Global Health Politics, COVID-19 and the Media

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Abstract

This study examined global health politics, COVID-19 and The Media. The study adopted the descriptive research design. Secondary data were used for this study and were gathered from textbooks, journals, newspaper editorials, articles, reports, and magazines. The findings showed that the outbreak further deepen the growing political division among nations of the world; as soon as the disease broke out WHO became the centre and target of criticism, instead of the world to join hands together and fight a common enemy (COVID-19) and that the readiness of health organization in tackling the pandemic was not adequate. It further revealed that media played a vital and important role during the COVID-19 disease outbreak created health campaigns, raised awareness. The study therefore concludes that, global health politics played a crucial and vital role in addressing COVID-19 outbreak. The study recommends that Global health should be prioritize over political interests, strengthen international organizations, and promote clear and accurate communication. There, should be adequate investment in health infrastructure, robust preparedness plans, testing and surveillance systems, health workforce support, global collaboration, and public health communication to enhance pandemic preparedness. The media should be strengthening their role by providing accurate and responsible reporting, collaboration with health authorities, promote health literacy, highlighting positive stories, balance reporting, and combat misinformation.
Keywords: Communication, COVID-19, Global Health, Political Interests, Media

Introduction

In December, 2019, the then novel Coronavirus disease now (COVID-19) was first identified in a city called Wuhan, the capital city of Hubei province, in China with a population of 11 million, after an outbreak of pneumonia without an obvious cause (Kristoffer et al, 2012). By January 2, 2020, researchers identified 41 Corona Virus patients who had been admitted to the hospital in Wuhan, China and as of February 3, 2020, the National Health Commission of China had reported 20,471 confirmed cases of COVID-19 infection in 34 provinces; autonomous regions, municipalities, and special administrative regions. Subsequently, many cases were also confirmed globally (Dhama, Khan, 2020). Early confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Wuhan were closely linked to the Wuhan seafood market (a wet market), where a large variety of vertebrate and invertebrate animals, wild caught and farm rose, are sold (WHO, 2020). Right after the official confirmation of the close linkage between severe pneumonia and the game animals, the market was closed on Jan 1, 2020.

The virus soon spread to other countries across the globe; Iran, France, Germany, United States of America, Switzerland, Italy, Japan and so on. And by March 4, 2020, 77 countries have reported cases of COVID-19 (Schuchat, 2020). The U.S was one of the countries that recorded great numbers of cases caused by the pandemic. The U.S was one of the countries that recorded great numbers of cases caused by the pandemic. The first confirmed Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) case in the United States was reported on January 21, 2020. The outbreak appeared contained through February, and then accelerated rapidly (Schuchat, 2020).

The first cases of COVID-19 in the United States occurred in January and February 2020 in travellers from China's Hubei Province, where the virus was first recognized, and their household contacts. Beginning in late February, cases with no history of international travel and no contact with infected persons were recognized. By mid-March, transmission had become widespread, and by April 21, a total of 793,669 confirmed COVID-19 cases had been reported in the United States, the majority resulting from widespread community transmission (Salimi, Gomar, et al 2020).

Various factors contributed to the rapid spread of the virus during February–March 2020, in the US, including continued travel-associated importations, large gatherings, introductions into high-risk workplaces and densely populated areas, and cryptic transmission resulting from limited testing and asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic spread (Pei-Yu, Sha R et al 2020). During a three-week period in late February to early March, the number of U.S. COVID-19 cases increased more than 1,000-fold. Various community mitigation interventions were implemented with the aim of reducing further spread and controlling the impact on health care capacity (LID, 2020).

As the pandemic evolved in the US, control efforts were continuously refined. Certain interventions that were critical in the early stages were put in place, such as quarantine and airport screening. In interviews across major television networks on Sunday, March 9, 2020, U.S. officials all admitted that efforts to contain the spread of the novel corona virus, COVID-19, have failed and that the country now needs to move to mitigate the effects of the continuing spread of the disease on the nation's health and economy (Amzat, Aminu, 2020).

Looking at the situation in Nigeria, it was reported that on February 27, 2020, Nigeria recorded an imported case from Italy to Nigeria, The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) confirmed the cases of COVID-19 in the country between February 27 and March 17, 2020 which was in the first 30 days, were imported by returning travellers into the country.

Subsequently, countries were adopting different ways to contain the spread of corona virus but there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Towns and cities have been locked down and large gatherings banned. Restrictions were imposed on travellers from hard-hit areas, such as China, Italy and Iran. Major sporting events, carnivals and events were also postponed or cancelled (Sharma, 2020). There was no one-size-fits-all strategy to stop the spread of the disease, but containment continued to be a top goal for all countries.

While at the peak of the global emergency, China was accused of keeping the knowledge of the Corona Virus disease to itself without revealing necessary information and awareness to her counterparts in other countries. States, companies, religious organisations, governments and people were not psychologically prepared to lock down their lives and daily activities all of a sudden; everything came as a shock. The reaction was, "how do you expect me to just suddenly shutdown my life and stay indoor? It was in the news that in Lagos, Nigeria, a lot of people found it difficult to work from home. The 'Lagosians' were clamouring to go back to work because they didn't know how to work from home (Country, 2021).

