

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public Discourses and Engagement on Governance of Covid-19 Response in Ekiti State, Nigeria



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ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Numerous studies have emerged so far on Covid-19 (SARS-CoV-2) across different disciplines. There is virtually no facet of human experience and relationships that have not been studied. In Nigeria, these studies include knowledge and attitude, risk perception, public perception of Covid-19 management, e-learning, palliatives, precautionary behaviours etc.^{1,2,3} Studies have also been carried out on public framing of Covid-19 discourses in Nigeria; these have explored both offline and online messaging and issues from the perspectives of citizens towards government's policy responses such as palliative distributions, social distancing and lockdown. The investigators of these thematic concerns deployed different methodological tools in their studies. These tools include policy evaluations, content analysis, sentiment analysis, discourse analysis, survey questionnaires, focus group discussions, in depth-interviews as well as machine learning.^{4,5}

These studies nearly always focus on the national government policy response, with little or no focus on the constituent states. In many of the studies, the researchers work with newspaper articles for analysis of public opinions while others use social media generated contents such as tweets) as sources for analysis of sentiments and opinions. Although there are others who rely on the use of survey questionnaires and other tools outlined above; the limitations of these approaches necessitated the research plan adopted by this study.

Most of the social media users in Nigeria are domiciled in cities and their demography comprises the middle class (socio-economic) who are more likely to be literate with access to internet technologies. Hence, the opinions of a majority of the population who are most likely rural dwellers with limited access to internet technologies are very often excluded. This is not in any way to disparage social media content analysis findings; because the opinions expressed by opinion leaders usually represent the larger subset of opinions prevalent in the society. Analysing public perception using questionnaires is also fraught with its challenges, as well as reliance on newspaper articles. A lot of the newspapers and news media organisations in Nigeria are politically hinged; some of them have active politicians and their associates as their proprietors. Getting unbiased opinions from these sources might be difficult. The news articles are also most likely to reflect and amplify official positions through press releases and interviews which usually privilege elite actors.

These gaps motivated this collaboration between Ekiti State Government and the African Leadership Centre at King's College London to embark on research that will primarily assess public perceptions of government leadership response to Covid-19 in Ekiti State. The timeframe of the study covers the first phase of the pandemic in Ekiti State (March/April to August 2020).

1 Eranga, I. O. E. (2020). Covid-19 Pandemic in Nigeria: Palliative Measures and the Politics of Vulnerability. *International Journal of Maternal and Child Health and Aids*, 9(2), 220.

2 Todd, A., Akhter, N., Cairns, J. M., Kasim, A., Walton, N., Ellison, A., ... & Bamba, C. (2018). The Pain Divide: A Cross-Sectional Analysis of Chronic Pain Prevalence, Pain Intensity and Opioid Utilisation in England. *BMJ Open*, 8(7), e023391.

3 Ufua, D. E., Osabuohien, E., Ogbari, M. E., Falola, H. O., Okoh, E. E., & Lakhani, A. (2021). Re-Strategising Government Palliative Support Systems in Tackling the Challenges of Covid-19 Lockdown in Lagos State, Nigeria. *Global Journal Of Flexible Systems Management*, 22(1), 19-32.

4 Adamu, H., Lutfi, S. L., Malim, N. H. A. H., Hassan, R., Di Vaio, A., & Mohamed, A. S. A. (2021). Framing Twitter Public Sentiment on Nigerian Government COVID-19 Palliatives Distribution Using Machine Learning. *Sustainability*, 13(6), 3497.

5 Oleribe O., Ezechi O., Osita-Oleribe P., et al.

SUMMARY OF METHODOLOGIES AND METHODS

To achieve the key objectives and to address some of the gaps missed by existing literature on the subject of interest, we used a multi-pronged approach involving multiple methods. This research is split into four independent sub-studies. The first part is about spatial and vulnerability mapping of at-risk populations in Ekiti State using Facebook Data for Good datasets and QGIS.

The second part explores social media analysis of the public perception of Government Covid-19 response in Ekiti State using quantitative content analysis. The third part assesses public perceptions and opinions on Covid-19 governance in Ekiti State through traditional news media using content analysis, correspondence analysis, and co-occurrence thematic network analysis.

The final part examines public perspectives and opinion dimensions on government leadership response to Covid-19 in Ekiti state using Stakeholder mapping and Q-methodology. More explanations for each of the methodologies and methods used in this research report are provided in the various study parts.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Spatial and vulnerability mapping of at-risk people in Ekiti State

- Part of the measures to control the spread of Covid-19 in Ekiti and Nigeria during the first phase of the pandemic outbreak was movement restrictions. To fully have an overview of the pattern of movement of the at-risk populations (Elderly: ages 60+) in the state, we used the Facebook Data for Good datasets which include Facebook's high-resolution population density data, Facebook's movement range dataset, and GADM shapefile polygon dataset together with QGIS 3.18.2 and the GRID3

Key Research Objectives

- To Map the thematic network and the narrative discourse terrain on issues surrounding Covid-19 leadership response in Ekiti State.
- To identify critical stakeholders and actors that can help shape government response in future health emergencies.
- To aggregate and cluster perspectives on Covid-19 policy measures in Ekiti State
- To collate existing local knowledge and memories from Governmental and Non-governmental actors' relationships during the first phase of the pandemic in Ekiti State.
- To derive policy recommendations from the research findings.

