

EVALUATION OF THE USE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES BY THE TARABA STATE GOVERNMENT ON COVID-19 IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Moses, John Maikomo*, Jimenda, Gideon David*, Jeremiah, Ingyesi Utiki**

*Department of Mass Communication, Taraba State University, Jalingo

**Department of Mass Communication, Kwararafa University, Wukari

Abstract

This paper evaluates public relations strategies by the Taraba State Government on covid-19 in the fight against the virus in the State. The study was anchored on excellence theory of public relations. Survey design was adopted by the study. Data were collected through questionnaire as they were administered to 399 respondents including the 12-man committee. Findings revealed that the Taraba State Government on covid-19 used public relations strategies in their fight against corona virus in the State. The study discovered that, the strategies that were adopted by the Government in the fight against corona virus in the State were very effective. The study therefore concluded that these public relations strategies used by the Government on covid-19, should be used by every result-oriented organization due to its effectiveness. In the light of the finding, the study recommended amongst others, recruitment of more qualified personnel in the Public Relations units of all health facilities in the state.

Keywords: Public Relations, Strategies, Evaluation, Taraba State Government, Corona virus Pandemic

Declaration of conflicting interests: The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

1. INTRODUCTION

The high death and morbidity rates of coronavirus disease (COVID-19), combined with its high degree of contagiousness, have pushed governments all over the world to put in place measures aimed at safeguarding populations against SARS-CoV-2 infection (Zylke and Bauchner, 2020). Governments adopted mandates to reduce the spread of COVID-19, according to Kalu (2020), based on recommendations from international and local public health authorities. State lockdowns, school closures, the closing of non-essential enterprises, social isolation, and the use of facial masks are all effective techniques to restrict the spread of new illnesses (Auger, Shah, Richardson and Hartley, 2020). However,

they have a huge impact on enterprises, the economy, education, government services, and daily life (Abdool, 2020; Ashraf, 2020).

However, as more researches were intensified four types of vaccines were produced and approved by global health and inter-governmental bodies to include World Health Organization (W.H.O), [The United Nation Children's Education Fund \(UNICEF\)](#), United Nations (UN), World Bank, [United States Agency for International Development \(USAID\)](#), OXFAM, Project Hope, [International Committee of the Red Cross \(ICRC\)](#) and [Medecins Sans Frontieres](#) among others. The main vaccines in circulation since 2021 and 2022 in Nigeria are Johnson & Johnson and Oxford AstraZeneca Vaccines (UNICEF, 2020).

The COVID-19 outbreak, which emerged in China and continued to spread rapidly all over the world, had brought with it increasing numbers of cases and deaths. Governments have suffered serious damage and losses not only in the field of health but also in many other fields. This has directed governments to adopt and implement various human relations methods and strategies in the communities to curb the scourge of this pandemic. However, only a few countries succeeded partially from the human relations methods/strategies implemented while other countries have failed. In this context, it is necessary to identify the most used strategies by the government and private individuals and also identify the strategies that were not implemented by the government or private persons. The outbreak of COVID -19 in December 2019 drew substantial attention towards combating the pandemic thereby opening room for infodemic (too many information) characteristics in the society. This was undoubtedly a very difficult task, especially in the Nigerian rural communities which are characterized by severe lack of the requisite facilities to access information on modern media platforms, compounded by high illiteracy and poverty rates.

Notable among the approaches in Nigeria were the lock down of boarders, aviation industries, transport system (local and international), oil companies, production companies, religious bodies/worship centers, schools and government offices among others (Vanguard 2020). This was to help checkmate the movement of people and face to face interaction which are facilitating factors in getting infected. This excluded essential services like health workers, journalists, securities, food production businesses and Banks amongst others but with stringent rules on how to go about their businesses.

The Nigerian government under the leadership of president Mohamadu Buhari (GCFR) set up a 12-member Task Force to control or contain the corona virus in the country. This Task Force was headed by the secretary to the federal government (SGF) Boss Mustapha and members included the minister of health Osagie Ehanrie, director general NCDC Dr. Chikwe Ihekwa and a world health organization representative among others (Vanguard 2020). In the fight against the virus, the Task Force introduced lock down from March 26th to 14th June 2020 in the country. Also, this necessitated the UN covid-19 response plan for Nigeria Basket Fund launched on 6th April 2020 till 30th April 2022. It is also referred to as the covid-19 Multi-sectoral Pandemic Response Plan to serve as a blueprint for a whole of government response. The objective is to ensure optimum care of confirmed

covid-19 cases and contain the spread of the outbreak through an inclusive and nationally owned process and based on emerging best practices from previous health emergencies as well other countries experiences during the covid-19 crises. Global Statistics shows that there have been over 19,720,406 confirmed cases and 4,981,609 deaths were recorded as at October 27, 2021 (NCDC, 2021).

