

Assessment of Public Confidence in Social Media Messages on COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study was carried out to determine the kind of confidence that Nigerians have in social media messages on COVID-19 pandemic and the value of such confidence on the fight against the pandemic. Anchored on the uses and gratifications theory and social exchange theory, the researchers adopted descriptive survey research design with the questionnaire used as the research instrument for data collection. Data collected were analysed using descriptive method where simple percentages, multivariate frequency distribution tables and SPSS were used as the statistical tools for data analysis under descriptive method. Findings revealed that many Nigerians have high trust in social media messages on COVID-19 pandemic. Facebook followed by Whatsapp are used more among Nigerians for messages on COVID-19, and while the messages on COVID-19 pandemic like the origin, causes, effects, rate of spread, prevention protocol/measures, assistance/support, testing, location of isolation centres and use of vaccine are available; those of COVID-19 prevention protocol/measures are most available in the social media compared to others. Majority of Nigerians share and comment than they send text messages, post, chat or call in the use of social media for messages on COVID-19 pandemic. Finding however reveals low level of adoption of social media messages on COVID-19 among Nigerians despite their trust in the platforms. The conclusion of the study was that social media are now widely trusted and used channels of communication but apathy in the adoption of the messages received through the media among users can limit the proportion of success in their use for any programme/campaign.

Keywords: Evaluation, Public Confidence, Social Media, Messages, COVID-19 Pandemic

Introduction

In contemporary global society, social media are one of the most used sources of information among different groups. Regarded as the media which “allow users to meet online via the internet, communicate in social forum like Facebook, Twitter, etc. and other sites where users generally socialise by sharing news, photo or ideas and thoughts or respond to issues and other contents with other people” (Sanusi, Gambo & Bashir, 2014, p. 302). With the internet technology, social media, which consist of YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, blogs, MySpace, have made the communication process faster, interactive, user friendly and enabling user-generated contents (Solo-Anaeto & Babafemi, 2015, p. 35). Common examples of social media are the

popular social networking sites like Facebook, Myspace, Youtube, Flickr, etc. Social media are an interactive media format that allows users to interact with each other as well as send and receive content from and to each other generally by means of the internet (Sanusi, Gambo & Bashir, 2014).

The use of social media has received recognitions as influential channels of communication with a large proportion of users globally (Eveland & Scheufele, 2000). The outbreak of COVID-19 which started in December, 2019 in Wuhan, the City of China and spread across over “220 countries and territories” (Worldometre, 2021) saw unprecedented surge in the use of social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Whatsapp, 2go, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, WordPress, Tumblr, Blogger, among others) across the world (Agim, Oraekwe, Chivuzo & Emenari, 2020; Akarika, Kierian & Aniekeme, 2020), to educate people about the virus and to reduce anxiety, tension, fear and uncertainty towards infective prevention and management of the pandemic (Agim, Oraekwe, Chivuzo & Emenari, 2020). But as good as it may, some critics also accused social media of spreading misleading and fake news about the coronavirus that raise fear and anxiety, thereby promoting negative perception and jeopardising efforts at preventing the disease (Aluh & Onu, 2020; Chukwuorji & Iorfa, 2020).

Arising from the above background, studying public perception of social media messages on COVID-19 in Nigeria to determine the kind of perception the public have on COVID-19 messages in the social media remains very crucial. This is in view of the paucity of empirical materials on this topic and the fact that “perception shapes one’s knowledge and the adoption of safety measures concerning the transmission of an infection” (Chukwuorji & Iorfa, 2020). Consequently, the kind of perception the public have on COVID-19 messages through the social media and the impact of such perception on the ongoing fight against the pandemic is the problem this study investigates.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Find out the social media platforms used by the public for messages on COVID-19 in Nigeria.
2. Determine the kinds of messages available in the social media for the public on COVID-19 in Nigeria.
3. Determine ways the public utilise social media for messages on COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.
4. Ascertain the extent to which the public utilise social media for messages on COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.
5. Assess the kind of confidence the public have in the messages on COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.
6. Investigate the level of public adoption of social media messages on COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.

