Influence of Social Media Representation of Coronavirus on Attitude of Undergraduate Students of Achievers University

Omowumi. B Olaseinde, Benjamin. Ogundeji and Goke Rauf
Adeleke University, Ede, Osun State, Nigeria

Abstract

This study was carried out to investigate the influence of social media representation of coronavirus on the attitude of higher institution students of Achievers University Owo, Ondo State. The study was aimed at ascertaining the Achievers University students' level of exposure to social media framing of the coronavirus pandemic as well as examining how social media representation influenced attitude of the students and the possible ways to curb misleading social media representation of covid-19. The study was anchored on the uses and gratification theory and social media integration and model. The data for the study were collected through descriptive survey using a population of 1930. The sample size was 333 derived through purposive sampling technique and Taro Yamane's formula. Findings revealed that majority of students of Achievers University are very active in their use of social media: all the respondents were exposed to social media framing of corona virus. There was negative influence of social media representation of corona virus on the attitude of the respondents and that communication in health regulatory bodies could curb misleading social media representation of covid-19 by posting the right videos, photos and news of the people infected with covid-19. The study concludes that while the social media platforms are significant outlets for information dissemination through which higher institutions' students gained information about COVID-19, the platforms were abused by way of spreading fake messages and instilling panic by their representation of coronavirus which caused negative attitude toward the disease amongst members of the public. The researchers recommended educating the Achievers students on what constitutes good and reliable information and how to critically think through information received as there is the need for some measures to be instituted by the government to sanction purveyors of fake news and misinformation. University students are advised to conduct personal research from reliable sources and authentic online accounts of organizations like National Orientation Agency and NCDC to prevent falling victim of disinformation.

Keywords: social media, corona virus, attitude representation, Achievers University, students.

Introduction

Coronavirus disease (*COVID-19*) reported in late December 2019 from Wuhan, China is one of the shocking pandemics for humans. The World Health Organization (WHO) affirmed *COVID-19* as a pandemic on 11 March 2020. The pandemic is challenging both for developed and developing nation's healthcare system, social, economic, and psychological well-being of humanity. As at July 14, 2021, *COVID-19* has affected over 218 countries. Globally, over 188 million

confirmed cases and 4.06 million deaths were reported (Cucinotta & Vanell, 2020).
Also, as at July 14, 2021 in Africa, over 6.1 million confirmed cases and +153,932 deaths were reported. After the first case was confirmed on 27th February 2020 in Nigeria, as at July 14, 2021 the number of cases and deaths had risen to 168,867 and 2,125, respectively. Social networking services with the aid of the Internet have been used to spread information and to find humour and a sort of psychological relief from the pandemic (Okwodu, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the usage of social media by virtually everybody in the world: celebrities, world leaders, and professionals alike. However, social distancing has forced lifestyle changes for many people, which put a strain on mental health (Gowan, 2020).

In an attempt to curb the rapid spread of *Covid-19,* Nigeria swung into action through immediate lockdown of the major epicenters of Lagos, Ogun, and Abuja, the commercial and administrative hubs of the country where there has been spike of coronavirus cases. Some state governors also took 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. The achievement of these feats can be attributed not just to proper healthcare facilities but also to the impact of social media in the country (Ngozika, Obi-Ani & Mathias, 2020).

During a time of social distance and limited contact with others, social media became an important place to interact. Social media platforms are meant to connect people and help the world to remain connected. Its use increased during the pandemic, since many people were asked to remain at home, they turned to social media to maintain their relationships and to access entertainment to pass the time (Wajahat, 2020).