The first case in Nigeria was recorded by the federal ministry of health on 27th February, 2020 when an Italian citizen who works in Nigeria returned from Milan, Italy on 25th February, 2020 and as at 12th of August 2020 the number increased to 47, 290 confirmed cases nationwide. In Taraba State however, the first Corona Virus cases were first published by NCDC on 26th April, 2020 giving a total number of 6 cases. Since then the cases have increased to 78 laboratory confirmed cases as at 12th August, 2020 (News Shuttle, 2020). This news caused mixed reactions among the populace in Taraba state with tension in all parts of the state making people to become very careful to interact with one another. This happened in the midst of the lockdown in the state with ease of the lockdown only on Wednesdays and Saturdays. In a state broadcast, the state Governor Arch. Darius Ishaku urged the citizens of the state not to panic, explaining that “government is taking measures to control the disease”.

The technical committee which is a combination of professionals from various fields of endeavor began their work from 26th day of March, 2020. They constantly adopted the two-way symmetrical communication model for effective communication with the people which called for an excellence theory of Public Relations to set in. True symmetrical communication according to Grunig (1997) requires a commitment to transparency on the part of the organization; negotiation, compromise and mutual accommodation; and institutionalized mechanisms of hearing from and responding to the public. Also, that it places a premium on long term relationship-building with all the organization's strategic publics: taxpayers, media, shareholders, regulators, community leaders, donors and others. It is however, the rare scientific organization that devotes significant resources to meaningful symmetrical communication (Nelkin, 1995; Gregory and Miller 1998).

The whole duties of the committee have to be public relations oriented in order to win their minds by using public relations strategies. Also, available for usage by the committee were a variety of new technologies such as the World Wide Web which

provides a number of platforms from online discussion groups to chat forums to blogs that allow real-time person-to-person communication and applications like zoom, whatsapp, telegram, twitter handle and facebook as citizen journalism has also been on the increase. They also had both radio and television to adopt programmes by health specialists to incorporate public input on the pandemic and the new regulatory initiatives. More so, the option of media briefing and press releases on a daily/weekly basis was vital and other PR strategies. They also had the option of printed brochures, flyers and placards displaying “stay safe, stay at home”, “use facemask, alcoholic hand sanitizers, keep social distancing, cough into your elbow” and a host of others especially where there are literates. Taraba state was one of the states in the northeastern Nigeria that had no victim of the pandemic even as other states of the nation were grappling with it. This continued till on 27th April, 2020 when NCDC confirmed six index cases of covid-19 victims in the state (Premium Times, 2020). After the first victim's case, many more cases were confirmed between May, 2020 to December, 2021 NCDC disclosed that Taraba state had the following report on corona virus pandemic: Number of cases confirmed = 1,269, number of cases on admission = 15, number of discharged = 1222 and number of deaths = 32 (NCDC, 2021).

This report according to News Shuttle, 2021 generated a lot of mixed reactions among residents of the state and northeast region. With the low level of education in some of parts the state however, most people preferred to listen and adopt misinformation or conspiracy theories which had a great deal on them negatively. It was also revealed that the number of covid-19 cases gradually rose in the state causing unfound uncertainties; palpable fear amidst misinformation regarding covid-19 characterized the state of the inhabitants of the state.

Since Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) was discovered in December 2019, substantial attention has been devoted to fighting the disease and countering the wave of conspiracy theories, myths, and misinformation that are peddled about the disease (.). This information crisis is one of the biggest obstacles that stakeholders have been contending with in the fight against the pandemic, evident in the fact that before declaring the disease a pandemic in March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) had already declared an “infodemic” on the disease in February 2020 (WHO, 2020). Soon after its outbreak, COVID-19 became the world's foremost public health enemy (.). As a result, this study evaluated the employment of

public relations methods by the Taraba state government through the committee on Covid-19 in managing COVID-19-related crises in order to assess their effectiveness and application in other health emergencies. The adoption of public relations strategies by the technical committee on covid-19 became very necessary so as to reach people with the right and useful information timely enough to guide and guard against the pandemic. The study unraveled the use of PR strategies by the committee and examined the people's perceptions on the effectiveness of the public relations strategies adopted.

