

**EVALUATING THE POTENCY OF SOCIAL MEDIA MESSAGES IN
PROMOTING ADHERENCE TO COVID-19 PROTOCOLS IN THE
NORTH-CENTRAL GEOPOLITICAL ZONE OF NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The study set out to assess social media campaigns in the fight against covid-19 pandemic in the north-central Nigeria. Employing a survey research design with simple and purposive sampling, it made use of Public Sphere Theory and Visual Rhetoric Theory. Results indicated that social media messages effectively educated and sensitise Nigerians about Covid-19 risks, encouraging adherence to safety protocols. Posts included videos and images depicting Covid-19 cases worldwide, alongside articles elucidating the pandemic's nature. Audio messages were also disseminated. Facebook and Twitter emerged as primary platforms for campaign dissemination. However, the proliferation of unverifiable content raised skepticism among Nigerians regarding the virus's presence. This study underscores the significance of strategic social media campaigns in public health crises.

Keywords: Campaign, social media, COVID-19, public sphere, visual rhetoric.

Introduction

Since its identification, the coronavirus is said to have accounted for more than 1.2 million deaths globally (WHO, 2023). The first recorded case of COVID-19 in Nigeria involved an Italian man who arrived in the country on 25 February 2020. He was subsequently admitted to an isolation centre in Yaba, Lagos, after exhibiting symptoms of the virus (NCDC, 2020). Following this initial case, the number of infections increased significantly. As of July 2024, Nigeria has reported a total of 266,675 confirmed COVID-19 cases, 3,155 deaths, and 259,953 recoveries (NCDC, 2024; Worldometer, 2024). Noticeably, Nigeria tried to curb the rapid spread of Covid-19 through immediate lockdown of the major epicentres of Lagos, Ogun, and Abuja: commercial and administrative hubs of the country; where there has been spike of coronavirus cases. Some state governors have also taken proactive actions by closing their “borders” in a bid to curtail the spread of the virus. Other measures include prohibition of mass gathering of people at churches, sports arenas and burials while schools were closed nationwide.

Over the years, social media have become an active technological tool in Nigeria, as well as a news and communication channel for the citizenry of Nigeria. Access to mobile telephony especially among the technologically savvy youths has made dissemination of information easy with a snap of the finger. In recent times, as the coronavirus pandemic encroaches on and emasculates world activities, social media platforms have been utilized as an information outlet to citizens. Its significance has gained more recognition owing especially to the fact that the government implemented a lockdown policy to curb the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, social media have become an active tool for engagement and communication for the dissemination of plausible information as well as incredulous mis-information Adebayo, (2020).

The World Health Organisation (WHO) announced on Thursday March 5th, 2020 that it is launching a new social media campaign urging people to be safe, smart and informed when faced by the coronavirus outbreak. The announcement was made in Geneva by WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and published (*The Straits Times*, 2020).

According to the World Health Organisation (2020) people are afraid of contracting Covid-19 pandemic, and that's normal and appropriate. That fear can be managed and moderated with accurate information. That is why the WHO launched a new social media campaign called "Be Ready for Covid-19," The Chief of the World Health Organisation averred that if people feel overwhelmed by fear, they should

reach out to those around them, and they should find out what their communities' emergency response plans are, how they fit in and how they can help.

Social media campaign is a strong force to fall to in times of public health emergency outcry. For example, in 2014, the social media was used to mobilise Nigerians to reject taking salt and water as cure to Ebola virus. The significance of social media platforms particularly Facebook and Twitter campaign in the fight against coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic cannot be overemphasized. Though, there are disinformation about the pandemic across the media platforms, in which experts such as Adelaku (2020) and Adebowale (2020) have labelled conspiracy theory. From Wuhan China, where the virus was first discovered to America. Italy, Spain and Brazil, where the virus spread like wildfire, the news stories of new cases of the virus were published on social media. The campaign such as #Covid-19stopswithme, #Takeresponsibility became so intense that some citizens of other countries, especially Nigeria got used to the new normal (NCDC, 2020). Despite Covid-19 campaign on social media, there are still negative news intended to create a notion that coronavirus is a white man's disease or that it does not affect the black man (Adelaku, 2020).

