

## **Review Article**

### **WEBINAR- A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY IN THE WAKE OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC: A SWOT ANALYSIS**

#### **Abstract**

*Web-based communication such as webinar is a form of online communication from a source to a receiver especially (in precarious urgent situations such as the present pandemic era) when abnormal is the new norm and with the prohibitions made on large gathering of people because their safety is not guaranteed due to the wide spread of the Corona Virus. Many organizations, associations among others due to the strengths and potentials of webinar speedily adopt and incorporate webinars as a communication medium without fully understanding and having complete knowledge on all there is to know about webinar usage. In so doing, they fail to realize and consider the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated to webinar as a medium of communication. The implication of such oversight is participants' not gaining value for their time and in some cases money spent, in some cases this creates a negative impression about webinar on the minds of participants. Therefore, the study presents an analysis on the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of organizations adopting webinar as a communication strategy in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study concludes that webinars are effective communication strategies; hence, corporate establishments and institutions of higher learning need to utilize the analysis presented herein particularly the weaknesses of webinars in order to structure and package their webinar events in a manner that will counter the weaknesses and thus produce satisfactory results for all parties.*

**Keywords: Webinar, Communication strategy, Online training, Coronavirus**

## 1. Introduction

No one ever foresaw that the world would one day be shut down and activities would cease for months. This shut down is attributed to the breakout of the novel Coronavirus also known as the COVID-19. The COVID-19 was first identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019. This strain of coronavirus became officially known as the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), and also referred to as 2019-nCoV. The infection caused by this virus is known as coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) (WHO, 2020). According to WHO (2020), the 2019-nCoV is a beta-coronavirus, as are the viruses that cause severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS).

Summarily, the symptoms of COVID-19 includes common symptoms such as fever, dry cough, tiredness; less common symptoms such as aches and pains, sore throat, diarrhea, conjunctivitis, headache, loss of taste or smell, a rash on skin, or discolouration of fingers or toes; while serious symptoms includes difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, chest pain or pressure and loss of speech or movement which may appear on an average of 5-6 days, or as long as 14 days, after exposure to the virus (Centre for Disease Control, 2020; WHO, 2020 ). COVID-19 symptoms are often mild, with less than 20% of infections progressing to severe diseases, such as pneumonia, respiratory failure and, in some cases, death (WHO, 2020).

Unfortunately, the cases of the COVID-19 are no longer limited to just Wuhan or China alone it has spread rapidly to many parts of the world, and on March 11, 2020, the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) declared COVID-19 a pandemic. COVID-19 affected over **213 countries and territories** around the world and 2 international conveyances with a total of 21,374,002 confirmed cases worldwide (Worldometer, 2020) and on February 27, 2020 Nigeria confirmed its first case in Lagos. The widespread of the virus has caused the deaths of thousands of people creating anxiety, fear and tension in the minds of others. The rapid growth of the virus has been attributed to its easy mode of transmission which can affect a large number of persons within seconds. Hence, large gatherings of persons contribute to the rapid spread and constitute a serious risk to safeguarding public health during a pandemic.

This situation led governments all over the world to institute lockdown measures, putting a restriction/ban to movement and large public gathering. This development led to the suspension

of face-to-face classes, closure of educational institutions at all levels, closure of corporate organizations and business, closure of airports, a restriction on religious gatherings and any gathering exceeding 20-50 persons depending on state regulations. As the pandemic spreads which is inevitable, no one knows for sure how long these closures are likely to last. Initial measures taken by the Nigerian government started from two weeks which has now been extended to months.

In no way were individuals and nations prepared for disruption of this magnitude, there is no blueprint or a preconfigured guide book to ensure appropriate responses, no one had contingency plans for when the world would be on lockdown. This unprecedented event has had significant impact on the economy of nations, and is serving as a quintessential adaptive and transformative challenge. In a time of increased risks businesses, corporate organizations, event organizers etc. have had to adopt major changes to ensure their survival in their various industries. These major changes were to ensure the continuous operation of their organization in a manner devoid or with lesser of face-to-face communication or operating from the four walls of a building and also ensuring the safety of stakeholders.

