NEW MEDIA AND COVID-19 AWARENESS AND PREVENTION CAMPAIGN IN NIGERIA: AN ANALYTICAL OVERVIEW

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Abstract

The use of modern information and communication technologies to disseminate information has been trending long before the outbreak of global Covid-19 pandemic. Since the outbreak of this highly infectious virus and its high mortality rate, new media has been used to inform and educate Nigerians about the danger COVID-19 poses to human existence. This study analytically reviews the efficacy of new media in creating awareness about the outbreak and spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the various measures put in place to inform Nigerians on how to curtail its spread in Nigeria. The method used for the study is an analytical review of the use of social media for creating awareness about the outbreak and spread of coronavirus in Nigeria. The review confirms that inspite of its misuse, social media has been extensively used to inform the populace about the outbreak, spread and prevention of the deadly COVID-19 pandemic. The study therefore concludes that social or new media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, and others were mostly used for creating awareness among Nigerians about the outbreak, spread and preventive measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The study concludes that social media misuse is a policy issue and therefore, the Federal Government of Nigeria should formulate policy to check social media misuse, misinformation and fake news in Nigeria.

Key words: New Media, Covid-19, Awareness, Prevention, Nigeria

Introduction

Communication plays a vital role in every aspect of human existence, especially in creating awareness about health-related and other issues all over the world. Before the emergence of digital media communication technology, the conventional or traditional media were used (and are still being used) to disseminate vital information in order to create awareness about outbreak of diseases globally as well as within a local community or nation. With the advent of high-technology, social media (Web 2.0), mass communication has transcended beyond the use of traditional method to social networking and interaction among large and heterogeneous audience. This development has made everyone a mass communicator or journalist of some sort (citizen journalism). Hence, it is an easy task for everyone who cares to transmit information about happenings in and around them particularly the outbreak and spread of the COVID-19 pandemic since December, 2019. People can now create content about just any matter of concern and in a matter of seconds transmit such information to a very large audience in any parts of the world.

Coronavirus disease 2019, (previously known as 2019-nCov), was first reported in Wuhan, China in December 2019. The disease originated from Hunan seafood market at Wuhan, China where live bats, snakes, raccoon dogs, wild animals among others were sold in December 2019 (Shereen et al, 2020). According to Wu et al cited in Gever and Ezeah (2020), in an article published by *Journal of the Chinese Medical Association,* COVID-19 was first reported late December in Wuhan and quickly spread to other places and eventually, other parts of the world. The highly contagious virus began its ravaging effect from Wuhan, Hubei Province, China and then around the world except Antarctica.

This led to so many measures being put in place to curb the spread which include; closure of public places, halting of public transportation, isolation and management of infected persons in many affected countries. It evolved as a severe menace for the global community, thereby, leading to the World Health Organization (WHO) declaration of the outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on 30th January, 2020 and as a pandemic on March 11, 2020 having met the epidemiological criteria of having infected 100,000 people in at least 100 countries (Callaway Cited in Ohia et al, 2020).

Covid -19 symptoms include; fever, cough respiratory symptoms, shortness of breath, and difficulty in breathing (WHO, 2020). Fatal cases include; lower-respiratory tract illness, such as Pneumonia and bronchitis, or Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in severe diseases which are more pronounced in patients with underlying health conditions such as cardiopulmonary disease, immune-compromised individuals, infants and the elderly (Centre for Disease Control (CDC, 2020). The eruption of corona virus, now termed Covid-19 by the World Health Organization has thrown the world into fear and anxiety. While the techno-medically advanced nations are test-running their techno-medical prowess in effort to put measures in place and to develop a vaccine to curtail much spread, the developing countries such as Nigeria have found the pandemic a herculean task to contend with due to poor medical facilities, inadequate technology and information management systems.

