (2021) found that media campaigns on preventive measures for COVID-19 have been successful to some extent, while admitting that the majority of people are aware of the various media campaigns to curb the spread of the disease, but the level of compliance is poor despite the intensity of these media campaigns. Moreover, Kolapo, Ilesanmi, Omoju, Odukanmi, Akanbi, Okediran and Balogun (2021) discovered that the majority of Nigerian youths sampled had general knowledge about COVID-19, its mode of spread, symptoms and signs, and other preventive measures. They opined that social media and television were the main sources of COVID-19 information for youths during the first few months of the pandemic. In another view, Richardson, Carraro, Cebotari, Gromada and Rees (2020), in their study of COVID-19 knowledge, beliefs, prevention behaviours, and misinformation among adults in selected Northern States, discovered that there were various sources of government health messages during COVID-19 through radio and health facility workers, but the rate of misinformation about the virus was high.

The studies agreed that the perception and attitude of young people towards the COVID-19 campaigns are very important if the prevalence of the infection is to be curbed permanently. Similarly, Corrin, Waddell, Greg, Young, Hierlihy and Mascarenhas (2017) and Dorcas (2020) submitted that the general success of preventive measures or campaigns aimed at managing serious social problems and life-threatening conditions depends greatly on people's attitudes and perceptions. At present, the whole gamut of the phenomenon revolves around how the global

health challenge can be totally eradicated and how people can build immunity towards the disease through acceptance of vaccination, which is projected through various communication campaigns (Akeredolu, 2020; Ikemefuna et al., 2021).

Overall, existing studies on COVID-19 in Nigeria have focused mainly on the impact of mass media campaigns on the infectious disease, awareness and adherence to preventive measures, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on corporate social responsibility, the role of social media in shaping public risk perception, the role of mass media and public health communications, the impact and role of mass media, the role of mass media interventions on promoting public health knowledge and behavioural social change, and consumer behaviour during the pandemic era. Some examples of such studies are: Analysing the impact of the media campaign and rapid testing for COVID-19 as an optimal control problem in East Java, Indonesia (Aldila, 2020); Consumer behaviour in the digital era: impact of COVID-19 (Rahmanov, Mursalov & Rosokhata, 2021), The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on corporate social responsibility and marketing philosophy (He & Harris, 2020), awareness and adherence to preventive measures on the COVID-19 campaign (Limaye, Sauer, Ali, Bernstein, Wahl, Barnhill & Labrique, 2020), Role of social media in shaping public risk perception during the COVID-19 pandemic: A theoretical review (Tsoy, Tirasawasdichai & Kurpayanidi, 2021). Role of mass media and public health communications in the COVID-19 pandemic (Anwar et. at., 2020), students' perception of COVID-19 campaigns (Johnson et al., 2020), Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): the impact and role of mass media during the pandemic (Arriaga, Esteves, Pavlova & Picarra,2021), and the role of mass media interventions in promoting public health knowledge and behavioural social change against the COVID-19 Pandemic in Jordan (Al-Dmour,Masa'deh, Salman, Al-Dmour & Abuhashesh, 2022).

As a result, this study seeks to take a different stand by exploring the perception and attitude of young people in Kwara State, Nigeria towards COVID-19 campaign messages. It was based on the assumption that, to achieve an effective message delivery and successful enlightenment about the virus, it is important that the interventions capture the perception and attitude of young people who were vulnerable to COVID 19. More so, the significance of the cultural acceptability of different aspects of the COVID-19 preventive campaign cannot be ignored in future interventions. Therefore, this research was conceived to explore the attitude and perception of young people towards the portrayal of the characters in the message conceptualization, the message tone of COVID 19 campaign, the nature of information on COVID 19 and creativity of the message design. Understanding the young people's perception and attitude may help in improving future campaign productions and contents.