In the course of the COVID-19, many organizations have had to deploy alternative communication strategies to enable them communicate their plans to both their internal and external stakeholders, as well as the media with tailored, targeted messages. Among the communication strategies deployed by organizations in the wake of the COVID-19 is the Webinar mode of communication. In this era of the COVID-19, the condition of the economy and the burning desire to reach a vast audience coupled with the help of technological advancements business organizations, educational institutions, associations, religious institutions, industry sectors and government are increasingly incorporating webinars as a means of communicating to their stakeholders. Webinars are increasing in popularity and have become an effective and affordable alternative mode of communication, offering a means for online presentation such as streaming online videos, PowerPoint presentations, and sideline chats among others.

The term "webinar" was created by Eric R. Kolb in 1998 (Yahoo! Answers; U.S. Registered Trademark No. 75478683, 2000) to describe the online meeting service his company developed.

Derived from two words, "web," referring to the World Wide Web, and "seminar," a meeting held for the exchange of useful information by members of a common business community. Put together webinars are synchronous, real-time online meeting events that gather people together at a specific time to listen to, observe, and participate in a presentation (Lande, 2011). Simply put, Webinars are seminars conducted on a virtual platform. Previously, participants in a webinar had to listen to presentations using their mobile phone while using a computer to watch presentation slides; however, due to advancements in technology and increased bandwidth have made it possible but both audio and visual presentation to be accessed from a single device.

According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, the term webinar is a live online educational presentation during which participating viewers can submit questions and comments. A broader perspective was given by Wikipedia; the term webinar is a short for Web-based seminar, a presentation, lecture, workshop or seminar that is transmitted over the Web, specifically a portmanteau of web and seminar, to describe a specific type of web conference. For the purpose of this study, a webinar is a web-based (on the internet) interactive seminar with the transmission of live audio-visual lecture, workshop or presentation from a source to an audience who participates through voice or video chat, file sharing and text-based chats. The recent proliferation of webinars is largely attributed to its nature whereby presenters and participants converge on a single platform from remote locations.

Webinar came about in the early 1990s when audio and video web-conferencing software was created in mid-1990s. In the late 1990s when a more advance version of web-conferencing became available more businesses and higher education institutes began to take webinars seriously. In the early 2000s when high-speed internet access became widely available and when the cost of video capture software and web cameras decreased and webinar software providers made video conferencing accessible by providing affordable services, companies began to embrace webinar and over the past decade the software capabilities have improved to the high quality services available today (Harrison, 2014). Webinars are in most cases used not just to communicate but to train attendees; a webinar uses a progressive video stream onto the attendees' device so there is no need for hard drive space or managing leftover media files. The on-demand ability to share and distribute recorded webinars via a portal or database plays a vital

role to the learner. It means that content is at the fingertips of trainees, and that unlimited playback is possible (Zielinski, Jaruga, Hofmann, Marinova, Plewczynski, & Kerler, 2012).

Webinars enables interactive communication in the sense that it provides a platform for sharing information with and receiving feedback and information from an audience without requiring that people gather in one physical location. Customarily, webinars are mostly one-time, 60 to 90-minute events; however, depending on the nature of the topic or the conversation, webinars can be structured to have two segments that could have duration of 60 to 90 minutes each. James (1999) opined that webinar technology is readily available and surprisingly inexpensive—downright cheap relative to hosting hundreds of people at a live seminar held in a high-rent hotel conference room.

Even with the suitability of using webinars to reach thousands of people, the use of webinars also have some minus. One of such minus is the divided attention a webinar presenter can get from an audience that ought to give undivided attention to the presentation. This minus is as a result of the large capacity of audience a webinar can host and given that these people are virtually from far and wide and not in the same physical space. The audience members might be multi-tasking in a number of ways: carrying on sidebar conversations with coworkers, folding laundry, checking email, or catching up on the latest sports scores (Lande, 2011). This presents a challenge for presenters who must put in extra effort to capture the attention and maintain engagement of the audience throughout the webinar.