2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

There had been many studies that scholars in public relations had carried out, that showed, a good number of organizations, both public and private are not only aware of public relations but also practice it. This is the same case with pressure groups, instituted committees and even political parties. In the same vein, the twelve-man committee of Covid-19 in Taraba State constituted to fight against coronavirus pandemic in the state also applied public relations. The reason for this is to create, enhance, disseminate information and maintain a cordial relationship between them and the general public they are called to serve. Public relations, in this regard, is a tool or apparatus for disseminating cogent information to the public. It does, makes use of various strategies to achieve this purpose. It is therefore possible for the committee of Covid-19 in Taraba State, constituted to fight against corona virus pandemic, not to use public relations strategies at all or to use it at a very low extent. This assumption is necessitated due to the fact that the twelve-man committees are health personnel and not from the management profession, so they may have shallow, myopic and wrong perception of what public relations really is. Public relations involve quality service delivery. If at all any committee needs the services of public relations, it is the twelve-man committee on covid -19 in Taraba State that was inaugurated to fight the outbreak of corona virus in the State. Any failure in the part of the committee will spare doom to the state as the virus was deadly and was spreading fast as a wide harmattan fire. The appearance of this deadly virus threw the world and Nigerian in particular into confusion as it claimed the lives of so many people in the world. Consequently, many Tarabans were in total darkness as regard what the virus was, how it spreads, it's vaccines and cure to mention a few and the disinformation among the citizenry was a matter of concerned and eventually how the outbreak

disappeared without causing significant damage to the citizenry and the state at large, is what gave rise to this study. This among other problems is the basis for this study which is aimed at evaluating the use of public relations strategies by the Taraba State committee on covid -19 in the fight against corona virus pandemic.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives are as follows:

1. Find out whether the Committee on covid-19 in Taraba State inaugurated to fight against corona virus pandemic in the state used public relations strategies.
2. To identify the Public Relations (PR) strategies used by the Committee on covid-19 in Taraba State in the fight against corona virus pandemic in the state.
3. To determine the effectiveness of the Public Relations strategies of the Committee on covid-19 in their fight against the pandemic in Taraba State.

4. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The role of public relations in any given organization cannot be overemphasized particularly in the health centres. This is because the entire community, society and the nation depend on the health centres for their wellbeing. This assertion is widely supported by scholars like; Achor and Moguluwa, (2012) and Ukpo, (2022). In their view, every individual in the society needs to know what is going on within and outside their immediate world in order to be healthy and function well. Public relations became an indispensable tool for the committee on covid-19 because it is the only medium where the entire public will get themselves abreast with relevant information of the corona virus pandemic, its spread and vaccination.

Public Relations Strategies used by the Committee on Covid-19 in Taraba State

The Committee on covid-19 used public relations efforts to keep COVID-19 contained in the state. According to data from the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, the total number of COVID-19 cases in Taraba State was 1,492 as of November 9, 2022. However, the virus has claimed the lives of forty-four persons in the state so far. In contrast, high index cases have been reported in other states such as Lagos and Kano. Taraba state is located at the northeastern part of the

country and was free from the virus until the following are some examples of public relations strategies:

Press Releases: In resolving COVID 19-related crises in Taraba, the State administration relied heavily on press releases as a public relations tactic. From the time the state's first index case was documented, this method was used. The press statement was meant to raise public knowledge about the virus's presence in the state, disclose government steps to limit it, and reassure the public that they were safe.

Special Broadcasts: To keep the public informed about COVID-19 in the state and to outline government efforts and directives on viral containment, the government employed special broadcasts on TTV, TSBS and NTA.

Press Conferences: Because there was a lot of disinformation about the virus circulating on various social media platforms, press conferences were used extensively to ensure that the correct information was transmitted to the general public through the media.

Announcements: There were several public announcements on COVID -19 prevention methods such as hand washing, social distancing, the use of sanitizer, the wearing of nose masks, and so on. There were also announcements about COVID -19 symptoms and phone numbers to call if somebody noticed them anywhere. TTV, NTA and TSBS were used to make these notifications.

