

ASSESSING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY MINISTRY OF HEALTH IN THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST MALARIA IN THE FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY, ABUJA

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Abstract

This study investigated the effectiveness of the communication strategies deployed by the Federal Ministry of Health in its malaria campaigns in the FCT, Abuja. The rationale for the study stems from growing concerns that despite the various communication efforts by the Ministry of Health in the campaigns against malaria in FCT, the burden of the disease has continued to increase. The study employed survey research design and data was collected through 380 valid questionnaire administered across four Area Councils of FCT (AMAC, Bwari, Gwagwalada and Kwali). The study was anchored on the Theory of Planned Behaviour and the Agenda Setting Theory. The study found that the ministry's communication strategies were not effective, with 50.5% of respondents saying they were not effective; 34.7%, slightly effective; 6.8%, very ineffective while only 8.4% said they were effective. It found that malaria messages were rarely and occasionally disseminated and mostly relied on a top-down communication approach. The study concluded that while there is some level of awareness about the ministry's communications strategies in the campaign against malaria, the effectiveness is low. The study, among others, recommended an increase in the frequency of dissemination of malaria messages, adopting a bottom-up/participatory communication approach, and combining both English and local languages in malaria campaigns for better outcomes.

Keywords: Assessment, Communication, Strategies, Malaria, Effectiveness, Messages

Introduction

Communication plays a pivotal role in driving positive change across various sectors, including the economy, banking, commerce, aviation, governance, education, and health. In public health, effective communication is crucial for the success of interventions and campaigns aimed at controlling and preventing diseases such as malaria, polio, diabetes, cancer, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS (World Health Organisation (WHO, 2024). Strategic health communication enhances public awareness of disease risks and solutions, provides motivation and skills for prevention, and increases demand for appropriate healthcare services (Adamu, 2019; Larson, 2020). Mass communication,

as a powerful social force, facilitates positive societal change (Ngonso, 2021). Supporting this assertion, Asemah, Ekharefo & Santas (2023) argue that communication is central to human existence and daily interactions, ensuring societal order and coherence. Public health communication strategies are designed to inform, educate, and persuade populations to adopt behaviours that prevent disease transmission and improve overall well-being (Vargas & Beltran, 2021; Rogers, 2019).

Malaria remains a major global health concern, with Sub-Saharan Africa bearing the highest burden of morbidity and mortality (WHO, 2024). The disease is a leading cause of illness and death,

particularly among children under five and pregnant women (RBM Partnership to End Malaria, 2023). Nigeria accounts for the largest share of malaria cases and deaths globally, contributing approximately 40% of the global malaria burden (WHO, 2024). The Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, is among the regions in Nigeria with a high prevalence of malaria, despite the various control measures and communication strategies implemented (National Malaria Control Programme (NMCP), 2024).

Communication strategies play pivotal role in the campaign aimed at eradicating malaria or reducing the high prevalence and burden of the disease in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Over the years, the Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH) has adopted several communication strategies in its bid to mitigate and ultimately eliminate malaria in the Federal Capital Territory. Despite the Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH) implementing various communication strategies through the National Malaria Elimination Programme (NMEP), malaria remains a significant public health challenge in the FCT (NMEP, 2023). The Nigerian National Malaria Control Programme (NMCP, 2024) reports that malaria incidence in Abuja has continued to rise, indicating possible gaps in the effectiveness of communication efforts deployed by the Federal Ministry of Health. The report further highlights that Nigeria accounted for 46% of global malaria deaths, with Abuja among the most affected areas (NMCP, 2024).

While Nigeria has the target of eliminating malaria by 2030, the rising cases and high burden of the disease in the FCT despite diverse communication efforts deployed by the ministry would constitute a significant barrier to actualising the goal. Besides, the negative impact of malaria on the productivity of the citizens, family finances, health and overall wellbeing of the people of the FCT cannot be over

emphasised. Not addressing this public health problem implies that more lives would continue to be lost to this disease which has long been eliminated in other parts of the world such as Algeria, Mauritius, Armenia, Argentina, Paraguay and China, among others.