LITERATURE REVIEW

COVID-19 Campaigns in Nigeria

Meanwhile, after the first discovery within the country in February 2020, the Federal Government of Nigeria had launched a series of responsive efforts, including the use of media channels for campaigns. The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) charged with developing and implementing policies and preventive measures to prevent the outbreak of diseases and epidemics, in conjunction with the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 (PTF-COVID), rolled out several measures to curtail the spread of the virus (Oyeranti & Sokeye,

2020). Part of these measures, as asserted by Folorunsho et al. (2021), include: interstate and international travel bans; stay-at-home orders; restrictions on mass or large gatherings; closure of schools, hotels, and businesses; social distancing; use of personal protective equipment; regular washing of hands and use of hand sanitizer; cessation of non-essential movements, among others. More importantly, the PTF-COVID and the NCDC also put up media and informational initiatives to increase public awareness of precautionary and safety measures as well as reduce tensions and fears among people (Olapegba et al., 2020).

Various campaigns to encourage proper hygiene and social distancing were also initiated by government and civil society. Some of them include the "Powerful hands" sensitization campaign which was targeted at select States with high COVID-19 cases in the country; #MaskOnNaija campaign which is an awareness initiative of the Centre for Communication and Social Impact (CCSI) aimed at raising the consciousness of the people on how the wearing of facemasks can help flatten the COVID-19 curve in the country. The #Take Responsibility campaign initiated by the NCDC was also to address the spread of misinformation, and empower Nigerians with the right information to drive individual behavioural change and prevent the spread of COVID-19. Other campaigns, such as "Stay Informed, Stay Safe," were rolled out by WHO and underscored the importance attached to curbing the menace (Ajayi et al., 2020). Moreover, temperatures were checked at the airports, and travellers coming into the country from other nations where COVID-19 cases had been verified were advised to isolate themselves (Folorunsho et al., 2021). The NCDC started keeping track of possible victims and their contacts in collaboration with state governments. State governments also banned all gatherings of more than 50 persons, built isolation centres for infected people, and ordered all lower and middle level public employees to work from home (Ewodage, 2020).

Young People's Attitude and Perception towards Health Communication Campaigns

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on global health, economies, and societies. The campaign surrounding COVID-19 has been instrumental in disseminating information, promoting preventive measures, and addressing various challenges (Smith & Thomas, 2021). Communication campaigns address misconceptions and provide accurate information to help youth understand their vulnerability and the potential consequences of their actions. Youth engagement can create a lasting impact on their health behaviours, resilience, and preparedness for public health crises (Lim, Hwee, & Chua, 2021). Engaging youth in communication campaigns is essential for effectively managing situations, as youth behaviours and attitudes can greatly impact public health outcomes.

Current studies on the COVID-19 phenomenon have shown that attitude and perception influence health beliefs (Zhong et al., 2020; Udoakang et al., 2022), highlighted the extent and means by which campaigns could aid in taming the menace (Msughter, 2020), and called for additional research to further interrogate the serious challenges posed by the public health problem, particularly among young people. From this, Adetayo et al. (2021) investigated the correlation between student attitudes and COVID-19 vaccination adoption. The study found that students' attitudes and understandings about vaccinations play a critical role in determining whether they will accept them or not. The results also revealed that by addressing respondents' worries about vaccines' unexpected side effects and changing their general suspicion of vaccines' benefits, vaccine acceptability may be increased among students.

Also, Adejumo et al. (2021) identified positive attitudes and opinions of vaccination and tertiary education as predictors of desire to take the COVID-19 vaccine. In a similar view, Ijeoma et al. (2021) offer a further example of the critical connection between attitudes, perceptions, and the overall success of responses, including campaigns. The study included a cross-sectional survey of adults conducted in the Gwagwalada Area Council of Abuja, Nigeria. It was reported that even though there was a high level of awareness and understanding of the route of transmission, prevention, and common symptoms of COVID-19, knowledge of an asymptomatic person's infectiousness was inadequate to cause the desired behavioural change. It was noted that there is still a lot of misunderstanding and risk perception surrounding COVID-19 necessitating the use of local stations for campaigns and debunking in order to fight the disease.

Similarly, Ajayi, Akosile, and Ajayi-Oluajayi's (2020) study revealed that despite widespread knowledge of the virus, many individuals treated it with contempt and ridicule. The data in the study showed that only 36.6% of respondents from the Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba tribes living in the Southwest Nigerian States of Ogun and Lagos thought the virus was real. While only 36.4% of respondents said that they would consent to a voluntary test for the virus, demonstrating that attitudes towards preventative healthcare are generally negative, In another related study, Lawal et al. (2022) examined the knowledge, attitude, perception, and practices of northern Nigerians with reference to COVID-19. The data in the study revealed that there is a significant connection and correlation between the respondents' level of understanding, attitude, and perception of the sickness and how they will act in response to it. Young, married male Northern Nigerians with a high socioeconomic standing were shown to have superior knowledge, attitudes, views, and practices about COVID-19.