Contrarily, social media is also utilized as a means of propaganda in disclosing news and information, which at most are based on assumptions and speculations. It is consequent upon this that this study assesses the use of social media campaigns in the fight against covid-19 pandemic in the north-central Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The proliferation of internet-based technologies, particularly social media platforms, has revolutionised the dissemination of health-related information, including efforts to combat the Covid-19 pandemic. The dynamic nature of social media has transformed traditional static information sources into interactive, many-to-many communication channels. However, the widespread use of social networking sites has raised concerns regarding the ethical implications and decorum of the content shared (Gwandu, 2019). In Nigeria, the ubiquitous presence of internet memes, comprising images and short videos, has become an integral aspect of Covid-19 communication campaigns, influencing individuals to become active consumers or even producers of such content.

Despite the significant contributions of social media to Covid-19 mitigation efforts in Nigeria, the impact remains ambiguous, with both positive and negative implications. Notably, there is a dearth of research focusing on the visual rhetoric employed in social media platforms, particularly Facebook and Twitter, as tools in

the fight against Covid-19. Previous studies predominantly centred on photographic representations of the pandemic in traditional media sources, such as newspapers and magazines (Hand in Gwandu, 2019). Therefore, there is a critical need for a comprehensive examination of how internet memes are use on social media to engage with and influence public perceptions regarding Covid-19 in Nigeria, particularly in the North Central region.

Despite extensive social media campaigns, a notable segment of the Nigerian population, including public figures like Governor Yahaya Bello of Kogi State, continues to exhibit skepticism towards the existence of Covid-19 and reluctance to adhere to preventive measures prescribed by health authorities. This raises questions regarding the effectiveness of social media campaigns in fostering awareness and behavioural change among Nigerians. Furthermore, the response of government agencies, such as the Ministry of Health and the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, to public discourse on social media platforms remains uncertain.

Considering the persistence of skepticism and non-compliance with preventive measures, it is imperative to assess the efficacy of social media campaigns in combating the Covid-19 pandemic in North Central Nigeria. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the effectiveness of social media campaigns in shaping public perceptions and behaviours towards Covid-19 in the region.

Objectives of the Study

1. Find out the potency of social media campaigns in the fight against Covid-19 in North Central Nigeria.
2. Evaluate the campaign messages on social media in the fight against coronavirus in North Central Nigeria.
3. Investigate the social media sites that are mostly used to champion the fight against coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic in North Central Nigeria.
4. Find out the threats of social media campaigns in the fight against Covid-19 pandemic in North Central Nigeria.

Review of Literature

Health Communication

Health communication encompasses a wide array of strategies aimed at informing and influencing individual and community decisions to enhance health outcomes. McQuail (2005) defines health communication as the study and utilisation of communication strategies, such as social media campaigns, to promote health, encompassing health promotion, protection, disease prevention, and treatment. Kreps (2015) emphasizes the examination of both human and mediated communication's impact on healthcare delivery and health promotion, aiming to identify communication barriers and implement effective interventions to improve healthcare quality. Health communication operates at various levels, including intrapersonal, interpersonal, and mass communication, focusing on informing and influencing decisions to enhance health (Okim-Alobi & Ngozi, 2017).

The primary objective of health communication is to induce behavioural change among individuals and communities regarding health-related issues, healthcare delivery, and policies. Airhihenbuwa (2000) underscores health communication as a social marketing strategy aimed at modifying behaviours and fostering acceptance of health campaigns. Guttman and Salmon (2004) support this notion, highlighting health communication's role in raising awareness of health risks and promoting recommended treatments.

