

Social Media Coverage of Anti-COVID-19 Campaigns and Public Perception of the Pandemic in Abuja, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Background: Anti-COVID-19 pandemic campaign became a major global health crisis issue within three months of its breakout; making social media to serve as a major source of spreading information and setting agenda to the public.

Objective: The study investigated social media coverage and public perception of anti- COVID-19 pandemic campaign.

Methods: A content analysis of Facebook posts from May 2020 to April 2021 coverage of Anti-COVID-19 using simple random sampling, yielded 1,315 COVID-19 posts. A cross-sectional online survey of social media users' in FCT, Abuja through google form designed questionnaire (n=375) was conducted. Frequency, tables, percentages and standard deviation were used to present the findings, While Spearman and Pearson Correlations were used to test the hypotheses.

Result: Findings reveals that respondents have much exposure to social media content and give much attention to COVID-19 posts. The study found that facemask is the dominant COVID-19 social media post and public attributes. Dominant agenda of social media COVI-19 corresponded with public perception on COVID-19- pandemic($rs=.443$, $p=.038$). Affective tune of COVID-19 campaigns also corresponds with public perception of the Pandemic. There was correlation between social media COVID-19 pandemic agenda and public supports ($r=.502$, $p=.01$).

Conclusion: The study shows hoe social media was used to raise the banner of COVID-19 crisis, thereby making them salience among the authorities and the public.

Unique Contribution: social media is now a major media in setting agenda among the public most especially during emergencies.

Key Recommendation: Users of social media should utilise the medium during health crisis; by making the crisis salience on the consciousness of the authorities, stakeholders and the general public.

Keywords: Public Perception, Social Media, COVID19, Health Crisis, and Agenda Building Research

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 pandemic became a global health crisis within three months of its breakout in December 2019 in Wuhan China and became dominant health crisis issue that drawn global attention, prompting plethora of research from different endeavours-health, economic, psychology, political science, and communication and media are not left out (Guanah, Ihiaeme & Igwe, 2024). There is no media that can withstand the coverage of social media as over 3.5 million half of world's population are on social (Yilmaz 2020), prompting the alternative media to serve as major source of news and discussion on anti-COVID-19 campaign (Dai, et al. 2021) and setting the agenda among public discourse. Social media worsen the situation through infodemic, fake health news, influencing misperception of the various preferred campaign measures.

COVID-19 is a global infectious disease that emerged from Wuhan in the Hubei province of China in December 2019. It has spread to 210 countries throughout the world. World Health Organization (WHO) declared it a pandemic on Jan 30, 2020, and raised international public health concerns for it (WHO, 2020). As of May 24, 2021, more than 167 million people have been affected by this disease. Studies have shown that pandemics in the past have never spread as fast as being experience with COVID-19 (Wilder-Smith, Chiew, Lee, 2020) such as the 2003 severe acute respiratory syndrome and H1N1 which equally had significant impacts on people's lives and livelihood, socioeconomic activities, and population movement (Ngai *et al.* 2020). Pandemics usually require large-scale immediate actions by the government to connect with the public and a change in behaviour of the public to combat the rapid spread of the disease (Ngai *et al.* 2020). For a new fatal infectious disease such as COVID-19, effective epidemic communication is crucial to inform the public about the latest updates of the disease infectious, motivate them on adopting preventive measures to minimize the transmission of the disease by controlling it, and continues reassuring the public of government capability of handling the situation (Zhao, Cheng, Yu, Xu, 2020). Many studies on epidemic and pandemic communication exist on traditional media (Ophir, 2018; Guanah, Nnwammuo & Agbanu, 2021), suggesting that the public learns about the health risks associated with the pandemic from the media (Hyland-wood, 2021; Ihiaeme & Guanah, 2023), which affects how they respond to the epidemic or pandemic (Ferrara, Cresci & Luceri, 2020).