Distribution of Palliatives: The Taraba State government distributed palliatives in the form of food and cash to many citizens in the state to assist them cope with the pandemic's effects and to ensure that they followed government directions on virus containment.

Use of social media: The government used a variety of social media channels to communicate with its inhabitants and ensure that all special broadcasts, news releases, and notifications were distributed to all residents of the state. Facebook, WhatsApp, and a blog are examples of these social media sites.

Evaluation of covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria

The index covid-19 case in Nigeria was recorded on February 27, 2020 (). An Italian citizen working in Lagos who had just returned from Milan tested positive for the virus. Lagos is the commercial hub and most populated state in the country. Since then, the number of positive cases has continued to rise. By the 18th of

March, the federal government had imposed “a travel bans and suspended visa on arrival for all travelers coming from countries that registered over 1,000 cases domestically” (). However, the spread of the virus continued until it became necessary to lock down the country. On March 30th, lockdown was imposed on Abuja (the Federal Capital Territory-FCT), Lagos, and Ogun States. This was later extended to other states across the federation that also recorded high numbers of cases.

Aside from states that were included in the federal government's lockdown, state governors in exempted states who also felt the need, locked down to curtail the spread of the virus within their borders. This was followed by an interstate travel ban that was imposed to prevent interstate mingling and movement of people across states of the federation. There were exceptions, though, for supplies of essential goods and services.

The lockdown sparked a serious socioeconomic crisis that saw citizens calling for reopening of the economy to enhance their living conditions. This was despite the palliatives-typically food items and in some instances, financial assistance- that were distributed to vulnerable individuals to cushion the effects of the lockdown in endemic states of the federation. Following the outcry, Federal Government relaxed the lockdown on the 4th of May (). This resulted in an exponential rise in the number of positive cases that doubled the initial total within the first week after the lockdown was relaxed. also corroborates that “Nigeria recorded more covid-19 cases in the past week than in the previous eight weeks put together.” Positive cases in the country rose from 1,728 on May 3rd to 3,526 one week later, by May 8. Since then, the cases have continued to rise. By the 24th of November, the country had recorded a total of 66,439 cases. Lagos remains the epicenter of the national pandemic, accounting for one-third of the total cases. Other states with high numbers of cases include the FCT, Oyo, and the Plateau states. Appendix D in page 107 shows this fact.

Communicating Covid-19 Messages in Nigeria

The Coronavirus pandemic (covid-19) bombed in just when people did not expect a surprise of such. It has had a huge impact on political and socio-economic structures and on their communication processes locally and globally (Xifra, 2020) as cited in (Chiakaan and Oruonye, 2020). Also, the corona virus pandemic has affected the institutions and organizations' stakeholder engagement thereby, halting so many activities unceremoniously. As a result, their communications and public relations departments had

to respond to an unprecedented Covid-19 situation though amidst fear of unpreparedness and poverty in the country. The information they received about health, safety, and continuity was not always consistent and trustworthy (WHO, 2020). Yet, they had to engage with stakeholders, including employees as well as customers, to restore their faith and trust, thereby providing a sense of stability to them (McKinsey, 2020) as cited in (Chiakaan and Oruonye, 2020). They were expected to communicate in a clear and straightforward manner and as frequently as possible about their preventive social and fiscal measures in order to restore confidence and normalcy in their organization.

In many cases, governments, institutions, and organizations including businesses and media have provided useful information on social distancing, wearing of face masks, constant washing of hands with soap, use of hand sanitizers and other hygienic practices to the general public. They encouraged citizens to remain calm and stay safe as with safety measures safety is guaranteed for all. This was really a big time to engage in dialogic communications with their publics beyond normal (Wang & Yang, 2020). The Nigerian government also had to communicate with organizations and the citizens to instill trust in their preventive measures as it builds morals faster, Channels Television (2020). Very often, they were following the recommendations of local and international health authorities so as not to default. This is in stark contrast to previous crises situations, where institutions or organizations were not always responding to their stakeholder messages in a timely manner (Camilleri, 2017). The organizations' openness and willingness to engage in dialogic communication with stakeholders is usually evidenced during times of crises (Wang & Yang, 2020). Wang and Yang also said that crises are a source of reputational threat to organizations as well as institutions as they will usually react in different ways. For example, during covid-19 various businesses have informed their employees about operational changes and new working conditions, revised their policies on leave of absence, working times, time-off, overtime, et cetera which were somehow favorable to others and unfavorable to others as well.