Social media has become a first-hand information channel during epidemics and more so in the pandemic. People can obtain new data about the disease and the current situation to share it with others. Its role in previous epidemics has been studied, demonstrating that social media information can influence people's own risk perception and behaviours (Jang & Baek, 2019). In this new scenario, the traditional media has reported the progression of the Covid-19 pandemic and the social media has assumed an important role in the faster diffusion of information and further and in some cases with fear-mongering (Depoux, Martin, Karafillakis,

Preet, Wilder-Smith, & Larson 2020). The challenge with such an Infodemic is not only to get people informed but to get people informed with accurate information that enables them to act properly.
Human behaviour is the crucial element to the framing of the pandemic. Individuals will change their attitude spontaneously by adopting protective behaviour when they perceive a high risk of infection and understand the severity of the disease. This attitude, in return, will help to reduce the transmission of the virus (Verelst, Willem & Beutels, 2016). Attitude has long been recognized as a factor that leads people to perform a particular behaviour (Ramayah & Razak, 2008). Attitude refers to the evaluative outcome of performing a specific behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen,1975).

Audience's preferences and attitudes facilitate content promotion and thus information spreading (Kulshrestha, 2017). This shift from the traditional news paradigm profoundly impacts the construction of social perceptions and the framing of narratives; it influences policy-making, political communication, as well as the evolution of public debate especially when issues are controversial. Users online tend to acquire information adhering to their worldviews to ignore dissenting information and to form polarized groups around shared narratives and when polarization is high, misinformation might easily proliferate (Vicario, Quattrociocchi, Scala & Zollo, 2019). Some studies pointed out that fake news and inaccurate information may spread faster and wider than fact-based news. However, this might be platform-specific effect (Ruth, 2019). The way the social media frame the pandemic will determine how the public responds to it and whether to take a precautionary measure or not. Therefore, understanding individual's attitudes toward social media framing of corona virus is important.

Statement of the Problem

In recent times, Covid-19 pandemic encroaches on and emasculates world activities. The social media platforms have been utilized as an information outlet by citizens in shaping the public opinion and perception of issues among which is the outbreak of the covid-19 virus. Social media as an active tool for engagement and communication for the dissemination of plausible information has also been said to be a means of spreading incredulous information. Social media has been used to spread false information, misleading the already tensed populace, causing more harm than good, while disseminating corona virus information. Wrong information can be created and spread easily through web and social media and create more fear within the public sphere. There are questions about whether

framing and misinformation on Coronavirus led to change of attitude by the citizens. Also, there are concerns on the possibility that misinformation received on social media made many youths to be afraid of going to hospital for vaccination or feel unconcerned, especially about the possibility of spreading the virus or scared of contacting the virus from others. It is also important to ascertain if the way the social media frame the pandemic determines how the public responds to it on whether to take precautionary measures or not.

A lot of studies have been specifically focused on the outbreak of the pandemic but not much have been done on the social media framing of the outbreak and how framing influences audience's attitude and response. This is the gap this study seeks to fill.

Research Questions

In order to give direction to the investigation, the following research questions were raised:

1. What is the Achievers University students' level of exposure to social media framing of corona virus?
2. To What extent does social media representation of covid-19 influence attitude of the Achievers University students?
3. In what ways could communication in health regulatory bodies curb misleading social media representation of covid-19?

Literature Review

Conceptual Review

Today, the world is taking a fresh start by leaving behind the tragedy of COVID-19 and moving forward to the era of technology and trade. When looking behind, we see that the increased urbanization, growing population and ample business and social activities between the countries and geographical areas had played a very important role in the spread of COVID-19 disease (Owen, 2020). Historically, the world has successfully faced serious epidemics like Malaria, Small pox, Influenza, Cholera, Yellow fever, Leprosy, Ebola, swine flu etc. No matter the progress of the world, some anomalies in human civilization exist. Like the humans have become so much sophisticated that they open themselves up to various trades, different eco systems, populations, and become more curious. As a result, they have become more vulnerable to catching strange diseases and this thing has paved the way towards the spread of most recent and life threatening COVID-19 pandemic. Fortunately, as time is progressing, this COVID-19

pandemic has started becoming a part of the history books. In the series of combats with COVID-19, a great tribute goes to the Public Healthcare Systems whose strategy and efforts have played a very effective role all over the world in decreasing the number of fatalities.

