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Perception of Public Relations Officers of Government Public Relations Approaches towards the Acceptability of COVID-19 Vaccination in Taraba State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study on perception of public relations officers on government public relations approaches towards the acceptability of Covid 19 vaccination in Taraba State, Nigeria sought to identify the public relations approaches adopted by government in the campaign for COVID-19 vaccine, examine public relations experts perception of the impact of public relations approaches in the campaign for COVID-19 vaccine in Taraba State, Nigeria and to find out the specific challenges faced by the public relations experts in the campaign for COVID-19 vaccine in Taraba State, Nigeria. The study employed the survey method of research design with a population of 158 and a sample. Using purposive sampling method, questionnaires was administered on a sample size of 103 respondents within the study area to elicit primary data. Findings of the study revealed that the government in Taraba State has implemented a diverse range of public relations (PR) strategies to promote the Covid-19 vaccine campaign. The study also found that public relations experts generally perceive the government's PR approaches positively. Furthermore, the study revealed that despite the overall positive perception of the PR efforts, several challenges persist such as vaccine hesitancy, limited access to reliable information sources and insufficient resources and funding key hurdles faced.

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The study concluded that the government's adoption of diverse PR strategies, including communication campaigns, media relations efforts, and collaboration with healthcare providers, demonstrates a proactive effort to engage with the public and address concerns. Finally, the study among others recommended that community engagement through grassroots initiatives, involving local influencers, community leaders, and healthcare providers and advocate for increased resources and funding to support comprehensive PR campaigns should be enhanced.

Keywords: Perception, Public Relations, Covid-19, Government, Acceptability

INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 is one of the most significant global health and social crises of the 20th century. The virus first appeared in late 2019 in the Chinese city of Wuhan and quickly became a global threat affecting all nations of the world. By March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared Covid-19 a pandemic. The virus has caused massive mortality and morbidity. As of May 23, 2023, the WHO reported 6.935,889 deaths due to Covid-19 virus. It has also caused an unprecedented economic loss for both developed and developing countries (Chiakaan & Idi, 2023).

In the early stages of the pandemic, countries were locked down, closed borders, closed schools, closed social gatherings and religious gatherings, among other measures. Non-pharmaceutical (NPI) interventions were also implemented, such as the use of face masks, maintaining social distancing, and regular hand washing with soap or hand sanitizer, among others. Although NPIs have been successful in slowing the progression of Covid 19, the most effective strategy to reduce mortality and mortality rates remains within the capabilities of medical technology, which includes effective, safe and accessible vaccines. According to the Pan American Health Organization (2021) cited in Chiakaan & Idi, (2023), vaccine is a key component in the package of actions to combat Covid 19. Since March 2020 when the World Health Organization (WHO) declared Covid 19 as a pandemic, scientists and pharmaceutical companies have been racing against time to develop vaccines for Covid 19 vaccines (Coustasse, Kimble, and Maxik, 2021).

COVID-19 vaccination is a global campaign to get more people vaccinated against the virus so we can get rid of it, control the spread of infection, reduce the number of serious

cases, and get people back to their normal lives. Most African countries have been slower to start their vaccine rollout than other regions, and the goal is to get more than 60% of the continent's population vaccinated so they can get herd immunity(Ayenigbara, eta' al, 2021). Vaccination programmes in Africa have been hard to do for a long time because of a lot of different reasons, but some of the biggest ones so far are the slow start of the vaccination process, limited funds, safety and uncertainty around vaccines, storage and regulatory issues, the shelf life of the vaccines, not being able to get to vulnerable communities quickly, problems with different vaccines, and conflicts and wars.

Nigeria had a lot of vaccine hesitations in the past, like the one that happened in 2003 when people in northern Nigeria boycotted a polio vaccination campaign (Taylor, et'al, 2017). The above hesitant attitudes of Nigerians towards polio vaccination made Nigeria to be one of the few countries that did not get rid of wild poliomyelitis in 2020. The above situation made scholars to argue that one of the main reasons for vaccine hesitancy in Nigeria especially in the case of polio and even COVID-19 is because people do not trust the government, especially since they were the ones pushing for the eradication of these viruses (Ogundele & Ogundele, 2020; Matos, Gonçalves & Couto, 2022; Afolabi & Ilesanmi, 2021; Kapp, 2004).

