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Examining Jalingo Residents' Perception of Social Media Campaign for Health Communication by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control on COVID-19

SAMUEL ASICUS

Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Communication and Media Studies,
Taraba State University, Jalingo
samuelasicus583@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The outbreak of COVID-19 has accentuated the significance and potency of utilising social media for health communication campaign. Consequently, individuals and organisations like the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) leveraged upon the multifarious advantages of social media platforms to disseminate relevant health information to wide range of audience. This study, therefore, examines Jalingo residents' perception of social media campaign for health communication by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control on COVID-19. The study was anchored on perception theory as theoretical framework, whereas mixed method approach was adopted with survey and in-depth interview as the research designs. The study specifically sought to assess the awareness level of Jalingo residents and to ascertain the perception of the residents towards social media campaign for health communication on COVID-19. Among other things, the study found out that there is high level of awareness of social media campaign for health communication on COVID-19 among Jalingo residents. In addition, the perception and attitude of the residents were both found out to be positive, as it influenced the audience to comply with COVID-19 safety protocols. Among other things, it was recommended that deliberate and consistent efforts should be made by NCDC to maintain the positive perception they have earned from the COVID-19 health communication campaign on social media.

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The study, therefore, concludes that social media played a prominent role in propagating NCDC's health communication campaign to a wide range of audiences, which was instrumental in consolidating government's efforts in fighting COVID-19 virus in Nigeria.

Keywords: Campaign, Examining, Health communication, Social media, Perception.

INTRODUCTION

Although COVID-19 is said to be gone but the concomitant effects and lessons it came with still abound and should not be shelved under the carpet to avoid reoccurrence of a more deadly pandemic taking the globe unawares. One of such lessons is how social media gained traction in virtually every facet of human endeavour. The usage of social media for health communication became common place during the outbreak of COVID-19 virus. Due to the unregulated nature of the social media platforms, there was an influx of fake health information all over the various social media platforms, which became serious threat to public health and safety. As a measure to contain the conspiracies and fake news making the rounds unabated on social media platforms, countries globally utilised relevant government agencies to serve as official sources for health information and to counter the conspiracies on different social media platforms (Ehondor & Unakalamba, 2021).

In Nigeria, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) which was established in 2018 and saddled with the responsibility for the management and control of health pandemic in the country, became the government's mouthpiece used for health communication to counter the prior existing conspiracies as well as provide citizens with reliable health information on daily basis via social media platforms (NCDC, 2020; Shahaduzzaman et al., 2020) Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and Non-governmental organisations like Breakthrough Nigeria staged and sponsored several campaigns on COVID-19 to create awareness and to conscientise Nigerians about the deadly virus, as well as giving orientation on how to reduce the spread of the virus in order to minimize mortality rate among those that contracted the virus (NCDC, 2020). These campaigns by the NCDC, like the #TakeResponsibility campaign launched on social media platforms, particularly Twitter and Facebook, served as major sources of health information for media outfits and individuals.

In spite of the efforts of the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control to manage the spread of fake news and misinformation online, the country recorded increasing cases of fake news and conspiracies which undermined the efforts of the government (Nwagbara et al. 2021). There was a burgeoning increase in the spate of COVID-19 infodemic in Nigeria and the world over during the pandemic, despite social media campaign that was launched by World Health Organisation and the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control. This is consequent upon the fact that most netizens preferred to access relevant information from other sources online other than the social media handles of the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (Ehondor & Unakalamba, 2021). This calls for investigation on the perception of audience members toward Nigeria Centre for Disease Control's health communication on COVID-19 which could be a possible reason for audience's cavalier attitude to the health communication by Nigeria Centre for Disease Control on social media platforms.

Studies have proven that perception of audience is influenced by the information they access, most particularly information received from social media platforms, which were widespread during COVID-19 pandemic (Ali et al., 2021 & Liao, 2023).

In light of this, many researchers were intrigued to investigate the functional and dysfunctional role of social media for health communication in Nigeria (Maikomo et al., 2021; Odeba et al., 2021). Be that as it may, there is still dearth of literature and research on audience perception of social media campaign by NCDC for health communication on COVID-19. Hence, the need to investigate audience awareness to social media usage for health communication by Nigeria Centre for Disease Control and their perception towards health communication on social media platforms by the NCDC. It is against this premise that this study was conducted to investigate Jalingo residents' perception of social media campaign by Nigeria Centre for Disease Control for health communication on COVID-19.

