



3RD VIRTUAL GLOBAL WHO INFODEMIC MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE

Stakes of messages linked to the infodemic broadcast in the media during the first six months of COVID-19 epidemic response in Cameroon

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DIGITAL POSTER



infodemic
MANAGEMENT

COVID-19 infodemic response overview for country Cameroon

Coordination, resourcing and strategy

- In the national response to Covid-19, the infodemic management is carried out between the media watch unit of the planning section and the awareness unit of the Operation section through the daily collection of rumors, false information, and reported information and the various manipulations collected in an Excel database, at the Public Health Emergency Operations Coordination Center
- There is a TASK National Communication Force which makes it possible to sectorally address all public health issues by involving all sectors
- There is no budget allocated for infodemia
- The management of the infodemic is done by a member of the awareness unit coordinated by the head of the unit
- The infodemic integrates all sectors involved in communication

Working relationships across society

- The media monitoring unit and the awareness unit of the Incident Management System verify the veracity of rumors and develop messages to deconstruct them
- The Ministry of Public Health has the facilities to disseminate awareness messages in the media and messages to deconstruct rumors in the various media and social networks
- The Ministry of Public Health coordinates the action of organizations (NGOs, Civil Society Organization) through a national communication task force, where all community feedback and surveys are published

Integrated measurement, research and data analysis

- The data collected daily and encoded by Excel Microsoft on a database by the media monitoring unit are transmitted to the awareness unit
- This system issues daily all the alerts recorded in the national and international media that address the themes of the Coronavirus pandemic according to a well-structured framework. Alerts classified into rumors, disinformation and manipulations are rated on a value scale ranging from primary to secondary.
- The stored and archived information is transmitted weekly to the awareness unit, which retrieves it and proposes communication strategies in response to rumors, false information, manipulation and generally to the pillar of risk communication and community engagement (CREC).
- During the first six months of the response, around two thousand (2000) alerts (proven information, false information, rumors, manipulations) were captured in the media, notably: written press, radio, television and cybernetic press. Of these alerts, four hundred (439) are considered to be false information, rumors or manipulations that were relayed by the fourteen (14) press organs in our samples.

Reporting and integration into decision-making

- Insights from social listening or response activities are triangulated with other socio-behavioral and epidemiological data to inform program and policy design.
- Social listening, infodemic preparedness and response activities are conducted on a daily basis.
- Knowledge, skills and practices surveys are also carried out in order to better capture the perception of the communities and adapt awareness messages and deconstruct the various rumors.

Evidence-based interventions and implementation research

- Specific interventions have been developed to address the infodemic based on insights
- Existence of a tailored infodemic management strategy for communities that are vulnerable and at risk.
- The media watch unit captures all rumors by monitoring social networks, press, etc.

What did infodemic management and response look like before the COVID-19 infodemic in your country?

Before the onset of coronavirus disease, there was no real talk of rumor management in Cameroon.

However, a media watch unit has always existed in the organizational structure of the incident management system, whose role was more to monitor rumors in social networks, the media and to receive calls from the community through the number. green ": 1510.

