GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM

THE ROLE OF RADIO IN COMBATTING MISINFORMATION ABOUT COVID-19: AN ASSESSMENT OF POTTERS FM IN THE BONO REGION

HANNAH B. NYAME

DECEMBER, 2021

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH (SOGSAR), GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE IN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION

DECEMBER, 2021

DECLARATION

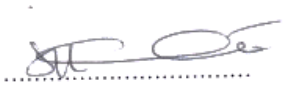
I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my original research, and no part of it has been presented for another degree in this institute or elsewhere. I am solely responsible for any shortcoming.

……15/12/2021……

Hannah B. Nyame Date

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the preparation and presentation of this project work has been supervised by me in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of dissertation as laid down by the School of Graduate Studies and Research, Ghana Institute of Journalism.



……15/12/2021……

Dr. James Asante — Date

(Supervisor)

DEDICATION

TO GOD,

MY FAMILY,

AND FRIENDS.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am greatly indebted to Dr. and Mrs. Otoo, of Trade Union Congress (TUC) whose encouragement has helped me to complete this work. I am grateful to Dr. James Asante for his professional assistance and constructive criticisms which helped shape this work. My appreciation also goes to all those who in one way or the other provided the match needed support for my work.

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ABSTRACT

With the current situation of pandemic and the lack of information control by regulatory authorities, the research will create awareness for radio stations to come to terms with the abilities they possess to reshape people's existing ideas and emotions about pandemics and their relating matters so as to push the correct narrative and come up with programs and activities that will help reduce the spread of the disease and educate people on the need to comply with government and health directives that are aimed at combating the crisis on all fronts. The aim of the study was to assess the role radio stations play in combatting misinformation about the current Covid-19 pandemic. The study used descriptive survey (questionnaire) to gather data from listeners of Potters FM in the Sunyani Municipality. The gathered data was further analyzed with the help of SPSS and presented using charts and graphs. Social Media and the Internet were seen to be the major sources of misinformation while TV, Radio, Newspapers and Magazines proved to be trusted sources for the dissemination of public health information. But even though radio possesses great abilities in combatting misinformation, the language used in disseminating public health information is clear and free from ambiguity. Policymakers and public health officials can also tap into the potentials of radio to push the narrative of public health safety measures.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The spread of infectious diseases has a unique ability to fuel fear, anxiety and mass hysteria. Infectious diseases challenge our social cohesion and our collective capacity to manage a crisis. They are divisive and traumatizing (Schwab & Malleret, 2020). What we are fighting against is invisible; our family, friends and neighbours may all become sources of infections. Everyday activities we cherish, like hugging or handshaking a friend, may easily become a vehicle for transmission. Often times, authorities that try to introduce, implement and enforce measures that are intended to keep people safe are perceived as agents of oppression. A common problem that is born about of a pandemic is what modern day researchers call "infodemic". Infodemic commonly refers to myths, misinformation and half-truths about a particular situation, person or event, especially in times of crisis when people are more vulnerable (Tangcharoensathien et al, 2020).

This chapter discusses the background, statement of problem, objectives of the study, research questions and significance of the study. The chapter further covers the scope of the study, its limitations and how the study is organized.

1.1 Background

"Stay home, stay safe. Wash your hands, sanitize. Don't touch your face, no handshakes. Stay apart, self-isolate. Mask up, this is the new normal". These are statements that have become very popular over the last eighteen (18) months. The Corona Virus disease, commonly called Covid-19 disease, originated from Wuhan in the Hubei Province of the People's Republic of China and swiftly moved through the world with such speed that is unprecedented. Within a

few months after it was announced in China, it had quickly travelled to Europe and notable European countries like Italy, the United Kingdom, Spain and France were all recording very high cases daily. By March, 2020, Ghana had reported its first confirmed case in Accra and reality started to dawn on a lot of people.

With the emergence of social networks and their omnipresence, especially as a source of information in critical situations, the information environment has become significantly more complex since the last worldwide epidemic of H1N1 Influenza. Today, people are faced with an abundance from various sources, many of them not credible, and the way key information is relayed to the general public has become critical (The Lancet, 2020). As a result, high-ranking officials from the world Health Organization (WHO) have spoken about the need to fight not only the current COVID-19 pandemic but also the related infodemic. In this research, I was thus interested in how mass media outlets, particularly radio, can help shape perceptions, emotional responses, and whether communication can promote behaviourial responses (i.e., adherence to preventive and protective measures) to the novel crisis situation.

Despite the emergence and broad usage of social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, e.t.c., radio remains an important mass medium in Ghana and across the entire continent of Africa. Challenges such as power availability, internet connectivity and media costs, make radio a highly sort after medium for public information. Radio as a mass medium employs electromagnetic radio waves through transmitters and antennas, to disseminate information, education and entertainment to listeners. According to Raza et al. (2020) Radio has become the most popular and effective medium for information dissemination to a larger audience around the world.

The Ministry of Health of Ghana and Ghana Health Service (G.H.S.) have been at the forefront of efforts to combat Covid-19 in Ghana. Both organizations have been active in setting up

isolation centres, hospitals and spaces to manage suspected and confirmed cases. The government has been engaged in training personnel and establishing rapid-response Covid-19 task forces across Ghana's 16 regions. In addition, the Government of Ghana has introduced numerous incentive packages for frontline workers in an attempt to motivate them in their fight against the pandemic. However, despite efforts to combat the spread of the disease, they have been seriously challenged by the problem of spread of misinformation or false information about Covid-19. Misinformation has single-handedly created public panic, fear and mass hysteria inhibiting efforts made in an attempt to curb the rapid spread of the corona virus. A typical example is people's hesitancy towards Covid-19 vaccines. Although the WHO and the Food and Drugs Authority (Ghana) continue to ensure the global audience of the safety of Covid-19 vaccines, people still remain hesitant to get inoculated. Misinformation has further allowed people to drop their guard and ignore the Covid-19 safety protocols like washing of hands, sanitizing, social distancing and wearing of nose masks.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The Ministry of Information, under the leadership of the minister, Kwadwo Oppong Nkrumah periodically hosted daily press briefings to keep the press and the general public up to date with the activities of the ministry. These briefings were often broadcast live on major national TV stations including GTV, JoyNews, UTV and Citi TV. Some radio stations also transmitted these press briefings. This was in effort to keep citizens up-to-date with happenings concerning the current Covid-19 pandemic and sensitize the information environment in order to ensure that citizens stayed safe to help curb the spread of the corona virus. The widespread use of internet has accelerated the rapid spread of rumours, fake news, half-truths and even the right information. Gone are the days when people relied solely on trusted sources such as CNN and BBC for the right news. Today's world has become increasingly complex; users of information

can access any kind of information at just a click of a button. There is a keen competition for people's attention, data and interest. As such, the perpetrators of information have increased and if the information atmosphere is not constantly fed with the right kind of news and information to demystify misinformation, conspiracy theories and fake news will continually flourish and efforts to reign in the virus will only be in futility.

The impact of misinformation is too damaging to be ignored. Pandemics and crisis become breeding grounds for the circulation and mass consumption of myths, hoaxes, half-truths and conspiracy theories. The progress made by government and health officials to combat the spread of infectious diseases are mostly thwarted by the persistence of misinformation. Misinformation tends to make people hesitant to comply with directives issued by government and health officials to the point that people widely develop deep distrust for the government of the day and the health officials who do everything possible to protect lives and prevent the economy from plunging itself into another crisis. In the case of Ghana, the Parliament passed the Imposition of Restrictions Act, 2020 (Act 1012) in order to empower the President to impose restrictions on the movement of persons within the country as it was established that the virus couldn't move, but people moving around were spreading the virus. Though these restrictions were imposed on movement of people and social gatherings such as church events, weddings, funerals, political rallies, demonstrations and beach outings, some people occasionally flouted these directives due to whatever news they received which made them believe that the corona virus was a hoax. Among such fake news were the 5G conspiracy theory, the bioweapon story, the tale of the depopulation agenda, among others.

Misinformation about covid-19 has increased stigmatization towards Covid-19 patients and even those that have fully recovered from the disease. Additionally, myths about Covid-19 increase the chances of people being less careful and dropping their guard, ignoring the instituted protocols and standing the chance of contracting the disease or spreading it. People

who rely on information from wrong sources tend to abuse certain drugs that are purported to be effective against Covid-19 and some can even develop some sort of hesitancy towards vaccines, should they be available to help reduce the spread of the virus. One major cause of vaccine hesitancy is misinformation about the possible side effects and adverse effects from receiving vaccines. These tales continue to flood the information space and the fight against misinformation needs to be intensified. As part of the fight against misinformation, radio has a potent ability to support this fight. As such, the extent to which radio can help to provide right information to their audience needs to be researched in order to fully tap into the prospects of radio in helping win the fight against misinformation about Covid-19.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The study aimed at tracing some of the sources of Covid-19 related misinformation among listeners of Potters FM (88.3MHz) in Area 3 in the Sunyani Municipality. That is, identifying the various means by which people receive fake news and hoaxes. Additionally, the study sought to find out the characteristics of fake news and the reasons people continue to circulate them (whether for financial gains or just mere amusement). An equally important objective of the study was the attempt to identify the role radio stations play in disseminating accurate information and how well they are doing this job.

1.4 Research Questions

The study seeks to address the following questions:

- ✓ Find out some of the sources of misinformation
- ✓ Find out how radio stations are responding to the Covid-19 Pandemic
- ✓ Find out the role of radio in disseminating accurate information

- ✓ Find out lessons on Covid-19 measures learned by radio listeners during the Pandemic

1.5 Significance of the Study

With the current situation of pandemic and the lack of information control by regulatory authorities, the research will create awareness for radio stations to come to terms with the abilities they possess to reshape people's existing ideas and emotions about pandemics and their relating matters so as to push the correct narrative and come up with programs and activities that will help reduce the spread of the disease and educate people on the need to comply with government and health directives that are aimed at combating the crisis on all fronts.

Regulatory authorities like the National Communications Authority (N.C.A.) and the Ministry of Information which formulate and implement policies could benefit from the recommendations that the researcher will make on the role of radio in combating misinformation during a pandemic or crisis. This information could be disseminated during workshops organized for radio station operators in order to improve their content.

