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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF HIV/AIDS AND COVID 19
COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN GHANA

PAPER SUBMITTED BY

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my mother, Mrs Lydia Baafi Agyare. Thank you for being such a selfless backbone.

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CHAPTER 1

1.1 Background of the study

The COVID-19 pandemic just as HIV/AIDS has severely affected lives all over the world and has highlighted the need for a space in which discussions on how strategic communication can play a key role in the health discourse. As at Friday, 19th of June 2020, the world had recorded a total coronavirus cases of 8,608,533 with a total of 456,949 deaths, 4,559,057 recovered; 3,592,527 currently Infected and 3,537,863 { recording a total of 98% out of the currently infected patients in mild condition}(Worldmeters ,2020) Although the World Health Organization declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January, and a pandemic on 11 March, 2020 (WHO, 2020) the first two cases in Ghana were confirmed on 12 March 2020 (MoH, 2020).

Anafi (2013) notes that the Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome otherwise known as (HIV/AIDS) remains one of the world's most critical social and health problem. As at 2019, a total of 38.0 million people globally, were living with HIV with 25.4 million accessing antiretroviral and about 1.7 million newly infected and with 32.7 million AIDS-related deaths since its outbreak (Global HIV/AIDS statistics, 2020).

Although there is no known cure for HIV/AIDS, Anafi (2013) accounts that, infected persons are increasingly gaining access to anti-retroviral drugs even though these drugs are, costly and inaccessible to the majority of infected persons especially those in Africa which has been negatively impacted the most globally.

Again, it is noted from the global HIV/AIDS fact sheet (2019) that new HIV infections have been reduced by 40% since the peak in 1998. That is, in 2019, around 1.7 million people were newly infected with HIV, compared to 2.8 million in 1998. New HIV infections have also declined by 23% since 2010, from 2.1 million to 1.7 million as at 2019.

Although there is no known cure for AIDS, infected people are increasingly gaining access to anti-retroviral drugs, which are still costly and inaccessible to the majority of those infected. Although a global problem, HIV/AIDS has had its worst impact on Africa. About 68% of the people infected with The Pan American Health organisation (PAHO) in a 2020 study on

COVID19 and HIV/AIDS emphasised the critical role of HIV/AIDS in terms of lessons, response, preparedness and resiliency in handling the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lunenberg (2010.p.1) simply define communication as “the process of transmitting information and common understanding from one person to another”. Hence, communication can be said to be one of the basic social activity every living individual engages in. as a result, the role of communication in deepening knowledge during and sometimes after pandemics cannot be over emphasised.

In the early days of the COVID 19 pandemic, a lot of people including a section of Ghanaians believed the virus to be a hoax and a way for the super powers to control the world and its economy. Given rise to this phenomenon is the emergence of social media which has given voice and thus encourage opinion formation in the public sphere (Eglestad, 2017 P.128) Others theorised and invented their understanding of the virus due to scanty to lack of communication as it was first of its kind and as a result posed a lot of communication challenges to the health regulatory body in Ghana; thus, to come up with a reliable and strategic communication plan on the virus.

Strategic term was first used in organizational theory in the 1950s and was developed to describe how companies in the market gain and increase market share. In 2007, strategy was thrust to the forefront as the influential text *Defining strategic communication* (Hatch 1997;Argenti 2005;Bütschi 2006;Hallahan et. al., 2007 as cited in Bütschi2006). Malecki et al (2020) theorises that, a ... “carefully planned crisis communication can play a critical role in prevention and mitigation of pandemics over time by reducing anxiety and fear, supporting public adherence to mitigation strategies, reducing burden, and increasing the effectiveness of medical interventions”. This only affirms the importance communication play in all aspects of human life but most importantly, in such unexpected health crisis.

Owing to this factor, there is the need for critical look on communication strategies, audience feedback and audience participation during a time such as this. Participation and two-way communication, constitutes a necessary element in order to avoid the mistakes of the past, thereby incorporating communication practices into the policies and practices of development. It intends also to offer a broader conception of communication that would take into account other purposes and functions. The study claims that communication is not only about raising awareness,

informing, persuading, or changing behaviour. It is also about listening, exploring, understanding, empowering, and building consensus for change.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO)'s communication strategy, its main goal is to provide information, advice and guidance to decision makers to prompt actions that will protect the health of individuals, communities and nations.