Ordinarily, not much people knew about and utilized webinar as a communication strategy, but due to the emergence of the COVID-19 webinars have become highly popular and patronized this period by various sectors than before, it is on this basis that this study sets out to examine the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of a webinar presentation in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic.

## **1.1 Theoretical Framework**

The **Media Richness Theory (MRT)** and **Social Presence Theory (SPT)** served as the theoretical foundation for the study. This study adopted two relevant theories on computer-mediated communication. The theories were then related to the study's focus, which is how webinars can be applied as an educational tool.

The **Media Richness Theory** sometimes referred to as information richness theory was propounded by Richard L. Daft and Robert H. Lengel in 1984 as an extension of Social Information Processing Theory, the theory is used to rank and evaluate the richness of certain communication media, such as electronic mail, phone calls, video conferencing etc. MRT was originally developed to describe and evaluate communication media within organizations and the ability of such a medium to reproduce information sent over it in a manner that reduces uncertainty and clarify ambiguity (Daft and Lengel, 1984). In presenting Media Richness Theory, Daft and Lengel sought to help organizations cope with communication challenges, such as unclear or confusing messages, or conflicting interpretations of messages. However, communication scholars have tested the theory in order to improve it, and more recently Media Richness Theory has been retroactively adapted to include new media communication mediums, such as social media.

Information richness is defined by Daft and Lengel as "the ability of information to change understanding within a time interval". The theory states that all communication media vary in their ability to enable users to communicate and to change understanding. The degree of this ability is known as a medium's "richness". MRT places all communication media on a ranking scale based on their ability to adequately communicate a complex message. Media that can efficiently overcome different frames of reference and clarify ambiguous issues are considered to be richer whereas communications media that require more time to convey understanding are deemed less rich.

Asemah, Nwammuo and Nkwam-Uwaoma (2017, p.271) notes that "the capacity of the different media for resolving ambiguity, negotiating varying interpretations and facilitating understanding are what makes them rich or lean". Simon and Peppas (2004) posits that in MRT, richness is operationalized in terms of a medium's ability to accomplish four goals: sending multiple cues, supporting language variety, providing immediate feedback, and allowing personal nature to be communicated. A rich medium, then, would allow for a variety of cues, both verbal and nonverbal, to be sent and received. It would also allow for the transmission of multiple language types, including the spoken and written word, and visual symbols and images. Rich communication media also permit feedback to be sent and received instantaneously and a high degree of personalization. Using these descriptions, a purely text-only medium would be the

least rich medium, whereas a synchronous video conference or webinar would be the richest. They went further to examine product websites' richness in terms of multimedia use. They classified "rich media sites" as those that included text, pictures, sounds and video clips, while the "lean media sites" contained only text.

In ranking media richness, face-to-face communication is the richest as its features includes visual, words, gestures, tone, body and sign language and more. Also immediate feedback is possible in contrast to text messages or email (Asemah, et al, 2017). Closely behind face-to-face on this ranking would be video conferencing like; webinars, Skype, video calls etc. While text message, email, letters etc. are leaner means of communication since they offer only one format of communication and does not promote immediate feedback. Bubas (2010) cited in Asemah, et al (2017) posits that richer forms of media such as the electronic media usually permit more types of information and feedback, enabling more comprehensive transmission and reception of messages and a better adaption of the message to the particular recipient. Bubas (2010) further adds that the effectiveness of a message or communication is related to the appropriate choice of a medium to deliver a specific message, regarding how complex, ambiguous, impersonal or emotional, the message should be.