Given the foregoing backdrop, this study therefore, assessed the communication strategies adopted by the Federal Ministry of Health in the campaign against malaria to ascertain their effectiveness.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the several communication strategies deployed by the ministry through the National Malaria Elimination Programme (NMEP) in the campaign against malaria, the burden still remains very high in the nation's capital. The disease has been identified as a leading cause of morbidity and mortality among residents of Abuja. A total of 1.4 million of the population of FCT suffered from malaria in 2024 (WHO, 2024). Not evaluating the effectiveness of the malaria communication campaign strategies adopted by the ministry may lead to a worsening situation and crisis in terms of malaria prevalence and cases in the territory. This study, therefore, assessed the communication strategies adopted by the Federal Ministry of Health in the campaign against malaria in the FCT to ascertain their effectiveness.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To identify the communication strategies employed by the Federal Ministry of Health in the campaign against malaria in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.
2. To ascertain how the existing communication strategies used by the ministry in combating malaria in the Federal Capital, Territory, Abuja, are deployed in the campaign against the disease.

3. To determine the effectiveness of these communication strategies in the campaign against malaria in the FCT.
4. To identify the challenges faced by the Federal Ministry of Health in implementing its communication strategies against malaria in Abuja.

Review of Related Literature

The deployments of communication strategies in malaria campaign efforts are very paramount as they determine the success or failure of the campaign against malaria. The Federal Ministry of Health (FMoH), in collaboration with various stakeholders, has over the years employed diverse communication strategies to enhance awareness, prevention, and treatment-seeking behaviour among residents. Deployment of communication strategies entail modalities employed in disseminating messages to target audience. But there are concerns over the effectiveness of these communication strategies deployed by the ministry over the time giving the rising prevalence of malaria in the FCT. Adepoju (2020) posits that the Federal Ministry of Health has relied heavily on television, radio and newspapers platforms to disseminate information about malaria prevention and treatment. But how effective have the deployments of these communication strategies been? While it is believed that the deployments of these channels would ensure broad coverage, reaching diverse demographics within the FCT, the outcome often prove otherwise as there are concerns that relying on the deployments of these strategies alone may not have achieved the desired outcomes especially in the rural communities and hinterlands giving a number of limiting factors.

Asemah (2015) posits that high illiteracy rates in rural areas limit the effectiveness of newspapers as a communication medium for malaria control. Many rural dwellers may not be able to read or interpret written health messages, thus rendering print media

ineffective. Additionally, economic constraints may restrict access to television and newspapers, further limiting the reach of these media channels. Corroborating the aforementioned, Aondowase (2023) argued that access to mass media in rural areas is often constrained by infrastructural limitations and economic factors. The effectiveness of any communication strategy heavily depends on the communicator's ability to deliver messages that resonate with the target audience. In some instances, communicators may lack the necessary skills or cultural understanding to craft messages that align with the values and beliefs of rural populations. This disconnect can lead to ineffective messaging and reduced engagement with malaria prevention initiatives.

Community engagement and mobilisation are critical factors that must be put into consideration in the deployments of communication strategies for malaria control. Deployments through town hall meetings, sensitisation programmes, and community dialogues have been instrumental in encouraging behavioural change at the grassroots level (Olawuyi & Adeleke, 2022). These efforts must involve traditional and religious leaders to foster credibility and acceptance.

The effectiveness of communication strategies in malaria control and prevention are very pivotal and critical. Utilising traditional mass media channels, particularly radio and television, as the sole means of disseminating malaria messages in Nigeria presents several notable drawbacks. These limitations can hinder the effectiveness of health communication campaigns aimed at controlling and preventing malaria. A significant portion of Nigeria's population resides in rural areas where access to radio and television is often limited, hence, may lead to the ineffectiveness of such communication strategy. Ubong and Nsikan (2024) highlight that the absence of broadcast

receiving sets in poverty-stricken areas impedes access to health-related messages, thereby excluding a considerable segment of the population from vital health information. For communication strategies in the fight against malaria to be effective and result-oriented, such strategies must be participatory in nature.

Review of Empirical Studies

Over the years, much works have been done by scholars and researchers on the role of communication in promoting campaigns on public health to engender behavioural change. This part of the study reviewed some related empirical studies done by researchers as they relate to assessment of communication strategies in the control of malaria as well as other related public health issues.

