PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA REPORTAGE OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AMONG YOUNG PERSONS IN DELTA STATE

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ABSTRACT

Social media was a major source of health information during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. Studies have shown that young people in Nigeria use social media mostly for informational and recreational purposes. Thus, the purpose of this study was to determine how young people in Delta State view health information on COVID-19 posted on social media and how much exposure they had to it. The study used a 384-respondents' sample size and a survey research design. The posed hypothesis was examined utilizing the statistical method of regression analysis. The study founded on media ecology theory thoroughly explored how technology, media, and communication processes affect human perception, feeling, understanding, and value. The study discovered a strong link between young people's perceptions of COVID-19 and their exposure to social media reports on the COVID-19 pandemic in Delta State. It advises the Federal Government and other interested agencies to increase their investment in social media initiatives to properly deal with the problems of
inappropriate disseminate of health information to the public rather than attempting to enact laws that will restrict citizens' use of social media.

**Keywords:** Perception, Social Media, COVID-19, Youths, Health Information.

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**INTRODUCTION**

The ability to instantly seek out and share news as well as one's own opinions and ideas through social media makes it possible for social media to play an important role in times of crisis. The world's equilibrium was upset by the CONVID-19 epidemic, which originated in Wuhan, China in December 2019 and spread to other parts of the globe. The number of COVID-19 cases and fatalities continued to dominate media coverage across all channels, including news, radio, print, and social media during the lockdown, with the main headlines often emphasizing the cases and fatalities (Farooq et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021). COVID-19 is a component of the global COVID-19 coronavirus disease pandemic that is brought on by coronavirus 2 that causes severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS-CoV-2).

As of December 21, 2022, more than 661.2 million cases had been reported across 191 countries and territories, resulting in more than 6.6 million deaths. More than 654.5 million people have recovered (CSSE, 2022). While in Nigeria as of December 21, 2022, 266,450 were the confirmed cases with Delta State accounting for 5,856 of the figure, 259,844 have recovered, while 3,155 have died from the virus nationwide (NCDC, 2020 updates).

The first case of the virus was confirmed by the Nigeria Federal Ministry of Health on February 27, 2020 when an Italian national who works in Nigeria and returned from Milan, Italy on February 25, 2020 tested positive to the virus. A second incidence of the virus was recorded on March 9th, 2020 in Ewekoro, Ogun State, in a Nigerian who had contact with the Italian (Nigeria records second case of Coronavirus, 2020). In Delta State, the first case was confirmed on April 7, 2020 in a 50-year-old male returnee from Canada (NCDC, 2022 updates).

Social media became a major source of reporting information on the COVID-19 outbreak (Farooq et al., 2020; Apuke and Omar, 2021). Social media use during the pandemic lockdown had an impact on people's wellbeing, but there were also clear benefits for participants, according to researchers (Apuke and Omar, 2021). Social media is commonly used to provide information about dangers like earthquakes, terrorism, COVID-19, and flooding, according to research (Van-Dijl et al., 2019). West (2015) and Pitaifu et al. (2018) corroborate Van-Dijl et al. (2019) view by stating that based on previous studies, people use a few social media platforms to exchange and hunt for information on disasters. Social media is frequently used to report on what Oji (2006) and Oji (2009) would define as conflict scenarios resulting from development agencies' pretense at development that ultimately morphed into stakeholders' struggles to own projects. While some of these materials are true, others are fake. On social media, a platform that is open to the public, users can look for, share, and post details about COVID-19 (Shah et al., 2019).