Objectives of the Study

The overarching objective of this study is to examine Jalingo residents' perception of social media campaign for health communication by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control on COVID-19. The specific objectives of the study are to;

- I. ascertain Jalingo residents' level of awareness of social media campaign for health communication by Nigeria Centre for Disease Control on COVID-19
- II. examine Jalingo residents' perception of social media campaign for health communication by Nigeria Centre for Disease Control on COVID-19

Review of Concepts

The following key concepts in this study were reviewed for clarification: perception, social media, health communication, and COVID-19.

Perception

The concept of perception is used in different context to mean different things depending on the perspective from which it is considered. Within the parlance of communication studies, perception entails the impression and or opinion an individual or group of persons hold over an idea or a thing. Weintraub et al. (n.d.) averred that perception is a cognitive process that help people comprehend their experiences of how to receive, filter, and interpret behaviours and communication messages. Perception basically determines the meaning assigned to communication messages, whether they were understood or not. Weintraub et al further stated that different factors influence the perception people hold on things, which include, but not limited to factors like age, gender, physical characteristics, cultural background, past experiences, and prevailing mood, among others.

In their opinion, Best and Coney (2004) cited in Asemah (2022) opined that perception in communication studies is a three-step process which involves exposure, attention, and interpretation of communication messages. Asemah et al. (2022) further explained that the three-step perception process, which is now four-step perception process in communication studies posit that media audience select what message to see or read from the barrage of messages circulating on different media platforms based on their interest. This perception process is also referred to as selective exposure. Having selected what media messages to get themselves exposed to, audience also choose from the messages they are exposed to the ones that deserve their attention, which is a process known as selective attention in perception processes.

In the same vein, the audience members still select the messages to interpret based on their pre-existing attitudes and beliefs, and this leads to the last perception process, which is retention. After communication messages have gone through the processes of selective exposure, selective attention, and selective interpretation, the media audience will still choose what to retain from the various messages they have interpreted, which basically forms the perception the audience will have over a communication message.

In addition, Asemah et al. (2022) stated that the source and content of communication messages are major determinants to the persuasiveness and perception the message will elicit from the audience. Where a communication source is perceived by the audience to be credible, such message will elicit a favourable disposition of the audience to the communication message and vice versa. The mass media have been regarded to be credible sources of information to the general public. However, with the advent of social media platforms and the influx of non-professionals using the platforms to post and share unverified information, this has discredited these platforms in the face of the public owing to the misinformation and fake news that are thriving unabated. Consequently, audience members have varied perceptions on the veracity of information posted on social media platforms, thereby undermining social media health communication campaigns.

Social media

Social media are online interactive microblogging sites that are used for sharing of information in diverse forms of texts, pictures, audios, videos, audio-visual, and multimedia format. Several definitions and nuances about in extant literature regarding the social media. In their study, Bryer and Zavatarro (2011) conceptualise social media as technological applications that facilitate two-way interaction, thereby enabling online collaboration by stakeholders across boundaries, time, and space. Using the potentials of the internet, social media sites have gained traction in the last decade and have consequently attracted millions of users all over the globe (Boyd & Ellison, 2007 cited in Adum et al. 2016). Owing to this development, many people are resorting to these new media outlets in their quest for news, information, business, and entertainment to the social media platforms. These social media sites provide the avenue for users to create customised profiles to connect with other users in other parts of the world, bypassing over time and distance barrier.

Furthermore, Okafor and Onyenekwe (2020) defined social media as interactive computer mediated-technologies that are used for creation and or sharing of information, messages among other forms of expression through online communities and networks. The inventions of modern technologies, as well as the advent of the internet, were major breakthroughs that made creation and dissemination of information possible online across distance thereby breaking and even obliterating the prior existing communication barriers. This development has revolutionised the way information is accessed, received, and shared globally, courtesy of the internet and sophisticated technologies. The multifaceted possibilities of the social media have reduced time and space barriers in communication to the barest minimum, as users can send and receive information in diverse forms instantaneously across different countries and even continents of the globe. This re-affirms the global village phenomenon predicted by Marshall McLuhan several years ago, that the world would one day shrink to a global village through the advancement of technology as it is today (Nwabueze, 2014).