Role of social media

Social media is a way to digitally link people around the globe. Social media are the apps and websites that enable the people to participate in social networking and can have online communications. People can share their photographs, locations, life events, and their activities with other people instantly. It all started in 1844 when Samuel Morse promoted a long-distance communication by sending a telegraph from Washington. Then in 1997, the first website, Six Degrees, was launched and then Friendster and Myspace followed in 2003 and 2005. In 2004, Mark Zuckerberg launched the Facebook, which helped people communicate in a new way (Singh, 2019). Every day, we spend hours using social media apps without being aware of the time we spend. Facebook has been the most popular for a long time. Now, many other apps like Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and Snapchat have also joined the competition.

Every young person as well as people from all the age groups have become fond of using the social media (Esteban, 2019). In this critical coronavirus situation,authorities are enforcing social distancing. The only way to maintain safe connections is through the social media and e-commerce. Social media is considered as the hub for the latest news and updates regarding current situation.

Statistics show that in this situation the trend of getting the news and updates from the social media has increased manifold. It is observed that people prefer searching online rather than sticking to TV and radio stations. When we talk about coronavirus it would not be an exaggeration to say that social media is creating awareness, helping in spreading news and opinions. This time is said to be the magic moment (Marco, 2020) for social media as all the activities are cancelled and everyone is bound to stay at home. A lot of videos for “pandemic” are being circulated around the social media that describe the pandemic situation in a misleading and dramatic way. In this hysterical situation, people are hungry for information and if they fail to achieve it they would surf the whole Internet and believe whatever they come across.

The best thing that can be seen in this regard is that social media influencers, actors, athletes that serve asrole models to many people are expected to speak up and urge people to practice social distancing and staying safe. And it can be seen as the best way to analyze and gather what people think about and how they react

to the pandemic. Along with that, it can be seen that at the beginning when pandemic started, people started panic buying (Alejandro de la Garza, 2020). It was majorly because of social media too as they used to see news about shortage of masks, sanitizers, toilet rolls people started panic buying, which created some problems.

On the other side, social media is also the source of misinformation. Especially, in the case of coronavirus such news can be proven chaotic. Spreading this sort of news further without any research can be problematic in that panic situation (Logan, 2020). Much fake news is travelling on the social media like:

- Breathing the warm air through the hair dryer can help clearing the respiratory track and could treat coronavirus symptoms
- Taking Vitamin C can treat the virus
- Drinking Vodka with 60% alcohol kills the virus etc.

Such news has been revolving on the Internet for weeks and many such news can be seen on the social media too which is without any facts but there is a huge amount of people that think that to be true (Jon-Patrick, 2020). Statistics show that about an increase in 12 million users have been reported on twitter in the start of 2020 and Facebook has reported increase in user activity too. And all the platforms are playing their part in scrutinizing the right and wrong information in order to play their part in the crisis situation (Sarma, 2020).

Many researchers have tried to investigate the role of social media in the pandemic situation (Wajahat, 2020) as the role of social media cannot be ignored in this situation. In order to practice social distancing, social media is playing its part efficiently.

Theoretical Framework: Uses and Gratification Theory

This uses and gratification theory explains how social media is affecting the life of an individual. As in this critical situation, fighting the negative thoughts, and cognitive needs are tough to be fulfilled therefore in order to stay updated and entertained, social media must play its part (Riva et al., 2016).

The public uses the social media to satisfy their needs. Social media has a multi-purpose capability such as watching movies, talking to people about its posts and statuses. It can also be used to gather knowledge or just for entertainment. This theory is majorly used for media usage as it can determine the relationships between different aspects of relationships with social media e.g. social media and

violence or pandemic etc. The intentions of the user can explain the role of social media such as Facebook etc. and its usage in a society (Ruggiero, 2000).

