

## INVESTIGATING THE COMMUNICATION COMPONENTS OF NIGERIA'S POST COVID-19 ECONOMIC RECOVERY POLICY

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### Abstract

In a bid to contain the spread of Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria, measures such as lockdowns and curfews were imposed by Federal and State governments. Among the worst affected by Covid-19 containment measures were informal sector operators. To cushion the impacts of Covid-19 containment measures and to strengthen the informal sector to contribute to reconstruction of post Covid-19 economy, the Federal Government of Nigeria, in collaboration with some agencies, rolled out post Covid-19 economic recovery interventions. Other than media coverage, there seem to be a lack of government commitment to diffuse the policy to engender even participation of the target population. This study investigated communication components of Nigeria's post Covid-19 economic recovery policy. Among other objectives, the study investigated communication platforms that were adopted to popularise the policy. Descriptive survey research design was used to study a population of 84,004,084 from which a sample size of 384 respondents was drawn. Findings of the study indicated sheer neglect of interpersonal communication networks in the implementation of Nigeria's post Covid-19 economic recovery policy. The study recommended, among other things, that the Federal Government of Nigeria and its collaborating agencies should incorporate interpersonal communication networks to diffuse the post Covid-19 economic recovery policy.

**Keywords:** *Covid-19 pandemic, informal sector, interpersonal communication networks, Nigeria informal sector operators, Nigeria's post Covid-19 economic recovery policy*

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### Introduction

The economic system of every society is often divided into the organised and unorganised sectors. The organised sector, otherwise referred to as the formal sector, constitutes the employer of a nation's labour force in public and private institutions with fixed wages and benefits, while the unorganised sector, popularly known as the informal sector, is neither taxed nor recognised as an organised formation by the government. Among players in the informal sector are traders, hawkers, vendors, artisans, farmers and motor transport operators. Not only that these informal sector operators are low-income earners, but also many of them survive on daily earnings. In other words, any occurrence or government policy that hinders an informal sector operator from engaging in his daily business could spell hunger, among other hardships, for him and his dependents.

In Nigeria, just as many developing economies, the informal sector makes up a significant percentage of the country's labour population (Pratab and Quintin, 2006; Andrews, Caldera and Johnson, 2011). This is not only due to the unemployment situation in Nigeria but also due to the economic outlook of the nation which traditionally links some ethnic groups or native tribes to particular economic vocations. Sometimes, identification with these ethno-economic attachments engage many young adults, thereby depriving them of the opportunity to acquire higher education or technical skills that often form the condition for securing employments in the formal sector. The result of this situation is that a large chunk of the labour population of Nigeria are active players in different informal vocations.

In the execution of measures to contain the spread of Covid-19 pandemic, Nigeria's informal sector suffered huge setbacks. This is not only due to government directives on inter-state lockdowns and restrictions, but also due to the partial and total closures of markets and business places. Across the six geo-political zones of Nigeria, the informal sector was significantly paralysed. In the South-South geo-political zone, for instance, there were total lockdowns in Rivers and Delta States. In Edo State, markets and shops were totally shut-down, except for dealers on food materials that were relocated to nearby government primary schools with strict restrictions in the number of traders and customers to access the markets at a given point in time. Other South-South States – Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom and Cross River States witnessed different degrees of restriction of movement and closure of business places. In Bayelsa State, hundreds of market shop owners were rendered jobless due to the demolition of some markets by the State government in its bid to contain the spread of Covid-19 pandemic.

It was a similar situation in the South-West, especially in Lagos State that witnessed prolonged lockdowns. The situation was not different in the South-East, North-East, North-Central and North-Western zones with lockdowns and closure of markets and other business places. Even artisans, farmers and small retail shops were not spared.

The result of the execution of Covid-19 containment measures is that operators in the Nigerian informal sector sub-economy experienced untold economic hardships since the pronouncement of measures to contain spread of the pandemic by the Federal Government of Nigeria in March 2020. Government provision of food palliatives to cushion the economic hardships orchestrated by Covid-19 containment measures have abysmally remained a far-cry from what an average family requires in terms of food materials alone. Even Federal and State governments acknowledged the gross inadequacy of the food palliatives. The condition is that Covid-19 pandemic and the attendant containment measures by the government made life a lot miserable for many Nigeria informal sector operators and their dependents.

