

## **The Artists in the Television Media's Fight against COVID-19: A Comparative Study of LTV and EKTV**

By

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### **Abstract**

Despite several information on the prevalence of Corona virus (COVID-19) in Nigeria, the National Centre for Disease and Control (NCDC) reports show that among the states, there have been sharp contrast in the level of infected people. This study investigates the influence of the artists in television media broadcasts in the fight against the spread of the virus. Using Ekiti State and the Lagos State (which have remarkable records of contrast in terms of the level of infected persons). It is on this backdrop that this study adopts a qualitative research design (comprising survey, interviews, focus groups discussions, NCDC reports and literary materials) for data gathering. The study uses Ekiti State Television (EKTV) and Lagos State Television (LTV) to carry-out a comparative study of the contents and impacts of television messages on the public's (i.e. Lagos and Ekiti States' dwellers') perceptions of the issue of Covid-19; in order to find out the element(s) that influences the public's favourable disposition to television broadcasts in the collective fight against the spread of Covid-19. This study anchors its argument on George Gerbner's Cultivation Theory and submits that: the television media has the power to shape the public's perception on particular subject matter, but the use of role models like the artist(s) as the channel(s) for propagating the subject matter, is key to influencing the public's positive disposition to the message.

*Keywords:* The Artist, Television, Covid-19, EKTV, LTV, Perception

### **Introduction**

The television, no doubt, is a handy tool for the dissemination of information to the doorstep of a people; but despite the news of several deaths caused by Covid-19 in Nigeria, there seem to be an apathy in adherence to the World Health Organization's (W.H.O's) laid down safety protocols (such as the use of nose-mask, social distancing, frequent washing of hands with soap and use of alcohol-based sanitizers) among some of the people living in

Nigerian; because reports by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) show that Lagos State (where one of these researchers lives) has a record of higher number of people who contract the virus and invariably, a higher death rate compared to the number of the people affected in other places like Ekiti State (where the other researcher resides). So, one wonders why the adherence to the information on the safety measures against contracting Covid-19 is higher in Ekiti State than it is in Lagos State.

Due the constant disparity in the rate of infected persons in Lagos State compared to Ekiti State (even though the two states are located in the same South-Western region of the country), the aim of this study is to cross-examine the role and impact of the Television Media in the fight against the spread of corona virus; in order to discover the effective approach in information dissemination by the television media that results in the sharp contrast in compliance to safety protocols between the two states, the researchers conduct a comparative study of the media contents of Lagos State Television and Ekiti State Television in the fight against COVID-19. The objective therefore, is to provide a viable template which other states in Nigeria, Africa as a whole, and in fact, other continents of the world can adopt to effectively combat the spread of the virus.

This study adopts a survey research methodology (which in specifics involves a thorough investigation on the nature of the programmes contents of the two television houses on COVID-19, interviews with the two Television stations' Programmes Directors and personal interactions with members of the public) for primary data gathering. Secondary data are gathered from NCDC reports, news programmes, journals, literatures and other archival materials. The gathered data are analyzed, and the differences highlighted to ascertain their impacts.

It is important to point out that due to Nigerians' lack of trust in the political class, there have been conflicting narratives on different social media platforms like facebook, whatsapp, twitter, etc., on the existence and/or severity of the havoc that the corona virus causes. Some people perceive that the covid-19 is just a fabrication. From personal interactions with different people, several people claim that the disease is another of governments' (politicians') ploy to siphon public funds. Some have it that: it is a disease that kills only the rich; some believe that the God they serve will always protect them from the virus; while some people

do not believe in its existence. These conflicting narratives and conspiracy theories may have been responsible for the non-general acceptance and practice of the laid down safety protocols. Hence, different governments' efforts to make the general public embrace the safety protocols are whittled down.

Christian C. Ezeibe, Ezinwanne N. Ezeibe, Chika N. Oguonu, Nnamdi A. Nwankwo, and Chukwuedozie K. Ajaero (5), corroborate the public's lack of trust in the political class, as being responsible in the non-compliance with government's directives as they state that:

Political distrust during the COVID-19 era in Nigeria manifests in non-compliance to government directives to mitigate the virus such as stay-at-home order, inter-state travels, curfews, closure of public gatherings exceeding 50 persons, wearing of face masks and maintaining personal hygiene.

Others include escape of patients from isolation centres, protest by patients in isolation centres, and unhelpful statements by some public individuals. For instance, Chief Raymond Dokpesi, a public figure in Nigeria, who, after recovering from Covid-19 infection, said on a television programme (AIT) that the same drugs for treating malaria were used in treating the infection. From these researchers' personal interactions during focus group discussions, such statement, coupled with the public's distrust for government also made many not to consider Covid-19 to be as lethal as the terrible pictures shown on Television.