Since the onset of the COVID-19 epidemic, social media has been widely used to give health information (Nabity-Grover et al., 2020). The COVID-19 epidemic undoubtedly contributed to the rise in digital and social media usage as well as the ensuing reporting. Around 3.8 billion people utilize social media globally, which represents 85% of the estimated 4.5 billion Internet users (Kermani& Faust, 2021). Since the outbreak of the epidemic, each person's daily use of
social media has increased from 75 to 82 minutes (Kermani & Faust, 2021). People began looking for alternative ways to connect and communicate with one another because of social isolation and lockdowns implemented in the majority of countries. For instance, TikTok has 1.5 billion users globally as of 2020 (Kermani & Faust, 2021), but the number of downloads rose by more than 100 million between the fourth quarter of 2019 and the first quarter of 2020. Additionally, "Instalive, the Instagram live video chat function, exploded as a competing digital video format worldwide." According to the Director General, National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), Kashifu Inuwa, statistics indicate that over 124 million Nigerians were using the Internet in Nigeria during the COVID-19 lockdown (Dangida, 2021). In the sea of information available on the internet, people struggle to find, gather, and organize content (Oji & Bebenimibo, 2021). This affects how they perceive media usage. This extensive use of social media though helps in prompt information dissemination, but may also create a situation where internet users are exposed to information they may not be able to properly process nor be able to understand how it shapes their perceptions (Chen and Wei, 2019). An excessive amount of news coverage on an infection may increase people's fear of that infection (Farooq et al., 2020; Gever et al., 2021). More specifically, bizarre events like virus epidemics reported on social media could frighten millions of people. Like what obtains in other climes, messages on the prevention and control of coronavirus is designed and disseminated using platforms such as social media, however, communication is said to be effective only when the sender and the receiver have common meaning and making the receiver to act as intended by the sender (Asemah & Akpabio, 2022). It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine perception of social media reportage of the COVID-19 pandemic among young persons in Delta State.

The Problem
Over the years, scholars have carried out numerous research on either how media report health (coronavirus) issues or the perception of people on media coverage of such issues. Some authors suggest that studying how media disseminate information on issues also requires a survey of peoples’ perception on media coverage of such issues. However, it is the responsibility of the media to inform and educate the people on the coronavirus pandemic. According to Baran (2004, p.4), social responsibility theory challenges media professionals’ ingenuity to develop new ways of serving their communities.

19: A systemic literature. Furthermore, Akpoghiran (2022) researched Public health risk: Public views on panic reporting and media framing of the COVID-19 pandemic. Asemah and Akpabio (2022) studied perception of media coverage of corona virus outbreak of select local government areas in Edo State; their study looked at all forms of media. Going by the literature, it is evident that there is very little or no study on perception of social media reportage of the COVID-19 pandemic among youths in Delta State. It is on this premise that this study was carried out to determine the perception of social media reportage of the COVID-19 pandemic among young persons in Delta State.

**Objectives**
The major objective of this study was to ascertain perception of social media reportage of the COVID-19 pandemic among youths in Delta State. However, the specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Find out if social media reported the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.
2. Determine the level of exposure of Delta State youths to social media reports on COVID-19.

**Research Questions**
The following research questions were set out to guide the study.

1. Are there social media outlets in Nigeria that report on the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How much social media coverage of COVID-19 are Delta State teenagers exposed to?
3. How do young people in Delta State perceive social media news about the COVID-19 pandemic?

**Hypothesis**
1. Youth perception does not strongly influence their exposure to social media reportage of COVID-19 pandemic.

**Delimitation of the Study**
The study is focused on perception of social media coverage of COVID-19 pandemic among youths in Delta State. The scope covers all young persons in Delta State who are between 15 to 35 years old as defined by the National Bureau of Statistics, (2012). The study focused on social media only. This simply excluded all other forms of media from the study. The study was only set out to study how youths perceive, interpret, and give meaning to social media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Social Media Coverage of COVID-19 Pandemic**
The Coronavirus (Covid-19) which is an infectious disease that causes acute respiratory infections ranging from the common cold to more severe respiratory challenges. It started in December 2019 from the Hunan seafood market at Wuhan, China where live bats, snakes, raccoon dogs, wild animals among others were sold and it was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization on 11 March 2020 (WHO, 2020). Since its recognition, the virus is said to have accounted for about 6.6 million deaths globally out of a staggering statistic of about 661.2 million positive cases which unfortunately increases aggressively daily (CSSE, 2022). The
initial victim of the virus in Nigeria was an Italian man who arrived in the country on the 25 February 2020. He was admitted to an Isolation Centre in Yaba Lagos after manifesting symptoms of the virus (NCDC 2020). Many Nigerians first learnt about this virus from social media posts on the internet.