Literature Review

The Coronavirus infection (COVID-19) is an emerging infectious illness which broke out during the winter of 2019 (WHO, 2020) in Wuhan Province, China which created an avalanche of health issues and crisis for various media outlets to report (Regencia, Stepansky & Uras, 2020). The

European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC, 2020) reports that coronaviruses are a large family of viruses capable of causing severe illness in animals or humans. Due to its presentations, it has been declared a public health emergency of international concern by the World Health Organisation (WHO) (WHO, 2020). An alarming response has been introduced across the globe due to its high infectiousness and case fatality rate (Zhong *et al* 2020). Currently, the Coronavirus disease has spread to 220 countries and territories with global confirmed cases risen to as higher as 153,690,803 and 3,218,861 deaths been recorded. Among this number, Africa recorded 4,612,159 confirmed cases and 122,637, with Nigeria having her fair share of 165,181 confirmed cases and 2,063 deaths from the virus respectively (WHO, 2021). As a part of the emergency response activities across all States in Nigeria, health education campaigns have been directed at members of the public (NCDC, 2020). These campaigns have been aimed at knowledge improvement and the correction of certain misconceptions that have been widely circulated among community members (NCDC, 2020). Education on precautionary measures such as wearing of face masks, regular hand washing with soap and water or with alcohol-based hand sanitisers and social distancing have been done (Gbadamosi, 2020; NCDC, 2020).

The media are in the forefront of the fight against the pandemic as since the outbreak the media (in all forms) have embarked on a reportorial spree to keep the public duly informed about the prevalence, fatalities and preventive measures (Akarika, Kierian & Aniekeme, 2020; Konstantinidou, 2020; Regencia, Stepansky & Uras, 2020). There are empirical evidence concerning the use of media for health and other purposes, including social media by different scholars (Agim, Oraekwe, Chivuzo & Emenari, 2020; Akarika, Kierian & Aniekeme, 2020; Aondover, 2020; Ekwueme & Okoro, 2018; Sunmisola & Usman, 2019). According to these studies, social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Whatsapp, 2go, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, WordPress, Tumblr, Blogger, among others are used to educate people on various aspects of preventiuon and management of the pandemic such as COVID-19. Similarly, some of the studies carried out in the past have also shown how the media influence behaviour on different issues, including health (Babaleye, Ibitoye & Odorume, 2020; Inegbedion, Inegbedion, Asaleye, Obadiaru & Asamu, 2021; Monjok, Ulasi & Lee, 2019).

In the above literature review, it has been observed that none of the studies reviewed was specifically on evaluating the public confidence in social media messages on COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, hence, the gap in previous literature this study seeks to bridge.

Theoretical Framework

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Uses and gratification theory or need seeking is one of the theories of communications that focuses on social communications. This theory adapts a functionalist approach to communications and media, and where study on information sourcing patterns of the people such as this is to be carried out, this theory is relevant because it pointed that media's most important role is to fulfill the needs and motivations of the audience. Therefore, the more these needs are met, the more satisfaction is yielded (Windahl, Signitzer & Olson, 2008, in Mehrad & Tajer, 2016). Audience's overall motive of seeking for information is to satisfy their already predisposed needs of seeking for such information. This theory initially therefore focuses on the motifs of the audience (Ruggiero, 2000 in Mehrad &Tajer, 2016) and then analyses the message and social system (Sarkisian, Nikoo, Saedian, 1997, in Mehrad & Tajer, 2016). In other words,

this theory concentrates on how users seek media and to what extent they are satisfied with their types, contents and methods of use (Amiri, Noori & Basatian, 2012 in Mehrad & Tajer, 2016).

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory is relevant to this study because of its power in explaining the cost and benefits in social relations which also include the use of the media. The theory guides us in further examining public perception of the confidence they have in social media messages on COVID-19 in Nigeria. Cook, Cheshire, Rice & Nakagawa (2013) revealed that we engage in many exchanges on a daily basis with a wide range of actors most often embedded in the groups, networks, organisations and institutions we inhabit.

Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was adopted to evaluate public confidence in social media messages on COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, while questionnaire was used as the research instrument for data collection. The population of the study comprised the Nigerian public across the six geo-political zones, particularly those from major cities who have access to the social media. The population of the study according to the major cities drawn across the six geopolitical zones of the country include: (i) Lagos-9000,000, (ii) Aba-897,560, (iii) Port-Harcourt-1,148,665, (iv) Kaduna-3,626,068, (v) Maiduguri-1,112,449 and (vi) Jos-816,824 (Worldometre, 2021). Therefore, put together, the population of the study comprised 16,601,566 Nigerians. The sample size of the study was 601 which was determined using online Survey Monkey sample size calculator software under the population size of 16,601,566, Confidence level of 95% and Margin error of 5% respectively. Stratified sampling technique was used to group the country into six geopolitical zones based on the already existing stratifications, after which purposive sampling technique was used to select one state from each of the strata. Purposive sampling technique was used because it enabled us to select one state from each geopolitical zone which has large number of social media users and also has high cases of the COVID-19 infections. Based on this, the states sampled in the study were (i) Lagos (South West), (ii) Abia (South East), (iii) Rivers (South South), (iv) Kaduna (North West), (v) Borno (North East), and (vi) Plateau (North Central). Purposive sampling technique was again used to sample a major city from each of the state sampled. Subsequently, Lagos, Aba, Port-Harcourt, Kaduna, Maiduguri and Jos were the major cities sampled to represent the entire population of the study. Respondents were sampled proportionate to the population size of each state using the formula thus:

$$\frac{S \times n}{N}$$

Where: S = Size of State; n = Sample Size; N = Total Population

Using this formula, respondents sampled from each of the cities selected included: (1) Laga-326; (2) Aba-32; (3) Port-Harcourt-42; (4) Kaduna-131; (5) Maiduguri-40 and Jos-30.

The research instrument used in the study was the questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed using online Survey Monkey questionnaire software and was administered on the respondents. The data collected were analysed using descriptive method. Multivariate Frequency Distribution Tables and SPSS were used as statistical tools for data analysis under descriptive method.

Data Analysis/Results

Table 1: Questionnaire Return Rate

Item	Frequency						
	Lagos	Aba	Port Harcourt	Kaduna	Maiduguri	Jos	Total
Rate of the Questionnaire Successful	314 (96.32)	31 (96.87)	41 (97.62)	127 (96.95)	39 (97.50)	29(96.67)	581(96.67)
Rate of the Questionnaire not Successful	12 (3.68)	1 (3.13)	1 (2.38)	4 (3.05)	1 (2.50)	1 (3.33)	20 (3.33)
Total							

The table above reveals that the 601 copies of questionnaire administered had return rate of 96.67%. The analysis was, therefore, based on the 96.67% (581 respondents).

Table 2: Social Media Platforms for Messages on COVID-19 in Nigeria

Item	Frequency													
	Lagos		Aba		Port Harcourt	Kaduna		Maiduguri		Jos		Total		
Facebook	92	29.30	11	35.48	13	31.71	51	40.16	15	38.46	11	37.93	193	33.22
LinkedIn	27	8.60	1	3.23	2	4.88	5	3.94	1	2.56	1	3.45	37	6.37
Whatsapp	71	22.61	8	25.81	9	21.95	36	28.35	11	28.21	8	27.59	143	24.61
YouTube	35	11.15	3	9.68	4	9.76	11	8.66	4	10.26	3	10.34	60	10.33
Instagram	38	12.10	4	12.90	6	14.63	8	6.30	5	12.82	4	13.79	65	11.19
Pinterest	17	5.41	1	3.23	2	4.88	3	2.36	0	0.00	0	0.00	23	3.96
Twitter	25	7.96	2	6.45	3	7.32	9	7.09	2	5.13	1	3.45	42	7.23
Others	9	2.87	1	3.23	2	4.88	4	3.15	1	2.56	1	3.45	18	3.10
Total	314	100	31	100	41	100	127	100	39	100	29	100	581	100

The data in the above table showed that Facebook and Whatsapp were the most used social media channels.

Table 3: Kinds of Messages available in the Social Media on COVID-19 in Nigeria

Item	Frequency													
	Lagos		Aba		Port Harcourt	Kaduna		Maiduguri		Jos		Total		
Origin of COVID-19	32	10.19	3	9.68	4	9.76	15	11.81	4	10.26	3	10.34	61	10.50
Causes of COVID-19	38	12.10	5	16.13	8	19.51	17	13.39	5	12.82	4	13.79	77	13.25
Effects of COVID-19	29	9.24	2	6.25	3	7.32	12	9.45	3	7.69	2	6.90	51	8.78
Rate of COVID-19 spread	39	12.42	4	12.90	5	12.20	20	15.75	6	15.38	5	17.24	79	13.60
COVID-19 prevention	74	23.57	9	29.03	12	29.27	39	30.71	9	23.08	8	27.59	151	25.99