Moreover, they established baseline safety requirements and adjusted to the new normal (McKinsey, 2020). Employees were instructed to maintain safe physical distances from each other, to adhere to cleaning and sanitizing procedures, and to ensure that they stay away from public activity, if they had temperature. Very often, the businesses' corporate

communications were positively framed as they highlighted best practices (Cheung & Thadani, 2020). Such communications could have been repeated and reinforced, as repetitive messages can have a persuasive effect on the individuals' perceived statement credibility.

Theoretical Framework

This study is hinged on Excellence Theory of Public Relations. The excellence theory is a general theory of public relations that resulted from a 15-year study of best practices in communication management funded by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Research Foundation. The excellence theory first explained the value of public relations to organizations and society based on the social responsibility of managerial decisions and the quality of relationships with stakeholder publics. The theory also holds that best public relations practice by an organization reduces cost of negative publicity (Grunig, 1992). Furthermore, the excellence theory believes that to maximize the value of public relations, public relations must identify strategic publics and build long-term relationships with them through two-way symmetrical communication programmes (Grunig & Grunig, 2008).

Based on the above, the theory is considered suitable for this study because a careful application of good public relations practices based on the four mentioned features identified by excellence theorists, the technical committee on covid-19 in Taraba State would be in position to establish good relationship with Tarabans and critical stakeholders through two-way symmetrical model of communication effort which by extension would create and maintain positive corporate image for the commission. This has the potential of garnering public support and cooperation for the activities of the committee in fighting the corona virus which has claimed many lives in the state.

5. METHODOLOGY

Survey research design was adopted for this study. The population of this study consisted of the entire people of Jalingo local Government Area of Taraba state with the population of 187,500. This helped the evaluation of the usefulness of public relations strategies by the Taraba State committee on covid-19 in the fight against corona virus pandemic. The population sampling size formular by Taro Yamane (1967), was used in arriving at a sampled size. Adopting simple random sampling approach, the study proportionally, sampled respondents from the study area. Data were collected through the instrument

of structured questionnaire which was administered for five days with the help of four research assistants properly oriented. This implies that analysis of the data was done based on the number of the questionnaire that was retrieved. The collected data were analysed using simple percentage in a tabular form.

6. DATA PRESENTATION

Questionnaire to the Public and Committee on Covid-19.

Table 1: Respondents knowledge of Public Relations

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	396	100
No	0	0
Total	396	100

Source: Field work 2022.

All the 396 respondents sampled agreed that they have knowledge of public relations. This means their responses to the questionnaire will give the needed data answer the research questions.

Table 2: Respondents views on the Application of Public Relations by the committee on covid-19 in Jalingo

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
They apply public relations	335	84.60
Public relations was not properly applied	38	9.6
They do not apply public relations	0	0
I am not sure	23	5.81
Total	396	100

Source: Field work 2022.

The implication of the above responses showed that the committee on covid-19 in Jalingo actually used Public Relations in their fight against corona virus

Table 3. Respondents' views of the Public on uses of public relations tools/ strategies by the committee on covid-19 in Jalingo.

Responses	SA	A	D	SD	Total
The committee on covid-19 used press release	189	123	54	30	396
TV stations and Media outlets were used	274	122	0	0	396
take advantage of social media platforms	197	75	74	50	396

Created website for users to share opinions	162	134	65	35	396
Newsletters were sent to schools, religious and social	290	103	3	0	396
Newsletters were sent to schools, religious and social	115	96	150	35	396

Source: Field work 2022.

The responses shown above implies that the public relations tools/ strategies used by the committee include Press release, Tv shows and media outlet, social media platforms, blogging, Newsletters, face book and twitter. This shows that, the use of public relations strategies by the Taraba State Committee on Covid-19 in the fight against corona virus pandemic was effective.

Table4. Respondents' views of the effectiveness of public relations strategies used by the committee on corona virus.

