

# Public Awareness and Sensitization Campaigns on HIV/AIDS in Nigeria

by

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## Abstract

The communicative effectiveness of language use is examined in this paper. This is done with particular reference to the texts of public awareness/sensitization campaigns on HIV/AIDS in Nigeria. Hence texts primarily meant to create awareness and sensitize the general public on the dangers of the HIV/AIDS pandemic are tested in a survey using questionnaires to determine if perceived messages of the texts are understood, as intended. Using the statistics of mean as the common indicator of central tendency, findings show that majority of the respondents do not feel influenced by the awareness and sensitization campaign texts on HIV/AIDS. [*editor note*: tables provided by the author related to this study were excluded, hence, contact the author for expensive findings regarding the tables: the full written content is present].

## Introduction

Human beings usually employ language for the primary goal of communicating their messages and feelings among themselves. The receivers of the messages are often expected to understand the intentions of the senders through the choices of linguistic forms made by the senders. This expectation is a very important facet of communication. Whereas scholars have spent centuries discussing the nature and form of language, very little appears to have been done in analyzing the use of language to be able to bring out the successful or unsuccessful degree of its deployment and the consequences of each outcome. Until Austin (1962), Searle (1969, 1979) and Grice (1975) came to limelight, it would seem that the scrutiny of the pragmatic uses to which language is put in communication contexts was simply without any seat, not to talk of having a back seat in the journey towards unveiling the complex phenomena of language. Halliday (1978, 1980), Back and Harnich (1979), Coulthard (1977) and Leech (1983), amongst others, have added their strong voices to the imperative to examine aspects of languages as a tool in use, rather than as mere “formal system” (Leech, 1983:10).

Our study therefore attempts to examine the communicative effectiveness of selected public awareness/sensitization texts on HIV/AIDS in Nigeria. In an empirical application using the staff of Keffi Local Government of Nasarawa State, it is investigated if the messages of awareness and sensitization sent out on issues surrounding the HIV/AIDS pandemic are understood by the workers and the impact fully felt and therefore said to have achieved their objectives.

The public awareness and sensitization campaign on HIV/AIDS in Nigeria today can be said to be at its peak. This is coming on the heels of the revelation that Nigeria is one of the countries in Africa in which the disease is said to be pandemic. There is therefore, a concerted effort to stem the tide of the spread of the dreaded disease in order to avert a catastrophic consequence on the countrys' economic, social, political as well as moral bearings. Public awareness and sensitization campaigns are one of the many efforts geared towards minimizing risky behaviours by encouraging moral uprightness especially in sexual matters between both sexes. Our concern in this paper is primarily on the use of language in the campaign by the various campaigners against the scourge using diverse means and media at their disposal. Chief amongst these anti-HIV/AIDS campaigners are the Federal Ministry of Information, Federal Ministry of Health as well as Federal & State Government Parastatals like the National Action Committee Against Aids (NACA) which is replicated in both outlook and functions across the 36 states of the nation and F.C.T Abuja. This is in addition to sustained campaigns emanating from specialized and non-specialized non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Education-based Organizations (EBOs), Faith-based organizations (FBOs), Labour-Based Organization, (LBOs), Parents, Teachers and sundry other bodies.

These campaigns are carried and sustained through various ways and means. Chief amongst these are the Television and Radio Jingles, talk-show programmes and drama presentation, Newspaper and Magazine adverts, posters, out door billboards, pamphlets and hand bills. Others include door-to-door campaigns, musical concerts and road-side shows.

The principal target of these campaigns is of course the general public. It is for this reason that selected lexical items considered central to the theme of the campaigns—namely, “abstinence”, “safe-sex”, “risky-behaviours”, “unsafe-blood”, “piercing instrument” and “stigmatization” amongst others are singled out from the mass of materials consulted for this research for testing the communicative effectiveness of the campaigns against the spread of HIV/AIDS in Nigeria.

