

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN DISSEMINATING INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATING ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS DISEASE IN CAMEROON

Peguy Ndonko¹

¹Health Anthropologist, University of Bamenda, Cameroon

Corresponding author: Peguy Ndonko

E-mail: pegndonkoanthro@gmail.com

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Abstract:

Social media is being used more and more by the general public as a means of disseminating information between people. The outbreak of the coronavirus disease mobilized researchers in a variety of disciplines, as well as the governments of the countries affected by the pandemic. The digital media have played an important role not only in disseminating information, but also in communicating about the contamination, the spread and the preventive measures against this pandemic. This study, based on social science research methods and techniques, shows that social media have played an important role in disseminating information about the pandemic. The supply and demand for information took on a dizzying pace, helping to warn people about this new disease. Social media has helped to spread information about the coronavirus as quickly as possible, but they have also enabled people to learn about the disease, the risks involved and how to prevent it, all of which is helping national governments with their public health programs.

Keywords: Media, Communication, Endemic, Epidemic, Pandemic

INTRODUCTION

Health professionals are increasingly interested in using social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter as a tool for monitoring public health incidents and transmitting health information and communication to the public in real time. Joelle J. Levac and Tracey O'Sullivan (2010:10) agree that: "Social media holds considerable potential for health promotion and other health intervention activities, as it addresses some of the limitations in traditional health communication by increasing accessibility, interaction, engagement, empowerment and customization. The use of social media increases the potential for easy access to preventive medicine, interaction with health care providers, interprofessional communication in emergency management, and public health. However, more research is needed to determine its long-term effectiveness and to maximize the strategic presence of health organizations on social networking websites. "On the other hand, the knowledge that health professionals have about coronavirus disease is poorly understood by the general public. When social media is used to inform them, they allow themselves to be dominated by prejudice and rumors of various kinds. The media are playing a key role in the development of relations between health professionals and the general public, providing useful information for prevention, organization, education and awareness-raising. In Cameroon, people welcomed the emergence of this virus with a lot of mix feelings. A few months after the existence of the virus and the announcement that some funds would be released to assist countries that had been affected by the virus, the Minister of Public Health in Cameroon declared that the virus had penetrated the nation, and the number of those affected kept rising on a daily basis. There was strict implementation of the coronavirus measures to prevent the continuous spread of the virus, and the rumors about the disease started or have been reinforced. These measures included washing of hands, wearing of face masks, social distancing, and avoiding crowded areas. In this regard, Cameroonians received the information regarding the virus and how to avoid contracting it in



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different ways. We thought it wise and important to gather many people's opinions on this issue to understand their worries and fears better. It was noticed that most people's perspectives differed according to the different regions in Cameroon. The interview is based on the population's opinion about the pandemic and what they heard that changed their perception, either for the better or worse. How have people interpreted the messages coming out of the media about coronavirus disease? Why did the rumor dominate people's consciousness so quickly? What role did the media play in spreading information about the disease?

Context of Study and Rational. Just like HIV (Human Immune Virus), Coronavirus is another deadly pandemic whose source is yet to be known. This virus, just like any other, is a threat to life. Over the years of its outbreak, humanity has suffered several material losses and a severe loss of lives. This pandemic has broken the world record as the deadliest virus of recent times. COVID-19 originated in China and spread throughout Europe, extended to Africa and to World at large. The Coronavirus has been progressively growing into a more resistant form called the Omicron virus. This Omicron virus is said to be more resistant and deadly than COVID-19 itself, which is now considered the weaker form. For now, the cause of the virus is yet to be known, as the World Health Organization has given no particular reason for what it may cause. Coronavirus is also referred to as a respiratory disease since its attack on the lungs is always very severe.