Bamidele (2020) evaluated the effectiveness of mass media, community outreach, and educational campaigns by the Federal Ministry of Health in promoting malaria prevention. A mixed-methods approach combining content analysis of media campaigns and surveys with community members in various regions was used as methodology. Findings of the study revealed that mass media campaigns, especially through radio and television, significantly improved malaria awareness and prevention behaviours among the targeted population. It however found that limited access to these platforms in rural areas hindered the reach of the malaria campaign messages to the target population. The study recommended expansion of the use of community radio and local outreach programmes to ensure rural populations are reached.

While this study is relevant to the current one, it however, did not evaluate the actual change in behaviour resulting from the increased awareness as a result of the communication strategies adopted by the ministry. Its focus is too broad as it covered the entire country and would be difficult to narrow down the finding of the study on a particular location. The current study is

dissimilar as it specifically examined the communication strategies adopted by the ministry in the Federal Capital Territory.

Also, Ngwu (2017), examined the communication strategies used in the National Immunisation Campaign in Cross River State, Nigeria between 2013 to 2016 to ascertain its effectiveness or otherwise. The study identified inadequate health information, unavailability of vaccines, inadequate health workers, and low local participation in the planning and implementation of the communication strategies as major challenges militating against complete vaccination and eradication of childhood killer diseases in mostly rural parts of the state.

Nyiam and Ngwu (2020), studied Strategic Communication and Management of Malaria Disease in Cross River State, Nigeria. The overall objective of the study was to determine the effectiveness or not of the communication strategies, employed by the state ministry of health to address the malaria pandemic in the state. The study found that poor access to media and weak communication infrastructure hindered the reach and impact of malaria messages. It also found limited involvement of community actors in the communication efforts. It recommended that malaria communication should move beyond reliance on mainstream media and embrace a mix channels. While the study is relevant and related, there is a gap as it focused on Cross River while the current study was on the FCT.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and the Agenda Setting Theory.

Agenda Setting Theory.

The Agenda Setting Theory was developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Lewis Shaw in 1972, based on their study of the 1968 US presidential election, also known as the "Chapel Hill study". This theory suggests that the media plays a significant

role in shaping public opinion by determining which issues are given the most attention, and thereby influencing what people think about. Applying the Agenda-Setting Theory to malaria communication strategies in Abuja provides a valuable framework for evaluating the effectiveness of public health messaging. The Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH) can use agenda-setting principles to position malaria as a critical public health issue through sustained and strategic media engagement.

Furthermore, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), developed by Icek Ajzen (1991), provides a psychological framework for understanding human behaviour. It posits that behaviour is influenced by three key components: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. These factors shape an individual's behavioural intentions, which in turn determine actual behaviour. Given its explanatory power, the Theory of Planned Behaviour is highly relevant in evaluating the Federal Ministry of Health's communication strategies in the fight against malaria in FCT, Abuja. Applying the Theory of Planned Behaviours to malaria communication strategies in Abuja provides a useful framework for assessing their effectiveness. By leveraging subjective norms, campaigns involving religious leaders, community influencers, and peer networks can foster social support for malaria prevention.

Research Methodology

The study adopted the survey research method using structured questionnaire as instrument for data collection. Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekhareafo & Okpanachi (2012) note that survey is an empirical study that uses questionnaire to discover descriptive characteristics of a phenomenon. A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted for the study. The four area councils selected for this study include Abuja Municipal Area Council (1,693, 400), Bwari (500,100) Kwali (188,000) and Gwagwalada 346,000). The researcher used the Taro Yarmane statistical formula to arrive at a sample size of 400 out of the FCT's projected population of 4,210,000 according to the 2024 National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) population projection (NBS, 2024). A total of 400 questionnaire were administered across the four FCT area councils with 380 of the questionnaire returned valid while 20 suffered mortalities, thus, yielding 95% return rate. The sample size was arrived at using the formula:

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

Where:

n= sample size

N=population size

e= margin of error (usually set at 0.05)