Health communication

Health communication is a portmanteau of two distinct concepts of health and communication. Having a good understanding of the two concepts is essential to appreciating the meaning and scope of health communication. World Health Organisation (WHO) (1948) defines health as the state of complete physical, social, and mental wellbeing and not just the absence of diseases. This shows for a person to be healthy, the person has to be sound in his body, sound in the mind, and in his relationship with his immediate environment. This is to also say that the health of an individual so much depends on the decisions and actions he make on taking care of his body, mind, and how he relates with his environment.

Communication is derived from the two Latin root words, "communicare" and "communis," which literally mean "to share" or "to make common" ideas between two or more persons (Asemah, 2022; Kalejaiye & Adeoye, 2008). Communication may also be defined as the act of sharing or making common meaning and ideas between a sender and a receiver. What is being shared could be ideas, meanings, thoughts, emotions, among others, using a common frame of reference known to both the sender and receiver. Communication has become a powerful and flexible lever to initiate and sustain behaviour change (Aiken, 2023). Abbas (2023) stated that without effective communication, behaviour change activities are not likely to yield positive results because the target audience may not understand the rationale for the change, the attendant benefits of changing their behaviour, or the procedure to make the change come to fruition. This shows that communication is a prerequisite for behaviour change, and this occurs only when the communication is effective enough to influence the communication target to give up previously held perspectives. This underscores both the relationship and relevance between communication and health.

The significance of communication on health is founded on the fact that communication is a very essential human activity for ameliorating most of human health problems (Uzochukwu et al., 2020). The concept of health communication has been in existence for a while, even though it was not given much scholarship attention in the previous years, not until Ebola outbreak and of recently, the COVID-19 pandemic, which has brought the concept to limelight in communication scholarship globally. Be that as it may, there is no universally acceptable definition of health communication, as many definitions abound in different literatures (Afful-Dadzie et al., 2023). Kayode (2021) defines health communication as a form of communication that uses mass media and of a recent the information and communication technologies and the internet to deliver relevant health messages to a target audience, so as to raise their level of awareness on specific aspects of personal and community health and to make the people realise the primacy of health in fostering change and progress in the society. Health communication is targeted at improving the state of health of individuals and groups alike. Essentially, health communication is concerned with the use of different media platforms to disseminate health related information aimed at promoting public health.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relevant literatures were reviewed to provide rudimental base for the study in light of the nuanced perspectives of different scholars.

Audience Awareness of Social Media Campaign For Health Communication by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control on COVID-19

In Nigeria, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) played a very important role in the management of the coronavirus from the time the first index case was recorded on 27th February 2020 in Lagos State, which eventually became the epicenter of the disease in Nigeria (Olapegba et al., 2020). Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and non-governmental organisations like Breakthrough Nigeria staged and sponsored several campaigns on COVID-19 to create awareness and to conscientise Nigerians about the deadly virus, as well as giving orientation on how to reduce the spread of the virus, thereby minimizing mortality rate among those contracted (NCDC, 2020). John (2023) carried out a study on the impact of media messages on the containment of the coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria. The results showed that the media effectively fulfilled their role in agenda-setting by raising awareness and influencing public discourse through highlighting important issues. He also emphasized that the media is the most effective channel for raising awareness, particularly during health emergencies.

These campaigns by the NCDC, like the #TakeResponsibility campaign launched on social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook, were highly instrumental in the successes recorded in containing the spread of the virus in Nigeria, as well as reducing mortality rate to the barest minimum (John, 2023). Sequel to this, risk communication campaign and public health education on coronavirus were launched vigorously after the confirmation of COVID-19 case in Nigeria. Both the mainstream and social media platforms like WhatsApp, Twitter, and Facebook were instrumental in disseminating updates and information towards containing the spread of COVID-19 by the government (Obioma et al., 2020). Regular updates on the outbreak were given by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control with support from major telecommunication companies in the country.