The relevance of Media Richness Theory to this study lies on the fact that it serves as a guide to organizations on the best way to choosing a medium that will effectively communicate its message and information to its stakeholders. This theory in relation to this study examines Webinar as a rich medium for the dissemination and retrieval of information. A webinar in this case can be certified a rich medium as it meet the basic requirements of a rich medium. As stated by Simon and Peppas, webinars affords the source an opportunity to send multiple cues contents that includes; using text, in addition to audio and video messages etc. Webinar messages are not limited to English speaking users only; it is open to both English and non-English speaking users. Webinars have immediacy features, in the sense that it allows presenters to send messages and get multiple responses from other users within seconds. It also permits users to air their opinions, views and ideologies in regards to the message communicated.

As most concepts in the social science discipline, there is no one acceptable definition for the **Social Presence Theory** as different scholars have provided different definitions but with the

same meaning. Short, Williams and Christie (1976) first came up with the SPT. According to Short, et al the theory focuses on “the degree of salience of the other person in the interaction and the consequent salience of the interpersonal relationships”. Simply put, the SPT was developed to explain the effects a mediated communication can have on the communication process and the way people perceive the information. The theory measures a communication media based on the degree of awareness of the other person in a communication interaction. Gunawardena (1995) provided a more updated definition of the theory to mean, “The degree to which a person is perceived as a ‘real person’ in mediated communication.”

Short, et al (1976) posited that people perceive some communication media as having a higher degree of social presence (e.g., video) than other communication mediums (e.g., audio). This theory places emphasis on the importance social presence has in a mediated communication and how it influences the way people communicate. Some forms of media have higher social presence which means they tend to be more sociable, personal and warm forms of communication, whereas, a communication medium with a low degree of social presence is regarded as less sociable, impersonal and a little bit cold. Tu and McIsaac, (2002) cited in Asemah, et al (2017) sees social presence as the degree of feeling, perception and reaction of being connected to another intellectual entity on computer mediated communication.

The Social Presence Theory holds that communication is effective if the communication medium has the appropriate social presence required for the level of interpersonal involvement required for a task. Similarly, in ranking various media according to their level of social presence, face-to-face communication would be regarded as having a high social presence, closely followed by video-based communication, while text-based communication would be regarded as the having the least social presence. Video is a clear example of a communication medium with high social presence because viewers not only see the person in the video but also understand that the person is real and can connect with their audience. Conversely, radio ranks lower on the social presence scale. This is based on the fact that since listeners cannot see the presenter and visual cues such as facial expressions and gestures, they find it difficult to feel connected to the presenter and the information been disseminated. Buras (2010) in Asemah, et al (2017) stated that the level of experience of social presence by users is related to the quality of the medium. Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) holds that social presence is the feeling that audience members experience or do

not experience being involved in a communication interaction when using mass media. Working webinar into the social presence ranking, webinars rank higher on the social presence scale because presenters and participants can converge in real time, there are audio-visual capabilities and there is a tendency for both presenters and participants to see themselves. Hiltz, (2013, p. 4) posited that “high social presence and immediacy are highly correlated with favorable learning outcomes.”

The Social presence theory according to Short, et al (1976) is majorly composed of two main concepts: intimacy and immediacy. Intimacy in a communication medium has to do with the level of connection of both parties which is influenced by a number of factors, such as: physical distance, eye contact, smiling, and personal topics of conversation, while Cobb (2009) posits that immediacy is a measure of psychological distance that a communicator puts between himself and the object of his communication. The relevance of the SPT to this study is that its tenet showcases the effectiveness of webinars as a communication tool that organizations, government and industry sectors can use in effectively communicating with their stakeholders or training and retraining the staff in this era where it becomes mandatory to work from home. In addition, to better enhance the effectiveness of webinars, Harrison (2014) suggests that it is important that webinar presenters understand the Social Presence Theory and deliberately structure their webinar in a way that their participants can connect with them.

## **2. Literature Review**

The study presents a review of literature on areas concerning webinar as a mode of communication, a SWOT analysis was also done on all that concerns adopting webinars in the wake of the corona virus.

### **2.1 Forms of Webinar**

Webinars have become highly popular and sort after due to the fact that they require limited resources, can be organized within a short time frame, and afford participants the opportunity to acquire skills and knowledge and also virtually connect them for an interactive learning experience without having to bother about the cost of travelling and accommodation.