Responses	SA	A	D	SD	Total
Spread of the covid-19 has drastically reduced	192	120	54	30	396
Spread of information has helped to get result	276	120	0	0	396
Social distance was one of the information observed	197	75	74	50	396
use of nose mask in schools, social and	160	136	65	35	396
The choice of social media yielded high result	290	103	3	0	396
Hand washing and the use of hand sanitizer has	150	115	96	35	396
distributed hand sanitizers to every home and office	197	75	74	50	396
Free and customized face masks	96	35	150	115	396
All covid-19 protocols were hardly observed	0	0	274	122	396
The authorities in Taraba state were reluctant in enforcing	74	50	197	75	396
Taraba recorded the highest infection	65	35	134	162	396

Source: Field work 2022.

Results from the table above, implies that public relations strategies was used by the committee on corona virus in Jalingo is very effective, going by the responses on the table.

7. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study are discussed below. Foremost, the study wants to find out, whether the Committee on covid-19 in Taraba State used public relations strategies, in the fight against corona virus pandemic? The answer to this research question is in Table 2 shows that, 335(84.60%) of the respondents

said the committee on covid-19 pandemic in Jalingo did apply public relations, 38(9.6%) did said Public relations was not properly applied; (0%) of the public said they do not apply public relations while 23(5.81%) said they are not sure. The implication of the above responses shows that the committee on covid-19 in Jalingo actually used Public Relations in their fight against corona virus; since the respondents that indicated “did apply public relations” have the highest frequency. The frequency of “did apply Public Relations” is high which means the effort of the committee needed to be applauded. This is in line with the work of Chiakaan(2015) in Upko, (2022)who asserted that “ organization (or any committee)whose sole interest is to blossom and thrive cannot ignore the pivotal place or role public relations plays in the advancement of such organization (or committee) globally. They are therefore expected to religiously use its elements to advance their cause”. The core of this study is to evaluate the use of Public Relations by the committee on covid- 19 in the fight against corona virus in Taraba State this is because public relations is a strategic form of communication that is expected to bond an organization (committee) and with its public (Chiakaan, 2015).

In the like of the understanding that the committee on covid-19 in Taraba State used public relations in their fight against corona virus, it is pertinent to ascertain that the public Relations (PR) strategies applied by the Committee on covid-19 towards enhancing its fight against the corona virus pandemic in Taraba State. On this note, the study revealed that public relations strategies that were undertaken by the committee on covid-19 as contained in Table 3 are as follows;

- i. The use press release to spread information about covid-19 pandemic in the State.
- ii. Taking advantage of social media platforms
- iii. Targeting local TV stations and Media outlets.
- iv. Blogging,
- v. Newsletters and magazines,
- vi. Face book and twitter

This finding is in line with the views of Quadros (2022) on public relations strategies in communities. His observations were that public relations strategies in our communities should be built on a robust relationship between the leaders and the followers. This is because good human relationship is the basis of good public relations. This can be improved by habit of sincerity, sense of resourcefulness, coordination and accommodation of some individual differences (Chiakaan, & Tsafa, 2021)

It's now a statement of fact that public relations strategies were used by the committee on covid-19 in the fight against corona virus in the State but another concern which was answered by table 4 is how effective was the used strategies? In the Table, emphasis were on the level of spread of the covid-19 pandemic whether it has drastically reduced due to the technical committee's constant sensitization through the media and meetings, the spread of information on covid-19 through the mainstream media has helped the committee in getting great results, Social distance was one of the information the committee forwarded to be observed, the use of nose mask in schools, social and religious gathering were part of the information conveyed by the committee, the choice of social media by the committee for the fight against the pandemic has yielded very high results in the state, hand washing and the use of hand sanitizer has been very effective in Taraba state, the committee has distributed hand sanitizers to every home and office in Taraba state to curb the spread of covid-19 pandemic, Free and customized face masks have been distributed to every home and office in Taraba state to minimize the spread of the pandemic, all covid-19 protocols were hardly observed in Taraba state despite the constant media adverts and the authorities in Taraba State were reluctant in enforcing covid-19 protocols in their local areas in the state thereby, leading to the spread of the pandemic.

