Use of Social Media and the Proliferation of False Reports During the COVID-19 Crisis in Nigeria: A Study of Residents of Apa LGA, Benue State

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Abstract
Reports of COVID-19 pandemic dominated different social media platforms during the intensity of the crisis. Such reports ranged from its modes of transmission, prevention, figures of confirmed and cases of deaths. They came from anonymous and verifiable sources. This study sought to examine the proliferation of false reports and fake cures/vaccines of COVID-19 pandemic among social media users in Apa LGA of Benue State. It was anchored on the Health Belief Model and employed survey research design with questionnaire as instrument for data collection. The sample size for the study was 400, arithmetically determined using the Taro Yamane formula. A total of 392 copies of the questionnaire were used for data analysis. The study used multi-stage, stratified sampling technique which further broke Apa LGA into council wards to ensure even distribution of the instrument. The findings revealed that Facebook and WhatsApp were the main source of information on COVID-19 in the area. It also revealed some challenges like false reports of government relieve funds, infected facial masks in circulation and confirmed cases in some states of the federation were recorded constraints in the course of social media use for COVID-19 reports. The researchers recommended that the Federal Ministry of Health, the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), health related NGOs and coalition of health bodies and authorities should proactively design and popularize their own pages on various social media platforms in a bid to curb false health reports, thereby, creating more veracity and credibility of health reports on social media.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, False/fake reports, Health Belief model, Public health, Social media

Introduction

The widespread adoption of social media for health promotion and intervention has gained some level of ascendancy and has thus, generated some mixed reactions considering the low credibility of its news stories compared to other traditional media forms. The nature of coverage and reports of the Corona pandemic otherwise christened COVID-19 pandemic, on different social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram and the likes, has thrown unnecessary fear to many, due to its unique mode of killing, spread and its current status of no sure vaccine or drugs.

Social media have been enablers of information dissemination, collaboration and coordination for reasons ranging from personal to public healthcare. In healthcare, the context we study here, information dissemination is a key mechanism of creating awareness, a crucial factor in the early detection and prevention of diseases. According to Lapointe, Ramaprasad and Vedel (2014), the social computing phenomenon (e.g. the proliferation of social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, MySpace and Twitter) is creating a new reality in healthcare, bringing social media to the forefront of health information generation and dissemination.

The large-scale use of new media technology has had a significant impact on the global healthcare sector. Anand, Gupta and Kwatra (2013) state that the birth and development of social media has fundamentally changed how individuals interact in our society and engage record numbers of people both online and otherwise. New media generally, comprises of computerized, interactive, networked information and communication. Social media, however, is new media with a social focus, where information is shared with the purpose of networking. Social networking sites like Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Twitter and others allow individuals to instantly communicate with large networks of friends, acquaintances and colleagues, while supporting multimedia content linked to other social media applications such as YouTube (Chou, Hunt, Beckjord, Moser and Hesse, 2009). The entrant of social media with their multiply platforms have, indeed, revolutionised communication (Adelakun, Aliede, Ambassador-Brikins, Odiegwu-Enwerem and Abutu, 2021; Aliede, 2020 and Aliede, 2015).

Significantly too, Tse and Fu (2015) observe that social media are increasingly harnessed for public health and can be used as communication tools to disseminate disease risks and interventions and to promote healthy lifestyles and health policies. They notably added that there is also the potential use of social media as data sources for public health surveillance. While social media will likely never replace traditional data sources for disease surveillance, they can provide complementary information.

Even though the prolific and the unbalanced media coverage of some epidemic such as Ebola virus (EVD) in the West African sub-continent by some media has fuelled the growing panic in many parts of the globe; the nature of coverage by the media provides handful of benefits for some countries in the region in fighting the disease. For instance, Yusuf, Yahaya and Qabli (2015) note that the wide coverage by social media specifically has at least raised the level of awareness of common people with no access to good electricity or satellite in the region, on the dangers of the disease and at least some preventive measures in the midst of the growing panic over Ebola.

However, Yusuf, *et al* (2015) further observe that while the government and private own media broadcast live and re-run programmes by professional medical and public health experts on the true causes, symptoms, mode of spread and prevention and control measures, the social media also support the spread of the message by exaggerating and giving non-professional and even dangerous solutions. However, the duo has successfully contributed to successes recorded in less or non-hit countries in the region such as Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana and Mali, due to scaring number of death and collapse of socio-economy and food in-security in the worst affected countries (Yusuf, *et al,* 2015).