The first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Africa on 14th February 2020, and subsequently spread to the sub-Saharan Africa. Consequently, Nigeria also recorded first case of COVID-19 infection on 27th February 2020 when an Italian citizen who entered Nigeria from Milan on a business trip was tested positive in Lagos, Nigeria. Similarly, on 9th March 2020, a second case of the virus was reported in Ogun State all in South West of Nigeria Following the announcement by WHO that Nigeria is among other 13 African countries identified as high-risk for the spread of the virus. The Federal Government of Nigeria has set up a Coronavirus Preparedness Group (CPG) to mitigate the impact of the virus on 31st January 2020. On 28th January 2020, the Federal Government of Nigeria assured her citizens on the readiness to prevent the spread of Coronavirus in the country. Ditto, the Centre for Disease Control (NCDC, 2020) set up a group for Coronavirus which was ready to activate the incident if any case emerges in Nigeria. The virus is mostly spread between people during close contact, often via small droplets produced during coughing, sneezing,

or talking. The virus can survive on the surface for up to 72 hours. Currently, there is no vaccine for COVID-19 while researchers are doing their best in discovering the vaccine.

New media are online platforms through which individuals, groups and organizations create presence and share information through texts, photos, music videos and so on. Friedman (2008), defined new media as ''so-called new media technologies-often referred to as Web 2.0- encompass a wide variety of web – related communication technologies, such as blogs, wikis, online social networking, virtual worlds forms''. They further explain that the new media technologies have five critical characteristics tagged- the five C's: Communication, Collaboration, Community, Creativity and Convergence". New media specifically refers to computer technology that emphasizes the form and cultural context that use technology, such as in art, film, commerce, science and above all Internet (Atkin, Hunt, & Lin, 2015).

New media development actually refers to change in media production process, distribution and use. New media cannot be separated from some key terms, that is, digitality, interactivity, hyper-textuality, dispersal and virtuality (Thomas, 2011). In the digitality concept all digital media processes are converted into numbers and therefore, the output is in a kind of online sources, digital disks or memory drives. Otherwise, these would be changed and received on a monitor screen or in the form of "hard copy". The interactivity concept refers to the opportunity when text in new media can provide users to 'write back into the text'. The concept of dispersal in new media refers to the production process and media distribution becoming decentralized and highly individuated. New media limits are often equated with digital media. These should refer to the context and concept of contemporary culture than media practice and a set of technologies itself (medium) (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2016).

The new media must have social responsibility to keep the population properly informed, since information sharing is one of the most important elements for disease prevention. Several websites have published information about COVID-19 and have given different instructions to their users about ways to prevent the spread of the virus, such as keeping a distance between themselves and others, using masks, and washing hands with soap and running water regularly. Social media has become a source of disseminating information to the public. Many individuals will experience isolation during hospitalization or when quarantining at home. Social media can be an efficient source of information and an effective means for staying abreast of the vast amount of medical knowledge and information. It is on this background that this study is being undertaken to review the efficacy of social media in creating awareness on how to prevent the spread of the global health crisis called Covid-19 pandemic.

With the egress of the COVID-19 outbreak as one of the most fatal pandemics, this study aims to critically analyze the use of new media campaign geared at creating awareness and prevention of Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. Emerging trends in socio-economic landscape shows a high premium being placed on information and the digital space by homes, organizations and even nations. This paper gives an analytical review of new media campaign messages that ensure awareness and prevention of the deadly viral disease in Nigeria.

Method and Data Sources
The procedural approach in developing this paper combines quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. The quantitative method involved a content analytical review of secondary data such as social media messages, empirical research by other scholars. This was further complemented by qualitative primary that were generated from first-hand observation by the researchers as social media savvy as well as unstructured interview with social media users.

Conceptual Clarification
New Media as an Information Outlet
In recent times, new media platforms are prompt and efficient tools in keeping up with dialogues surrounding the pandemic. New media such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, blogs, online newspapers, and YouTube where the contestations about the pandemic are most pronounced as an information outlet provides

information to Nigerians during the pandemic. All these outlets and much more makes it easy to spread information since a good number of Nigerians have access to these platforms. Health Care Agencies such as NCDC updated the populace on information on the number of victims, positive, fatal and recovered cases in Nigeria through some selected new media platforms.

NCDC is the country's national public health institute with the mandate to lead the preparedness, detection and response to infectious diseases outbreak. The agency was formally signed into law in November 2018 by the president of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari. The mission of the agency is to protect the health of Nigerians through evidence-based prevention, integrated diseases surveillance and response activities and they serve as a body that disseminates information to the citizens (NCDC, 2020). Savrum and Leon (2015) cited in Obi-Ani et al (2020) explain it thus, "The media provide a freedom of choice and individuals are free to choose which broadcast best represents their interest."