But, beyond the immediate challenges of Covid-19 on these vulnerable groups, the recovery of businesses and people's economic mainstay that have been battered by the pandemic left millions of Nigerian citizens agitated. The impacts of business losses on the economy, especially the informal sector that engages a significant percentage of Nigeria's population in the post Covid-19 economy, became a huge burden to the government. To enable the reconstruction of Nigeria's post Covid-19 pandemic economy and to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic on households, the Federal Government, in collaboration with some governmental agencies, launched some monetary and fiscal stimulus packages for small businesses and households. Other than media coverage of the announcement of the post Covid-19 economic recovery policy, the communication components of the initiative are unknown. Thus, the awareness, perception and participation of Nigeria informal sector operators in the post Covid-19 economic recovery policy serves as justification for this investigation.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Since the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria, measures, such as lockdowns, curfews, closure of market and business places and other forms of restrictions have been experimented by Federal and State governments to contain the spread of the virus. Among the worst affected by Covid-19 containment measures are Nigeria informal sector operators, such as traders, farmers, artisans, transporters and shop owners. Since many people in this category of the nation's population must carry out their economic vocations daily to make ends meet, the impacts of Covid-19 containment measures were massive on Nigeria informal sector operators and households.

To cushion the impact of Covid-19 containment measures and to raise the capacity of the informal sector to contribute to the reconstruction of post Covid-19 economy, the Federal Government of Nigeria, in collaboration with the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and the Federal Ministry of Finance, Budget and

National Planning, rolled out the post Covid-19 economic recovery interventions. Some of the post Covid-19 economic recovery monetary palliatives are the Fiscal Sustainability plan of the Federal Government and the CBN 50 billion Naira Targeted Credit Facility (TCF) to support households and micro, small and medium enterprises (Olisa, 2020; Agbakwuru, 2020, Kola, 2020). There is also the CBN 50 billion Naira credit facility through the Nigerian Incentive-Based Risk Sharing System for Agricultural Lending (NIRSAL) (Otaru, Akubo and Oji, 2020).

Other than the announcement of the post Covid-19 economic recovery interventions over the news media, there is a seeming lack of government commitment to diffuse the post Covid-19 economic recovery policy through interpersonal communication networks in order to identify and clarify doubts and misconceptions and to avoid the shortcomings of previous economic recovery policies, such as, the agricultural economic recovery intervention that was launched to address the impacts of 2016 economic recession (Ire and Nwanmereni, 2017). It appears that the seeming neglect of interpersonal communication networks have assigned the post Covid-19 economic recovery policy an elitist outlook. Thus, the problem of this study is summarised in the following questions: What were the communication platforms used in popularising Nigeria's post Covid-19 economic recover policy? How do Nigeria informal sector operators perceive the post Covid-19 economic recovery interventions?

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study were to:

1. investigate the communication components of Nigeria's post Covid-19 economic recovery policy;
2. ascertain Nigeria informal sector operators' perception of post Covid-19 economic recovery policy; and
3. ascertain the factors that affect Nigeria informal sector operators' participation in post Covid-19 economic recovery policy.

### **Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following questions:

1. what were the communication platforms used in popularising Nigeria's post Covid-19 economic recovery policy?
2. how do Nigeria informal sector operators perceive post Covid-19 economic recovery policy?
3. what are the factors that affect Nigeria informal sector operators' participation in post Covid-19 economic recovery policy?

### **Literature Review**

The study was anchored on Expectancy and Diffusion of Innovations theories.

#### **Expectancy Theory**

The Expectancy Theory was postulated by Vroom (1964) in his book entitled "*Work and motivation*" (Sapru, 2013). The theory states that a person's motivation towards a cause is determined by the expectation or assurance that participation in the cause will culminate in success. The theory states that people will demonstrate a high level of commitment towards a programme when they are certain that participation will engender expected benefits. What this means is that participation in a programme is governed by the assurance that the expected benefits of the programme are achievable.

Expectancy theory looks at the relationship between an individual's disposition to an action and his past experiences in related actions. It goes to say that one's past experience can affect his attitude towards related actions in the future. Sapru (2013) observes that genuine participation becomes probable due to past experiences and that a person's motivation towards a programme defines his experience and satisfaction with related programmes in the past. That is, if an individual was not satisfied with the outcome of a past project, he may not be motivated to participate in similar projects in the future.