### **COVID-19, its Nature and Spread**

Corona virus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a novel corona virus that has been christened severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). It belongs to the family "*Coronaviridae*" and the genus *Betacoronaviru*. Most people infected with the virus do experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. However, some do become seriously ill and require medical attention. It is also lethal in some cases. The virus has an incubation period of between one to fourteen days for it to fully manifest and symptoms include cough, fever, and shortness of breath.

Initially, corona virus was tagged an "epidemic" by the World Health Organization (WHO); sequel to this, the Director-General

of WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on 30 January 2020, and characterized it further as a “pandemic” on 11<sup>th</sup> of March, 2021; owing to its global spread and deadly nature which raised international public health concerns (Obi-Ani, Anikwenze and Isiani Chukwudi, 2).

According to Chinenyenwa Ohia, Adeleye Bakarey and Tauseef Ahmed (279), the first case of Covid-19 was recorded on November 17, 2019. As of July 15, 2020, more than 13 million people have been infected by it and about 0.6 million deaths reported. It has proved far more fatal than other corona virus family members, with a fatality ratio of 1.4% (varying slightly among countries). According to Gilbert Municipal (871), the outbreak has been reported in all continents of the world, with first case in Africa reported in Egypt in February 2020.

Modes of spread of the virus range from droplets, airborne, feco-oral to contact spread. There is news of the virus staying viable on surfaces from a few hours to many days, thus, the heterogeneous spectrum of the disease is one of the reasons for the increased fatality of the disease (Oyebola Adegboye, 5).

The first case of COVID-19 in Nigeria was confirmed on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2020 in Lagos state which occurred in an Italian citizen who flew from Milan, Italy to Lagos, Nigeria on February 24, 2020, and travelled on to his company site in Ogun State the same day in a private vehicle. On February 26, 2020, he was presented at the company clinic with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 and was referred to the Infectious Disease Hospital (IDH) in Lagos where a COVID-19 diagnosis was confirmed. A total of 216 contacts in Lagos and Ogun States, including the passengers on the flight which landed on February 24 were identified for 14-day follow-up, with 40 of these contacts identified as high-risk (Adefisoye Adedokun, 99).

The spread of Covid-19 in Nigeria has been rapid, just as it has been globally. Lagos and Ekiti States are among the states in Nigeria that responded swiftly by setting up Covid-19 Task Force to combat the spread of the disease in the states. Among the measures taken to curb the rapid spread of the virus were constant media announcements on prevalence of the corona virus, immediate lockdown (restriction of human and vehicular movements), closure of land borders, and regular admonition on maintenance of social distances, use of nose-mask, frequent washing of hands with alcohol-based sanitizers, among others.

Other measures include prohibition of mass gathering of people at worship centres, sports arenas and at other events like burial ceremonies; while schools were closed nationwide.

With respect to the Covid-19 pandemic, the NCDC worked with the 36 states in Nigeria to activate their emergency operations centers to manage and link up with the national incidence coordination centers. Moreover, the South Western region of the country accounted for the majority of the confirmed cases of COVID-19 which is largely contributed by Lagos (which has the highest population density). Regarding the number of confirmed cases as at when the pandemic started, Nigeria was the number 4 in Africa; Lagos state had the highest number. (Abubakar Abdulsalem, 155).

Lagos, being a major economic center and the most populous state in Nigeria has since become the epicenter of COVID-19 in Nigeria, accounting for 15, 414 (34.7%) of the 44, 433 confirmed cases and 192 (21.1%) of the 910 reported deaths in Nigeria as at August 5, 2020. However, there has been an increase in the number of severe cases and deaths (NCDC, 2020).

Lagos State later became one of the high-burden states contributing 64.5% of the cumulative total cases in Nigeria by the end of May 2020. Between February 27 and May 31, 2020, 63,882 persons have been tested, of which 10162 (15.9%) were confirmed as being infected with SARS-CoV-2 by RT-PCR. Males appear to be disproportionately affected accounting for 67.7% (6,882) of the confirmed cases. A total of 287 deaths have been recorded among the confirmed COVID-19 cases which resulted in an observed case fatality ratio (CFR) of approximately 2.8% (Lauer Simeon, 577).

