

# AUDIENCE PERCEPTION OF CHILD NUTRITION MESSAGES ON COMMUNITY RADIO STATIONS IN ZINDER REGION, NIGER REPUBLIC.

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## **Abstract**

*This study aims at determining audience perception of child nutrition messages on community radio stations in Zinder region, Niger Republic. Through a qualitative and quantitative research method, the work seeks in finding out the community radio stations contribution in promoting child nutrition in Zinder Region. With 203 in 2020 stations, Niger Republic is one of the Africans countries with an important number of community radio stations. Those stations as developmental tools are supposed to contribute significantly in promoting key development sectors. However, despite this important number of community stations, the country is still facing challenges in child health. Through audience survey and content analysis about Kitari FM, Tsirkeao FM, Mai Tama and Martaba FM, the research tries to discover the correlation between child nutrition radios messages and audience perception of those health related content.*

**Keys-words-** *audience perception, child nutrition, community radio, health promotion*

## **Résumé**

*Ce travail est une étude sur les médias depuis le paradigme des médias communautaires. Au Niger, l'Etat et ses partenaires techniques au développement ont reconnu la nécessité de faire intervenir les radios communautaires dans l'amélioration des secteurs clés du développement depuis les années 1990. De ce fait, en 2020, selon le Conseil Supérieur de la Communication (CSC), le Niger est doté de 203 radios communautaires. Malgré le nombre important de ce type de radios, le Niger continue encore de faire face aux problèmes majeurs relatifs à la nutrition infantile. Autrement dit, on constate une inadéquation entre le nombre des radios communautaires et la promotion de la santé infantile. C'est ainsi qu'à travers une méthode quantitative et qualitative, nous allons analyser le contenu des messages diffusés par les radios communautaires de la région de Zinder afin de dégager leur efficacité dans la promotion de la nutrition infantile.*

**Mots-clés-** *perception, radio communautaire, nutrition infantile, promotion de santé*

## **Introduction**

Communication is considered as the bedrock of human society's development. The strong link between communication and

development has led some communication scholars into conceptualizing this relationship by using the concept of development communication. In 1971, Nora cited in Bessette and Rajasunderam (1996, p.10) used the term *development communication* to refer to “the use of communication processes and strategies in disseminating new ideas for positive social changes in rural communities.” These scholars consider development communication as the use of communication strategies in order to bring out positive social changes in rural areas.

Since the 1950’s, development communication played significant role in rural development. For Imoh (2013), development communication was introduced since independence as part of rural development in Africa in order to promote and facilitate the participation of rural dwellers in the process of development decision making.

Community radio stations give the communities the opportunity to participate in the process of local development. It allows the rural dwellers to take part in the development activities through identifying their own problems and ways of solving them. Community radio facilitates the collective participation of the community in programme design in a way that it focuses on local development challenges. Mhagama (2015) argued that community radio stations can be seen as tool for carrying out development projects. They can play a significant role in accompanying developing countries in solving development problems regarding some keys areas such as public health, education, economy and good governance. Niger Republic being one of the developing countries is not left behind in considering community radios as tool for national development.

In Niger, international development bodies are convinced that communication can contribute in enhancing development. They agree that community radio can be used in overcoming development challenges in this country. According to the UNDP (2015), since 1999, international development bodies recognized the importance of community radio stations in carrying out development projects in Niger Republic. This is why in 1998, a rural development programme for Dosso and Tahoua regions in Niger Republic named *le Programme du Développement Rural Ader-Doutchi-Maggia* established the first community radio called *la radio rurale de Keita*. This is followed by the creation of *Radio Gomni* of Bankilaré in Tillabéri in 1999 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Considering their significant role in rural development, community radio stations have been rapidly promoted in Niger Republic by Non-Government Organizations (NGO) and development bodies such as Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Children' Fund (UNICEF), Helen Keller International (HKI). According to the *Conseil Supérieur de la Communication* (CSC) which stands for Supreme Communication Counsel, in May 2021, Niger Republic counted two hundred and three (203) community radio stations. With thirty-five (35) stations, Zinder is the second region behind Tillabéri which has forty-two (42) stations. The capital Niamey, with six (6) stations, has the least number followed by Diffa with eighteen (18) stations. Tahoua has thirty (31), while Maradi, Dosso and Agadez have respectively twenty four (28), twenty two (22) and twenty one (21) stations. As mentioned so far, those community radio stations are meant to promote some key public health issues such as child nutrition, maternal health and malaria.