To enhance people's participation in an economic or development policy, Reddi (2009) underlines the importance of identifying and clarifying doubts and goals in ensuring genuine participation of members of a target population. The importance of identifying and clarifying goals and doubts underscores the role of communication in successful implementation of a development project. Reddi (2009) states that citizens' informed opinion of a development programme is vital to the realisation of the goals of the programme. He adds that "a widespread understanding of a plan is an essential stage of its fulfilment" (p. 51). What this means is that prospective beneficiaries of Nigeria's post Covid-19 economic recovery interventions should be educated and encouraged to align their expectations with the goals of the policy. It also underscores the role of public information disseminated through interpersonal communication networks that are consistent with the socio-cultural and economic conditions of Nigeria informal sector operators in the realisation of the goals of post Covid-19 economic recovery policy.

### **Diffusion of Innovations Theory**

The Diffusion of Innovations theory was postulated by Everett Rogers in 1962 (Miller, 2002; DeFleur, 2010; Baran and Davis, 2015). The theory is concerned with how an idea (innovation) gains acceptance, diffuses and spreads through a target population over time. According to George (2006), different kinds of people embrace and adopt new ideas in different ways. This condition presents a task before a development or change facilitator who must determine the disposition of a target population towards an innovation. Okorie and Ekwamu (2012) argue that to possibly communicate and realise the objectives of an innovation, the perception and attitude of the target group to such innovation must be certified. The scholars also identify the possession of the skills and requisite technology to exploit the gains of an innovation as conditions that can affect acceptance and participation in an innovation.

The foregoing argument presents a likelihood of the fact that the formulation and introduction of an economic framework may not after all translate into direct participation of the target population in the framework. It is possible that certain intervening tendencies could whittle the successful implementation of the framework. The implication of the diffusion of innovations development philosophy is that Nigerian government and its collaborating agencies must certify the attitude of the country's informal sector operators towards post Covid-19 economic recovery policy through entire communication that embraces the interpersonal channels related to the target population, in addition to mass media and internet-based communication platforms.

### **Nigeria's Post Covid-19 Economic Recovery Policy and Imperatives of Media Integration**

The term "media integration" in this study refers to the combination of communication platforms that enable the exchange of messages between interdependent groups. With this delineation, media integration can be defined as the combination of relevant communication media channels to engender exchanges among stakeholders of a project. It is the fusion of relevant media channels to enable interactions with concerned audience fragments (Mcleod, Daily, Gou, Eveland, Bayer, Yang and Wang, 1996; Zhu and Liang, 2018). Media integration defines the application of two or more communication platforms to enable interactions among stakeholders.

The goal of media integration in driving a development programme is to ensure that the target benefits of the programme are achieved. Thus, integration ensures that the shortcomings of one communication medium is overcome by exploiting the strengths other media forms. UNESCO (1980) states that if overall communication goal is to promote socio-political and economic progress, decisions must be undertaken to structure the links between different communication channels and to maximise the power of the mass media and interpersonal communication networks. It goes to say that while the mass media may be exploited to create overall awareness due to their pervasive nature, interpersonal networks are essential in affecting and modifying attitude towards realising the goals of a development plan. UNESCO (1980) avers that although the mass media can affect people's perception, interpersonal communication is more effective when the goal is attitudinal change.

The integration of relevant media channels in the communication component of a development project also supports the determination of meaningful feedbacks. Audience feedback is pivotal since it demonstrates the attitude or response of a target population to a development project. Dominick (2012) identifies immediate and measurable feedbacks as advantages of interpersonal communication over mass communication. Reddi (2009) remarks that interpersonal communication "is an ideal and effective communication situation because you can get immediate feedback. You can clarify and emphasise many points... It is possible in this type of communication to influence the other person and persuade him or her to accept your point of view" (p. 40).

Integrating interpersonal communication platforms, such as, town hall meetings, market unions and community-based groups into the communication component of the post Covid-19 economic recovery policy will not only establish direct contacts with Nigeria informal sector operators and households but will also enable the clarification of doubts that may affect implementation of the policy. Interpersonal communication networks will also identify and address misconceptions of the goals of the policy.

### **Imperatives of Nigeria's Post Covid-19 Economic Recovery Interventions**

The occurrence or prevalence of economic recession is the foundation of economic interventions. The goal is to address the impacts of a recession on citizens and to stabilise the economy through formulation and implementation of some economic recovery policy. Economic recovery interventions are directed at individuals and groups whose activities impact on the general economic well-being of the nation. Clunies-Ross, Forsyth and Huq (2009) state that "economic stabilisation is fundamental to human welfare everywhere, and especially in the poorest countries, in many of which instability is pervasive and its human effects overwhelming" (p. 331). Thus, it can be summarised that the imperative of economic stabilisation programmes is to ensure that citizens are not left destitute by the occurrence of an economic disturbance.