Breakthrough Nigeria, among other Non-Governmental Organisation launched campaigns via social media platforms to sensitise, educate, and create more awareness on social media regarding the spread of the COVID-19 virus (Vraga et al., 2020). The NCDC regularly publish protocol on the management and prevention of coronavirus. These safety measures include, but not limited to observing of social distance in public places, hand washing/sanitising, maintenance of personal and respiratory hygiene, coughing/sneezing in one's bent elbow, wearing of face mask among others. The social media tools like Twitter/X and Facebook, WhatsApp, blog and short message services (SMS) were replete with information on COVID-19 infection. The messages were translated into local Some Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), such as Breakthrough Nigeria, launched sensitisation programs on social media platforms to educate the public and raise awareness about the spread of the COVID-19 virus (Vraga et al., 2020). The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) regularly publishes guidelines for managing and preventing coronavirus. These safety measures include, but are not limited to, maintaining social distance in public spaces, handwashing and sanitizing, upholding personal and respiratory hygiene, covering one's mouth when coughing or sneezing, and wearing face masks. Social media platforms like Twitter/X, Facebook, WhatsApp, blogs, and short message services (SMS) were filled with information regarding COVID-19 infections.

Messages were translated into local languages to effectively reach the broader public on how to prevent and control the virus. The NCDC's health communication campaigns highlighted the importance of individual and community responsibility in preventing COVID-19 and maintaining public health during the pandemic.

Audience Perception of Social Media Campaign for Health Communication by Nigeria Centre for Disease Control on COVID-19

The use of social media for health communication, among other informational needs, is gaining widespread acceptance across different parts of the globe. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a high surge in the number of users of social media platforms globally. Many people integrated the use of social media to both access and share relevant health information online. Adum et al. (2016) noted that seamless exchange of communication became practicable all over the world owing to the flexible nature of social media platforms. By instinct, the first place for consideration to someone seeking information in the contemporary times is usually social media platforms. Suffice to say that social media have become integral part of day-to-day life's activities for most persons. Whereas a good population of individuals have accepted the use of social media to satisfy their informational needs, including accessing relevant health information, other people are still skeptical in accepting information from social media platforms. Apparently, the adoption of social media for health communication in the recent times has elicited different perceptions from the general populace.

Geopoll conducted a survey to assess the awareness, sources of knowledge, and information regarding the coronavirus among a sample of 1,350 individuals from Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa, with 450 respondents from each country (Elliot, 2020). The result of the survey revealed that social media platforms were the most common sources of information in the various countries where the survey was conducted. More so, the platforms were also found to be the leading sources of misleading information, thereby making over 75% of the population to have skepticism in believing social media reports on COVID-19 due to the porous nature of the platforms. Owing to the lack of regulatory mechanism and gatekeeping on the social media platforms, users became used to sharing health related messages among other information without verification. This has consequently made several conspiracies and misleading information on COVID-19 to become popular on social media platforms, which subsequently became difficult for the government, through the NCDC, to counter such information (Inobemhe et al., 2021).

The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control was established in 2018 and charged with the responsibility, among other things, to collate, synthesise and disseminate public health research towards policy formulation and implementation. To achieve this goal, the NCDC uses several avenues, primarily the mainstream media and online platforms, which include of social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, where they have large followership. The NCDC, as part of its public communication strategy to combat COVID-19 launched different campaigns in the 2020 and beyond to circulate relevant information on how to contain the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria (NCDC, 2020a).

Theoretical Framework

Perception theory was selected to serve as theoretical framework for this study owing to its suitability.

Perception Theory

The perception theory was originated by Steiner and Berelson in 1964 (Olufemi, 2017). Steiner and Berelson (1964) define perception as an advanced process through an individual selects, organises and interprets sensory stimulation into a coherent and meaningful worldview or perspective. Perception can be influenced by an individual's experience of the past, family, and societal values, either way, stimuli are perceived differently by people.

There are two different ways to influence perception, viz: structural and functional. Anaeto, Onabajo, and Osifeso (2008) stated that structural influence describes how sensory stimuli are seen in physical terms. As the name implies, the influence is usually coordinated and structured. On the other hand, functional influence is predicated on one's personal conviction (which in most cases is subjective); and in all cases, linked with psychological factors that affect human perception. An individual's perception is shaped by his environment, background, past experiences among other determining factors. As a result, messages are not interpreted in the same manner by different individuals. This also presupposes that mass communication extends beyond just reaching a target with a communication message. Consequently, media messages might be sent to a receiver without necessarily fulfilling the intention of the sender, owing to the fact that the interpretation of the message is largely dependent on the receiver. Communication messages are decoded in light of one's previous experiences and current dispositions- needs, moods, and memories which serve as intervening variables (Asemah et al., 2022).