Effective health communication necessitates the provision of comprehensive information to raise awareness about health hazards and solutions, inspire behaviour modification, offer support to those in need, and promote habitual or attitudinal changes. This is exemplified in intensive social media campaigns on platforms like Twitter and Facebook, using various hashtags to motivate and mobilise individuals to take appropriate actions. Various methods can be employed in health communication, including media literacy, advocacy, public relations, advertising, education entertainment, and individual and group instruction, as well as partnership development. These methods serve as avenues for implementing health campaigns aimed at behavioral change, disease prevention, and health education (Rainingruber, 2014), ensuring successful execution of the health communication process

Elements of an Effective Health Communication Campaign

Promoting good health within society often relies on effective communication campaigns aimed at informing and educating the public about healthy habits and healthcare practices (Crawford & Okigbo, 2014). A health communication campaign entails a series of coordinated messages or promotional efforts designed to achieve specific goals and objectives. Various organisations, including the World Health Organization, UNESCO, NCDC, Ministry of Information, and Ministry of Communication, demonstrated intentionality in their social media campaigns, using hashtags to raise awareness and encourage behaviours such as staying at home, wearing facemasks, and practicing regular hand hygiene.

The social responsibility theory of the media underscores key professional principles guiding the media's moral obligations to society, which serve as ethical codes for evaluating the effectiveness of media campaigns (Aghamelu, 2013). Given the unique nature of health communication, which aims to influence public behaviour regarding health, lifestyle, and nutrition, specific elements are essential for its effectiveness. These elements are crucial for tailoring campaigns to address particular health issues and ensuring their efficacy (Satcher, Lurie, & Smolinski, 2000).

Key elements for measuring the effectiveness of health communication campaigns include accuracy, availability, consistency, balance, cultural competence, evidence base, reach, reliability, repetition, timeliness, and understandability (Satcher, Lurie, & Smolinski, 2000). These criteria serve as guidelines for journalists and media practitioners in executing effective health communication campaigns. Health communication, being primarily focused on prevention, underscores the moral responsibility of media practitioners and communicators to ensure successful execution of health messages and campaigns, reaching the target audience effectively (Nwanne, 2014). Effective health communication requires skilled communicators capable of interpreting information and delivering it effectively to the public (Agba in Aghamelu, 2013). Media entities are encouraged to prioritize public interest in fulfilling their role, particularly during critical times.

Uses of Social Media by Hospitals

Although many healthcare organisations have been hesitant to embrace social media, recognising its benefits can lead to increased engagement and outreach. Research suggests that teaching hospitals and those with higher bed capacities tend to adopt social media more readily (Bennett, 2013). Social media platforms offer hospitals various advantages, including expanding patient volume, reaching new

audiences, introducing services, raising awareness, improving outcomes, delivering superior customer service, and managing organisational reputation. For instance, Facebook serves as a cost-effective advertising tool, allowing hospitals to target specific demographics and preferences through paid advertisements in users' news feeds (Bennett, 2013). Hospitals worldwide are leveraging social media to disseminate information, educate patients, and market their services. Barry (2010) identified common uses of social media among hospitals, including providing general information, sharing organisational updates, announcing news and events, enhancing public relations, and promoting health initiatives. Institutions such as the Mayo Clinic, Henry Ford Health System, Innovis, and Scripps Health uses blogs and interactive web pages linked with platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to broaden their audience reach.

The significance of social media for healthcare organisations lies in their ability to manage online reputation while combating misinformation and misconceptions. While online health information has been linked to positive health behaviours, concerns persist regarding the reliability and quality of information disseminated via social media platforms (Lustria, Smith & Hinnant, 2016).

The Dangers of social media in Creating Awareness on Covid-19 Poor Quality of Information

The main limitation of health information found on social media, and other online sources is a lack of quality and reliability, Sajadi, (2011). Authors of medical information found on social media sites are often unknown or are identified by limited information. Also, medical information may be unreferenced, incomplete, or informal. While evidence-based medicine de-emphasizes anecdotal reports, social media tend to emphasize them, relying on individual patient stories for collective medical knowledge. Similar problems exist with traditional online media; however, the interactive nature of social media magnifies these issues, since any user can upload content to a site. Social media users may also be vulnerable to both hidden and overt conflicts of interest that they may be incapable of interpreting (Sajadi, 2011).