The intensified COVID-19 fear created by social media such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and numerous other platforms emanate from gross spread of misinformation from non-professionals and other users, These unfortunate and ugly incidents have become of great concern. Although different social media platforms drastically assist in fastening the level of awareness and consciousness of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria as in other parts of the world, the negative approach to doing this raises a lot of pertinent questions. It is for this reason that this study specifically sought to assess the proliferation of vague and false reports of causes, vaccines and cures of the disease on various social media platforms.

Statement of the Problem

According to Lau, Fernandez, Gabarron and Armayones (2012), recent years have seen social computing sites like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter gain unprecedented community acceptance, and many similar commercial sites for health are now in operation. However, little seems to be known about the impact of social media on consumer health decisions, behaviours and outcomes or the quality and safety of these sites. Charles-Smith, Reynolds, Cameron, Conway, Lau, Olsen, Pavlin, Shigematsu, Streichert, Suda and Corley (2015) relatively opine that social media can create a sense of anonymity, allowing for unadulterated personal expression when compared to traditional face-to-face meetings, especially among young people and about intimate matters.

Social media (e.g. videos, games, blogs, mobile applications, and social networking sites) may overcome many of the reading and writing barriers people experience due to limitations in their health literacy (Lau. *et al* (2012). However, consumers are likely to experience harmful mental or health effects when accessing social media health reports that are vague, stale or even false in entirety. While citing an example of the abuse of social media through false health reports during the Ebola virus (EVD) in 2015, Yusuf, *et al* (2015) note that the nature of coverage and reports of the whole epidemic and its perceived false cure on social media had thrown unnecessary fears to many. This paper, therefore, presents a range of safety concerns that health consumers in Nigeria are already experiencing in the social media space with the rising global spread of COVID-19. Specifically, the paper sought to examine the proliferation of false reports and fake cures/vaccines of the COVID-19 among social media users in Apa Local Government Area of Benue State of Nigeria.

Research Questions

Specifically, the applied the following research questions:

1. What was the most used social media platform among Apa residents in the course of acquiring and disseminating health information on Corona pandemic in Nigeria?
2. What are the prospects of the use of social media in ascertaining information pertaining Corona pandemic among social media users in Apa LGA?
3. What were the various false reports and fake vaccine cases that were witnessed on social media by its users in Apa LGA during the Corona pandemic tension in Nigeria?

Literature Review

The Concept of Social Media

Social media are those internet-based tools and services that allow users to engage with each other, generate content, distribute and search for information online. According to Madueke, Nwosu, Ogbonnaya and Anumadu (2017, p. 48), "social media are interactive web-based media platforms that offer citizens opportunity and place to connect, share opinions, experiences, views, contacts, knowledge, expertise, as well as other things like job and career tips". They belong to a new genre of media that focuses on social networking allowing users to express themselves, interact with friends and share information with greater freedom as well as publish their views on issues on the World Wide Web.

Chatora (2012) as cited in Madueke (2017, p. 48) observes that it is this interactive or collaborative nature of these tools that makes them social. He describes these media as "online platforms that promote participation, openness, conversation and connectedness". Akinwunmi (2011) sees them as social instruments of magazines. They are online content, created by people using highly accessible and scalable publishing technologies to disseminate information across geographical boundaries, providing interaction among people.

Social media emerged with the advent of the internet and the World Wide Web. According to Madueke, *et al* (2017), they are usually associated with the term "web 2.0" which is used to describe websites that provide opportunity for a user to interact with the sender of a message. Nnadozie (2007) observes that "Web 2.0" refers to the state of the web from 2004 till date; a period when interactive websites emerged as opposed to "web1.0" which describes the state of the web prior to 2004.

Once the concept of social media is mentioned, what comes to mind are Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube etc and other interface of interaction such as LinkedIn and Flicker. Anim (2013) states that these are the interactive websites, chat rooms, or platforms that permit users to leave comments and have discussions with other people. According to him, there are many characteristics of social media that enables them to be adapted for more than the sharing of social courtesies among friends. McQuail (2016) summarizes these characteristics in his own words as; social presence, media richness, autonomy, playfulness, privacy, and personalization.