Classification of Social Media

Social media are still evolving and will continue to evolve as far as the frontiers of information communication technologies or computer mediated platforms continue to expand (Achor, 2015). The fluid nature or descriptions of social media have made it imperative here to identify their nomenclature and typologies. Literature indicates that social media technologies take on many different forms including magazines, internet fora, weblogs, social blogs, microblogging, wikis, social networks, podcasts, photographs or pictures, video, rating and social bookmarking (Ki, 2006). Technologies include: blogs, picture sharing, vlogs, wall-postings, email, instant messaging, music-sharing, crowd sourcing and voice over IP, etc. It is important to note that many of these services can be integrated via social network aggregation platforms. Based on the application of a set of theories in the field of media research (social presence, media richness); public relations excellence and dialogic communication and; social processes (self-presentation, self-disclosure) seven different types of social media are identified:

1) Collaborative projects (e. g. Wikipedia);
2) Blogs and microblogs (e.g.; Twitter, Linkdln);
3) Content communities (e.g., YouTube and Daily motion);
4) Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook);
5) Virtual Game Worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft);
6) Virtual Social Worlds (e.g., Second L: ife); and
7) Content publishing (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Boundaries between these different types have been increasingly blurred. This is largely due to their interface and similarities in information production and delivery. For this reason, Quinn-Allan (2008) argues that Twitter, as a combination of broadcasting service and social network is better to be classified as a social broadcasting technology. Apart from the aforementioned typologies, there is also mobile social media. When social media is used in combination with mobile devices it is called mobile social media (Palen, 2008). Social media is a group of mobile marketing applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Wirtz, 2010). A distinction can be made between the traditional social media and mobile social media. Due to the fact that mobile social media runs on mobile device, it differentiates from traditional social media as it incorporates new factors such as the current location of the user (location-sensitivity) or the time delay between sending and receiving messages (time-sensitivity).

The Role of New Media During Pandemic

New media has revolutionized how people interact and communicate, effectively turning our planet into a true "global village". At the same time, new and unexpected challenges emerged alongside, including phenomena of "fake news" and cyber-bullying to mention but a few.

In the face of pandemic, new media is a great way for individuals and community to stay connected even while physically separated.

The new media can be said to be the source of information and misinformation. Now we have more information at our finger tips in the face of the global occurrence. Such information can ensure safety, providing us with a better knowledge of what is occurring and how it might impact us in general. Yet, new media can also spread falsehood, including preventive measure false claims about the implementation of laws and so on. During sudden outbreaks, the public needs access to timely and reliable information about the disease symptoms and its prevention. Nowadays, social media are often seen as fast and effective platforms for searching, sharing, and distributing health information among the general population. Also, social media serves to provide an important informal source of data to identify health information that has not been reported to medical officers or health departments and to uncover or share perspectives on any life-threatening health-related issues. But this channel of disseminating knowledge sometimes mixed with scare tactics, discrimination, misleading reports and conspiracy theories related to the origin of the virus, its spread and mass buying of face masks, all closely connected to the modern 21st century "info media" social media networks. Despite the importance of rapid access to information in these critical situations, poor comprehension or inaccurate or false information in the format of rumors or unreliable news can lead to misunderstanding in the community, which makes the situation worse (Sahni & Sharma, 2020).

The internet can be seen as an effective source for obtaining health information- a tool for information dissemination. Oh, et al (2020) expatiate that during recent infectious disease outbreaks, social media networking sites (hereafter social media) have functioned as firsthand information channels from which the public can obtain disease-related information and exchange it with their family, friends, and neighbors in real time (Jang & Paek, 2019). For example, Ding and Zhang (2010) found that the outbreak of the H1N1 flu was first reported via social media. For this reason, government agencies such as the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have started to use social media to inform the public of emerging infectious diseases such as the Zika and Ebola outbreaks (Chan et al., 2018; Lazard, Scheinfeld, Bernhardt, Wilcox, & Suran, 2015). Particularly when traditional media do not provide relevant, timely information for the public, social media serve as a major, immediate information source (Jang & Paek, 2019; Yoo, Chio, & Park, 2016). While scholars have increasingly attended to the role of social media during infectious disease outbreaks, the question of how social media use might affect the public's affective responses, risk perception, and preventive behaviors are yet to be fully explored.