Despite the fact that the scourge of COVID-19 seems to have subsides, vaccination is highly recommended by public authorities in almost every country. However, the (lack) of public trust in Nigeria could probably be a factor in the (failed) COVID vaccination campaign, especially as the country struggles with government credibility (Sato, 2022). Therefore, as the Nigerian government strive to secure the health and well-being of their citizens, the role of effective communication cannot be overstated. Public relations strategies become instrumental in disseminating accurate information, debunking myths, addressing misconceptions, and building public trust to encourage vaccine acceptance. Therefore, it against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine the perception of public relations experts on government public relations approaches towards the acceptability of COVID-19 vaccination in Taraba State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Research Problem

The issue of vaccine hesitancy in Nigeria presents a significant challenge to effective vaccination campaigns due to various factors such as safety concerns, uncertainties about vaccines, and deeply entrenched traditional beliefs. Historical events like the 2003 polio

vaccine boycott in northern Nigeria have contributed to a lasting reluctance towards vaccination efforts, leading to ongoing struggles with diseases like polio. Scholars argue that a key driver of this hesitancy, not just limited to polio but also evident in the context of COVID-19, is a widespread distrust of government entities, particularly those promoting vaccination initiatives. Despite governmental initiatives, recent studies show persistent resistance to COVID-19 vaccination. This study aims to explore the perspectives of public relations experts on governmental strategies to improve vaccine acceptance in Taraba State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine the perception of public relations experts on Government public relations approaches towards the acceptability of COVID-19 vaccination in Taraba State, Nigeria. However, the specific objectives of the study are:

1. To determine the level of awareness of public relations practitioners about government use of public relations in the campaign for COVID-19 vaccine
2. To identify the public relations approaches adopted by government in the campaign for COVID-19 vaccine.
3. To find out the opinion of public relations experts about the way and manner public relations approaches were used by government in campaign for Covid-19 vaccine in Taraba State
4. To find out the opinion of public relations experts about the impact of the public relations approaches by government in the campaign for Covid-19 vaccine in Taraba State

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study

1. What is the level of awareness among public relations practitioners regarding the government's use of public relations in the COVID-19 vaccine campaign?
2. What public relations approaches did the government adopt in the COVID-19 vaccine campaign?
3. What are the opinions of public relations experts on how the government utilized public relations approaches in the COVID-19 vaccine campaign in Taraba State?

4. What are the opinions of public relations experts on the impact of the government's public relations approaches in the COVID-19 vaccine campaign in Taraba State?

Theoretical Framework

The perception theory was propounded in 1964 by G.A Steiner and Berelson. They (Steiner and Berelson, 1964) defines perception as a "complex process by which people select, organize and interpret sensory stimulation into a meaningful and coherent picture of the world" perception can be influenced by an individual past experience, societal and family values, either way, stimuli are sensed differently by people.

Perception can be influenced in two different ways: structural and functional. Anaeto, Onabajo and Osifeso. (2008) structural influence refers to how sensory stimuli are perceived physically. As the name states, it is coordinated and usually structured. Functional influence is based on personal conviction (which is in most cases subjective), and in all cases deals with psychological factors that affect our perception. These two influences on perception (structural and functional) are related in the sense that the structural influence poses as a platform for functional influence.

There is tendency for individual to have a varying perception based on circumstances encountered, environment, sex, and lifestyle and so on. This tendency is termed *selective perception.* For this reason, messages are not interpreted in the same manner by individuals. This suggests that mass communication goes beyond just hitting a target with an arrow. The messages can reach the receiver and still fail to accomplish its purpose because its interpretation is at the mercy of the receiver. According to Severin and Tankard (2001), the process of receiving and interpreting information is called decoding. The process involves perception or the taking of stimuli through the senses and the subsequent processing of that information. The other processes similar to selective perception are: selective exposure, selective attention and selective retention.

Selective exposure is a notion built on Festinger 's Theory of Cognitive Dissonance which states that in order to reduce dissonance after making a particular decisions; people seek our information that supports their course of action. This mostly applies in cases where an individual has to take a decision which outcome he will live with for a long time like voting for a presidential candidate. Due to the arrays of personality running, an electorate tries to decide on which candidate he feels will govern well. When the decision is finally made, the

vote is casted and par adventure the desired candidate wins, the electorates tries to keep finding reasons throughout the tenure that will help convince him that he made the right decision. It also applies the other way round. People expose themselves to information that is an agreement with their attitude.

Selective attention on the hand is the tendency to give audience to pay attention to those parts of a message that suits held beliefs, customs and norms. Selective retention is the inclination to memorize an aspect of information due to its relevance and to recall the information as at when needed.

