

Perception of Warri Metropolitan Residents on Online Newspaper Reportage of the Monkey Pox Virus Vaccination Hoax

Okwudili Ben Okanume

Department of Mass Communication, College of Management and Social Sciences, Novena University Ogume, Delta State, Nigeria

Email address: benokanume @ gmail.com

Abstract—Adopting the survey design, this inquiry on Warri metropolitan residents' perspectives of Nigeria online newspapers reports on the monkey pox virus hoax, derives its theoretical foundation from the agenda setting viewpoint. The study administered copies of questionnaire for data collection from 400 respondents in Warri metropolis. It reveals that Nigeria newspapers displayed the principle of prominence in reporting and creating public health awareness of the virus. Online newspapers also dispelled the hoax that soldiers attempted to depopulate the South East through inoculation. This paper recommends synergy between the federal ministry of health and the media to increase public education against the dread of monkey pox. As an antidote, design standardized template in creating public health campaigns against contagious diseases, similar to the responses crucial in the demise of the 2014 Ebola virus outbreak.

Keywords— Reportage, online newspapers, hoax or rumour mongers, public perception.

I. INTRODUCTION

The dread and death posed to Nigerians by the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD), in the months of July to December 2014, will remain indelible in the annals of Nigerian public health history. From Liberia throughout the West Africa sub region, the Ebola scourge left in its wake thousands of human fatalities. More than 22 countries revoked visas granted to Nigerians and cancelled business memoranda.

After the trails of Ebola, Nigerians' apprehensions were justified in October, 2017, at the eruption of another plague by the name of monkey pox. The monkey pox was first reported in central part of the Democratic Republic of Congo in the 1970's. The first recorded case of the dreaded disease in Nigeria was through a man who killed a monkey and ate the meat with members of his family in Bayelsa State. This became the primary or index case before infecting others. Like Sahara desert wild fire, monkey pox spread to Enugu in the South-East, Port Harcourt, in the South-South geo-political zone. Besides a monkey pox patient in Bayelsa State who committed suicide, no death was recorded. However, the pandemonium created by monkey pox and subsequent hoax, rumour mongering left unsavoury consequences of fake news.

In several southern states, rumours were rife that soldiers forced their way into primary and secondary schools to forcefully inoculate children with monkey pox vaccination. The fear of sinister motives and lack of proper media

sensitization created state of fear and stampede when parents broke down school gates and scaled fences to withdraw their wards. The following front page headline (*Vanguard*, Wednesday, October 18, 2017) sums up: *Pandemonium in Ondo, Rivers over Monkey Pox.*

Monkey pox is transmitted through blood, vomit, and sweat of an infected victim. Symptoms include high fever and diarrhoea. Health scholars note that most effective measure in preventing the spread of the disease is through strategic public health mandates. Such good infection control practices include isolation, quarantine, contact tracking, provision of health staff protective gear, government monitoring and media sensitisation. Media public awareness campaigns become very pertinent because Nigerians, being used to culture of hugging, handshakes, elaborate family greetings, clustered tenements, close-quarter worships, perceive monkey pox, like Ebola as instant death sentence. With the spread of dreadful, contagious diseases as HIV/AIDS, Ebola, anti-biotic resistant tuberculosis, sexually transmitted diseases; appropriate health communication is now a prominent global concern. Sridhar (1991, p.53) cautioned: Public health considerations is about the most significant of disposal of the dead because, the ultimate purpose of public health is to control diseases, promote health and prolong life. Improper disposal of the dead poses a serious health hazard, especially when death is due to epidemics and communicable disease. The problem is worse in populous tropical countries. Improper disposal of the dead makes bodies become reservoirs of infection.

The clamour and prominence for public health information orchestrated by the monkey pox is predictable because of contemporaneous vital public health, national development implications and economic imperatives. No nation of sick citizens could muster any meaningful development when such ravaging plague as monkey pox can jeopardize national security. Deadly contagious virus as monkey pox, Ebola, Zika, Lassa fever, bird flu, HIV/AIDS can paralyse and devastate the workforce, educational, political, economic, social milieu and developmental aspirations of precariously fledgling democracy as Nigeria.

The media ought to create composite public forum to sensitize, inform, educate, and mobilize citizens of preventable measures to evade the spread of deadly plagues as monkey pox. This requires professional journalistic devotion

and humanitarian sensitivity in reporting public health. The need to understand health-conscious human behaviour, perceptions, social norms, emotions and fear of uncertainty in health issues through competent public health online newspaper awareness is the focus of this discourse.

