

Media Usage by Poultry Farmers in the Control of Avian Influenza in Lagos State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT Lagos State, Nigeria, witnessed the outbreak of Avian Influenza in March 2006. The state is the commercial nerve centre of the country. The disease affected nine of the 20 Local Government Areas in the State with consequent devastating losses to poultry farmers. The State Government responded by launching a media campaign to combat the spread of the disease. This study was carried out to ascertain how poultry farmers utilized the media in obtaining information for the control of the disease. It specifically found out the media preference and reliance of the poultry farmers for information. Systematic random sampling was used to select 200 poultry farmers. The study found that majority (82.4%) of the farmers relied on the media for information. It also found that poultry farmers prefer traditional mass media for information. Of these, radio was the most preferred medium by the poultry farmers, which was followed by television. These findings showed among others the primacy of the media in educating the farmers and as a reliable institution in the control of the disease. It is hereby recommended that Lagos State should continuously employ radio, television, newspapers, magazines and interpersonal communication as partners in progress in mobilising the poultry farmers/public in eradicating the disease or any other that can affect the well-being of the public.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria witnessed the outbreak of the dreaded Avian Influenza (AI) disease in 2006. On February 4, 2006, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) confirmed the presence of the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) H5NI in Sambawa farms- a commercial poultry farm in Kaduna State. The disease quickly spread to other neighbouring states. According to Kumbish et al. (2006), a total of 129 outbreaks had occurred in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Anambra, Bauchi, Benue, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Lagos, Nasarawa, Ogun, Oyo, Plateau, Rivers, Taraba and Yobe states of Nigeria.

Faluyi et al. (2006) reported that stringent measures were put in place to eradicate the disease and prevent its spread to other states. Such measures comprised mass destruction of infected birds, payment of N250 (Two Hundred and Fifty Naira) compensation to poultry farmers for each bird destroyed; supply of relevant drugs such as Tamiflu, the strengthening of laboratories for effective diagnosis and confirmatory tests; social mobilization and community awareness, capacity building for health personnel and effective epidemiological surveillance.

These methods notwithstanding, Nigeria, according to the National Veterinary Research Institute (NVRI) lost not less than one million birds to AI between February and September

2006 alone. This was a threat to the means of livelihood of millions of Nigerians who are directly engaged in poultry business.

Yet, the poultry industry, according to the Federal Government of Nigeria (2007), is vital to the socio-economic development of Nigeria. The country has a poultry production of about 140 million comprising 25% commercial farms, 15% semi-commercial and 60% backyard. It contributes about 9-10% of agricultural Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

AI (bird flu) is an infectious disease of birds caused by type A strain of the influenza virus. It is a worldwide disease. These viruses occur naturally among birds. They are carried in the intestines of birds. AI is very contagious among birds causing sickness in domesticated birds comprising chickens, ducks and turkeys. It causes severe sickness in birds resulting in deaths. The disease is caused in domesticated birds through direct contact with waterfowl or other infected poultry or through contact with surfaces or materials that have been contaminated with the virus.

Outbreak of Avian Influenza in Lagos State

Avian Influenza first broke out in Lagos State on 2nd March, 2006 at Sab-Wale Farms, Iju, Agege-Lagos. According to Ocholi et al. (2006), Lagos, being the commercial nerve centre of the country recorded the outbreak as people from

all parts of the country transact one form of business or the other there. Besides, the major sea ports in the country through which goods are imported into the country (poultry products inclusive) are located in Lagos.

Nine out of the twenty Local Government Areas in Lagos State were affected by AI. There were consequently devastating losses on the part of the farmers in the state. According to the Ministry of Information, Lagos State, the mortality recorded in the state was 414,910 as at September, 2007.

Worse still, the only human casualty recorded during the outbreak of the disease occurred in Lagos State. This made the case of the state more precarious than that of others.

Problem Statement

Lagos State has a thriving and successful poultry industry. It has a market for the sale of poultry products. Because of its high population density, poultry farmers struggle to meet the ever-increasing demand for poultry products. But the ravaging AI affected the fortunes of the farmers and consequently their means of livelihood.

Besides, many of the farmers did not know that it was AI that affected their livestock. Others simply dismiss the disease as that of the cold and temperate regions of the world.

Given that Lagos is the home to majority of the media houses in Nigeria, how did poultry farmers utilize media for information in the control of the disease? Were they able to utilize the media advantage of location and the obvious access to various media channels? Did the farmers rely on the media for information about the disease? What is the media preference of the farmers with regard to controlling the disease?

Objectives of Study

The objectives of this study were:

- 1- To determine the extent to which poultry farmers rely on the media for information about AI.
- 2- To find out the media preference of poultry farmers with regard to its control of AI.

METHODOLOGY

Survey method was used for this study. Based on the Kriggle and Morgan(1970) table for se-

lecting sample size, 200 respondents were selected. The respondents were sampled through systematic random sampling from a population of 415 registered poultry farmers with the Lagos State Ministry of Agriculture.