The workers of Keffi Local Government of Nasarawa State are used as a basis for generalization. By “effectiveness” in this study we mean that the awareness and sensitization texts are understood, assimilated and the messages received by the public in such a manner that the objective (i.e to sensitize and educate Nigerians on the dangers of HIV/AIDS) is achieved. This study will be carried out within the framework of this hypothesis: “Public awareness/sensitization campaign texts on HIV/AIDS lack potent communicative effectiveness.”

## Method and Procedures

The study depended mainly on the questionnaire method for data collection. The closed questionnaire was preferred to the open questionnaire. The closed questionnaire, though limiting in some respects, has the advantages of guiding the respondent to provide answers that will help the researcher with the information he is looking for.

Both the senior and junior staff of Keffi Local Government Area of Nasarawa state were used as respondents for testing the communication effectiveness of the HIV/AIDS public awareness/sensitization campaigns texts. 82 respondents were used initially but only 75 completed the research. The stratified random sampling method was used because it exposed each member of the population to the calculable likelihood of being sampled. This assisted us in identifying the degree of similarity and divergence in the responses according to status and level of education. The questionnaire was administered in two stages. The first stage involved the pre test questionnaire, while the second involved the main test.

The most important issue in the research and in fact the main pillar on which its usefulness rests is the proof or evidence of the impact or change of perception brought about by the HIV/AIDS public awareness/sensitization texts. We therefore have to be sure that the change was due to the influence of the HIV/AIDS public awareness/sensitization texts mainly. The use of pre test questionnaire therefore rested on this fact. Indeed, the reality of our research context is that word of our respondents could not just be taken for granted. A measurably objective device of finding out how effective the HIV/AIDS public awareness/sensitization texts have influenced and changed our respondents was to use a pre-test questionnaire to find out their attitude before they were exposed to the awareness texts.

**Pre-Test:** The pretest questionnaire contained a short section seeking broad knowledge of the respondents' background. The remaining section, without linking the question to HIV/AIDS public awareness/sensitization texts, attempted to find out general understanding of the respondents on such issues as "abstinence", "risky-behaviour", "unsafe-blood", "piercing instrument" and "stigmatization". These issues were themselves taken from the HIV/AIDS public awareness/sensitization texts but not linked to issues on HIV/AIDS in the pretest. They were only linked to HIV/AIDS public awareness/sensitization texts in the main test. A total of 100 copies of questionnaire were distributed at the pretest stage, but only 82 were completed and returned by the respondents. This represented 82% of the total number of questionnaires sent out.

The already held knowledge (prior to exposure to the specific HIV/AIDS public awareness/sensitization texts) of the respondents concerning the issues of “abstinence”, “risky-behaviour”, “unsafe blood”, “piercing instrument”, and “stigmatization” as demonstrated in their response to the questionnaire was presented. The questionnaire provided three options from which respondents were to select one which they believed best expressed their understanding of the issues. For the purpose of presenting result in a concise manner, the choices are narrowed to “poor knowledge” and “clear knowledge” depending on whether the respondents selected an option inappropriately or appropriately indicating the meaning of an issue.

## **Main Test**

The questionnaire for the main test consisted of items arranged under a general section which sought to find out the broad knowledge the respondents possessed about HIV/AIDS public awareness/sensitization campaign as a health challenge and its philosophy. The next section went ahead to test the communicative effectiveness of the selected HIV/AIDS public awareness/sensitization texts on the scourge. Under this section, five extracts were selected and written out. Under each extract, questions testing the comprehension of respondents and, more importantly, the impact of the texts on the respondents were then asked. Eliciting the impact of the texts on the respondents was very important because this information was to encompass the core of this research. A communicative encounter can, in part, be adequately assessed from this point of view. It is one thing for a reader or listener to claim he has decoded, it is another thing for this same reader or listener to show that the communication has changed his attitude, belief, position feelings or behaviour in any way(s). Communicative effectiveness seems to lie in this latter aspects of impact on the reader or listener, and this is the most important aspect of our research. To achieve this, questions in the main test were designed for each extract to repeat the search (as in the pretest) for respondents fore knowledge of what the text proposed. If they did not, judging from the sort of response to the preliminary test, but now say they know (after exposure in main test), this might help in judging how effective the texts are. A gap of three weeks was given between the conduct of the pre-test and the main test. The pre-test was undertaken in the last week of March, 2007. It lasted for three days. The main test was carried out in the last week of April, 2007 and it lasted for two days. The motive behind conducting the two separate tests was not disclosed to the respondents.