## **1. Statement of problem**

Niger Republic as other developing countries faces development challenges. According to the 2020 report of the United Nations Development Programmes (UNDP) on Human Development Index (HDI), Niger Republic is the least developed country in the world. This is due to some development challenges in areas such as in improving maternal and child health, enhancing adolescent health, preserving environment, tackling gender inequality, improving agricultural and educational system among others.

According to the Ministry of Public Health, promoting child health is one of the most challenging aspects for Nigerien government. In 2020, according to the annual report on public health, 12.7% of the Niger Republic children suffer a serious malnutrition. With 14.9% Zinder is one of the three regions with the highest figure in terms of child malnutrition. The remaining two regions are Diffa with 19.3% and Agadez with 14.8%. This is very critical because the maximum percentage of child malnutrition shouldn't be beyond 10% according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

It is important to note that, studies on community radio and development such as those by Saaka (2021), Kumar (2018), Charles (2018), Sesonga et al (2017), Schiavo (2016), Mhagama (2015), Baniya (2014) , Imoh (2013), Eric (2010), Banda (2010), Tembo (2010), Milan (2009), Mrutu (2008), Pavarala and Malick (2007) , Diagne (2005) among others , found out that community radio stations can enhance public health, education, agriculture and other local development projects .The researcher noticed that most of these studies focused more on the audience's perception of the media content rather than the media content itself. This is why our study attempts in filling an important gap in terms of research methodology left by previous researches on media studies. So, this research combines the assessment of the media content with audience perception survey about the content.

On the other hand, despite the important number of community radios as mentioned earlier (203 stations), Niger Republic is still facing major development challenges. For the year 2019 for example, Niger republic HDI is 0.394 ranking the country at 189<sup>th</sup> position out of 189 countries of the world. This low HDI is justified through the absence of major improvements in some areas considered to be keys domains for measuring development indices such as child and maternal health, the life expectancy, gender inequality. This problematic situation motivates the present research in order to assess the community radio stations' performance in promoting child nutrition in Zinder Region, Niger Republic.

## **2. Aim and objectives of the research**

This study is aim at assessing the performance of community radio stations in promoting child nutrition in Zinder Region, Niger Republic. That is why the research has the following objectives:

1. To point out the main health messages on community radio stations' programme.
2. To examine the prominence of child nutrition messages in the content of the community radios stations.
3. To analyse the quality of the child nutrition messages.
4. To examine the audience perception of child nutrition messages on community radios stations messages.

### **3. Research questions**

This study, we will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What are the main health messages in community radio stations' programme?
2. What is the prominence of child nutrition messages in community radios' content?
3. What is the quality of child nutrition health messages?
4. How do the audience perceive messages related to child nutrition?

### **4. Significance of the study**

The significance of the research can be perceived from various angles. First, this study contributes in to enriching research findings on the area of development communication. This is very significant for a developing country like Niger Republic. The outcome of the study can help in exploring the role of community radio stations in addressing specific public health problems. Because the country is facing perennial public health challenges, any study on this area is of great importance for Nigerien government and the society at large.

Second, the research will add to the body of existing knowledge in the area of community media studies. As mention so far, community radio stations dominate the media landscape in Niger and very few studies were carried out on this category of media organisations. These community radio stations are supposed to be agent for development. Despite the long experience of community radio stations in Niger, there isn't much studies aim at assessing the performance of these small scale media stations. This study will help in finding out the strength and weaknesses of such radio stations.

Third, the present research can open ways for further studies on community radio stations. Communication research is not well developed in Niger compared to other neighbouring countries such as Nigeria for example. So, this study is of utmost importance because it will contribute in improving literature on community media studies in particular and the communication research in general.

## **5. Scope and limitation**

This research is exclusively on community radio stations in Zinder region, Niger Republic. The study focuses on the community radios' content related to child nutrition. Also, the researcher intends to find out the audience perception of child nutrition messages on community radio stations. The study concerns only the year 2020. This is because according to the Nigerien Ministry of public health, in 2020 child malnutrition was a serious public health problem. The researcher examines child nutrition messages and the audience perception of those messages on community radio stations.