Review of Empirical Studies

In Kente's (2020) investigation titled: "Evaluation of Selected Nigerian Newspapers Report of Covid-19 Pandemic and its Impact on Newspaper Readers," the focus was on examining the extent of coverage by Nigerian newspapers, Polit and News Direct, regarding the Covid-19 pandemic from April 27, 2020. Employing content analysis supplemented with interviews, the study found that both newspapers dedicated

significant attention to the pandemic, effectively raising awareness among the populace. It concluded that these newspapers played an active role in disseminating information about the Covid-19 pandemic and recommended sustaining such awareness campaigns through continued engagement with health information in newspapers.

This study shares similarities with Kente's research, as both investigate how media outlets contribute to raising awareness about the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria and how the public perceives and responds to these awareness campaigns. However, while Kente's study focused on newspaper coverage, the current research centers on social media hashtag campaigns, encompassing various media formats such as videos, images, audio clips, texts, and graphics. Notably, newspapers are subject to regulation by the Nigeria Press Council (NPC), potentially limiting the dissemination of unverified news stories. In contrast, the present study grapples with issues surrounding the execution and reception of social media campaigns in an unregulated online environment.

Salamatu and Muhammad (2020) conducted a study titled: "Social Media and Misinformation during the Covid-19 Pandemic: An Assessment of WhatsApp and Facebook Forwarded Messages." Their objective was to assess the prevalence of misinformation and fake news circulating on social media platforms, specifically WhatsApp and Facebook, during the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. Employing content analysis, data was collected from social media over a period of five weeks from July 11 to August 9, 2020. The research revealed the dissemination of false information regarding the virus's origin, transmission, preventive measures, and purported cures, primarily through Facebook and WhatsApp forwarded messages. The study concluded that social media platforms were misused to propagate misinformation, causing panic and anxiety among the populace.

It also shares a common focus with the preceding research in highlighting the misuse of social media during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, while Salamatu and Muhammad's study primarily examined the proliferation of fake news, the current research takes a different approach by investigating the positive utilisation of Facebook and Twitter to promote awareness and encourage compliance with Covid-19 safety protocols in Nigeria. In Msughter's (2020) study titled: "Internet Meme as a Campaign Tool to the Fight against Covid-19 in Nigeria," the primary objective was to explore the application and implications of internet memes as a campaign tool in combating the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. Employing semiotic and qualitative content analysis methods, the study examined how internet memes, particularly photograph memes, were used to convey messages related to Covid-19

and stimulate government involvement. It concluded that social media platforms, especially Facebook and Twitter, were instrumental in creating awareness and combating the spread of coronavirus in Nigeria.

Msughter's study shares similarities with the current research in its focus on assessing how social media has been used to raise awareness and stimulate public engagement in the fight against Covid-19 in Nigeria. Additionally, both studies address the prevalence of fake news and conspiracy theories circulating on social media platforms during the pandemic. However, while Msughter's study have explored the role of social media in Covid-19 awareness campaigns and the dissemination of misinformation, there remains a gap in understanding the effectiveness of specific social media campaigns, particularly in North-Central Nigeria. The current research intends to address this gap by conducting a comprehensive assessment of social media campaigns' efficacy in combating the Covid-19 pandemic specifically in the North-Central region of Nigeria.

Anthonia (2021) conducted a qualitative investigation titled: "The Role of Social Media in the Covid-19 Pandemic Discourse," exploring various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, blogs, online newspapers, and YouTube. The study unveiled how misinformation on these platforms contributes to the spread of falsehoods about the severity of the coronavirus, exacerbating the pandemic's impact. The research emphasizes the critical role of social media in disseminating information but also highlights its susceptibility to abuse, as individuals exploit its anonymity to propagate fake news, leading to public panic.

This study builds upon Anthonia's work by examining the efficacy of social media campaigns in combating the Covid-19 pandemic in North-Central Nigeria. Unlike Anthonia's qualitative approach, this research adopts both qualitative and quantitative methods, employing a survey research design. While both studies focus on the role of social media in combating Covid-19, the current research specifically investigates the effectiveness of these campaigns. It addresses gaps left by Anthonia's study, particularly in the realm of campaign assessment, which aims to evaluate the impact and reach of Covid-19-related messages disseminated through social media platforms.