In recent years, social media has become an operational technological tool in Nigeria, as well as a news and communication medium for Nigerians. Access to mobile telephones, particularly among the technologically savvy youths, has made dissemination of information easy within the blink of an eye. As the corona virus pandemic raged on and disrupted world activities, social media platforms were utilized as information channels. Its relevance has gained more acceptance owing especially to the fact that the government at the onset of the virus in 2020 implemented a lockdown policy to control the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Hence social media became an active tool for engagement and communication for the dissemination of credible information as well as incredulous (mis)information (Okeke, Ikechukwu & Ajagu, 2021).

Social media helps in spreading information fast and the reach is unbeatable plus, it has the capacity to store information in perpetuity, enabling multiple access and retrieval globally. It is in recognition of the important role that social media play in health communication that propelled health bodies like World Health Organisation (WHO), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), and others to have dedicated websites and social media platforms through which they disseminate information, issue statements, and give guidelines on COVID-19 and other health issues (Guanah, Nwammuo & Agbanu, 2021).

Nevertheless, information on the virus spread like wild fire during and after the lockdown across all social media platforms. Social media became awash with all sorts of information concerning the disease. Medical practitioners utilized social media to put across certain information on how the disease can be prevented and at the same time, individuals not well versed in health matters equally put out information concerning this disease, thus leading to possible disinformation, misinformation and information overload.

**Perception of Social Media Coverage of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Perception is the organization, identification, and interpretation of sensory information in order to represent or understand the environment. The perceptual systems of the brain enable individuals to see the world around them as stable, even though the sensory information is typically incomplete and rapidly varying (Okeke, Ikechukwu & Ajagu, 2021).

The word perception refers to what the body is able to perceive, that is, the information that the body is able to discern from the outside world. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, perception is “the process of becoming aware or conscious of a thing or things in general; the state of being aware; consciousness; understanding.” The process of understanding becomes a mediated experience, as it requires the use of the senses to process data. To be perceivable, the object must have the ability to be understood by the mind through the interplay of sight, sound, taste, touch and smell. To be perceived, a sensation must pass through the body through one or more of the sensory organs, that is, the eye, ear, nose, mouth, or skin. To interpret that sensation is what is known as perception.
To perceive something is not just to understand something, but rather to hold that perception as a truth. Studies have found that social media reports are perceived differently by individuals and depending on the circumstances surrounding such messages. Perception of social media messages have been investigated from different angles by several researchers both within and outside Nigeria and their findings have revealed a lot of information about the phenomenon.

Erubami, Bebenimibo & Ugwoke (2021) found that exposure to COVID-19 risk information via social media is significantly associated with increased risk perception towards the disease, suggesting that people who frequently utilise social media in gathering information on COVID-19 tend to perceive themselves as being at greater risk of contracting the disease. This finding is resonating with Angawi & Albugmi, (2022) in their study on impact of social media on risk perception during the COVID-19 in Saudi Arabia confirmed that the risk perception is associated with various socio-demographic factors and social media. The study reported a key finding of higher risk perceptions among individuals with higher exposure to social media.

Okeke, Ikechukwu & Ajagu, (2021) sought to find out respondents’ perception on the quality of social media health messages on COVID-19. Using a scale of very high, high, low and very low, they found that majority of the respondents who rate 42.9% agree that the quality of social media information on COVID-19 is high. This by implication indicates that despite the misrepresentations, misinformation, and overload of information on messages related to COVID-19, users still find quality information about COVID-19 on social media.

Also, Demuyekor (2020) analyze the positive impact of receiving COVID-19 information on social media among the Ghanaian migrants in Beijing, China. Among the key questions, respondents answered were; do respondents feel good getting information concerning COVID-19 on social media, and how do they think the misinformation on social media on COVID-19 impacts their emotions. Respondents’ perceived information they read or received on social media about COVID-19 as very effective as most of them agreed to the positive impact it has on them (m = 3.72), the respondents attest to feeling good each time they get information on social media about COVID-19(m = 4.22), and they perceived misinformation on social media about COVID-19 to impact their emotions positively (m = 4.22).