## **6. Literature review**

For this study the review of relevant literatures will be undertaken. This will include books, journals and relevant dissertation on audience and media studies.

The study of Mbajiorgu et al (2016) on audience perception and attitudes of media coverage of HIV/AIDS pandemic in Limpopo province of South Africa stands as one of the important literature for this research. These scholars succeed in carrying out a study on audience perception of health related media content in one of African countries. The objective of their research is to determine audience perception and attitudinal response on media coverage of HIV/AIDS pandemic in a Limpopo. Through survey approach, Mbajiorgu et al capture public views on media content related to HIV/AIDS in their area of study. The findings of the research reveal that media coverage of HIV/AIDS pandemic was comprehensive and effective. This helped the audience into taking informed decisions regarding the pandemic. In other words, audience judged the Limpopo media coverage of the pandemic as highly comprehensive. According to the study, audience were able to interpret and assign meaning to media messages on the subject matter. The public perceived positively the media health related content. The researchers argued that the messages were positively perceived in the sense that they influenced the attitudinal responses of the audience related to HIV/AIDS. These attitudinal responses include consulting or seeing a doctor or a health care service provider on HIV/AIDS. However, the study discovered that there were no specific

messages targeting youth and teenagers about the discussed disease. Also, the researchers observed that media coverage didn't specifically focus on some issues related to the disease such as the aspect of transmission, treatment and consequences. That is why the study recommends a more specific coverage of HIV/AIDS pandemic in Limpopo province. It is important to note that Mbajjorgu et al (2016) adopt survey approach in conducting the study on the audience perception of media messages.

However, for this study, the researcher intends to qualitatively analyse the child nutrition messages on community radio stations before capturing audience perception of these messages. In other words, being a study on audience perception of health related messages, this research combines qualitative content analysis with survey approach. This combination facilitates in assessing the quality of the health related media content in order to successfully determine audience perception of the received messages.

The study of Ofusu-Boateng and Acquaye (2021) is another work that reinforces the literature review for this research. These scholars work on audience perception of media content in Ghanaian context. Through qualitative research method, their work determines audience perception of information credibility on media platforms in Ghana. By adopting Focus Group Discussion as technique, the researchers collect data on participants' perception of information credibility on media platforms. The findings of the study reveal that audience express a high degree of scepticism in trusting information from media platforms. Ofusu-Boateng and Acquaye argue that audience perceived social media messages as less credible. According to their research, social media messages are perceived as misleading and untrue information. The participants of the study believe that media platforms messages are characterised with misinformation and fake news. Based on the research findings, social media platforms succeed in spreading information quantitatively but not qualitatively. In other words, audience don't have a positive perception of information credibility on media platforms. The findings of this study reveal how audience perceived media messages. However, the researchers didn't mention the determinants of audience perception of media content. So, this is a gap that the present research on audience perception of child nutrition messages tries to fill.

Mofoluke (2016), through his study, entitled “ audience participation and perception of media programmes: implication or national development”, contributed in enriching the literature on audience perception researches. The work investigates audience participation and perception of media programmes. The researcher uses survey approach in collecting data on audience opinions about media development programmes. Mofoluke discovers that audience perceived media programmes as beneficial in the sense that it helps them in making informed decisions. This is to say that the media programmes are so comprehensive enough to influence public decisions and attitudes related to the discussed topics. Based on democratic-participant and development theory, the researcher vividly explains how the media programmes create and sustain audience self-confidence and self-important. The results of the study confirm the way media impacted positively on the life of the public and become a crucial tool for development.

