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THE ROLE OF DANCE AND THE SOCIAL MEDIA IN SURVIVING COVID-19 PANDEMIC LOCKDOWN IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The year 2020 was perhaps the most globally awe-striking year of the last century due to the deadly Covid-19 pandemic that suddenly emerged and claimed lives in an unprecedented way. On a daily basis, cases piled up, deaths were recorded and there seemed to be no end to the deadly scourge. More importantly, across many countries, economies shut down, schools, religious centres, social gatherings and entertainment hubs shut down. This was the adverse effect of the pandemic. As certain measures were taken, tailored to the needs of each country, uprisings and violent related occurrences bedeviled some African countries as an aftermath of the virus and the inability of the Government to cater for the immediate needs of those under prolonged lockdown. Thus, this paper, guided by Lazarus and Folkmans Coping Theory, examines the Covid-19 situation in Nigeria, with a specific focus on the underlying socio-economic, political, and entertainment issues and how the Nigerians were able to cope using dance and the social media to kill boredom, ease tension and put smile on the faces of people during the lockdown. The methodology employed for this study varies from content analysis to interview method and also participant observation method where the researchers use personal experiences to underscore the details of the boredom and the survival strategies employed. Also, consultations were made from books, materials and the internet where a lot of information about covid-19 were used to exemplify discussions. This study found out that during the lockdown, many Nigerians found solace in the art of dance as well as social media commentaries on the covid-19, and associated news relating to its management. This paper therefore concludes that dance and the social media were vital instruments for easing boredom in times like this, and that the critical comments made by Nigerians towards the government's management of Covid-19 in Nigeria carry significant weight that needs to be examined.

Keywords: Covid-19, Dance, Words, Government, Social Media, Economy

Introduction

Covid-19 is the generic term for Corona virus, a virus that emanated from animal strains and has been very potent in attacking and killing the cells and immune system of humans. Although the cases and deaths have been enormous globally in the year 2020, according to Liu, Kuo and Shih (2020, p. 328) "The novel human coronavirus

disease COVID-19 has become the fifth documented pandemic since the 1918 flu pandemic. Covid was first reported in Wuhan, China." It was initially not taken seriously until the disease began to spread across countries in unquantifiable ways. Measures were later introduced to combat the global pandemic and end the surge of the deadly virus (COVID-19) that suddenly made the world a scary place. Immediately, the least physical human interactions that was the norm became an anomaly, thereby necessitating the culture of social distancing. In doing this, each country developed its own measures and parameters for ameliorating the effect of WHO lockdown/ stay-at-home directives.

It took a while for the virus to find its way into Africa and for a while, obnoxious conclusions about the African blood and territory being anti-corona was a popular opinion among many. Reality however dawned when the first sets of cases, mostly by non-African immigrants into Africa and its unavoidable spread between and among their contacts began the African segment of the corona virus spread. Slow in the initial stages, the cases, recoveries as well as body counts have spiraled.

In Nigeria, the virus was purported to have entered through an Italian. Okoye and Nwatu (2022, p.2) believes that "Nigeria received her shipped-in share of the novel Corona virus through an Italian consultant who arrived Nigeria on February 27, 2020, and reported by the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) on the 28th of February, 2020 being the first reported case of COVID-19 in Sub Saharan Africa the travel." For a few days, the airlines were not shut down, and this allowed Nigerians who were abroad and had contracted the virus through their contacts with affected people to return home with the virus. Notable cases as reported in news outlets were those of the sons of the President, the former Vice President and the chief of staff to the president of the country. Jimoh, Aminu, Kolo, Akinyele, Ogundairo and Danjibo (2020, p.222) buttresses thus:

During the first 30 days of COVID-19 in Nigeria, the disease distribution was elitist. The majority of those who tested positive were returnees from abroad (NCDC, 2020). Air travel is predominantly elitist in Nigeria because of the high rate of poverty. The political elite also bore the early brunt of COVID-19 with three state governors and some political appointees testing positive for COVID-19. Due to the (initial) trend, the initial perception was that COVID-19 was a disease of the elite, who returned from international travels or had contact with the political bourgeoisie. Such perception, which has not dissipated, undermined control efforts. Sooner than expected, there was evidence of community transmission as COVID-19 broke the class boundary. It then became the responsibility of every Nigerian to take preventive responsibility.

In order to properly deal with known cases and curb additional infiltration into the country, certain measures were taken by the President. Aside the indefinite lockdown of all travels from Nigeria to other countries in the world, movements seized in all parts of the nation, and with the exception of food and pharmaceutical shops and essential commodity outlets, all professions, offices, shops, outlets, religious gatherings, sporting activities and the likes were put on hold, serving as precautionary measure to curb the spread of the virus.