This is to say that social media audience perceive health communication messages on COVID-19 from the NCDC based on several factors, which include their previous experiences, backgrounds, previously received messages which could include conspiracies, among others. The perception they will have about the health communication message is highly dependent on these intervening factors, and this explains why the same communication messages are perceived differently by the audience (Olufemi, 2017). Asemah et al. (2022) also stated that the level of credibility associated to a communication messages source also determined the perception on the recipient. Where the message is perceived to be from a credible source, the perception will be positive, and vice versa.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative designs. According to Cresswell and Cresswell (2018), while each method has its own strengths and limitations, using them together allows for a deeper understanding of the research problem or questions, effectively addressing the shortcomings of each approach. For the quantitative aspect of this study, a survey research design was used. On the other hand, in-depth interview was deployed for the qualitative approach, where participants were examined about their perception on social media health communication campaign by the NCDC on COVID-19.

The geographical location for this study is Jalingo local government area. According to National Bureau of Statistics projected population, the population of Jalingo local government area is 220,700 (NBS projected population, 2022). Therefore, the population of this study is 220, 700. The multi-stage sampling technique was used to get respondents for the study. Afterwards, the convenient sampling was also used to select participants who were willing to participate in the study and are active on any of the social media platforms used by the NCDC for health communication.

Raosoft online calculator was used to determine the sample size for this research. From the Raosoft online calculator, using a margin of error of 5% and a confidence level of 95%, the sample size generated for this study is 384. Consequently, 370 copies of questionnaire were administered. In addition, 14 participants were also interviewed to meet the research sample size of 384 as determined by Raosoft online calculator. This helped to provide sufficient data for the study to answer the research questions. In the analysis, mean score rating was used to determine the weighting of the likert scale values. According to Senam (2020, p. 48), “if the computed value of the 5-point scale is up to or above the mean aggregate weighting (i.e 3.0), the statement would be held in affirmative, but if it is below the mean aggregate, the statement would be held in the negation.”

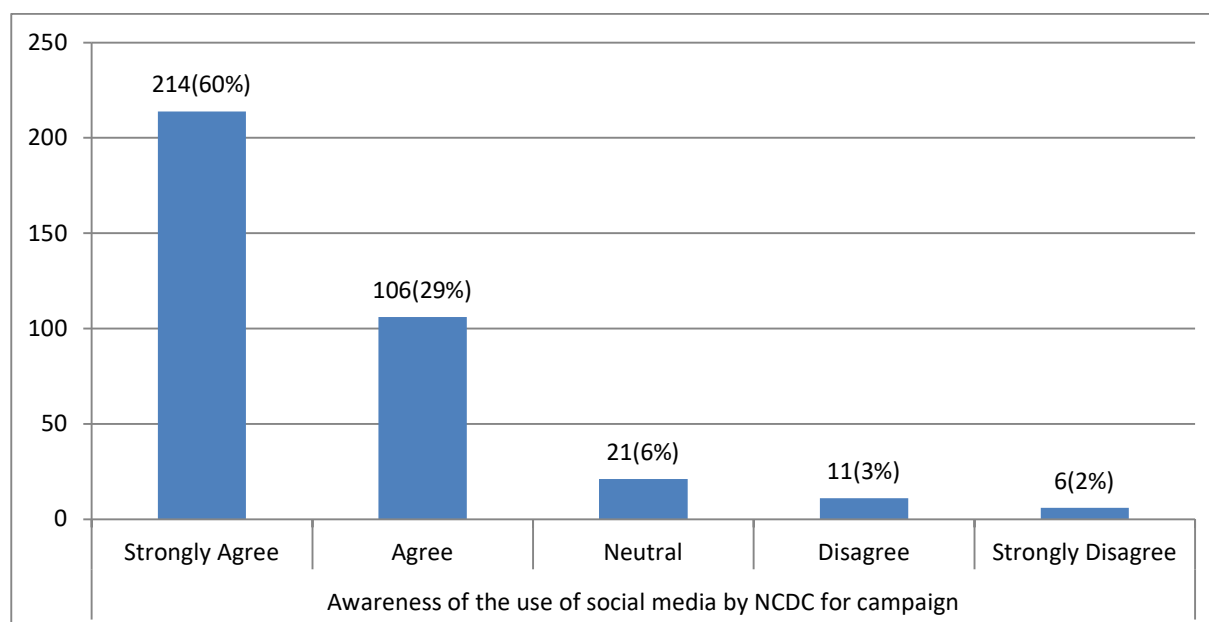


Figure 1. Awareness of the use of Social Media by NCDC for campaign.