It is worthy to note that mainstream and social media campaigns are used to affect public health behaviours and attitudes on the grounds that the media are capable of moulding the public's knowledge reservoir during a health emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic (Lesk, Hooke, & King, 2010). Studies have shown that media campaigns on public health crises like the Ebola outbreak helped with disease prevention and can slightly affect health behaviour (Nwanne, 2014; Obukoadata, 2014; Basch, Basch & Redlener, 2014; Bello-Osagie, 2015). For instance, during the Ebola epidemic, the media had an impact on public perception of the illness and the adoption of protective measures (Ufuophu-Biri, 2017).

One of the numerous implications that can be derived from the available literature is that perception and attitude towards health efforts are vital if the prevalence of the infection is to be permanently eradicated. For instance, Nigeria had 266,675 cases as of June 2023, up from the 9,532,788 total cases reported in Africa. This was 433 cases higher than the 266,242 recorded as of 2022 (Satistica, 2022) and clearly underscores the need for caution. Although younger people are less likely to have severe negative health effects from a COVID-19 infection, their propensity for more frequent social interactions makes them an important population to take into account when trying to stop the virus's spread (Dong et al., 2020; Ward et al., 2020).

The record shows that 1.2 billion people, or 16% of the world's population, are between the ages of 15 and 24 according to the World Youth Report (2020). 19.3% of Nigeria's population is between the ages of 15 and 24 (Lucky et al., 2014), while 42% of people are under the age of 15, and about 70% of Nigerians are under the age of 30 (Akanni & Jacob, 2021). This cohort poses a serious threat to vulnerable people (Cesar et al., 2021). However, despite the

increasing susceptibility of people to COVID-19 in Nigeria during the pandemic period (Obinna, 2020; Isah et al., 2020; Izekor et al., 2020; Oyadiran, 2020; Oladosu, 2021; Acheampong et al., 2021; Amos, 2021; Ali et al., 2021; Adetayo, Sanni, & Aborisade, 2021; Ikemefuna et al., 2021; Idowu et al., 2022), the perception and attitude of young people especially in Kwara state Nigeria towards COVID 19 campaigns has not received considerable attentions of researchers.

The gap in literature in this study area becomes an obvious one because of the reality that existing studies on COVID 19 in the Nigeria context, have focused mainly on several topics such as: internet addiction during the pandemic (Olawade et al., 2020), meme as a campaign tool against COVID 19 (Msughter, 2020); public perception of radio campaign messages in managing COVID-19 (Talabi et al., 2022); a preliminary assessment of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) knowledge and perceptions (Olapegba et al., 2020); a review of COVID-19 pandemic: myths, misconceptions, and role of media education in Nigeria (Izekor et al., 2020); COVID 19 pandemic, media sensitisation campaign in Nigeria and the marginalised ears (Chukwu-Okoronkwo, 2020); Perception and practices during the COVID-19 pandemic in an urban community in Nigeria: a cross-sectional study (Ilesanmi & Afolabi, 2020); Knowledge, attitudes and practices towards COVID-19: an epidemiological survey in North-Central Nigeria (Reuben, Danladi, Saleh & Ejembi, 2021).

Others include, the campaign against COVID-19 in Nigeria: exploring church leaders' role perception and action (Nche & Agbo, 2022); Perception of COVID-19 transmission risk and testing readiness in rural Southwest Nigeria (Akinyemi et al., 2022); COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy in six geopolitical zones in Nigeria: a cross-sectional survey (Ogunbosi et al., 2022); Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Knowledge, Attitude, Practice (KAP) and misconceptions in the general population of Katsina State, Nigeria (Isah et al., 2020); Implementing an emergency risk communication campaign in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria: lessons learned (Ihekweazu et al., 2022) and Suspecting the figures: What church leaders think about government's commitment to combating COVID-19 in Nigeria (Nche & Agbo, 2022).