Statement of the Problem

A problem exists when the social media is deployed to spread the hoax that soldiers were depopulating the South-East through monkey pox vaccination of school children. Such rumour has the propensity to ignite another civil war and public disorder.

To invoke fear and anxiety, some people (saboteurs) utilized the social media as facebook, Instagram, whatsapp as rumour mongering tool to demoralize the populace. The hoax implied that the APC led government of President Muhammadu Buhari deployed soldiers on forced vaccination exercise to depopulate the South-East and South-South. In chaotic droves, parents scampered through fences, broke school gates to evacuate their children from various schools, forcing temporal closure of several primary and secondary schools. This chaotic scenario depicts lack of sensitivity, sensualisation, creation of appropriate awareness by the government, at a time when government soldiers killed some Igbo youths in the South-East and proscribed Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) and thereafter launched a medical outreach. Any delay by public health officials in sensitizing the public during outbreaks of contagious diseases could doom a nation. There exist communication gap between the government, the media and the masses which created opportunity for rumour mongers and the monkey pox virus hoax.

Objectives of the Study

1. To ascertain how residents of Warri metropolis perceive Nigeria online newspapers reports on the monkey pox virus hoax.
2. Determine if Nigeria online newspapers created public awareness of the monkey pox virus.
3. To discover perception of Warri residents on Nigeria online newspapers refutation of the hoax that Nigerian soldiers used monkey pox inoculation to depopulate the South-East region of Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide this study:

1. How did Warri metropolitan residents perceive Nigeria online newspaper reports of the monkey pox virus hoax?
2. Did Nigeria online newspapers create public awareness of the monkey pox virus?
3. Did Nigeria online newspapers refute the hoax that Nigerian soldiers used monkey pox inoculation to depopulate the South Eastern region of Nigeria?

Definition of Operational Terms

In order to avoid ambiguity, it is essential that some phrases used in this study be explained in concise and precise manner. Health communication is the art of informing,

influencing, persuading, motivating and galvanising individuals, masses and the public about vital health issues and subsequent behavioural changes to achieve cohesive, realistic public health goals. Baran (2004, p.5) aptly opine that “communication serves as the symbolic exchange of shared meaning.”

Monkey pox virus: Monkey pox virus is highly contagious and transmitted through blood, vomit, and sweat of an infected victim. Its primary index infestation is from infected monkeys to humans. Symptoms include high fever, diarrhoea and similar but bigger bumps than chicken pox.

Nigeria online newspapers Online edition newspapers have vast amount of space for more information, photos, graphics, and illustrations than traditional papers, thereby giving space for more detailed stories without page numbers. A replica edition implies the exact copy as the hardcopy edition except that it is online. The focus of this discuss is Nigeria online newspaper replica editions.

Reportage is the amount of space, framing or angle of reporting and number of Nigerian online newspapers which devoted time, space and resources in reporting the monkey pox epidemic.

Hoax or Rumour mongers: Hoax is synonymous to prank, ruse, deceit or fraud such as spreading lies. Rumour mongers are those who circulate gossips, hearsays, unverified report without known authority for the truth. Inclusive are those who connive, commence and encourage the spread of malicious lies against a person, government, business, organization, civil society and corporate entities. As regards this study, it is a fabrication of lies about the monkey pox virus to mislead the public and incite hatred against soldiers accused of deploying inoculations to depopulate a section of the country.

Theoretical Framework

As propounded in 1972 by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, the Agenda setting theory assert that the press set public discourse agenda for the citizens. This implies through giving prominence to issues, the media actually determine what people discuss. McQuail (2005) cited Walter Lippmann’s opinion that, while the media would not tell people what to think, the media certainly tell people what to think about. Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma (2017) assert that the agenda-setter perspective of the media is premised on the fact that the theory presupposes that the facts which people know about public issues tend to be those which the mass media present to them. The implication is that the significance which the media ascribe to these issues tends to be proportionate to the amount of attention given to the same issues in the media.

Simply, the arrival of the monkey pox, the news of its infestation, the frequency of reportage, the prominence given to such epidemic; force such issues on the front burner of public discourse.

Baran and Davis (2009, p.278) cited Bernard Cohen as being credited with refining Walter Lippmann’s idea of agenda-setting theory. Cohen wrote that the press is more than just purveyor of information; writers, editors and publishers of newspapers could influence what people read and think about.

Applying this theory to this study, Nigerian newspapers, editors, reporters and gate-keepers can set public agenda. Instead on mere daily events, newspapers can concentrate their reportage on fear, crisis and potential death posed by monkey pox virus, including prevention measures to curb the virus. The print media has social responsibility obligation to avoid break down of law, order, preserve the unity of Nigeria, and expose the implications of nefarious rumours mongering which created inestimable anxiety, divisiveness, suspicion and chaos.