### **The Television and its Role in the fight against Covid-19 in Nigeria**

According to Shola Balogun (4), the television is a telecommunication medium that is used for the transmitting and receiving of moving images and sound. And its role is to educate, inform and entertain the public. Balogun (4), goes further to aver that, to a large extent the television has the power to determine how people see the world, as well as influence the people's decisions and responses to certain issues. Onabanjo Olufemi (3), Chioma Patricia (14), and Adavi Abraham (16), corroborate this assertion as they observe that the broadcast media such as radio and television report and interpret information about the society, as

well as provide cultural guidelines that help to teach the citizens how to live, how to behave and what is expected of them through various program contents.

The peculiarities of television give it certain advantage over other forms of mass media which includes its ability to pictorially deal with topical issues, depict messages in various formats (audio-visual) and ability to reach a large population. The television is therefore defined as an audio-visual medium which blends pictures with sound to produce a communication experience exhibited on the screen as it uses sound and movement to explain the visuals presented on the screen in a unique way and pattern (Owauamalam Emeka, 238).

The television also has the potency to influence viewer's interest as it carries them along through its diverse programs, drama, film, documentaries and presentations, all with the sole aim of entertainment, education and information purposes (Saodah, Wok and Mohd Yusuf 24). Amafili Ikon (18), affirms that its most striking characteristic is the speed with which it disseminates information.

According to Asogba Clement (154), the role of the mass media has remained indispensable in eradicating pandemics and in promoting positive health behaviours. Collinson Khan (15), also avers that during the covid-19 pandemic, information on positive public health practices such as social-distancing, hand-washing, respiratory hygiene and government policies in tackling outbreaks were disseminated through the television media.

### **Ekiti State Television and Lagos State Television**

Ekiti State is in the South-western region of Nigeria; it was created on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1996 alongside five other states in the country during the military regime of General Sani Abacha as head of state. It was carved out of the Northern part of Ondo State and covers a land area of about 7,000 sq. kilometers. The EKTU is a broadcasting service channel 41UHF under the Ekiti State Ministry of Information. It is cited in Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State.

Lagos State, also a South-western State, was created on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1967. It is the most populous city in Nigeria with a total population of 14,862,000 as of 2021 within city proper. Lagos metropolitan area has a total population of 21.3 million, making it the second largest metropolitan area in Africa after Cairo (National Population Commission Report). The Lagos State Television (LTV) is situated at Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria. The LTV was

established in October, 1980 and was the first television station in Nigeria to operate on two frequencies/bands VHF and UHF but now on UHF channel 35 and the first state owned television station on cable satellite DSTV channel 256 and on Star times channel 104.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study hinges its argument on George Gerbner's Cultivation Theory. Cultivation theory (sometimes referred to as the cultivation hypothesis or cultivation analysis) was an approach developed by George Gerbner. The theory stipulates that watching television can influence viewers' ideas of what the everyday world is like. Cultivation theorists argue that television has long-term effects which are small, gradual, indirect but cumulative and significant.

### **Core Assumptions and Statements of Cultivation Theory:**

Cultivation theory in its most basic form, suggests that television is responsible for shaping, or 'cultivating' viewers' conceptions of social reality. The effect of massive television exposure by viewers over time subtly shapes the perception of social reality for individuals. The theory has it that people who watch television a lot are likely to be more influenced by the ways in which the world is framed by television programmes than are individuals who watch less, especially regarding topics of which the viewer has little first-hand experience. Denis McQuail (283) corroborates this assertion as he avers that: the Cultivation theory of media effects views the media as molders of society and that the message of the media is from reality on several key points. Thus, persistent exposure to it leads to its adoption as a consensual view of society. Onuora Nwuneli (37) clearly discusses how the theory supports the expectation that "perception of social reality corresponds closely to the mass media 'realities' because the images of the world portrayed in the media will be internalized and accepted as accurate representations of reality by media audiences." Also, Charles Okigbo (107), succinctly explains that: 'Our knowledge of the world comes from various sources, of which the most important is the mass media...'

### **Cultivation Theory Effect on COVID-19 and the Apathy in Adherence to Safety Protocols**

The relevance of the Cultivation Theory to this study emphasizes

the role of the television in picking up issue of the public in reference to the Covid-19 virus in Nigeria and how the television provides the people with information. In Nigeria, the use of the television in creating awareness about the Covid-19 virus has really helped majority of Nigerians to be informed that the disease exist and how to prevent its spread. So, the television, through its role in dissemination of information about various issues on the virus to the masses has been considered vital in providing the most consistent, pervasive images and messages. From the values of the medium as well as the frequency of transmission of its contents, it can be said that has had a role to play in the fight against the virus. But, due to the **people's distrust for politicians or government**, not everything disseminated by the television is swallowed hook, line and sinker by everybody – this might be the reason for the show of apathy as regards believing in the reality of the corona virus and embracing the stipulated “safety protocols”; hence, the more rapid spread of the virus in some quarters than in some.