The pervasiveness of social media in contemporary social, economic and political sphere is now seen to be establishing itself as a contending source of news and information to the public and the journalist in the traditional mainstream media (Rony, Yousuf & Hassan, 2018). Though not considered when the agenda setting theory was formed, social media is becoming a major source of agenda in agenda building and agenda setting on issues that affects the public, drawing in a new area of research in agenda setting and agenda building of the media (Zhang & Kioussis, 2018). The need to unravel the puzzle social media have brought to agenda setting have push researchers to continue to debate on whether social media is now setting public agenda, thereby displacing mainstream media known for serving that purpose (Ashong & Henry, 2017; Moyo, 2018), considering the important position it is occupying in the lives of the public as seen in the COVID-19 pandemic (Yilmaz 2020). As a compelling argument, this study raises discussions about agenda setting in health crisis situations, is reported to be lacking in the main knowledge of policy agenda setting that is primarily focused on non-crisis situation ((Dai, Li, Cheng, Zhao & Meng, 2021)

However, the emerging agenda source of social media is now seen as new frontier in agenda setting research (McCombs, 2014; Aruguete, 2017). Social media agenda is emanating from the youth within the public sphere and now can be seen as an agenda building tool. It is therefore, imperative to theoretically investigate social media role in agenda building for Anti-COVID campaign issue. Thus, this study investigates the potency of social media in setting agenda for the public with focus on how social media spur agenda on anti-COVID-19 campaign.

The Research Questions

Based on the above observations, the study provides answers to the following questions:

1. What were the dominant agenda of anti-COVID-19 pandemic campaigns as perceived by residents of Abuja, Nigeria?
2. What were the dominant agenda in the social media coverage of anti-COVID-19 pandemic campaigns in Abuja, Nigeria?
3. Is there a correlation between public perception and social media coverage of anti-COVID-19 pandemic campaigns in Abuja, Nigeria?
4. Did social media anti-COVID-19 agenda build consensus among the public on the pandemic campaigns in Abuja, Nigeria?

The Research Hypotheses

- H01: Dominant agenda of social media anti-COVID-19 campaigns will not correspond with public perception on anti-COVID-19 pandemic campaigns.
- H02: Affective tone of anti-COVID-19 campaigns will not correspond with public perception of anti-COVID-19 Pandemic campaigns.
- H03: There will be no significant relationship between social media and public support of anti-COVID-19 pandemic campaign.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media and Agenda Building

The news stories accessible, and therefore shareable online, are highly comparable with those found in “legacy media” (Moyo, 2018). Recently, and critical to the study of mass media agenda setting through social media, Grzywińska, and Batorski(2016)demonstrated that there is considerable focus among the stories shared on social media when compared with other online media sites. Topics that are popular in the mass media receive more shares on Facebook than they do on Twitter, suggesting that “sharing on Facebook centers more around a few dominant issues, whereas on Twitter there is more variation” (Grzywińska & Batorski, 2016). And while some might expect Facebook to facilitate informational echo chambers as a function of the personal network users assemble, the information shared on Facebook is actually quite diverse. Consequently, if people are exposed to incidental news through social media, and it appears that they are, then social media may convey political information to users and perhaps, therefore, have an agenda-setting effect that reflects the content of mass media

Social media have been studied as an expression of dominant discourse in public opinion, but also as an instrument for the political system to shape news coverage and even more so, to challenge journalism standards and practices. In the domain of agenda building, two lines of analysis are viable. Firstly, the degree of influence that the political agenda exercises –or not– on the media agenda, and secondly, the uses that journalists give to new media (Aruguete, 2017). Moyo (2018) study confirmed that traditional media and social media set agenda for each other. Recently, we have seen headlines of mainstream media carrying the hash tag such the 2008 Obama election, the 2012 Arab Spring movement, the 2020 *#BlackLivesMatters* global movement and the 2020 *#EndSARS* protest were attributed to be successful because of social media agenda setting force (Sparks, 2016; Ashong & Henry, 2017; Uwazuruike, 2020).