For several weeks and counting in Lagos State, Ogun State and the Federal Capital, Abuja, and less in some other parts of the country, words/songs of lamentations continually filled the Nigerian media and particularly the social media. The songs and lamentations were of how abysmal the conditions of living were during those weeks of the lockdown/stay at home enforcement. The reasons for the outcry particularly bother on the inability of the government to provide succor in terms of foodstuffs and relief materials to the Nigerian populace. This was particularly difficult considering the fact that a large number of Nigerians earn their living on a daily basis by providing essential services and getting paid for them. The motor cycle riders, the brick layers, the multi-variant hawkers and numerous others fall into this category experiencing constraint and difficulties fending for their families

Literature Review

The Corona Virus Pandemic was a global high scale pandemic that threatened many lives and claimed thousands of lives too. Before then, very little or nothing was known about the virus and this resulted in a widespread panic. According to the World Health Organisation;

Coronaviruses are a group of viruses belonging to the family of Coronaviridae, which infect both animals and humans. Human coronaviruses can cause mild disease similar to a common cold, while others cause more severe disease (such as MERS-Middle East Respiratory Syndrome and SARS – Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome). A new coronavirus that previously has not been identified in humans emerged in Wuhan, China in December 2019. Signs and symptoms include respiratory symptoms and include fever, cough and shortness of breath. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome and sometimes death. Standard recommendations to prevent the spread of COVID-19 include frequent cleaning of hands using alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water; covering the nose and mouth with a flexed elbow or disposable tissue when coughing and sneezing; and avoiding close contact with anyone that has a fever and cough.

The World Health Organisations publication on the virus was a dossier on the pandemic and how to best prevent its occurrence and its spread. In fact, it was as a result of the disease's effective spread in some parts of the world that necessitated the globally adhered social distancing and the stay at home directives. These measures helped to a large extent to reduce the spread significantly, but its effect on those who had already contracted it before it was properly identified and diagnosed was evident in several countries, especially European countries. Cheema, Ameduri, Abraham, Doraiswamy, and Mamtani, R (2022, p.1) opine that;

The number of confirmed infections with SARS-CoV-2 has reached 20 million worldwide, and mortality from COVID-19 is estimated to be above 850 000 [1]. All the evidence thus far available quite clearly shows that those at highest risk of a severe illness and death are the elderly, individuals with existing co-morbidities and the

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immunocompromised. Undeniably, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in loss of human life; it has wreaked havoc on healthcare systems worldwide, highlighting inequities in healthcare availability and access; it has resulted in drastic public health measures in most countries of the world. Low- and middle-income nations with weak health systems, dwindling economies, high population density, a high reliance on informal employment, poor technological infrastructure and the double burden of non-communicable and communicable disease are, in particular, more vulnerable to the COVID-19 challenge than high-income nations.

The continuity of the Covid-19 and the social distancing allowed the populace to leverage on the dynamics of the social media. Social media is a globally popular online and internet enabled platform that allows people to connect via different handles, pages and media to become friends, share photographs and videos, share ideas and also make money. It is a very viable medium for connecting people throughout the world.

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 61), social media is defined as “a group of Internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content”. It has also grown to accommodate a wide range of people who leverage on several opportunities that it provides. In fact, the advent of social media influencers who make their living solely through the social media opened up another angle of financial and professional engagements. Before the pandemic, social media was already a place for different kinds of socializations. However, with the social distancing and the lockdown, the social media became a powerhouse for millions of Nigerians to cover up some of the lacunas of not leaving their houses. Even religious programmes leveraged on social media and the internet to provide words of encouragements to their members and also hold online programmes. Before the pandemic, many churches held services only physically, but the lockdown opened up social media and internet platforms for many churches to thrive.

Skit making has become a very popular art and act on social media and it is a sensation among youths both for entertainment purposes and a money making avenue. Godwin (2022, p. 2) opine thus;

Enabled by smartphones, cheap cameras, social media accounts, and the internet; a category of young Nigerians is currently creating what I call a social media skit industry. Many of these Nigerians are university graduates who could not secure jobs and found it difficult to own businesses in Nigeria because of the problematic business environments.

Godwin's opinion that a number of Nigerians into skit making are doing so because they couldn't find a job can be faulted on the premise that a number of them actually began to make skits from the University. Again, he did not take into account those who studied theatre/performing arts and are determined to carve a niche for themselves in the art/entertainment world. It is therefore sufficient to refer to those who ventured in to skit making as a result of lack of job as “some” rather than “many”. A

The second interviewee, Mary, a 20 year old student of Kwara State University, Malete, Kwara State expressed herself thus:

The experience of Covid-19 was terrible to come to terms with especially because people were dying globally and the situation was becoming very unpalatable. To take my mind of it, I submitted totally to the allure of dancing. Fortunately, I was not the only one as millions of Nigerians, old and young were all on the social media, especially Tik Tok, dancing away their tensions while hoping that the safety precautions are enough to keep them alive. I really enjoyed myself despite the global scale of the treacherous corona virus pandemic.