Christian C. Ezeibe, Ezinwanne N. Ezeibe, Chika N. Oguonu, Nnamdi A. Nwankwo, and Chukwuedozie K. Ajaero (1), affirm that political distrust is responsible for people's lack of interest in embracing the safety protocol, as they state that:

While studies have explored how health sector corruption, weak healthcare system, large-scale immune compromised population, misinformation and prevalence of highly congested slums contribute to the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria, **they have glossed over the impact of political distrust on the spread of the virus . . .** political corruption motivates large-scale political distrust. **This undermines public compliance to government protocols**, limits the outcomes of government responses to COVID-19 and facilitates the spread of the virus in Nigeria. [Emphasis ours].

### **NCDC reports on Covid-19 in Lagos state**

In Lagos State, the lockdown was a strategic measure implemented with two objectives: first, to slow the spread of the virus across the country, and second, to buy time for the health system to increase its preparedness. During the lockdown period, the NCDC worked with all states to enhance contact tracing activities and increase capacity for case detection and treatment.

In March 27, 2020, Lagos had the highest number of cases (54). By April 5, 2020, the number of positive cases had increased exponentially to 232. The death toll had risen too and 33 persons had recovered while states with positive cases in Nigeria totaled



14. Within the 30 days, the NCDC observed that 70% of the individuals tested positive for COVID-19 were male, and 30.0% were female. Their ages ranged between 30 and 60 years; while the people that aged 31-50 years were the most affected (39.0%). About 44.0% (101) of the cases were imported and some 41.0% (96) had incomplete epidemiological information as the sources of their infections were unknown (NCDC, 2020).

Lagos State accounted for over 50% of the cases in Nigeria. The cosmopolitan characteristics of Lagos which makes her to have more contact with infected persons than any other state of the country include its being the site of major international airports and seaports, and its hubs of commercial and administrative activities. In spite of these, if every uninfected person living in Lagos would adhere to the stipulated safety protocols, the rate of spread of the virus and the number of infected persons would have been much lower. As at June 7, 2020, Lagos, Kano, and the FCT had the highest incidence, with 46.2%, 8%, and 7.6%, respectively; Lagos still remained the epicenter of Nigeria's COVID-19 crisis. (Adefisoye Adedokun, 103).

#### **NCDC reports on Covid-19 in Ekiti State**

Ekiti State had her first index case on March 18, 2020, through an American returnee who in turn infected his driver. (Ani Emmanuella, 29). According to the NCDC report, the prevalent rate of COVID-19 in Ekiti State was 6.1%. And the prevalence was higher in males (3.7%) than in females (2.4%). The age group with the highest positivity rate was 71-80 years, while the age group with the lowest positivity rate was 6-10 years. Only 3.1% of those who tested positive admitted to traveling outside the state within 14 days of the survey. This therefore attests to the fact that there is local transmission of the disease in Ekiti State. As at the time of this research, Ekiti State is in the 26th position of the thirty-six states infected with covid-19 with a total of 324 reported cases. More so; the Local Government Areas located at the boundaries with other States had higher prevalence rates than inner LGAs: the prevalence for border LGAs was 3.43%, while the rate for the inner LGAs was 0.99%. In addition; only 12.3% of those who tested positive developed symptoms which were fever, cough, runny nose, and sore throat; 57% percent had just one symptom and 43% had symptoms which was mostly fever and mild cough and the hospitalization and mortality rates were both zero (Eromosele, Essien 29).

All the previous cases in Ekiti State were the Covid-19 patients who sneaked into the state. Supporting this assertion, the NCDC recorded 48 new cases as at June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021 in which; Lagos State had (16) new cases, Yobe (16), Kano (8), Gombe (3), Akwa Ibom (1), Delta (1), FCT (1), Kaduna (1), Rivers (1) while states with no cases reported included Ekiti, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo and Sokoto.

### **LTV and the Fight against Covid-19**

For this study, a face-to-face interview was conducted with Mrs. Abimbola, the Director of Programmes, Lagos State Television on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April 2021, at exactly 10:30 am. The researcher raised some questions bothering on the role of LTV in the fight against Covid-19 in Lagos state: when the station began to deploy the television in the fight against it; the programmes aired by the station in the fight against the spread of the virus and their various times; the rationale for airing these programmes at such periods and if the station's media strategy in the fight against the spread of the virus yielded the desired results.