Against the aforementioned, and given how critical it is to know how various COVID-19 campaign elements are perceived and attitudinally treated by the young population, the goal of the current study is to adopt a fresh perspective in light of the above identified gaps by examining the perception and attitude of young people in Kwara state, Nigeria who were exposed to COVID-19 campaigns. The study contends that understanding how young people perceive COVID-19 messages and their attitude towards the campaigns may help improve the preparation and implementation of future campaigns against public health issues and sundries.

Theoretical Framework

This study utilizes perception theory and knowledge gap theory. According to Asemah, Nwammuo, and Nkwam-Uwaoma (2017), perception theory was propounded by Berelson and Steiner in 1964. The theory explains the complex role of sense organs in people's behavioural responses to issues (Osuagwu, 2020). They averred that humans are endowed with sense (perceptual) organs (eyes, ears, and nose) to help them recognise and process information in the environment, and such organs serve as inputs to the brain for information processing. The exponents see perception as a complex process by which people select, organise, and interpret

sensory stimulations into a meaningful and coherent picture of the world (Anaeto, Onabajo, & Osifeso, 2008). In the view of Osuagwu (2020), perception involves human interpretation of the sensory data that are generated from the human's five senses. These definitions have most obviously shown that sensory organs are central to the process of perception. Hence, two types of influences on perception were mentioned: structural and functional influences. Thus, this theory is relevant to the study because the believability of COVID-19 has to do with perceptions that contradict factual beliefs. People perceive what they believe and prefer to perceive what they want based on structural and functional influences.

On the other hand, Philip Tichenor proposed the Knowledge Gap Theory in 1970 (Asemah et al., 2017). The theory explicates that, as the infusion of mass media information into a social system increases, segments of the population with higher socioeconomic status tend to acquire this information at a faster rate than the lower status segments, so that the gap in knowledge between these segments tends to increase rather than decrease (Anaeto et al., 2008).

With the outbreak of COVID-19 in Nigeria, it can be surmised that the influence and relevance of motivational factors, the intensity of information consumed, and the nature or composition of communities and their available information sources (i.e., pluralistic or otherwise) may have increased. Thus, the hypothesis of this theory is relevant in this study as the audience level of knowledge about messages on COVID-19 tends to be higher than that of those with lower knowledge. Therefore, the magnitude of this knowledge relationship varies across residents in Kwara State, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative design. It was carried out among purposively selected young people in Kwara State, Nigeria. In-depth interviews were held with 20 young people between the ages of 18 and 25 at the University of Ilorin and Kwara State University, both in Kwara State. While nine of them were males, the remaining were females. An unstructured interview guide was used. The interview guide was validated through experts check and informants triangulation .Also, all the informants were assured of the confidentiality of the study. Adequate information was also provided to each of them on the rationale for the study. Owing to the burden of the pledge made to the informants, henceforth, in referring to the selected informants, the use of anonymous identifications was applied. Hence, all informants were identified with numbers 1–20. The in-depth interview conducted in English was thematically analysed with NVivo 10 software. Although the in-depth interview centred on the perception and attitude of young people towards COVID-19 campaigns in Kwara state, Nigeria, these young people were also asked about their perception towards improving subsequent health communication campaigns in Nigeria.

Data Presentation, Analysis and findings

Analysis of the transcripts revealed four main themes, which were identified and further confirmed by two independent reviewers.

Theme 1: Portrayal of the characters in the message conceptualization

Most of the young people interviewed expressed their displeasure towards how most COVID-19 messages were conceptualised with the use of cartoons and animated figures without the involvement of the people that the messages were actually meant for during the beginning of the pandemic. Specifically, the majority of the informants asserted that it is vital for campaign planners to use characters that the target audience can easily relate with within their social context. According to some of the informants, the use of cartoon characters and animated figures belittled the severity of the issue during that early period; a few others explained that the use of celebrities and other recognised individuals in the country could have made the campaign more impactful at the beginning of the exercise and could have led to fewer casualties during the period. One of the informants explained:

> ‘‘The best characters for me are public figures e.g., comedians, respected politicians, actors, content creators, YouTubers and the likes’’.