82 copies of the questionnaire were distributed during the main test. Only respondents who participated in the pre-test were re-sampled to ensure that the aim to link answers of the main test to a previous dependable yardstick was not defeated. Out of the 82 questionnaires distributed 75 were returned representing 91.5% of the total number sent out for the main test.

## Analysis and Discussion

Research in this study shows that of the 75 respondents tested in the main test, 45 or 60% demonstrate poor knowledge of “abstinence” even after going through the sensitization and awareness campaign texts. 30 respondents or 40% show that they have clear knowledge of what sensitization and awareness campaign means. It is worthy to note that on the basis of educational qualification, respondents with BA/Bsc/HND demonstrate that they have a clear knowledge of what abstinence is. Is this knowledge dependent on the communicative effectiveness of the sensitization and awareness campaign texts? A look at the column showing either positive influence or negative influence by sensitization and awareness campaign texts, and the relevant pre-test result shows that out of the 10 respondents who belong to that educational bracket, only one respondent agrees he is positively influenced by the sensitization and awareness campaign text. With regard to the pre-test of “abstinence”, 7 respondents had indicated clear knowledge, while 3 indicated poor response. This means that only one respondent changed his position after the main test, and it is likely that the respondent is the one now showing a positive influence by the sensitization and awareness campaign texts.

It has already been indicated earlier that seven respondents were lost after the pretest. This is because in the pretest we had 82 respondents. But in the main test, they came down to 75. It is important to note that this reduction may have mainly come from respondents in the qualification bracket of WASC and primary school. Hence, the qualification bracket of BA/Bsc/HND was not affected by this reduction. It is therefore useful that discussion of results of the main test concerning respondents of this educational background be linked to the outcome of the pretest. Based on the correlation with the pretest, it can be stated that the respondents claim poor knowledge of “abstinence”. The few (from the high level educational bracket) who demonstrate clear knowledge of abstinence however indicate that this is explainable on other factors but not on the influence of sensitization and awareness campaign texts. It is possible that because of their high level of education, respondents from the B..A/B.Sc/HND qualification may have been exposed to the learning that enabled them to have prior basic knowledge of the idea of “abstinence”. As for the WASC and primary school qualification groups, poor knowledge is generally claimed after both tests. This shows that the sensitization and awareness campaign text, which should have helped in making the difference does not however achieve this.

Thus, out of the 75 respondents 38 or 50.7% demonstrate clear knowledge of “risky-behaviour” while 37 or 49.3% claim poor knowledge of the same concept. This is not markedly different from the performance in the pre-test where 39 or 52% had shown clear knowledge while 43 or 57% showed poor knowledge. In fact, when the reduction in the number of respondents after the pretest is taken into consideration, it would seem that only this reduction creates a difference between generally. Credit cannot really be given to the sensitization and awareness campaign texts on this topic.

With regard to the BA/Bsc/HND qualification bracket, which affords us a good comparative basis, to the extent that the same people in this bracket who participated in the pretest also participated in the main test, we can say that two respondents moved to the clear knowledge column after the main test. Only one out of the two however indicates that this change could be as a result of a positive influence of the sensitization and awareness campaign texts. And generally, with regard only 10 respondents or 13.3% indicate that they were positively influenced by the sensitization and awareness campaign texts. 65 or 86.7% indicate a negative influence.