Social media plays a crucial role in the lives of people. Also, the comparison between the social media and other mediums of information and entertainment can be done following the uses and gratifications theory (UGT) (Learning theories, 2019). Also, the choice of the medium is an important aspect of this theory. The answer to what medium does an individual prefer when it comes to social media is answered by this theory. The authenticity and quality are easily assessed by the audience so what a person thinks when he gets certain knowledge about and from social media can be explained too. The uses and gratifications theory (UGT) explains the scheme of media usage in which circumstances increased the use of social media and in some situations; the usage may decline (Megan & Rosalind, 2019).

Social Media Integration Theory and Model

The social media integration model (SMIM) involves the interaction of social media and the users. This model explains the two-way interaction and promotes the transfer of information in the social networking system. The social bookmarking helps the users to express their thoughts about the data present on the Internet, make recommendations, and leave feedback about them.

Social Media Integration Theory and Model

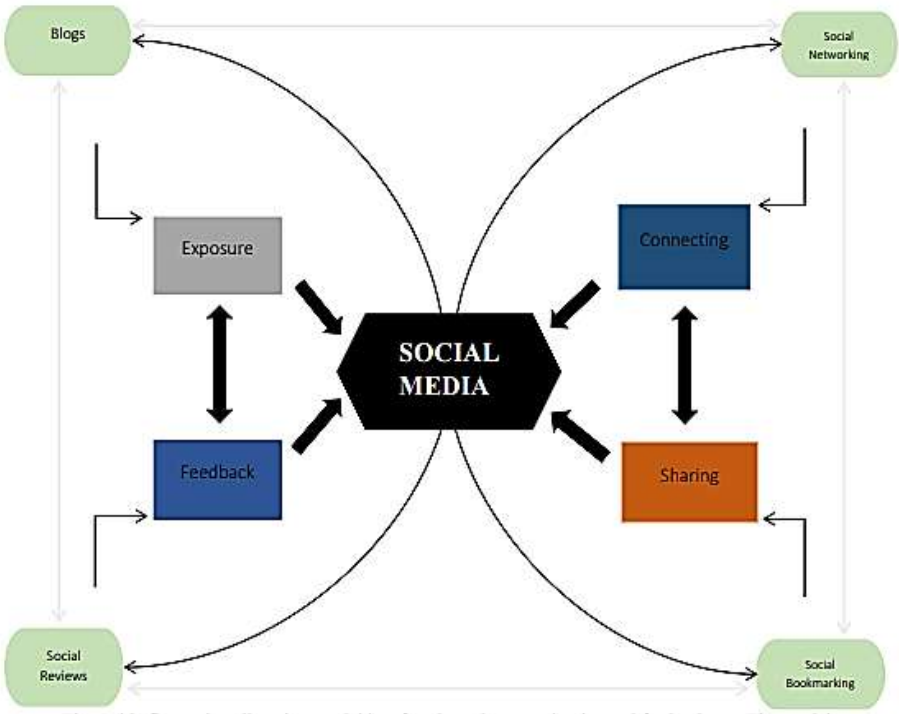

Figure 1: Social Media Integration Theory and Model (Source: Potter, 2012).

This model is different from the traditional models and it shows the primitive nature of the social media. This process, once it enters the system, it is then known as a viral communication in the social mediums. All the social mediums are now mostly the means of communication and information transfer channels. It can be said that due to social media, the whole of the communication process has been transformed. According to a study conducted by Chadwick Isra (2019), it has been found out that people are more likely to follow the brands and materials that incorporated the social media like Facebook, twitter etc.

The Social Media Integration model also has an overall effect on the capability of the media platforms (DiGangi & Wasko, 2016). More so, social media has the potential to make the platforms so addictive that a person spends hours watching different stuff on it. This is increasing the engagement of customer and social mediums. With the increasing advancement on social media platforms, research on social media keeps increasing every day and some of these works of research are used to evaluate the behavior of people on social media.