In this new age of technology, new media can get in the way of accurate information thereby giving room to a lot of misinformation in the media space. Information is accessible and as such easily given out and subsequently consumed by both professionals and non-professionals sometimes without verification from the appropriate offices. This at the time gave room for a lot of speculation and spread of misinformation subsequently leading to the wrong practices, bringing about a rise in the number of infected people within few weeks of the outbreak. It is therefore paramount that information sharing by health professionals especially during health crisis or pandemics such as COVID 19 and HIV/AIDS is critically looked at especially one which threatens the livelihood of the masses.

Communication is an integral part of every developing society and as such the centre of many developmental policies especially in the area of health communication, however as postulated by Malecki et al (2020), strategically planning communication interventions is as crucial as the message being carried across as it aids in prevention and mitigation of pandemics, by the reduction of anxiety, fear and burden while increasing the effectiveness of the various medical interventions. The number of people who are exposed, infected, and fall ill can be considered the hazard. How the public and patients and respond to messages regarding risk mitigation relates to outrage. Social and cultural factors, immediacy, uncertainty, familiarity, personal control, scientific uncertainty, and trust in institutions and media all shape perception and response to risk messaging

1.2 Problem statement

In the early years of HIV/AIDS, there were lot of inaccuracies as well as misinformation widely spread (Mian &Khan, 2020), that is, it was "...plagued by conspiracy theories, rumours, and misinformation for many years (Mian and Khan, 2020). However, over the years, various communication strategies have been adopted that has subsequently, influenced how HIV/AIDS is perceived among its audience. In Ghana, there have been significant changes in the HIV/AIDS eradication battle since its outbreak in ... although according to the Ghana National HIV/AIDS

strategic plan 2016, a major challenge remains stigma and discrimination against persons living with HIV (PLHIV).

Since its outbreak in December 2019 (WHO, 2020), COVID 19 has come with its challenges with regards to information and misinformation, people's perception and belief about the existence of the virus, its preventive measures and even a possible cure (Jha 2020; as cited in Verma et al, 2020). This gave room for a lot of speculation and spread of misinformation subsequently leading to the wrong practices, bringing about a rise in the number of infected people within few weeks of the outbreak.

As at Friday, 19th of June 2020, the world had recorded a total coronavirus cases of 8,608,533 with a total of 456,949 deaths, 4,559,057 recovered; 3,592,527 currently Infected and 3,537,863 { recording a total of 98% out of the currently infected patients in mild condition} (Worldmeters ,2020) Although the World Health Organization declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January, and a pandemic on 11 March, 2020 (WHO, 2020) the first two cases in Ghana were confirmed on 12 March 2020 (MoH, 2020).

The Pan American Health organisation (PAHO) in a 2020 study on COVID19 and HIV/AIDS emphasised the critical role of HIV/AIDS in terms of lessons, response, preparedness and resiliency in handling the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the COVID19 evolves and new evidences emerge, there is the need to take a critical look at the various communication strategies so as to combat this new virus. Although there have been a lot of studies conducted on both HIV/AIDS and COVID19 individually, not a lot of has so far been done comparatively on their communication channels and strategies. I will compare the communication strategies of HIV/AIDS and COVID 19 in terms of audience's awareness, perception, message engagements, social media presence and the ability to influence behavioural change based on communication messages.

1.3 Research questions

The following are the questions this study seeks to enquire

1. What is social media's role in the dissemination of information on corona virus and HIV/AIDS?
2. What are audience's perceptions on HIV/AIDS and COVID19 communication in Ghana?
3. To what extent has the communication strategies employed, influenced behavioural change among Ghanaians?