The knowledge of possible sources of misinformation and how to identify and verify myths, hoaxes, half-truths and conspiracy theories could help radio listeners, who are at the danger of being exposed to these pieces of information, to stay in line with government and health directives to help reign in the crisis.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study focused on the role Potters FM (88.3GHz) played in combating misinformation among its listeners during the Covid-19 pandemic. Potters FM (88.3GHz) is located in the Sunyani Municipality, the capital of Bono Region (formerly Brong Ahafo Region).

1.7 Limitations of the Study

Since the study was limited to just one FM Station in Sunyani Municipal, the views of its listeners within the vicinity of Area 3 may not ideally represent all the views of the listeners in the Municipal. Some listeners were unwilling to respond to some items on the questionnaire. This attitude might have affected the results of the study to some extent. The items on the questionnaire might not be enough to bring forth the requisite information and this might have affected the findings. The researcher had to travel a long distance to carry out the field work and this affected the study because the researcher was sometimes stressed after the long journey. The field work need lots of funding in the printout of questionnaires and transportation of the researcher.

1.8 Organization of the Study

The study consists of five chapters. The first chapter entails the introduction of the study. It consists of the background, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, scope of study and significance of the study. The chapter also includes limitations of the study and the organization of the study.

Chapter Two covers the literature review and areas such as sources of misinformation, how to identify and spot misinformation and the role radio played in helping to disseminate accurate, reliable and timely information to their audience during the pandemic.

Chapter Three focuses on the methodology. It consists of the research design, the population for the study, sample and sampling techniques. It also looks at the research instrument, data collection procedures and data analysis plan.

Chapter Four deals with findings and data analysis.

Chapter Five consists of recommendations, conclusions and suggestions for further study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews existing literature, it looks at the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the study. In this chapter, the conceptual framework, theoretical framework and other studies related to this study are discussed under the following headings:

- ✓ Conceptual Framework
- ✓ Causes and Spread of Misinformation
- ✓ Characteristics of Misinformation
- ✓ Misinformation During the Covid-19 Pandemic
- ✓ The Use of Radio During the Pandemic
- ✓ Efforts by Radio to Combat Misinformation During the Pandemic

2.1 Conceptual Framework

Concept of Misinformation

Misinformation contaminates the information space globally and the trend of manipulating facts continues to disrupt public communication discourse and, eventually, accelerate the vehicles of fear, panic, anxiety, uncertainty and hysteria. Misinformation is not a new phenomenon, but the proliferation and mass usage of social media has made this issue more urgent, especially in events like pandemics where the very lives and health of people are under a serious attack. Misinformation has the power to promote negative narratives about crisis and pandemics and to discredit the work of health and government officials who are tasked with mounting strategies to counter the attacks of the corona virus. The beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic was marked with fake news propagated through the media and social media networks and promoted in the public domain. The term “fake news” encompasses misinformation (when

false information is shared with no intended harm), disinformation (when false information is shared with the intention to cause harm), and malinformation (when genuine information is shared to cause harm, often by moving information designed to stay private into the public sphere) (definitions by Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). It will be less of an exaggeration to suggest that people's reluctance to adhere to Covid-19 safety protocols and the recent hesitancy towards vaccines were directly motivated by the spread of fake news.

The concept of fake news is not a novelty of the media landscape of the 21st century, but rather emerged with the appearance of the first newspapers, initially serving to entertain and/or perhaps help sell more copies. There were no sinister agenda, and journalists or editors made sure that the reader was aware that the information presented was not true. Over the years, politicians and business people realized the potential of fake news and started to use it for manipulation – politicians with the intention to reach a certain position in society, and business people for profit maximization. The trend of not marking fake news as such continues to this date and it has become exceedingly difficult to recognize such news. Ironically, only satirical portals continue to mark their news as fake.

Although, truth was the basis and core founding pillars of journalism, with journalists taking up the role of meticulous individuals within the societies of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, it was just a matter of time before those who embellished information appeared, exploiting journalism and journalists for their own agenda and propaganda. This, particularly, came to prominence during World War I, when the warring sides, especially the UK, the USA and later Germany, realized that armies and soldiers were not enough so they began using various manipulative techniques to influence the public and even their own soldiers. One soldier on the losing side, Adolf Hitler, directed all his power in the rise of Nazism to propaganda, with the help of Joseph Goebbels.

2.2 Causes and Spread of Misinformation

In social media, misinformation, rumors and false information are most often caused by four underlying issues, which are detailed more fully below;

a) Incorrect information – intentional versus unintentional;

b) Insufficient information;

c) Opportunistic disinformation; and

d) Outdated information.

Incorrect Information

Incorrect information can be caused by situations where the true situation is difficult to confirm. Radiation in Japan was a good example. After the meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station in March, 2011, many rumours circulated regarding appropriate safety precautions, such as whether people should evacuate, the possibility of food and water shortages and whether there would be additional radioactive releases. Incorrect information and rumours can be caused by persons who wish to create confusion. A typical example is when fake accounts are created that impersonate official accounts. Users of such fake accounts proliferate fake news which are reposted, retweeted and re-shared until they hit the full public domain where they receive massive attention.

Insufficient Information

When information is slow to emerge on circumstances surrounding an event, rumours can start rapidly. Insufficient information can be a result of several factors, such as: not having clearance

to release the data, lack of a designated official for that information, or a belief that information must be complete to release and therefore intentionally withheld. Confusion continues to arise when official channels do not release information fast enough, provide information updates in the right social media and traditional media channels, or the population is unaware of or does not trust the official source for that information. The public will generally follow and amplify official information when they can access information they believe.

Opportunistic Disinformation

Opportunistic disinformation occurs when predatory individuals attempt to capitalize on a particular event or incident and it generally falls into one of two categories, namely, revenue-generating and financially incentivized or malicious and politically incentivized.

Revenue-generating disinformation attempts to hijack the attention of the users of social media from a particular happening or event that is newsworthy and redirect that attention for commercial purposes. Typically, a phishing scam or spammer may mimic a pre-existing website, blog or social media account redirect users to a sales pitch or other ad. Some scammers also capitalize on a popular hashtag and use click-throughs to boost viewer statistics on a website or encourage the purchase of a specific product or service unrelated to the original hashtag.

Malicious disinformation is typically politically motivated, and can be even more challenging to both identify and counter. Studies that have examined the volume, timing and location (e.g., tracked IP addresses, associated time zone and geo-tagged posts) of this category of social media posts indicate an intent to cause harm and disrupt the standard flow of truthful information during a specific event or incident. During Hurricane Harvey in 2017, a rumour spread on Twitter that officials were asking shelter-seekers about their immigration status. Also

in 2017 after Hurricane Irma, a rumour surfaced that survivors would receive generators from the federal government. While some posts could be attributed to innocent mistakes, the scope and velocity of amplification seems to indicate an intentional rebroadcasting of disinformation with the intent to frighten vulnerable members of the local communities and weaken their trust with government entities offering essential aid.

Outdated Information

The current media environment relies heavily on being first with information. During crisis, rumours start to surface, novice and experienced users alike surf the internet, often posting images of the initial returns from their search without first verifying the date or accuracy of the data they are sharing. This happens most often with users sharing photos from past disasters in a hurry as evidence of a disaster, which is often believed as being true as the phrase "pictures of it didn't happen" has permeated social media user's mindsets. Secondarily, older articles describing a past incident can resurface when reposted and publication dates are changed automatically through re-posting.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

If truth is the foundation of journalism, news is its key genre – without it, there are no journalists, media or journalism as a profession. In the early formation days of news writing, the profession followed the rule established back in the ancient Rome, that news was important to answer five questions (the 5 Ws): who, what, where, when and why. Over the years, the rule has been expanded to include "how (H) and the mandatory attribution of sources, as well as "what next" (W) that addresses the question of what happens next. If all these questions are answered, the result is hard, undisputed facts, with no lies, accurate, balanced and objective

(Malovic 2007). Do we get an answer from fake news? We do! The only difference is that the answer is a lie and as such cannot be classified as news. News must be truthful – if it is fake, it cannot be considered news, hence, fake news in this sense is an oxymoron.

In almost every case, one can clearly determine whether a particular piece of media content, in all the 400 years of journalistic history, is fake news (misinformation, disinformation and malinformation). But to do so, it is vital to define terms such as "fake news", "alternative facts" and "post-truth", as well as to clarify whether it is possible to have a generic term for misinformation, disinformation and malinformation, and whether the term "fake news" is that term. Among the numerous authors and academics who have brought due diligence to the phenomenon of fake news so as to give it a definition and typology, two names stand out – Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow. The authors state that fake news is "news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false, and could mislead readers" (2017: 4). A similar division is offered by Edson C. Tandoc Jr. et al, who explain that fake news has six forms; "(1) news satire, (2) news parody, (3) fabrication, (4) manipulation, (5) advertising, and (6) propaganda. Fake news hides under a veneer of legitimacy as it takes on some form of credibility by trying to appear like real news" (2017: 11). David Klein and Joshua Wueller define fake news as the "online publication of intentionally or knowingly false statements of fact" (2017: 6). According to John Allen Riggins, fake news "could be understood as intentionally misleading context made to imitate journalistic content with the primary aim of generating profit" (2017: 1315). Lion Gu, Vladimir Kropotov, and Fyodor Yarochkin state that fake news is "the promotion and propagation of news articles via social media. These articles are promoted in such a way that they appear to be spread by other users, as opposed to being paidfor advertising. The news stories distributed are designed to influence or manipulate users' opinions on a certain topic towards certain objectives" (2017: 5). Finally, Ethical Journalism Network 2 defines fake news

as “information deliberately fabricated and published with the intention to deceive and mislead others into believing falsehoods or doubting verifiable facts.”