The SMIM is related to social media crisis communication model (SMCC) as it plays a role in the communication for crisis situation today. This model involves the influential stakeholders who spread the information that is perceived by the other people, the followers who access that information, and the inactive members who may not access the information directly through social media but receive them through other sources. The essential component of this model is the circulation of information through the social media and also between the mass media and social media. This model explains the useful aspect of communication, and also the risk involved as it is the fastest means of spreading information, keeping in mind that as for the inactive followers, the information reach them through the active followers (Liu,Jin, Austin & Jamoske 2012).

Empirical Review of Related Studies

Social media have the advantage of disseminating educational content of the COVID-19 messages faster and more rapidly. Infographics about airway management of patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infections are shared on the social media platforms such as Twitter and WeChat where, in a few days, requests were received for translation into more than ten languages. Also, the distribution allowed for the adaptation of the infographics to the peculiarities of each healthcare setting (Chan, Nickson, Rudolph, Lee, and Joynt, 2020).

A recent study by Basch, Hillyer, Meleo-Erwin, Jaime, Mohlman and Basch (2020) evaluated the100 most viewed videos on YouTube with the word "coronavirus". These videos together had more than 165 million views as at March 5, 2020, 85% of them belonging to news channels. It was also found out that less than ⅓ of the videos mentioned the recommended prevention measures, less than half mentioned the most frequent symptoms. However, almost 90% commented on deaths, anxiety, and the quarantine status. This study leaves us with an important reflection on the missed opportunities for dissemination of quality information on the prevention of contagion and frequent symptoms of COVID-19 on platforms such as YouTube, which are being increasingly consulted as an information source.

A study carried out by Eysenbach (2011) also shows that the dissemination of scientific literature on social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) increases the number of downloads, queries, and citations of articles. COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly allowed for a rapid dissemination of knowledge worldwide, in addition to markedly reduced editorial times, which have gone from months of processing to days or weeks since its reception.

Highlighting the advantages of social media platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic, Baschet al. (2020) lists the possibility of arranging collaborative research projects, surveys, and multi-center studies as well as supporting continued medical education through online live and recorded webinars via platforms like YouTube, Skype, or Zoom.

However, Chan et al. (2020) noted that there is a high possibility of transmission of COVID 19 information that is not current, or has not been subjected to a peer review. Such information can only be invalid, incorrect, not applicable to our environment. Other big obstacles for social media and the dissemination of information are the "bubble filters", a concept coined by Eli Pariser in 2011.. This is about a "personalized ecosystem" towards the user in which the algorithms through the data collected from the same user predict their preferences and yield results that are considered similar to the likes of that user. These bubbles produce a loop of similar contents that prevent the user from seeing other different sources to contrast the available information. This concept applies to any scenario or illness that is consulted in Internet search engines or on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Pariser, 2011)

In an online survey carried out by Wang et al. (2020) in China with 1,210 responses, the study found out that 53.8% of the respondents considered the epidemic's psychological impact as moderate or severe. Even a research group created and validated a scale called "Fear of COVID-19 scale" to assess the level of stress and anxiety in the population and to establish appropriate measures to prevent sequels associated with the pandemic, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which was the most prevalent psychiatric sequel after the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic in Asia in 2003, followed by depressive disorders (Mak et al., 2009).

By April 20, 2021, there were more than 15,000 papers in PubMed with the word "COVID-19", which tells us about the tsunami of information in less than 2 years since its appearance in China; with all the attention poured into the media, the avalanche of data becomes affordable, something also called "Infodemia" (Zarocostas, 2020).

At the same speed at which the information travels so does the disinformation as well. It is for this same reason that some authors have suggested creating working groups aimed at fighting myths and disinformation in social media platforms. In

this way, the World Health Organization (WHO) developed an exclusive section on its website designed for coronavirus myth-busting (Depoux et al., 2020).