1.4 Significance of the study.

This study provide an insight into how strategic communication can aid in the management of health crisis especially during pandemics, people's response to these interventions and how it can influence behaviour change among people. It also answers questions on audience's perception and how new media can be a tool in today's fight of health crisis. It will also provide information on both new and traditional media and as such assist organizations in making decisions on effective communication channels and serve as reference material for further studies for health organisations, government policies in communication planning and add to existing knowledge in related field.

1.5 Limitations and Scope of study.

The study analyses communication strategies employed in Ghana in the bid to eradicate one of the long battled viral diseases, HIV/AIDS and the current WHO declared pandemic, COVID19. One of the main limitations of this comparative study between HIV/AIDS and COVID19 is data gathering as the researcher is limited to online base respondents due to restriction of movement as a result of COVID19.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Culture, Traditions and belief towards diseases in Ghana

This study falls in line with the larger discipline of development which lay the foundation for every society, however, Customs and traditions which encompasses the culture of Africans especially Ghanaians, play a pivotal role in the adaptation of new diseases leading to a subsequent behavioural change. In Ghana for example, religion plays a role in the healing of the sick and it is generally believed especially in the Christian community that God is the ultimate healer of all kinds of diseases. When a person is sick, no matter the nature of the sickness, people are always of the belief that, the church can pray to heal the sick. Prior to Ghana confirming its first covid 19 case, a lot of Christians gathered around for special prayers to keep the virus off the shores of Ghana. Even at the point when the virus was confirmed in Ghana, many Ghanaians rejected this assertion and believed there was more to it than just a disease being spelt out. Some religious leaders had to at a point be arrested over breach of government's directives on ban on all church activities. The belief systems and conspiracy theories with regards to the disease among a section of Ghanaians brought about a rise in covid 19 cases as a result of grave disregard for the precautionary and safety protocols prescribed to curb the spread of the canker.

Health communication is widely considered to be a major aspect of any public health campaign that is, Strategies integrated into a community in fighting for the betterment of the health of the people in the society. However in Ghana, one major reason which fight against these campaigns aside the health and belief in customs and traditions is misinformation, rumours, fake news and over sensationalism of issues which tends to be fun, interesting and very easy to relate to because they are purposefully spiced and flavoured, to the appeal of the common Ghanaian as well as the general public.

Strategic Communication where all the various groups of beliefs and ideologies are considered can help eliminate elements that may further aggravate mistakes of the past. Health Communications issues. This study claims that communication is not only about raising awareness, informing,

persuading, or changing behaviour. It is also about listening, exploring, understanding, empowering, and building consensus for change.

2.2 Theoretical framework

LittleJohn and Foss (2008 p.11) define a theory as “any organized set of concepts explanations and principles of some aspects of human life”. A theory can also be defined as a system of constructs and variables in which the constructs are related to each other by propositions and the variables are related to each other by hypothesis (Bacharach, 1989 as cited by Wacker,1998). Simply put, once enough evidence is accumulated to support a hypothesis, it becomes a theory. Over the years, multiple theories have been postulated to explain and give a better understanding to human behaviour.

For this study, two theories would be focused on to help understand student behaviour in relation to phone use. Theories such as, the Health Belief Model and the social learning theory will help situate the study.

2.2 The Health Belief Model (HBM)

The health belief model was originally developed by Hochbaum in 1950, specifically aimed at explaining preventive health behaviour. This was to understand the rationale behind most people’s unwillingness to go for a chest x-ray even though Tuberculosis was at the time one of the serious health problems affecting the US.

The health belief model has over the years been empirically tested in explaining and predicting preventive health behaviour in relation to belief patterns, with specific focus on the relationship between health behaviours and the use of health services available. (Jose et al 2020). This model was based on the “...assumption that people fear diseases, and that health actions are motivated in relation to the degree of fear (perceived threat) and expected fear-reduction potential of actions, as long as that potential, outweighs practical and psychological obstacles to taking action” (Glanz, 2001)

The health belief model also assumes that health-related behaviour depends on the combination of several factors such as, perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived benefits, perceived barriers, cues to action, and self-efficacy. Glanz (2001)

Perceived susceptibility refers to an individual's opinion of the chances of contracting the illness condition. Perceived severity refers to an individual's opinion of how serious a condition and its consequences are. Perceived benefits refer to a person's belief in the efficiency of the recommended health behaviour in reducing the risk or seriousness of the condition.

