

## Infotainment During the Pandemic: An Analysis of *Gidan Badamasi* Television Drama of Arewa 24

### Abstract

Media is central in the matrix of communication exchange between people and authorities, especially in the time of unplanned and unexpected crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper investigates the use of infotainment to educate the public about COVID-19 by a leading Hausa language television station Arewa 24 through one of its prominent weekly drama series *Gidan Badamasi* (“House of Badamasi”). Specifically, this paper analyses how the producer of *Gidan Badamasi* presented the non-pharmaceutical COVID-19 preventive protocols as outlined by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) in two specially produced episodes on COVID-19 and aired intermittently on the Arewa 24 Television Station. In its conclusion, the paper acknowledges the display of creativity in presenting the protocols to families and businesses.

**Keywords:** Infotainment, Infodemic, COVID-19, Television Drama, Arewa 24.

### Introduction

On 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2020 the Nigerian Center for Disease Control (NCDC) confirmed the first case of the Corona Virus Disease in Lagos, Nigeria’s economic capital. This was a few months after the global outbreak of the disease that originated from Wuhan Province in China and its subsequent declaration as a pandemic by the World Health Organisation on 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2020.

As the world became embroiled in the crises triggered by the global pandemic, the media – as a critical sector of society – has been playing a vital role in combating the pandemic through programmes aimed to enlighten the public. This paper analyses how *Gidan Badamasi*<sup>3</sup> Television Drama of Arewa 24 TV station fused information about Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in the drama, with the aim of finding out how the drama demonstrates the non-pharmaceutical preventive measures of COVID-19 as outlined by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) in two special episodes of *Gidan Badamasi*.

---

1 PhD, Lecturer in the Department of Information and Media Studies, Faculty of Communication, Bayero University Kano, e-mail: midanja.ims@buk.edu.ng.

2 PhD, Senior Lecturer and Head of the Department of Information and Media Studies, Faculty of Communication, Bayero University Kano, e-mail: nibrahim.ims@buk.edu.ng.

3 A Hausa Television Drama Series aired daily at intervals on Arewa24.

## COVID-19 in Nigeria

Nigeria's first case, according to the NCDC, was reported was reported on 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2020 involving a 44-year old Italian who had entered the country from Milan through Murtala Muhammed International Airport aboard a Turkish Airline three days earlier, and went to Ogun state where he owned a business. Immediately the case was confirmed, the contacts of the person were identified, including 20 people in Lagos and 40 in Ogun State. Since then, the cases of COVID-19 infections rapidly rose across the country to 168,552 confirmed cases and 2,124 deaths as of July, 2021.<sup>4</sup>

This situation necessitated the Nigerian government to join other governments in the world to take measures to reduce the spread of the disease. These initially started with travel cessation and night-time curfews in Lagos and Abuja. Later, compulsory use of face masks and total lockdown was imposed on the entire country.

Despite these measures, there was unprecedented spread of the disease. The pandemic took its toll on a society that was already be devilled with multi-faceted crises, including the *Boko Haram* insurgency in the north-eastern part of the country, the kidnap-for-ransom and banditry attacks in the north-central and north-west and agitations for secession from the south-eastern part of the country. The imposition of total lockdown without adequate commensurate palliative measures worsened already deepening socio-economic woes. The situation in Nigeria at the time of the global outbreak was described by the NCDC as "...weak health systems compared to countries in other regions; high population density notably in informal peri-urban settlements; prevailing conflicts and humanitarian crises...; and, the contending burden of other diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and sickle cell disease."<sup>5</sup> In the midst of these socio-economic crises, the Nigerian entertainment sector stepped in by tailoring programmes and music specifically about COVID-19.

## COVID-19 Protocols

In order to curb the spread of COVID-19, the NCDC laid down a list of protocols, which – according to the NCDC – included physical spacing between people and between employees and customers. Such a distance should be a minimum of 2 meters; plus regular washing of hands for 20 seconds at home

4 World Health Organisation, *Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)*, Situation report, No. 42, 2 March 2020, <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200302-sitrep-42-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=edd4> (accessed 15 July 2021).

5 Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, *One Year After: Nigeria's COVID-19 Public Health Response (February 2020 – January 2021)*, Abuja: Federal Ministry of Health, 2021, p. 1.

and the provision of alcohol-based sanitisers or water and soap within business premises; and mandatory use of non-medical face masks/covering.

With regards to weddings and funerals, the NCDC protocol indicted that the number of attendees should be limited to 20 close family members. The NCDC ruled that business owners must ensure the wearing of face masks when selling goods and services, must ensure the provision of sanitisers and appropriate personal protection equipment to all workers and must limit the number of workers and customers at a time to allow for physical distancing within premises.