There are four main factors that always stimulate and increase the acceleration of misinformation, especially, during a health crisis (Rosnow, 1988). These are general uncertainty, outcome-relevant involvement, personal anxiety and credulity. Misinformation depends on uncertainty. When people spread a misinformation, they must exist in an uncertain information environment. Besides, the misinformation which people believe in is basically associated with their life or important to the public. During a pandemic, personal anxiety may amplify the rapid transmission and consumption of misinformation. Scholars define anxiety as a negative affective state that is produced by apprehension about an impending, potentially negative, outcome. Scholars also investigated the relationship between the anxiety and personal belief and in brief, the level of anxiety is notably related to the belief of misinformation (Zollo, 2018). Credulity is regarded as another factor that has been implicated as a predictor of misinformation spreading. In the sphere of public health, two factors can impact people’s credulity. First is health literacy, which is defined as the degree to which individuals and groups can obtain, process, understand, evaluate and act upon information needed to make public health decisions that benefit the community (Freedman, 2009). Usually, public health issues are complex to the public. Not only does the public readily trust a piece of information but also misunderstand an accurate information and turn the information into a piece of misinformation. Besides, previous research indicated that cultural, social and religious factors profoundly influence health-related behaviours (Zhang, 2020).

2.4 Other Related Studies

A recent study on the characteristics of Misinformation spreading on social media during the Covid-19 outbreak in china was conducted by Kelin Chen, Yuni Luo, Anyang Hu, Ji Zhao and Liwei Zhang of the Institute of Urban Governance, Shenzhen University, Shenzhen. The study sought to understand some of the characteristics of health misinformation because that can be a premise to rebuking and purposefully correcting such misinformation on social media. The study, however, did not assess the role radio can play in disseminating accurate information during emergency health situations like the Covid-19 pandemic.

In August, 2020, Lejla Turcilo and Mladen Obrenovic of Heinrich Boll Foundation published a study on misinformation, disinformation, malinformation: causes, trends and their influence on democracy. The study made it clear that misinformation, disinformation and malinformation have become new threats to democracy. The study further indicated that information disorder is creating global political and economic disorder as well and as such, all global, regional and local actors should be included in strategies for preventing and combatting these threats.

An editorial with the topic "Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19): The Impact and Role of Mass Media During the Pandemic was published on 23rd August, 2021, by Patricia Arriaga, Francisco Esteves, Marina A. Pavlova and Nuno Picarra, seeking to examine media use, mental health and well-being during the Covid-19 pandemic. The study does not throw light on the role radio has to play in minimizing the proliferation of misinformation about the pandemic.

"Covid-19 Related Misinformation on Social Media: a systematic review" was published by Elia Gabarron, Sunday Oluwafemi Oyeyemi and Rolf Wynn with objective to review misinformation related to coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) on social media during the first phase of the pandemic and to discuss ways of countering misinformation. The study revealed

that several social media posts about Covid-19 (28.8%) during the first phase of the pandemic could be classified as misinformation.

2.5 Misinformation During the Covid-19 Pandemic

"We are not just fighting an epidemic; we are fighting an infodemic" – Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus (WHO). Fighting against misinformation amid pandemic outbreaks is quite challenging in places where internet users are very high (Van Prooijen, 2018). The first rumour about Covid-19 emerged in January, 2020. The rumour held that it was not possible for the corona virus to reach Africa or even survive in Ghana, due to the warm weather in the area. Tales of natural shielding by nature were circulated mainly via WhatsApp. The rumour that black people were immune to Covid-19 due to melanin in their skin soon reached the shores of Ghana by February. This rumour was widely circulated through Twitter, WhatsApp and Facebook (now Meta). It was just a matter of time before the 5G Conspiracy Theory surfaced. The idea that 5G towers installed in Wuhan, China and some parts of Europe were the causes of Covid-19 cases soon flooded the internet and social media platforms and gained momentum by mid-April, 2020.

Consequently, Covid-19 cases started rising in Ghana and spread steadily from the country's capital Accra to other regions of the country. Ashanti, Western, Eastern, Northern and Ahafo regions subsequently recorded cases and the President stepped in to encourage the wearing of Personal Protective Equipments (especially nose masks), practicing of social distancing and the directive to stay home and only go out for essential items. Another directive that followed suit was the reduction of the number of passengers boarding public transport vehicles. the closure of schools and the closure of entry points into the country (Land and Airports), only allowing for entry of essential goods and services. Gradually, the reality of the situation started

to dawn on most Ghanaians and things became more serious when lockdown measures were implemented and security forces were charged with enforcing the lockdown measures. In Accra, the epicenter of the country's Covid-19 outbreaks, contact tracing began and was strengthened by training 1,340 surveillance officers during the first three months of the project.

All these measures were implemented to help contain the virus and aid in the safe reopening of socioeconomic activities and schools.

2.6 The Use of Radio During the Pandemic

Radio has the power to instill and promote citizens' resilience during periods of public health emergencies. It has the potential to influence opinions, change behavior and accurately inform the public about Covid-19. In order to effectively position radio to debunk misinformation about Covid-19 in Ghana, several strategies could be employed (Kapoor, 2020). In the current crisis caused by Covid-19, radio has been an essential medium to stay informed (Rodero, 2020). According to a study by Rodero (2020), radio consumption during the pandemic in Spain increased significantly. The peak slot continued to be mornings but due to lockdowns, listening was more spread throughout the day, with increased listening especially in the afternoon and at noon times. The same research also depicted that an upward trend in radio consumption was recorded in other countries like the United Kingdom, Italy, Chile, Australia and South Africa. This trend was not different from the situation of Ghana as radio stations adapted to the new situation with professionals working from home and programmes modified to include content on coronavirus. As in other crisis, consumption of radio content has increased and the medium is aiding in lessening the psychological effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.7 Efforts by Radio to Combat Misinformation During the Pandemic

It is important to use trusted and credible sources for information collection and assimilation. Media stations, including Television, Radio and Print Media, have all mounted efforts to help guide citizens and propagate the narrative of government and health officials during the pandemic. Radio stations all across the country immediately responded to the emergency health situation by broadcasting safety tips like frequent washing of hands with soap, social distancing, sanitizing and the need to self-isolate if a person developed symptoms of Covid-19. Radio stations also aired the president's periodic Covid-19 updates and held programmes on the next day to thoroughly dissect key issues of the president's addresses (which were characterized by the popular phrase "Fellow Ghanaians").

2.8 Summary

Misinformation, fake news and rumours will always continue to circulate; they cannot be eliminated in their entirety but agencies can act proactively and preemptively with measures that will lessen the risks during disasters and emergencies. Radio has great potentials to reach people in times of emergencies when people's appetite for news and update is ripe. It remains a strong source for public information in times of health crisis. With widespread panic caused by misinformation about Covid-19, radio can play a huge role in combating the spread of false and misleading information. Many people within the populace continue to listen to radio daily and this provides radio with great capacity if the right information can be disseminated timely and unambiguously, in languages, dialects and translations that ensure that the entire populace in the country is reached. This will go a long way to assist the government and health officials in dealing with emergency situations such as the Covid-19 pandemic in order to reduce the stress on medical facilities and protect the vulnerable economy from being pushed into another crisis altogether.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the methodology used for the study is discussed. Focus is thrown on the research design, population, the sample and the sampling technique employed. The research instrument, data collection procedures as well as data analysis plan are all discussed under this chapter. Research Methods, according to Rajasekar (2006), refer to all the methods used by a researcher during a research study. Explanations are drawn using research methods to collect, measure and observe facts. Explanations cannot be done solely on the basis of reasoning. Experimentally verified explanations are accepted.

3.1 Research Design

For this study, the researcher adopted the use of descriptive survey. Descriptive survey is the process of collecting data in order to test hypothesis or answer questions concerning the current status of the study (Lawrence and Tar, 2013). This research design was appropriate for this study because it is useful in arriving at meaning conclusions. Data is collected from the Area 3 listeners of Potters FM through the administration of questionnaires and things are reported as they are observed. However, one weakness of this research design is that it is difficult to ensure that the questions to be answered by the respondents are clear, not misleading and free from ambiguity (Seifert & Hoeffunnug, 1991). Nonetheless, this method satisfies two goals: it describes and predicts, and there is no manipulation of the process. The validity of the findings obtained via descriptive surveys is established through replication (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006).

3.2 Population

It is vital to draw a distinguishing line between a *population* and a *sample*. Population refers to all members that meet a set of specifications. For example, the population of Accra is defined as all people residing in Accra. A population of inanimate objects can also exist, such as all 3-storey buildings in Accra. A single member of any given population is referred to as an element. When only some elements of a given population are selected for a particular study, we refer to that selection of those elements as a sample. A sample is different from a census, in that, a census includes all the elements of a population, whereas a sample is a selection of just some of the elements of a given population.

Area 3 in Sunyani Municipal is a complex mix of residential apartments and business premises. The area is littered with stores and shops which make it ideal for the researcher to obtain unbiased data from the respondents. The location houses the Sunyani Melcom Shop, MTN Ghana Office, Potters FM, Llord Driving Academy and residential apartments interspersed with small shops and offices. The Sunyani Coronation Park is situated at the centre of Area 3. For this study, the targeted population comprises the people living in Area 3 of Sunyani Municipal.

3.3 Sample

A good job needs to be done at the sampling stage of any research work. This is because the sample is a direct representation of the population. As such, getting the sample wrong means a wrong representation of the entire population. A sample is a subset of a population that depicts the general population characteristics and enables statistical inferences to be made that are representative of that population.

The sample was selected from Area 3 in the Sunyani Municipality of Bono Region. Specifically, only listeners of Potters FM were selected to be part of the sample. The sample consisted of 120 listeners of Potters FM who were randomly selected. The respondents comprised shop owners, restaurant operators, blue-collar workers, insurance brokers and everyday ordinary residents who live in crowded apartments in the area.

3.4 Sampling Technique

Sampling is a method that enables researchers, without examining each person, to obtain information on a population based on the results from a subgroup of the people (Emerson et al., 2013). The researcher used a non-probability sampling method called the *Purposive Sampling Technique.* With this type of sampling technique, the researcher relies on his or her judgement when choosing members of a population to participate in a study. The researcher selected individuals who had worked or lived in Area 3 of Sunyani for more than a year and above 18 years.

3.5 Research Instrument

The researcher applied the use of questionnaire as the main instrument for the research work. Its appropriateness in eliciting responses from the respondents made it the obvious choice for the researcher. For a descriptive survey, data are usually collected by administering questionnaire (Gay, 1987). The questionnaire was structured into five sections; Section A, B, C, D and E. Section A consisted of questions about the demographic characteristics of the respondents; gender, age, education level and marital status. Section B comprised five items which measured sources of misinformation as perceived by the respondents. Section C handled the preparedness of Potters FM towards the pandemic and how the station responded to the

pandemic. For Section D, five items were provided to measure the role Potters FM played in disseminating accurate information and Section E also consisted of five items that tried to measure lessons learnt by the respondents by listening to Potters FM during the pandemic.