Corona Virus: Emergence of a New Global Health Scare
According to the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission (2020), the corona virus belongs to a family of viruses that may cause various symptoms such as pneumonia, fever, breathing difficulty and lung infection. These viruses are common in animals worldwide, but very few cases have been known to affect humans. The World Health Organization (WHO) used the term 2019 novel corona virus to refer to a corona virus that affected the lower respiratory tract of patients with pneumonia in Wuhan, China on 29 December, 2019 (Adhikari, Meng, Wu, Mao, Ye, Wang, Sun, Sean, Rozelle, Raat and Zhou, 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) subsequently announced that the official name of the 2019 novel corona virus is corona virus disease (COVID-19).

Adhikari, *et al* (2020) noted that in response to the outbreak, the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (China CDC) dispatched a rapid response team to accompany health authorities of Hubei province and Wuhan city to conduct epidemiological and etiological investigations. The WHO (2020) confirmed that the outbreak of the corona virus epidemic was associated with the Huanan South China Seafood Marketplace, but no specific animal association was identified. Scientists immediately started to research the source of the new corona virus, and the first genome of COVID-19 was published by the research team led by Prof. Yong-Zhen Zhang, on 10 January 2020 (Adhikari, *et al*, 2020).

Within one month, this virus spread quickly throughout China during the Chinese New Year – a period when there is a high level of human mobility among Chinese people. Adhikari, *et al* (2020) stated that although it is still too early to predict susceptible populations, early patterns have shown a trend similar to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) corona viruses. Susceptibility seems to be associated with age, biological sex, and other health conditions (Fehr, Channappanavar and Perlman, 2017). COVID-19 has now been declared as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern by the WHO (2020).

Corona viruses are a large family of viruses that are known to cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). According to the WHO (2020), the most common symptoms of this virus are fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulty. In more severe cases, the infection can cause

pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, and even death. The period within which the symptom will appear is 2-14 days.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) Situation Report-63 as at 23rd day of March, the pandemic recorded 332,930 cases and 14, 509 cases globally; in the African region, it recorded 990 cases and 23 deaths, while in Nigeria, it recorded 22 cases and 0 deaths. Given the above data, WHO (2020) rated the risk assessment of this virus as very high.

Social Media and Effective Health Communication
While efficacy and efficiency of traditional media campaigns are well documented in the literature, the use of the social media like Facebook or Twitter in health messaging remains an enigmatic topic with a small evidence base (Anand, *et al,* 2013). Traditional media campaigns are used widely in public health for a wide variety of objectives and have shown positive outcomes in terms of reach, public awareness and to a certain extent, behaviour change. As more consumers turn to the internet for health related information, health organizations have begun to turn to social media as a tool for connecting with the public.

According to Anand, *et al* (2013, p. 42), "preliminary reports have demonstrated considerable reach associated with social media applications and have potential for engaging specific target audiences". However, given the rapid and exponential growth of social media use, development of best practices by public health organizations are crucial for adapting social media to every day public health practice. Also the context and the socio-political factors influencing the use of social media particularly by the target population i.e. the end users needs considerable attention (Moorhead, Hazlett, Harrison, Carroll, Irwin and Hoving, 2013).

Reports suggest that social media is a very feasible option that is relatively easy to adopt, but requires adequate and appropriate human resources to maintain. Anand, *et al* (2013) also notes that social media users have the potential to increase the number of interactions and thus are provided with more available, shared, and tailored information. Social media can generate more available health information as users create and share medical information online. According to Moorhead, *et al* (2013), blog sites create a space where individuals can access tailored resources to deal with health issues.

Social media can widen access to those who may not easily access health information via traditional methods, such as younger people, ethnic minorities, and lower socioeconomic groups important aspect of using social media for health communication is that it can provide valuable peer, social, and emotional support for the general public and patients. According to Smith (2007) in Anand, *et al* (2013), Colineau and Paris reported that people used health-related social networking sites to discuss sensitive issues and complex information with health professionals.

Social Media in Health Communication: Safety Concerns for Health Consumers
An emergent phenomenon is that social media have become outlets for organizations, news sources, and consumers alike for channelling and expressing their opinions and points of view on controversial topics (Briones, Nan, Madden and Waks, 2011). In the health domain, this often consists of trashing public health messages, thereby reducing or distorting the effectiveness of major public health campaigns.