Selection retention is the tendency for the recall of information to be initiated by wants, attitudes needs and other psychological factors. The selective process is often thought of as a four-ring defence mechanism with selective exposure at the fore front with others following sequentially. The defence works in a way that: if a person expects a mix of information (selective exposure), he can pay selective attention to only the parts of the message that are agreeable. If not, the person can then exercise selective perception in decoding the message. If this also fails, the person can then exercise selective retention by letting go of the irrelevant or contrary bits of information.

Perception influences decision. It is a dynamic defence that filters what is acceptable and what is not to individuals, which in this case are the public. The manner in which the public perceive media content/messages determine what they make of the messages; these stresses the major tenets of the perception theory that audience of the mass media are heterogeneous in terms of demographics, and even mentality which is as reaction on integration of many factors like culture, experience, new knowledge and so on.

The perception theory is relevant to this research work based on the assumption that the perception process is influenced by the characteristics of a stimulus, for example, the nature and content of the media. Perception varies from one individual to another. In a different way, the public relations experts can different perceptions.

METHODS

The survey method was used for this study. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2011) survey research deals with the data gathering for the purpose of describing and interpreting a certain condition, practice, beliefs attitudes, etc. It has to do with administering

questionnaires to gather data, and collecting them back from various respondents in other to analyze the data for better result. The reason for adopting survey is due to the design's ability to retrieve data from a large number of people within a short period of time.

The population of this study comprised of the entire public relations experts in Taraba State, Nigeria. According to the data obtained from the various organizations, public relations experts that form the population of this study are 158. The population based on each of the organization is presented thus: YEDC (23), FMC (28), NUJ (35), Taraba State University (11), Police Headquarters, Jalingo (28), and National Orientation Agency (29). These organization were selected to from the population of the study they have the highest number of people who are either practicing as public relations officers or who are scholars and versed in the profession.

To determine the sample size of the study, the researcher made us of the Krejcie & Morgan (1970) table for determining sample size for this study. According to Krejcie & Morgan (1970) sample size determinism table, a sampling size of 103 is sufficient for a population size ranging between 140 to 150. Therefore, the sample size for this study will be 103 experts.

The research adopted purposive sampling. The rationale behind this decision is based on the fact that purposive sampling enables a study of this kind to focus on subjects on the basis of specific characteristics or qualities and eliminates those who fail to meet these criteria. This enabled the study intentionally concentrate on public relations experts in Taraba State. The selection of respondents in this regard, was based on the researcher's prior knowledge of them. This implies why only those perceived to have fair knowledge about public relations were sampled for data collection.

The instrument used to gather data for this study include the questionnaire. The instrument was designed in line with the research objectives. 103 copies of questionnaire were distributed via face-to-face channel within two weeks. It is apt to state that the researcher was assisted by three researcher assistants who were properly given orientation to administer the questionnaire.

RESULTS

Table 1: Respondents' Demographic Data

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	53	54%
Female	45	46%
Total	**139**	**100.0**
Age		
20-30	23	23%
31-40	38	40%
41-50	22	22%
51-60	15	15%
61 and Above	0	0%
Total	**98**	**100**
Educational Qualification		
Bachelor's Degree	74	76%
Master's Degree	17	17%
Ph.D/Doctorate	0	0%
Others	7	7%
Total	**98**	**100**
Occupation		
Civil Servant	91	93%
Business Man/Woman	5	5%
Student	2	2%
Unemployed	0	0%
Total	**98**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 1 provides demographic data of respondents involved in assessing the government's PR approaches for promoting Covid-19 vaccine acceptability in Taraba State, Nigeria. Firstly, in terms of gender, 54% of the respondents were males, while females constituted 46%. This distribution suggests a slightly higher participation of males whom data were collected from.

Secondly, concerning the age status of the respondents, the data reveal that 40% of respondents fell within the 31-40 age bracket of the total sample. One important thing here is that data were assessed from respondents who were of different status.

Thirdly, in terms of educational qualification, 76% of respondents held Bachelor's degrees, those with Master's degrees were 17%. The implication of the data collected here is that the respondent was educated.

Lastly, regarding occupation, the bulk of respondents were civil servants, constituting 93% of the total sample, with negligible representation from other categories like businesspersons, students, or the unemployed. Data, by implication were collected from respondents with diverse occupational backgrounds.