Considering the role media have been following every step of this journey – with multiple stories, incessant updates, it is well established that the media plays an enormously influential role in public responses to health issues. The reach of the mass media, which includes print, television, radio, and the internet, is unmatched. It has a lot of influence over setting agendas.

Statement of the Problem
As the global emergency deepened, China was perceived not coming out with the real situation with the outbreak of the pandemic. As a result of secrecy from China, so many issues evolved as to how people received the news and the right approach to deal with them. There was poor preparation across the globe. Poor preparations in terms of adequate health infrastructure and protective facilities, for instance, facemasks, test-kits, working procedures in a pandemic (for example, working online from home, online schooling, social interaction (for example, social distancing) and the psychological readiness of the people's mind to the shutdown. Globally, medical facilities were not in place, countries left their borders opened; governments of nations were relaxing, while the citizens lack basic knowledge on how to protect themselves from being infected. There was poor preparation across the globe in terms of adequate infrastructure as well as protective facilities.

Research Aims and Objectives
The aim of this study is to examine the global health politics during the COVID-19 outbreak and the various communication methods of government and that of the media, while the objectives are to:

i.   Examine the politics that surrounded COVID-19 pandemic

ii. Investigate the readiness of health organizations in tackling the pandemic

iii. Assess the role of the media in the fight against COVID-19 pandemic

Significance of the Study
The potential implications of this research work for theory or practice will determine the role or function of communication in curbing and creating mechanisms that may lead how to cure or reduction in the spread of the pandemic. The outcome of the study would be of primary benefit to governments, leaders and nations on effective ways to sensitise and proffer solutions to global health issues while medical measures are sought in addressing the global health challenges.

The media, both at the national and international level will find out ways to better conduct their risk communication with different audience demographics in order not to put fear in the mind of the people.
Citizens of Nigeria and that of other countries through the findings of this study will know how to source news from their various media especially on health information in order to avoid fake news. Finally, this study will provide conceptual and theoretical knowledge on the topic of discussion which will serve as empirical framework upon which further studies can be conducted by future researchers.

Scope of the Study
The study will cover the period from March 11, 2020, when the World Health Organisation WHO first declared the outbreak a pandemic till date. This period covers when the threat of COVID-19 triggered a serious global health concern, causing fear and panic around the world. This period is significant period in history, where a great number of deaths were recorded, just as international order was significantly affected.

The study will derive data from secondary sources such as organisation publications, journals, books on how people are able to effectively communicate and how they adapt their mode of communication to the pandemic consciousness both to their work, general interaction with people. This study will also cover the type of efforts put up by governments in making people to be aware of the danger of COVID-19 and the role that social media has been playing in making people know the importance of social distancing in wherever they find themselves and also, people's mode of communication during the pandemic period. Finally, this study will highlight the effects of COVID-19 affected international relations.

Theoretical Frame Work
Conspiracy Theory:
Conspiracy theory is an explanation of historical, ongoing, or future events that cites as a main causal factor a group of powerful persons, the conspirators, acting in secret for their own benefit against the common good. This definition excludes theories positing benevolent actors toiling away in secret for the good of all mankind (i.e., doctors working in secret to save humanity from the scourge of cancer). Such theories seem to be the product of a very different set of factors and are rare compared to those positing an enemy (Douglas, 2021).

Conspiracy theories began to emerge immediately after the first news of the COVID-19 outbreak and many of these stemmed from existing tensions within and between groups. For example, from early on during the pandemic, some people believed that COVID-19 was deliberately manufactured by the Chinese to wage war on the USA (or vice versa). As the pandemic progressed, others believed that COVID-19 was a hoax or was exaggerated by left-wingers as part of a plot to derail Donald Trump's reelection campaign. These conspiracy

theories persist, and recently vocal minorities of "antimaskers" in Western countries have protested against what they view as a direct attack from powerful authorities on their civil liberties (Uscinski, 2018).

Recent research suggests that conspiracy theories about COVID-19 are no exception, and, in particular, that they have negative consequences for people's intentions to comply with government recommendations. For example, belief in COVID-19 conspiracy theories in the US shows that these beliefs were negatively associated with perceived threat of the pandemic, taking preventive actions (e.g., wearing a mask), and intentions to vaccinate against COVID-19 if a vaccine became available (Uscinski, 2018).

In the context of this study the prevalence and impact of conspiracy theories add a crucial layer of complexity to the public discourse surrounding the pandemic. The emergence of conspiracy theories, such as those attributing the origin of the virus to deliberate actions by a specific country or dismissing the severity of the pandemic as a hoax, underscores the influence of information dissemination on public perception. These theories, often fueled by existing tensions, have been shown to negatively affect individuals' intentions to comply with government recommendations, including preventive measures like mask-wearing, and vaccination uptake. Understanding the dynamics of how these conspiracy theories spread and gain traction in the global health narrative is essential for comprehending the challenges governments and media face in effectively communicating public health information, particularly during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. Addressing the harmful impact of such theories becomes integral to fostering collective efforts in halting the spread of the virus and mitigating the associated public health risks.