Theoretical Underpinning

This study is anchored on Public Sphere Theory and Visual Rhetoric Theory

Public Sphere Theory

Jurgen Habermas introduced the concept of public sphere theory in 1962 in response to what he perceived as the massification and atomization of public discourse by the media (Habermas, 1989, as cited in Terfa, Hemen, & Jinuta, 2017). According to Habermas, the public sphere is an arena where citizens have unrestricted access to discussions about matters of general interest, based on freedoms of assembly, association, expression, and publication of opinions without undue economic and political control. This theory holds relevance to the current study as social media platforms serve as public spaces where Nigerians engage in discussions on issues that concern them. Given that the coronavirus (Covid-19) is a universal infectious disease, the public naturally gravitates towards discussing it on social media. Nigerians are notably active on social media platforms, convening to discuss pertinent issues. Flichy (2010) argues that Web 2.0 provides amateurs with opportunities to contribute to topics of interest, engage with diverse opinions, and find an audience, thus granting them influence previously exclusive to professionals and experts in mainstream media. This social recognition of amateurs holds significance across various domains, including arts, popular culture, science, and politics.

The public sphere theory underpins the primary objective of this study, which is to examine the use of social media campaigns in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria. The initial report of the virus was disseminated via Twitter (@officialncdc), a social media platform. Subsequently, discussions on the virus's origins, preventive measures, symptoms, and modes of transmission proliferated across social media platforms. The freedom afforded by public spaces like social media has facilitated both positive and negative commentary on the efficacy of responses to the virus. Despite the proliferation of conspiracy theories, the public sphere theory posits that individuals seek out mediums where they can freely express their sentiments, potentially contributing to campaigns against the Covid-19 pandemic in North-Central Nigeria.

Visual Rhetoric Theory

Visual rhetoric refers to the art of effective communication through images, typography, and text. It involves the skill of visual literacy and the ability to analyse images for their form and meaning. Rooted in rhetorical analysis, visual rhetoric

explores how the structure of an image influences its persuasive impact on an audience. The usage of images is intrinsic to visual rhetoric, as they aid in presenting arguments or making cases. Furthermore, visual rhetoric encompasses the arrangement of visual elements on social media platforms, including fonts, colors, and graphs, to convey messages effectively. Scholars such as Msughter (2018) and Gwandu (2019) argue that visual texts carry meanings beyond their literal interpretations, emphasizing the importance of dissecting visual texts to uncover underlying meanings. For example, analysing a visual text featuring a bold eagle alongside written words evokes connotations of strength and freedom, surpassing a mere depiction of a bird. Understanding the semiotics, creative choices, and rhetorical strategies employed in visual texts enhances their interpretative depth.

In addition to semiotic analysis, which considers the creative and rhetorical choices regarding color, shape, and object placement, visual rhetoric views images as sensory expressions embedded with cultural and contextual significance, transcending mere aesthetic considerations. This theoretical framework finds application across various academic disciplines, including art, social sciences, history, linguistics, semiotics, cultural studies, business, technical communication, speech communication, and classical rhetoric. By expanding rhetorical theory to encompass images and their interpretations, visual rhetoric seeks a more comprehensive understanding of communication processes. The relevance of visual rhetoric to this study lies in the widespread use of social media platforms globally to address the threat posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. During this period, individuals use social media to raise awareness, advocate for preventive measures, and call upon governmental action, while others employed internet memes to critique governmental responses. Beyond textual content, organisations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), and various health organisations, as well as individuals, disseminated videos and images depicting the virus and its impacts. These visual messages, ranging from cartoons to footage of patients in hospitals and overcrowded graveyards, aimed to persuade viewers to adhere to guidelines set forth by the WHO and NCDC to mitigate the spread of the virus.