Review of Related Literature

Scholars in general believe that major improvements are needed to drive adequate public health campaigns. This led Udokah and Iwokwagh (1998) to claim that “such as the use of radio and television jingles, drama, enlightenment programmes and multi-media are not as effective enough”, thereby leaving much to be desired in every attempt to eradicate dangerous and contagious public health diseases. In similar study on effectiveness of printed texts in public health communication, Raji (2008), found that there is lack of potency of communication efficiency.

Press reports, electronic, internet and newspapers are vital in creating public awareness and education in order to provide adequate knowledge about large scale communicable diseases for citizens to protect themselves. World Health Organization (WHO) and America Center for Disease Control (CDC, 2014) as noted by Gojo (2014) demonstrated how public health campaigns and knowledge of hand washing/hand sanitizer provided preventive measures during the Ebola virus outbreak. During outbreaks of deadly viruses such as Ebola, HIV/AIDS, zika, bird flu, Lassa fever and monkey pox, public health campaigns necessarily ought to include educating care givers and health professionals on how best to prevent them from being infested by such viruses while attending to infected patients. Dr. Stella Adedevoh died from Ebola virus disease in 2014 after being infected by the dreaded virus through Patrick Sawyer, a Liberian traveller. Khan, Tshioko and Heymann (1999) contend that evidence abound that the most dreadful virus outbreaks are propelled by person-to-person transmission, with health workers being the most vulnerable.

Bergner (2009:229) noted that: influenza actually kill’s more than ten thousand people in the United States each year. Many of its victims are the elderly. Twice over the last hundred years, virulent strains of flu have swept the world in epidemics that killed tens of millions of people each time. Hence, effective health communication should be targeted at a particular audience and specific situations, such as current outbreak of monkey pox. In creating public awareness, the media and public health officials should adhere to the following:

- Create audience knowledge and awareness of a health issue
- Influence alternative behaviours and attitudes towards a health issue
- Demonstrate to the public health practices
- Illustrate the merits of behavioural changes to public health outcomes

- Advocate a position on a health issues and government policies
- Propagate increase, demand and support for health services, particularly in rural areas
- Refute rumours, lies and misconceptions about public health practices, particularly vaccinations

This is precisely why Ezeh (2000:424) opines that public health communication requires:

A complete change in our basic attitudes towards the use of our environments. This can be achieved through public enlightenment campaign to educate our people on implications of keeping our surrounding clean. .. followed by close supervision to ensure penalties were awarded to those who litter the gutters and their surroundings with domestic wastes.

Likewise, Murray and Pizzorno (1998:17) views on health are similar to the World Health Organization which sees health as state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The issue of health and communicable diseases often come down to public awareness by the media and individual responsibility.

Online article in *Vanguard*, (Wednesday, October 18, 2017, page 7) By Dayo Johnson, with the headline: Pandemonium as rumour of Vaccination by soldiers hits Ondo, with subheadings: Minister’s Reaction, Parents pull down gates, Govt’s statement, Army denies vaccination rumour, Police. The article stated: PANDEMONIUM broke out across Ondo State, yesterday, as parents trooped to schools in search of their children and wards, following reports of forced anti-Monkey Pox immunization. Reports had it that some soldiers were going round to force pupils in schools across the state to be immunized.

Vanguard online (Wednesday, October 18, 2017, page 13) headline Rumour of Army free Immunization disrupts activities in Rivers Schools. It states: There was panic in primary and secondary schools in Rivers State, yesterday following a rumour that the army had stormed schools with free immunization against monkey pox. The rumour of the vaccination caused pandemonium. There was rowdiness in major streets in Port Harcourt as students who were terrified by the news left their classes. Parents were also seen running straight to their children’s schools to pick their wards.

Same *Vanguard online* (Wednesday, October 18, 2017, page 28) South East Voice section stated: Through the social media, information began to spread that some people in the army uniform had invaded schools in the region and were injecting pupils with monkey pox virus for the purpose of depopulating South East and South South. Without verifying the authenticity of the information, most parents rushed to their children’s schools and demanded to take them home.

Vanguard online (Tuesday, October 24, 2017, page 34) by Vincent Ujumadu titled Monkey pox Controversy May Impede Battle against Polio. It stated: Chairman of Nigeria National Polio Plus Committee, Dr. Tunji Funsho said, “Since the news broke out about monkey pox, we have met a brick wall following the allegation that vaccine were meant to wipe out people from certain parts of the country. We have been making effort to debunk it.