Agenda Setting Theory:
This study essentially will essentially anchor on the agenda setting theory of the media. This theory will examines the analytical concept of gate keeping, priming and framing in the media on the critical role the media play in shaping the public's perception of a particular issue. The theory explains how news coverage in the media chooses which topics get people's attention. The first mention of agenda setting theory dates back to 1922, when Walter Lippmann expressed his worry about the critical role that the media can play in shaping the public's perception of a particular issue (Zain, 2014).

This theory elaborates the connection in terms of relationships between the emphasis that the mass media put as an issue and the media audiences or the public's reaction or attributes to such issues. The theory has inspired and developed hundreds of latter explorations on how the mass media primes and frames issues for their audiences. The subject includes, but is not limited to, how the media portrays a certain event to its viewers. Therefore, the mass media can be considered as responsible in influencing and shaping the public opinion and agenda (Auwalu, 2018).

Health Belief Model:
The quest by public health departments to understand the reason behind people's decision to use or not to use preventive measures in the 1950s, informed the development of Health belief model (Inobemhe, Santas, 2022). HBM was first developed by Godfery Hochbaum, Stephan Kegels, and Irwin Rosenstock (Jahanlou, Lotfizade, 2013). This theory postulates that what influences people to take action with regards to disease or outbreak is their belief on whether or not they are at risk as well as their perceptions of what they stand to gain from the said action. Put differently, health belief model rests upon the understanding that an individual will take action regarding his health if the persons believe or is convinced that a negative health problem can be avoided through the action, or if the person expects a positive outcome if the recommended action is taken or have confidence that the recommended action can successfully be taken. The theory's major constructs are perceived susceptibility and perceived severity, perceived benefits and perceived barriers, cues to action and self-efficacy (Inobemhe, Santas, 2022).

Methodology

This chapter focused on the method of research enquiries used to carry out the study under the following subheadings: research design, population of the study, sampling techniques, description of research instruments, validity and reliability of research instrument, method of data collection, and method of data analysis.

This study relied on secondary data to do a qualitative descriptive analysis. Thus, the research instruments used are library (both physical and online) where data will be gathered from textbooks, journals, newspaper editorials, articles, reports, and magazines.

Results and Findings

From the data gathered, this researcher found that instead of the pandemic to conceivably bring the world together to fight a common enemy which was COVID-19, it rather contributed to the growing political division. When the disease broke out WHO was at the center of criticism, it was said to have failed to exercise global health leadership and also became a tool of Chinese politics, power, and propaganda. The COVID-19 pandemic has been inseparable from the political dynamics and governance structures within which it has unfolded. The interplay between science and politics displayed by China and other developed countries, to show who the world powers really reside with by trying to prove technology and science advancement in vaccine production. Some developed country complained about China withholding information that should have been useful in vaccine production. It was noted that WHO was not addressing the issue, though it was involved in financing the health sector of developing countries. All of these highlighted the complex and multifaceted nature of politics surrounding the pandemic.

Also, it was discovered that the unpreparedness of health organizations in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic put health organizations (World Health Organization - WHO) and other national health agencies under immense pressure to respond effectively and efficiently to the crisis. The COVID-19 outbreak as a novel pandemic or epidemic came with a high demand for health workforce for the triage system and other medical attention and health facilities which include the PPE equipment, oxygen and others. The triage system was put in place by most countries as a mechanism to detect and monitor the COVID-19 pandemic serving as health surveillance and the WHO facilitating information sharing, coordinating response efforts between countries, and ensuring a unified global approach. The readiness of health organizations in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic played a critical role in shaping the global response to the crisis.

Furthermore, this research brought the vital role of the media into the spotlight. Media platforms, including traditional news outlets and social media, played a significant role in disseminating critical information, shaping public perception, and facilitating communication between health organizations and the public. The Public Service Announcements was used by the government to disseminate critical health information to help the general public adhere to guidelines issued by health organizations thereby reinforcing behaviors that help prevent the spread of the virus. The media helped in in scrutinizing government responses to the pandemic by revealing the deficiencies in public health systems in various countries through an unbiased reporting and empathetic storytelling during the pandemic. Furthermore, the media's ability to disseminate accurate information, debunk myths, and amplify the voices of those impacted had been essential in rallying public support for necessary interventions.

Recommendations
1. There is need for adequate surveillance on COVID'19 and pandemics generally; continuous observation of pandemics is required because they will always occur.
2. Global health should be prioritize over political interests, strengthen international organizations, and promote clear and accurate communication.
3. There should be adequate investment in health infrastructure, robust preparedness plans, testing and surveillance systems, health workforce support, global collaboration, and public health communication to

enhance pandemic preparedness.
4. The media should strengthening their role by providing accurate and responsible reporting, collaboration with health authorities, promote health literacy, highlighting positive stories, balance reporting, and combat misinformation.

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