Methodology

The study adopted survey research design. According to Onwukwe (2011) in Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekareafu & Okpanachi, (2012), survey research is concerned with the collection of data for the purpose of describing and interpreting a certain condition, practice, beliefs, attitudes, perception and preference. The purpose is usually to describe systematically the facts, qualities or characteristics of a given

population, events, or areas of interest concerning the problem under investigation. Thus, the reason for the adoption of the survey research method is because it offers easy method to sample people in a particular area, and allows easy analysis of subjects under review. Residents of Abuja and Kogi state make up the population of the study. The choice for these two areas in north central Nigeria is because, Abuja as the capital of Nigeria is made up of people from different states, who could have different perception and approach to social media campaign against coronavirus pandemic. On the other hand, Kogi state is sharing boundary with Abuja, which could mean that people enter, move in and out between Abuja and Kogi with the knowledge of the prevalent Covid-19 pandemic. And according to the National Population Commission (2016), the total population of Abuja is 3,564,126, while that of Kogi state is 4,473,490. Therefore, the total population of the study is 8,037,616. The sampling techniques used in this study are the simple and purposive sampling techniques.

In determining the sample size where the population is known, Taro Yamene's formula cited in Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekareafo and Okpanachi (2012) is adopted. The formula is as follows:

$$S = \frac{N}{1 + N (e)^2}$$

Where

S = Sample size

N = Given population

e = Margin of error = 0.05

l = Constant

Therefore,
$$S = \frac{N}{1 + N (e)^2}$$

Were

S = Sample size?

N=8,037,616

e = Margin error = 0.05

$$S = 8,037,616$$

$$1 + 8,037,616 (0.05)^2$$

$$S = 8,037,616$$

$$20,095.04$$

$$S = 400$$

Therefore, the sample size for the study is 400.

Furthermore, data was presented and analysed through the use of frequency and percentage table.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Potency of Social Media Campaigns in the Fight against Covid-19 Pandemic

S/N	Variables	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Total
1	You have social media account	213	133	09	06	21	382
		56%	35%	2%	2%	5%	100%
2	Social media platforms are used for online campaigns in the fight against coronavirus (Covid-19) in Nigeria.	307	73	02	00	00	382
		80%	19%	1%	00%	00%	100%
3	Social media campaigns such as #COVIDStopsWithMe,	302	80	00	00	00	382

	#Takeresponsibility, #MyCOVID19NaijaStory have encouraged you to obey Covid-19 safety guidelines	79%	21%	00%	00%	00%	100%
4	The campaigns have helped to slow down the spread of the virus in Nigeria, particularly north central	202	76	53	30	21	382
		52%	20%	14%	8%	6%	100%
	Number of Responses	1024	362	64	36	42	1528
	Percentage (%)	67%	23%	4%	2%	3%	100%

Source: Field Survey Data, 2023

The implication of the findings above is that, owning social media account means one could be aware that during the lockdown in Nigeria, hashtags were used to campaign against the virus. This also implies that respondents who have social media accounts may have seen or read of campaigns against the virus or may have partaken in the campaigns.

Table 2: Social Media Campaigns Strategies in the Fight against Coronavirus in Nigeria

S/ N	Variables	N	SA	SA	MA	EA	Total
		A					
1	Usually, social media campaigns come in form of texts, infographics, videos & audios	-	12	09	27	334	382
		-	3%	2%	7%	88%	100%
2	Such campaigns used to fight Covid-19 in Nigeria include #MyCOVID19NaijaStory, #COVIDStopsWithMe, #Takeresponsibility, #CelebrateResponsiblyamong others.	-	-	32	57	293	382
		-	-	8%	15%	77%	100%
3		-	08	15	105	254	382

	These campaigns are in correspondence with NCDC's safety guidelines such as avoid crowded places, stay-at-home, wash hands regularly, wear face mask, hand sanitise.	-	2%	4%	27%	67%	100%
4	During the lockdown, Nigerians used hashtags such as #MyPandemicSurvivalPlan, #FlattenTheCurve, #WorkingFromHome and #QuarantineAndChill to express their compliance to safety guidelines.	-	66%	50%	107%	159%	382%
		-	17%	13%	28%	42%	100%
	Number of Responses	-	86	106	296	104	1528
	Percentage (%)	-	6%	7%	19%	68%	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The implication of this data is that majority of the respondents were either involved directly in the campaigns against coronavirus on social media, or were followers of those campaign messages, which educated them on the danger of violating Covid-19 safety guidelines. And the implication was that many people became aware of the rules and guidelines protocols released by the NCDC in line with the World Health Organisation for the minimization of community spread of the virus.

