Chapter 16

Awareness and Education on Viral Infections in Nigeria Using Edutainment

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ABSTRACT

Researches in clinical and medical science have shown that Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Hepatitis B, and to some extent Hepatitis C viruses, constitute a major public health challenge in the Sub-Saharan Africa. This is without prejudice to the Ebola virus disease (EVD) that is more deadly than the other three put together, and had affected some countries in West Africa- Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. There is little awareness and education via the mass media on some common viral infections in Nigeria like Hepatitis compared to HIV. Therefore, there is dire need for information, sensitisation and education on the viruses, means of transmission, preventive measures and also therapy. Edutainment is the fusion of education into entertainment programming which can come in form of drama, music, poetry and lots more, and it had been used as a platform to create awareness for positive reproductive health and HIV/AIDS by leading health organisations like WHO, USAID, DFID, SFH, and UNFPA. This paper therefore, examines why edutainment should be used and how it can be used to educate media audience in Nigeria on some viral infections that pose serious health risks and how they can live healthy lives.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is one discipline that is dynamic and evolving over the years as different aspects have emerged due to the dynamic nature of man and his environment. There is no doubt that communication plays a significant role in our lives, and it forms the crucible of human existence. In every foundation class of communication, it is rightly mentioned that the types of communication are: Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, Group, Organisational and Mass communication. An addition to this list is health com-
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munication; communication scholars like Corcoran (2007) otherwise call it communication in health. She is of the opinion that communication in health can be defined generally the same way communication has been defined as a transactional process. Kreps (2003) as cited in Corcoran (2007, p. 8) “summarises the addition of ‘health’ to the definition of communication as a ‘resource’ that allows health messages (for example prevention, risk or awareness) to be used in the education and avoidance of ill health. This broad definition incorporates the fact that health communication can take place at many levels and embodies a holistic approach to health promotion.”

It will not be out of place to state that health communication emphasises health promotion and education, that aims at reducing unhealthy practices and improving public health. This is very vital, especially in developing countries as they strived to achieve some of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 which were health related: reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

For health communication to be effective, the mass media are indispensable because they serve as tools for the ‘transactional processes’. The mass media play important roles in our lives as they perform their functions: sources of information, education and entertainment. Ebo (1999) acknowledges that channels of mass communication perform peculiar functions as they educate, entertain, inform, mould opinion, and socialise thereby satisfying the needs and aspirations of the audience. Assay and Adigu (2008) note that in both long-and-short term bases, the media can make substantial contributions to the process of creating public awareness whether the aims of such efforts are to: Bring about an increase in information or knowledge of the public or target group about a specific issue; generate a change in their opinions or attitude; or motivate them to action that is to change their behaviour and habits.

This presupposes from the above mentioned the need to employ the mass media wisely and effectively in health education interventions, and public health campaigns in the areas of tackling viral infections and promoting healthy living. Therefore, this paper explores how edutainment as a media campaign strategy can be employed by media organisations, governmental and non-governmental organisations, community stakeholders, corporate organisations, etc. to promote awareness and education on viral infections prevalent in Nigeria, their modes of transmission, prevention and possible cure.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

British psychologist, Stephenson (1967) as cited by Folarin (2005, p. 170), divides man’s activities into work and play; the former meaning reality and production, while the latter deals with entertainment, relaxation or self-satisfaction. He further says that the audience use the mass media (both old and new) for play- pleasure and entertainment than for information and serious work. This has led to a constant criticism of television and radio in Nigeria, on its focus on entertainment more rather than on development purposes (Folarin, 2005). Rather than just criticise the media, it will be profitable to maximise its emphasis on entertainment by juxtaposing it with the educational function to promote positive social behaviour that will lead to positive social change.

In this section therefore, two theories that capture the two functions will be discussed as it relates to health communication. The theories are Social Learning Theory and Mass Entertainment Theory.