In the Table, item one to seven had had a positive tone, its responses showed that, strongly agree (SA) and Agree (A) have the highest frequencies against the responses of Disagree and Strongly Disagrees (SD). The highest frequencies of these seven items showed that the strategies were very effective. Item eight to eleven which had negative tone showed that strongly agree (SA) and Agree (A) had the lowest frequencies against the responses of Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagrees (SD). This also implied that public relations strategies used by the committee on corona virus in Jalingo was very effective. This is in line with the view of Udoji, (2010) who carried out a study on disparity in knowledge about HIV/AIDS between areas where public relations enlightenment campaign had not been carried out and areas where there had been. It was found out that 68% of respondents in the areas where enlightenment campaign did not occur had poor awareness about the HIV/AIDS diseases whereas it as not the case with the area where enlightenment campaign had been made. The author therefore, advocated for the use of modern public relations tools in the fight against the Virus, especially in the grassroots where high ignorance about the disease

poses a great threat. Ontario Hospital (2020) also maintained that effective communication is a right, a non-pharmaceutical intervention (NPI) for COVID-19 which can increase adherence to protective behaviours necessary to mitigate the spread of the corona virus.

8. CONCLUSION

This study was carried out to achieve three objectives; primarily it was carried out to ascertain whether the committee on covid-19 used public relations strategies in the fight against corona virus in the State. From the findings of this study, the researcher concluded that: the committee on covid -19 used Public Relations strategies in their fight against corona virus in the State. They used press release to spread information about covid-19 pandemic in the State, taking advantage of social media platforms, targeting local Television stations and Media outlets, Blogging, Newsletters and magazines, Face book and twitter as important strategies. That the public relations strategies used by the committee in the fight against covid-19 in Taraba State were highly effective and of high extent. Public relations strategies used by the Committee on covid-19 in Taraba State have a significant effect on its fight against corona virus in the state.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the objective of the study above, the following recommendations are proffered:

- i. Taraba state Government should put in place measures that will make public relations more relevant and effective in the health sector to make people believe in its health Communication plans.
- ii. The managements of health sector in the state should ensure that public relations practitioners are well trained to employ the weaponry of Public relations strategies in the further fight against Covid-19 pandemic and any futuristic outbreak of disease.

References:

1. Amzat, J., Aminu, K., Kolo, V. I., Akinyele, A. A., Ogundairo, J. A. & Danjibo, M. C. (2020). Coronavirus outbreak in Nigeria: Burden and socio-medical response during the first 100 days. *International Journal of Infectious Diseases*, 98, 218 - 224 .

- <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijid.2020.06.067>
2. Aondover, M. E. (2020). Internet meme as a campaign tool to the fight against COVID-19 in Nigeria. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science (A)*, 20(6), 1-14. https://globaljournals.org/GJHSS_Volume20/4-Internet-Meme-as-a-Campaign.pdf
 3. Castanheira, T. (2020). As COVID-19 ravages Brazil, governments promote homicidal reopening of schools. *World Socialist Web Site*. <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/08/01/br-az-a01.html>
 4. Chiakaan, G.J Udende, P. and Umar, J. L (2018). TY, Danjuma's allegations of against the Army the wake of Farmers-herders crisis: implications on the image of the Army and Nigeria.
 5. Darma, M. R. (2018, September 2-4). *Shatagement: Implications of Dr. Mamman Shata's Sarakuna (Royalty) Songs on Management and Contemporary Issues*. Paper Presented at the International Conference on Alhaji (Dr.) Mamman Shata Katsina. Organized by the Centre for Research in Nigerian Languages Translation and Folklore, Bayero University, Kano
 6. Depoux, A., Martin, S., Karafillakis, E., Preet, R., Wilder-Smith, A. & Larson, H. (2020). The pandemic of social media panic travels faster than the COVID-19 outbreak. *Journal of Travel Medicine*, 27(3), 1-2. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jtm/taaa031>
 7. Ferguson et al (2020): History of Pandemics ever in the world. Retrieved on 11th December, 2021.
 8. Grunig, L. A., Grunig, J. E., Dozier, D. M. & Broom, G. M. (1997). *Excellent public relations and effective*. <https://doi.org/10.1016>
 9. NCDC. (2020). *COVID-19 in Nigeria: Vulnerabilities to COVID-19 and containment measures*. <https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/report/#/>
 10. Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) (April 9, 2020). COVID-19 case update. Available online at <https://twitter.com/NCDCgov/> Olatunji, H. (February 29, 2020).
 11. Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) (April 9, 2020). COVID-19 case update. Available online at <https://twitter.com/NCDCgov.ng>
 12. NHS England (2020): *Next steps on NHS response to Covid-19*. Retrieved on 12th December, 2021.
 13. News Shuttle (2020): *News report on corona virus update in Taraba state*. Retrieved on 12th August, 2020.
 14. Nelkin, Gregory and Miller (1995): *handbook of public communication of science and technology*. Routledge Taylor and Francis group. London and New York.
 15. Nweke, O.F.F. (2001): *Public relations, practices and concepts*. Enugu: Hamson Publishers.
 16. Olufemi, A. (2020, May 3). As Nigeria relaxes lockdown, country records more COVID-19 cases than ever. *Premium Times*. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/coronavirus/391186-as-nigeria-relaxes-lockdown-country-records-more-covid-19-cases-than-ever.html>
 17. Oruonye, E. D. & Ahmed, Y. M. (2020). An appraisal of the potential impacts of COVID-19 on tourism. *Journal of Economics and Technology Research*, 1(1), 32-41. <http://www.scholink.org/ojs/index.php/jetr/article/view/2799>
 18. Ozili, P. K. & Arun, T. (2020), Spillover of COVID-19: Impact on the Global Economy. SSRN. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3562570>
 19. Padayachee, N. & Toit, L. C. (2020, April 13). Debunking 9 popular myths doing the rounds in Africa about the coronavirus. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/debunking-9-popular-myths-doing-the-rounds-in-africa-about-the-coronavirus-135580>
 20. Poonam, S. K. & Rathi, B. (2020). Coronavirus disease COVID-19: A new threat to public health. *Current Topics in Medicinal Chemistry*, 20(1), 1-2. <https://www.eurekaselect.com/179976/article>
 21. Reuben, Danladi R.C, Danladi M.M, Saleh D.A & Ejembi E.A(2020): *Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices Towards COVID-19: An*