Questions were also raised on issues regarding the reason why Lagos State has a higher rate of spread of the virus when compared to many other states in Nigeria and lastly, any deliberate strategy that was deployed by the station to bring a positive difference in the fight against the spread of the virus. The findings from the interview are as follows:

- LTV aired enlightenment programmes on Corona virus – its prevalence, nature, modes of possible spread, and the safety protocols that must be adhered to (to prevent further infections). Among the nature of the programmes contents are: mini features which are usually between 3 - 5 minutes. These were in the form of mini documentaries in cartoon characters to enlighten and appeal to the audience. These mini features were done in both English and Yoruba languages (in order to reach-out to the grass root natives who may not understand English).
- LTV also aired a 25 minutes daily programme tagged: *Virus Beyond Borders*; a programme which was strictly dedicated to the issue of corona virus within and outside Nigeria; and presented daily between 1 pm-1:25 pm. This programme is targeted at making the people realize that Covid-19 transcends beyond Nigeria to being a global phenomenon faced in other parts of the world.

- Health Program tagged *Sound Health* is also aired between 10 am-11 am; health practitioners are brought to further educate the public on COVID-19.
- *Morning Delight*, a morning breakfast show, discussed issues concerning Covid-19 on the programme.

On these programmes opportunities for feedbacks from the viewers were created, which gives room for clarifications on questions asked. Also, the Lagos State governor, Babajide Sanwoolu, from time to time, gives press updates on how the state is fairing during the pandemic.

### **EKTV and the Fight against Covid-19**

Another face-to-face interview was also conducted with Mrs. Olayinka, the Director of Programmes at Ekiti State Television on the 20<sup>th</sup> April 2021 at exactly 12pm; here, similar questions (as the ones put forward to LTV Director of programmes) were also asked. The investigation reveals that in fighting the virus, EKTV provided news updates, jingles, health and sensitization programmes aimed at creating awareness on the prevalence and the dangers of Covid-19. Some of the programmes aired by the TV station include:

- *Day Break Nigeria*: a programme on current affairs in the society where reportage and analysis of current issues on Covid-19 are aired every Monday, Tuesday and Thursday by 8 am-10 am;
- *Ejire*: a live programme presented by 8am-10am on Wednesday and Friday and anchored by the Lawanson Adeniran foundation. The programme focuses its discussions on zoonotic diseases like Lassa fever. Issues on the Covid-19 virus are also discussed on this programme to enlighten the public.
- The EKTV also used different popular and local artists to produce jingles and short drama skits on the subject of Corona Virus; and the need to embrace the W.H.O prescribed safety protocols. Among such artists are the entertainment maestro, Chief Ebenezer Obey (who happens to be an indigene of Ekiti state), artists from the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Tourism's Performing Company.

### **Findings**

The following are our findings:

- Though the images and messages of the Covid-19 in

Nigeria are accurate representations of reality, there have been different narratives and counter narratives on social media platforms like Facebook and Whatsapp (due to the public's distrust of politicians, and/or perhaps deliberate acts of mischief to mislead the public); thus, the existence and/or severity of the corona virus are disputed by some people in different quarters. This political distrust whittles down the public's resolve to take government's directives seriously; hence, the nonchalant dispositions in embracing the laid down safety protocols against contracting corona virus.

- Both the LTV in Lagos State and the EKTU in Ekiti State did engage extensively in different sensitization programmes to educate the public on the prevalence of corona virus, its mode of spread and how to avoid contracting the virus by adhering to the safety protocols.
- The striking difference between the broadcast contents by LTV and EKTU is EKTU's engagement of the services of both local and renown performing artists (most of whom are indigenes) in the propagation of messages on corona virus and the safety protocols.

### **Conclusion**

The index case of corona virus in Nigeria, involving an Italian, was recorded in Lagos. The fact that the population density of Lagos State, which is also host to international ports, is the highest in Nigeria could be responsible for the huge rate of corona virus infections evidenced there. However, if all the uninfected persons had strictly adhered to the safety protocols, the spread of the virus from the Italian and from the early sets of people who contracted the virus through him would have been very negligible.

The Lagos State Television (LTV) did almost the same things as Ekiti State Television (EKTU) did in the fight against the spread of corona virus; they mainly differed in their use of artists for the propagation of their messages. Therefore, it can be concluded that because of the public's distrust of government and politicians, it was difficult for the Lagos State Television (LTV) to immediately and effectively convince everybody in Lagos that the corona pandemic is real and deadly; most people, therefore, did not embrace the laid down safety protocols. But the EKTU's engagement of the services of role models and celebrities, who were mostly artists, was a defining factor in persuading people to

accept the reality of the prevalence and deadly nature of the virus; hence, people largely embraced the safety protocols in Ekiti State. So, we can conclude that the use of artists in television media's fight against COVID-19 in Ekiti State was a major reason for the very low rate of people with the virus in the state.

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