Table 1: Level of Awareness about PR approaches used by Government in the campaign for Covid-19 Vaccine in Taraba State

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
High	48	49%
Moderate	40	41%
Low	7	7%
I am not Aware	3	3%
Total	**98**	**100**

Source Filed Survey, 2024

Table 2 shows that almost half of the respondents (49%) have a high level of awareness about the PR approaches used by the government in the Covid-19 vaccine campaign. Meanwhile, 41% of the respondents have a moderate level of awareness, 7% have a low level of awareness, and 3% are not aware at all. Overall, while the findings show a positive trend in awareness levels, they also underscore the importance of continuing and refining communication efforts to achieve comprehensive awareness and understanding of the Covid-19 vaccination campaign across all demographics in Taraba State.

Table 3: Respondents' Opinion about the way and manner government used PR approaches in the campaign for Covid-19 in Taraba State

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
Approaches were correct but not adequately and correctly used	41	42%
PR approaches were correct and properly used	42	43%
Government appeared to be Confused about the right PR approach to use in the campaign against Covid-19 in Taraba Strte	7	7%
I am not Aware	8	8%
Total	**98**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The findings from Table 3 indicate mixed opinions about the government's use of PR approaches in the Covid-19 vaccine campaign in Taraba State. While 43% of respondents believe the PR approaches were correct and properly used, 42% feel that, despite being correct, the approaches were not adequately or correctly implemented. This suggests a significant portion of the population perceives a gap between strategy and execution, highlighting the need for improved implementation and possibly better-trained personnel. Additionally, 7% of respondents believe the government appeared confused about the right PR approach, which could undermine trust in the campaign. The fact that 8% are not aware of the PR approaches used further underscores the necessity for broader outreach and more effective engagement strategies. These findings suggest that while the overall strategy may be sound, the government needs to focus on refining execution, enhancing clarity and consistency in communication, and increasing community engagement to ensure that all segments of the population are well-informed and confident in the campaign efforts.

Table 4: Whether Communication Campaigns through Radio, TV and Social Media is one of the strategies use for COVID-19 vaccine campaign

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
Strongly Agree	48	49%
Agree	40	41%
Disagree	7	7%
Strongly Disagree	3	3%
Total	**98**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 4 presents data on the effectiveness of communication campaigns through various media platforms for promoting Covid-19 vaccine acceptance in Taraba State, Nigeria. The majority of respondents, comprising 90% of the total sample, either strongly agreed or agreed that communication campaigns via radio, TV, and social media were effective strategies. Specifically, 49% strongly agreed, while 41% agreed. This indicates a significant level of approval for these communication channels in spreading awareness about the vaccine.

However, a small proportion of respondents, 10% in total, either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the effectiveness of these campaigns. This dissenting opinion could be due to various factors, such as accessibility to media platforms, cultural barriers, or skepticism towards the vaccine itself.

The data above suggests that the majority of respondents perceive communication campaigns through radio, TV, and social media as effective tools in promoting Covid-19 vaccine acceptance, albeit with a minority expressing dissenting views.

Table 5: Whether Educating People through hall meetings is a strategies use for COVID-19 vaccine campaign

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
Strongly Agree	9	9%
Agree	14	14%
Disagree	41	42%
Strongly Disagree	34	35%
Total	**98**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 5 illustrates the effectiveness of using hall meetings as a strategy for promoting Covid-19 vaccine acceptance in Taraba State, Nigeria. The data shows that a minority of respondents, totaling 23%, either strongly agreed or agreed that educating people through hall meetings is an effective strategy. Specifically, 9% strongly agreed, and 14% agreed with this approach.

However, a significant majority of respondents, comprising 77% of the total sample, either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the effectiveness of hall meetings for vaccine campaign purposes. Among them, 42% disagreed, and 35% strongly disagreed.

This suggests a lack of confidence or support for the effectiveness of hall meetings in disseminating information and promoting vaccine acceptance. Possible reasons for this skepticism could include concerns about the reach and impact of such meetings, logistical challenges, or perceived inefficacy compared to other communication channels.

Table 6: Whether corporate advertising and other PR tools like press release are used to educate the people about COVID-19 vaccine

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
Strongly Agree	32	33%
Agree	35	36%
Disagree	18	18%
Strongly Disagree	13	13%
Total	**98**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 6 outlines the perceptions regarding the use of corporate advertising and other PR tools, such as press releases, to educate the public about Covid-19 vaccines in Taraba State, Nigeria.