Furthermore, theoretical studies investigating the public's reactions to infectious disease outbreaks are limited. To fill this gap, this study examines how social media use is related to emotional responses and risk perception, which in turn predict preventive behaviors. Using data collected during the 2015 outbreak of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV, hereafter MERS) in South Korea, the study explores underlying mechanisms by examining the roles of two self-relevant emotions: fear and anger. Specifically, the study investigates three issu0es: (1) how social media use relates to the two self-relevant emotions, (2) the extent to which the self-relevant emotions predict public risk perception, and (3) how social media use affects preventive behaviors through psychological and cognitive mechanisms.

Literature Review
As the world combat the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic caused by the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-Cov-2), one might find some ghoulish consolation in considering the historic context of world pandemics.
The world has re-experienced varying epidemic in the past from the Black death (1346–1354) with at total deaths worldwide estimated at 75 to 200 million, Antonine plague (165 AD- !80 AD), the Spanish flu (1918–1920), the Asian Flu (1956–1958),Third Plague Pandemic (1855)starting in China and spread into India, where 10 million people died, Plague of Justinian(541-750AD) in Egypt spreading to Europe, to mention but a few. The Covid-19 pandemic is a recent phenomenon and its study is still limited. However, some of the studies done will be revealed. Also, works on new media and its influence as a tool of information dissemination are similarly reviewed.

Covid-19 seems to have become one of the largest pandemics in the world. Olagbega et al (2020 conducted a study titled; "A preliminary Assessment of Novel CV-19 Knowledge and Perceptions in Nigeria" assessed the knowledge and perception among the general populace in Nigeria during the initial week of the pandemic lockdown in the country. The cross-sectional survey used an anonymous online questionnaire to collect data from 1403 respondents, 180 cities and towns within Nigeria on the components of COVID-19 knowledge included the source of COVID25 19, modes of transmission, symptoms, methods of preventing and curbing the infection, 26 perception of COVID-19 fatality and sources of information about COVID-19. Approximately half of the respondents, 46.94% opined that Covid-19 is a biological weapon designed by the government of China while 41. 93% identified it as "a severe illness transmitted to people from wild animals. Also, most respondents constituting 94.25% selected, "Regular hand washing and social distancing, 48.86% supported "disinfecting contaminated surfaces and 40.10% chose "closing schools and cancelling mass gathering events, whereas "11.86% held consuming gins, garlic, ginger, herbal mixture, and African foods/soups as preventive measures". It is not unexpected that the study shows that Nigerians (83.86%) had high knowledge of covid-19. Despite the several misconceptions about the preventive measures, knowledge of precautionary behavior by WHO was recorded as high.

Findings from the study indicated that a large portion of the participants representing Nigerians are aware and knowledgeable about the covid-19 and its presence in Nigeria. The study also revealed that the major sources of information about COVID-19 is the mass media (radio, television and newspapers (81.5%), followed by social media (WhatsApp, Facebook, Titter, Instagram etc) and the internet (61.5%). This statistic shows that social media contributed immensely to the awareness about the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.

Another relevant study to be considered is by Reuben et al (2020), "Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices towards COVID-19. An Epidemiological Survey in North-Central Nigeria". This study assessed the level of knowledge, attitude and practices towards covid-19 among residents of north-central Nigeria (Benue, Kogi). It also sought to understand the epidemiological dynamics of disease and effectiveness, compliance, preventive measures adopted in the country, especially the North-central Nigeria. The findings showed that almost all the respondents, 586(99.5%) had knowledge of the Covid-19. The majority of the respondents, 328(55.7%) and 162(27.5%) stated the internet /social media, and Television as their major source of knowledge respectively.

The study further revealed that the majority of the respondents (79.5%) had positive attitude toward the adherence of Government preventive measures with 92.7.96.4 and 82.3% practicing social distancing/self-isolation, improved personal hygiene, and using facemask respectively. Findings show that there is a significant relationship between knowledge of Covid-19, attitude towards preventive measures and perception of national response among resident of North-central Nigeria. The high level of Covid-19 knowledge recorded in the study could be attributed to the caliber of respondents who are educated and use the social media and internet. The use of social media (55.7%) and Television (27.5%), constitute the major source of accessing information about Covid-19. 18.5% of the respondents follow the recommendations of the Federal Ministry of Health and NCDC and 45.3% (267) were satisfied with the media/social media coverage of the covid-19 pandemic because it keeps them updated.