- Epidemiological Survey in North-Central Nigeria*.journal of community health. Springer nature 2020.
22. Rettner, R. (2020, July 14). 14 coronavirus myths busted by science. *Livescience*. <https://www.livescience.com/coronavirus-myths.html>
 23. UNICEF Coronavirus disease (covid-19: *What Parents Should Know – how to protect yourself and your children*. Available online at <https://www.unicef.org>. Retrieved on 12th August, 2020.
 24. Wang, J, Tang, K., Feng, K., Li, X., Lv W., Chen, K. & Wang, F. (2020). High temperature and high humidity reduce the transmission of COVID-19. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2003.05003>
 25. Westcott, B. & Jiang, S. (2020, March 14). Chinese diplomat promotes conspiracy theory that US military brought coronavirus to Wuhan. *CNN*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/13/asia/china-coronavirus-us-lijian-zhao-intl-hnk/index.html>
 26. Wells, W. Burnet, J. & Moriarty, S. (1998). *Advertising: Principles and Practice*, (6th edition). London: Prentice – Hall International.
 27. White, C. & Park, J. (2010). Public Perceptions of Public Relations, *Public Relations Review* 36 states of the federation. Abuja.
 28. WHO. (2020a). *Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) Situation Report - 13*. <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/330778/nCoVsitrep02Feb2020-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
 29. WHO. (2020b). *Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboard*. <https://covid19.who.int>.
 30. WHO. (2020c). *Report of the WHO-China Joint Mission on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)*. https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/who-china-joint-mission-on-covid-19-final-report.pdf?sfvrsn=fce87f4e_2.
 31. WHO. (2020e). *CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19) ADVICE FOR THE PUBLIC: MYTH BUSTERS*. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters>
 32. World Bank. (2020). *Rural Population- Nigeria*. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL?locations=NG>
 33. Wilson, J. & Jibrin, R. (2014): *Community Relations: An Impetus for Educational Growth and Development in Nigeria*. Kaida press, Kaduna.
 34. Williams, J. (2020, February 22). People of color may be immune to the coronavirus because of melanin. *Blackmentravel.com*. <http://blackmentravel.com/people-of-color-may-be-immune-to-the-coronavirus-because-of-melanin/?fbclid=IwAR16vIBzQJBHNppX1Qbr2-S7Zf67YDHVLI405SYwsiSgnEy9c4ZgM0Soclk>
 35. Worcester, R. M., (1997). *Managing the Image of your Bank: The Glue that Binds*. International World Health Organization. (WHO, 11 March, 2020). *WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19—11 March 2020*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization; 2020.
 36. World Health Organization. (WHO, 11 March, 2020). *WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19—11 March 2020*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization; 2020.
 37. World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>. Retrieved on 21st July, 2020.
 38. World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>. Retrieved on 21st July, 2020.