One of the modes of economic stabilisation is compensatory finance, which involves the provision of capital for businesses that are affected by an economic disturbance. Such capital is provided in the form of loans or grants that enable operators in the affected sector of the economy to stabilise their businesses which eventually overtime impact on the national economy (Todaro and Smith, 2015). This economic stabilisation paradigm exemplifies Nigeria's post Covid-19 economic recovery interventions.

But, the implementation of investments in the informal sector does not go without challenges. One of the major challenges is the participation of the operators in the industry. This is because if citizens do not understand or do not have confidence in a governmental policy, the realisation of the goals of such a policy could be deadlocked. Todaro and Smith (2015) state that any investment that is designed to promote the informal sector must have the capacity to cope with the challenges of participation. To this end, ensuring Nigeria informal sector operators' participation in the post Covid-19 economic recovery policy will not only enable the recovery of capital investment in the policy, but will also mitigate the impacts of the pandemic on households, businesses and the nation's economy.

## **Impacts of the Informal Sector on National Economy**

The contribution of the informal sector to the stability of the national economy, especially the economies of developing countries, is not only due to the inability of the formal economy to shoulder the labour burden of a nation but also because many informal activities graduate into formal sector businesses. Since labour opportunities in the formal sector are grossly inadequate to cater for the unemployment burden of a nation, especially due to the nagging problem of urban migration, encouraging the growth of the informal economy becomes the panacea to the swelling unemployment problem (Pratab and Quintin, 2006; Kappel and Ishengoma, 2006; Andrews, Caldera and Johnson, 2011).

The informal sector is associated with the rural sector. This is not only because many players in the urban informal economy are often migrants but also because the urban populace hardly identifies with the economic characteristics of the informal economy, such as farming, trading and artisanry. In many cases, the production and distribution of essential food materials are undertaken by the rural populace. Thus, players in the formal economy depend on the informal sector for the provision of some essential goods and services and the informal economy flourishes by the patronage of the formal economy. Todaro and Smith (2015) observe that the link between the formal and informal sectors is crucial for a stable national economy since the interplay enables excess labour to escape from extreme poverty and unemployment. Todaro and Smith (2015) adds that “the formal sector depends on the informal sector for cheap inputs and wage goods for its workers and the informal sector, in turn, depends on the growth of the formal sector for a good portion of its income and clientele” (p. 350). It goes to say that the interplay between the formal and informal sectors is healthy for the growth and stability of the national economy. It also means that investments in the informal economy can actually check capital flights that results from the importation of goods that can be produced locally.

Other than unemployment reduction, poverty eradication and the conservation of foreign exchange, the informal sector also encourages the development and conservation of local technologies. This is because informal economic activities make great use of local resources. Informal sector operators play substantial role in collecting and assembling scrap materials that are recycled and used by the manufacturing sub-sector in the production of essential products. Todaro and Smith (2015) aver that the informal sector is crucial in promoting and distributing the benefits of development. To this extent, ensuring that investments in Nigeria’s post Covid-19 economic recovery policy accomplishes the target benefits becomes a task that cannot be compromised.

## **Perception of Nigeria’s Post Covid-19 Economic Recovery Policy**

Perception can be defined as the different ways different individuals and groups think about or understand a particular phenomenon or idea. What this means is that different individuals or people can perceive a particular idea in different ways. McCombs and Shaw (1972) define perception as the different ways people perceive or interpret a particular idea based on differences in psychological makeup, ideological construct, world view and exposure (Ndimele and Innocent, 2006). This assertion gives the impression that people who have a similar exposure or experience are likely to perceive and interpret a particular phenomenon in a similar way.

Some social scientists do not share the notion that individuals with a similar experience or exposure could be consensual in their perception of a given phenomenon. The argument is that different individuals have different psychological constructs which serve as a defence mechanism that filter information to affect individuals’ unique view of phenomena. Baran and Davis (2015) thus define perception as a selective process that underlies the interpretations people accord a given phenomenon. To

this end, two persons can perceive a given idea unlike despite the likeness of their experience or training. This accounts for why two lawyers could interpret a given law or matter in different ways.