Calculation

Given population size (N) = 4,210,000

Let's assume a margin of error (e) = 0.05

$$n = \frac{4,210,000}{1 + 4,210,000(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{4,210,000}{1 + 4,210,000(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{4,210,000}{10,526}$$

$$n = 399.95$$

Therefore, the sample size is 400 rounding up to the nearest whole number

Results

Table 1 Demographics Characteristics of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	207	54.6%
Female	173	45.4%
Total	380	100%
Age Group		
18–24	83	21.8%
25–34	93	24.5%
35–44	117	30.8%
45 and above	87	22.9%
Total	380	100%
Occupation		
Student	69	18.2%
Employed	147	38.7%
Self-employed / Business entrepreneur	124	32.6%
Unemployed	40	10.5%
Total	380	100%
Education Level		
Tertiary	212	55.8%
Secondary	107	28.2%
Primary	41	10.8%
No formal education	20	5.3%
Total	380	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The implication of the data is that the findings of this study are robust, inclusive and all-encompassing since it captured respondents from diverse age groups, gender, occupational and educational backgrounds.

Table 2: Are you aware of the Federal Ministry of Health’s communication strategies?

<i>Response</i>	Frequency	Percentages
<i>Highly aware</i>	37	9.7%
<i>Aware</i>	126	33.2%
<i>Moderately aware</i>	157	41.3%
<i>Not aware</i>	62	16.3%
Total	380	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The implication of the finding from the above table is that there is limitation and gaps in terms of awareness of the ministry’s communication strategies among the respondents. This highlights the need for

more inclusive, accessible, and engaging communication approaches by the ministry to increase awareness among residents of the FCT.

Table 3: Through which channel (s) did you get the awareness about the campaigns?

Response	Frequency	Percentages
Radio/television	231	60.8%
Print media (newspapers/posters)	42	11.1%
Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc)	58	15.3%
Community outreaches/townhalls	25	6.6%
All of the above	34	8.9%
Total	n=380	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The above data which revealed over utilisation and reliance on the traditional electronic mass media channels (television and radio) by the ministry suggests some gaps in the choice of communication channels adopted for its campaigns. The

implication is that not effectively utilising the social media, community outreaches and townhalls as part of its communication channels could limit the reach and momentum of its malaria awareness campaigns among the people.

Table 4: Which of these options best describes how the Federal Ministry of Health's communication strategies are deployed?

Response	Frequency	Percentages
Top down approach	261	68.7%
Bottom up approach	26	6.8%
Collaborative approach	55	14.5%
Decentralised approach	38	10%
Total	380	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The above data implies that decisions on choice of messaging, design, and dissemination are solely controlled by the Ministry, with little or no inputs from local

communities and other stakeholders. This will lead to exclusion of community voices and detachment from local realities, thus reducing the effectiveness of messages.

Table 5: How would you rate the overall effectiveness of the Ministry's National Malaria Strategic Communication campaign in your area?

Response	Frequency	Percentages
Very effective	32	8.4%
Slightly effective	132	34.7%
Not effective	192	50.5%
Very ineffective	26	6.8%
Total	380	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The above data implies that the ministry’s malaria communication campaigns in the FCT are largely perceived to be ineffective. This findings highlight some significant gaps in the communication strategy, message design and delivery; and audience engagement by the ministry.

Table 6: What are the challenges facing the implementation of communication strategies for malaria prevention and treatment in your community?

Response	Frequency	Percentages
Difficult use of language	63	16.6%
Insufficient funding	86	22.6%
Wrong communication channels	48	12.6%
Inadequate community engagement	79	20.8%
All of the above	104	27.4%
Total	380	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The findings above highlight the need for the ministry to address the issues of difficult use of language, wrong communication channels, inadequate community engagements and insufficient funding to enhance the effectiveness of its communication efforts against malaria in the FCT.

Discussion of Findings

Findings revealed that majority of the respondents perceived the communication strategies deployed by the Federal Ministry of Health in the campaigns against malaria in FCT as ineffective with more than half (50.5%) of them saying they are not effective. Findings also showed that majority of the respondents said they rarely and occasionally received malaria campaign messages from the ministry. These findings highlight some significant gaps in the ministry’s communication strategies, message design, delivery and audience engagement. For the ministry’s malaria campaigns to be effective, the frequency and intensity of message dissemination must be high to be able to set agenda for the audience. This aligns with

the Agenda Setting Theory which underpins this study. A core assumption of the Agenda-Setting Theory is that media attention influences public perception of an issue’s importance. When an issue (in this case, malaria) receives sustained coverage and publicity, it becomes a dominant topic in public discourse (Folarin, 1998).