Another informant asserted that:

> ‘‘everyone uses social media these days and we all follow either one or more of the celebrities that fall under different categories, they serve as ambassadors to the public and for this, people are more likely to understand, trust and get the information as soon as possible’’.

Similarly, Informant 9 observed that:

> ‘‘Well, real people character is what I see as the best among other characters, and the reason for that is actually because, characters that are based on real situations, and that use honest and empathetic tone, are more likely to be trusted and relatable to the audience. And that's because of the authenticity. For example, campaigns that used celebrities, workers or survivors of COVID 19 can inspire empathy and gratitude.’’

Yet, another informant shared an almost similar view, noting that:

> ‘‘The characters that had a more significant impact were the use of celebrities and cartoons. This is because, celebrities were able to relay the message in different relatable ways and since social media was more rampant during the pandemic; I would always look forward to seeing content from celebrities. Also, the use of cartoons because they were easy to understand and absorb by kids, and even when I get to forget, my younger siblings would remind me because they understood it better than I do. So, I feel the cartons were positioned for the kids while the use of celebrities was focused more for adults. Therefore, the

use of both cartons and celebrity were good for adults, youths and children''.

Other Informants specifically inferred that the media campaign experts need to go the extra mile towards ensuring that the information that is disseminated goes beyond using mere animated figures that they believe the target audience would understand. Few other informants spoke passionately about their belief that campaigns disseminated during that period were not tailored specifically to the niche that they were being disseminated to. The informants expressed that the media campaign planners should have a better orientation of what the target audience understands by conducting copy test experiments on each of the different advertisements that are being channeled into the public domain. They added that when such an experiment is conducted, a specific audience will easily understand and accept it. The majority of the informants agreed that the use of the right characters would lead to the eventual success of the health campaigns in Nigeria.

Theme 2: Message tone of the COVID-19 Campaign

One of the interesting discoveries of this research is the attitude of the informants towards the tone of the COVID-19 message campaign. As described by one of the informants, the tone or mood of a campaign message influences how the message is perceived. Another informant stated that tone reflects personality, goals, values, and areas of expertise and helps campaign planners connect with their audiences. This implies that the tone of COVID-19 campaign messages is expected to be distinctive, recognisable, and unique. This is in order to ensure that such a message creates a lasting impression on the recipients or audience. However, one of the informants shares her view on the tone of COVID 19 campaign:

> ''I'll say precautionary. Because it was more of trying to warn us of the dangers and educating us on the symptoms and the steps, we should take if we are experiencing any''

Another informant also expressed a similar observation:

> ''It's more of precautionary message and a bit empathetic because most of the campaigns is basically on what to do to prevent the disease and how to. It's empathic because it directs the mass on how to take care of themselves when any symptom is detected and to make sure they remain quarantined if they catch the virus''.

A few of the informants also observed that the majority of the messages passed across to their target audiences had a fearful tone, which to a large extent made people have a depressing attitude towards the infection at the beginning of the pandemic. However, it was later that the fear tone of the COVID-19 campaigns was toned down to become empathetic when it was discovered that it was almost leading people into depression.

Theme 3: Nature of Information on COVID-19

Despite the fact that a lot of the informants explained that they get most of their information from online websites, social media, or blog sources, they admitted that they still relied on

messages passed down to them from the recognized media campaigns that they were exposed to. The majority of the informants explained that messages shared on COVID-19 during the pandemic period were up-to-date. They reiterated that the recency of the message to a large extent shaped their attitude towards how to deal with pandemics during that period of time.

In support of the above assertion, Informant 9 remarked that:

> ‘‘I think some of the information passed at that time was current as most information relayed was needed for the particular period. For example, the everyday information of how many people were infected, how many had recovered and how many were not infected.’’

However, a few of the informants who tested positive for COVID-19 explained that after a while the messages that the media campaign organizations were sending down to the public domain became too repetitive and stale, and this led to people not being interested in or looking forward to any information from them. Informants 16 and 9, who tested positive for the infection, added a more critical note on the inadequacy of the messages being disseminated:

> ‘‘The information I had before I tested positive were minor ones like COVID 19 is real. Itwas after I tested positive that I started having real information about the infectionfrom the hospital’’ (**Informant 16).**

Also, Informant 2 reiterated that:

> ‘‘The main salient information in the advertisements were them talking about social distance, COVID 19 statistics and washing of hands. People need to know something better than what they were giving us. They should have let us know everything important and also current information. The information that they were giving us were so obsolete at a point and also, they were putting so much fear into us’’.