Social Media and Public Agenda during the Peak of the COVID-19 Pandemic

COVID-19 became global health crisis that attracted a couple of theoretical study in Agenda setting research with considerable evidence of social media influence in shaping the direction of public and government opinion on the issue (Dai et al. 2021). Though most of the studies didn't follow the traditional approach to agenda setting study as some a purely conceptual work (Yilmaz, 2020), others only used one methodology (Mbikwana, 2020) and others applied the theory on COVID-19 as media issue (Kigatiira, 2020). However, Dai et al. (2021) used big data analysis and case study to find an overall public-led pattern of agenda setting in China through the instrumentality of social media. Albarracin and Jung (2021) proposed a theory and research on agenda for the COVID-19 world. Yilmaz (2020) conceptualised the significance of social media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic, while Abdullahi, Hajat and Rahman (2020) used a survey and interview in social media for agenda setting of COVID-19.

METHOD

A cross-sectional design was adopted for the content analysis and data collection for the survey part. This research used Facebook Anti-covid-19 posts to generate data for the content analysis. Anti-Covid-19 posts serve as the unit of analysis. During COVID-19, millions of active users followed the pandemic information on Facebook on a daily basis, and dozens of government accounts posted pandemic-related information (NCDC, 2020). We collected Facebook's posts from June 2020 to May 2021, covering different stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country and filtered these posts by COVID-related Facebook keywords (hashtags). Our dataset contains posts created by official sources (NCDC, PTF-COVID, WHO, Ministry of Health and UNICEF). We randomly sampled 1315 posts in the final dataset.

Unit of Analysis and Content Category

The Covid-19 posts on Facebook serve as unit of analysis.

Three levels of content categories were developed. These are the Anti- COVID-19 campaign Dominant Themes, Attributes and *affective* tune categories which were used to measure the unit of analysis.

1. Seven (7) anti-COVID-19 themes were developed:
 - i. Social Distance

- ii. Facemask
 - iii. Hygiene
 - iv. Isolation/treatment centre
 - v. Lockdown
 - vi. Palliative
 - vii. Vaccines
2. Ten (10) COVID-19 attributes were developed:
 - i. Cases in Nigeria
 - ii. Death rate
 - iii. Concerns about risk & Nigeria's preparedness
 - iv. Government/institutional measures and response
 - v. Public enlightenment and education
 - vi. Treatment, control & Vaccine
 - vii. Fear, panic and anxiety
 - viii. Ethics/Discrimination
 - ix. Misinformation/ Disinformation
 - x. Lack of trust in the reality of Covid-19
3. The affective anti-COVID-19 campaigns were the tone or valance given to such anti-COVID posts.

The inter-coder reliability for all the seventeen coding units reveals high reliability coefficient with Cohen Kappa statistics ranging from 0.77 to 1.00 for pilot testing of the coding scheme. This same pattern was followed for final coding which range from 0.77 to 0.96

The survey conducted was to know public perception of social media coverage of Anti-COVID-19 pandemic campaign. Residents of FCT, Abuja serve as the study population with a population strength of 1,856, 235 people as at year 2022 based on 2006 census projected at 2.3% population growth. Using Krejcie and Morgan (2006) statistical table, three hundred and seventy-three (373) served as the sample size. The study utilized respondents that were in both public and privates' universities in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja; who were reached via their social media platforms.

The random sampling technique was used for this study because of the largeness, diverse and extremely complex nature of the population in terms of demography (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014). Given that the respondents for this study are social media users, the administration of the questionnaire was done through the use of online hosted 'Google forms'. The link to the forms was made available to the target respondents across their schools using their respective emails, Whatsapp and Facebook groups platforms and individual accounts. The Whatsapp platform enabled research assistants that were employed individually across the respondents to constantly send reminders to them. Informed consent of the participants were sought on the first displayed page of the questionnaire and assured of their anonymity. A total of three hundred and seventy-three (373) respondents filled the questionnaire and were found useful for the analysis.

The questionnaire consisted of five sections to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses raised. **Section 1:** This section was on respondents' demographics: age, gender, and level of education completed. **Section 2:** Social Media Usage Patterns, **Section 3:** Anti-COVID-19 campaign Issues Salience. **Section 4:** Affective Tone and **Section 5:** Public support on Anti-

COVID-19 campaign Issues Attributes. To ensure reliability of the instrument of measurement, the researcher conducted a pilot study. Responses from the pilot study were subjected to a reliability test using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The results of scaled items used in this study for both pilot test and final survey data collection were between 0.87 to 0.94 reliability. The data obtained was extracted, cleaned and transferred onto Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 for the analysis. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, tables, percentages and standard deviation were used to present the findings, While Spearman and Pearson Correlations were used to test the hypotheses according to the tradition of agenda setting research.