As written by Mike Odiegwu and Vincent Ikuomala, in *The Nation online* (Tuesday, October 17, 2017, front page) headlined: Monkey Pox: 43 ‘cases’ in Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Enugu with subheading; Patient commits suicide in Bayelsa. This write-up stated: Forty-three suspected monkey pox cases have been reported in eight cases, Minister of Health Prof. Isaac Adewole said yesterday. The states are; Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Ekiti, Lagos, Enugu, Nasarawa, Rivers, and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Yesterday, a victim of monkey pox receiving treatment at the University of Niger Delta Teaching Hospital (UNDTH), Okolobiri, Bayelsa State, has committed suicide. It was gathered that the victim, whose name was not disclosed, hanged himself early yesterday.

In *The Guardian online* (Friday, October 21, 2017, page 38) captioned: “Children Are More Susceptible To Monkey pox”, Tobi Adwodipe interviewed Prof. Akin Osibogun, renowned Consultant Public Health Physician and Epidemiologist. The summary is as follows: Monkey Pox is a rare disease that occurs primarily in remote parts of Central and West Africa, near tropical rainforests. For the moment there is no treatment or vaccine available against the plague. Human monkey pox was first identified in humans in 1970 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) in a 9 year old boy. Cases have been reported in rural rainforests of the Congo Basin and West Africa. In October, 2016, 26 cases of outbreaks and two deaths were reported but contained in the Central African Republic. How Monkey Pox is transmitted: Index infection occurs from direct contact with the blood, bodily fluids, cutaneous or mucosal lesions of infested animals. Infections have been documented through the handling of infected monkeys, giant rats, squirrels, rope squirrels, tree squirrels, striped mice, dormice, primates and rodents are the major reservoir of the virus. Secondary infection which imply human-to-human transmission result from close contact with infected respiratory tract secretions; skin lesions of an infected person and objects recently contaminated by patient fluids or lesions. Droplet of respiratory particles requiring prolonged face-to-face contact poses the greatest danger in human-to-human transmission. This puts family members at great risk.

Congenital monkey pox transmission occurs through inoculation or the placenta. The symptoms is divided into two durations, besides the incubation period of 6 to 16 days or 5 to 21 days, the invasion period (1-5days) is characterized by fever, fever, intense headache, swelling of the lymph node (lymphadenopathy), back pain, muscle ache (myalgia) and intense asthenia (lack of energy). Following the fever, skin eruption, (usually within 1 to 3 days) appear as rashes on the face, palms of the hands and soles of the feet. Evolution of the rash from maculopapules (lesions with flat bases, to vesicles (small fluid-filled blisters), pustules, followed by crusts occurs within 10 days. It takes approximately three weeks for the disappearance of the crusts. Lesions also affect oral mucous membranes, genitalia, eyelid, and cornea (eyeball). Monkey pox can be clinically diagnosed in laboratory tests through Enzyme-Linked Immunosorbent Assay (ELISA), antigen detection tests, Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) and virus isolation by cell culture.

Nigeria Online Newspapers and the Monkey Pox Virus

It is the prerogative of the media in the first instance to raise alarm over an impending calamity. In so doing the media raises public awareness, sensitise the masses, and proffer potential solutions while galvanizing the government and health officials for appropriate action. During the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) of 2014, both local and international media as *CNN* took the bull by the horn by reporting on the devastating effects of the scourge which compelled the government and health officials to action and eventual defeat of the plague. Take the issue of hand washing, easiest and most effective way to prevent infectious diseases. *Vanguard* (Tuesday, June 26, 2014. Page 51) spread the message of and vitality of hand washing, as Procter and Gamble; manufacturers of Safeguard soap embarked on enlightenment ‘Family Fun Fair’ campaign. In the *Vanguard* article, public health physician, Dr. Nkechi Olalere noted that respiratory infections as pneumonia, dysentery, much more serious illnesses as meningitis, bronchitis, influenza, hepatitis A, reduction in resistant staphylococcus aureus; all of which with the propensity of fatality, can be prevented through proper hand washing hygiene.

With the onslaught of the monkey pox virus (MPV) and subsequent rumour mongering, Nigeria newspapers took up the challenge to sensitize, create awareness, sanitary precautions and awaken both the government and public health officials to combat the scourge. In essence the print media is fulfilling her obligations to safe-guard the society by providing agenda setting reportage of the outbreak of monkey pox.