Another study done by Nwakpu, Ezema and Ogbodo (2020) on Nigeria's media framing of coronavirus pandemic and audience responses revealed that that the coverage of the pandemic was dominated by straight news reports accounting for 763 or (71.3%) of all analyzed items. This was followed by opinions 169 (15.8%), features 120 (11.2%) and editorials 18 (1.7%) respectively. The Punch newspaper, with the frequency of 309 (28.9%), reported the outbreak more frequently than The Sun newspaper, which has the total frequency of 266 (24.9%), The Guardian newspaper aslo reported the pandemic with the total frequency of 258 (24.1%), while the Vanguard newspaper reported the outbreak with the total frequency of 237 (22.1%) respectively. Findings from Nwakpu et al's (2020) study further suggest that the framing pattern adopted by the newspapers helped Nigerians to take precautionary measures.

Ahmad and Murad (2020) conducted a study on the impact of social media on panic during the covid-19 Pandemic in Iraqi's Kurdistan. The findings of the study revealed that the participants reported that social media has a significant impact on spreading fear and panic related to the COVID-19 outbreak in the Kurdistan region of Iraq with a potential negative influence on people's mental health and psychological well-being. Facebook was the most used social media network for spreading panic about the COVID-19 outbreak in Iraq. The study found a significant positive statistical correlation between self-reported social media use and the spread of panic related to COVID-19 (R=.8701). Results from the study showed that the majority of youths aged between 18 and 35 years were facing psychological anxiety during the pandemic.

Methodology

The present study adopted descriptive survey method, using questionnaire to generate data from 333 respondents drawn from a population of 1930 students of Achievers University, Owo, Ondo State, during the 2020/2021 academic session. However, the return rate for the administered questionnaire was 184. Taro Yamane's formula (1967) was used to determine the sample size for the target population.

Data Presentation

Data gathered for the study are analyzed and presented below:

Research Question 1: Level of exposure to social media framing of corona virus

Table 1.1: Level of exposure to social media framing of corona virus (**n = 184)**

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Which social media platform do you use to get news and information about COVID-19?		
WhatsApp	21	11.4
Instagram	38	20.7
Twitter	91	49.5
YouTube	11	6.0
Others	23	12.4
Total	**184**	**100**
How frequent do you use make use of social media platforms for information on Covid-19?		
Every day	173	94.0
Twice in a week	9	4.9
Weekly	2	1.1
Total	**184**	**100**
Information shared on social media about Covid-19 are clearly understood by me?		
Yes	117	63.6
No	67	36.4
Total	**184**	**100**

Source: ***field survey 2021***

From the responses obtained as expressed in Table 1.1, almost half of the respondents, representing 91 (49.5%), use twitter to get news and information about COVID-19, 38 (20.7%) use Instagram, 21 (11.4%) use WhatsApp, and few of the respondents 11 (6.0%) use YouTube, while 23 (12.4%) use other social media platforms to get news and information about COVID-19. This implies that the respondents are social media compliant and, therefore, generally have access to the social media platforms. It also shows that all respondents get news and information about COVID-19 on social media platforms.

The table also shows that majority of the respondents make use of social media platforms everyday, while 9 (4.9%) of the respondents make use of social media platform at least twice in a week followed by those the respondents that make use of this social media platform weekly. The above imply that majority of students of Achievers University are very active in their use of the social media platforms. Finally, the table shows that majority of the respondents clearly understood the information shared on the social media about Covid-19, while (36.4%) did not. The implication of the respondents' responses in Table 1.1 above is that the

students are generally exposed to social media information on Covid-19 and more importantly understood social media framing of corona virus (Covid-19).

Research Question 2: The influence of social media representation of corona virus on the attitude of Achievers University Students.