Perception serves as a sensory stimulus that underlines individual's idiosyncrasies. This is why the perception is a crucial factor that must be taken into consideration by a development facilitator, such as, the government or government agency. Perception can result in the success or failure of a development programme. This is especially since development is about people. The provision of infrastructure, such as, roads, electricity, schools and water may not translate into development. Such infrastructure only enable development when they identify with people's development priorities (Asadu, 2009; Obutte, 2012). What this means is that Nigeria informal sector operators' perception of post Covid-19 economic recovery policy could be antithetical or supportive to realisation of the goals of the policy. It also means that Nigerian citizens' perception of the government can support or undermine the realisation of the goals of an economic policy.

## **Methodology**

The nature of this study necessitated the use of descriptive survey research design. Survey involves the investigation of the characteristics of a sample which can be attributed to the larger population from which the sample was drawn (Ihejirika and Omego, 2011; Wimmer and Dominick, 2011). The population of the study was 84,004,084. This is the figure of registered voters in the six geo political zones of Nigeria according to the 2019 report of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). This figure which represents the adult population of Nigeria was adopted following the absence of data on the population of Nigeria informal sector operators. The distribution of registered voters in Nigeria's six geo-political zones is presented as follows:

North- East: 20, 158, 100 (24%);  
South-West: 16, 292, 212 (19%);  
North-Central: 13, 366, 070 (16%);  
South-South: 12, 841, 279 (15%);  
North-East: 11, 289, 293 (14%); and  
South- East: 10, 057, 130 (12%)

A combination of registered voters in the six geo-political zones puts the population of the study at 84,004,084. From this population, a sample size of 384 respondents was drawn based on the sampling system of Keyton (2001).

To administer the questionnaire on the sample, a multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted. The first stage introduced the cluster sampling technique, which is used to divide Nigeria's six geo-political zones into clusters. The second stage involved the proportionate sampling system, which enabled the allocation of samples to the different clusters based on their percentage representation in the overall population of the study. Thus, Nigeria's six geo-political zones received samples as follows: North-West: 92 samples; South-West: 73 samples; North Central: 61 samples; South-South: 57 samples; North East: 54 samples; and South East: 47 samples. The actual administration of copies of the questionnaire (the research instrument) adopted the convenience sampling technique. Data were presented in tables using simple percentages and weighted mean score (WMS) based on a four-point Likert Scale.

## Decisions

When the calculated value from the Likert Scale is equal to or greater than the mean, the proposition was held in the affirmative. When the calculated value is less than the mean, the proposition was considered to be negative. The mean is 2.5. The formula for calculation is:

$$\frac{AR \times W}{R \times NO}$$

Where:

AR = Aggregate Response

W = Weighting

R = Total number of Response

NO = Number of options in the scale (4)

Using the four-points Likert Scale, responses to the items in the questionnaire were weighted as follows:

Strongly Agreed (SA) = 4

Agreed (A) = 3

Strongly Disagreed (SD) = 2

Disagreed (D) = 1

## Data Presentation and Analysis

Data for the study were obtained through copies of the questionnaire administered to the sample. Data were presented in statistical tables, using simple percentages and weighted mean score (WMS) based on a four-point Likert Scale.

**Table 1: Awareness of Post Covid-19 Economic Recovery Policy**

Awareness	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Aware	349	91
Not Aware	35	9
Total	384	100

The presentation in Table 1 indicates that many Nigerian informal sector operators were aware of Nigeria's post Covid-19 economic recovery interventions based on 91% awareness rate obtained by item 4 in the questionnaire.

**Table 2: Sources of Awareness of Post Covid-19 Economic Recovery Interventions**

Sources of Awareness	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Mass media (Radio, Television, etc) reports	318	83
Town Hall Meetings with government officials	0	0
Market tours by government agencies	0	0
Market unions	0	0
Community leaders	0	0
Civil Society Organisations	0	0
Financial institutions (Banks, Insurance)	0	0
Conference/workshop/rallies	0	0
Government Official websites	11	3
Social media	55	14
Colleagues/associates	0	0
Total	384	100

The presentation in Table 2 indicates that that the mass media were the major sources of awareness of Nigeria's post Covid-19 economic recovery interventions. This report is based on 83% respondents who identified the mass media as their sources of awareness of the policy.