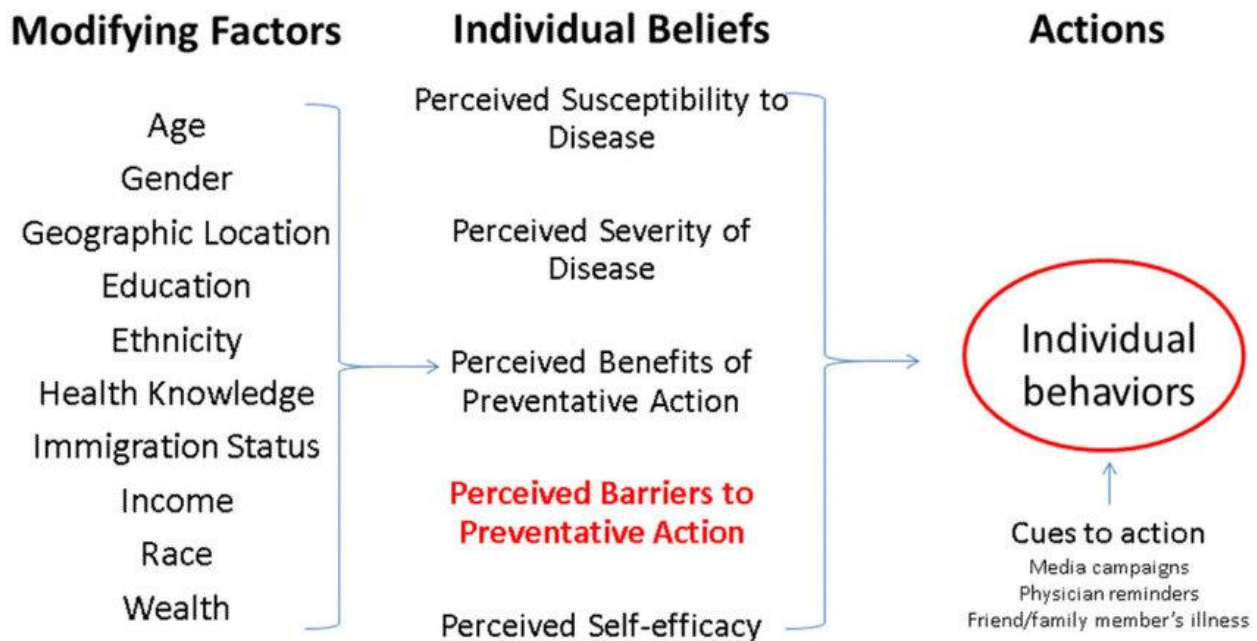
Perceived barriers refer to the perception of cost associated with adhering to a recommended health behaviour if it is likely to be beneficial in reducing or eliminating the perceived threat. In this instance buying and wearing of masks, test kits, social distancing etc.

Self-efficacy refers to the level of confidence in one's ability to perform the health behaviour in question. Those persons who have low self-efficacy will have low confidence in their ability, which will have an effect on the likelihood of the behaviour being performed. The HBM has been applied with considerable success to a range of health behaviours and populations, particularly preventive behaviours, such as diet, exercise, smoking cessation, vaccination, and contraception and sick role behaviours such as adherence to recommended medical treatments.

Although the health belief model was initially developed as an explanatory model to health behaviours, it has over the years been successful in health behavioural change planning, that is, it is used in designing interventions which serves as foundation for developing messages that are tailored at persuading individuals to make better and healthier decisions.

“In the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, the constructs of the HBM will be influenced by the interaction of information from news and media reports, government policy actions, and feedback from the public throughout the course of the outbreak” (Raamkumar, 2020) An example of this is the compulsory measure of wearing nose masks and social distancing in public places by health experts and the various world leaders at large.