3.6 Data Collection Procedure

The researcher visited the location a week before the questionnaires were distributed and mapped Area 3. Respondents were chosen at random and the researcher had a brief presentation with them in clusters to declare the intentions of the study and request their cooperation. A brief background was provided on the questionnaire to aid the respondents to fully comprehend the nature of the study. The researcher was available to explain those items which were unclear to the respondents. An ample time of 7 days was given to each of the respondents and the researcher revisited the area to recollect the completed questionnaire from the respondents after the 7 days. All the distributed questionnaires were duly completed and the researcher achieved 100% return rate.

3.7 Data Analysis Plan

According to Sarantakos (1998), data analysis allows the researcher to work on the data collected for assessment and derive meaningful and useful conclusions. The completed questionnaire was further edited to increase its consistency. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software was used to analyze data generated from the administration of questionnaires to the respondents. Results were then presented using frequency tables, percentages and charts.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the colossal amounts of data collected (Marshal & Rossman,1990). Of what use is data which cannot be organized, analysed and used in generating meaning conclusions? This chapter deals with the thorough analysis of the data collected with the use of frequency tables, charts and graphs. The data analysed are grouped under subheadings to make them easy to retrieve.

4.1. Background Information

The research instrument solicited the personal details from the respondents. These were Gender, Age, Education Level and Marital Status of the respondents.

4.1.1 Gender of Respondent

Table 1 depicts that 70 out of the 120 respondents were males. This figure represents 58.3% while 50 respondents were females, representing 41.7%. The chart below gives a pictorial representation of this analysis.

Table 1: Gender of Respondents

Item	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Male	70	58.3
Female	50	41.7
Total	120	100.00

Source: Field Work 2021

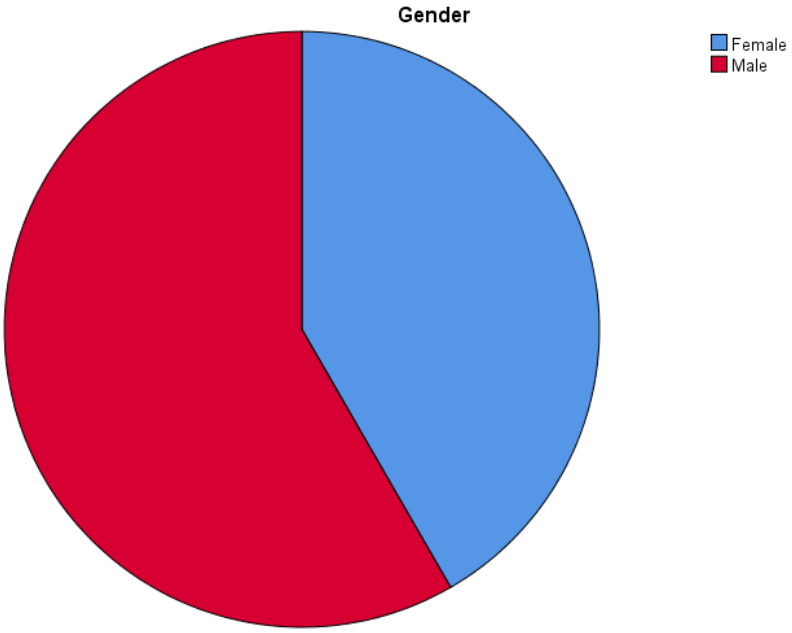


Figure 1 Gender Distribution of Respondents

4.1.2 Age of Respondents

Table 2 below shows the age distribution of the respondents. Most of the respondents were 51 years old and above; a total of 35 respondents representing a percentage of 29.2. Age ranges "18 – 30 years" and "41 – 50 years" recorded the same number of respondents, 29 each, bringing their cumulative percentage to 48.4. For age range 31 – 40 years, only 27 respondents were recorded, representing 22.5%. However, the respondents were evenly distributed according to their ages, with no age group significantly standing out.

Table 2: Age of Respondents

Items	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
18 – 30 Years	29	24.2
31 – 40 Years	27	22.5
41 – 50 Years	29	24.2
51 years and above	35	29.2
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field Work 2021

4.1.3 Educational Level of Respondents

Table 3 and Figure 2 below illustrate the education level of the respondents of the study. Respondents with just Basic Education were the least among the three groups. Basic Education group recorded a total of 20 respondents representing 16.7%, while Secondary Education group recorded a total of 54 respondents, representing 45.0%. Meanwhile, Tertiary Education, which is the highest among the three levels of Education, had 46 respondents, which is far more than those with Basic Education but falls behind those with Secondary Education. Tertiary Education holders represented 38.3% of the represents.

Table 3: Educational Level of Respondents

Items	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Basic Level	20	16.7
Secondary Level	54	45.0
Tertiary Level	46	38.3
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field Work 2021

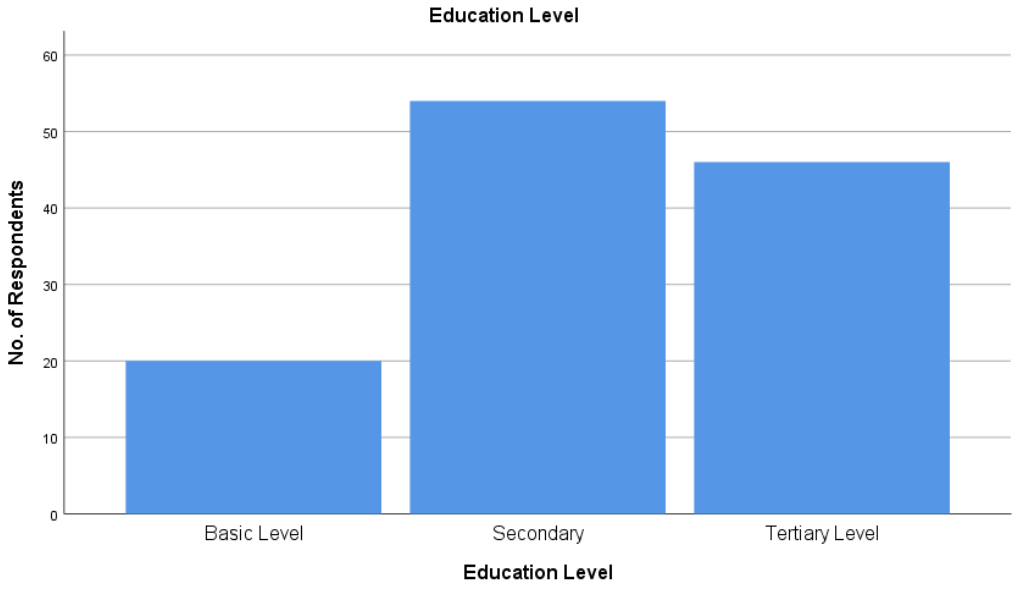


Figure 2: Education Level of Respondents

4.1.4 Marital Status of Respondents

Data was collected from respondents regarding their marital status. Only two options were provided for this item; Married and Unmarried (Separated/Single/Divorced). Out of the total number of 120 respondents, 54 (representing 45.0%) were unmarried, while the majority of them were married (66 respondents representing 55.0%). Analysis of the marital status of respondents can be seen in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Marital Status

Items	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Unmarried	54	45.0
Married	66	55.0
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field Work 2021

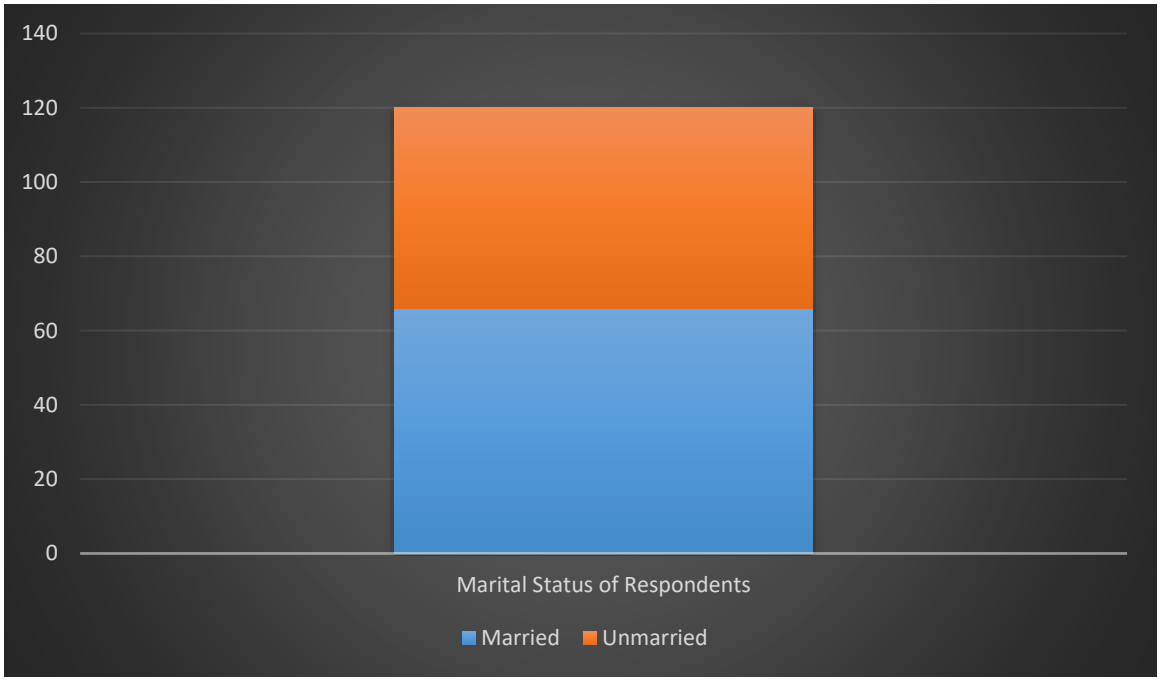


Figure 3: Marital Status of Respondents

4.2 Sources of Misinformation

Respondents were asked to provide what they perceive to be the various sources of misinformation. Five main sources were provided in the questionnaire and respondents were asked to tell how strongly they believed or otherwise, that a particular source was responsible for the spread of misinformation. Among the items provided were Family and Friends, Social Media and the Internet, Radio Stations, TV Stations and Newspapers/Magazines. Analysis of how they responded to each of the items on the questionnaire is provided in the sub-sub topics below.