COVID-19, just like any other pandemic, has left the world with devastating effects. Normally, no pandemic has ever brought positive effects to its victims. Within this period of its outbreak, many people have suffered heavy business losses, slow turnover in business, loss of loved ones, separation from families and many more. Others condemn the repeatedly wearing of face mask which has caused more health issues than expected. Many people reveal that due to the wearing of face masks, more often, especially the elderly, they have been exposed to other diseases that are even more deadly than the COVID-19 pandemic. Other opinions hold that a better vaccine should be constructed, where one can be sure of safety without necessarily maintaining all the preventive measures. Some of these preventive measures include: wearing a face mask, washing hands with clean running water and soap, social distancing, coughing and sneezing beneath the elbow, group gathering restrictions and many more. The virus can be acquired through verbal conversations with an infected person, the use of an infected object, frequent touching of the eyes, nose and ears, handshakes with infected persons and so on. Over a million people have lost their lives to this deadly pandemic. China has been blamed for being the cause of the virus. Many people have it that this pandemic has been fabricated in China as a means of reducing the world population. Even though the virus is dying down, many people still have different views on it. Some people believe that it is a strategy used by the government to bring all its citizens under surveillance, while other thinks is a means of raising revenue. Above all, it is still necessary to prevent oneself from being contaminated since prevention has no side effects.

Public health officials and even politicians are increasingly using the mass media and social networks to communicate on issues of disease, prevention, promotion and care. Radio, television and social networks are the most prominent. According to Francis Balle (2004:28), "radio is the first medium in history capable of reaching a large, dispersed audience live", while television is seen as a window on the world. More than ever, this channel relays public health messages. People are also using social media as a means of communication and to maintain links with their communities. Among the media currently available, politicians are focusing more on audiovisual media, which have the particularity of not allowing people to respond or exchange views, compared with social media such as Facebook, where individuals are free to give their point of view by publishing and disseminating information.



Valerie March (2018:7) believes that "In France, as in the rest of the world, Facebook remains the most widely used social media, with a strong emphasis on photos, videos and animated gifs". Public health officials have taken an interest in the use of social media as a tool for monitoring public health incidents. Social media allows information to be transmitted quickly and effectively in real time to the public, healthcare professionals, government agencies and managers, even better than traditional media. The objectives of this study are to show that the traditional media have not been sufficiently used to raise awareness of the coronavirus disease, and that rumors have predominated over the reality of the disease due to a tense socio-political context. How do the social sciences and communication work on interdisciplinary health issues? How are they analyzing the COVID-19 health crisis in conjunction with other crises?

METHODS

The study population is made up of the inhabitants of the town of Bamenda. Qualitative techniques lead to open-ended interviews, which allow people to describe their lives in their own words, and it often gives voice to those whose views are rarely heard or considered. Qualitative methods also offer researchers techniques that are more holistic and place people's experiences in larger contexts. We decided to carry out this study when we observed that barrier measures were no longer respected by the majority of people. Users were no longer required to wash their hands, wear masks or respect social distancing, as was the case at the start of the pandemic in March 2020. Containers set out in places to provide water for hand washing were increasingly rare or empty when they existed, and hydro-alcoholic gels were no longer required as they had been previously. Those wearing face masks were looked upon with disdain and suspected of being potential COVID-19 sufferers. Individual informants answered the questions on rumors of COVID-19 in Bamenda. The data was mainly collected in Bamenda chief town of the North West. A total of 15 persons were interviewed on the covid 19 survey, and these were some of the revelations made by the informants.

Convenience sampling helped with data collection. Convenience sampling is a method in which, for convenience's sake, the study units that happen to be available at the time of data collection are selected in the sample. A drawback of convenience sampling is that the sample may be quite unrepresentative of the population you want to study. Some units may be over-selected, others under-selected or missed altogether. It is impossible to adjust for such a distortion. Our informants were met at random in a tense socio-political context. It is not easy and almost impossible to meet and talk to individuals. Wherever we were and whenever we had the opportunity to talk about the pandemic, we started discussions in order to introduce our questions into the conversations.