Source: Field survey, 2024

Since the computed value (4.42) of the weighted mean score is greater than the mean of the aggregate weighting (3.0), it is implied that the residents of Jalingo metropolis are aware of the use of social media by the NCDC for health communication campaign.

Data from the study suggest that the use of social media for NCDC’s health communication campaign contributed significantly in making the campaign to be both ubiquitous and popular among the respondents as a representative of the entire population.

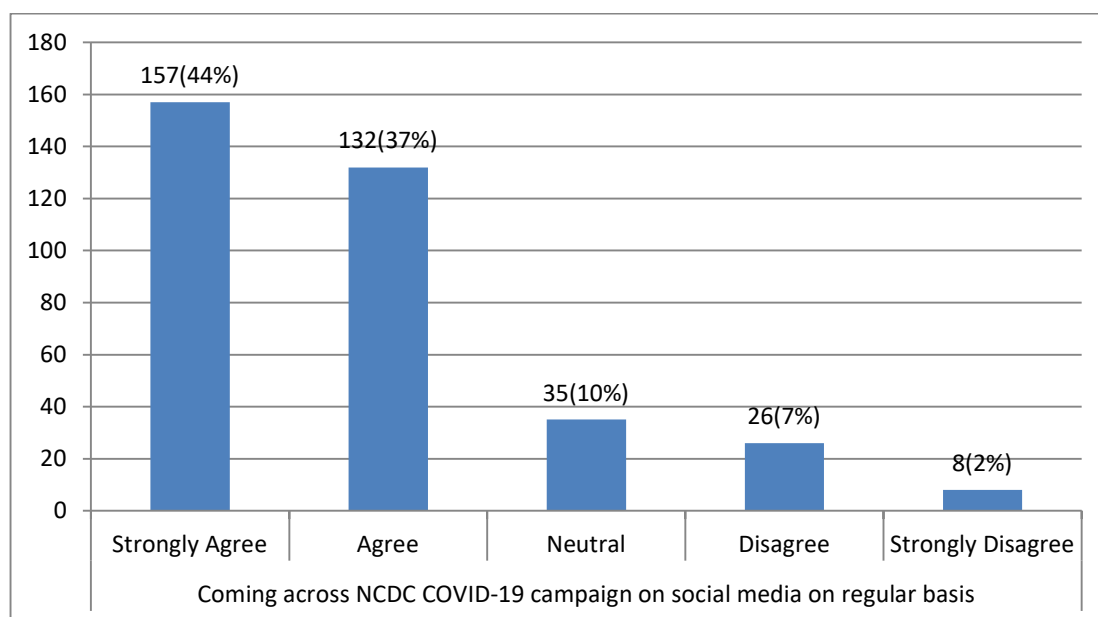


Figure 2. Coming across NCDC's COVID-19 campaign via social media on regular basis.

Source: Field survey, 2024

Since the computed value (4.13) of the weighted mean score is greater than the mean of the aggregate weighting (3.0), it is implied that the residents of Jalingo metropolis have come across NCDC COVID-19 health communication campaign on regular basis.

As indicated from the figure above, it implies that social media platforms have given wide and regular publicity to NCDC COVID-19 health communication campaign. Owing to this wide and regular publicity given to COVID-19 health communication campaign on social media by the NCDC, majority of the respondents came across the campaign on frequent basis, thereby staying abreast with COVID-19 updates.