Theoretical Framework
Literature and Theory on Computer Mediated Communication (CMC)
Social media, an offshoot of computer mediated communication (CMC is a social instrument of communication that encompasses a media with a social component. Social media is also an internet-based tool which enables users to interact with one another online. Social media enables users to generate content which is popularly known as "User Generated Content" (UGC) or Web 2.0, that is, two-way communication. Some of the popular social media networking sites or platforms include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, Yahoo Messenger, Snapshot and Instagram.

Platforms are computing interface or digital environment in which a piece of software is executed for the purpose of social interaction or communication. It may be the hardware or the operating system (OS), even a web browser and associated application programming interfaces, or other underlying software, as long as the program code is executed with it. An environment where parties in a communication process interface, interact, dialogue or exchange information.

Social Media is an internet-based tool or web application that enables users to interact with one another online. Social Media is a buzz phrase or coinage that has enjoyed not only wide discussions, but also enjoyed extensive usage in almost all spheres of human endeavours or disciplines. Social Media have greatly transformed how individuals and organizations engage in personal and corporate communications (Harrison-Rexrode, 2011). Jenkins (2006) describes the emergence of social media in media and communication industries as "another paradigm shift" from the mainstream media such as newspapers, magazines, television and radio to a hyper media (Macnamara, 2010). This shift has enabled the expansion of communication channels that have allowed publics (people, stakeholders) to be more in control of what they read, hear and watch (Ahlqvist, 2008). This explains a break from the static nature of the traditional or mainstream media to the dynamics of social media.

Despite the prevalence of social media and those who use these channels, the definition of what constitutes social media is still evolving or fluid. Attempt is made here to present some of the conceptualizations of social media as found in some of the literature on social media. Safko and Brake describe social media as "activities, practices, and behaviour among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conservational media". 'Conversational' which can also be described as dialogic, interactive media is what makes the huge difference and a dramatic shift or change from the 'monologic' traditional media. One-way or what can be described as monodirectional communication had been a challenging feature of the traditional or mainstream media until the emergence of the social media.

According to Ahlgvist (2008), social media refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and network (Kaplan, 2010). Dykeman (2008) describes social media as a place for humans to use internets and mobile-based tools for sharing and discussing information. Kaplan & Haenlein (2011) define social media as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and which allows the creation and exchange of user – generated content (UGC). This interactive feature of social media is what makes all the difference between the social media and the traditional or mainstream media. In mainstream media and pop culture, social media are often used to describe web sites like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and all places where humans can go to interact and engage with others by simply logging on through a computer or mobile device. Kietzmann and Kristopher (2011) similarly note that social media "depend on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user generated content". Furthermore, Palen's (2008) definition of social media is akin to Kaplan & Heinlein's definition. Palen (2008) describes social media as "blogs, social networking environments, person-to-person broadcasting, messaging and other Web 2.0 applications.

The web is a network of information resources and a powerful communication tool; information on virtually any subject can be found on the web. According to Vender-Merwe (2013), the Web provides an "all-purpose communication medium". Literature on web 2.0 indicates that it forms the underlying communication architecture of social media. Web 2.0 is described as the development in the way that people use the internet that allows users free access and gives them more control over information (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 9th ed). As a working definition, social media refers to digital mediated platforms and applications that allow individuals, groups, organizations and their publics, or a community of people who gather online to converse, share information, knowledge and opinions. Its features include open interactivity, collaborations, conversation and harnessing collective intelligence. The characteristics of social media as

expressed in those terms above, align closely with definition of excellence in public relations as outlined by Grunig (2010) and dialogic models of public relations as discussed by Kent and Taylor (2010). In other words, social media platforms are internet tools that allow users to go beyond just receiving from websites or media organizations but also enables users to generate and share their own contents. This infers that users can also create, share and drive content.

The term 'Social Media Network' consists of three terms: social, media and network. The term 'social' ubiquitously refers to the characteristic of living organisms as applied to populations of humans. It refers to the interaction among humans and to their collective co-existence irrespective of whether they are aware of interaction or not, and irrespective of whether the interaction is voluntary or involuntary (Dolwick, 2009). Based on this definition, it can be deduced that the term 'social' reflects the characteristic of a society which allows a group of people living in the society to relate or interact with one another.