Research also showed that 57 respondents or 76% showed a clear knowledge of the concept of “unsafe-blood”. 18 or 24% show a poor knowledge. This finding, shows an unexpectedly overwhelming understanding of the concept of “unsafe-blood”. Linking this to the possible impact of the sensitization and awareness campaign text, two remarks can be made. One is that even before exposure to the sensitization and awareness campaign text, a clear understanding of the concept of “unsafe-blood” had been indicated in the pretest. Out of 82 respondents a total of 63 or 76.8% had shown clear knowledge of “unsafe-blood” in the pretest, while 19 or 23.2% showed poor knowledge. Secondly, in the specific attempt to commit respondents during the main tests to make choices concerning the influence or non-influence of sensitization and awareness campaign text, that only 11 respondents or (14.7%) feel influenced by the sensitization and awareness campaign texts, while 64 or 85.3% show that they are not influenced. Again, it is worthy to note that none of the respondents from the qualification bracket of BA/Bsc/HND shows he feels any influence by the sensitization and awareness campaign texts concerning the issue of “unsafe-blood”.

The findings in some situations were very similar, hence, this may be so because the variable in question which is “piercing instruments” can be said to be closely related to social factors, whereas 50 respondents or 66.7% claim clear knowledge of the “piercing instrument”, while 25 or 33.3% claim poor knowledge. Again, as the pretest findings show, awareness of “piecing instruments” was shown before exposure to the relevant sensitization and awareness campaign texts. 49 respondents or 59.8% in that pretest showed clear knowledge of “piercing instrument” while 33 respondents or 40.2% showed poor knowledge. It cannot therefore be very convincingly argued that exposure to the sensitization and awareness campaign texts may have been responsible for the impressive demonstration of clear knowledge about “piercing instrument” in the main test. Moreover, only 7 respondents or 9.3% agree with a possible influence by the sensitization and awareness campaign texts. The behaviour of the BA/Bsc/HND educational qualification group is also not very different from others in this study.

Findings in the study would have been a reversal to the trend as seen within the measurements, except for the obvious block behavior of respondents from the BA/Bsc/HND educational qualification bracket. With all the 10 respondents in this bracket showing demonstration of clear knowledge, an addition of the remaining 22 and 7 respectively from the WASC and primary school bracket gives a total of 39 respondents or 52% showing clear knowledge of the concept of “stigmatization”. 36 respondents or 48% on the other hand, demonstrate poor knowledge of this concept. This is a remarkable change compared to the pretest findings of 46 or 56.1% demonstrating poor knowledge and 36 or 43.9% demonstrating clear knowledge. Ordinarily the credit for this change should now go to the enlightening sensitization and awareness campaign texts. But out of the 75 respondents who participated in the main test, only 12 or 16% indicate possible influence by the sensitization and awareness campaign text. The remaining 63 respondents or 84% indicate non influence by the sensitization and awareness campaign text. Even the single respondent from the group of 10 in the BA/Bsc/HND qualification bracket who had indicated poor knowledge of the concept of “stigmatization” during the pretest, but now shifted to clear knowledge in the main test, does not indicate a possible influence by the sensitization and awareness campaign text. The researcher finds developments such as this one baffling.

### Significant Test of Mean

Apart from the use of percentages to indicate the nature of our findings, we shall, attempt to show the relationship between responses in order to bring out points of convergence and extents of sameness. This will be done through the significance test of mean which has the formula:

$$X = \frac{\Sigma x}{N}$$

Three major steps are involved in this formula:

- $\Sigma X$  = implies additional of sum scores
- $N$  = implies number of scores
- $X$  = implies that to get the mean, total sum scores as found in (a) should be divided by number of scores as found in (b)

The preceding analysis has shown the distribution of respondents according to education and the parameters of clear knowledge or poor knowledge of the topics on which information is being communicated, and a feeling of influence or non influence by the sensitization and awareness campaign text, regarding the various indications of clear knowledge particularly. Using the significance of mean test; which highlight the points of convergence with respect to some variables that show in the results of the main text.