In a previous study, Mahama Saaka *et al* (2021) discussed audience perception, attitudes and practices related to child nutrition radio messages. Through the research entitled “ effect of nutrition behavior change communication delivered through radio on mothers’ nutritional knowledge, child feeding practices and growth”, Saaka et al confirmed the correlation between child nutrition radio messages and nutritional knowledge of the target audience. Their study seeks into confirming the hypothesis that mothers’ who are exposed to child nutrition radio messages will manifest a greater nutritional knowledge. Similar to our research, Saaka’s *et al* (2021) study determines audience perception of radio stations content on child nutrition. The researchers selected radio *Upper west*, *Nabiina* community radio, radio *Wa* and radio *justice* for the study. Those radio stations aired frequently child nutrition messages during twelve months (from January 2019 to December 2019) in Northern Ghana based on an appropriate schedule. Mothers’ with children aged from 6-36 months are the target audience of the child nutrition radio messages. Through a quantitative and qualitative data from audience perspective, the research demonstrates the contribution of radio drama series on nutrition in enhancing mothers’ nutritional knowledge. For these scholars, the child nutrition messages on the selected radio stations have significantly increased the nutritional knowledge of the audience. In other words, audience perceived

positively the radio child nutrition messages. This audience positive perception of the radio messages influences preventive health seeking behavior of the target women. Based on a qualitative content analysis of the messages, the study finds out that the messages were translated into local dialects. Also, the scholars argue that child nutrition messages were transmitted mainly in form of drama. And according to the findings, the entertainment nature of the messages has successfully facilitated the audience comprehension of those messages.

However, Saaka Mahama et al (2021) opine that mothers' nutritional knowledge have little or no effect on nutritional status of the children. In others words, there is an inadequacy between mothers' nutritional knowledge, attitudes and nutritional practices. According to the study, this is because many factors intervene in the issue of child malnutrition. The researchers argue that child malnutrition can be caused by some socio-demographic and economic factors. For their study, child nutritional status depends not only on nutritional knowledge but on economic status of the household. Saaka Mahama *et al* (2021) study is an important work on radio and child nutrition. Despite the fact that the study used a good and scientific methodological approach, it lacks a precise theoretical framework. Being a health related study, the researchers fail in using at least one health related communication theory for their work. Simply put, through the review of the study, the present research identifies a theoretical gap in Saaka's et al research.

## **7. Theoretical framework of the study**

This study is anchored by some theories of health communication and media studies. The researcher decides to constitute the theoretical framework based on three theories. Since the study is interested in the area of health communication, theories related to health communication researches are selected. This is why the study refers to Health Belief Model (HBM) and perception theory in examining the addressed health issues. According to Abraham and Sheeran (2015) Health Belief Model can be applied to researches on health promotion and preventive health measures. In other words, these scholars recommend the use of HBM in promoting preventive good health behaviour such as balance diet and physical exercise. So, it seems appropriate to refer to Health Belief Model in examining audience

perception of child nutrition messages. In addition to the HBM and perception theory, the researcher proposes to use democratic-participant theory in order to take into consideration the angle of community media study.

### ***7.1. Health Belief Model (HBM)***

According to Annuar et al (2020), Health Belief Model was developed in 1950 with the aim to explain the decrease of public participation in health prevention programmes. As other models and theories of communication, HBM seeks to explain an addressed health communication problem related to an illness or health intervention. The early use of HBM in health studies is attributed to Hochbaum's (1958). Eighty year after the development of the model, Hochbaum's conducted a study on tuberculosis X-ray screening using HBM. While the first study used it for a communicable disease, others adopted it to non-communicable disease such as preventive dental visits and use of safety gloves.

Health Belief Model helps to explain individual behavioural change based on fundamental elements. Barthlett cited in Annuar et al (2020) identified four mains elements called fundamental constructs of HBM. For this scholar the mains constructs of HBM are perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived benefits and perceived barriers. Barthlett argues that Health Belief Model (HBM) refers to public perception and behaviour related to health issues. Going by Barthlett argument, one can observe that public perceived susceptibility and perceived severity of an illness is prerequisite to public health behaviour change.

For Health Belief Model (HBM), a belief of a disease is constructed on perceived severity and susceptibility of the disease. The various perceptions of a health problem determine change in health behaviour. The idea behind HBM is that public perception of a health problem or a disease is related to treatment perception and medical advice compliance about that disease. In other words, individual adherence to medical treatment and the use of medical service is strongly based on individual perception of the illness severity and perceived benefits of the treatment. HBM seeks to explain the psychological capacity of individual to assess the quality of medical treatment or medical advice on a specific health problem. The HBM is used for this study in order

to examine how audience perception of child nutrition messages can shape their perception of child malnutrition as a disease. In other words, the model helps in analysing the effectiveness of child nutrition messages on community radio stations in reducing child malnutrition in Zinder. As explained by Charles and Pascal (2015), HBM aim at analysing and enhancing the effectiveness of health programme or health interventions.