The dance challenges referred to above were of various kinds, they are, but not limited to

- Duduke Challenge
- Buss it Challenge
- Koleyewon Challenge
- Infinity Challenge
- Silhouette Challenge

One challenge that was quite interesting to watch was the Duduke dance Challenge which was created from popular Nigerian singer Simi's single where she sang in expectance of her unborn child. The challenge had many Nigerians, Old and young, padding their stomachs up to assume the shape of pregnancy as they glowingly engage in the duduke challenge. The Duduke challenge was emotional and at the same time a psychological let out from the situation at the time. Dance experiences like the Duduke challenge is why Harper (1999, P.41) opines that:

Dance is expressive human movement that engages the physical, the intellectual, the emotional and the spiritual dimensions of people. It is a unique art from which uses the body as an instrument of communication. It is a powerful means of sharing languages, cultures, abilities, genders, identities and other issues across boundaries.

During the pandemic lockdown, dance also functioned effectively as a form of therapy. The news of the virus, and the daily death toll was enough burden on Nigerians, especially those whose health status and mental health situation before the pandemic was weak. Another interviewee James relayed the experience of a friend:

he was mentally being affected by some issues just before the pandemic and was on the verge of losing it before dance came to the rescue, he participated in the dance challenges on Tik tok and we began to see clear improvement.

Apart from the excretions of the body, dance has an aura of joy and happiness attached to it via music. This means that the combination of both is capable of working magic from an emotional, physical and mental point of view.

The Covid-19 pandemic lockdown led to a large scale practice of dance that is difficult to empirically state, but testimonies abound of how dance became a powerful art for releasing tension and coping with the lockdown.

Social Media

Another angle of the lockdown/stay-at-home impediment was the regimented lifestyle it imposed and the boredom that followed it. The inability to go to work, church, cinema, football viewing centres, bars and entertainment hubs took a toll on most people, forcing them to confine themselves to their homes. Within these constraints, Nigerians adopted several measures to mitigate the effects of their confinement. Here, we examine WhatsApp status-induced comic posts that brought up joy to the average Nigerian, created a vista for entertainment, and consequently filled the day to day life of individuals with actions and activities. A few of such WhatsApp status posts will be used as yardstick to exemplify the extent of boredom and bring to bear how they became a stop gap to other forms of entertainment that were suspended.

1. To begin with, On April 7th, a WhatsApp status that was trending that day was *"in the University of stay at home, faculty of lock down, department of social distancing, what is your area of specialization? mine is writing and film perusal"*. It generated responses from many people and some of them even replied stating their "area of specialization" while placing it on their status bars too, thereby becoming a trend for the day and week. As it is in many fields of study globally, areas of specialization is linked to each course of study, and in the "stay at home" university as amusingly created, all of us have activities that has kept us sane, hence our area of specialization.
2. On her status, Ella, a contact on WhatsApp wrote "after this whole corona wahala, you go dey hear wedding colours like: **quarantine green, isolated yellow, pandemic purple, covid blue, indoor white and shut down blue, sanitizer white and mask peach**". One cannot but giggle or laugh at the ingenuity of the original composer of the short note and its creative link to the popular occasion and ceremony colour stratification.

Ella who before the covid-19 pandemic had shown a penchant for comic posts, wrote **"Abuja on total lockdown, but fire went to work"**. This was unique because of the way she comically expressed the news that fire gutted the accountant general of Nigeria's office and perhaps her shock at what could have triggered it since everyone was at home. Not long after the inferno, narratives began to surface on the possibility of it being staged especially because it happened a day after the National Assembly had requested for the documents that clearly stated the expenditure of the billions of naira generated as relief funds for the Covid-19 pandemic. Analytically, the phrase **fire went to work** is a subtle dig at the possibility that humans were involved in the tragic fire incident at the office of the accountant general of the federation.