Health Belief Model



Source: *Fayojin et al (2014)* accessed online at <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/262019973> *Perceived Barriers to Mammography among Underserved Women in a Breast Health Center Outreach Program*

2.3 Critique of the Health Belief Model

Although the general assumptions of the Health Belief Model centres on the idea that, if people know about a serious health threat, feel at risk personally, and think that the benefits of taking an action to avoid the threat outweigh the costs of the action, they will do what it takes to reduce their risk. However it is argued that the model does not account for a person's attitudes, beliefs, or other individual determinants that dictate a person's acceptance of health behaviour. Again, it does not take into account habitual behaviours and thus may inform the decision-making process to accept recommended actions, nor account for behaviours that are performed for non-health related reasons such as social acceptability. Environmental or economic factors that may either prohibit or promote the recommended action is not considered, as well as assume the fact that everyone has access to equal amounts of information on diseases which is usually not the case. The HBM is more descriptive than explanatory, and does not suggest a strategy for changing health-related actions

2.5. Related Studies

Costa (2020) notes that, lack of proper messaging during an outbreak of a new disease can be a great cause of panic and negatively affect livelihoods as well as economy and even political stability among other things.

Anafi P. et al (January 2013) Using appropriate communication strategies for HIV prevention education in rural communities in Ghana, *int. Public Health J* 2013;5(3):303-314 Nova Science publishers Inc, ISSN: 1947-4989 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327620821_Using_appropriate_communication_strategies_for_HIV_prevention_education_in_rural_communities_in_Ghana

According to Anafi (2013) HIV/AIDS remain one of the world's challenging social and health problems of which Ghana is not excluded. The study sets out at Dangme West, one of Ghana's rural communities in the Greater Accra Region with the objective to gather data on existing communication channels and strategies in determining the efficacy of the channels and strategies in HIV/AIDS preventive education. The study revealed that although there are existing communication channels such as radio, newspapers and opinion leaders such as health workers, teachers etc.

The indigenes did not regard the channels as effective neither due to language barrier. That is a lot of the education were done in English or other preferred local dialect which is not indigenous to the community. The study made use of the mix method of research by combining both the qualitative and quantitative research method where focus group and structured questionnaire were the instruments used in data collection and analysis. The study also spells out suggestions given by the indigenes on how HIV/AIDS communication could be effective especially in rural Ghana, by community involvement whereby community based groups are formed to that regard alongside the involvement of family heads, parents etc. so as to endure effective HIV/AIDS education and general impact on deepening knowledge and subsequently leading to behavioural change in rural Ghana.

Owusu Y. A. & Laar A. (2018) Managing HIV-positive sero-status in Ghana's most HIV concentrated district: self-perceived explanations and theoretical discourse, *African Journal of AIDS Research*, 17:1, 82-90, DOI: 10.2989/16085906.2017.1419268

The research sought to find the correlation between stigmatization and the daily livelihood of HIV/AIDS patients in Agormanya, one of the communities in Ghana with the most confirmed cases of HIV/AIDS as at the time of the research. The major objective of the study then was to critically explore, how persons infected with HIV manage their lives, especially in the midst of entrenched stigma and discrimination in the community.

Using the purposive and randomly selected sampling technique, the researcher collected data from 38 HIV-positive persons in two leading hospitals in the community. From the findings, the researcher recommended that community opinion leaders and other stakeholders sensitise community members in Lower Manya Krobo to better understand the mode of HIV infection so as to encourage and strengthen family and community cohesion and social support.

Mheidly N. Fares J.(2020) Leveraging media and health communication strategies to overcome the COVID-19 infodemic. *J Public Health Pol.* <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41271-020-00247-w>

In this study, the researcher establishes that, social media affects and influences spread of information during pandemics such as the current coronavirus (COVID19). The researcher recommends that governments develop and direct public health policies to address the role of media portals in propagating information in times of pandemics. The phenomenon of spreading misinformation during outbreaks has been known to occur since the middle Ages however, the advent of social media has considerably amplified it. The researcher noted that unverified sources posting on platforms play central roles in the reportage of incorrect numbers of cases and inaccurate guidelines, as well as advertising unapproved treatments and remedies as antiviral cures. Such misinformation led to an increase in public anxiety about health, and resulted in chaos, fraudulent schemes, financial abuse, and fear. The study employed the content analysis tool where of social media posts and of 1000 tweets circulated on Twitter (published on 6 and 7 February 2020) was investigated. The outcome of the study showed that false information to have been tweeted more than science-based evidence or fact-checking tweets. Knowing that science-based evidence is vital to ensure the public is well informed and can react effectively to a pandemic, an infodemic clearly hinders mitigation, conveys misleading messages on the disease, and promotes ineffective precautionary measures.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