In any webinar event, there must be a facilitator and one or more presenter in some cases there is a convergence of roles and responsibilities. The facilitator is responsible for promoting the event,

and handling every other logistics such as; setting up the online platform, opening the webinar, providing various types of technical support, and ensuring follow-up. The presenter, usually a subject matter expert, creates and presents the learning content of the webinar, and engages the participants through interaction (Arivananthan, 2015).

Wang and Hsu (2008) posit that there are three formats for webinar-session delivery: (a) presenter vs. multiple participants from one site; (b) presenter vs. multiple participants from multiple sites; and (c) multiple presenters from one site vs. multiple participants from one or multiple sites. There are some software or tools that make webinar hosting or event possible, some of these tools are; Elluminate, Anicam-Live, Interwise, Adobe Acrobat Connect, Skype, Zoom etc. These e-learning software all share similar features that enrich the entire on-line presentation and knowledge sharing experience. Webinars accommodate a series of activities; sharing slides by the presenter, live text chat with attendees, video streaming, the presenter can also conduct polls for attendees to participate in, presenters also get to upload documents that support the lecture or discussion, encouraging interaction between presenters and participants, and on a final note the entire presentation can be recorded and sent to those who could not attend and even to those who attended the live event.

In an **Elluminate** session, the instructor can monitor learners' status from the participants' Status Window, which shows the participants' audio-video connection, the participants' hand-raise status and order, and the participants' message-typing status. The Direct-messaging Window enables participants to communicate through real-time text chatting. The message is archived, so the instructor can scroll back to read the texts. The instructor can use either the Application-sharing Window to share the application with participants or the Whiteboard Window to illustrate ideas or concepts. In a study on how Elluminate can facilitate online learning Kohorst and Cox (2007) used Elluminate to facilitate both virtual office hours and the communication of course-related information to students. Elluminate effectively facilitated interaction between the instructor and individual students who had questions regarding the course materials.

**AniCam** is a tool that provides many functions suitable for synchronous teaching. For example, it enables teachers to use their computer screen as a blackboard to explain course content and provides 'canvas' functions—such as a painting brush and blackboard eraser to be used on the

blackboard. In addition, all of the course presentation and interaction processes can be recorded synchronously and can be provided to students for review after the class is over (Chen, Ko, Kinshuk, and Lin, 2005). Chen, et al (2005) conducted a webinar study using Anicam-Live at the Cyber University in Taiwan with the aim of facilitating synchronous communication between the presenter or instructor and the students. The findings and results gathered revealed that students were satisfied with the online synchronous live instruction mode. **Adobe Acrobat Connect** is webinar enabled software that is comprehensive in nature and serves as a platform for digital marketing events, online training and learning, delivery immersive events, maximize attendance and measure results thereby optimizing campaign investments for organizations.

**Interwise Connect** combines voice, Web and video conferencing in a single platform that enables organizations and other users provide unlimited conferencing and collaboration to all their stakeholders. Designed for the unique needs of mid- to large-sized enterprises, Interwise Connect is unique for delivering an enterprise-class application that transforms voice, Web and video conferencing from multiple point tools into one core communication product that can be made available to organizations stakeholders ([www.interwise.com](http://www.interwise.com)). Ng (2007) conducted a webinar study using Interwise at the Open University of Hong Kong. 200 students were divided into 6 groups; instructors delivered the course through both synchronous and face-to-face mode. The results suggest that synchronous learning promotes tutor-student interaction better than student-student interaction.

**Skype** is a computer program that enables users to make free video and voice calls to anyone in the world using the Skype network. Some features of Skype include free Skype-to-Skype calls, free video calls, conference calls, instant messaging, SMS messaging and the ability to forward all calls to a mobile phone when a user is offline. Through videoconferencing, students participate more in their own learning, hence they are more invested. Skype can be used for e-learning such as tutoring students, conducting interviews, connecting with students in different countries, collaborating on group projects, and to attend remote lectures. Researchers Pan and Sullivan (2005) initiated studies on the implementation of synchronous learning environments using VoIP (Skype) to facilitate online chat sessions and suggested that the tool facilitates synchronous interaction and provides just-in-time clarification and information for students.