3. Folorunsho Fatai Adisa, an erstwhile President of the Faculty of Arts Students Association, University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria, and a young English scholar expressed the extent of his boredom on his status, saying **"Boredom is Butchering my Being"**. Contextually, this short but lucid and pungent expression is a subject of analysis within the cross-currents of literary discourse

with a particular focus on figures of speech. Sandwiched in the statement are the following figure of speech

- i. **Alliteration:** The statement is an alliteration because words that form the basics of its meaning begin with the same letter, adjacent to each other. Had it been longer than that, it would have fallen into the category of alliteration tongue twisters.
 - ii. **Parallelism:** Parallelism is a literary device in which parts of a sentence are grammatically the same, or similar in construction. The above statement "*boredom is butchering my being*" falls within this explanation. Additionally, parallelism has repetitive qualities that make sentences symmetrical and therefore memorable for a reader.
 - iii. **Personification:** Boredom and butchering do not correlate. The word boredom has been given a human attribute, therefore it is personification.
 - iv. **Paradox:** It is paradoxical because it looks contradictory at surface level.
 - v. **Pun:** The sentence obviously is a joke made to capture the extent of boredom felt and to exploit the different possible meanings of the words used. That makes it a pun.
 - vi. **Consonance:** There is no questioning the fact that there is an agreement and compatibility between opinions and actions in the sentence. This makes it a consonance in nature and perspective.
4. Another contact wrote **"please those who used to boast during an argument that they can feed your entire family for a year, please come and carry me oh, this is the right time to prove it"**. This statement is common among youths during arguments; it is usually used on an opponent during an argument as a way of claiming superiority in terms of financial might. Usually, such arguments may not even have anything to do with money, but in a bid to show superiority in the argument and other areas of human endeavour, such statements are verbosely used. To the writer of the status, the pandemic and its curtailing measures of stay at home without an adequate consideration of what people will eat and how they will fare was the best time for such threats to be made manifest by the challengers. Feeding a whole family for the remainder of the lockdown is even enough proof of such statement let alone a year.
5. Another contact expressed that **"the Federal Government of Nigeria should give *"OUR"* money to Jehovah witnesses or NEPA (The acronym used for the power supply company as obtainable in the 80's/90's) to share for us, they know every compound"**. This statement confirms that Nigerians surely have ways of amusing themselves in times of challenges. The two subjects of comparisons are quite very popular within the context of their practice, and the movement from place to place, discharging their respective duties. All over the country, there is arguable no 'nook and cranny that electricity company officials do not get to for the distribution of electricity bills. Similarly, the Jehovah witnesses have mastered the act of home visitation across every part of the

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nation. Who then other than these two, should be saddled with the responsibility of ensuring that the share of the covid-19 relief fund, if truly intended for the masses, gets to each compound and home? Certainly no one. Will this advice be considered? Your guess is as good as mine.

6. A concerning post, despite its comic intention, was the one that reads **"not even sure of what will kill someone again, corona dey outside, hunger dey inside"**. Certainly, the person who posted this is not in the category of those who will struggle to eat even in the lockdown conundrum, but, introspective analysis of the statement within the context of livelihood in that trying time gives it a huge meaning and confirms the fears of a lot of Nigerians.
7. Lastly, a comic status with a serious undertone that reads **"Corona left china as a virus, got to Italy as a pandemic but came to Nigeria as a business"** was on WhatsApp statuses during the lockdown, and this perhaps is the feeling of many Nigerians who have watched with disdain, the various forms of outrageous and contentious happenings since relief funds began to build up in billions and citizens were asked to stay at home with little or no consideration at all. At the last count, it was gathered that contributions from well-meaning Nigerians and multinational companies/organizations amounted to 15 billion naira, excluding the allotted figures from the Central bank and other agencies as ratified by the President. Dangote, the richest man in Africa, his friend Otedola, Globacom giant Mike Adenuga, banks like UBA, Zenith and many others were at the fore front of these donations. Considering the magnitude of the virus and its rapid spread, coupled with the struggles of advanced and more developed nations like America, Italy and France in containing it and stopping its spread, such donations were crucial and timely.

The social media platforms documented, especially WhatsApp statuses and TikTok, engaged millions of Nigerians during this time even as it offered comedy; dance and dance challenges; information and news; and criticisms of the Nigerian Government's handling of the citizens during this period.

Conclusion

The common parlance "desperate times require desperate measures" was evident during the covid-19 pandemic and lockdown was required. By all means, it was a globally trying period when lives were critically at risk. Despite the lockdown compliance, it became clear that not only those who had contacted the virus could die, but also those whose health status could not cope with the flow of information and news, either accurate or not, and the daily death counts that spiraled upward. Certainly, it was the numerous negative tendencies of this period that made millions of Nigerians to turn to dance and social media in their quest to beat the deadly virus, while ensuring that their mental health is not at risk. By turning to dance and social media, boredom was also taken care of and the body and soul were engaged in activities that strengthened them.

The import of the above is that dance is an important art form that is capable of aiding the survival of humans when the need arises, and that the contemporary gift of social media is a networking tool that has the capacity to engage the mental and psychological faculties of humans when the need arises.

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