A major criticism of the use of mass media as a method of health communication is the unfortunate ability for false and misinformed messages to spread quickly through the mass media, before they have the chance to be disputed by professionals. It generates panic amongst the public who receive the messages. As precisely demonstrated by rumour of sinister forced inoculation by soldiers, the social media as an extension technology with interactive ability to disseminate information at the speed of light and accessible to everyone does not help matters. For instance, a few years back, majority of citizens distrusted of vaccinations in Northern regions of Nigeria due to verbal utterances of misguided individuals based on religious/ethnic motives and the publication of false messages which link childhood measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccination with autism. The speed with which this message spread through the social media caused many families to distrust vaccinations and restrained their children from inoculation. Even though at the end the rumour was found to be fictitious, several citizens still harbour a lingering suspicion towards vaccinations. This is a hindrance to public health communication. In 2017, with the monkey pox, Nigerians faced similar rumour mongering.

Immediate past President of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan, as quoted in *Vanguard Allure online* (March 15, 2015 page 10) had this to say about dangers of false, scary communication in Nigeria’s health sector:

There is no government that will not take the health seriously. Some people including a professor preached that

polio vaccines reduced the reproductive rate of a woman. In fact some of the officials of government that were handling the immunization were attacked and even killed. That certainly set us back.

Some Nigeria newspapers available to this study were examined which demonstrated that Nigeria print media devoted ample time, resources and space to create public awareness about the history, infection and how to avoid monkey pox virus. Suffice it with the following examples. *The Nation* online (Thursday, October 26, 2017 page 20) captioned: Muslim Congress Seeks State of Emergency in Health Sector. It questioned; The National president of Muslim Congress, Dr. Luqman AbdurRaheem queried "...what are the three different levels of government doing to checkmate these outbreaks and especially this particular monkey pox outbreak? According to the minister of Health, Prof. Isaac Adewole, no fewer than 33 suspected cases of monkey pox have been reported in seven states across the nation. *The Nation* online (Saturday, October 14, 2017) on its Weekend Life front page, with a menacing picture of a monkey and an infected patient, had this screaming headline: PANIC IN THE LAND...as Monkey Pox Scare spreads. *Nigerians employ weird measures to escape being infected * Bush meat sellers, food vendors lament low patronage * States on red alert to contain further spread. The lead paragraph stated; "The wave of anxiety that swept across the country in 2014 when the dreaded Ebola virus disease hit the country resurfaced during the week with the spread of monkey pox disease to seven states".

In detail the same article enumerated the inevitable consequences of the monkey pox scare. Several Nigerians avoid sitting next to strangers in public transport, High degree of tension, anxiety, apprehension and suspicion have pervaded states of the nation, vivacious lifestyles of residents have been disrupted, people have stopped shaking hands with one another, the worst affected business include meat vendors, poultry owners and hunters, and customers have stopped patronizing bush meat joints. A bush meat vendor at Abeokuta, Amoke Iyabo lamented, "Those saying bush meat causes monkey pox are only spoiling our business like they did in the past with the Ebola disease. This is not fair to us. This is our business and that is where we make money to train our children and feed our families". *Vanguard online* (Friday, October 19, 2017 page 5) captioned Monkey Pox – Army not Dispensing Vaccines – FG. In part, it stated that the Federal government has exonerated the military reiterating that the army is not dispensing any vaccines.

In his Candid Notes column (*Vanguard online*, Tuesday, October, 24, 2017 page 17) Yinka Odumakin: Rumours have spread across cities that the army was carrying out vaccinations aimed at killing school children by injecting them with the latest affliction in town –monkey pox. The rumour went further that there was a plan to reduce the population of certain sections of the country. Given the recent Operation Python Dance which allegedly inflicted horrors in the South East,...Explanation by the Military in Enugu that the free medical outreach was not aimed at depopulating the region fell on deaf ears. *Vanguard online* (Tuesday, October 24, 2017

page 34) captioned: Monkey Pox Controversy may Impede Battle Against Polio- Chairman of Nigeria National Polio Plus Committee, Dr. Tunji Funsho stated, " Since the news broke about monkey pox, we have met a brick wall following the allegation that vaccines were meant to wipe out people from certain parts of the country. *In Vanguard* (Thursday, November 2, 2017 page 34) captioned Monkey Pox Cases now 94 – UNICEF, the first paragraph read: "The United Nations Children Fund has said with confirmation of two cases of monkey pox in Benue State, the number of cases now stands at 94."