GIS database.^{6,7} These datasets and tools helped to do Covid-19 risk-vulnerability mapping of vulnerable populations in Ekiti State during the timeframe of study (i.e., between April and August of 2020).

- Facebook's movement range data maps provide information about population response to physical social distancing measures using two metrics: Change in Movement and Stay Put. The former presents 'how much people are moving around and compares it with a baseline period that predates most social distancing measures'; while the latter 'looks at the fraction of the population that appear to stay within a small area during an entire day'.^{8,9} We also used the Geo-Referenced Infrastructure

6 Humanitarian Data Exchange. (2020). *Facebook's Data for Good*. Retrieved 31 August 2020, from <https://data.humdata.org/organization/facebook>

7 GRID3 (n.d.). *Ekiti Health Care Facilities (Primary, Secondary and Tertiary)*. Retrieved 25 July 2020, from <https://grid3.gov.ng/dataset/ekiti-health-care-facilities-primary-secondary-and-tertiary#>

8 Humanitarian Data Exchange. (2020). *Movement Range Maps*. Retrieved 31 August 2020, from <https://data.humdata.org/dataset/movement-range-maps?>

9 Ibid.

and Demographic Data for Development (GRID3) for GIS shapefiles on Ekiti State health facilities and infrastructure. One limitation of the Facebook Movement Map is that it depends on user activation of their location and other proximity features; hence, most rural areas are excluded from the data capture. To this end, Only Irepodun/Ifelodun Local Government and Ado-Ekiti Local Government Areas of Ekiti State had enough Facebook mobility data for the risk vulnerability analysis. Ado-Ekiti is the capital city of Ekiti State.

- The collection of maps in figure 2 (on pp. 19-20) depict the Covid-19 vulnerability score for at-risk individuals (age 60+) in Ado-Ekiti and Irepodun/Ifelodun local government areas of Ekiti state between March and August of 2020. Between March and April 2020, the risk vulnerability scores were (extremely low: 0-8) and (mildly high: 60-69) for Irepodun/Ifelodun and Ado-Ekiti local government areas respectively. It must be clarified that these scores do not show infection or confirmed cases neither do they indicate the severity of infection.

Social Media Analysis

- The dominant themes of the Covid-19 social media messaging (Twitter) on Ekiti State Covid-19 during the first phase of the outbreak starting from March to August of 2020 were more about updates and confirmation of cases. By April, the messages were about the provision of advice, and clarifications right after communication of confirmation and update. This messaging pattern suggests active Ekiti State Government leadership of the crisis communication narratives on social media.
- Ekiti Covid-19 social media discussions were led mainly by texts made, shared, or amplified by accounts linked to government and pro-government interests.
- The Covid-19 themes on social media in Ekiti State are consistent with the direction of mainstream media. Government sources (both state and federal e.g., press releases, NCDC updates etc.) accounted for most of the information distributed on social media (Twitter) and newspapers.



News Articles Analysed

- 54% of the materials (articles, blogposts etc.) with gender attribution analysed (N=790) were written by male authors, while 18% were written by female authors. The remaining 28% did not have any gender attributions.
- The news publications (N=761) with the most coded extracts are The Nation (n = 157: 21%), Premium Times (n = 126: 17%), The Sun (n = 100: 13%), and Nigerian Tribune (n = 97: 13%). All these news organs are print media except Premium Times that is an online news publication. These publications provided more coverage on Covid-19 in Ekiti State during the first phase of the outbreak than the other publications.
- Of the 554 coded extracts belonging to opinion leaders (interviewed) by gender attribution, (n = 318: 57%) are male actors or personalities, only (n = 56: 10%) are female actors. The remaining (n = 180: 33%) have no indicated gender attribution.
- The News reports on Covid-19 privileged organisational leaders more than the opinions of private citizens. Most of the news actors interviewed were affiliated with political or government agencies. Other public opinion leaders such as traditional monarchs, academics, youth leaders, and religious leaders have less sufficient representations in the mainstream media during the first months of the Covid-19 disease outbreak in Ekiti State. Most of the news discourse on Covid-19 in Ekiti State from March to August 2020 were in publications located in capital cities such as Lagos (n = 97: 13%), Abuja (n = 54: 7%), and Ado-Ekiti (n = 96: 13%). The implication of this is the exclusion of voices from rural communities.
- The co-occurrence network maps of the mainstream media show that their thematic narratives surround the

subjects of updates, awareness, confirmation, and information dissemination.

- In the conversation graphs in the newspapers and other mainstream media, anti-government sentiments, partisan criticisms, and protests were sparsely covered by the publications.