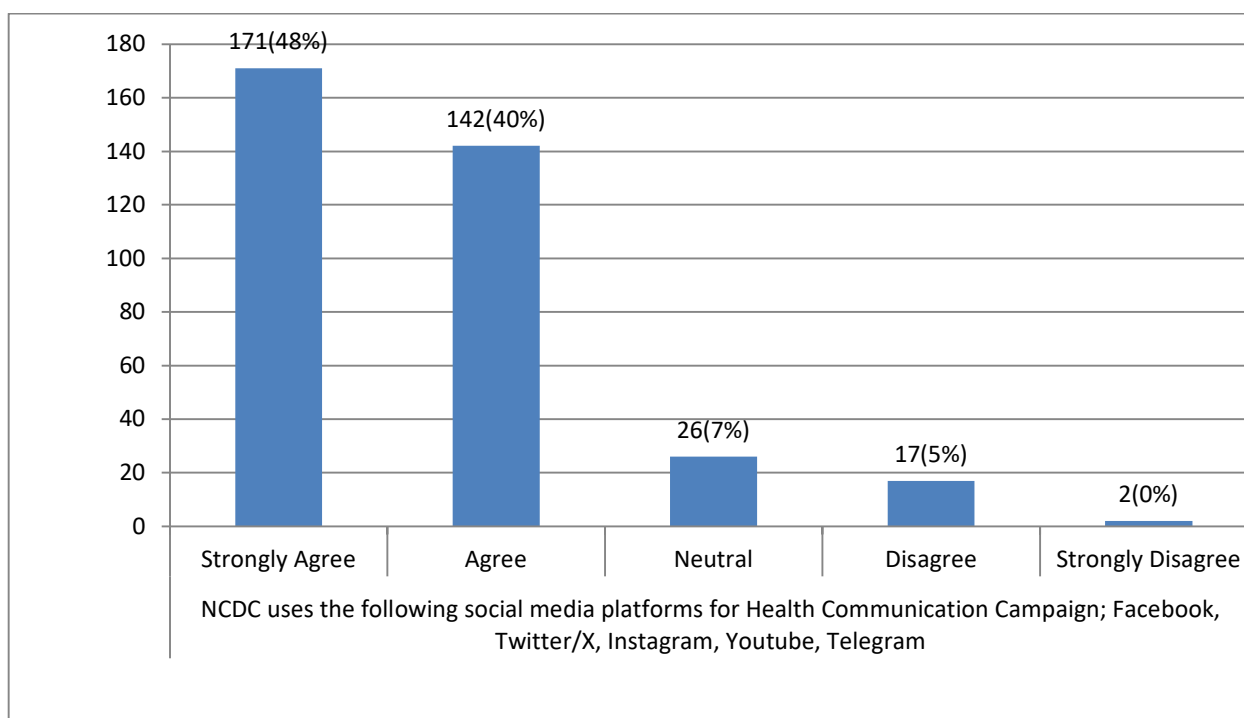


Figure 3. NCDC's use of social media platforms for health communication campaign.

Source: Field survey, 2024

The computed value (4.29) of the weighted mean score is greater than the mean of the aggregate weighting (3.0), it could be deduced that NCDC uses different social media platforms for health communication campaign on COVID-19.

The chart above indicates that the use of social media was one of the major reasons for the mass publicity and awareness COVID-19 health communication campaign received all over the country, as only an insignificant population of the respondents were not aware of the different social media platforms used for the campaign.