A research design according to Aker et al (2001) is a blueprint that guides the researcher in employing a suitable methodology to be used so as to arrive at achieving the set objectives of the research. This study employs the experimental research design where a structured questionnaire will be used to access information from respondents. This design is suitable for social science studies especially that which observes human behaviour and actions towards a particular phenomenon. A questionnaire is a set of well-structured questions set by a researcher in order to get the needed information from the target population of the study. Yin (2009) notes that an empirical study approach into a contemporary phenomenon which lacks clarity and as such multiple sources are used in gathering evidence to support the phenomenon. According to Yin (2009) emphasis is placed on critical contextual analysis on events and its relationships. This study therefore aims at a comparative study of HIV/AIDS communication strategy and COVID 19 communication strategy in Ghana.

3.3 Technique of data collection

This study will mainly be based on the use of both primary and secondary data. Data will be collected from the various official social media handles responsible for communicating on to Ghanaians on both HIV/AIDS and COVID 19. Again the study will make use of the communication strategies on the official website of the Ghana Health service website with specific focus on an in-depth analysis of the messages being communicated; this will also include that of the Ghana Aids commission website. This study will also look at the communication strategies employed in the dissemination of relevant information on the various sites. Stories on HIV/AIDS and COVID19 will be thoroughly searched and studied from 2015 to 2020 on HIV/AIDS and from February 2020 on COVID19.

3.4 Population

Williams, (2011) explains population as objects, organizations, people or even events. A total number of eighty (80) respondents will constitute the population. For this study, the population will consist of staff and communications officials from the Ghana Aids commission and the Ghana Health service. This population will mainly be responsible for providing relevant information in a structured questionnaire which will include both open and close ended questions. Again this will include a section of Ghanaians living in the Greater Accra region, as this region has recorded the highest number of cases of COVID 19 since its outbreak in Ghana with 23,785

out of a current rise from 46,004 to 46482 as at Friday, September 25th, 2020 according to the Ghana Health Service. While the region recorded HIV/AIDS of will be chosen using the random sampling technique to answer questionnaires aim at assessing their use, response, understanding, influence on their knowledge of both COVID 19 and HIV/AIDS leading to behavioural change and general perception of the official websites and social media platforms.

3.5 Sampling technique

This research will make use of the purposive sampling technique. According to Bryman (2012), purposive sampling strategically sample respondents relevant to the research questions which in this case consist of communication staff of Ghana Health Service, the Ghana Aids Commission and a section of selected Ghanaians.

3.6 Instrument

Required instrument for this study will be the researcher's laptop, note pad and pen to take notes on the field.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

This study set out to comparatively analyse the communication strategies used during crisis and for that matter, present an overview of COVID19 and HIV/AIDS communication activities and analyses the role communication strategies play in the outbreak of pandemics with specific focus on HIV/AIDS and COVID19. While there have been extensive study on HIV/AIDS and the current COVID 19 individually, none has so far been done on HIV/AIDS and COVID 19 with specific focus on comparing their communication strategies. This study therefore looks at its effectiveness in deepening knowledge; educating, informing, generating feedback and its ability to enforce behavioural change among Ghanaians. It provides an insight into how strategic communication can aid in the management of health crisis especially during pandemics, people's response to these interventions and how it can influence behaviour change. It also answers questions on audience's perception and how new media can be a tool in today's fight of health crisis, serve as reference material for further studies for health organisations, government policies in communication planning and add to existing knowledge in related field.

Currently there has been no empirical study done with regards to comparing these two communication strategies in Ghana, this study will therefore will be first of its kind in Ghana and other parts of the world due to its rare nature.

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