The data indicates a relatively positive sentiment towards the effectiveness of these strategies, with a combined 69% of respondents either strongly agreeing (33%) or agreeing (36%) that corporate advertising and PR tools are useful for vaccine education. Conversely, a minority of respondents, totaling 31%, either disagreed (18%) or strongly disagreed (13%) with the effectiveness of these approaches. This suggests a level of skepticism or dissent regarding the impact of corporate advertising and PR tools in vaccine education.

It could deduced from the data above that the majority viewpoint supports the notion that corporate advertising and PR tools play a significant role in educating the public about Covid-19 vaccines, although there is a notable minority expressing reservations or disagreement with this perspective.

Table 7: Whether Use of Media Relations strategy through press conference, feature articles, commentary was used to enlightened the people about COVID-19 vaccine

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
Strongly Agree	31	32%
Agree	40	41%
Disagree	15	15%
Strongly Disagree	12	12%
Total	**98**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 7 presents data on the utilization of media relations strategies, including press conferences, feature articles, and commentary, to educate the public about Covid-19 vaccines in Taraba State, Nigeria. The data in the table revealed a positive perception among respondents, with a combined 73% either strongly agreeing (32%) or agreeing (41%) that media relations strategies are effective for enlightening people about the vaccine. Conversely, a minority of respondents, totaling 27%, either disagreed (15%) or strongly disagreed (12%) with the effectiveness of these strategies. This suggests some skepticism or dissent regarding the impact of media relations efforts in vaccine education.

Overall, the majority viewpoint supports the notion that media relations strategies, such as press conferences and feature articles, play a significant role in enlightening the public about Covid-19 vaccines, although there is a notable minority expressing reservations or disagreement with this perspective.

Table 8: Whether Public relations efforts positively influenced public perception and acceptance of the COVID-19 vaccine in Taraba State

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
Strongly Agree	34	35%
Agree	41	42%
Disagree	14	14%
Strongly Disagree	9	9%
Total	**98**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 8 presents data on whether public relations efforts positively influenced public perception and acceptance of the Covid-19 vaccine in Taraba State, Nigeria. The data indicate a generally positive perception among respondents, with a combined 77% either strongly agreeing (35%) or agreeing (42%) that public relations efforts have positively influenced public perception and acceptance of the vaccine.

On the other hand, a minority of respondents, totaling 23%, either disagreed (14%) or strongly disagreed (9%) with the notion that public relations efforts have had a positive impact on public perception and acceptance of the vaccine. This suggests some level of skepticism or dissent regarding the effectiveness of public relations efforts in this context.

It could be deduced from the data above that the majority viewpoint supports the idea that public relations efforts have played a positive role in shaping public perception and acceptance of the Covid-19 vaccine in Taraba State, although there is a notable minority expressing reservations or disagreement with this perspective.

Table 9: Whether Public relations strategies effectively addressed concerns and hesitancy regarding the COVID-19 vaccine among residents of Taraba State.

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
Strongly Agree	24	24%
Agree	29	30%
Disagree	25	26%
Strongly Disagree	20	20%
Total	**98**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 9 presents data on whether public relations strategies effectively addressed concerns and hesitancy regarding the Covid-19 vaccine among residents of Taraba State, Nigeria. The data show a mixed perception among respondents regarding the effectiveness of public relations strategies in addressing vaccine concerns and hesitancy.

A combined 54% of respondents either strongly agreed (24%) or agreed (30%) that public relations strategies effectively addressed these concerns. However, a substantial portion of respondents, totaling 46%, either disagreed (26%) or strongly disagreed (20%) with this notion.

This suggests a divided opinion among the respondents regarding the efficacy of public relations strategies in addressing vaccine concerns and hesitancy. While some respondents believe these strategies are effective, others express skepticism or dissatisfaction with their impact.

Table 10: Whether Public relations campaigns increased awareness and knowledge about the importance of vaccination in combating COVID-19 in Taraba State

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
Strongly Agree	40	41%
Agree	48	49%
Disagree	5	5%
Strongly Disagree	5	5%
Total	**98**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 10 displays data on whether public relations campaigns increased awareness and knowledge about the importance of vaccination in combating Covid-19 in Taraba State, Nigeria. The data indicate a largely positive perception among respondents regarding the impact of public relations campaigns on increasing awareness and knowledge about vaccination. A combined 90% of respondents either strongly agreed (41%) or agreed (49%) that public relations campaigns have been effective in increasing awareness and knowledge about the importance of vaccination in combating Covid-19.

On the contrary, a very small proportion of respondents, totaling 10%, either disagreed (5%) or strongly disagreed (5%) with this notion, suggesting a minority viewpoint expressing skepticism or dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of these campaigns.