Mass communication theory construction has placed an increased emphasis on cognitive dimensions of mass communication. Cognitive psychologists and sociologists joined forces with specialists in computer modeling and artificial intelligence to explore more carefully what might be going on in the minds of viewers, readers and listeners of mass media messages. With the cognitive emphasis comes a shift from an examination of effects to a focus on processes, a regular feature of our first mass communication formulations that seems to have been lost during the period of radical behaviorism, during which much early mass communication theory developed. One common concern of the cognitive media theorists has been to identify and examine the place of principal or goal-directed media use. Through interpersonal communication, relationships begin, grow, remain static, or deteriorate. People seek to create and maintain rewarding relationships. People cannot know others directly as they actually are; they do the best they can to know them through communication. We only know each other by what they do and say. Cultivation theory is used here



because it indicates that television has become a primary source of information. What people see on television, particularly with respect to violence, cultivates a distorted view of reality and builds exaggerated social norms.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Role of social media in the coronavirus health crisis. The media has always had a strong obligation to offer the public professionally produced content and reliable information, and so with the help of the media, individuals can realize these attitudes and go ahead to change them. Good thing the media is prioritizing issues related to this Virus as updates on its development are released on a daily basis. Media channels have taken it a point to sensitize the public on the virus, educating them on the right measures to take to prevent the virus and how to keep themselves and their loved ones safe. It over emphasis on the virus is because the virus is new, and its rate of deaths is causing so much panic in the world.

Nevertheless, through the information and daily reports on the virus, the public is kept informed and is doing everything to heed the advice by practicing the various preventive measures. Emmaculate, 45 years old, inhabitant of Bamenda, asserts that: "The media plays the role of sensitizing the public on the preventive measures of COVID-19 and where to go or whom to call when a case is discovered. Taking the case of Cameroon, since the outbreak in the country, there have been sensitization messages on radio, TV and the Internet and even from the president himself, cautioning people to respect the barrier measures put in place. Also, short messages were sent online and on the radio asking people to call 1510 in case of any suspected outbreak. All these have made people more aware, and they now know how to protect themselves". As of now, the panic has greatly reduced because of the influence of the media. Due to the way the information on the virus is revealed, people are becoming more relaxed, though cautious. Also, the increase in recovered cases is doing much good to the population, as many people have started seeing a glimmer of hope. The media should therefore continue showing these positive developments to completely wipe away the panic because some people end up dying from the panic rather than the virus. Joelle L. Levac et al, 2010:47 stated that: "Social media holds considerable potential for health promotion and other health intervention activities as it addresses some of the limitations in traditional health communication by increasing accessibility, interaction, engagement, empowerment and customization. The use of social media increases the potential for easy access to preventive medicine, interaction with health care providers, interprofessional communication in emergency management, and public health. The main rumors suggested a spread and contamination orchestrated by the State and Western institutions concerning the coronavirus disease. The role of anthropology is to collect and deconstruct rumors. From this perspective, anything that has anything to do with the response (disinfection operations, awareness-raising teams, doctors) can be seen as a source of spread of the epidemic. However, the response has underestimated the importance of these everyday places, which could become awareness-raising platforms, capable of conveying the right information, based on the principle of more horizontal communication. During the COVID-19 epidemic, social networks, as well as places where women and children gathered for tea, meals and water collection points, provided a forum for the creation and spread of rumors. Social media is used every day by millions of people across the world. The impressive growth in social media has been fascinating to watch, but intriguing as well, when you consider the multitude of applications these tools have unleashed and their potential to influence population health.

Awareness-raising messages to inform instead of communicate. Today, health and healthcare go well beyond the realms of medicine and inevitably touch on the social sciences, and a