**Zoom** is a cloud-based conferencing solution that provides both video conferencing and screen share capabilities. It is an easy to use video conferencing program that allows for multiple participants, audio and video sharing, working on a whiteboard and recording. Zoom can be used for meetings among individuals or to conduct interviews for potential hires. In the wake of the COVID-19 and employees working from home, zoom application has become highly patronized by organizations and even individuals used mostly for training purposes.

## 2.2 Features of Webinar

As a mode of communication there are identifiable features associated with webinar events. These features are explained below:

**Internet Access:** Webinar are online seminar that must have internet connection before the presentation can go live. At the participants end, internet access must be present before attendees can successfully connect to the event. This is a key feature of a webinar as without internet access hosts cannot commence the programme and audience cannot connect to the programme. In addition, webinar providers require specific software

**Scheduled Date and Time:** As a live online seminar, webinars have a scheduled time when the presentation will kick-off and when attendees are supposed to connect to the programme, webinar events are usually scheduled way ahead of time, from up to 6-8weeks ahead of time to enable participants programme themselves ahead of time. Although time zone may vary for participants and be a challenge but as long as participants have the intention to attend and have internet connection, the time zone challenge can be overcome. Webinar events have fixed and limited duration of hours presenting content using audio, video, sharing screen, PowerPoint presentations, etc. should not exceed the scheduled time.

**Rights Giving:** In webinar events, the host or presenter in charge of the webinar may give different rights and approvals to some of the participants that make them presenters for a certain amount of time. This right giving helps to encourage feedback and it gives the participants more options like screen sharing, PowerPoint presentation, file sharing, etc. during the event.

**Attendance is by Invitation:** Webinar events are not open to all individuals online. Attendance on webinar events are by invitation, webinar hosts sends out invitation to individuals or group of individuals who are the target audience of the event. The invitation messages sent to prospective audience usually includes a link for attendees to register for the webinar.

**Interactivity:** On webinar, events interactivity levels are usually tutor-student interaction than student-student interaction (Wang & Hsu, 2008). However, interaction with participants can be done on various levels such as audio, chat, quizzes, surveys, whiteboard, “hands up” button, etc.). This one-sided method of interaction is among the reasons for webinars unpopularity in institutions of higher education and its popularity in the business industry. Student-student interaction is very limited majorly due to the partial anonymity of participants on a webinar. Most attendees in a webinar in most cases do not know and see themselves; hence, there is little or no interaction among them.

### **2.3 Adopting Webinar as a Communication Strategy in the Era of COVID-19 Pandemic: A SWOT Analysis**

An analysis would be presented on the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats available to organizations and government in utilizing webinars as an alternative mode of communication during unprecedented times like this.

#### **2.3.1 Strengths**

There are various strengths and positive sides of incorporating webinars as a mode of communication for organizations that want to share information with a large number of people without having to gather them in one physical location. Thus the strengths of webinars included the following;

**Cost-Efficiency:** Frederick (2011) cited in Lande (2011) posits that corporate and educational budgets are shrinking. If a target audience extends beyond the local area, webinars do not need funds to cover travel expenses or costs for substitute instructors. This advantage can be attributed to the advancement in technology and the creation of software used for remote communication which has subsidized the sale of webinar technology and has made it more available. The implication of the reduction in the cost of organizing and attending seminars is that trainee’s satisfaction increases and that an alternative to traditional training and learning has emerged.

Similarly, Britt (2006) states that cost of organizing and executing a webinar is considerably less than what is needed for face-to-face seminars. The cost-saving quality of webinars means that there is no need for travel or accommodation expense for both trainees and attendees, no additional technology fees, no need to rent a hall, no need to print materials for attendees, no need for event greeters to hand out materials and nametags, and no need for snacks or meals (Lande, 2011).