As part of the measures to prevent the spread of monkey pox virus to other states, several state governments have set up emergency hotlines for the public and a situation room to monitor the plague. *The Guardian* (Saturday, October 21, 2017, page 9) as written by Niadvara Musa, titled: We'll Not Close Schools over Inoculation Scare, Says Borno Commissioner. It stated: The Borno State Government would not close public schools over rumours that some strange persons were forcefully administering deadly vaccines on pupils in schools, which led to massive withdrawals of pupils from schools in Maiduguri by parents on Thursday. The panic generated by the outbreak of the disease has compelled governments of the seven affected states and other states yet to experience the outbreak to put measures aimed at riding their domains of the disease. In Anambra State, for instance, the state government has inaugurated a committee in all the local government areas and has started sensitisation in schools, churches, markets among others.

Nigeria Medical sector is still being undermined by the poor political commitment to health and health care needs of Nigerians by Nigeria's top political and public office holders. The health sector is also blighted by poor budgeting for health at federal, state and local government levels. However, public health officials should utilize every available avenue to stem the tide of contagious diseases. Dr. Dorothy Jeff-Nnamani is Managing Director CEO, Novo Health Africa (*Vanguard online* Saturday, April 25, 2015 stated:

Every contact with a patient serves as an opportunity to provide health education. Educational materials should be available during hospital visitations. Go back to the time we had Ebola scare; everybody had personal responsibility to sanitize. You could hardly spot any Nigerian without their hand sanitizer. There were so many literature, you could read from the internet and people were well informed.

II. METHODOLOGY

The survey research method through the questionnaire was adopted; to gather data to ascertain public perspective on the reportage of Nigeria online newspapers about the monkey pox virus and subsequent rumour/hoax that soldiers were using inoculation to depopulate South Eastern region of Nigeria. Survey probes public attitudes and dispositions towards the usefulness of newspapers reports on the crisis. Okoro (2004,p.3) asserted that, "A survey is a process of gathering data from a target population through the use of questionnaire or interviews and subjecting such data to statistical analysis...". Likewise, Osuala (1989, p.86) stated

that “Researchers in social sciences agree that survey method is the most suitable of all the research method especially for studies that samples Peoples’ opinion...” The survey method allows the researcher to assess the characteristics of a chosen set of population whose attitudes, opinion and behaviour are vital for the collection of data required for this exercise.

The method of obtaining data is through the questionnaire, by a set of closed-ended questions which was administered in face-to-face encounter to 400 shoppers of Shoprite, Effurum, Warri, located in Warri South Local Government Area, Delta State. The choice of the Delta mall in Warri as the location to administer the questionnaire is informed by the following: the mall is of world standard, an economic, socially, entertainment hub in Warri metropolis housing movie theatres, restaurants, clubs, exotic shops, mega grocery mall and other businesses, the management confirmed that on average week: Friday to Sunday, our five thousand patrons pass through the mall on daily weekend basis. There the survey was administered on a Saturday, at the entrance of the mall, during high traffic patronage.

Population of the Study

Population wise, Nwodu (2006, p.49-50) posits that “population of study refers to a group of people, objects or events which a researcher deliberately decides to study. Primarily to obtain necessary data needed to solve a given problem”. According to information obtained from National Population Commission website (2017), Warri South Local Government Area, which constitutes the metropolis of Warri city, has a population of 773,440.

In arriving at the sample size, as cited in Owuamalam (2012, p.111) Taro Yamani’s formula is used to determine the sample size of this study as follows:

$$S = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where S = sample size

N = given population

E = margin of error (should not exceed 5%)

1 = constant

$$\text{Therefore } S = \frac{773,440}{1 + 773,440(0,05)^2} = \frac{773,440}{1934.6}$$

= 773,440 divided by 1934.6 = 399.79 (Therefore the sample size for this study is 399.79 and approximated to 400).

Sample Size for the Survey

Purposive sampling technique (non probability) was adopted for this study. The primary reason for the choice of purposive sampling technique is to meet the study objectives set by the researcher. Purposive sampling as asserted by Nwodu (2006, p.6):“...means that the researcher is at liberty to judge, select or reject a respondent on the basis that the respondent meets or fails to meet the purpose of the research.”

This criterion of choice is a matter of the researcher’s judgment. In this study, the researcher exercised this judgment to enable the researcher hand-pick respondents perceived to constitute a representative sample of the population of Warri

metropolis which constitute residents of Warri South Local Government Area, Delta State.

Data Collection Instrument and Method of Application

The instrument utilized in the collection of data for the survey is the questionnaire. The questionnaire contained structured closed-ended questions with multiple answer options. The questionnaire was administered on face-to-face bases to be certain that respondents interacted with the researcher should any respondent need further clarity on the questionnaire. More so, that the researcher’s presence and interaction guaranteed that appropriate respondents were sampled and questionnaire copies properly filled out and handed over right on the spot.