better understanding of how to provide care involves the society in which we live and better protects our future. During the period of the coronavirus pandemic, the awareness-raising messages coming from the various media mainly informed rather than communicated, without, however, engaging in dialogue with people or listening to them. It was due to the nature of the disease, which was reported to be very dangerous, and the appalling statistics broadcast by the national and international media. People were therefore upset and confused by a disease that was easily and rapidly contagious. The fear spread by the media led people to develop rumors about the health system, the disease itself and the prophylactic measures put in place by the government to deal with the scale of this public health issue. From the various news reports and video clips from different countries of the world, it is clear that no country is left behind in the fight against the virus. The population wear the facemask all the time, lockdowns have been implemented in countries, social gatherings and activities that may likely bring people together have been suspended, provisions have been made by governments and individuals for water and soap at strategic places in town to enhance the hand washing measure, and the fact that people have resorted to waving as a form of greeting thereby respecting social distancing means the media has successfully and effectively played its role of sensitizing and educating the public. What the media has to do now is make sure the measures are continuously respected by keeping the virus its main issue and continue reporting on it.

Social media's role in the health system in Cameroon. During the epidemic, the people of Bamenda did not take the disease seriously and accused the government of scheming and manipulating people's consciences. The Minister of Public Health was accused of accepting money to facilitate the entry of the disease into the country and decimate the population, even though some acknowledge that he was one of the first to take the vaccination. It could not be any other way in a healthcare system that has been facing enormous difficulties for decades, even if there have been some improvements in recent years. Flavién Ndonko and Bergis Schmidt-Ery (2000:20) note that: "For several decades, health policy in Cameroon focused on free care in public health facilities. Patients received care without being required to pay for it. Medicines were distributed free of charge. [...] These health facilities, which did not already have an excellent reputation among the population, saw their image profoundly tarnished by this unexpected situation [...]. Thus, public hospitals were seen not only as incapable of receiving patients properly, but also as lacking in medicines. The failure of the free healthcare system resulted in a loss of confidence in public health facilities, which are by far the most numerous in the national medical universe".

From this and from the history of rumors about diseases in literature, people developed rumors that could only take on a pessimistic tone. People saw quarantine centers as a way of embezzling money from the people and justifying it. Reception centers have been set up to care for covid patients, but there are no health centers in many parts of the country, and where there are, the technical facilities are disgraceful. Antoine Socpa and Yves Bertrand Djouda Feudjio (2011) describe the look of healthcare systems and health facilities in Cameroon several decades later and note that the Cameroonian hospital is described as a mirror of global society, in the sense that the hospital is the place where quality of life can be measured, a place where inequalities are reproduced, conflicts arise, relational and commercial networks are mobilized. All of which calls into question relations between individuals and governments characterized by mistrust and denunciation".

Social media and the origin of the disease (coronavirus). Social media has encouraged the rapid spread of prejudice about coronavirus disease. Communication tools such as telephones and computers are within the reach of the vast majority of people, and information from these tools is quickly shared and discussed among friends, parents and classmates to alert them when new

information is circulating and when they should be wary of it. When corona virus broke out, many people had different opinions about its origin. Some believed that it originated in America or from Russia, while others are of the opinion that European powers came together to create the virus. Most of our informants learned from different mass media and social media that it originated from China; that the Chinese government created the virus as a method to reduce its country's population, but unfortunately, they could not manage the virus well, so it did not spread to other countries, and that is why it became a global threat. Many inhabitants of Bamenda are of the opinion that since China and America have been having their controversies, beefing and Cold War, China decided to launch the Corona Virus to weaken America, but they did not plan it properly, and this caused the virus to affect other countries. Many others sources are of the opinion that the virus originated from pigs in China. Due to man's relationship with pigs, the virus had to cross to man, and he unconsciously walked around and shared it with other individuals without his knowledge. Before some medical personnel discovered this, it had affected a lot of people, which made it difficult for the virus to be controlled. We should also take into consideration the opinion of people who think the virus originated from bats in Southern China. Due to the exposure of fresh meat and fish in the market where animals are equally killed, the market becomes a spot for bats, and they sometimes feed on this meat and blood. That is how humans came in contact with the virus. All these negative considerations about the origin of the disease could only encourage negative perceptions.