The term 'media' as the plural of 'medium', simply refers to the means of communication, such as radio, television, newspapers, and magazines that reach and influence people widely. BusinessDictionary.com corroborates this definition and adds that media are communication channels through which news, entertainment, education, data, or promotional messages are disseminated. Media however include every broadcasting and narrowcasting medium such as newspapers, magazines, TV, radio, billboards, direct mail, telephone, fax, and internet.

As a computer terminology, the term 'network' means an interconnection (via cable and/or wireless) of a group of computers and peripherals which are capable of sharing software and hardware resources among many users (Baden, 2009). Internet is an example of a global network of networks. As a communication terminology, it can be referred to as a system that enables users of telephones or data communication lines to exchange information over long distances by connecting with each other through a system of routers, servers, switches, and the likes (Dolwick, 2009). The Merriam-Webster Dictionary however defines networking as the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions; specifically: the cultivation or enhancement of productive relationships for employment, business transactions or social interactions.

With the foregoing definitions, the term 'Social Media' can now be conceptualized. Agichten, Carlos, Donato and Aristides, (2008) define social media as a form of electronic communication (such as Internet, Websites or Mobile phones usually for social networking and blogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (like videos). Tang and Whinston, (2012) also define social media as the means of interactions among people through which they create, share, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities (computer-aid) and networks. Social media however can meaningfully be regarded as a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of websites, and that allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Simply put, it depends on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities can share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content. It introduces substantial and pervasive changes to communication between organizations, communities and individuals (Kietzmann and Kristopher, 2011). Social media differs from traditional/industrial media in many aspects such as quality (Tang, 2012), reach, frequency, usability, immediacy and permanence (Nigel, Graham and Hodges, 2012) all of which are enhanced by the internet. There are many effects that stem from internet usage. As a result, according to Nigel, 2012), many internet users would continue to spend more time with social media sites than any other type of site. From the meaning of 'social' and 'network' as given in the foregoing paragraphs, the term Social Network can meaningfully be inferred as an internet-based services that allow individuals to (i) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (ii) articulate a list of users with whom they share a connection, and (iii) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site. While the term "Social Network Site" appears

to have been widely employed to describe this emerging phenomenon, it also appears in many public discourses, and the two terms: Social Network Site and Social Networking Site seem to be often used interchangeably (Keitzmann and Kristopher, 2011; Tang, 2012; Baden, 2009).

In this study, the term network suffixing 'social media' would be employed and not "networking" simply for the purpose of emphasis and scope. "Networking" emphasizes relationship initiation, often between strangers and while it may be possible on some sites, it might not be the primary purpose of many others, nor is it what differentiates them from other forms of computer mediated communication (CMC) (Dolwick, 2009).

Media Richness Theory (MRT)
Bridging the gap between face to face (f2f) communication and computer mediated communication (CMC) is the main assumption or idea behind the Media Richness Theory (MRT) and the emerging digital communication technology has made great impact or contribution in this regard as social media (Web 2.0) has the capacity to create social presence through the use of 'video chatting' and 'teleconferencing'. In other words, distance and cost are no longer barriers to enjoying social presence in a communication encounter made possible through social media technology (Computer Mediated Communication).

R. L. Draft and Macintosh Corporation developed Information Richness Theory (IRT) in 1981 which is also known Media Richness Theory (MRT). The theory shows the ability of Computer to enhance communication within an organization. Today, Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) does not only enhance communication within an organization, but computer has also enhanced communication outside an organization, that is, both internal and external communication. Established in 1984 by Richard L. Draft and Robert H. Lengel, Media Richness Theory ranks or evaluates the richness of certain communication media such as phone calls, video conferencing or teleconferencing and email. Draft and Lengel argued that the success of an organization depends on the ability of the organization to process information with adequate or appropriate richness, reduce uncertainty to the barest minimum and clarify all forms of ambiguity. Therefore, the main assumption of this theory is that clear, concise and understandable flow of information brings about the success of an organization.

As technology advanced, Draft and Lengel (1990) reviewed the Media Richness Theory to align with the digital world, hence, the theory is no longer restricted to business organizations but it also applies to individuals, groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), media organizations and educational institutions to communicate between and among friends, family members, teachers and students as well as the larger audience. The ultimate aim of this theory is to show clarity of the message being transmitted which depends largely on the richness of the media used for transmission (Patton, 2008).