Table 4.4: The influence of social media representation of corona virus (**n = 184)**

VARIABLES	SA	A	D	SD
Information on social media representation of corona virus misleads me	76(41.3%)	41(22.3%)	46(25%)	21(11.4%)
Social media representation of corona virus informs me falsely	85(46.2%)	34(18.5%)	22(12.3%)	43(23.4%)
Social media representation of corona virus creates more fear of contacting the virus in me	113(61.4%)	30(16.3%)	29(15.8%)	12(6.5%)
Misinformation of social media makes me afraid of going to hospital so as not to be declared as a corona virus patient	89(48.4%)	53(28.8%)	32(17.4%)	10(5.4%)

Source: ***field survey 2021***
Note: *SA = Strongly Agreed, A = Agreed, D = Disagreed, SD = Strongly Disagreed*

From the responses obtained as expressed in Table 1.2, 63.6% of the respondents indicated that information on social media's representation of corona virus misled them as against 22.4% of the respondents, who think that the information on social media's representation of corona virus did not mislead them. Also, the table shows 64.7% of the respondents were falsely informed by social media's representation of the corona virus as against 23.4% who claimed that they were not informed falsely by social media's representation of the corona virus. In addition, majority of the respondents 61.4% stated that social media's representation of corona virus created in them the fear of contacting the virus as against only 6.5% of the respondents who claimed otherwise. Finally, the part of Table 2.1 dedicated to the influence of social media's representation of corona virus on the attitude of the respondents shows that 77.2% of the respondents agree that misinformation of social media makes them afraid of going to hospital where they might be declared as corona virus patients, while 22.8% of the respondents were not afraid of such. The implications of the data presented in Table 1.2 above

was that social media's representation of corona virus had negative influence on the attitude of Achievers University students.

Research Question 3: Ways in which communication in health regulatory bodies could curb misleading social media's representation of covid-19?

Table 4.4: Ways to curb misleading social media representation of covid-19 (**n = 184)**

VARIABLES	SA	A	D	SD
Posting of right videos, photos, and news of the people infected with covid-19 will make people to prefer preventive measure against the virus	124(67.4%)	47(25.5%)	9(4.9%)	4(2.2%)
Social media is used for positive persuasion such as frequent washing of hands with soap and water, for at least 40 seconds, especially after going to a public place, or after nose-blowing, coughing, or sneezing?	166(90.2%)	12(6.5%)	5(2.7%)	1(0.5%)
The public are influenced through the recommendation of the Federal Ministry of Health or the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) through their social media platforms	94 (51.1%)	41(22.3%)	32(17.4%	17(9.2%)
Regulating social media for proper disseminating of information about covid-19	166(90.2%)	12(6.5%)	5(2.7%)	1(0.5%)
The National Orientation Agency (NOA) should be adequately engaged to sensitize the public on the negative effects of false information through social media	122(66.3%)	42(22.8%)	13(7.1%)	7(3.8%)
The Nigeria Communications Commission (NCC) should be empowered to use Internet Protocol (IP) address tracking system for identification so as to ban the lines of errant social media users.	109(59.2%)	24(13.0%)	32(17.4%	19(10.3%

Source: ***field survey 2021***

Note: *SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree*

The implications of the respondents in Table 2.3 are that posting of right videos, photos, and news of the people infected with covid-19 will make people to prefer preventive measure and also that social media should be used for positive persuasion. The data in the Table also indicated that public were more influenced through the recommendation of the Federal Ministry of Health and the NIgeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and, particularly, through their social media platforms, while 17(9.2%) of the respondents stated otherwise. Also, the majority of the respondents advised that social media should be regulated for proper dissemination of information and that the National Orientation Agency (NOA) should be adequately engaged to sensitize the public on the negative effects of proliferation of false information by the social media. In addition, that the Nigeria Communications Commission (NCC) should be empowered to use Internet Protocol (IP) address tracking system for identification so as to ban the mobile phone lines of errant social media user's.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question One: On the level of exposure of Achievers University students to social media framing of corona virus, findings from this study revealed that almost half of the respondents, representing 91(49.5%), use twitter to get news and information about COVID-19, 38 (20.7%) use Instagram, 21 (11.4%) use WhatsApp, few of the respondents 11 (6.0%) use YouTube, while 23 (12.4%) use other social media platforms to get news and information about COVID-19. These findings were consistent with other studies (see, for example, Eysenbach, 2011; Pariser, 2011; Basch*et al.,* 2020; Chan). Findings from this also study revealed that majority of the respondents 173 (94.0%) make use of social media platforms every day. This implies that majority of students of Achievers University are very active in their use of these social media platforms. This finding was consistent with the studies of Basch et al. (2020) and Chan et al*.,* (2020) where the respondents make use of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WeChat, etc. every day to receive or disseminate information. Also, the findings of the present study revealed that more than half of the respondents 75 (40.8%) get involved in publishing information and news related to COVID-19 on social media and that 117 (63.6%) representing majority of the respondents clearly understood information shared on social media about Covid-19. This finding is consistent with the findings of Ahmad and Murad's (2020) study where they concluded that the participants were active in sharing information on social media through the use of Facebook, being one of the most used social media network.