The above views showed that while some of the informants asserted that the information that was churned out to the public domain was up-to-date, others believed that the messages became too repetitive and stale after they contracted the virus itself.

Theme 4: Creativity in Message Design

Another interesting discovery of this research is the criticisms against many of these COVID campaign messages, which range from lacking in creativity to being ambiguous sometimes. The consequence is that the messages sometimes become too complex for the average person to understand. Rather than aiming at the average person, it appears the focus tends to lean more on those that are highly educated, above the average class, or close to the middle class. The statements below illustrate that young people still have serious reservations about the creativity of the COVID-19 campaign. One of the informants shares his view on this:

> ‘‘The advert is creative enough for me and I think anybody of my academic status can get the central message of the advert. A person of

lesser academic status may not have a comprehensive understanding of the message due to their limited academic exposure'' (**Informant 15).**

The above informant showed that, to a large extent, academic qualifications determine the perception of the clarity of the COVID-19 message. So, educational qualifications are a major pointer to how resilient a campaign message will be. However, there are those who dismiss many of the messages as totally lacking in creativity.

> ''The contents of the adverts are too common place; imagine the usage of cartoon's picture with no audible word. The campaigns should not be a hit and miss campaign because people will forget…. It should be something creative and impactful. I might not be able to create something creative now but there should be something that when people see it, they will say waoh! They should create something new and attractive not something that is common and boring'' (**Informant 11).**

> ''I didn't get much on the creativity. They used the narration technique. Most of the campaigns I was exposed to kept giving description of the virus and narrating how we can prevent it. They were basic infomercials; it would have been better if our social and cultural realities are taken into deep consideration in the creativity concepts of the campaigns'' (**Informant *6*).**

However, another informant had a positive view on the creativity of the COVID 19 campaign:

> ''Despite the fact that the one I can remember now was animated, it was creative enough that both children and adults could understand what COVID was about.One of the animated figures was about to step out then she saw a stone like object which represented COVID 19, she was scared and immediately ran back inside her house. When she ran back in, her sister educated her on COVID (not stepping out if it isn't important,washing of hands with soap and water, the importance of using sanitizer,etc).They made it look real so it was creative''.

Another informant commented further:

> ''The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a surge in creative and innovative campaigns. Governments and health organizations employed various strategies to raise awareness, promote preventive measures, and encourage behavioral change. Some used creative elements like using catchy slogans like #Mask up, # Stay Safe, #Save for One Save for all, # Get Vaccinated, # COVID is real, #One arms apart. Also, social media platforms were used to disseminate information, share educational contents, and promote behavioral changes, by engaging visuals, videos, infographics, and interactive elements. There was a lot of creativity during that period to relay the COVID message''.

Two points need to be reiterated in this section. The first is the fact that media messages have to be creative in order to have a lasting influence on young people. The second reason is that advertisements and messages need to imbibe the culture of the people, which demands conscious efforts, as beautifully summed up by one of the informants:

> ‘‘You shouldn’t just frame up a message and take it to the North for instance, because they have different beliefs about things. So, you have to go to the North to get information on how they do things, their views about that thing, their opinions and perception when you bring out the message, they will embrace it. The same thing goes with the Eastern part of the country, you shouldn’t just cook up something and throw at people, they may not embrace it” (**Informant 2).**

The above views showed that the majority of the young people had sufficiently deep knowledge of the cultural implications of message saliency and acceptability. It is therefore, important that campaign planners draw upon the cultural context of the target audience in promoting particular normative ideas that are needed to achieve a particular behavioural change that orients human consciousness and positively motivates human action.