Researchers have interpreted these opposition movements using Conspiracy Theory and Civil Liberties (Briones, *et al,* 2011), concluding that social media outlets such as YouTube have the potential to significantly shift public attitudes and beliefs about a controversial topic in a short period of time. This was illustrated in a recent publication on the content analysis of videos on the Human Papilloma virus (HPV) vaccine, which found that the majority of videos were expressed in a negative tone, disapproving of the HPV vaccine (Briones, *et al*, 2011), and that most of these opposing videos were consumer-generated content or news clips (Briones, *et al,* 2011). This phenomenon is also apparent across different languages,

where another study by Tozzi, Buonuoma, Ciofi, Carloni, Meloni and Gamba (2010), involving a content analysis of 74 websites in Italian and 114 in English found that 16.2% and 6.0% of the websites, respectively, were opposed to the HPV vaccine.

According to O'Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson (2011), health professionals need to be aware that patients access social media sites for information about their health, and most of these sites are not regulated. Clinicians need to anticipate the psychological impact and misconceptions patients may already have about their condition, prognosis, treatment plans, and procedures due to accessing inappropriate and incorrect content online. This is especially important with younger patients (Maskell, Cross and Gluckman 2010).

Related Empirical Works
Nduka (2015) carried out a study titled, "The Use of Social Media in Combating the Ebola Virus in Nigeria". The major objective of the study is to see how social media was used in fighting the Ebola Virus Disease in Nigeria. Findings of the study suggested that the quick thinking to use social media to convey real-time information about the deadly virus has been described as a superb success story which can be replicated in other countries. Overall, it was recommended that the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in Nigeria and the organization that provided and maintained the social media platform should synergize and present a common front for future disease outbreak in Nigeria and the neighbouring West African countries.

Similarly, Mogo (2018) conducted a research titled, "Social Media as a Public Health Surveillance Tool: Evidence and Prospects". The aim of this paper was to conduct a systematic review of the literature specifically on the use of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook in public health surveillance. Specifically, 103 articles were reviewed to explore contemporary uses of social media for public health surveillances, best practices in the use of social media for public health surveillance, strengths and limitations in the use of social media for public health surveillance and opportunities for further research. Findings revealed that social media can be an accurate, timely, granular and cost-effective means for tracking population health sentiments, behaviours, outcomes and emergencies. The study further recommends that future research is needed on how to effectively integrate social media sources with clinical surveillance systems.

Theoretical Framework
This study is anchored on Health Belief Model. While explaining this concept, Burke (2013) states that the Health Belief Model is an intrapersonal approach that is used in health promotions to design intervention and prevention programmes. The model was developed in the 1950s by social psychologist, Hochbaum, Rosenstock and others, who were working in the U.S Public Health Service to explain the failure of people participating in programmes to prevent, and detect disease even when the service was without charge and in a different convenient location.

Afterwards, the model received further insight through the work of researchers who concluded that six main constructs influence people's decisions about whether to take action to prevent screen for, and control of illness. The six constructs include: i) *perceived susceptibility* ii) *perceived severity* iii) *perceived benefits* iv) *perceived barriers* v) *cues to action* and vi) *self efficiency*. Ezinwa and Onyike (2014) note that it is the position of this theory that people's beliefs influence their health behaviour. Therefore, the focus of HBM is to assess health behaviour of individuals through examination of perceptions and attitudes someone may have towards disease and negative outcomes of certain actions.

The HBM is unarguably relevant to this study. It is basically an intrapersonal health intervention model that unveils how the presentation of health messages – contextually on social media – can shape the health behaviours of individuals towards positivity. This process of positive health behavioural change has

been demonstrated in the six main aforementioned constructs. The *perceived susceptibility* of individuals on their chances of contracting COVID-19, their *perceived severity* of the virus, their *perceived benefits* of adherence to preventive measures, their perceptions of the *barriers* that could deter them from adopting positive health behaviours, the dissemination of COVID-19 case/death updates which *cues them into action*, and of course their *self-efficacy* as a result of the proactive measures/actions they may have adopted. This lucidly demonstrates the significance of HBM to this study.