Research Question Two: On the influence of social media's representation of corona virus on the attitude of Achievers University Students. Findings from this study as revealed in Table 4.4 show that there was negative influence of social media's representation of corona virus on the attitude of Achievers University students as majority of the respondents 113 (61.4%) stated that social media's representation of the corona virus creates more fear of contacting the virus in them and 89 (48.4%) of the respondents stated that misinformation of social media makes them afraid of going to hospital so as not to be declared as corona virus patients. This result was consistent with the findings of Ahmad and Murad (2020 that social media has a significant impact on spreading fear and panic related to the COVID-19 outbreak in Iraqi's Kurdistan region, with a potential negative influence on people's mental health and psychological well-being. Also, there was a significant positive statistical correlation between self-reported social media use and the spread of panic related to COVID-19 (R=.8701). moreover, this finding was consistent with the findings of Adebimpe et al's. (2015) study, which was conducted prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. The study was on the Ebola virus outbreak in 2014, which affected many people in West Africa. Nigerians, at the time, used the social media for the circulation of fake and unreliable news. The period witnessed several broadcast made all over WhatsApp, Facebook, and the likes with unverified medical information such as bathing with salt water, bitter cola and antibiotics in a bid to prevent contagious diseases (Adebimpe *et al.,* 2015). Some citizens also went as far as drinking saltwater as preventive measures against the Ebola disease. Unfortunately, this turned out to be deleterious to people who engaged in this as some met their untimely demise.

Research Question Three: On the ways in which communication in health regulatory bodies could curb misleading social media's representation of covid-19. Findings from the present study showed several ways health regulatory bodies in Nigeria can curb the misleading social media's representation of covid-19 as majority of the respondents strongly agree to the possible solution highlighted like posting of right videos, photos, and news of the people infected with covid-19. The social media should be used for disseminating positive persuasions and recommendations of the Federal Ministry of Health or the NCDC through their social media platforms. The social media should also be regulated for proper dissemination of information about covid-19 and the NCC should be empowered to use Internet Protocol (IP) address tracking system for identification so as to ban the lines of errant social media users.

Conclusions

Based on its findings, the present study concludes that people use social media platforms to gain information about COVID-19. It concludes that the significance of the social media outlets cannot be overemphasized with recourse to information dissemination. Also, it concludes that these platforms have been abused as people hide under its anonymity to spread fake messages and instigate panic among members of the general public. This bad social media representation of corona virus causes negative attitude toward the disease among the populace. Through the same media, information should be rectified as well as verified by the right sources. It, therefore, becomes essential to actively debunk fake news and to enlighten people on the need to be circumspect in forwarding unverifiable news and in consuming every information they got from the Internet as a blueprint for their reactions.

Recommendations

Based on the responses obtained, the present study recommends the following:

1. Educating the achievers students on what constitutes good and reliable information and how to critically think through information on covid-19 and related endemics.
2. University students are generally advised to conduct personal research from verifiable sources and authentic online accounts, such as the National Orientation Agency and the NCDC, so as not to fall prey to disinformation about Covid-19 circulating on various social media outlets
3. There is need for some measures to be put in place by the government in order to sanction any errant social media users spreading fake news and misinforming the public on Covid-19 and other related viruses.

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