Furthermore, the study found that television and radio were the dominant channels used while others such as print media, social media, townhalls and community outreaches were less utilised. This corroborate earlier study by Adepoju (2020) who posits that the Federal Ministry of Health relied heavily on television and radio platforms in its health information dissemination. The over utilisation of radio and television suggest gaps, hence, the need to use multiple channels of communication to increase the level of awareness among residents of the FCT. This aligns with the position of Adams and Jones (2020) who posit the need to adopt a combination of communication channels, including traditional media (radio, television, and print), digital platforms, and community engagement initiatives, to ensure that

information is accessible to all members of the society.

Furthermore, the study revealed that English was the dominant language used by the ministry as indicated by 63.9% of the respondents followed by a combination of English and local languages (32.9%) while local languages only, recorded an insignificant 3.2%. The finding highlights the need for the ministry to overhaul its communication strategies by including more local languages in its malaria campaign messages to enhance inclusivity, effectiveness and impact. This position aligns with previous research which examined the role of indigenous languages in comprehension of public health communication. A study by Nwankwo (2018) found that malaria campaigns in Igbo language led to significantly higher comprehension and reduction in malaria incidence among rural women compared to English-only messages. Similarly, a comparative study in Nigeria and South Africa showed that indigenous languages were strong predictors of message comprehension and trust in health campaigns (Uwah, 2024). Similarly, Oni (2023) argue that English-dominated messaging risks alienating rural or low-literacy populations, thereby undermining inclusivity.

Also, this study found that the ministry mostly relied on top-down communication approach in the deployment of its campaigns against malaria in the FCT. Little attention was given to bottom-up, collaborative and decentralised communication approaches as revealed by the study. The implication of this finding indicates that critical stakeholders were left out. This underscores need for the ministry to adopt more of bottom-up, collaborative and decentralised communication approaches which are participatory and democratic in nature for better outcomes. This aligns with the position of Santas, Inobemhe and Garba (2023) who advocated

participatory communication strategies that involve the people in the design of government communication efforts. They argued that by including people, it will lead to the development of communication strategies that meet their needs.

Furthermore, the study identified difficult use of language, insufficient funding, wrong communication channels and inadequate community engagement as challenges facing the ministry's communication strategies. These findings highlight the need for the ministry to adopt the use of easy to understand language, push for adequate funding of malaria communication efforts, select the right channels of communication and ensure active participation and engagements of community actors in the campaigns. Doing these will enhance the effectiveness of the ministry's malaria campaign efforts in the FCT. Overall, the study has identified a number of gaps and barriers militating against the effectiveness of the Federal Ministry of Health's communication campaigns in the fight against malaria in the FCT. Addressing these gaps and barriers could help in improving the ministry's communication efforts for better outcomes.

Conclusion

While communication is found to be key in engendering the needed behavioural change in the campaign against malaria, findings from this study, however, revealed some gaps and challenges such as low frequency in dissemination of malaria messages; top-down approach instead of participatory approach in its malaria communications strategies; wrong channels of communication; over reliance on the use of English Language as language of communication; non-involvement of community actors; inadequate funding and technological barriers. These barriers if not addressed will affect the overall effectiveness of the Federal Ministry of Health's communication strategies in the

campaigns against malaria in the FCT, Abuja.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions drawn from the study on the assessment of communication strategies adopted by Federal Ministry of Health in the campaign against malaria in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. The Federal Ministry of Health should utilise multiple communication channels and increase the intensity as well as frequency of its malaria campaign messages to increase the level of awareness among residents.
2. The Ministry should shift from a top-down communication approach to a bottom-up, community-driven model by involving local leaders, health workers, opinion leaders, and residents in designing and delivering messages to improve trust, ownership, and message relevance.
3. Beyond television and radio, more emphasis should be placed on social media, community outreaches, town hall meetings, and print materials to reach different demographic groups, especially rural and underserved populations to enhance communication effectiveness.
4. The Federal Ministry of Health should avoid the use of difficult language, wrong communication channels and ensure adequate community engagements and use of indigenous in its malaria campaigns to enhance their effectiveness.

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