Method of Data Presentation and Analysis

The objectives of the study and subsequent research questions were used as guide in analyzing data collected from respondents. All 400 copies of the questionnaire administered were retrieved, a response rate of 100%. This is probably due to the fact that the questionnaire for data collection was administered to respondents through face-to-face encounter; questionnaire was filled on the spot by each respondent and retrieved on the spot by the researcher and student assistants. The raw data generated during the data collection process were manually counted, coded and presented in frequency distribution tables. The researcher’s only demographic requirement for this study is that the respondent must be above the age of 15 and has access to the social media. Hence, only the answers to research questions posed, which were pertinent to the objectives of the study, were displayed by tables for this study.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Data were analyzed using the simple percentage system, with the following formula:

$$P = \frac{FR \times 100}{TN}$$

Where P = Obtained percentage; FR = Frequency of response and TN = total number of respondents.

For easy understanding of results, tabulation aided by tables was used in analyzing data in this study. Coding scheme for responses to questions on the questionnaire was set into coding sheet frequency and percentages in describing sample characteristics and answering research questions.

TABLE 1. Warri metropolitan residents’ perception of Nigeria newspaper reports of the monkey pox virus hoax

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Newspaper provided prominent coverage	356	89%
Newspaper did not provide enough coverage	27	6.75%
Don’t Know	17	4.25%
Total	400	100%

Source: field survey, 2018

The question in table 1 sought to know how Warri residents perceive Nigeria newspapers reports on the monkey pox hoax. The data show that majority of the respondents, 356 (89%) agree that newspapers provided prominent coverage on the monkey pox virus hoax.

TABLE 2. Nigeria online newspapers created public awareness of the monkey pox virus

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	351	87.75%
No	37	9.25%
Don't Know	12	3%
Total	400	100%

Source: field survey, 2018

The question in table 2 sought to know if Nigeria online newspapers created public awareness of the monkey pox virus. The data show that majority of the respondents 351 (87.75%) stated in the affirmative.

TABLE 3. Nigerian newspapers refuted the hoax that Nigerian soldiers used monkey pox inoculation to depopulate the South-East region of Nigeria.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	120	30%
Agree	236	59%
Undecided	4	1%
Disagree	18	4.5%
Strongly disagree	22	5.5%
Total	400	100%

Source: field survey, 2018

The question in table 3 sought to know if Warri residents agree that Nigeria online newspapers refuted the hoax that Nigerian soldiers used monkey pox inoculation to depopulate the South-East region of Nigeria.

The data in table 3 show that majority of the respondents, 236 (59%) agree and 120 (30%) strongly agree (a total of 356, 89%) stated that Nigeria newspapers refuted the hoax that Nigerian soldiers used monkey pox inoculation to depopulate the South East region of Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

In line with the objectives of this study, research question one posed the question; How did Warri metropolitan residents perceive Nigeria online newspapers reports of the monkey pox virus hoax? The data in table 1 show that a total number of 356 (89%) respondents perceived that Nigeria online newspapers reports on the monkey pox virus hoax placed prominence on their reportage of the virus. This finding is in tandem with the Bagdikan's strand of political economy emphasised by Nichols & McChesney (2009) that newspapers including online media tend to report in line with the interest of the location where they are situated. In this case Nigeria online newspapers placed prominence on the monkey pox virus from their frame-view that it is a Nigerian problem.

Research question three sought to unravel if Nigeria online newspapers refuted the rumour/hoax that Nigerian soldiers used monkey pox inoculation to depopulate the South East region of Nigeria? As indicated by table 3, out of 400 respondents, the data show that majority of the respondents 356 (89%) indicated that Nigeria online newspapers refuted the hoax that Nigerian soldiers used monkey pox inoculation to depopulate the South-East region of Nigeria. The implication is that a total number of 356 (89%) of the respondents believe that Nigeria online newspapers did their utmost best to refute the hoax planted by saboteurs that

soldiers under the pretext of small pox inoculation attempted depopulation of South-East region of Nigeria.

III. CONCLUSION

The fear and dread generated by the monkey pox virus nearly crippled the psychic of Nigerians. To fuel more fear, saboteurs utilized the social media and incited the hoax that soldiers conducted forced inoculation on school pupils with the aim to depopulate the South-East and South-South regions of Nigeria. In the frenzied and chaotic stampede to withdraw their children from schools, some parents and their wards were involved in vehicular accidents.