The above data implies that the majority of respondents perceive public relations campaigns as successful in increasing awareness and knowledge about vaccination against Covid-19 in Taraba State, indicating their significant impact in educating the public about the importance of vaccination in combating the pandemic.

Table 11: Whether Limited access to reliable information sources posed a challenge in crafting effective communication strategies about the COVID-19 vaccine

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
Strongly Agree	31	32%
Agree	41	42%
Disagree	19	19%
Strongly Disagree	7	7%
Total	**98**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 11 presents data on whether limited access to reliable information sources posed a challenge in crafting effective communication strategies about the Covid-19 vaccine. The data indicate that a majority of respondents, comprising 74% of the total sample, either strongly agreed (32%) or agreed (42%) that limited access to reliable information sources was indeed a challenge in crafting effective communication strategies about the vaccine. Conversely, a minority of respondents, totaling 26%, either disagreed (19%) or strongly disagreed (7%) with this notion. This suggests that while some respondents do not perceive limited access to reliable information as a significant challenge, the majority recognize it as a barrier to crafting effective communication strategies.

Table 12: Whether overcoming vaccine hesitancy and skepticism among the public was a significant challenge to public relations effort by government

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
Strongly Agree	26	27%
Agree	37	38%
Disagree	22	22%
Strongly Disagree	13	13%
Total	**98**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 12 presents' data on whether overcoming vaccine hesitancy and skepticism among the public was a significant challenge to public relations efforts by the government in Taraba State. The data reveal that a majority of respondents, totaling 65% of the total sample, either strongly agreed (27%) or agreed (38%) that overcoming vaccine hesitancy and skepticism among the public was indeed a significant challenge to public relations efforts. Conversely, a minority of respondents, comprising 35% of the total sample, either disagreed (22%) or strongly disagreed (13%) with this notion. This suggests that while some respondents do not perceive overcoming vaccine hesitancy and skepticism as a significant challenge, the majority recognize it as a barrier to effective public relations efforts by the government.

The above data highlights the importance of addressing vaccine hesitancy and skepticism as a critical aspect of public relations efforts aimed at promoting Covid-19 vaccination in Taraba State.

Table 13: Whether insufficient resources and funding hindered the implementation of comprehensive public relations campaigns for the COVID-19 vaccine

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
Strongly Agree	29	30%
Agree	40	41%
Disagree	18	18%
Strongly Disagree	11	11%
Total	**98**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 4.13 presents data on whether insufficient resources and funding hindered the implementation of comprehensive public relations campaigns for the Covid-19 vaccine. The data indicate that a majority of respondents, totaling 71% of the total sample, either strongly agreed (30%) or agreed (41%) that insufficient resources and funding indeed hindered the implementation of comprehensive public relations campaigns for the vaccine. Conversely, a minority of respondents, comprising 29% of the total sample, either disagreed (18%) or strongly disagreed (11%) with this notion. This suggests that while some respondents do not perceive insufficient resources and funding as a significant

hindrance, the majority recognize it as a barrier to the implementation of effective public relations campaigns.

The above data emphasizes the importance of adequate resources and funding in ensuring the successful implementation of comprehensive public relations campaigns aimed at promoting Covid-19 vaccination in Taraba State.

Table 14: Whether enhancing community engagement through grassroots initiatives and involvement of local influencers can improve public trust in the COVID-19 vaccine

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
Strongly Agree	36	37%
Agree	41	42%
Disagree	14	14%
Strongly Disagree	7	7%
Total	**98**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 14 presents data on whether enhancing community engagement through grassroots initiatives and involvement of local influencers can improve public trust in the Covid-19 vaccine. The data indicate that a majority of respondents, comprising 79% of the total sample, either strongly agreed (37%) or agreed (42%) that enhancing community engagement through grassroots initiatives and involvement of local influencers can indeed improve public trust in the vaccine. Conversely, a minority of respondents, totaling 21% of the total sample, either disagreed (14%) or strongly disagreed (7%) with this notion. This suggests that while some respondents do not perceive community engagement and involvement of local influencers as significant in building public trust, the majority recognize it as a valuable strategy.

The above data highlights the importance of grassroots initiatives and local influencer involvement in fostering public trust in the Covid-19 vaccine, indicating the potential effectiveness of such approaches in Taraba State.