Discussion of Findings

As presented above, the study examined the perceptions and attitudes of young people in Kwara State, Nigeria towards COVID-19 campaigns. On the representation of the characters in the message conceptualization, this study found that the usage of cartoons and animated figures affects the campaign message and downplays the authenticity of the challenges of contracting the virus while pinpointing the effectiveness of human characters, including recognised faces and celebrities, for effective message delivery and an impactful message as it relates to COVID-19 campaigns. This finding is in tandem with Duhé and Zeldin's (2017) position that celebrity health endorsements can have a positive impact on health-related attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours. The authors also suggested that celebrity endorsements can enhance message credibility, increase attention to health campaigns, and positively influence health intentions and behaviours. Similarly, Quick, Bates, and Rowe (2013) found that celebrity endorsements in public health campaigns have the potential to increase message effectiveness, including improving knowledge, attitudes, and intentions related to health behaviours.

Furthermore, studies by Brown and de Matviuk (2010) on drug use prevention awareness, Brown et al. (2003) on addressing public concerns about child abuse, and Brown and Basil (1995) on raising public concerns about AIDS and lowering intentions to engage in risky sexual behaviour have all shown that identifying with a celebrity modifies the audience's values, beliefs, and behaviours so that they align with what the celebrity promotes across different socio-cultural groups. In addition, a number of other studies (Hoffner, 1996; Lee, 2013; Larson et al., 2005; Kosenko et al., 2016) also confirmed that celebrities may have a substantial impact on our memories, behaviours, and decisions, particularly those pertaining to our health. These studies show how celebrities can influence social change for the better by eradicating the stigma attached to illnesses and inspiring people to seek out information and maintain their health. Celebrities' capacity to influence public opinion, however, can also be a source of worry. It is

therefore understandable why young people in North-Central Nigeria have not reacted positively to COVID-19 campaigns so far.

Also, findings on the attitude of the informants towards the tone of the COVID-19 message campaign revealed that the tone of the COVID-19 message campaign was more of empathy and precaution, as it dwelled more on preventive measures, and a fearful tone was also spotted by some of the informants. This finding is in tandem with Laran, Janiszewski, and Salerno's (2014) submission that the emotional tone of advertisements can have positive impact on health-related campaigns by enhancing message sharing and how viral it can go. The study suggests that incorporating positive emotions into health messages can increase their reach and impact. Furthermore, majority of the participants believed that offering alternatives and speaking in a compassionate manner would have been the most effective approach to persuading people to key into the campaign and embrace the messages. Similarly, Pollard et al. (2016) averred that there is no "one size fits all" solution when it comes to health campaigns. The study reiterated that despite the fact that text messaging allows for immediate and direct communication, it is challenging to develop inspirational dietary advice for young adults and further highlighted the significance of considering the tone and substance of message interventions for health promotion. This is consistent with earlier research that demonstrated the significance of message framing and the fact that most people favour messages that are framed positively (Kessels et al., 2011; Lewis et al., 2010). Therefore, it could be deduced that the way a message, especially a health-related one, is framed, packaged and channeled matters most to the recipients. The tone must be framed in a sympathetic, persuasive, and appealing way so as to have the right impact on the recipients and also influence their attitude towards such a message positively. This position also aligns with that of Folorunsho, Adegboye, Adewumi, and Yunus (2021), who claimed that the right use of messages and words in health campaigns has the potential to influence behavioural changes in the audience by positively influencing their attitude towards their health.

Findings on the currency of information on COVID-19 revealed that messages shared on COVID-19 during the pandemic period were recent messages that shaped the attitude of people towards how to deal with the pandemic at that period of time. The messages were seen by the informants as updated information on the current situation of the pandemic in terms of number of casualties, number of deaths, recoveries and how best to avoid being infected. Moreover, the informants see those messages as timely and a guide for them in total compliance with the non-pharmaceutical protocols that were laid down. Still on the currency of information on COVID-19, another finding showed repetitiveness of the message also affected the informant's exposure to it. This implies that persistent dissemination of messages on COVID-19 pandemic during the lockdown period gave the informants more insight about the virus and its preventive measures. This findings agreed with the views of Folorunsho, et al. (2019) that the media plays crucial role as political and social gladiators, and they possesses certain powers needed to influence various aspect of human lives in a big way of which health is a major aspect. By providing the needed information on major health problems like pandemic, outbreak of diseases and others, the media are helping to creates attitudinal changes among people in the society and assisting them to gain more insight on the particular health issue. Also, the finding is in tandem with that of Gupta and Sharma (2017) which posit that the media act as instruments for reinforcing the existing health beliefs and behaviours in people by instilling behavioural change, knowledge and attitudes about health, as well as healthy behaviours in them.