**Table 3: Nigeria Informal Sector Operators' Perception of Post Covid-19 Economic Recovery Policy**

S/N	Questionnaire Items	SA	A	SD	D	Total	WMS	Remarks
6.	Government post Covid-19 economic recovery policy is genuine.	244	111	424	74	853	2.2	Rejected
7.	Government post Covid-19 economic recovery policy is only a political statement.	860	366	52	21	1, 299	3.3	Accepted

On perception of post Covid-19 economic recovery policy, the presentation in Table 3 shows that many Nigeria informal sector operators perceived the policy as a political statement. This report is based on 2.2 and 3.3 weighted mean scores obtained by items 6 and 7 of the questionnaire. The implication of this report is that the implementation of Nigeria's post Covid-19 economic recovery policy could be affected by the perception of the target population.

**Table 4: Factors affecting Nigeria Informal Sector Operators' Participation in Post Covid-19 Economic Recovery Policy**

S/N	Questionnaire Items	SA	A	SD	D	Total	WMS	Remarks
8.	I have applied to access post Covid-19 economic recovery grant.	256	0	640	0	896	2.3	Rejected
9.	I am yet to apply because I do not have confidence in the post Covid-19 economic recovery policy.	684	405	128	14	1, 231	3.2	Accepted
10.	I am yet to apply because my attempts at accessing previous economic recovery grants were unsuccessful due to bureaucracy in government processes.	532	312	112	91	1, 047	2.7	Accepted
11.	I am yet to apply because the time frame given to repay economic recovery grants is often inadequate.	328	183	292	95	898	2.3	Rejected

The presentation in Table 4 shows that many Nigeria informal sector operators were yet to apply for post Covid-19 economic recovery grants based on 2.3 weighted mean score obtained by item 8 of the questionnaire. Data in the same table show that Nigeria informal sector operators' participation in the post Covid-19 economic recovery policy is challenged by factors, such as lack of confidence in the policy and apprehensions that an attempt at accessing the grant may be unsuccessful due to failure in accessing similar grants in the past. Table 4 also shows that inadequacy of time frame given for repayment of government monetary grants may be one of the factors that affect Nigeria informal sector operators' participation in post Covid-19 economic recovery policy.

## **Discussion of Findings**

The discussion is based on the research questions.

### **Research Question 1: What were the communication platforms adopted in popularising Nigeria's post Covid-19 economic recovery policy?**

Communication is the lifeblood of every development or economic sustainability programme. This is because communication serves as the vehicle that conveys the programme message to the target population. It is also with communication that results can be measured. Hence, research question 1 investigated the communication networks of Nigeria's post Covid-19 economic recovery policy. Responses to the research question indicated that the Nigerian government and its collaborating agencies unduly rested in the information power of the mass media to popularise the post Covid-19 economic recovery policy. Data presented in Table 2 indicated that interpersonal communication networks were neglected in diffusing the policy.

No doubt, the mass media are critical in wider dissemination of development information due to their pervasive nature. In fact, the mass media are considered as critical stakeholders in the development process (Udoakah, 2004; Anaeto and Anaeto, 2010; Ebagere and Anyanwu, 2011). However, the incorporation of interpersonal communication networks in the development process is crucial in

overcoming certain intervening conditions that may whittle mass media influence. Intervening conditions could be an individual's disposition to innovations, influence of peers and opinion leaders and the spread of misconceptions. Okorie and Ekwamu (2012), in their articulation of diffusion of innovations theory, argue that communicating and realising the objectives of a development programme requires the development facilitator to certify the perception and attitude of the target group towards the programme. UNESCO (1980) states that the mass media can actually be effective in affecting people's perception but interpersonal communication is critical if the goal of a campaign is attitudinal change. The organisation adds that if the goal of a campaign is to promote socio-political and economic progress, decisions must be made on how to maximise the power of interpersonal communication networks to overcome the shortcomings of the mass media in effecting attitudinal change.

Interpersonal communication networks, such as market unions, town hall meetings, market tours by officials of the government and collaborating agencies, community-based organisations and civil society alliances are critical channels in driving the message of the post Covid-19 economic recovery policy. With massive awareness already established through the mass media and social media channels, interpersonal channels hold the benefits of identifying and clarifying doubts and misconceptions that could affect Nigeria informal sector operators' participation in the post Covid-19 economic recovery policy.