### **The Media, Infotainment and Infodemic during COVID-19**

In the era of the Covid-19 Pandemic, the Nigerian media were confronted with three sets of audience groups; the first group are those who looked at the pandemic pessimistically, as a mere western' conspiracy to reduce the world's population. The second group viewed the pandemic as a disease that only affect well-to-do members of society. The third group involved those that believed there was no pandemic in the region and that the government was only using it to siphon public funds and garner international palliative attention in terms of cash which would be diverted for personal use.

The outbreak of COVID-19 paved way for massive a infodemic campaign. Infodemics according to the PAHO, are defined as an overabundance of information – some accurate and some not – that make it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need them.<sup>6</sup> It also refers to:

“a large increase in the volume of information associated with a specific topic and whose growth can occur exponentially in a short period of time due to a specific incident, such as the current pandemic. In this situation, misinformation and rumours appear on the scene, along with manipulation of information with doubtful intent. In the information age, this phenomenon is amplified through social networks, spreading further and faster like a virus”.<sup>7</sup>

According to Ayesha Anwar, Meryem Malik, Vaneeza Raees and Anjum Anwar, “whenever there is an outbreak, people tend to turn to the media for information”.<sup>8</sup> In a study conducted by Nigerian Emergency Management

6 The Pan-American Health Organization, *Understanding the Infodemic & Misinformation in the Fight Against COVID-19*, PAHO Fact Sheet number 5, 2020.

7 John Zarocostas, 'How to fight an infodemic,' *The Lancet*, Vol. 395, Issues 10225, 2020, p. 676.

8 Ayesha Anwar, Meryem Malik, Vaneeza Raees and Anjum Anwar, 'Role of Mass Media and Public Health Communications in the COVID-19 Pandemic,' *Cureus*, 14 Sep 2020, Vol. 12, No. 9, e10453, p. 8.

Agency in August 2020 in collaboration with International Organization for Mitigation, 99% of the respondents in Nigeria were aware of the existence of the coronavirus and their means of getting information about the disease included: awareness campaigns in the local and international media and by word of mouth. The contribution of the media is “manifested in the form of journalists and media outlets deciding to be responsible and thus support the measures announced by governments and health organisations worldwide.”<sup>9</sup> Anwar et al emphasised this critical role of media in creating awareness and disease control.<sup>10</sup> They observed that the media modifies people’s behaviour and attitudes, which had helped people adopt essential protective measures during the previous outbreak of the H1N1 epidemic in 2009.

Since the outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic, governments all over the world have battled to check rumours and misinformation about the disease, something made possible by the internet and social media/networks. This misinformation tended to induce fear in the minds of the people and propagate unscientific and unverified cures for COVID 19. To dispel these rumours and misinformation, governments sought the help of media to supplement regular communication and community engagement. Ideally, media is supposed to relay reliable, fact-checked information that would help citizens make informed and knowledgeable decisions.

According to David and Sommerlad, “the COVID-19 pandemic is a health crisis, but it is at the same time a crisis of information—one which has created an overabundance of information and misinformation that has in turn constructed a global infodemic.”<sup>11</sup> The concept of Infodemic, according to Anwar et al, entails the “rapid and far-reaching spread of both accurate and inaccurate information about a disease.”<sup>12</sup> Adding further, Yossi and Sommerlad stated that, “in the context of the COVID-19 infodemic, we have witnessed various attempts by both democratic and authoritarian regimes to increase control over the flow of media and information and to control information regarding the spread of the virus. One important function of the media was to act as mouthpieces for the governmental and public institutions...”<sup>13</sup>

The World Health Organisation (WHO) suggested that experts and authorities should rapidly employ ways to relay necessary and concerning

9 Yossi David and Elizabeth Sommerlad, ‘Media and Information in Times of Crisis: The Case of the COVID-19 Infodemic,’ in *COVID-19 and Similar Futures. Pandemic Geographies*, Gavin J. Andrews, Valerie A. Crooks, Jamie R. Pearce, Jane P. Messina (eds), Cham: Springer, 2021, p. 137.

10 Anwar, Malik, Raees and Anwar, ‘Role of Mass Media....,’ p. 8.

11 David and Sommerlad,, ‘Media and Information....,’ p. 137.

12 Anwar, Malik, Raees and Anwar, ‘Role of Mass Media....,’ p. 10.

13 David and Sommerlad,, ‘Media and Information....,’ p. 137.

information to the public as soon as possible using mass media, including print media (brochures, pamphlets, newspapers), television, Internet, and social media.<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, infotainment is a term that involves blending information into entertainment. Boukes observed that infotainment is an umbrella term for a range of genres that provide a softened form of communication by combining information and entertainment within one outlet.<sup>15</sup> Infotainment has been propelled by a scramble for audiences in a competitive media environment by commercial television stations. “News coverage has thus become a potential source of revenue for media companies instead of just a societal duty. Consequently, many producers of news are guided by a media logic in which news outlets aim to survive commercially, rather than by a public logic in which informing the audience would be the primary goal”<sup>16</sup> This changing nature of news dissemination made news producers tailor information towards the needs of the market, therefore presenting information in the form of entertainment. The news thus became entertaining and entertainment becomes news. This is achieved by making the news more accessible to the audience in terms of language, presentation style and framing, “to evoke engagement of all citizens, political content should be produced in a diverse range of styles, modes, and combinations of topics that match the capacities, experiences, and interests of everybody, including “non-elite” citizens. Infotainment, arguably, does so.”<sup>17</sup>