protocol/measures (social distancing, use of face mask, hand washing, use of hand sanitiser, avoiding crowded places)	Assistance/support	29	9.24	2	6.45	1	2.44	5	3.94	3	7.69	2	6.90	42	7.23
	COVID-19 testing	22	7.01	1	3.23	2	4.88	4	3.15	2	5.13	1	3.45	32	5.51
	Location of COVID- 19 isolation centres	19	6.05	2	6.45	3	7.32	8	6.30	3	7.69	2	6.90	37	6.37
	COVID-19 Vaccine	17	5.41	1	3.23	1	2.44	3	2.36	2	5.13	1	3.45	25	4.30
	Others	15	4.78	2	6.45	2	4.88	4	3.15	2	5.13	1	3.45	26	4.48
	Total	314	100	31	100	41	100	127	100	39	100	29	100	581	100

Table 3 revealed that social media were used for messages on COVID-19 pandemic. They were used to communicate messages on the origin, causes, effects, rate of spread, prevention protocol/measures (i.e. social distancing, use of face mask, hand washing, use of hand sanitiser, avoiding crowded environment), assistance/support, testing, location of isolation centres, use of vaccine. However, messages on COVID-19 prevention protocol/measures were the most (25.99%) available in the social media compared to others.

Table 4: Ways of Public Utilisation of Social Media for Messages on COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

Item	Frequency													
	Lagos		Aba		Port Harcourt		Kaduna		Maiduguri		Jos		Total	
Texting	27	8.60	3	9.68	5	12.20	17	13.39	3	7.69	2	6.90	57	9.81
Posting	42	13.38	5	16.13	6	14.63	22	17.32	7	17.95	5	17.24	87	14.97
Commenting	78	24.84	7	22.58	9	21.95	27	21.26	9	23.08	8	27.59	138	23.75
Sharing (i.e. texts, audios and videos)	95	30.25	9	29.03	12	29.27	35	27.56	14	35.90	10	34.48	175	30.12
Chatting	25	7.96	2	6.45	3	7.32	11	8.66	3	7.69	2	6.90	46	7.92
Calling	33	10.51	4	12.90	4	9.76	9	7.09	2	5.13	1	3.45	53	9.12
Others	14	4.46	1	3.23	2	4.88	6	4.72	1	2.56	1	3.45	25	4.30
Total	314	100	31	100	41	100	127	100	39	100	29	100	581	100

Table 4 revealed that there are different ways that social media were used among Nigeria for messages on COVID-19 as the platforms were used for texting, posting; sharing (i.e. texts, audios and videos), chatting, calling, while sharing of texts, audios and video (30.12%) was predominant compared to others.

Table 5: Extent of Social Media Utilisation for Messages on COVID-19 Pandemic among Nigerian Public

Item	Frequency													
	Lagos		Aba		Port Harcourt		Kaduna		Maiduguri		Jos		Total	
To a great extent	287	91.40	27	87.10	34	82.93	116	91.34	28	71.79	24	82.76	516	88.81

To a little extent	16	5.10	3	9.68	5	12.20	8	6.30	7	17.95	4	13.79	43	7.40
Difficult to say	11	3.50	1	3.23	2	4.88	3	2.36	4	10.26	1	3.45	22	3.79
Total	314	100	31	100	41	100	127	100	39	100	29	100	581	100

Table 5 implies that social media were used to a great extent (88.81%) among Nigerians for information on COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 6: Kind of Confidence in Messages on COVID-19 pandemic among Nigerian Public

Item	Frequency													
	Lagos		Aba		Port Harcourt		Kaduna		Maiduguri		Jos		Total	
Trustworthy to a great extent	219	69.75	17	54.84	25	60.98	99	77.95	24	61.54	18	62.07	402	69.19
Trustworthy to a little extent	51	19.43	5	16.13	7	17.07	14	11.02	6	15.38	5	17.24	98	16.87
Fake to a great extent	8	2.55	2	6.45	2	4.88	3	2.36	2	5.13	1	3.45	18	3.10
Fake to a little extent	15	4.78	3	9.68	4	9.76	5	3.94	3	7.69	2	6.90	32	5.51
Undecided	11	3.50	4	12.90	3	7.32	6	4.72	4	10.26	3	10.34	31	5.34
Total	314	100	31	100	41	100	127	100	39	100	29	100	581	100