Q-Methodology (Public Perceptions)

- The public perspectives on Covid-19 in Ekiti State are clustered around Four (4) viewpoints and discourse dimensions. They are: (i) Distributive engagements and Socio-economic Access (Factor I), (ii) Disease Surveillance, Intervention assessments, Information and Education access (Factor II), (iii) Palliatives and social supports issues (Factor III), and (iv) Crisis communication, collaborative response, and protests (Factor IV). These Factors described the grouped perspectives expressed by the participants in the Q-sorting. Their pattern of aggregating the opinions in Ekiti Covid-19 conversation space.
- There are 37 opinions (Statements) in the conversation space. They are collected into 7 different criteria thematic categories.
- The disease surveillance policy measure by Ekiti State during the timeframe of the investigation was the Forward contact tracing approach. This entailed the isolation of known cases to forestall further transmission. However, this approach is susceptible to missing asymptomatic cases (*Criteria I: Disease surveillance and face covering*).
- There was a noteworthy acknowledgement of the impacts of the enforcement of movement restrictions, random testing protocol and the expansion of Ekiti State's only isolation centre on the mitigation of the spread of the virus (*Criteria II: Movement restriction and testing*).
- The collaboration between state and non-state local actors was not sufficient enough to significantly impact the management of Covid-19 in Ekiti State during the first phase of the pandemic (*Criteria III: Collaborative response and citizen engagements*).
- Regular updates, clarifications and case confirmations were provided by the Ekiti State government on Covid-19 to curtail misinformation. Awareness and information

campaigns strategy of the state government aimed at bus and tricycle drivers on social and physical distancing helped stemmed the spread of the virus during the first phase of the pandemic in the state (*Criteria IV: Information, updates, and awareness*).

- There are views that provision and distribution of palliatives during the lockdown were not enough. There were also concerns about the transparency in the distribution of welfare support packages and palliatives (*Criteria V: Palliative, social, and welfare support*).
- Despite government directives on social and physical distancing, many businesses and markets operated without observing these measures in Ekiti State. Economic sustenance is a primary reason for this infraction.
- Education access was also hindered by the lockdown. The alternatives provided such as the use of internet technologies, radio and television could not fully ameliorate the access limitation because of some of the factors discussed earlier including digital literacy, affordability; others include poor or inadequate virtual education teaching methods and curriculum, inadequate electricity supply etc. (*Criteria VI: Economic, education, and access to justice*).

RECOMMENDATIONS (POLICY) On Social Media

- Have a more distributed messaging strategy involving identifying private or non-government social media influencers who are resident within, and outside Ekiti State who could have attracted more retweets and spread. A multi-layered crisis strategic online communication should be more diffused and distributed to include non-state actors with relevant influence.

- The social media crisis communication strategy for the Ekiti State should be complementary and inclusive of traditional offline communication infrastructure due to the place of Ekiti as a low internet access/penetration state.
- Although mega and macro-influencers (mainly non-resident actors with large followership) are important for mass appeal; but, since all disaster events are local, it is crucial to engage more with micro and nano-influencers (residents) because they have a more focused message process with higher relevance factor. Their inclusion in the information dissemination process by tagging, mentioning, and sharing their messages (relevant) will add to the quality and reach of the communication process.



On News Media

- Ekiti State Government should engage more with local community publications in future communication planning of the state for emergency events.
- Government communication strategy during a crisis should be reformed to be more horizontal (i.e., peer-to-peer) especially among the various responsible agencies instead of the hierarchical (command-and-control) structure.
- Having the different agencies own their part of the communication process is more beneficial than solely centralised, top-down information. Aside from the Ekiti Commissioner for Health, the Director of the Ekiti State Emergency Management Agency Ministry, Ekiti State University Teaching Hospital should also be empowered to participate in the communication process. This will distribute the conversation further.
- Ekiti State Ministry of Information should work with the State Union of Journalists to train journalists and reporters on inclusive journalism to accommodate the underreported voices (e.g., women, youths, and rural dwellers).

On Q-Methodology (Public Perceptions)



- In future disease surveillance interventions, bidirectional contact tracing protocol should be deployed to complement available disease surveillance infrastructure including proximity-detection digital applications. Bidirectional approach ‘uses “reverse-tracing” to identify the parent case who infected a known case, then continues tracing to iteratively discover other cases related to the parent.’¹⁰
- More Rapid SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) Diagnostic Antigen Testing kits be made accessible to citizens, and we also recommend the provision of more mobile testing facilities. A collaboration with local scientists could help in the development of cheaper alternatives to the more expensive kits and facilities.
- More collaborative intervention and policy initiatives between Ekiti State Government and local non-governmental actors should be emplaced. These collaborative relationships should cut across different socio-economic segments of the society and should reflect active citizen engagements.
- Mistrust of government policies around the distribution of palliatives can be averted by the enactment of measures that will encourage distributed engagements with citizens and transparency in the distribution of provisions and palliatives. Open communication and inclusive decision making on relief distributions can also prevent hoarding and corruption on the distribution chain.
- Virtual education, internet and mobile learning pedagogies should be developed by the state. Teachers should be trained on digital teaching methods to provide education access in situations where physical lessons are non-practicable.

¹⁰ Bradshaw, W. J., Alley, E. C., Huggins, J. H., Lloyd, A. L., & Esvelt, K. M. (2021). Bidirectional contact tracing could dramatically improve COVID-19 control. *Nature Communications*, 12(1), 1-9, 2.