**Theoretical Framework**

This study is hinged on the Media Ecology Theory (MET) which aims to understand the social impact of technology and communication (McLuhan, 1964). Media ecology, or the study of how media and communication processes influence human perception, feeling, understanding, and value, is focused around communication studies (Moreno & Koff, 2016). Marshall McLuhan (1964) noted that electronic media have revolutionized society, and society quickly become reliant on these communication technologies. The rules of media set forth by MET include enhancement, obsolescence, retrieval and reversal. These show how technology affects communication through the development of new technology. MET focuses on the idea that society cannot escape the influence of technology and that technology will forever remain central to almost every action in modern life.

The influence of media technology on society is the main concept of MET, upheld by three main assumptions: media is infused into every act and action in society, media fixes our perceptions and organizes our experiences, and media tie the world together, we cannot escape the media
presence in our lives as it is ubiquitous in our realities of day-to-day life. Media directly influences us, as they are powerful in our view of the world. Media connects the world into a “global village,” where media can tie anyone around the globe into a single social, cultural, political, and economic system (Moreno & Koff, 2016). As a result, we can receive information instantaneously.

Media Ecology helps us to understand why people continue to interact online, despite somewhat of a loss of control over their public and private boundaries. As noted by McLuhan (1964), society quickly became reliant on electronic media – such as social networking sites – for many reasons such as efficiency and ease. Technology has continually progressed over time – forcing people to adapt – and social networking sites are no different. Society is becoming increasingly comfortable and reliant on new media forms for communication and youths are the major drivers of this evolving communication platform. This theory is relevant to this study because it helps us to understand why youths were engulfed in the massive consumption of social media messages on COVID-19 and how these messages shaped their perception of the disease and the messages that emanated from the social media during the pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

The study was designed as a survey. Young people in Delta State were used for the study. Youths according to the National Baseline Youth Survey Report are those between 15 to 35 years of age (National Bureau of Statistics, 2012). The population of the study consists of all young persons in Delta State and this figure is given as 1,738,331 by the National Bureau of Statistics (2012). The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table. The authors propose that for populations of 100,000 to infinity, 384 should be used as the sample size. Therefore, 384 was adopted as sample size for the study.

Young people within Delta State who are active internet users and are between 15 to 35 years of age were eligible for this study. This range is the approved age for youths according to the National Baseline Youth Survey Report of 2012. To ensure that only people within this age range participated, the study included screening questions at the beginning of the survey, this made respondents who were not eligible to be automatically redirected to the online questionnaire appreciation and closing page for abrupt submission, these were also automatically discarded by the web form. Although the participants had the liberty to discontinue the study whenever they felt like, they were required to answer the entire instrument’s questions there was no missing data in the submitted responses.

The study made use of an online survey of young person’s perception of social media reports on COVID-19. The survey started from December 11, 2022, to January 02, 2023. The survey’s questionnaire was developed using Form Sapp, a free online survey software. The instrument was shared on the internet using a snowball sampling technique, otherwise known as chain referral. The selected participants after participating also identified and referred potential participants within their network to complete the survey. The sampling process lasted until we reached the required number of participants. Compared to probability sampling, online surveys have the advantages of reduced cost and broader geographical reach (Baltar & Brunet, 2012). Nevertheless, online surveys are liable to sample bias and generalizability problems; hence, the
need to compare online sample results with the national demographic statistics to ascertain their representativeness of the study’s population Erubami, Bebenimibo & Ugwoke (2021).