RESULTS

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Demographic Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Age Group		
Less than 31 years old	127	34.0
31-40 Years Old	91	24.4
41-50 years Old	124	33.2
Above 50 years Old	31	8.3
Total (M=33.1, SD=8.4, Min =19, Max=62)	373	100.0
Gender		
Male	219	58.7
Female	154	40.3
Total	373	100.0
Education Completed		
Secondary School	15	4.0
Diploma/NEC	89	23.8
HND/Bachelor Degree	137	36.7
Post Graduate (PGD, MSc & PhD)	132	35.4
Total	373	100.0

Source: Researchers field work, 2022

The respondents in this study are evenly distributed between digital natives and digital immigrant, and digital settlers though with some degree of overlap. For gender, male respondents were slightly ahead of female and majority of the respondents have attend some level of tertiary education.

The data on table 2 shows that over half of the respondents have Facebook account and they used it the most and over one third are on Facebook daily, while averagely they spent 2 hours on social media. Similarly, more than one third have very much exposure to covid-19 post on social media and same gave much attention to such stories on COVID-19. Similarly, about half of the respondents gives COVID-19 post much importance. It therefore, means that the respondents were averagely exposed to COVID-19 stories on social media. Thus, it is now ideal for the researcher to test the efficacy of agenda setting theses on the respondents because of their considerable level of exposure to the agenda of study on social media.

Table 2: Patterns of Social Media Usage

Patterns of Social Media Usage	Frequency	Percentage
Social Media use the Most		
Facebook	205	55.0
Twitter	105	27.0
Others (Whatsapp, Telegraphs, Youtube)	67	18.0
Total	373	100.0
Number of Day(s) following social media Per Week		
0 day	6	1.6
1 day	10	2.6
2 days	23	6.1
3 days	42	11.2
4 days	56	15.0
5 days	91	24.3
6 days	18	4.8
7 days	127	34.0
Total (M= 5.40, SD=1.74, Min=0 day, Max= 7day)	373	100.0
Level of Exposure to Social Media		
Little Exposure	81	21.7
Much Exposure	147	39.4
Very Much Exposure	145	38.8
Total	373	100.0
Time Spent on Social Media		
Below 30 Minutes	79	21.1
30 Minutes – 1 Hour	147	39.4
2 Hours – 3hours	98	26.2
4 Hours and Above	49	13.1
Total (M=2.01, SD= 0.77, Min= below 1 h, Max = 4hours)	373	100.0
Attention Given to COVID-19 Post		
No Attention	80	21.4
Some Attention	53	14.2
Moderate Attention	97	26.0
Much Attention	143	38.3
Total	373	100.0
Importance of COVID-19 Post	Frequency	Percentage
No Importance	94	25.2
Little Importance	80	21.4
Much Importance	106	28.4
Very Much Importance	93	24.9
Total	373	100.0

Source: Researchers field work, 2022

The above on table 3 data shows Facemask as the dominant agenda on social media, followed by lockdown and then social distance.

Table 3: Dominants Theme on Anti-COVID-19 Campaign in the Social Media Post

Anti-COVID-19 Dominant Agenda	Social Media Agenda		
	F	%	Rank
Social Distance	255	19.4	3
Facemask	417	31.7	1
Hygiene	75	5.7	7
Isolation Center	81	6.1	6
Lockdown	258	19.6	2
Palliative	120	9.1	4
Vaccine	108	8.2	5
Total	1314	100.0	

Source: Researchers' field work, 2022

Table 4: Dominants Attributes on Anti-COVID Campaign in the Social Media Post

Anti-COVID-19 Dominant Attributes	Social Media Agenda		
	F	%	Rank
Cases in Nigeria	266	21.9	1
Date Rate	62	5.1	7
Concerns about risk & Nigeria's preparedness	75	6.1	6
Government/institutional measures and response	155	12.7	3
Public enlightenment and education	255	21.0	2
Treatment, control & Vaccine	121	9.9	4
Fear, panic and anxiety	38	3.1	9
Ethics/Discrimination	42	3.4	8
Misinformation/ Disinformation	98	8.0	5
Lack of Trust in the reality of COVID-19	101	8.3	4
Total	1213	100.0	