**Multi-purpose:** Webinars are platforms that enable users to communicate a variety of messages intended for different purposes. Companies conduct webinars to share goals and upcoming changes with employees, corporate training departments use webinars to train employees scattered in various locations, professional associations host educational webinars for members, and marketers sponsor webinars for target audiences. Webinars make it easy for companies to hold shorter, more frequent training sessions several times a year (ReadyTalk, n.d., p. 2).

Webinar sessions provide those looking to raise their qualifications or retrain in a certain subject area a viable option to try various subjects if they are unsure of the specifics of what they want to study. Thanks to webinar technology; trainees can attend different webinars to check themes and topics before choosing often expensive traditional training formats or post-graduate studies (Zielinski, 2012).

The **Convenience** of webinars eliminates the need for the participants to be geographically defined. Webinar audiences can include people from all over the world, thereby broadening the reach of an organizations webinar. What is most important is to have access to quality internet and a computer or a smart phone to connect to the webinar. Advancements in technology made this feat possible as it allows for live streaming audio and visuals, which is less costly for large audiences. Another strength of webinar can also be related to individuals who find it difficult to travel; webinars bring the information to them at the comfort of their choice location.

**Multi-level Interaction:** Recent advancements in technology have aided webinars to eliminate the linear mode of communicate. That is, a communication that makes the audience passive without having to make input during the event. A major strength of webinars lies in its ability to facilitate multi-level interaction that includes feedback mechanisms such as sideline chats and more recently participants can now make audio and visual input during the event. This strength

of webinars contributes to improving the quality of the webinars and also causes satisfaction for both the presenters and the attendees.

**Availability of Post-Webinar Content:** Live webinar presentations can easily be recorded for future reference or usage, the recorded sessions are then provided to people unable to attend the live presentation. The advantage of this is that attendees can also re-view them at their leisure and share the recordings with others.

**Status Bar:** Organizations and associations looking to create a positive image and raise their status in the eyes of their stakeholder can use the instrumentality of webinar to do so. Membership organizations can increase their value in members' eyes-and increase their membership too. This is an eLearning strategy to grow membership and increase revenue (Lande, 2011).

**Promotes Real-time Multilevel Demonstrations:** Webinar is a mode of communication that has social presence, in the sense that attendees feel connected to a presenter they can see and read facial and body expressions of the presenter. Webinar presentations facilitates real-time multilevel demonstrations in that presenters use visual cues such as facial expressions and gestures to enhance their presentation and create some form of intimacy with the audience.

### 2.3.2 Weaknesses

Although webinar has a range of strengths it presents as a mode of communication, it is quite unavoidable that it also has some weaknesses. These weaknesses pose as a challenge to using it to effectively communicate information to a large number of persons not in the same geographical location.

**Attentiveness:** Due to the fact that webinar audiences are not present in one physical location but are scattered about, their attention level maybe low as they can easily be distracted if they lose connection with the presenter or if the webinar is not moving at a good pace.. Attendees in traditional seminar are generally pays more attention to the presentation than those participating in a webinar. While a webinar is in progress, trainees may browse the internet, work, read and do many other things that might distract them and detract from the training. Riddle (2010) notes that some attendees in a webinar may be at home watching children; or

writing shopping lists, while others are in noisy work areas having sidebar conversations with coworkers or visiting other websites.

In order to overcome this weakness webinar host and presenters must capture and endeavour to maintain the interest of participants by providing engaging activities using tools such as; polling questions, quizzes, or whiteboard exercises (Godfrey, 2009). Polling questions can serve many purposes: to motivate the audience to participate, get a pulse for the audience's knowledge of the subject matter, draw attention to an interesting fact, or calculate the percentage of audience members who have experienced something related to the topic. Questions can also be used to provide immediate reinforcement of learning (MacKeracher, 1998) cited in (Lande, 2011). Regardless of the reason, questions that require the audience to do something-such as click a radio button for the right answer-help engage them in their learning experience and helps creates a higher level of attentiveness.