As in the Ebola crisis, the media, particularly online newspapers as demonstrated by online newspaper articles cited in this study played significant role to squash the hoax, as well as, created public awareness of monkey pox virus.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The federal ministry of health should set up public health educational messages and awareness. Such messages should focus on reducing the risk of infection from bush animals-to-humans.
2. Media blitz should target schools, offices, banks, government agencies, plane/bus terminals and public places. This will ensure precautionary sanitation posters, handbills and trained personnel on hand.
3. Competent public health communication analysis and designation of special newspaper columns solely dedicated to daily health reportage.
4. The study recognizes the need for formal and systematized training of mass communication students in public health communication while providing rigorous training for public health leaders, practitioners, and researchers.

REFERENCES

[1] Asemah, E. S., Nwammuo, A. N. & Nkwam-Uwaoma, A. O. A. (2017). *Theories and models of communication*. Jos: University Press.

[2] Baran, S.J. (2004). *Introduction to Mass Communication: Media Literacy and Culture* (3rd. ed). Boston: McGraw Hill.

[3] Baran,S.J; Davis, D.K.(2009) *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Ferment and Future*.(6th. Ed) Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

[4] Carey J.W. (1989) *Communication as culture: essays on media and society*. Winchester, MA: Unwin Hyman.

[5] Center for Disease Control and Prevention. "Health Communication Basics". Retrieved 24 October 2017. CDC website. Monkeypox at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/monkeypox/retrieved June 24, 2018>.

[6] Ezeh, C.A (2000) *Public Health, Environmental Sanitation and Environmental Education in The Developing Countries in Man And The Environment* (Ed) Obasikene, J.I; Adinna, E.N; Uzoechi, I. F. A. Enugu: Computer Edge Publishers

[7] Hester, Eva Jackson (February 2009). "An Investigation of the Relationship Between Health Literacy and Social Communication Skills in Older Adults". *Communication Disorders Quarterly* 30 (2): 112–119. doi:10.1177/1525740108324040.<http://www.healthcommunication.net/APHA/APHA.html>. Retrieved 24 October 2017.

[8] Khan, A. S., Tshioko, F.K. & Heymann, D. L. (1999). The re-emergence of Ebola Haemorrhagic Fever, Democratic Republic of Congo, 1995. *Commission de Lutte contre les Epidemies a Kikwit. J Infect Dis; S 76-86*

[9] Kreps, G. L.(1998). "Health communication research: a guide to developments and directions". Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.

- [10] McQuail, D. (2005). *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory* (5th ed.) London: Sage.
- [11] Murray, M; Pizzorno, J (1998) *Encyclopedia of Natural Medicine*. California: Prima Publishing.
- [12] Nichols, J. & McChesney, R. W. (2009). The death and life of great American newspapers. *The Nation* online. Retrieved April 20, 2018 from <http://www.thenation.com>.
- [13] Nabi R.L. *A cognitive-functional model for the effects of discrete negative emotions on information processing, attitude change, and recall. Communication Theory* 1999; 9: 292-320 doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2885.1999.tb00172.x.
- [14] *National Technical Guidelines for Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response: Epidemiology Division*, Federal Ministry of Health Nigeria, December 2009.
- [15] Nwodu, L.C. (2006). *Research in Communication and Behavioural Sciences: Principles, Methods and Issues*. Enugu: Rhyce Kerex Publishers.
- [16] Okoro, N (2004) *Mass Communication Research Issues & Methodology*. Nsukka: AP Express Publication.
- [17] Osuala, E.C. (1989). *Introduction to Research Methodology*. Onitsha: African Feb. Publisher.
- [18] Owuamalam, E. O. (2012). *Data Analysis & Research Project Writing: A Practical Approach*. Owerri: Top Class Agencies Ltd.
- [19] Raji, S.M (2008) Public Awareness and Sensitisation Campaign on HIV/AIDS in Nigeria. *The Nigeria Journal of Communication*, 6: 59-68.
- [20] Rimal, R.N; Real, K. *How behaviors are influenced by perceived norms: a test of the theory of normative social behavior. Communication Report* 2005; 32: 389-414 doi: 10.1177/0093650205275385.
- [21] Schiavo, R. (2007). *Health Communication: From Theory to Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- [22] Sridhar, M K C.,(1991) *Disposal of the Dead in Waste And Environmental Hazard Control*. Ibadan: Claverianum Press
- [23] Thompson, Teresa; Roxanne Parrott; Jon Nussbaum (2011). *The Routledge Handbook of Health Communication* (2 ed.). ISBN 978-0-203-84606-3. Retrieved October, 27, 2017.
- [24] Udoakah, N & Iwokwagh, S. (2008). communication and HIV/AIDS prevention among Adolescents in Benue State. *The Nigeria Journal of Communication*, 6: 44-58
- [25] World Health Organization (2014). *The West Africa Ebola Report*.