Contributions of social media to the diffusion of vaccines. After the coronavirus became global, a lot of things were done to curb it and limit the way people were dying. It is rumored that America, Russia and China came together to create a vaccine that will be able to prevent people from contracting the virus, help in reducing pain in the victims and cure the victims equally. However, most Cameroonians boycotted the vaccine; some for personal reasons, and others because of what they heard about the vaccine. We carried out research on this behavior given to the vaccine in Cameroon, and below are some reasons we gathered. According to Martha, an inhabitant of Bamenda, 32 years old, "People say they avoided the vaccine because when it was produced, rumors had it that it was sent to Africa to be tested as if Africans were some sort of 'lab rats'. It made a lot of people stay away from the virus because they did not want to be an object of experiment; they believed that the vaccine was a means to wipe out the black race. They base this claim on the fact that the white race has always feared the strength of Blacks, and this fear has led to suspicions. So, the whites will use any opportunity in front of them to reduce or, better still, eliminate all the blacks who act as a future threat to them. The vaccine was created to save humanity, but the Cameroon government, with the help of some scientists in the country, has added something poisonous in the vaccine to get rid of the Anglophone Population." According to some inhabitants of Bamenda, the vaccine is not to curb the virus because they heard people complained that immediately they were injected, their joints weakened, and they had rashes all over their bodies, which later became boils. It is also reported that the Cameroon government was desperate to prove that the virus was in Cameroon. So, the vaccine was instead aimed at giving those who have not yet been infected with the virus. It kept a lot of people away from the vaccine for fear of being contaminated. Reports have it that most pastors told their Christians not to take the vaccine because, according to them, it contains the mark of 666, and once an individual was injected, he is already a candidate for hellfire. It made a lot of Christians feel reluctant to take the vaccine because they believe they are living in the end times and have to be cautious and conscious as children of God. Most inhabitants consider the vaccine to be more of a political game. Since the Government had declared the existence of the virus in the country, in order to make this claim genuine, the vaccine had to be injected on innocent population in order to attract assistance from international bodies. Many see the Government as

manipulative, and they see no reasons playing along. Equally, the act of making the vaccine obligatory made a lot of people question it. They believe that if something is meant to help people, it will never be imposed on them; everyone should have their free will to partake in it, but just the fact of the Government trying to impose the vaccine in schools and workplaces compounded issues and made them look desperate in the eyes of the population. They claim that the vaccines render women sterile and so prevent childbirth. Another unverified information claims that the vaccines are rather a source of illnesses to the population, and extreme views even allege that the vaccine kills. Others hold that the vaccines are not safe for people with allergies. Some anti-vaccine proponents are of the opinion that the vaccine, once taken, will alter the DNA of the consumer. Finally, people believe that the vaccines are not safe because they were researched and developed quickly, and for this reason, they can never be effective. Others say pregnant women or breastfeeding mothers were told not to take the vaccines. All these rumors greatly affected the perception of individuals drastically, as many Cameroonians made up their minds never to take the vaccine. The vaccines that are given to poor African countries are not the same as those given to American and European countries. Those who get vaccinated will die after a short while, so no need to get vaccinated. The spot vaccinated can immediately catch fire. Scientists are still looking for the medicine that has not been found. The vaccines are free for everybody. Those who get vaccinated will not live up to 7years. People after tested positive refuse to take the vaccines. People are charged high amounts for the test to be done meanwhile government says it is free of charge.



Figure 1. Corona virus vaccines

The test kits are not enough for the many Cameroonians, and priorities are given first to people with cardiac problems and diabetes. School Children are forced to carry out the COVID test before attending classes or lectures, and when tested positive, they are quarantined for 7 days, but they are still fully recovered. Just like a school in Mankon who send students out of school if they do not show prove of a COVID test conducted on them. "I could not attend school for two weeks because I tested positive and had to be quarantined, which to me is fake because my elder sister, with whom I share my bed with was tested negative following the rumors on her the disease spread, showing that I had just a mile cough and catarrh and was termed COVID positive". (Favor 15yrs). Pourquoi cette urgence autour du vaccin contre la maladie alors que le sida, le paludisme n'e connait pas d vaccine depuis?