Barrow (2009) validates this view when he sums it up as follows:

> Media Richness Theory proposed by Draft and Lengel in 1984 essentially states that task performance increases when the task needs are matched to the medium's richness. In other words, if I use the medium with a richne ss level most accurately suited to a given task to communicate that information about the task to an individual, the individual's performance of that task will improve. Additionally, the theory suggests that individuals predictably favour the use of specific communication medium to perform certain tasks. Specifically, that rich media are more likely to be found appropriate for "equivocal" communication, which occurs more in complex tasks.

The view of Barrow (2009) is noted here as the summary of Media Richness Theory because it takes into cognizance, the speed of transmission of information or message, feedback, interactivity, completeness and clarity of message enabled by the richness of the medium or media used. Media Richness Theory has its

own strengths and weaknesses. Its major strength is that it is self-explanatory. That is, it is easy to understand. Its weaknesses include lack of or little consideration for new digital or electronic media, and several social and cultural backgrounds and pressures that can influence the choice of media.

It is related and relevant to this study because of its interactive and democratic nature, that is, users have the capacity to create or generate content (UGC). It is also relevant in terms of the speed of feedback, interactivity and some level of social presence it creates, areas of applicability and because the theory also originates from the literature on computer mediated communication (CMC) just as the social presence theory.

Discussion of Findings

The theoretical framework underpinning the study has established that Media Richness Theory and digital technology have greatly impacted on the way we interact in the 21st century. Bridging the gap between face to face (f2f) communication and computer mediated communication (CMC) is the main assumption or idea behind the Media Richness Theory (MRT) and the emerging digital communication technology has made great contribution in this regard as social media (Web 2.0) has the capacity to create social presence through the use of 'video chatting' and 'teleconferencing'. In other words, distance and cost are no longer barriers to enjoying social presence in a communication encounter made possible through social media technology (Computer Mediated Communication).

The theory and computer mediated communication further established that social media is a multimedia platform that has the capacity to disseminate textual, audio, audiovisual and graphical messages to the audience.

Some Common Messages on Social Media about COVID-19

"So, if you notice any of these three things, quickly take hot water and drink plus garlic. Note that it takes like two weeks for this virus to penetrate your whole body, with this initial remedy of garlic and hot water kills it. Do not keep this information to yourself pass on to all your family and friends. God bless you (WhatsApp Communication, 2020)". The foregoing is only an instance to many other such messages sent all over the WhatsApp messenger application, Facebook, and other social media platforms. The writer, whose medical knowledge or expertise is not known and most cases cannot be traced, proffers garlic and hot water as a remedy and enjoins the receiver to endeavor to pass on the messages. On one side, the message confirms the use of social media platform (WhatsApp) for creating awareness about COVID-19 pandemic. On the other side, the source and its authenticity as well as whether or not the prescription is coming from qualified medical personnel cannot be ascertained.

Since the gullible citizenry can easily access such messages, they take it all in and even introduce their family members to follow suit as a preventive measure against the coronavirus (COVID-19 pandemic).

Another instance of such broadcast messages from Facebook goes thus: "Coronavirus before it reaches the lungs remains in the throat for four days and at this time, the person begins to cough and have throat pains". If he drinks water a lot and gargles with warm water and salt or vinegar, he eliminates the virus" (Somuah, "Profile Picture," Facebook, 2020). In this excerpt, the writer instructs the general public to apply this solution, then further advises other Facebook friends to pass on the messages to their family and friends; whereas health agencies in the country did not endorse or verify such information. Those who swallow this titbit like hungry dogs often do not live to tell the story. Thus, there is the need to take information on social media with a pinch of salt. While some information on social media is ennobling, most are debasing, mischievous and outright falsehood.