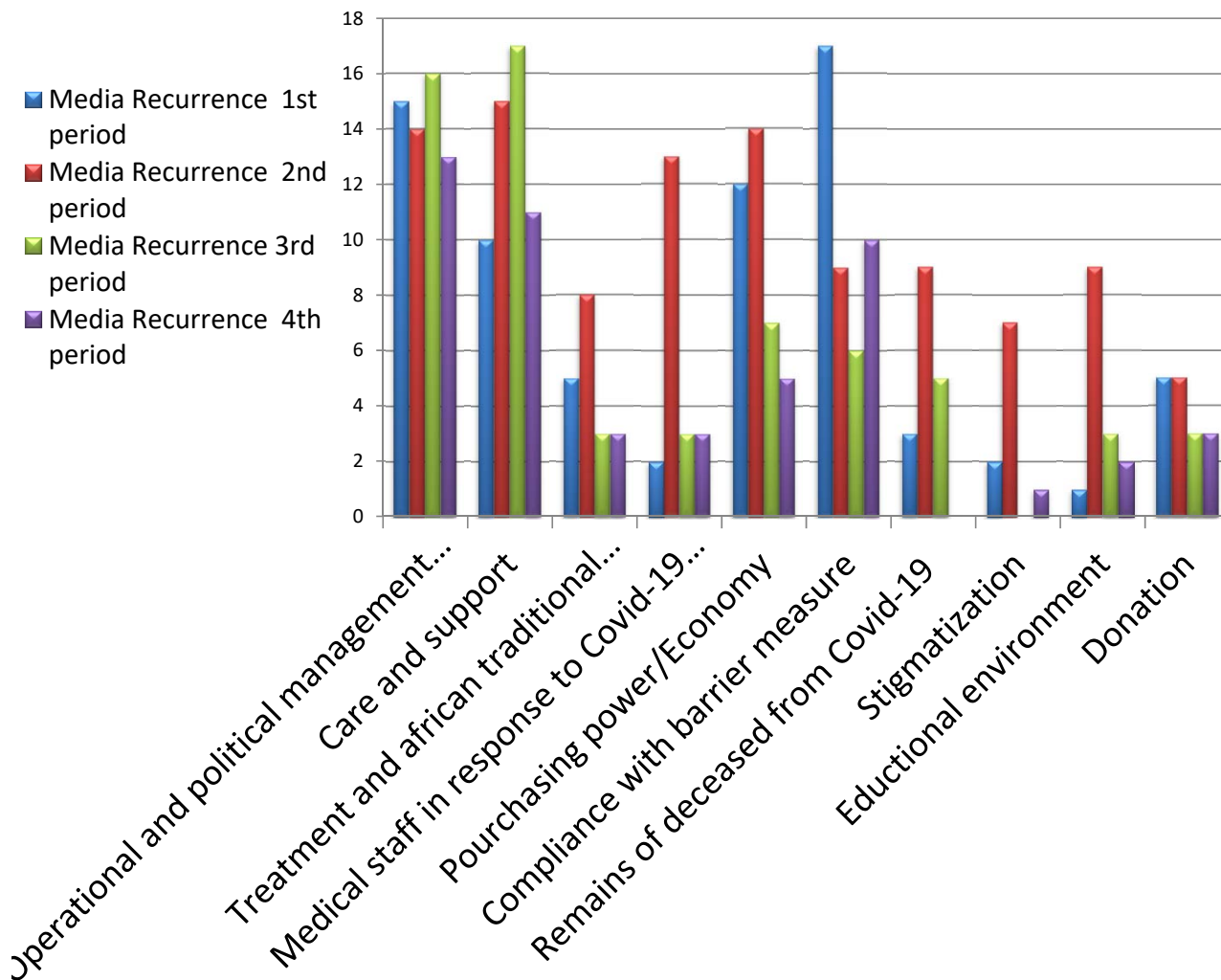
It should also be noted that an important literature has been relayed on this theme in the past. It was approached in its time under the term of rumor in other major events including the limnic eruptions of Njindoun in 1984 and Nyos in 1986, respectively located in the regions of West and North-West Cameroon, where he was observed that "Faced with the inability of scientists to quickly agree on the nature of the hazard at the time it occurred, many parallel explanations were deployed to explain the event" (Molo). Other circumstances have also seen the development of rumors so in a train incident it emerges that Le 'On October 21, 2016 around 8 am, a rumor spread announcing the circumstance of a derailment in Eseka. This cyber rumor then spreads very quickly, with public communicators responding in silence " (ZOGO, 2018).

What has changed in infodemic management and health misinformation response since start of COVID-19?

The onset of the disease brought an important change in the management of the infodemic in Cameroon. The major change was to attribute a larger function to the watch unit which collects on a daily basis through alerts collected in the media of masses (radio-television, written press, internet) and social networks, all information deemed false information, manipulation.

On a daily basis, operators collect verbatim information in a classified and hierarchical database.

This information is transferred to the awareness unit of the operations section which transcribes and decrypts it to generate response strategies. The strategies can integrate other pillars of the response or be managed within the unit in terms of proposals. a communication strategy depending on the severity or by a press release or by publishing posts in communication channels such as whatsapp forums.



This table presents the different themes that were addressed by the fourteen media that were selected and addressed our sample of 14 local media on the theme of infodemia.

On reading this graph it appears that the recurring themes have focused on: compliance with barrier measures, operational and political coordination of Covid-19, the issue of the management of Covid-19 cases and medical staff and health training. Ultimately this graph illustrates the proliferation of themes during the four operational periods of the disease response,

What are the lessons learned from the experience of infodemic and infodemic response in COVID-19?

What advice would you give to other countries developing their own infodemic response plans?

In terms of lessons learned, we have retained that with the ever-growing number of mass media and especially the cybernetic press, the management of a public health event cannot get rid of the proliferation of rumors regarding the issues of protection of communities through their health and well-being. Therefore:

- ✓ Managing the infodemic must be an imperative, states must develop strategies to stay alert even outside of the management of Covid-19,
- ✓ If it is with the Coronavirus pandemic that this problem has been further developed, it must serve as a basis for the management of other public health events to come,
- ✓ In the case of Cameroon, the proliferation of this infodemic on: the management of the remains resulting from disease, the declarations on the fact that it was a conspiracy of the West to exterminate the African population, the stigmatization of the Covid-19 patients had an impact on the rate of use of the hospital environment as well for the pandemic as for other diseases and afflictions.
- ✓ In other states which intend to develop strategies, it is necessary to think of the follow-up which is the most difficult part in terms of prompt response strategy, to think of coordinating actions to avoid the development of various sources of information, to communicate as soon as possible , stay tuned to communities

What are your plans for future infodemic management work in your country?

For the case of Cameroon:

- ✓ We continue to do a media watch which has extended with the cholera epidemic management system at the national level;
- ✓ We are looking for funding for a more digital management of rumors, false information and manipulation, in particular through the implementation of applications allowing the awareness unit to obtain information and process it as quickly as possible.
- ✓ In fact, the collection of information is manual and is done on a daily basis, where all the information is collected and transmitted at the end of the day, which makes the systems even cumbersome.