### ***Gidan Badamasi* Drama of Arewa 24 Television Station**

Arewa 24 television station was launched in 2013 as the first 24-hour Hausa-speaking television station in northern Nigeria through funding from the State Department of the US government in order to promote peace building, ensure deradicalisation and counter violent extremism as guides to its programming. Thus the aim was to provide uninterrupted entertainment to the audience.

Since its commencement of broadcasting in 2014, Arewa 24 has become the foremost Hausa-language television station that magnifies the rich Hausa culture through programming that focuses on deeply-rooted socio-political issues and drama presentations that highlight societal problems. The station had an audience of 38 million as of February 2020. Another core area of the

---

14 World Health Organization, *Managing Epidemics: Key Facts about Major Deadly Diseases*, Geneva: World Health Organization, 2018.

15 Mark Boukes, ‘Infotainment,’ in *International Encyclopedia of Journalism Studies. Forms of Journalism*, T. P. Vos, F. Hanusch, D. Dimitrakopoulou, M. Geertsema-Sligh and A. Sehl (eds), Hoboken (NJ): Wiley-Blackwell, 2019, doi: 10.1002/9781118841570.iejs0132 2019.

16 Boukes, ‘Infotainment,’ p. 1.

17 Boukes, ‘Infotainment,’ p. 3.

station's programming is providing by a platform for up-coming musicians and artists.

In addition, Arewa 24 has a robust online presence, where content is made available on social media such as YouTube. Furthermore, there also exists a phone application *Arewa 24 on Demand* for mobile phone users to subscribe to watch any programme at the viewer's convenience globally.

*Gidan Badamasi (Badamasi's House)* is one of the favourites of many drama series aired by Arewa 24, running into its third season. The drama falls within the *Sit-Com* genre and has family conflict as its central theme. Family conflicts are common in Hausa television drama and home videos. They "mainly focus attention on family conflicts and upholding traditional Hausa family values."<sup>18</sup> The show is produced and directed by Falalu A. Dorayi. Its central plot is a battle of wits between a rich, but stingy old man, wheel chair-bound Alhaji Badamasi and his many cunning and greedy children, led by his eldest son Dankwambo.

## Methodology

This paper is based on a qualitative research technique, whereby it relies on qualitative content analysis of two selected short dramas produced by Falalu A. Darayi. Content analysis is conducted in order to document the words, themes and concepts used within the selected dramas in order to make inferences about the messages they contained and how they are used in educating audiences about non-pharmaceutical COVID-19 preventive protocols as outlined by the NCDC in two selected episodes.

Qualitative Content Analysis is a technique for systematic description of spoken or visual communication. It involves analysis of media content such as television, movies, videos and Internet. The justification for adopting content analysis is that the study focused on the production of drama series, which according to Walizer and Weinir, involves a systematic procedure devised to examine content.<sup>19</sup>

## Data Presentation and Analyses

For the purpose of qualitative content analysis, two specially produced episodes of *Gidan Badamasi* were selected. They are: (i) *Rashin sani ya fi dare duhu* ("Knowledge is better than ignorance"), and (ii) *Cin kasuwa da Corona* ("Business in Corona").

18 Abdalla Uba Adamu, *Transglobal Media Flows and African Popular Culture – Revolution and Reaction in Muslim Hausa Popular Culture*, Kano: Visually Ethnographic Productions, 2007, p. 79.

19 Michael H. Walizer and Paul L. Wienir, *Research methods and analysis: Searching for relationships*, New York: Harper & Row, 1978.

1. Storyline of *Rashin sani ya fi dare duhu* (2 minutes, 25 seconds)

Three of Alhaji Badamasi's grown-up children are dressed up in preparation to attend a friend's party despite the outbreak of the Corona pandemic. Seated in his courtyard, Alhaji Badamasi queries their decision to attend a party. Their decision to attend was informed by the vast range of misinformation about the Corona Virus, such as that the disease does no harm to young Africans. In agreement with Alhaji Badamasi, the eldest son Dankwambo debunked all the misinformation by highlighting the non-pharmaceutical Covid-19 Protocols and he locks the gates to prevent them from going out.