Role of social media in barrier measures against coronavirus disease. Another measure to curb the virus was the usage of a facemask. In Cameroon, the arrival of the facemask was welcomed with mix feelings. The facemask was aimed at preventing the virus from being spread through saliva when talking, especially if the person was infected. However, since it was difficult to know someone

who was infected by looking at the person, everyone was asked to put on the mask, children and adults. Anyone seen without a facemask was fined by the forces of law and order in the country. This new trend was rather too difficult for most Cameroonians to execute. Most Cameroonians doubted the existence of the virus in the country. They say they always heard the number of cases announced on radio and television, but have never had a neighbor, friend or relative who has contracted the virus. So why will they want to protect themselves from what they believe does not exist? People boycotted the imported facemask because it was said that before the facemask left China for Cameroon, it had been infected by the Chinese with the virus, and once you purchase it and put it on, you immediately start having symptoms like difficulties in breathing, and when you go to the hospital, you are confirmed positive.



Figure 2. Corona virus

Most of the people interviewed preferred to use their locally made masks to avoid any complications, especially regarding what they heard about the imported facemask, and given that it could only be worn once. Inhabitants of Bamenda appreciate the initiative of the facemask because it is not only used to prevent them from contracting the virus but also against dust and from people with mouth odor, sinusitis. Princely, inhabitants of Bamenda, 22 years old argue that: "Face masks are ineffective in fighting against Covid and even dangerous, masks are used for infected persons to stop them from transmitting the virus to others, that is why some refused to wear the mask because they believe that if the virus really existed, nothing will stop it from spreading, so there is nothing they can do and they stubbornly do not walk around with the mask. Mask-wearing increases ill health. It is alleged that protective masks restrict breathing, causing hypoxemia (insufficient oxygen in the blood) and hypercapnia (presence of too much carbon dioxide in the bloodstream). Unsupported claims of facial deformities, including narrowing of the face, mouth and dental malocclusions.

The Advent of the facemask, according to materials gathered from the field, had its positive sides, like preventing the spread of the virus and dust, but it also had its negative side. It is because when the virus was imposed on children and adults, some families lost their children. After all, when they wore the mask, they could not breathe properly, and it made them suffocate. When this repeated itself for sometime, the Government stepped in to place an age limit for wearing masks. People can suffocate with the facemask as they are not able to breathe well when they wear it. Medical face masks are already infected with maggots and some living things when you put them in hot water, so there is no need to wear them. For Brandon, 24 years inhabitant of Bamenda, "There is no Covid 19 in Bamenda, so why should I be putting on a facemask that will hinder me from breathing well. I only wear it in school, offices and checkpoints to avoid being punished by the forces of law and order". During the coronavirus disease in Bamenda, the forces of order checked those passengers who had not worn face masks. Rogue passengers were fined 1,000frs to continue their



journey. The face mask checks led to obvious conflicts between the police and passengers, who wondered why the health of the public was their concern.

Washing of hands was a normal practice done even before the outbreak of the coronavirus. Everyone was aware of the fact that if you touch a dirty object, you wash your hands, you visit the toilet, you wash your hands, you greet people, you wash your hands, you want to eat, you wash your hands. With the coming of the virus, the practice of washing hands became essential and obligatory. Each and everyone was asked to wash their hands as many times as possible in a day and to avoid taking your hands close to your mouth, nose or eyes. If an individual did not want to wash his or her hands, then they were asked to walk around with a hand sanitizer. As concerns Cameroon, this practice faces little or no resistance as it was already something everyone did on a daily basis, apart from the fact that many people did not like the idea of constantly washing their hands because it often made their hands dry, as they had washed away the body lotion. Apart from this, washing hands was more comfortable for most people. There are not so many rumors concerning hand washing because some see it as a consciousness that the disease has brought for people always to wash their hands. People get infected after using the same tap in the same way the disease is transmitted from one another. Regular hand washing is not practical in Bamenda because people do not even have clean water to use in washing hands under a running tap. So people only respect the washing of hands in public. Do not wipe your hands after washing. Rumors also had it that the only "savon" to be used is "Azur". According to another testimony we heard from Favor, 21 years old girl, hand sanitizers were being distributed to everyone for free, but when we went to get one, we were charged 100 frs or 200 frs before we could get one for ourselves.