4.2.1 Family and Friends as a Source of Misinformation

Respondents chose the degree to which they agreed or disagreed that misinformation originated from Family and Friends. Analysis is seen in Table 5 below. The results in the table show that most of the respondents agreed that misinformation, to a certain extent, are received from Family and Friends. As many as 71 of the respondents strongly agreed, as well as 42 of them agreeing that Family and Friends spread misinformation. The cumulative percentage of these two groups of respondents is an overwhelming 94.2%.

Table 5: Family and Friends

Items	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	71	59.2
Agree	42	35.0
Neutral	1	0.8
Disagree	6	5.0
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field Work 2021

4.2.2 Social Media and Internet as a Source of Misinformation

Almost all the respondents agreed that Social Media and Internet (as a set) is a major accelerator of misinformation. From Table 6 below, we can observe that 98.3% of the respondents agreed that Social Media and Internet was a major source of misinformation.

Table 6: Social Media and Internet

Items	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	91	75.8
Agree	27	22.5
Neutral	1	0.8
Disagree	1	0.8
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field Work 2021

4.2.3 Radio Stations as Source of Misinformation

In Table 6 below, most of the respondents disagreed that radio was a source of misinformation. Only a single respondent strongly agreed that radio was a source of misinformation. In fact, 61 of the respondents disagreed that radio was a source of misinformation and 50 respondents strongly disagreed to this as well.

Table 6: Radio Stations

Items	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	1	0.8
Agree	0	0.0
Neutral	8	6.7
Disagree	61	50.8
Strongly Disagree	50	41.7
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field Work 2021

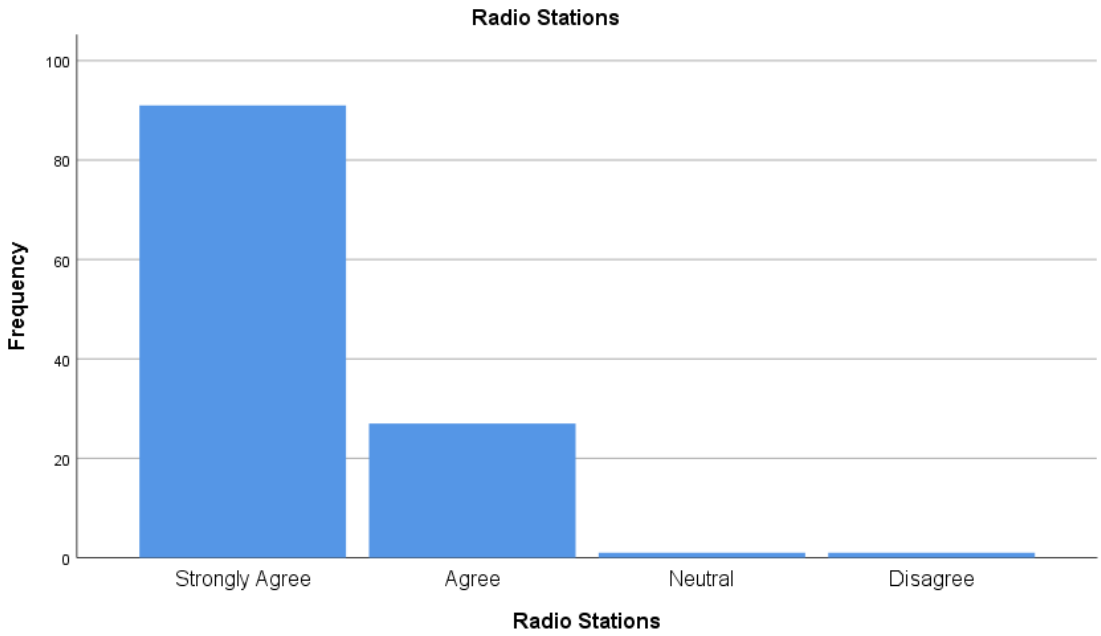


Figure 4: Radio Stations as a Source of Misinformation

4.2.4 TV Stations as Source of Misinformation

From Table 7 below, 60 respondents representing 50% strongly disagreed that TV Stations were a source of misinformation. 46 of the respondents as well disagreed to this assertion. Just a handful of respondents believed that TV Stations were a source of misinformation. 2 of them strongly agreed that TV Stations were a source of misinformation while 5 of them just agreed. For these 2 groups of respondents (Strongly Agree and Agree) a cumulative of 5.9% was recorded which is just 7 out of 120 respondents. 5.8% of the respondents remained Neutral on the question.

Table 7: TV Stations

Items	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	2	1.7
Agree	5	4.2
Neutral	7	5.8
Disagree	46	38.3
Strongly Disagree	60	50.0
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field Work 2021

4.2.5 Newspapers and Magazines as Source of Misinformation

Table 8 gives an analysis of the respondents' views as to whether Newspapers and Magazines were a source of misinformation. As much as 54.2% of the respondents strongly disagreed that Newspapers and Magazines were a source of misinformation. 36.7% of them further disagreed and only 5.8% strongly agreed that misinformation was circulated through Newspapers and Magazines.

Table 8: Newspapers and Magazines

Items	**Number (N)**	**Percentage (%)**
Strongly Agree	7	5.8
Agree	2	1.7
Neutral	2	1.7
Disagree	44	36.7
Strongly Disagree	65	54.2
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field Work 2021

4.3 Potters FM's (88.3MHz) Responses to the Pandemic

In the table below, descriptive statistics is provided on how Potters FM (88.3MHz) responded to the Covid-19 Pandemic. The researcher sought to find out if the listeners of Potters FM believed that the FM station responded adequately to the pandemic. Several questions were posed to the respondents and these are the results of their answers.

Table 9: Potters FM's Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic

Item	YES		NO	
	N	%	N	%
Were Covid-19 Programmes organized	96	80.0	24	20.0
Were Statistical Updates given	109	90.8	11	9.2
Were Covid-19 Safety Measure Jingles played	118	98.3	2	1.7
Were Covid-19 Programmes aired at Convenient Times	72	60.0	48	40.0
Were new Programmes organized to entertain	100	83.3	20	16.7

Source: Field Work 2021

From Table 9 above, majority of the respondents answered in the affirmative that Covid-19 programmes were organized by the FM station. A whopping 80.0%, representing 96 respondents, said YES, the FM station organized Covid-19 programmes while 20%, representing 26 respondents said NO.

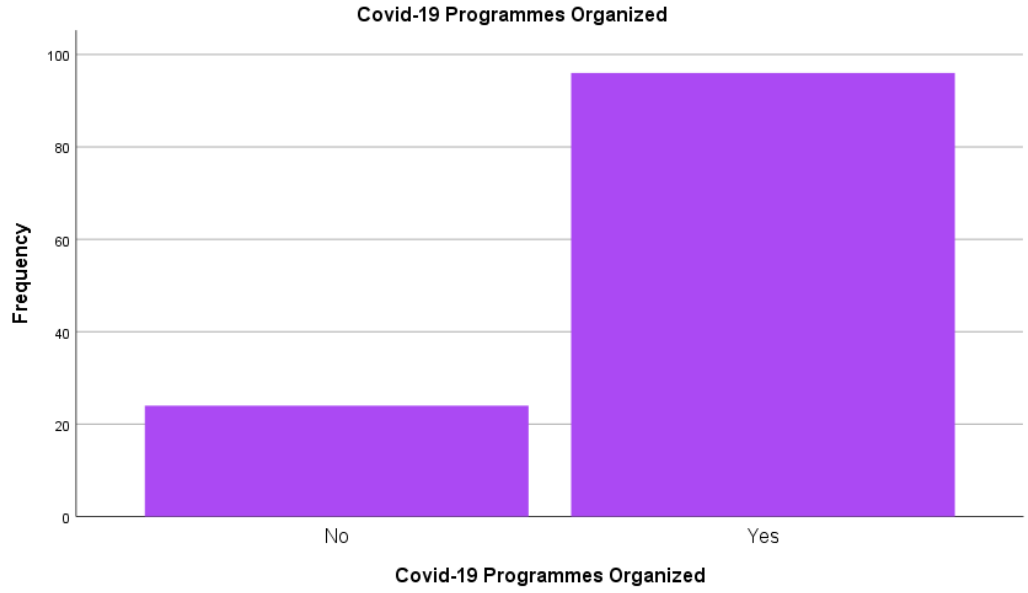


Figure 5: Covid-19 Programmes Organized

When it came to the question of Potters FM (88.3MHz) providing statistical updates on Covid-19 cases, majority of the respondents, 109 respondents answered YES. This number represented 90.8% of the respondents while only 9.2% said NO.

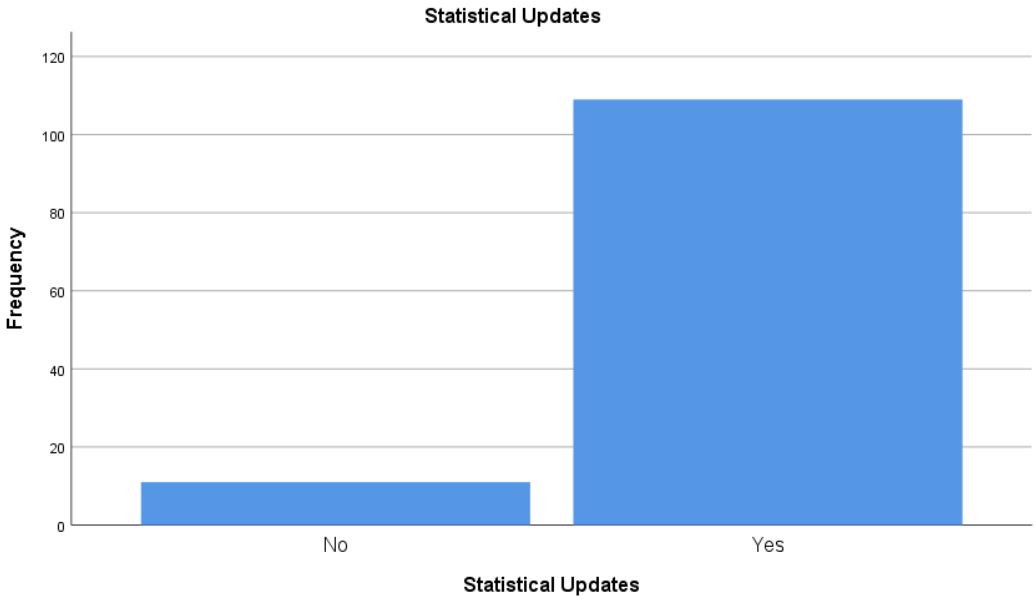


Figure 6: Statistical Updates

118 respondents, representing 98.3%, indicated YES, Potters FM (88.3MHz) played Covid-19 Safety Measure Jingles. According to the Free Dictionary online, a radio jingle is a catchy, often musical advertising slogan. A jingle normally is characterized by a voice-over and it is a short advertisement or promotion of a product, person, event or activity.