Annur et al (2020) affirm that some socio-demographic determinants influence individual belief. They discuss that in HBM there is always a self-efficacy that is belief in one's capacity and ability to change. The scholars argue that culture, age, gender and ethnicity determine public health belief. For them, people with the disease may have different belief of the disease due to socio-demographic determinants. It is observed that social status, gender or age influence belief. While for HBM, belief shapes people's behaviour change. So, since beliefs are influenced by socio-demographic, hence social factors play key role in behaviour change. These factors determine individual adherence to health treatment or advice and use of health service. Being a study which intends to examine audience perception of child nutrition messages; the researcher uses the Health Belief Model in order to analyse audience perception of child messages and their perception of malnutrition. So, for this research HBM can be used to explain whether the socio-economic factors influence audience perception of child nutrition messages in *Zinder* community.

## **8. Research Methodology**

### ***8.1. Research method***

The researcher wishes to use content analysis and survey as research methods. This is because the study has to do with media content and audience perception. As argued by Gunter (2000), a media output study can use quantitative and qualitative content analysis while a media audience research can adopt survey as a method. So, as a combination of both media output and audience study, this research intends to combine content analysis with survey.

For the study, the survey method helps in examining the audience perception of child nutrition messages on selected community radio stations. From a descriptive perspective, the survey method facilitates

in describing audience opinions about the child nutrition messages on the community radio stations under study.

## **8.2. Sample of the study**

Being a study on media output and audience survey, this research has two samples. For the media study, four community radio stations are selected according to their transmitting power. So, we have *Martaba FM* (50w), *Tsirkeao FM* (100 w), *Maitama FM* (300 w) and *Kitari FM* (500 w). This gives an approximate representation of each radio station in term of typology and community location. For each selected radio station, child nutrition messages will be quantitatively and qualitatively analysed. The second sample has to do with the survey of audience perception of child nutrition messages on community radio stations. And the criterion for the selection of the respondents is the breastfeeding status of mothers living within the community of the selected radio stations. It appears that there is not available data on the number of the breastfeeding mothers living within the area covered by the selected radio stations and during the year 2020. In other words, the number of the population is unknown. So, in this case the researcher has to determine a sample from unknown figures of the population. For this reason, the study uses the mathematical ways in determining the sample size as proposed by *qualtric* enterprise survey technology. According to *qualtric* in order to determine a sample size for survey research from unknown population size, the following method is applied. First, the researcher determines a margin error which is generally +/- 5%. The next step is to determine the confidence level which may 90%, 95% or 99%. For every level of confidence, there is a corresponding figure called Z score. So, the confidence level of 90%, 95% or 99% there is respectively the Z score of 2.326, 1.96 and 1.645. Finally, the researcher chooses the standard deviation of five (5). The correspondence of confidence level and Z score is:

- a. 90% confidence level has a Z score of 2.326
- b. 95% confidence level has a Z score of 1.96
- c. 99% confidence level has a Z score of 1.645

The formula for the calculation is as follow:

$$\text{Sample size} = \frac{(\text{Z score})^2 \times \text{standard deviation} \times (1 - \text{standard deviation})}{(\text{Margin error})^2}$$

For the sampling procedure the researcher chooses the confidence level of 99%.

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Sample size} &= \frac{(1.645)^2 \times 5 (5)}{(5\%)^2} \\ &= \frac{2.7060 \times 25}{(05)^2} \\ &= \frac{67.650}{0025} = \frac{6765}{25} = 270.6 \text{ approximate of } 271\end{aligned}$$

Sample Size for this study is 271 respondents. As the sample size is determined for the survey study, it is important to know more about the profile of the sampled community radio stations for the quantitative and qualitative media output analysis.

## Conclusion

As PhD thesis, this research is on progress. After this theoretical and methodological step, the researcher will proceed in collecting, presenting and interpreting the data for the study. The next part of the study will reveal the nature of the findings and appropriate recommendations will emanate accordingly.

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