Research Methodology

Survey research method was adopted for this study. It enabled the study to include all the vital elements of the population while using only a segment of it. The quantitative approach allowed us to study the people through collection and analysis of data from a few people considered to be representative of the entire population - social media users among the residents of Apa LGA of Benue State. The population of Apa LGA residents in the 2006 Census was 200,300 as provided by the National Population Commission (NPC, 2006) (its current projection not available. Apa LGA notably comprises of 11 council wards, but for the sake of even distribution and reach, the researcher wrote them on separate sheets and rolled them into a box in a bid to randomly select 8 council wards. The eight council wards of Apa LGA selected and administered 50 copies of questionnaire each were as follows: Oiji, Igoro, Ugbokpo, Edikwu II, Ikobi, Akpete, Oba and Edikwu I, totalling 400 copies.. More so, primary and secondary sources of data collection were used in this study, while simple statistics was used for data analysis.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The total copies of questionnaire distributed were 400 but only 392 were valid and used for data analysis. The remaining 8 copies were not appropriately filled and thus, were not used. Consequently, a total of 392 copies of the questionnaire were used for data analysis. Of the 392 respondents, 204 (52%) were males, while 188 (48%) were females. Their ages ranged from 18 to 36 and above. They were mainly students, civil servants, farmers and traders.

Table 1: Social media platforms most used in getting and spreading reports of COVID-19

Response	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Twitter	47	12%
Facebook	162	41.3%
WhatsApp	158	40.3%
Instagram	16	4.1%
YouTube	9	2.3%
MySpace	-	-
Total	**392**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 4 reports the social media platforms used more often by the respondents in acquiring and or disseminating health information on COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The dominant platform they applied was Facebook, followed by WhatsApp, Twitter and Instagram. The implication of this is their good knowledge of these media and how they could be used to source and dissemination vital information, especially during healthy crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 2: Prevalence of prospects in use of social media for COVID-19 reports in Nigeria

Response	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes, there are	392	100%
No, there aren't	-	-
Total	**392**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 5 has data on if there were prospects associated with the use of social media in ascertaining information pertaining COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria; and all the 392 respondents (100%) on the table overwhelmingly indicated that there were.

Table 3: Respondents' perceptions on the use of social media for COVID-19 reports in Nigeria

Response	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Transcends literacy barrier	12	3.1%
Quickest health update media	166	42.3%
Steady accessibility	31	7.9%
Multiple sources of health reports	162	41.3%
Relatively popular media	21	5.3%
Total	**392**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2021

As contained in the above table, the respondents believed that was significant prospects associated with the use of social media in ascertaining information pertaining COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. They agreed with the presented features of the media which distinguish them from other means of communication, among them ability to transcend literacy barrier; quickest health update media; guarantee steady accessibility; availing multiple sources of health (COVID-19) reports; and relatively popular. However, above all, the most significant prospects associated with the use of social media in ascertaining information pertaining COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria are that it is the quickest health update media as indicated by a marginal majority and they avail multiple sources of health reports as indicated by a marginal majority.

Table 4: Existence of false reports and fake vaccine cases of COVID-19 on social media

Response	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes, there are	392	100%
No, there aren't	-	-
Total	**392**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The entire respondents were of the view that there were actually false reports and vaccine cases that were witnessed by Apa residents on social media during the Corona pandemic in the area.

Table 5: Experienced false reports and fake vaccine cases on social media during the Corona pandemic in Nigeria

Response	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Inflated number of confirmed cases	15	3.8%
False reports of confirmed cases in some states	120	30.6%
False reports of infected facial masks	122	31.1%
False reports of government relieve funds	124	31.6%
Exaggeration of the modes of transmission	11	2.8%
Total	**392**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The respondents confirmed the prevalence of such false claims and fake reports which include inflated number of confirmed cases; false reports of confirmed cases in some states; false reports of infected facial masks in circulation; false reports of government relieve funds to some areas; exaggeration of the modes of transmission; false reports and fake vaccine cases; government relieve of funds to some areas; infected facial masks in circulation and the confirmed cases in some states. Confirmation of coming across theses false reports shows they used social media.

Discussion of Findings

This study mainly sought to assess the use of social media and the proliferation of false reports and fake vaccine cases that were visible during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in Nigeria. The key goal of the study was attained as the specific objectives were achieved. Among them, the respondents indicate Facebook and WhatsApp as the most sought social media platforms by Apa LGA residents in the course of acquiring and disseminating health information on the Corona pandemic. This confirms social media as been at the forefront of health communication generally as reaffirmed earlier in the literature by Anand, *et al* (2013) who categorically observe that the rapid and exponential growth of social media use, development of best practices by public health organizations are crucial for adapting social media to every day public health practice.