Table 15: Whether transparency in communication, including sharing regular updates on vaccine safety and efficacy, is essential for building public trust

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
Strongly Agree	32	33%
Agree	35	36%
Disagree	18	18%
Strongly Disagree	13	13%
Total	**98**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 15 presents data on whether transparency in communication, including sharing regular updates on vaccine safety and efficacy, is essential for building public trust. The data reveal that a majority of respondents, totaling 69% of the total sample, either strongly agreed (33%) or agreed (36%) that transparency in communication, including regular updates on vaccine safety and efficacy, is indeed essential for building public trust. Conversely, a minority of respondents, comprising 31% of the total sample, either disagreed (18%) or strongly disagreed (13%) with this notion. This suggests that while some respondents do not perceive transparency in communication as essential for building public trust, the majority recognize it as a crucial factor.

The above data highlights the importance of transparency in communication, particularly regarding vaccine safety and efficacy, as a fundamental aspect of building public trust in the Covid-19 vaccine in Taraba State.

Table 16: Whether collaborating with healthcare providers to address vaccine-related concerns and provide accurate information can enhance public confidence in vaccination efforts

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
Strongly Agree	48	49%
Agree	40	41%
Disagree	7	7%
Strongly Disagree	3	3%
Total	**98**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 16 presents data on whether collaborating with healthcare providers to address vaccine-related concerns and provide accurate information can enhance public confidence in vaccination efforts. The data in the table findings indicate a strong consensus among respondents, with a combined 90% either strongly agreeing (49%) or agreeing (41%) that collaborating with healthcare providers is essential to enhance public confidence in vaccination efforts. Conversely, only a small proportion of respondents, totaling 10% of the total sample, either disagreed (7%) or strongly disagreed (3%) with this notion. This suggests that the vast majority of respondents recognize the significance of collaboration with healthcare providers in addressing vaccine-related concerns and providing accurate information to enhance public confidence.

The above data stresses the importance of partnerships between government authorities and healthcare providers in promoting vaccination efforts and fostering public confidence in Taraba State.

DISCUSSION

The field survey data reveals a generally positive trend in awareness about the government's public relations (PR) approaches in the Covid-19 vaccine campaign in Taraba State. Nearly half of the respondents (49%) reported a high level of awareness, indicating that a substantial portion of the population is well-informed about the government's strategies. An additional 41% exhibited a moderate level of awareness, bringing the total to 90% of the population having at least some knowledge of the PR efforts. This suggests that the government's communication strategies have been notably effective, reaching a broad audience across Taraba State.

However, there is still a portion of the population with insufficient awareness of the PR approaches. Specifically, 7% of respondents reported a low level of awareness, and 3% were not aware at all of the PR efforts related to the Covid-19 vaccine campaign. These findings highlight a gap that needs to be addressed to ensure the campaign's messages are universally understood and accepted. The presence of these less aware groups indicates that while the overall strategy is effective, there are challenges in reaching certain segments of the population.

Firstly, the data reveals that communication campaigns through radio, TV, and social media were widely adopted strategies. According to Table 2, the majority of respondents agreed

or strongly agreed on the effectiveness of these campaigns in raising awareness about the Covid-19 vaccine. This aligns with scholarly recommendations emphasizing the importance of utilizing multiple media channels for effective health communication campaigns (Nabi et al., 2018). In their study, Nabi et al. found that leveraging diverse media platforms can help reach a broader audience and disseminate information effectively, which is particularly crucial in the context of vaccine promotion during a public health crisis.

Similarly, corporate advertising and PR tools like press releases were perceived as effective in educating the public about the Covid-19 vaccine, as indicated in Table 4. The majority of respondents acknowledged the utility of these approaches in disseminating information. This finding is consistent with research by Wakefield et al. (2010), who highlight the impact of strategic communication in shaping public perceptions and behaviors related to health interventions. Wakefield et al. argue that strategic communication, including corporate advertising and press releases, can play a significant role in influencing public attitudes and encouraging desired health behaviors.

Despite the efforts made, challenges remain in addressing vaccine hesitancy and skepticism, as highlighted in Table 7. A significant proportion of respondents expressed concerns about the effectiveness of PR strategies in overcoming these challenges. This underscores the complexity of vaccine hesitancy and the need for tailored communication strategies to address specific concerns and misconceptions. Studies by Betsch et al. (2018) emphasize the importance of understanding the underlying factors contributing to vaccine hesitancy and designing targeted interventions to address them effectively. Betsch et al. argue that addressing vaccine hesitancy requires a multifaceted approach that considers individual beliefs, attitudes, and socio-cultural factors influencing vaccine acceptance.