These are the convergence points of clear knowledge and poor knowledge of the concepts of “abstinence”, “risky-behaviour”, “unsafe-blood”, “piercing instrument”, and “stigmatization” which sensitization and awareness campaign texts handled. The mean points of possible influence or no influence of the HIV/AIDS public awareness/sensitization texts in influencing clear knowledge will also be shown.

Hence, the claim for a clear knowledge of the issues has a higher mean of 14.3 compared to that of 10.73 for poor knowledge. Taken in isolation, these means could simply lead to the conclusion that respondents claim an effective communication for the sensitization and awareness campaign texts considering the fact that the findings used for the calculation of the mean were got from the main tests which tested response to the sensitization and awareness campaign texts. Perhaps this is where the value of the pre test comes in. During this test, respondents as shown in the discussion above demonstrate a prior clear knowledge of the issues which were tested generally without reference to the HIV/AIDS sensitization and awareness campaign texts.

Within the main test, we decided to ask respondents to make deliberate mention of their feeling of the sensitization and awareness campaign texts’ influence. As our calculations of mean for this aspect show, the expression of non influence by the sensitization and awareness campaign texts carries the mean of 21.9, while that for some influence carries a mean of 3.8 Recalling, once more, our hypothesis, which states:

The HIV/AIDS public awareness/sensitization campaign texts lack the potency of communicative effectiveness”

We can make the following observations:

1. It is true that HIV/AIDS public awareness/sensitization texts lack the potency of communicative efficiency, to a large extent. This extent, in the context of our findings is that relating mainly to awareness of (and demonstration of this) the different backgrounds of decoders, for whom messages are intended. The educational backgrounds of our respondents for example are not the same. This must have influenced the sort of responses given by those of them in the WASC and Primary School qualifications bracket.
2. It is also noteworthy that majority of respondents who demonstrated low feeling of influence by the sensitization and awareness campaign texts come from this WASC-Primary School qualification bracket. It is therefore possible that if the HIV/AIDS public awareness/sensitization campaign took their relatively low educational background into account and allowed this to influence the contents of the texts a more positive communicative effectiveness of the texts would have been shown.



## Conclusion

The communicative effectiveness of selected HIV/AIDS public awareness/sensitization texts has been examined in this paper. Selected civil servants at Keffi Local Government of Nasarawa State were asked to respond to the texts as a means of testing their (texts) communicative effectiveness. The importance of communicative language use has been brought to the fore by the results of the test. Communication through language should be viewed as transcending mere information exchange. It should attempt to anticipate the background, mood and psyche of the decoder(s). This need is even more urgent in the developing nations where the language (of mass communication) involved are those of the ex-colonial masters but not mother tongues. Moreover the fact that most studies of these colonial language in the developing nations have tended to focus on structure and form, necessitates an urgent shift to the dynamic function of language. In other words, more studies on the languages are required now more than ever to focus on their effective use in communication.

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The National Action Committee on AIDs the Presidency, Abuja.

Information on HIV/AIDS – Trust Support Association Support Group for PLWH, PABA AND  
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“Remember, your best protection against HIV/Aids is as simple as ABC.

A - Abstinence

B - Be Faithful

C - Use a condom”

A Television Advert sponsored by F.C.T committee against Aids carried on AIT on 20 February  
2005.

“Aids is real, avoid casual sex, stop the stigmatization of HIV/AIDS patients”

An 93.5 Aso-Radio Jingle carried on 25th July 2005 sponsored by the  
Federal Ministry of Health.

“Aids is real. Abstinence is the your sure protection.”

Radio Jingle sponsored by the Society United Against Aids” carried on  
Radio Nigeria Abuja on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2006.

“Aids is Real Avoid risky behaviours. Go for voluntary counselling and testing today”

A radio advert sponsored by AIT and carried by both Ray power Radio and  
AIT on daily basis before and after news bulletin.