Table 3: Social Media Platforms Mostly Used to Champion the Fight against Coronavirus

S/N	Variables	Definitely	Very probably	Probably	Probably not	Definitely not	Total
1	Facebook and Twitter are mostly used for campaigning against the virus.	231 61%	142 37%	4 1%	-	3 1%	382 100%
2		267	98	6	4	6	382

	This is so because both platforms are faster and are more interactive in raising awareness during health crisis.	69%	26%	2%	1%	2%	100%
3	Facebook and Twitter carried the most reliable and verifiable Covid-19 campaign messages, because the World Health Organisation and the Nigeria Center for Disease Control use them.	187	52	78	45	20	382
		49%	14%	20%	12%	5%	100%
4	Over the past one-year, social media campaign messages have proven to be effective in the fight against coronavirus in Nigeria.	217	159	3	-	3	382
		57	42%	0.7%	-	0.7%	100%
	Number of Responses	902	451	91	49	32	1528
	Percentage (%)	59%	30%	6%	3%	2%	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The implication for this data is that despite the fact that Facebook and Twitter were vigorously adopted by both Nigerians and government health agencies such as the NCDC, Ministry of Health in the campaigns against Covid-19, social media as a whole have become dominant tools to enlighten the masses on health-related issues.

Table 4: Threats of Social Media Campaigns in the Fight against Covid-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

S/ N	Variables	SO	SO	N	SF	SF	Total
1	Social media has been used to cause panic among Nigerians, because the virus has over been reported against the actual happenings.	132 35%	142 37%	4 1%	101 26%	3 1%	382 100%
2	Too many unverifiable articles, images and videos are posted on social media, making Nigerians doubt about the existence of the virus in the country.	45 12%	98 26%	165 43%	53 14%	21 5%	382 100%
3	There are conspiracy theories posted on social media, which are countering the efforts of authorised health bodies such as WHO, NCDC.	126 32%	42 11%	68 18%	135 36%	11 3%	382 100%
4	NCDC's social media campaign messages on Covid-19 have generated mixed reactions from Nigerians, who have accused the federal government of manipulating figures to justify the existence of the virus in the country	3 0.7%	- -	3 0.7%	159 42	217 57%	382 100%
Number of Responses		306	282	240	448	252	1528
Percentage (%)		21%	18%	16%	29%	16%	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The implication of this data is that there were unverified tweets across Facebook and Twitter and other social media platforms in the campaigns against the virus, and this could have been the reason why some Nigerians doubted whether there was coronavirus in the country.

Discussion of Findings:

The study reveals a significant presence of social media campaign messages on platforms like Facebook and Twitter during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria, particularly during the nationwide lockdown. Amidst the lockdown period, Nigerians used social media to demonstrate solidarity with frontline healthcare workers battling the disease and to mourn the loss of loved ones. Concurrently, these campaigns urged individuals to adhere to guidelines established by the Presidential Task Force on Covid-19, aligning with directives from the World Health Organisation (Ede, 2020).

Moreso, a substantial proportion (79%) of respondents affirmed that social media campaign messages played a crucial role in educating and sensitizing Nigerians about the hazards of flouting Covid-19 protocols. This education served as a motivational factor, encouraging individuals to adhere to stay-at-home orders and

comply with Covid-19 safety measures (Egbunike, 2020). Notably, counter-narratives like #MyCOVID19NaijaStory and #COVIDStopswithMe emerged on Twitter, aiming to combat COVID-19 denial narratives and promote responsible public health behaviours (Egbunike, 2020).

Internet memes emerged as a prevalent tool used by social media users in Nigeria to depict prominent personalities and convey messages related to the pandemic. Social media platforms, particularly Facebook and Twitter, assumed central roles in disseminating information and promoting Covid-19 prevention efforts (Omoruyi, 2015). For instance, the #Covid19StopsWithMe campaign spearheaded by Nigerian music producer DonJazzy aimed to raise awareness and encourage individuals to take ownership of efforts to curb the virus's spread (Egbunike, 2020). DonJazzy's social media influence, with over 4.7 million Twitter followers, facilitated the campaign's reach and impact.