The demographic variables were measured using tables and simple percentages. The Likert Scale was used in tables 7 and table 8 to measure youths’ perception of social media reports during the COVID-19 pandemic. The response pattern of this scale was a 5-1 point (5 = I strongly agree; 4 = I agree; 3 = I undecided; 2= I strongly disagree and 1= I disagree). This 5 point scaling technique had been used by Akpoghiran (2022) to measure participants’ views on panic reporting and media framing during pandemics. Data obtained were analysed in percentages, mean and standard deviation for the research questions. While the formulated hypothesis was tested using regression analytical techniques with a significant level at 0.05. Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) aided the analysis.

**DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

**Table 1**

*Sex Distribution of Respondents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>46.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>53.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above shows that more females responded to the research instrument than males. 179(46.6%) males took part in the survey while 205(53.4%) females responded.

**Table 2**

*Age Distribution of Respondents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the table above, 54(14.1%) respondents were between ages 15-19 years old, 72 (18.8%) were 20-24 years old, 102(26.6%) fall between the age bracket of 25-29 years of age and 156(40.6%) were between 30 to 35 years old. This shows that more youths from ages 30 to 35 years old responded to the questionnaire.

**Table 3**

*Level of Education of Respondents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of education</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’Level</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the table above, 8(2.1%) of the respondents had primary education, 28(7.3%) have secondary education, while 122(31.8%) and 165(43.0%) have NCE/OND and B.Sc/HND respectively and 61(15.9%) have other forms of qualification. This shows that more youths with Bachelor and Higher National Degree responded to the research instrument.

**Table 4**  
*Marital Status of Respondents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table reveals that more single people responded to the questionnaire. From the analysis, 296(77%) were single while 88(23%) were married and none of the respondent was divorced.

**Table 5**  
*Respondents’ Extent of Knowledge of Social Media Reports on COVID-19 Pandemic*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent of knowledge</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have knowledge</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have partial knowledge</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have no knowledge</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the respondents have knowledge of social media reports on COVID-19 during the pandemic. This is evident from the table above which shows that 235(61%) of the respondents revealed they have knowledge of social media reports on COVID-19, 143(37%) said they have partial knowledge, 2(1%) have no knowledge and 4(1%) were undecided.

**Table 6**  
*Social Media Platforms from where Respondents Received Social Media Messages on COVID-19 the most*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>43.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Respondents received COVID-19 messages more from Facebook during the pandemic. This is evident from the table above which shows that 166(43.2%) of the respondents received COVID-19 messages more from Facebook, 86(22.4%) from WhatsApp, 54(14.1%) from Twitter, 39(10.2%) from Instagram. While 11(2.9%), 7(1.8%) and 21(5.5%) respondents received COVID-19 information more from TikTok, Snapchat and other social media platforms respectively.

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>UD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social media reported the COVID-19 pandemic</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I was exposed to a lot of COVID-19 messages on social media during the pandemic</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>UD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Social media messages on the COVID-19 pandemic were informative</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Social media reported government safety directives on COVID-19</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Social media reported failed health system in Nigeria during the COVID-19 pandemic</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Social media messages on the COVID-19 pandemic created fear and panic</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Social media messages on the COVID-19 were MAJORLY misinformation and fake news</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>2.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Social media messages on the COVID-19 pandemic were trivialized</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Social media messages on the COVID-19 pandemic were politicized</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents expressed their views on social media COVID-19 pandemic reporting on a set mean at 3.00

Test of Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was tested:

Hypothesis: Youth perception does not strongly influence their exposure to social media reportage of COVID-19 pandemic.
In analyzing this hypothesis, constructed variables used were perception of youths on COVID-19 pandemic and youth exposure to social media reportage of COVID-19 pandemic in Delta State. Below is the result presentation

Table 9
**Summary of Regression Analysis Youth Perception does not Strongly Influence their Exposure to Social Media Reportage of COVID-19 Pandemic**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.901</td>
<td>.813</td>
<td>.812</td>
<td>.33905</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Predictors: (Constant), perception of youths on COVID-19 pandemic

**ANOVA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>190.285</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>190.285</td>
<td>1655.338</td>
<td>.000b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>43.912</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>.115</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>234.197</td>
<td>383</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Dependent Variable: youth exposure to social media reportage of COVID-19 pandemic
b. Predictors: (Constant), perception of youths on COVID-19 pandemic