Data from the study on creativity in message design revealed that most of the campaign messages lack creativity as the choice of words used. The informants explained that the message design, apart from being too ambiguous and complex for people to understand, is also not highly creative even for educated people. This finding is backed up by Cho & Lee's (2019) submission that creative strategies in health campaigns positively influenced message credibility, attitude towards the ad, and attitude towards health. In order to satisfy the information needs and preferences of the general public and to encourage general participation in health care, particular attention must be paid to the substance of health information, including its recency, sources, structures, and styles. Throughout the many stages of a pandemic, the development of proper information systems and the promotion of health communication approaches have the potential to raise public knowledge of COVID-19, minimise negative attitudes, and promote preventative steps to block the spread of the virus (Xie & Liu, 2022; Duplaga, 2019).

Overall, the study aligns with Aligwe et al.'s (2018) assertion that the majority of individuals in a typical Nigerian society are more concerned with treating health problems than avoiding them. In addition, it posits further that how a health-related message is packaged and delivered has much to do with the overall success of the campaign and that a society devoid of accurate and appropriately communicated health information and precautions is at risk of public health issues and epidemics. This is consistent with Odorume's (2015) earlier observation that providing the needed information to people on major health problems like pandemics, outbreaks of diseases, and others is a way of creating attitudinal changes among people in a society.

CONCLUSION

The main focus of this study was to understand the perspective and attitude held by young people in Kwara State, Nigeria with reference to COVID-19 campaigns. The participants acknowledged that the campaigns presented recent messages that met their urgent needs at a particular point in time. As a result, their attitude and perception were generally favourable. However, the efficacy of the message as well as its conceptualization leave much to be desired as a result of the use of cartoons and animations in the process of communicating the message to the general public. A good proportion of the people who took part in the study believed that the message was unclear since it was presented using computer graphics and in a manner that included a lot of medical terminologies and jargons. As a result, the conclusion of this study is that there is a need for future campaign messages not to utilise animations and cartoons for the propagation of health promotion messages as supported by Ogbalu (2018).

In order to ensure the conveyance of such a sensitive message in a way that is effective, it is necessary for the message to be complete, concise, considerable, concrete, courteous, clear, and correct. The challenges of misinformation and the need for follow-up inquiries are decreased when there is complete communication, which also helps the overall communication process. Additionally, when a message is clear, succinct, and gets straight to the point, it does not include any information that is extraneous, irrelevant, or otherwise likely to bore the readers particularly young people who have shorter attention spans and less patience, it is impactful. Also, the campaign messages will be more persuasive, understandable, and effective for the target audience if the contents and tone of the messages are tailored to the specific audience that they are meant for. Moreover, concreteness makes communication more effective because it presents a more thorough image of the meaning for the recipient. This takes into account the other

person's culture, values, and opinions. In conclusion, there is a need for health communication planners to ensure the contents of health messages in the media are effectively creative. Creativity in this sense implies that these contents should inculcate the culture and beliefs of the people for whom they are targeted. Furthermore, these messages should be simplistic, easy to comprehend, precise, and draw the attention of the target audience using phrases and illustrations that are compatible with their culture, attitude, and beliefs. This is necessary in order for these health messages to be acceptable and complied with; this is the hallmark of health messages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The communication strategist and NCDC should collaborate with well-known personalities, influencers, or public figures who have a strong following and credibility to ensure they align with the campaign's goals and values, and consider involving a diverse range of celebrities to appeal to different demographic groups and communities.

2. Experts in public health and communication professionals should develop a comprehensive and effective COVID-19 campaign that is relevant and ensure the accuracy of campaign information.

3. They should ensure creativity in subsequent health campaign messages similar to the COVID-19 campaigns; there is a need to use appealing graphics, simple words, culture, values, and languages that can resonate effectively with people, hence making them impactful.

4. The campaigns should also instill a positive tone by highlighting stories of resilience, recovery, and the importance of collective efforts to overcome the crisis.

5. There is a need to ensure that subsequent health campaign messages similar to COVID-19 are creative enough to ensure the saliency of the message among the target audience.

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