2. Storyline of *Cin kasuwa da Corona* (2 minutes, 50 seconds)

Adhama, Alhaji Badamasi's son-in-law, is set to return to his business after the lockdown imposed to curtail the spread of Corona. From home he is tutored by his wife on how to observe one of the key Covid-19 protocols before going out. At his place of business he was also instructed by his boss to follow the new business rules during the pandemic. Although he registered displeasure with the new rules, his boss explains that observing the new rules is the only solution to check the spread of Covid-19. He further explains in detail the inevitability of living with the new rules.

## **Discussion**

The first episode of *Gidan Badamasi* is entitled *Rashin Sani Ya Fi Dare Duhu* ("Knowledge is Better than Ignorance") and was produced during the outbreak, with society fighting infodemic in part caused by misinformation about the virus. The episode starts with three children of Alhaji Badamasi coming out of the house and about to get into a car to attend a party. The way the trio were portrayed signifies the young's exuberance; Bazooka is holding a guitar, Gimba is shown dancing his way to the car, while Zilly is well-dressed for a party. However, their encounter with their father, who is seated in the courtyard while shaving, show they were misinformed about the disease that had already consumed the lives of many. Upon sighting them, Alhaji calls them and enquires where they are going 'naked.' The word naked is used to describe their vulnerability, a point Alhaji emphasised "Going out without face masks is like moving around naked."

The children claim that as young people and as Africans, they are immune to the disease. Dankwambo, Alhaji's eldest son drives in to demand what is going on. When the father tells him they are going to a party during the pandemic, he expresses his astonishment and informs them there is no way they can go out without face masks. Dankwambo tells them that "Corona doesn't discriminate

between the young and the old. The only solution is washing hands, wearing of face masks and social distancing.” Zilly and Gimba say they have never seen a patient of Covid-19 and that both are physically sound. Dankwambo further observes that a person may contact Covid-19 and remain asymptomatic and will go about spreading the disease to loved ones like their aged father without knowing it. Upon reaching an understanding about the dangers of attending a party during the pandemic, the house of Badamasi is chained closed.

The second episode is produced as it became clear that people had to learn to live with Corona after months of lockdown and as businesses were gradually re-opening, hence the title *Cin Kasuwa da Corona* (“Business in Corona”). When Adhama is preparing to go out to his business, his wife Hauwa is shown directing him on how to wash his hands properly with soap and water for 20 seconds to avoid spreading the virus and to cover his face with anything that can conveniently cover the mouth and nose, not necessarily the conventional face mask. At the stall, Adhama’s boss, Zaidu is shown directing his customers on the ‘new normal,’ which includes the rule of maintaining a two-meter space between people and applying hand sanitiser before and after touching the wares on display. He also offers face masks for sale at a discounted rate. The programme does not limit the application of Covid-19 protocols to seller and buyer, but also to employees of the same business. It shows how Zaidu uses a tape to demarcate how they will be seating at the stall with Adhama, and also insists that whenever Adhama interacts with the wares for sale he should sanitise his hands with alcohol-based sanitiser. These prevention methods are also re-echoed by Adhama as the only means of preventing the spread.

At the beginning, both episodes start with the regular theme music and an animated picture of Alhaji Badamasi’s house. By so doing, the producer may be evoking the popularity of the programme among the audience of the television station and inducing them to pay attention to what is aired. However, the house is embossed against a background that involves an image of the virus and the titles of the episodes. When observing the framing of the camera shots of the drama, we discover that, despite the display of ignorance about the dangers posed by Covid-19 by some of the characters, all the shots are framed to emphasise social distancing, with each of the characters standing or sitting 2 meters away from each other. At the conclusion of each episode, instead of the end credits to accompany the theme music, a picture of the Producer/Director is shown with a face covering and a bold text that states *Ka rufe fuskar ka, ka kare sauran mutane* (“Cover your face to protect others”), which may have been done to give the audience a lasting impression about the messages contained in each episode.

## **Conclusions**

This paper has shown that information when fused with entertainment can be used to convey messages. *Gidan Badamasi* has incorporated the NCDC-outlined Covid-19 non-pharmaceutical preventive protocols into drama and at the same time debunked infodemics that have accompanied the outbreak of the pandemic using local language understood by the majority of people in northern Nigeria.

The findings of this research are:

1. Local drama in local language is a channel of communication that can be harvested towards the attainment of societal goals in the time of the pandemic.
2. *Gidan Badamasi* television drama utilises characters, actions, dialogues and camera framing to present Covid-19 prevention protocols to families.
3. The drama is also used to discredit misinformation that feeds the infodemic in society
4. The drama subtly educates businesses on how to operate during the pandemic.

Based on the above findings, this research concludes that television dramas can be used to promote a social cause, in this case dramas presenting Covid-19 prevention protocols to families and businesses on how to restart after lockdown. However, the subject of further research may be to investigate the extent to which this changes the attitudes of media audiences.