### **Research Question 2: How do Nigeria informal sector operators perceive post Covid-19 economic recovery policy?**

Perception is critical to the success of any people-centred economic programme. This is because perception shapes the attitude of the target population to the programme. Research question 2 investigated Nigeria informal sector operators' perception of post Covid-19 economic recovery policy. The presentation in Table 3 indicated that many Nigeria informal sector operators perceived the policy as a political statement. This report is evident from the weighted mean scores of 2.2 and 3.3 obtained by items 6 and 7 of the questionnaire.

The perception of post Covid-19 economic recovery policy as a political statement may have risen from the elitist posture of the policy. The sheer neglect of direct engagements with informal sector operators at coordinated interpersonal forums appears to have assigned an elitist outlook to the post Covid-19 economic recovery policy. Baran and Davis (2015) define perception as a selective process that underlies the interpretations people assign to a given phenomenon. Nwanmereni and Ochonogor (2020) state that understanding citizens' perception of a development programme is a critical consideration in the implementation of the programme. Genuine engagement of Nigeria informal sector operators at designated interpersonal forums will unravel the conditions that underlie the groups' perception of the post Covid-19 economic recovery policy as a political statement.

### **Research Question 3: What are the factors affecting Nigeria informal sector operators' participation in post Covid-19 economic recovery policy?**

Data presented in Table 4 indicated that many Nigeria informal sector operators were yet to apply to access the post Covid-19 economic recovery grants. The table showed that absence of confidence in the policy and apprehensions that attempts at accessing the grant may be unsuccessful, were some of the factors affecting Nigeria informal sector operators' participation in post Covid-19 economic recovery policy. This report is evident from the weighted mean scores of 3.2 and 2.7 obtained by items 9 and 10 of the questionnaire. The presentation in the same table also indicated that inadequacy of time frame given to repay government monetary grants contributed to low participation in post Covid-19 economic recovery policy.

A peculiar feature of the identified challenges to Nigeria's post Covid-19 economic recovery policy is that such challenges are traceable to communication deficit. These challenges which can simply be summarised as fear of the unknown outcome of participation in post Covid-19 economic recovery policy are manifest indicators that the policy was not effectively communicated to elicit useful feedbacks. Sapru (2013), in the analysis of the expectancy theory, emphasises the importance of identifying and clarifying doubts that may impede the realisation of the goals of a development plan. It goes to say that the essence of communicating a development plan or an economic sustainability programme is not simply to inform and to educate the target population but also to elicit feedbacks that should determine the manner of programme implementation. The importance of measurable feedbacks underscores the integration of interpersonal communication networks with the modern media channels in development programme implementation. Reddi (2009) remarks that interpersonal communication channels are the ideal communication platforms in articulating and implementing development programmes because such communication channels enable the development facilitator to identify, clarify and emphasise points. The sheer neglect of interpersonal communication networks by the Federal Government of Nigeria and its collaborating agencies resonates in the abysmal participation of the country's informal sector operators in the post Covid-19 economic recovery policy.

## **Conclusion**

The laudable initiative of the Federal Government of Nigeria to mitigate the devastating impacts of Covid-19 pandemic on households, the informal sector and the nation's economy through the post Covid-19 economic recovery interventions is confronted by consequential communication deficit. The policy is confronted with information deficit, resulting in apprehensions and abysmal participation of Nigeria informal sector operators. The suspicion that the policy is a political statement, that attempts at accessing the policy grants may be unsuccessful due to bureaucracy in government processes and that the time frame to be allowed before repayment of the grants may be brief, could have been elicited and conveniently addressed through entire communication.

## **Recommendations**

The first recommendation is, beyond mass media channels, the Federal Government of Nigeria and its collaborating agencies should incorporate interpersonal communication networks in diffusing the post Covid-19 economic recovery policy. Interpersonal communication networks, such as market unions, market tours, town hall meetings, community leaders, community-based organisations, conferences and rallies will help in diffusing the post Covid-19 economic recovery policy.

The second recommendation is to have collaboration with organised groups, such as, civil society organisations, financial institutions, co-operatives and the Nigeria chamber of commerce that will help to deliver the post Covid-19 economic recovery policy message to the target population. Collaboration with these groups will also enhance the believability of the policy.

The third recommendation is that Nigeria informal sector operators should not resign to fate due to intrinsic challenges in accessing government monetary grants. The impacts of Covid-19 pandemic and the contributions of the informal sector to economic growth and stability should spur operators to perseverance.

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