When somebody dies because of the disease, he or she is buried immediately away from others, just by medical personnel. Couples were not allowed to kiss or embrace their partners during their marriage ceremony. People were not able to touch or eat animals like goats, pigs and cows because they are also infected. Also, another said we should keep away from hibiscus flowers because it absorbs Covid19 like humans and hence can be transmitted to humans. Not more than 50 people should be present for an occasion. Do not greet people with a handshake. Keep a social distance of about 1-3 meters away from the next person to avoid being infected by COVID-19. Traditional medicine does not have a proper dosage. It is not available or affordable for all people who may need it, as the scale of production is low. Rumors circulating that the government does not want the Covid to stop if it is actually existing reasoned why they are refusing to support Samuel Kleda in his discovery of the traditional medicine, because many testimonies have it that the traditional medicine is curing people and can be found at Saint Blaise or Saint Mary in Bamenda. However, many people in Bamenda do not know about its presence there and have resorted to using other supplements circulating, like drinking fever grass mixed with salt and sugar, drinking lemon in hot water and ginger, which they believe is a normal medication for cough and catarrh.

Impact of social media on the affected cases. From January 3rd 2020, the number of cases of those infected by the coronavirus kept on increasing in each and every region, and most hospitals had places where those suspected of having the virus were confined for about two weeks. If, after two weeks, the coronavirus is recarried on the individual, if he does not have it, he returns to his or her house, but if the results come out positive, then the individual stays there for treatment. Many people contradict the number of those affected by the virus in Cameroon. They claim the virus does not exist, and the government keeps increasing the numbers on a daily basis for their egoistic interests. According to some students from Bamenda, the chief town of the North West Region, the symptoms of the virus are the same with that of a cold. During the period when the Government declared an increase in the number of cases in Bambili, it was noticed that the roads were under

construction, which led to a lot of dust in the environment. So, most of them claim that the students had just contracted catarrh from the dust and not COVID-19. Inhabitants of Bamenda claim that in their neighborhood and community, they have not seen anyone suffering from the virus, and until they see, they will not believe. To some, the number of cases reported every day, to be cured, infected or dead, as a result of the virus, is still the continuation of the game the Government had already started to play by declaring the presence of the virus in Cameroon. To others, if the virus really existed in Cameroon like the Government claims it does, it would have already consumed the whole country due to Cameroonians "laissez faire" attitude towards the virus. According to these individuals, if the virus existed and those numbers of people affected were real, then everyone in Cameroon would have had the virus because most people do not even respect the coronavirus measures; they go to crowded places without masks, they hug people, and they do not even wash their hands as often as expected, nor do they sanitize. These analyses show that social media have a supply-side effect, in that they have become a source of information, but they also have a demand-side effect, in that they make it possible to take the pulse of public opinion and understand the demand for information on certain subjects, such as coronavirus disease.

Just as in previous pandemic that has consume the lives of many in the early 80's. Coronavirus, or call it COVID-19, has raised another wildfire after the pandemic, which started in Spain about 40 years ago. COVID-19 did not discriminate between the rich and the poor, as people who had wealth or money could not buy themselves out of the hands of this pandemic. America, which is said to be powerful as far as science is concerned, saw its economy threatened. China, which is said to be economically viable, is said to have given birth to the pandemic of COVID-19, thus leading to a reduction of many lives in China and the world in particular. Though they have been the most affected as far as the coronavirus is concerned. It should be noted that it took care of people with this pandemic all over China, and the rest of the world began to receive cases with people being spread with this pandemic. At the start of this pandemic, Africans had the believe that it was a disease meant for the white, but in a short time, South Africa fell into the dragnet of this pandemic, and later, other African countries became involved. Lockdown and other measures were taken as a solution to prevent the rapid spread of this pandemic. Just as a myth that people thought it was, they have come to realize that the coronavirus is a reality. Bernard Seytre (2022) stated that: "One cannot propose an intelligible epidemic control policy and design a relevant communication strategy without studying the perceptions of the population. Although considerable human and financial resources have been dedicated to the "infodemic", its real impact on people's adherence to COVID-19 prevention measures has not been established. It would be more useful to redirect some of these resources toward obtaining a clear picture of the COVID-19 health literacy of target populations through social sciences studies".