**Coefficients**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>1.116</td>
<td>.074</td>
<td>15.044</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 perception of youths on COVID-19</td>
<td>.737</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>.901</td>
<td>40.686</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Dependent Variable: youth exposure to social media reportage of COVID-19 pandemic

Source: Researcher’s Computation, 2023

The model summary for the test of the hypothesis which explains the significant influence which youth perception has on the exposure to social media reportage of COVID-19 pandemic in Delta State is presented in Table 9. As observed, the value for standard error recorded for the reward strategy stood at 0.33905. Note that the low value for standard error is an indication that the model specified to examine the link between the variables of concern (in this case, perception of youths on COVID-19 pandemic and youth exposure to social media reportage of COVID-19 pandemic in Delta State) in the study alongside the regression outcomes are not only precise, but very reliable. With the aforesaid, the conclusion drawn from the result presented in Table 9 is adjudged reliable and dependable.

Succinctly, we observe that the value of \( t_{\text{stat}} \) obtained for the model was 40.686 with a corresponding \( p \)-value of 0.000. This result suggests that the youth perception has significant influence on the exposure to social media reportage of COVID-19 pandemic in Delta State. This result is confirmed by the result of the \( F_{\text{cal}} \) for the overall model which stood at 1655.338 with a corresponding \( p \)-value of 0.0000 (\( F_{\text{cal}} = 1655.338; \ p-value = 0.0000 < 0.05 \)). To further strengthen the result, the coefficient of determination (Un-standardized \( \beta \) value) was presented. The model \( \beta \) value of 0.737 indicates that a unit change in perception of youths on COVID-19 pandemic with cause a 73.7% changes in youth exposure to social media reportage of COVID-19 pandemic in Delta State. With this result, the hypothesis of this study is rejected, as stated, thereby leading to the conclusion that there is a significant relationship between youth perception on COVID-19 and their exposure to social media reportage of COVID-19 pandemic in Delta State. In essence, the level of youth media exposure on COVID-19 pandemic is strongly influenced by the level of reportage of the pandemic.
Discussion of Finding

Results from the study show that 384 youths responded to the questionnaire, this gives a 100% return rate. This was made possible because of the structure of the online instrument which does not allow respondents to submit the instrument unless all fields had been completed. The instrument was also set to stop as soon as the required number of responses was reached. This made it possible for the 100% return rate that was achieved. More females (53.4%) responded to the research instrument and most of the respondents (40.6%) were youths from ages 30 to 35 years old majority of whom (43%) had Bachelors and Higher National Degree and a good number of them (77%) were not married. Most (61%) of the respondents have knowledge of social media reports on COVID-19 during the pandemic and majority (43.2%) of the respondents received COVID-19 messages more from Facebook during the pandemic.

The main objective of the study was to determine youths’ perception of COVID-19 social media reports during the pandemic. On table seven, respondents expressed their views on level of exposure to social media reports on COVID-19. Where all calculated mean from items 1 and 2 were greater than set mean (3.00), the respondents indicated that social media reported the COVID-19 pandemic(4.53 >3.00) and that they were exposed to a lot of social media reports on the pandemic (4.57>3.00). These findings support previous studies that demonstrate that social media have become very important in both interpersonal and mass communication globally and that its platforms have emerged as positive and good sharing medium in preparing, gathering, responding, and educating the public about the COVID-19 pandemic (Igben, & Madubuchukwu, 2017;Chukwere, 2022)

On table eight, which contains items 1 to 7, respondents expressed their opinions and perceptions of social media contents on the COVID-19 pandemic. They opine that social media coverage during the pandemic were informative (4.46>3.00). This supports findings by Guanah, Nwammuo &Agbanu, (2021) which revealed that the majority (56.03%) of the residents of Awka believe that social media are very effective in disseminating Coronavirus/COVID-19 information. The results also show that social media platforms were used to report government safety directives on the prevention of the spread of the virus (4.39>3.00). Respondents were also of the view that social media reports during the COVID-19 pandemic exposed failed health care system and facilities in Nigeria (3.57>3.00), this resonates with findings in Akpoghiran (2022) and Guanah, Nwammuo & Agbanu, (2021). No doubt, COVID-19 exposed the inadequacies in the healthcare systems of nations like Nigeria, and social media have been effective forum through which citizens have been calling out their various governments to improve and provide critical health infrastructure and services in their different domains. This failure obviously accounts the reason why many Nigerians travel abroad for medical treatment and many medical practitioners go abroad to practice.