Source: Researchers' field work, 2022

For the main Anti-COVID-19 agenda attribute on social media, the study found cases update as the most consistent followed by public enlightenment and education. That messages on the effort of government taken in the fight against the COVID-19 outbreak such as lockdown, restriction of movement, closure of schools and other sectors of the economy. The next was the number of those who had contracted COVID-19 in Nigeria or those who were being treated or those who had died of the virus. These COVID-19 issues have been ranked the highest in social media post from official sources.

Table 5: Affective Tone Agenda of the Social Media Anti-COVID-19 Campaign

Anti-COVID-19 Tone	Social Media Affective Tone				Rank
	F	Ala	Neu	ReA	
Cases in Nigeria	266	19.2	37.6	43.2	7
Date Rate	62	2.9	41.8	55.3	3
Concerns about risk & Nigeria's preparedness	75	22.4	27.3	51.3	4
Government/institutional measures and response	155	11.2	12.6	76.2	1
Public enlightenment and education	255	7.3	21.0	71.7	2
Treatment, control & Vaccine	121	16.0	32.7	51.3	4
Fear, panic and anxiety	38	41.7	34.8	23.5	10
Ethics/Discrimination	42	9.8	58.4	31.8	9
Misinformation/ Disinformation	98	27.2	26.8	46.5	6
Lack of Trust in the reality of COVID-19	101	21.9	43.6	34.5	8
Total	1213	15.0	36.6	48.4	

Source: Researchers' field work, 2022, Ala=Alarming; Neu=Neutral; ReA=Reassuring; Rank: Reassuring tone only

For the affective agenda attributes, Government/institutional measures and response ranked first followed by public enlightenment and education. Date rate which is number of death resulted from COVID-19 complication.

Table 6: Respondents Level of Agreement on Anti-COVID-19 Campaign Dominants Theme

		Level of Agreement*(%)							
Dominants	Public	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD	Rank
Agenda									
Social Distance		5.0	9.0	5.7	24.0	56.3	4.17	1.18	2
Facemask		4.3	8.0	7.0	26.3	54.3	4.58	1.14	1
Hygiene		4.0	9.3	4.3	33.7	48.7	4.14	1.11	3
Isolation Center		25.0	9.7	26.0	12.7	26.7	2.06	1.17	6
Lockdown		28.7	25.4	45.7	15.5	10.1	2.03	1.94	7
Palliative		26.0	19.1	15.7	24.9	14.3	2.07	1.19	5
Vaccine		11.7	35.3	36.3	31.6	21.4	2.85	1.93	4
Total							4.17	1.16	

Source: Researchers' field work, 2022; Note: 2.5 is the cut-off point between agreement & disagreement on table

For the public dominant agenda in both table 7 and 8, facemask is ranked the highest. Thus was followed by social distance and personal hygiene ranked the third and vaccine the fourth. Thus, facemask agenda is the most recalled COVID-19 issue among the public.

Table 7: Dominant Theme of Anti-COVID-19 Campaign as Perceived by the Public

Anti- COVID-19 Dominant Theme	Readers Perceptions		
	F	%	Rank
Social Distance	72	19.3	2
Facemask	168	45.0	1
Hygiene	36	9.6	4
Isolation Center	10	2.6	7
Lockdown	43	11.5	3
Palliative	31	8.3	5
Vaccine	13	3.4	6
Total	373	100.0	