However, skepticism and misinformation surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic persist among some Nigerians. Many individuals perceive the pandemic as a hoax, attributing their skepticism to a chronic lack of trust in government institutions and past instances of broken promises. Additionally, there is a belief that the pandemic serves as a financial opportunity for Nigerian politicians and their associates, as evidenced by foreign donations and the allocation of Covid-19 funds to state governments (Egbunike, 2020). These perceptions highlight the complex socio-political dynamics shaping public attitudes towards the pandemic in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the study uncovered that social media posts encompassed a variety of formats, including videos depicting Covid-19 cases in Nigeria and globally, images to provide visual evidence, written articles for comprehensive understanding, and audio messages for both offline and online consumption. An overwhelming 88% of respondents demonstrated extensive awareness of these diverse media forms. Moreover, the research found that 293 participants (77%) actively engaged with or followed various social media campaigns during the lockdown, such as #MyCOVID19NaijaStory, #COVIDStopswithMe, #Takeresponsibility, #CelebrateResponsibly, #MyPandemicSurvivalPlan, #FlattenTheCurve, #WorkingFromHome, and #QuarantineAndChill (Adelaku, 2020). Celebrity endorsements also played a significant role in disseminating Covid-19 prevention messages on social media platforms. For instance, footballer Daniel Amokachi used the #washyourhandoo campaign on Twitter to advocate for regular handwashing and observance of physical distancing. Similarly, music producer DonJazzy endorsed video blogger Oliseh Kadishi's #Covid19StopsWithMe YouTube video, emphasizing the importance of using hand sanitizers (Adelaku, 2020).

The study highlighted Facebook and Twitter as the primary platforms for Covid-19 campaign messages, although other platforms like YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram were also used. A majority (69%) of respondents acknowledged the speed and interactivity of Twitter and Facebook in delivering instant messages, contributing to effective awareness-raising during health crises. However, a small percentage (2%) expressed disagreement, suggesting limitations and occasional doubts about the credibility of messages on these platforms.

Additionally, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) maintained an active presence on Facebook and Twitter, providing daily updates on the Covid-19 situation in the country. Despite initial trust in the NCDC's information dissemination, doubts regarding the virus's efficacy emerged over time. Nevertheless, 57% of respondents affirmed the effectiveness of social media messages in combating the virus, aligning with theories of public rhetoric (Msughter, 2018; Gwandu, 2019). However, the proliferation of unverified articles, images, and videos on social media platforms led to skepticism among some Nigerians regarding the existence of the virus in the country. This phenomenon contributed to panic among certain segments of the population, undermining the credibility of official reports issued by the NCDC. Approximately 27% of respondents acknowledged experiencing such panics, underscoring the challenge posed by misinformation and fake news in social media campaign efforts against the virus (Gwandu, 2019).

Conclusion

The study was carried out to investigate the effectiveness of social media campaigns in the fight against Covid-19 pandemic in the country. The study concludes that Facebook and Twitter have been effective in the fight against coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic in Nigeria by way of hashtags; hashtags are used for online campaigns against the virus, and that Facebook and Twitter were the most active social media platforms used to champion the fight against the virus. Furthermore, the study concludes that social media campaigns against the virus had challenges, which included some fake and unverifiable images, articles and videos, conspiracy theories, which were tweeted to represent the virus. But this challenge was quickly tackled by Facebook and Twitter. The two giant sites introduced a feature button which filtered messages posted on the platforms.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made. Firstly, it is advised that the Nigerian government collaborates with Facebook and Twitter to filter and use Covid-19 campaign messages on their platforms. Secondly,

the use of social media for campaigns against the Covid-19 pandemic should be significantly increased across the country. Thirdly, the government should encourage universities, churches, mosques, and traditional institutions to create social media pages dedicated solely to campaigns against the virus and other health crises, such as HIV and STDs. Finally, the Federal Government of Nigeria, through the National Orientation Agency, should conduct a social media orientation campaign to educate the public on the effective use of social media, thereby sustaining online campaigns for future health crises.

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