A weakness associated with webinar is **Pacing Inability**, whenever a webinar presenter hangs on particular information or dwells on one slide for too long, participants tends to lose focus. Presenters should employ the right pacing by using more slides to note key points during online presentations as this helps keep participants focused. Fripp (2009) says that this can be achieved by making each slide contain as little information as possible and by creating a new slide for each new bullet point. The key technique to this is to not let the audience stagnate for too long on particular information.

The **absence of physical communication**: Traditional meetings allow participants to be more flexible and interact more than during webinar sessions. While webinars offer synchronous communication, the venue "promotes tutor-student interaction better than student-student interaction" (Wang & Hsu, 2008, p. 176), which accounts for webinar's unpopularity in educational institutions unlike they are in business and professional association communities. In a webinar, dialogue is limited and interactivity becomes a challenge; however, a skilled trainer can use multiple techniques to minimize this effect.

**Technical issues:** To conduct a webinar properly, a trainer needs software and the knowledge and experience to use the software as intended, requiring the trainer to spend additional time learning the software.

Participants have few technical issues to consider besides installing the webinar software and following any on screen prompts. The majority of users will have access to computers meeting at least the minimum requirements to participate in a webinar. In addition, slow network speed and loss of Internet connection are also weaknesses to using webinars as a means of effectively communicating information.

### **2.3.3 Opportunities**

Given the advancements in technology, modifications have been made on webinar software that they are now compactable with mobile phones implying that more people can make use of webinars. This means that the reach of webinar events will only keep increasing and organizations that need their message to reach a vast majority of people across geographical landscape can easily use the instrumentality of webinar.

### **2.3.4 Threats**

The cost of internet subscription poses a threat to users of webinar, this cost arises from the high level of data consumption live webinar requires, consumption arising from streaming live videos and audios. This threat may deter prospective participants from connecting to live webinar events.

A SWOT analysis on webinar has been presented; it then behoves organizations, association, educational institutions and government to use webinar in a way that is most suitable for all stakeholders involved in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

Web-based communication such as webinar is an effective way of communicating from a source to a receiver especially in a period such as this, when there are prohibitions to large gathering of people because their safety is not guaranteed due to the wide spread of the Corona Virus. Among other strengths, webinars create a two-way flow of communication which enhances information reception and helps to achieve the goal and objectives of webinar hosts. This is so because of the immediacy and intimacy which they create as theorized by the Social Presence Theory.

However, many organizations, corporations, government, marketing firms, educational institutions among others due to the strengths and potentials of webinar speedily adopt and incorporate webinars as a communication medium without fully understanding and having complete knowledge on all there is to know about webinar usage. In so doing, they fail to realize and consider the weaknesses and threats associated to webinar as a medium of communication. The implication of such oversight is participants not gaining value for their time and money spent (if any), in some cases this creates a negative impression about webinar on the minds of participants.

### **Recommendations**

Based on analysis presented in this study the strengths and potentials of webinar as a means of communication far outweighs the weaknesses and threats. Organizations need to utilize the analysis particularly the weaknesses of webinars in order to structure and package their webinar events in a manner that will be satisfactory to participants.

Harrison (2014) posits that the most key point is that organizations must put in more effort into promoting the webinar event, and in order to increase audience participation incentives should be provided for registration and for feedback. For registration, incentives such as offering a certain percentage of discount for early registration and also discount for group registration. Increasing the effort in all of these aspects of the webinar planning will increase the number of participants and thus the quality and quantity of feedback to help improve future webinars.

In addition, it is recommended that more research be done on the effectiveness of webinar as training and learning platform, as a training platform, do webinar presenters possess the necessary requirements and competence to successfully impact knowledge? As a learning platform do webinars promote retention of information for participants? Whether webinar presentations creates a significant impact or results in a change of attitude or behavioural modifications on participants?

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