COVID-19, known in full as Coronavirus disease 2019, is an infectious disease that affects the human respiratory system. It is contagious and is transmitted through contact with an infected person. The disease, which originated in Wuhan, China, in 2019 and quickly spread to all parts of the world, has, for the past three years, been responsible for millions of deaths across the globe. Symptoms of the disease include cold, cough, fever, body pain and respiratory difficulties amongst others. With the disease being contagious, preventive measures have been adopted globally to reduce the spread. These measures include increased hygiene, social distancing and wearing of masks. Governments, at some point, took it as their responsibility to provide sanitation equipment to their populations. Gatherings were banned, and distancing measures were taken where they were inevitable. Entry restricted in public buildings for people without masks. Lockdowns were declared in areas where the death toll or number of infections was dreadful. These measures, in their own



ways, checked the spread. However, the number of cases around the world remains disturbing. Since the 2019 outbreak and declaration of the disease as a pandemic by the World Health Organization, doctors and scientists throughout the world have worked restlessly to find a cure for the killer disease. Vaccines have been produced, and drugs have been tested and approved for the treatment of the disease. Herbal treatment has also been introduced. Over the years, despite the decrease in infections, people around the world, for various reasons, still doubt the efficiency of these vaccines and medications.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, information from the media is very powerful and has the ability to influence the entire population. As a result, professionalism needs to be exercised at all times so that the information coming from the media to the public will not cause more harm than good. The media has a social responsibility to its audience and so must make sure the audiences are well catered for through the information released. Also, a lot of misinformation and fake news circulate in the media, especially on social media, about the virus, including miracle preventive measures and several myths about the virus. These false messages are coming at a time when many people are grappling for as much information as possible, thereby making them susceptible to false and sometimes hazardous claims. The population, therefore, needs to be alert to differentiate the fake information from the right one because finding trusted sources of information regarding COVID-19 is extremely important in saving one's life. From the interviews conducted in the field, the population believes that COVID-19 does not exist and is simply a scam brought in by the white man and the government to extort money from Cameroonians. People believe that the diseases actually exist, but with a lot of controversy surrounding them. Also, that is a way or strategy by the white man to break the social bond that exists in Africa out of jealousy because they are not all that social or have that bond among themselves. Also, the vaccines sent to Africa are not the same use by European countries, and they aim to kill Africans reason why they send the medicines to be tested in African countries.

Social media is being used more and more, offering a new way of communicating health information to the general population. Although the use of the media seems very promising, their effectiveness as a means of communicating and disseminating information remains uncertain. What is more, individual behavior in response to information varies according to personal values, peers and social, demographic, socio-economic and cultural contexts. Firstly, it is not clear how the public reacts to messages broadcast by the media. Given the predominant role of these media in establishing links with family and friends, it is not surprising that one of the most attractive factors and the main use of social media is to read and listen to other people's stories and testimonies about health issues. Francis Balle (2004:70) reinforces this assertion about the importance of the media in the following terms: "With the media, communication has become utilitarian. From now on, "to communicate" is no longer simply "to change, to establish a dialogue, to perpetuate a person-to-person relationship, but more specifically to influence others, to sell something, to inculcate an idea, or to give them an image of a public figure or an institution that inclines them towards benevolence or consideration". If the virus was in fact discovered in a laboratory in China, as people say, why not take all measures to keep the disease there?

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