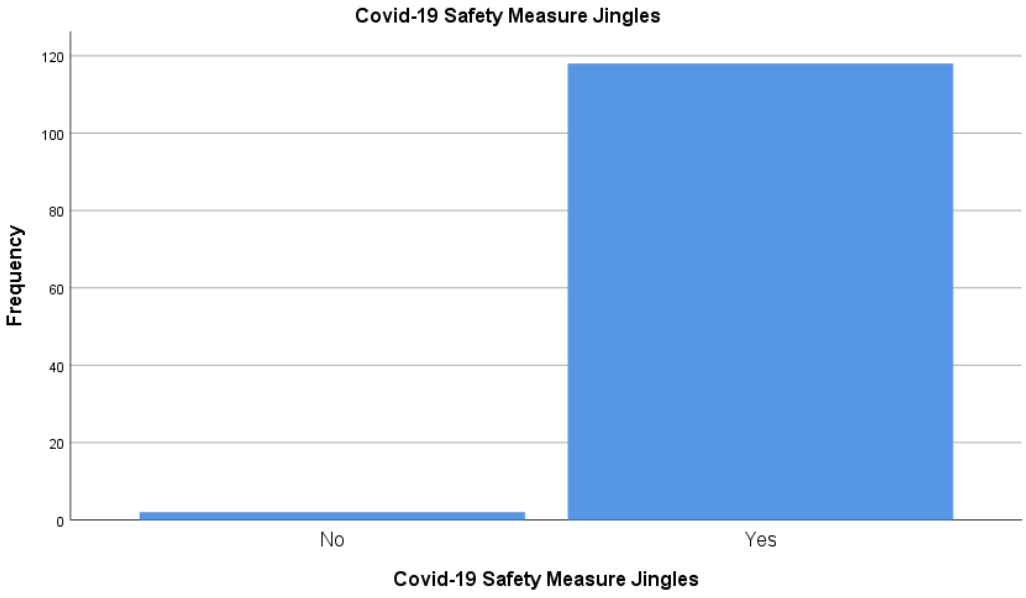
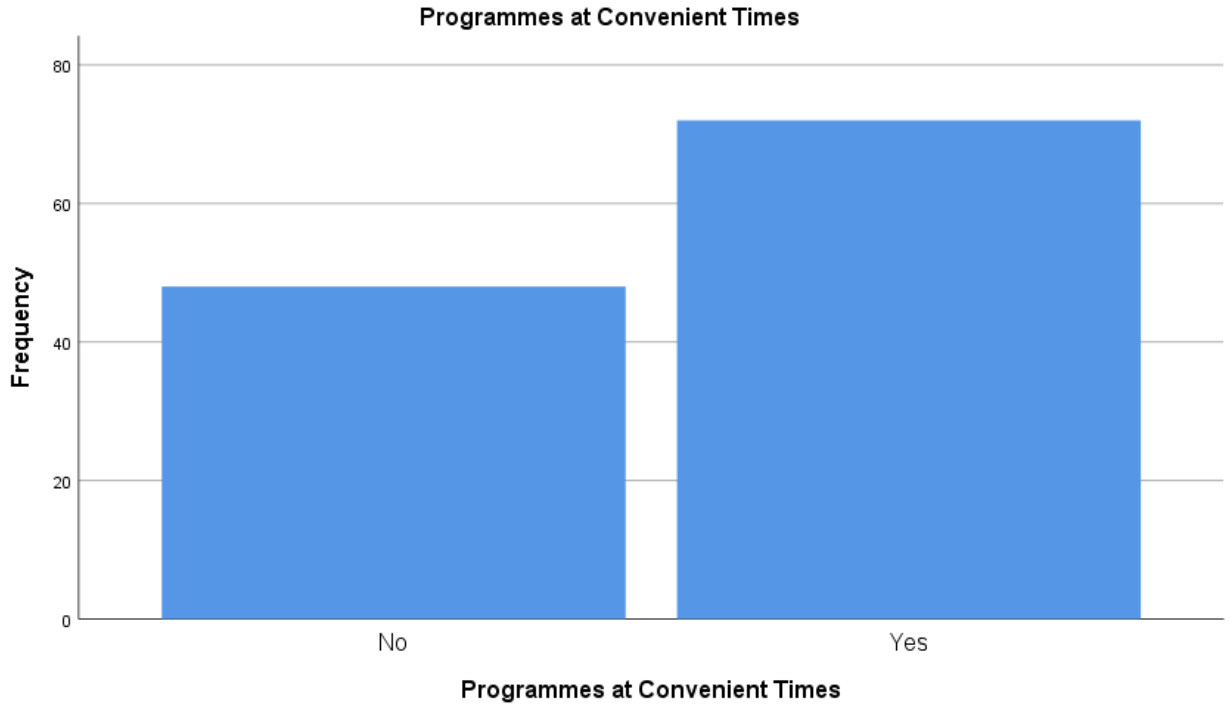


Figure 7: Covid-19 Safety Measure Jingles

Although as many as 72 of the respondents answered yes that Potters FM aired Covid-19 programmes at convenient times, 48 on the other hand suggested that the times during which Covid-19 programmes were aired weren't convenient enough to fit into their schedules.



On the subject of the provision of programmes to entertain listeners during the pandemic, as many as 100 respondents, representing 83.3% strongly agreed that this was done. 20 respondents also agreed that entertaining programmes were introduced to keep listeners engaged during the pandemic.

4.4 Role of Potters FM (88.3MHz) in Disseminating Accurate Information

4.4.1 Timely Provision of Key News about Covid-19

Table 10: Timely Covid-19 News

Items	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	91	75.8

Agree	27	22.5
Neutral	1	0.8
Disagree	1	0.8
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field Work 2021

4.4.2 Ample Time Allocated for Covid-19 Programmes

Table 11: Ample Time for Covid-19 Programmes

Items	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	51	42.5
Agree	23	19.2
Neutral	1	0.8
Disagree	18	15.0
Strongly Disagree	27	22.5
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field Work 2021

4.4.3 Language Used was Clear to Understand

Data on the clarity of language used for Covid-19 programmes was analysed in the table below.

Table 12: Clear Language for Covid-19 Programmes

Items	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	45	37.5
Agree	23	19.2
Neutral	10	8.3
Disagree	21	17.5
Strongly Disagree	21	17.5
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field Work 2021

From Table 12 above, 45 respondents strongly agreed that language used for Covid-19 programmes was clear. 23 agreed and 10 respondents were neutral on the topic. For Strongly Disagree and Disagree groups, the remainder of the respondents were slip 21 each.

4.4.4 Invitation of Health Experts for Covid-19 Programmes

Table 13: Health Experts on Covid-19 Programmes

Items	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	89	74.2
Agree	22	18.3
Neutral	1	0.8
Disagree	3	2.5
Strongly Disagree	5	4.2
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field Work 2021

4.4.5 Potters FM Provided for their News about Covid-19

Table 14: Provision of Sources for Covid-19 News

Items	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	79	65.8
Agree	41	34.2
Neutral	0	0.0
Disagree	0	0.0
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0
Total	**120**	**100.0**

4.5 Lessons Learnt by Listeners of Potters FM (88.3MHz) During the Pandemic

4.5.1 Potters FM Helped to Stay Safe

On the subject of learning to stay safe during the pandemic, 93 respondents strongly agreed that Potters FM did help in cultivating this habit. 25 respondents, representing 20.8%, also agreed to this narrative. Table 15 below gives the details.

Table 15: Staying Safe

Items	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree (1)	93	77.5
Agree (2)	25	20.8
Neutral (3)	1	0.8
Disagree (4)	1	0.8
Strongly Disagree (5)	0	0.0
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field Work 2021