Furthermore, Table 11 reveals the perceived hindrance posed by insufficient resources and funding on the implementation of comprehensive PR campaigns for the Covid-19 vaccine. This finding underscores the critical role of resource allocation in effective health communication efforts. Scholars such as Wakefield et al. (2010) argue that adequate funding is essential for developing and disseminating persuasive health messages to target audiences effectively. In their study, Wakefield et al. emphasize the importance of investing in communication infrastructure, human resources, and research to support robust health communication initiatives.

In light of these findings, actionable strategies can be developed to improve public trust and engagement in the Covid-19 vaccine campaign. These strategies may include:

1. Strengthening communication efforts through diverse media channels: Given the effectiveness of communication campaigns through radio, TV, and social media, efforts should be made to expand and diversify communication channels to reach a broader audience. This may involve partnering with local media outlets, leveraging social media influencers, and disseminating targeted messages through community networks.

2. Enhancing community engagement through grassroots initiatives: Table 12 highlights the perceived effectiveness of grassroots initiatives and involvement of local influencers in improving public trust in the vaccine. Community engagement efforts should focus on building partnerships with community leaders, faith-based organizations, and local healthcare providers to disseminate accurate information, address concerns, and promote vaccine acceptance at the grassroots level.

3. Collaborating closely with healthcare providers: Table 13 underscores the importance of collaborating with healthcare providers to address vaccine-related concerns and provide accurate information. Public health authorities should work closely with healthcare professionals to ensure consistent messaging, address misinformation, and provide support for vaccine distribution and administration efforts.

4. Advocating for increased resources and funding: To overcome the challenges posed by insufficient resources and funding, stakeholders should advocate for increased investment in health communication infrastructure and capacity-building initiatives. This may involve securing government funding, leveraging partnerships with philanthropic organizations, and mobilizing resources from international donors to support comprehensive PR campaigns.

5. Implementing targeted interventions to address vaccine hesitancy and skepticism: Given the complexity of vaccine hesitancy, tailored interventions should be developed to address specific concerns and misconceptions among different population groups. This may involve conducting targeted messaging campaigns, organizing community forums, and providing resources for healthcare providers to engage in one-on-one conversations with hesitant individuals.

In conclusion, the findings from the survey conducted in Taraba State, Nigeria, provide valuable insights into the public relations approaches employed in the Covid-19 vaccine

campaign. While the data indicates the effectiveness of certain PR strategies, challenges remain in addressing vaccine hesitancy, overcoming resource constraints, and ensuring equitable access to accurate information. By implementing actionable strategies informed by these findings, public health authorities can improve public trust and engagement in the Covid-19 vaccine campaign, ultimately contributing to the control of the pandemic and the protection of public health in Taraba State, Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings from the survey in Taraba State underscore the importance of strategic public relations (PR) approaches in promoting the Covid-19 vaccine campaign. The government's adoption of diverse PR strategies, including communication campaigns, media relations efforts, and collaboration with healthcare providers, demonstrates a proactive effort to engage with the public and address concerns. Despite challenges such as vaccine hesitancy, limited access to information, and resource constraints, public relations experts perceive these efforts positively, acknowledging their role in raising awareness and improving public trust. Moving forward, targeted interventions and sustained efforts are needed to overcome these challenges and enhance vaccine acceptance. Strengthening communication efforts, enhancing community engagement, advocating for increased resources, and implementing tailored interventions to address vaccine hesitancy are recommended strategies. By addressing these challenges and leveraging effective PR approaches, stakeholders can improve vaccine acceptance and contribute to controlling the Covid-19 pandemic in Taraba State. Overall, strategic PR efforts play a crucial role in fostering public trust and engagement in the Covid-19 vaccine campaign, ultimately contributing to the protection of public health and well-being.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen communication efforts by utilizing diverse media channels and ensuring transparent and regular updates on vaccine safety and efficacy.

2. Enhance community engagement through grassroots initiatives, involving local influencers, community leaders, and healthcare providers.

3. Advocate for increased resources and funding to support comprehensive PR campaigns, including investment in communication infrastructure and capacity-building initiatives.

4. Implement targeted interventions to address vaccine hesitancy and skepticism, tailoring messaging to address specific concerns and misconceptions among different population groups.

5. Foster partnerships and collaboration between government agencies, healthcare providers, community organizations, and other stakeholders to create a coordinated and effective approach to promoting vaccine acceptance and combating the Covid-19 pandemic.

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