Here is a typical example of a WhatsApp broadcast message by Nigerians on the presence of the Chinese in the country: "In Spain: over 640,000 #Covid19 testing kits from China didn't work … Czech: 150,000 kits from China tested positive. Ukraine: 250,000 kits from China tested positive. Turkey: 500,000 kits tested positive Netherlands: 600,000 masks from China were returned. China proudly killing the world …. Please

my fellow Nigerians …Stay away from all the Corona Virus kits sent from China government through their agent called Jack Ma … It already arrived MMIA since Monday through Ethiopian airline and I heard it was moved to Abuja for distribution … Who knows the fact? But please don't get close to them in the name of God you serve. I beg all of you … Their mission is to reduce the population of Nigerians and still make money from it. Those kits from China are the real Corona virus. Thanks. China supplies 2 million masks for Africa. The most suspicious is that the WHO says that Africa must prepare for the worst. My advice is as follows: wherever you are (markets, hospitals, etc …) if they distribute the masks, please do not take them. These are infected brands. Save lives. Share to everyone. pls (WhatsApp communication, 2020)".

The above message still trends on WhatsApp as till the time of the writing of this paper as the populace highly believe that the Chinese government is responsible for the increment of infected individuals in other countries; thus, have become bent on spreading the information to Nigerians to desist from accepting medications from the Chinese government or anything from the West in general. Incredulous side to these kinds of broadcast is that some celebrities who have thousands of followers have similarly made a video and have urged people to forward it to groups and individuals.

From the above, it is clear that the use of social media platforms for (mis)information is evident amongst the populace. The information that are passed across are mostly assumptions cum speculations which are disseminated to spread panic to other members of the citizenry.

The Facts of the Matter
To sum up and for a better understanding of the discussion, some facts of the matter as stated by the World Health Organization, (WHO, 2020), Johns Hopkins Medicine (2020), Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC, 2020) and other reputable health organizations and agencies are highlighted below. They include, but not limited to:

1. Coronaviruses are highly infectious types of virus. There are many different kinds of coronavirus that cause disease. Coronavirus was identified in 2019. SARS-CoV-2 has caused a pandemic of respiratory illness called COVID-19, which is the "most recently discovered coronaviruses". The new virus and disease were not known prior to the outbreak in Wuhan, China, in December 2019.
2. Covid-19 can be severe.
3. COVID-19 is a pandemic affecting many countries and has caused millions of deaths globally.
4. It causes lasting health problem for some who survived the illness.
5. COVID-19 is diagnosed with a laboratory test.
6. Coronavirus spreads through droplets and virus particles released into the air when infected person breathes, talks, laughs, sings, coughs or sneezes.
7. Larger droplets may fall to the ground in a few seconds, but tiny infectious particles can linger in the air and accumulate indoor places, especially a poorly ventilated places with many people.
8. The incubation period for COVID-19 is within two (2) to fourteen (14) days of exposure to the virus.
9. COVID-19 symptoms include cough, fever or chill, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, muscle or body aches, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell, diarrhea, headache, new fatigue, nausea or vomiting and congestion or runny nose. Among the most common symptoms, fever has the highest percentage (88%), followed by cough (68%), fatigue (38%), shortness of breath (19%), muscle/joint pain (15%), sore throat and headache have 14% respectively, chills 11%, nausea/vomiting as well as nasal congestion are 5% each, diarrhea has 4%, while haemoptysis and conjunctival congestion are the least with 1% each.

Conclusion and Recommendation
This paper has examined the use of social media for creating awareness about the ravaging global pandemic, COVID-19 in Nigeria based on some existing literature and empirical studies carried out within the country. The foregoing analysis and discussion have shown that social media platforms are being used for creating

awareness about the outbreak and spread of the COVID-19 in Nigeria. The review also shows that some of the information on social media platforms about coronavirus are fake and misleading. From the various studies reviewed, social media use has a unique advantage over the traditional or mainstream media in terms of reach, cost, accessibility and most especially interactiveness. The Nigerian experience in the use of social media platforms for interactive communication has shown that there are diverse perspectives from which different people with unequal socio-cultural, economic, political and religious backgrounds view the knowledge and use of innovations or technology.

The review further validates the efficacy of social media in information dissemination to large and heterogeneous audience globally. It also shows the importance of information as an integral part of human existence as demonstrated in the curiosity of a large number of Nigerians who use and get information via social media. The analysis reveals that quite a number of social media users are citizen journalists; who are not necessarily trained journalists or who are knowledgeable about ethical considerations in information dissemination. Inspite of misuse, a lot of useful information can be obtained from social media platforms. Social media misuse is a policy issue and therefore requires government of every nation to handle it as such.

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