As well, the study further adduced reasons for the application of social media for seeking information during the pandemic. Among the reasons for the choice included the social media been the quickest health update source and their ability to avail multiple sources of health reports. Additional benefits of these digital media were their edge over other traditional media forms when it comes to immediacy of news updates and their availability of multiple sources of reports for their users.

Corroborating with the above findings, Anand, *et al* (2013) also note that social media users have the potential to increase the number of interactions and thus, are provided with more available, shared and tailor information, observing further that social media can generate more available health information as users create and share medical information online. Moorhead, *et al* (2013) additionally cited an example of blog sites which can create spaces where individuals can access tailored resources to deal with health issues.

The identified benefits show the social media as viable instruments of health intervention. If properly managed, they can be efficiently used in health communication and promotion to design intervention and prevention programmes in line with the provisions of the Health Belief Model (HBM)

earlier elaborated upon in the theoretical framework of this study. Furthermore, the study affirmed the prevalence of false reports and cases of fake vaccines during the Corona crisis, among them false reports of government relieve funds to some areas, infected facial masks in circulation and confirmed Coronavirus cases in some states of the federation.

When presented vaguely, falsely, as fakery or through inflation of facts, health reports in the in the social media tend to exacerbate tension. O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson (2011) are of the same opinion when they recommended that health professionals need to be aware that patients access social media sites for information about their health and most of these sites are not regulated. They added also that clinicians need to anticipate the psychological impact and misconceptions patients may already have about their conditions, prognosis, treatment plans, and procedures due to accessing inappropriate and incorrect contents online. Their warning is pertinent, as unless thoroughly addressed, the effective use of social media for health promotion and communication – in line with the provisions of the Health Belief Model – would be just an illusion.

This can be seen from the respondents' answers to research question one: What was the most used social media platform among Apa LGA residents in the course of acquiring and disseminating health information on corona pandemic in Nigeria? Their answers specifically show that the social media platforms used more often by the respondents in acquiring and/or disseminating health information on COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria were Facebook and WhatsApp.

Responding to research question two: What are the prospects of the use of social media in ascertaining information pertaining corona pandemic among social media users in Apa LGA?, they indicated there were prospects associated with the use of social media in ascertaining information pertaining COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. All the 392 (100%) of the respondents affirmed the position. The most significant prospects associated with the use of social media during the crisis were that they were the quickest means of health updating media and there they availed multiple sources of health reports. These, thus, ranged from their perception as the quickest health update media and their ability to provide multiple sources of health reports.

With research question three: What were the various false reports and vaccine cases that were witnessed by APA LGA residents on social media during the corona pandemic tension in Nigeria?, the respondents provided answers including reports on the cases of false reports and vaccine issues that were visible on social media during the crisis and the various false reports on fake vaccine cases that were witnessed on social media by Apa LGA residents during the Corona pandemic. Others were false reports include government relieve of funds to some areas; infected facial masks in circulation and confirmed cases in some states.

Conclusion
The rapid adoption of social media for health awareness creation, promotion, advocacy and communication has gained some level of ascendancy and has, thus, generated some mixed reactions considering the low credibility of its news stories compared to other traditional media forms. This study primarily sought to assess the use of social media and the proliferation of false reports and cases of fake vaccine perceived during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. Findings revealed that Facebook and WhatsApp were the most popularly used platforms by residents of Apa LGA for COVID-19 report acquisition and dissemination. These platforms notably had some prospects which rested on their quicker reports and updates on the pandemic, as well as their provision of multiple sources of reports on COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, some notable challenges such as cases of false reports of government relieve funds to some areas, infected facial masks in circulation and confirmed cases of the disease were recorded constraints in the course of social media use by residents of Apa LGA during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendations

Consequently, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. The Federal Ministry of Health, the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), health related non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other coalitions of health bodies and authorities should proactively design and popularize their own pages on various social media platforms. This would help in curbing public utilisation of vague or fake health reports and thus, create more credibility and believability of health reports on social media.
2. Social media users should consciously make efforts to verify health reports on the platforms before disseminating or sharing them. This could be simply done by visiting other official newspaper and/or television sites online or offline.
3. Health authorities, professionals and practitioners should make efforts towards embracing the use of social media in disseminating health awareness messages in a more graphic, illustrative and cogent manner. In doing so, adequate feedback mechanism should be equally considered in a bid to enhance clarifications. This would also counter false reports on the causes, prevention, curses or vaccines in critical cases of pandemics such as COVID-19.

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