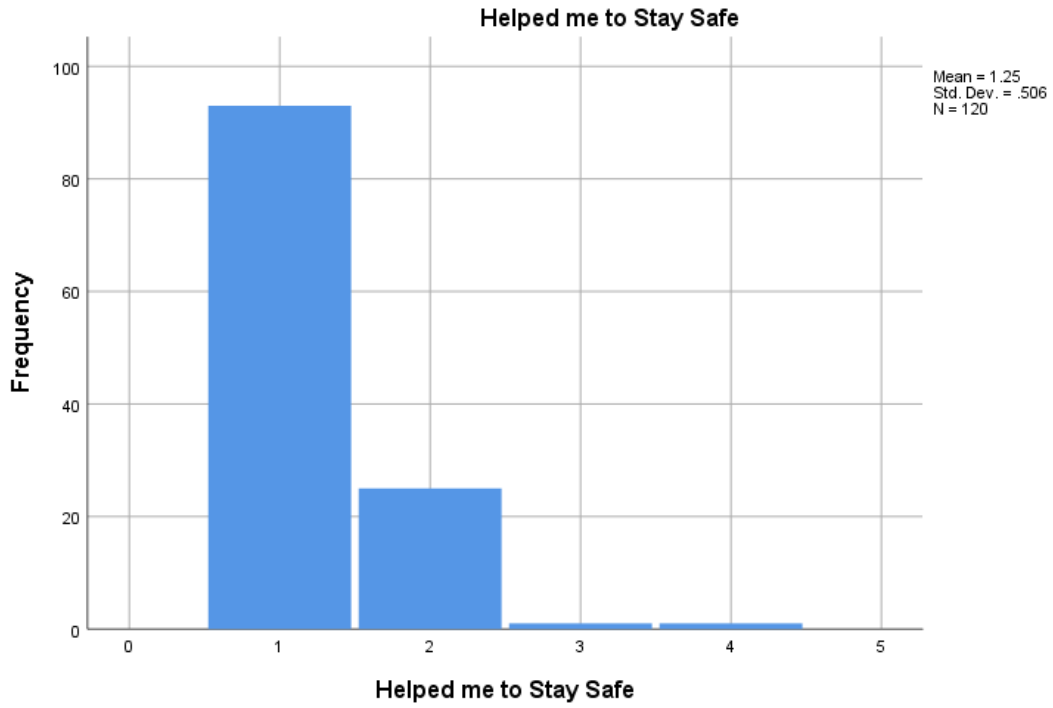


Figure 9: Staying Safe

4.5.2 Anxiety and Uncertainty

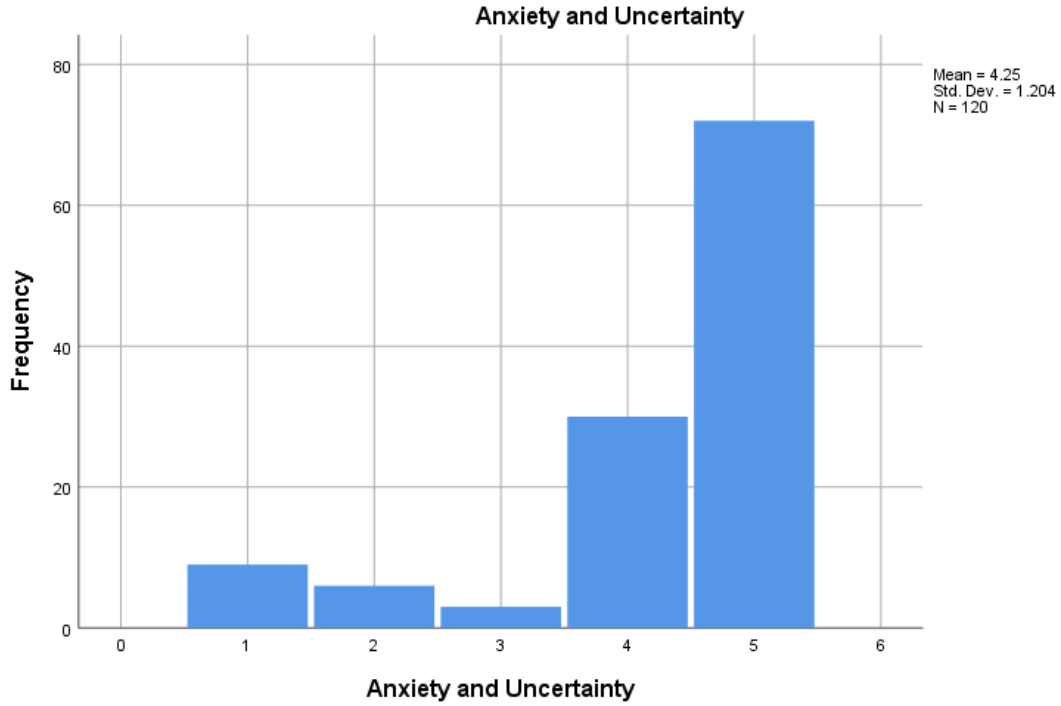


Figure 10: Anxiety and Uncertainty after Listening to Radio

Figure 10 gives a pictorial presentation of opinions of respondents regarding increase in anxiety and uncertainty levels after listening to radio. High numbers of the respondents disagreed with this narrative.

Table 16: Anxiety and Uncertainty from Listening to Radio

Items	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree (1)	9	7.5
Agree (2)	6	5.0
Neutral (3)	3	2.5
Disagree (4)	30	25.0
Strongly Disagree (5)	72	60.0
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field Work 2021

4.5.3 Encouraged Relations to Listen to Potters FM (88.3MHz)

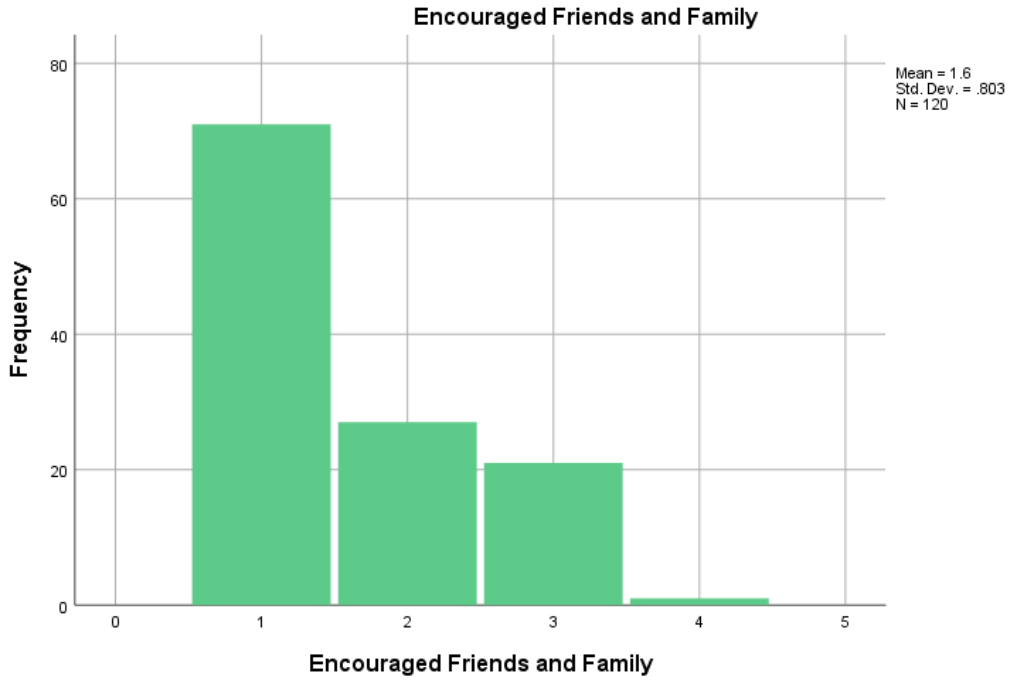


Figure 11: Encouraged Friends and Family

Table 17: Family and Friends Listening to Radio

Items	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree (1)	71	59.2
Agree (2)	27	22.5
Neutral (3)	21	17.5
Disagree (4)	1	0.8
Strongly Disagree (5)	0	0.0
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field Work 2021

A total of 71 responded strongly agreed that they recommended Potters FM to their close relations. 27 of them further agreed and none of the respondents disagreed on the topic.

4.5.4 Verification of Sources of News

A close observation of Table 18 below depicts that 69 out of 120 respondents, representing 57.5% strongly agree that they now verify sources of news items. 25 of them also do the same while 23 of them, representing 19.2% remain unchanged. Just 1 respondent strongly disagreed to the question asked and 2, representing 1.7% disagreed.

Table 18: Verification of Sources of News for Covid-19

Items	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	69	57.5
Agree	25	20.8
Neutral	23	19.2
Disagree	2	1.7
Strongly Disagree	1	0.8
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field Work 2021

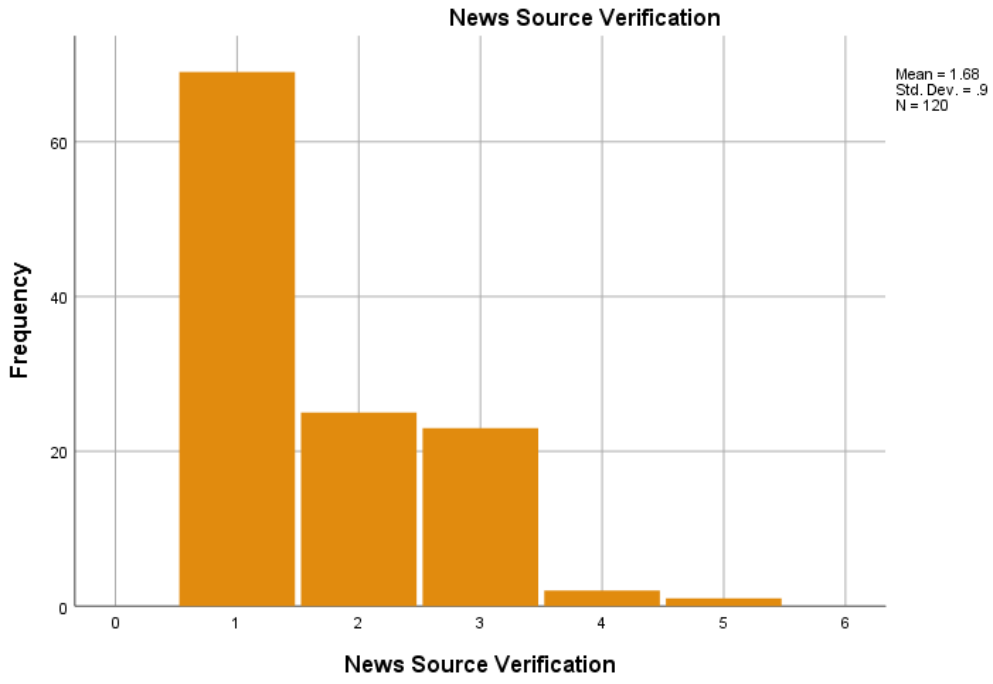


Figure 12: News Source Verification

4.5.5 Everyone has a Part to Play in the Covid-19 Pandemic

Table 19: Everyone has a Part to Play

Items	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	87	72.5
Agree	32	26.7
Neutral	1	0.8
Disagree	0	0.0
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field Work 2021

As displayed in Table 19 above, 72.5% of the respondents strongly agreed that they have learnt that, everyone has a part to play to help reduce the rate of infections in the country. 26.7% of the respondents agreed that everyone has a part to play in the fight against the pandemic. All the respondents were split between “strongly agree” and “agree”. Only 1 respondent remained Neutral on this subject.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents summary of the findings of the study, conclusions and recommendations. All these are discussed in relation to the literature review and findings of the research in the earlier chapters.