Source: Researchers' field work, 2022

Table 8: Affective Tone Public Agenda

Anti-COVID-19 TONE	Public Affective Tone			Rank
	Ala %	Neu %	ReA %	
Cases in Nigeria	9.2	27.6	63.2	2
Date Rate	2.9	41.8	55.3	3
Concerns about risk & Nigeria's preparedness	25.4	27.6	48.0	5
Government/institutional measures and response	31.2	32.6	36.2	7
Public enlightenment and education	7.3	21.7	71.0	1
Treatment, control & Vaccine	16.0	32.7	51.3	4
Fear, panic and anxiety	41.7	34.8	23.5	10
Ethics/Discrimination	9.8	58.4	31.8	9
Misinformation/ Disinformation	27.2	26.8	46.5	6
Lack of Trust in the reality of COVID-19	21.9	43.6	34.5	8
Total				

Source: Researchers' field work, 2022, Ala=Alarming; Neu=Neutral; ReA=Reassuring; Rank: Reassuring tone only

For the affective tone agenda attribute, public enlightenment and education ranked the first among the public. This was followed by the cases that use to updated daily by NCDC.

Table 9: Public Perception for Anti-Covid-19 Campaign

Public Support	Level of Support*(%)					M	SD
	1	2	3	4	5		
The death rate is reassuring	3.3	5.3	3.3	26.3	61.7	4.38	1.01
I am concerns about the risk & Nigeria's preparedness	4.3	17.1	12.7	35.8	30.1	3.70	1.09
Government/institutional measures and response are active	4.3	21.1	14.0	33.1	27.4	3.58	1.21
There is public enlightenment and education	3.7	13.3	11.0	39.7	32.3	3.83	1.13
There is Treatment, control & Vaccine	5.4	23.1	19.1	31.1	44.1	3.40	1.21
There is fear, panic and anxiety	3.3	21.0	20.7	37.0	18.0	3.45	1.11
Ethics of treating those with COVID-19, and measures to reduce its transmission is present	4.3	14.0	9.4	46.8	35.5	3.75	1.11

Misinformation/ Disinformation: Post about fake news, disinformation, misinformation, conspiracy theory and	17.7	43.0	15.3	17.3	6.7	2.53	1.16
Lack of trust in the reality of COVID-19	5.0	19.0	19.3	37.3	19.3	3.47	1.15
The Current cases are encouraging	1.3	6.0	6.4	33.2	53.0	4.30	0.30
Total						3.63	1.06

Source: Researchers' field work, 2022

Generally, the respondents have agreed on the campaign against COVID-19 ($M=3.63$, $SD=1.06$). Specifically, the reduction in the death rate is encouraging ($M=4.38$, $SD=1.01$) and the high reduction in the number of new cases ($M=4.30$, $SD=0.30$). Thus, campaign against COVID-19 have encouraged in the reduction of the virus in the country.

Hypotheses Testing

The following hypotheses have been formulated in line with the tenants of agenda setting research.

H0₁: Dominant agenda of social media Anti-COVI-19 Campaign will not correspond with public perception on Anti-COVID-19- pandemic.

The Spearman's rho correlation for the two measures (social media and public agenda) reveals moderate significant relationship $r_s = .443$, $N=7$, $p= .038$. This result shows that there is low correspondence between the social media and public agenda of the main COVID-19 issue.

Table 10: Spearman's rho Correlation between Social Media and Public Agenda on Anti-COVID-19 Campaign Themes

Anti-COVID-19 Agenda	N	R_s	P
Social Media /Public Agenda	7	.443	.38

Source: Researchers' field work, 2022

Therefore, the study has been able to confirmed on the correspondence social media has with the dominant agenda in the public domain in respect to use of facemask, social distance which are parts of the public enlightenment and education always seen on social media posts.

H0₂: Affective tune of Anti-COVID-19 campaign will not correspond with public perception of COVID-19 Pandemic

The Spearman's rho correlation for the two measures (social media and public affective agenda) reveals significant relationship $r_s = .571$, $N=7$, $p= .36$. This result shows that there is correspondence in the media and public agenda of the main Anti-COVID-19 issues.

Table 11: Spearman's rho Correlation between Social media and Public Affective Agenda of Anti-COVID-19 Campaign attributes

COVID-19 Affective Attributes	N	Rs	P
Social Media/Public Agenda	7	.571	.36

Source: Researchers' field work, 2022

The result of the Spearman rho correlation shows a moderate correspondence between social media and public on effective tone agenda attributes.