Table 6 shows therefore that most Nigerians have great confidence (69.19%) in social media messages on COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 7: Level of Adoption of the Social Media Messages on COVID-19 Pandemic among Nigerian Public

Item	Frequency													
	Lagos		Aba		Port Harcourt		Kaduna		Maiduguri		Jos		Total	
To a great extent	91	28.98	9	29.03	11	26.83	27	21.26	11	28.21	7	24.14	156	26.85
To a little extent	210	66.88	20	64.52	25	60.98	93	73.23	25	64.10	20	68.97	393	67.64
Difficult to say	13	4.14	2	6.45	5	12.20	7	5.51	3	7.69	2	6.90	32	5.51
Total	314	100	31	100	41	100	127	100	39	100	29	100	581	100

Table 7 revealed that there was low level (affirmed by 67.64%) of adoption of social media messages on COVID-19 among Nigerians despite the high level of confidence that they have in the platforms.

Discussion of Findings

Social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Whatsapp, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, and Twitter are used among Nigerians for messages on COVID-19, but Facebook followed by WhatsApp remain the most available used platforms for the purposes. This is evident as majority (33.22%) of the respondents in the study used facebook followed by another majority (24.61%) that used Whatsapp more than other platforms studied. This finding agrees with other scholars

such as Agim, Oraekwe, Chivuzo & Emenari (2020) who identified a number of social media platforms used for health awareness.

Social media were used for messages/information on COVID-19 pandemic like the origin, causes, effects, rate of spread, prevention protocol/measures (i.e. social distancing, use of face mask, hand washing, use of hand sanitiser, avoiding crowded environment), assistance/support, testing, location of isolation centres, use of vaccine, while messages on COVID-19 prevention protocol/measures such as social distancing, use of face mask, hand washing, use of hand sanitiser, avoiding crowded places were most available in the social media compared to others. This is evident in the majority (25.99%) of the respondents who were exposed to such messages compared to others. This finding agrees with that of Akarika, Kierian & Aniekeme (2020) which revealed how social media were used for information on COVID-19 pandemic.

Texting, posting, sharing (i.e. texts, audios and videos), chatting and calling were some of the ways that social media were used among Nigerians for messages on COVID-19. This finding agrees with Stassen (2010) who found that social media have become platforms for posting and sharing news for others. Social media were used to a great extent among Nigerians for information on COVID-19 pandemic. This is evident in the majority proportion of 88.81% who made use of social media to great extent for information on COVID-19. This finding validates the one from the study by Solo-Anaeto & Babafemi (2015) which revealed how unprecedented social media have attracted users around the world. This finding also revalidates uses and gratifications theory which defines why people chose which media to use or the media programme to consume.

Many Nigerians have high trust in social media messages on COVID-19 pandemic. This is based on the fact that majority of the respondents agreed to that effect. This finding agrees with the previous finding by Akarika, Kierian & Aniekeme (2020) which revealed that during health emergency situation like the COVID-19 pandemic which was occasioned by anxiety, tension, fear and uncertainty, residents depended more on the media to obtain information that can help reduce tension and fear. Furthermore, finding revealed that there is low level of adoption of social media messages on COVID-19 among Nigerians despite the trust they have in the platforms. This is evident in the majority proportion of 67.64% respondents who adopted the social media messages on COVID-19 to a little extent.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings showed that majority of the respondents have high trust in social media messages on COVID-19 pandemic. The respondents mostly got COVID-19 messages from Facebook and Whatsapp. Social media were used to a great extent among Nigerians for information on COVID-19 pandemic, but the extent of adoption was low. Thus, the following recommendations are hereby given:

1. Social media should be embraced as platform for health awareness information among those who are in doubt concerning the credibility of the platform.
2. Equal priority should be given to the use of all social media platforms for health awareness instead of prioritising the use of just a few for the purpose.
3. Ways through which social media are used for health awareness among the people should be given equal priority rather than concentrating on just a few.

4. Social media platforms more prominent among people should be used more during health awareness campaign in reaching the people.
5. There should be great improvement in the adoption of messages on social media during pandemic for greater impact of the usage.
6. Social media users should always cross check any health information that is not clear from professional source to avoid adoption of health information that is incorrect.

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