5.1 Discussion of Findings

The study examined some of the sources of misinformation, a couple of misinformation circulated during the Covid-19 pandemic, how radio stations responded to the Covid-19 pandemic and the role they played in disseminating accurate information during the pandemic. Specifically, Potters FM (88.3MHz) in the Sunyani Municipality was chosen. The study adopted the descriptive type of survey and used questionnaires to gather data from 120 respondents and the data collected was analysed in-depth under chapter 4 with the use of SPSS Software.

The findings from the study indicated that Social Media and the Internet are a major source of misinformation. Though governments, policymakers and health officials rely on Social Media and the Internet to communicate to their audience in a timely manner, these tools also remain a hotbed for the production, growth and dissemination of misinformation (Han et al, 2014). Anyone with a smartphone or computer and an active internet connection can access tons of information with just a click of the button. The perpetrators of online fake news do so mainly to attract attention in order to increase traffic flow on their sites. Some even use this as an advantage to advertise their products and services. Meanwhile, Radio Stations, TV Stations, Newspapers and magazines remain trusted and credible sources for people to access and

assimilate information. Chen (2021) agrees that social media remains a major conduit or vector for spreading health misinformation during a public health emergency. Althought the World Health Organization (WHO) has launched a new information platform called the WHO Information Network for Epidemics, misinformation on social media goes faster and further like the viruses that travel with people go faster and further (Zarocostas, 2020)

The findings also revealed that radio stations have potentials to reach the grassroots. There seems to be an abundance supply of radio gadgets in homes, offices, public transport vehicles, markets and general public spaces. Key information can be relayed to a large number of people through radio and radio even has the capacity to reach places where internet reception proves to be in low supply. The portability, convenience, cheap cost and availability of free signals make radio a very popular medium in both developed and developing climes. There exist both state-owned and privately-run radio stations in most country capitals, other large cities and rural areas across Africa (Madmobe, 2005).

Furthermore, the study indicates that radio stations need to recognize that they have an important role to play in promoting public health protocols especially in times as this. In times of pandemic, people resort to trusted news sources for information. Radio stations therefore need to adequately prepare and respond during such times. Bazley (2016) affirms the findings that radio remains the most widely used mass media in the world. Despite the immense popularity of television and the internet, radio still remains the mass medium that reaches the widest audience in the quickest possible time. Existing statistics indicate that over 5 billion people, representing 70 percent of the total world population have access to radio stations. Predictions based on research findings by Nielsen and Deloitte show that people aged between 18 and 34 will most likely spend more time on radio than watching television by 2025 (Stewart, 2018). As such, dedicated segments during the news or programme broadcasts are good avenues to dispel misinformation about Covid-19.

Additionally, radio stations need to develop new strategies to keep listeners entertained during emergency health situations. As a measure to curb the rapid spread of infectious diseases, governments may impose restrictions such as lockdowns and partial curfews. During this time, anxiety levels as well as boredom may increase in people. As such, entertaining and educative programmes on radio stations can keep people engaged throughout the difficult time of lockdowns and curfews. Radio broadcasts are a useful means to share public information especially to the most remote populations. In rural Africa, people depend on it as their primary source of information (UNESCO 2020 Report on Burkina Faso – addicted radio). The study also revealed that there is the need for radio stations to adapt their programming and station policies to envisage public health emergencies and how well vulnerable citizens can be rightly informed, educated and entertained.

5.2 Limitations

The study could not make generalizations based on the fact that only listeners of Potters FM (88.3MHz) in Area 3 were used. As such, the views of these respondents may not necessarily reflect the views of all radio station listeners in the region or the country for that matter.

Again, time constraint factors did not enable the researcher to include other variables which would have been equally important in the study. Future researchers could investigate other factors related to the consumption of radio station activities especially in times of public health emergencies.

However, the findings of this study are useful for governments, politicians, health administrators, policymakers and other radio stations to help them deliver tailor-made activities to the public in times of pandemics and other similar situations.

5.3 Suggestion for Further Studies

It is imperative that further research is conducted into the strategies that can be developed and implemented to help curtail the spread and circulation of misinformation. Since the major source of misinformation, as suggested by this study, is Social Media and Internet, policymakers can help draw plans that can regulate the use of these tools in order to make them safe while not abusing the rights of people in the quest for a more trustworthy information atmosphere.

Since radio stations play a vital role in disseminating key information to the grassroots, further research can be conducted into strategies can be put in place by governments and other groups to help cushion radio stations which stand the risk of falling out of business in difficult times like pandemics.

5.4 Conclusions

The information atmosphere has evolved and keeps evolving more rapidly. The capacity of people to receive and consume a piece of information has been deepened with technological breakthroughs and the proliferation of social media. As such, agencies that have the mandate to safeguard the public during emergency health situations should be abreast with tools and strategies that are capable of communicating the right messages to vulnerable citizens to help prepare them against the threat. The existence of misinformation is real. Even more tangible is the threat that misinformation poses to the work of public health officials who work tirelessly to bring the situation under control. An enormous work done can just be crumbled with one piece of misinformation within a matter of days.

Anxiety, confusion, mass hysteria and distrust are serious vehicles of misinformation, especially in an emergency situation like pandemics. The Covid-19 pandemic has been

characterized with uncertainty and mass hysteria. These have become even more bizarre with the spread of fake news, half-truths and unverified stories about the origins and purposes of the corona virus and conspiracy theorists about the Covid-19 vaccines. If governments, the media, public health authorities and other regulatory bodies, who are in charge of the health of masses of people, do not regularly provide information to instil trust in the populace, it's just a matter of time that people fall prey to fake news, hoaxes and conspiracy theories.

Radio has strong potentials to reach grassroots because it is easily accessible, inexpensive, immediate and widespread. Everyone who has a mobile phone nowadays conveniently and literally has a radio in the palm of their hand. Most mobile devices are capable of receiving radio station frequencies and as such, these potentials must be fully utilized to ensure that accurate information is disseminated timely to better equip citizens in order to improve preventive behaviours and self-efficacy. Radio station programmes are nowadays aired over community information centres and also in public transport vehicles like taxis, buses and mini buses (trotro). Public health authorities should therefore take advantage of this and use radio to propagate their narrative in a clear and unambiguous language. Dedicated segments during the news or programme broadcasts could be good avenues to dispel misinformation about Covid-19. Radio stations could dedicate ten to twenty percent of news time to informing listeners on the latest updates in the fight against the virus. In Burkina Faso for example, Radio Salaki dedicates the first five minutes at the beginning of each programme to talk about Covid-19. During these dedicated segments, presenters talk about preventing transmission, symptoms and other important information (Tellier, 2020).

This study has clarified that misinformation (fake news, hoaxes, conspiracy theories, half-truths, etc.) has become a real and present threat to public health. This threat can even transcend to damage the economy which thrives on a healthy labour force and the free movement of consumers. Radio is identified as have an immense capacity to reach a lot of people and if this

potential can be fully utilized, governments and public health actors can help win this fight. It is important to fight this pandemic from the medical and scientific fronts. Equally important is the need to fight the accompanying “infodemic” which can crumble our hard-earned scientific and medical breakthroughs.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE

GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM

SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

My name is Hannah Nyame, a student at the School of Graduate Studies and Research (SoGSaR) of Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ). This questionnaire is intended to solicit information on "Assessing the Role of Radio in Combating Misinformation about Covid-19; A Study of Potters FM (88.3MHz) in Area 3 in the Sunynai Municipality of the Bono Region", to be submitted to the Institute in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of Master's Degree in Development Communication. The research is solely intended for academic purposes. I assure you that the answers provided would be treated as confidential.

Section A. Demographic Characteristics

1. Gender
   - A) Male [ ]
   - B) Female [ ]

2. Age
   - A) 18 – 30 years [ ]
   - B) 31 – 40 years [ ]
   - C) 41 – 50 years [ ]
   - D) 51 and above years [ ]

3. Education Level
   - A) Basic Level [ ]
   - B) Secondary Level [ ]
   - C) Tertiary Level [ ]

4. Marital
   - A) Single [ ]
   - B) Married [ ]

Section B: SOURCES OF MISINFORMATION

Kindly indicate the extent to which you agree to each of the following items using a Likert scale of 1 – 5 [where 1=**Strongly Disagree**; 2=**Disagree**; 3=**Neutral**; 4=**Agree** and 5 =**Strongly Agree**].

S/N	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	Family and Friends					
2	Social Media and the Internet					
3	Radio Stations					
4	TV Stations					
5	Newspapers and Magazines					

Section C: HOW RADIO STATIONS ARE RESPONDING TO THE PANDEMIC

Write short answers or tick [√] as applicable where alternative answers are provided.

1. Were Covid-19 programmes organized by Potters FM during the pandemic?
   Yes [ ] No [ ]

2. Were statistical updates given by Potters FM during the pandemic?
   Yes [ ] No [ ]

3. Did Potters FM play covid-19 safety measures jingles?
   Yes [ ] No [ ]

4. Were Covid-19 related programmes aired at convenient times?
   Yes [ ] No [ ]

5. Did Potters FM organize new programmes to keep listeners entertained?
   Yes [ ] No [ ]

Section D: ROLE OF RADIO IN DISSEMINATING ACCURATE INFORMATION

Kindly indicate the extent to which you agree to each of the following items using a Likert scale of 1 – 5 [where 1=**Strongly Agree**; 2=**Agree**; 3=**Neutral**; 4=**Disagree** and 5 = **Strongly Disagree**].

S/N	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	Key news about Covid-19 was provided on time					
2	Ample time was given to the Covid-19 programmes					
3	Language used was clear to understand					
4	Health Experts were hosted on the programmes					
5	Potters FM provided sources for their news about Covid-19					

Section E: LESSONS LEARNT FROM RADIO DURING THE PANDEMIC

Kindly indicate the extent to which you agree to each of the following items using a Likert scale of 1 – 5 [where 1=**Strongly Disagree**; 2=**Disagree**; 3=**Neutral**; 4=**Agree** and 5 =**Strongly Agree**].

S/N	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	Potters FM helped me to stay safe during the pandemic					
2	Anxiety and uncertainty increased from listening to Potters FM					
3	I encouraged family and friends to listen to Potters FM					
4	I now verify sources of news before re-sharing or reposting them					
5	Everyone has a part to play to minimize the spread of the virus					