The state was created in 1967 and is located in south-western part of Nigeria. It has a wet land urban environment and is located on the narrow coastal plain of the Atlantic Ocean on an area of 3,577 square kilometer out of which 787 square kilometer (22%) is water. The state has a population of 9,013,534 people according to the 2006 population census.

Two hundred (200) respondents (poultry farmers) were selected for the study through systematic random sampling from the registered poultry farmers in Lagos state. A total of 188 questionnaires were retrieved and the analyses were based on these.

Media Usage Factors

Media use of respondents entails ownership of media, access to media, frequency of exposure and media preference. These were measured as follows:

- a) Media ownership refers to possession of media equipment by respondents. Media equipment such as radio, television, internet facilities, newspapers and magazines were assigned scores of 1 (Yes) and 0 (No) to ascertain respondents' possession.
- b) Access to media implies ability of the respondents to obtain information from a particular medium either owned or not. This was measured with scores of 1 (Yes) and 0 (No).
- c) Media preference: The media were subjected to ranking in terms of usage preference by the respondents.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study were discussed in line with the objectives stated above. Hence, each of the objectives was analysed. A total of 188 questionnaires out of 200 were retrieved and the analyses were based on this.

Objective 1: To determine the extent to which poultry farmers rely on the media for information about AI

Reliance on the media for information was very critical to the creation of awareness and consequent knowledge about the prevention and

control of AI by the poultry farmers. The media will have the onerous responsibility for educating the farmers on preventive practices. The adoption of same will be beneficial to them.

There was a high reliance on the mass media as regards the control and prevention of bird flu as shown in Table 1. About half (47.3%) of the respondents relied highly on mass media while more than one-third (35.1%) relied very highly on the media. In other words, majority (82.4%) of the poultry farmers relied heavily on mass media for information. There was a low and very low media reliance of 16.0% and 1.6% respectively.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents' (poultry farmers) reliance on the media (n=188)

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Media reliance with regard to control and prevention of bird flu	Very high	66	35.1
	High	89	47.3
	Low	30	16.0
	Very Low	3	1.6

Source: Field Survey 2009

From the above, it was clearly shown that majority of the poultry farmers in Lagos State rely on mass media for information on how to prevent the disease. This showed the primacy of the media not only in creating awareness and education but also as a reliable institution in the control of AI.

Objective 2: To find out the media preference of poultry farmers with regard to its control of AI

Media preference of the poultry farmers showed which medium was preferred above the other with regard to receiving news and information about the control of the disease.

Table 2 showed preference of traditional mass media over interpersonal and group communication media channels. Radio was the most preferred medium by the poultry farmers. Some reasons could be adduced for this. First, radio is a portable medium. Poultry farmers could easily listen to it while working on their farms. Secondly, radio can be listened to without recourse to electricity. This is particularly true of Lagos as in most parts of Nigeria where regular electricity supply is a rarity. Hence, most Nigerians resort to battery-operated radio or listen to it through their handset phones. Thirdly, ra-

dio is a great source of news or information. Fourthly, listening to radio is an individual affair and the listeners are very loyal.

Table 2: Distribution of media preference of respondents (poultry farmers) n=188.

Category:	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Traditional mass media</i>		
Radio	62	32.9
TV	43	28.8
Newspaper	11	5.8
Magazine	5	2.7
<i>Interpersonal media</i>		
LSW	15	7.9
VEA	16	8.5
BHP	13	6.9
PAN	23	12.2

Source: Field Survey 2009

Key

LSW: Lectures, seminars and workshops

VEA: Village Extension Agents

BHP: Billboards, handbills and posters

PAN: Poultry Association of Nigeria

The findings showed further that TV was second in media preference with a percentage of 28.8% while newspaper came third in the traditional media category. Magazine was last with a percentage of 2.7%.

This result is in conformity with a recent study of Radio Quick Facts and Figures by Kerry (2011) (www.audiowharf.com/listeners.html).

Kerry found among others that there were more than 600 million radios in the United State (U.S.) with average U.S. household having 5.6 radio receivers. He found further that 44% of the persons above 12 years listen to radio, 41% watch TV, 10% read newspapers and 5% read magazines.

CONCLUSION

Findings from this study showed that majority (82.4%) of poultry farmers relied heavily on the mass media for information about AI prevention and control. This tended to show that the poultry farmers had a high knowledge about the disease and thereby better positioned to take preventive measures to curb the continuous spread of the disease in Lagos state.

The study further revealed that Lagos State farmers preferred the traditional mass media for information and news about how to prevent bird flu.

The study showed that the poultry farmers mostly preferred radio, television, newspapers and magazines in that order. They (poultry farmers) can therefore be better reached through the media they prefer for education about the prevention of the disease.

It is hereby recommended that the Lagos State government should continuously employ the mass media as partners in progress in mobilizing the poultry farmers and the public in general if it wants to succeed in eradicating the disease or any other disease that can affect the well-being of the public. This does not, however, exclude the complementary role of other channels of communication mostly inter-personal.

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