The study also found that social media coverage of the pandemic increased fear and panic among Nigerians as shown on item 4 of table seven (3.57>3.00),Although this is worrisome, but it however reduced the spread of the virus, as the panic made respondents to follow safety instructions. The respondents’ however rejected the assumption that social media messages on the COVID-19 were majorly misinformation and fake news (2.45<3.00), This finding supports Okeke, Ikechukwu & Ajagu, (2021) findings on perception on the quality of social media health
messages on COVID-19 where majority of the respondents who rate 42.9% agree that the quality of social media information on COVID-19 is high. This by implication indicates that despite the misrepresentations, mis-information and overload of information on messages related to COVID-19, social media users still find quality information on the COVID-19 disease on the various social media platforms. In order to reduce fake news and misinformation during a pandemic, Oji (2022) asserts that as the bubbles of post-truth swear up in the online media, and conned objectivity and rationality are conjured to stimulate strong sentiments capable of making individuals uphold wrong beliefs about coronavirus, the use of human actions in managing coronavirus information rather than surrendering it to machine-based computational procedures should be adopted.

Many young persons sampled in the study believed social media messages on COVID-19 were trivialized (3.40>3.0). This may be because of various jokes and comedy that emanated during the pandemic. While some of these contents deployed humour to pass important safety measures like social distancing, wearing of face mask and regular washing of hands, some others were filled with trivial issues. Result from item 7 on table eight also show that social media messages on the COVID-19 pandemic were also politicised (3.67>3.0).

In testing the stated hypothesis, the study reveals that there is a significant relationship between youth perception on COVID-19 and their exposure to social media reportage of COVID-19 pandemic in Delta State. In essence, the level of youth media exposure on COVID-19 pandemic is strongly influenced by the level of reportage of the pandemic.

**CONCLUSION**

The COVID-19 pandemic attracted and impacted the public as well as the mass media more than any other pandemic recorded in the past decade. Social media played an important role in reporting the pandemic and because of its fluid nature; the media genre was heavily used for information dissemination on the virus. This heavy usage created a lot of perception about its content on the phenomena. This study found that although social media messages on the COVID-19 created fear and panic among Nigerians, exposed the failed nature of the Nigerian health system and the reports were sometimes trivialized and politicized, these however did not negate the importance of the information that were gotten from the platform. The study also found that social media platforms helped the Nigerian public to understand government safety directives and a lot of persons were heavily exposed to social media reports on the pandemic.

**Recommendations**

Arising from the findings of this study, the following recommendations are hereby made:

1. The federal government and other stakeholders should invest more in social media efforts to combat health and other emergencies by putting in place laws and policies that will support the use of social media to spread important information about emergencies instead of attempting to enact laws that will muzzle the use of social media by citizens.
2. Having realized the critical functions that social media played in the spread of information on COVID-19, the government and should deploy all available social media platforms in combating future emergencies including its use to communicate poverty alleviation information as enunciated in Oji (2011).
3. To guide against fake, misleading, and false information about COVID-19 on social media, social media users must ensure that the sources of their information on COVID-19 are credible by fact-checking and verifying any of them before posting or acting on them.

4. It is important that social media users are enlightened on the need to be cautious in forwarding unverifiable messages on health emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic.

5. Social media users are advised to conduct personal researches from authentic sources that are online such as the National Orientation Agency and the NCDC who are government bodies that have been mandated to provide the public with verifiable information on the COVID-19 pandemic.

References


COVID-19 Dashboard by the Centre for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE, 2021) at Johns Hopkins University (JHU).