H0₃: There is no relationship between social media coverage and public support of COVID-19 pandemic campaign

The Pearson correlation for the two measures (Social Media agenda and public support) reveals moderate but significant relationship $r = .502$, $p = .01$. This result shows that there is correspondence in the social media and public agenda of the main COVID-19 issues.

Table 9: Pearson Correlation between Perceived Dominants and Public Support of Anti-COVID-19 Campaign

Dominants Agenda	R	P
Perceived Dominance/ public support	.502	.01

Source: Researchers' field work, 2022

The result shows a moderate significant relation between perceived dominate agenda and public support for COVID-19 campaign.

DISCUSSION

Primarily, this study applied agenda building of agenda-setting in social media by investigating public perception and social media coverage of Anti-COVID-19 Pandemic campaign. The study was able to hypothetically explain the role of the social in building agenda among the public. The study found that the dominant themes in the social media coverage of COVID-19 are facemask, social distance, COVID-19 update, public enlightenment and programs and government measures and control. Through the social media attaching importance to COVID-19 attribute; the public has now resonated with this issue of COVID-19 in the country (Dai et al. 2021; Guanah et al. 2024). This is what agenda setting research is aiming at (McCombs, 2014) – public consensus on popular policy. The Anti-COVID campaign attribute from the social media that resonate among the public are the Cases around the country, death rate concerns about risk and Nigeria's preparedness, government/institutional measures and response, public enlightenment and education, the treatment, control and vaccine fear, panic and anxiety, misinformation/ disinformation. This confirmed the studies of Albarracin and Jung (2021); Dai et al. (2021); Guanah et al. (2021, 2024) about public perception of the pandemic in Nigeria.

The study was able to test agenda building by establishing a correlation between social media coverage and public perception of COVID-19 pandemic campaign. Therefore, confirming the studies of Aruguete (2017) and Rony (2018) Abdullahi et al. (2020) on the effectiveness of social media in setting agenda among the public. Though, this study found some weakness in validating

the theses of agenda setting in its totality on social media; it was able to establish the fact that agenda setting theory goes a long way in determining the dominant attribute attached to Anti-COVID-19 pandemic campaign among the public.

CONCLUSION

Social media coverage and the public have favourable view on anti-COVID-19 Pandemic campaign. The Anti-COVID-19 campaign issues that was ranked first is Facemask, serving as the major campaign issue on social media and in public domain. The social media posts and the public were majorly concerned about social distance, hygiene isolation/treatment centre, lockdown and palliative. The reduction in the death rate was encouraging and the high reduction in the number of new cases makes the public to have relief. Thus, campaign against COVID-19 have encouraged in the reduction of the virus in the country.

This study contributes to scholarship in social media agenda-setting research and in particular, applying the agenda building in health crisis in Nigeria. Therefore, the study explicates the theses of social media agenda setting on public perception of COVID-19. The study shows the significance of social media in building and setting agenda among the public when it comes to health crisis as it serves as platform for public enlightenment, sensitization and education. Therefore, social can serve as potent tool for health communication campaign and in times of emergencies. Though, the study finds a limited effect of agenda setting, calls for more research in developing nations like Nigeria to validate or otherwise the profound assumptions of the theory even as the social media continue to create disruption as a contender for source of news to both the public and the legacy media. On the theoretical plain, the study recommends more exploration of social media agenda building should be done on health issues in Africa and Nigeria and public support in studying local issues. Practically, it is recommended that users of social media should utilise social media during health crisis; by making them salient on the consciousness of the authorities, stakeholders and the public.

Ethical Clearance

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the respondents used for the study and their confidentiality was assured.

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Conflict of Interest

There was no conflict of interest

Authors' Contributions

Simon Okaiyeto and Obehi Oribhabor conceived the study, including the design. Obehi Oribhabor drafted the study outline and background to the study. Simon Okaiyeto coordinated the collection of the data. Simon Okaiyeto analysed and interpreted the data while Obehi Oribhabor wrote the conclusion and recommendations. All the authors read and approved the final manuscript for publication.

Availability of data and materials

The datasets on which conclusion was made is available in the form of SPSS Version 26. It is available on reasonable request.

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