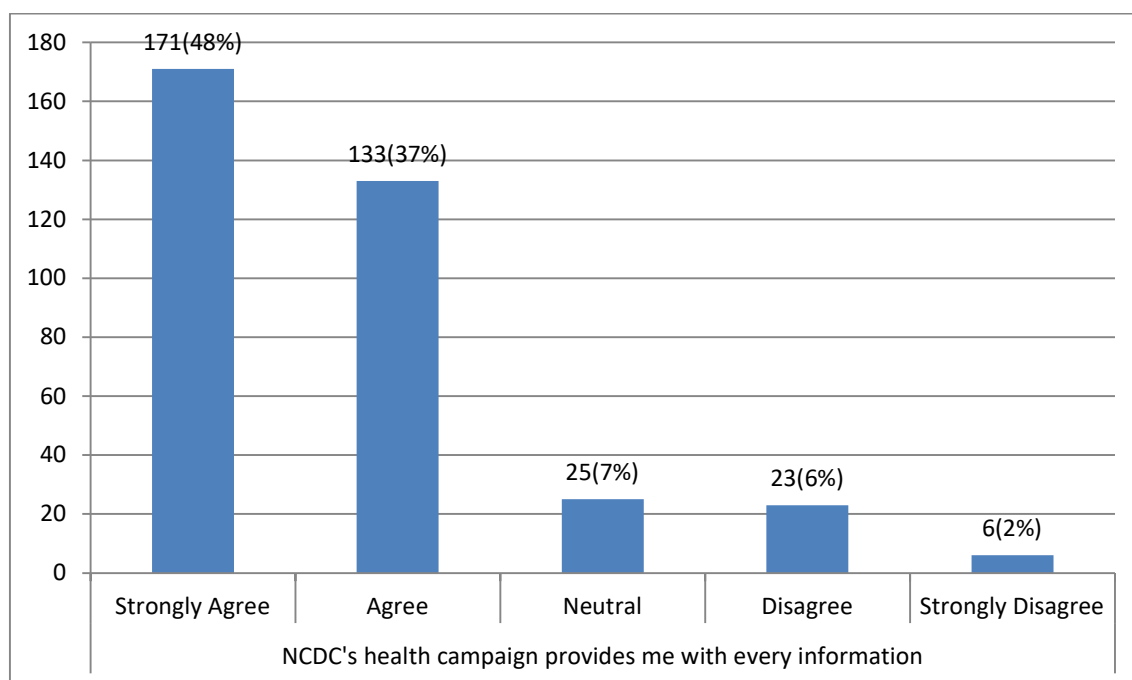


Figure 4. NCDC's health campaign provides me with every information.

Source: Field survey, 2024

Since the computed value (4.23) of the weighted mean score is greater than the mean of the aggregate weighting (3.0), it is implied that NCDC provides the audience with every relevant health information they need to know about COVID-19. This is apparent from the public's awareness on COVID-19 updates, safety protocols, and government's policies, among other vital information disseminated.

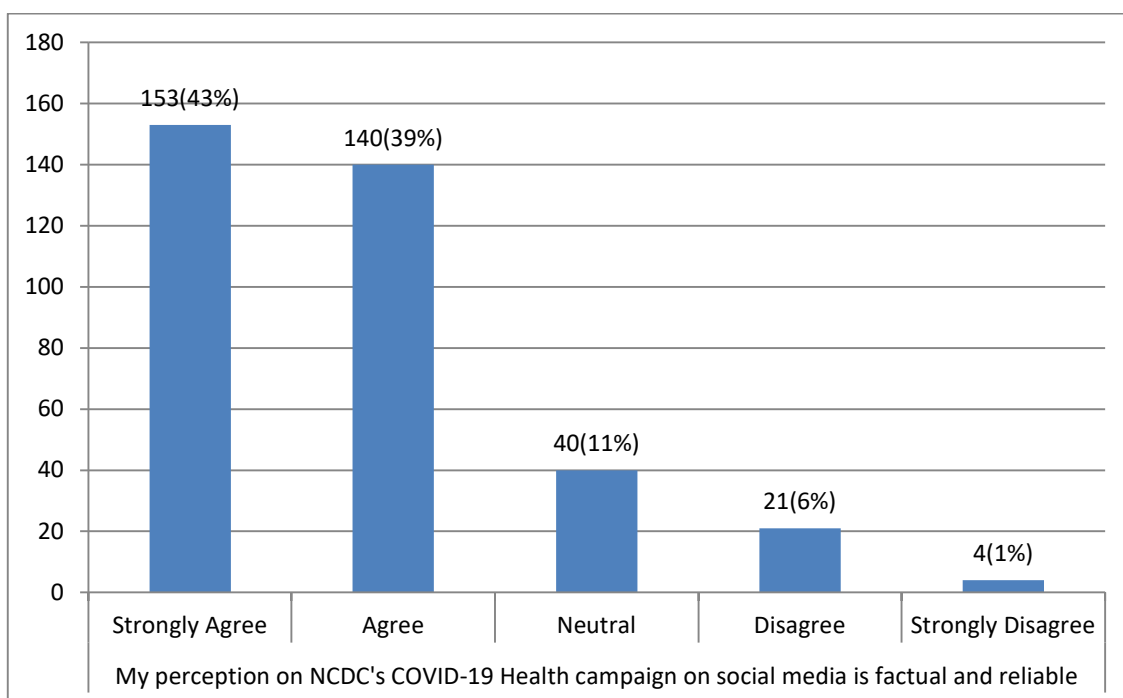


Figure 5. Audience perception of the reliability of NCDC's social media campaign.

Source: Field survey, 2024

Since the computed value (4.16) of the weighted mean score is greater than the mean of the aggregate weighting (3.0), it is implied that the perception of Jalingo residents toward NCDC's COVID-19 health communication campaign on social media is factual and reliable. This implies that the residents believe the COVID-19 health communication campaign they receive on social media. It also suggests that the respondents perceive the information from NCDC's social media page to be the online authentic voice of the NCDC and, by extension, the government itself.

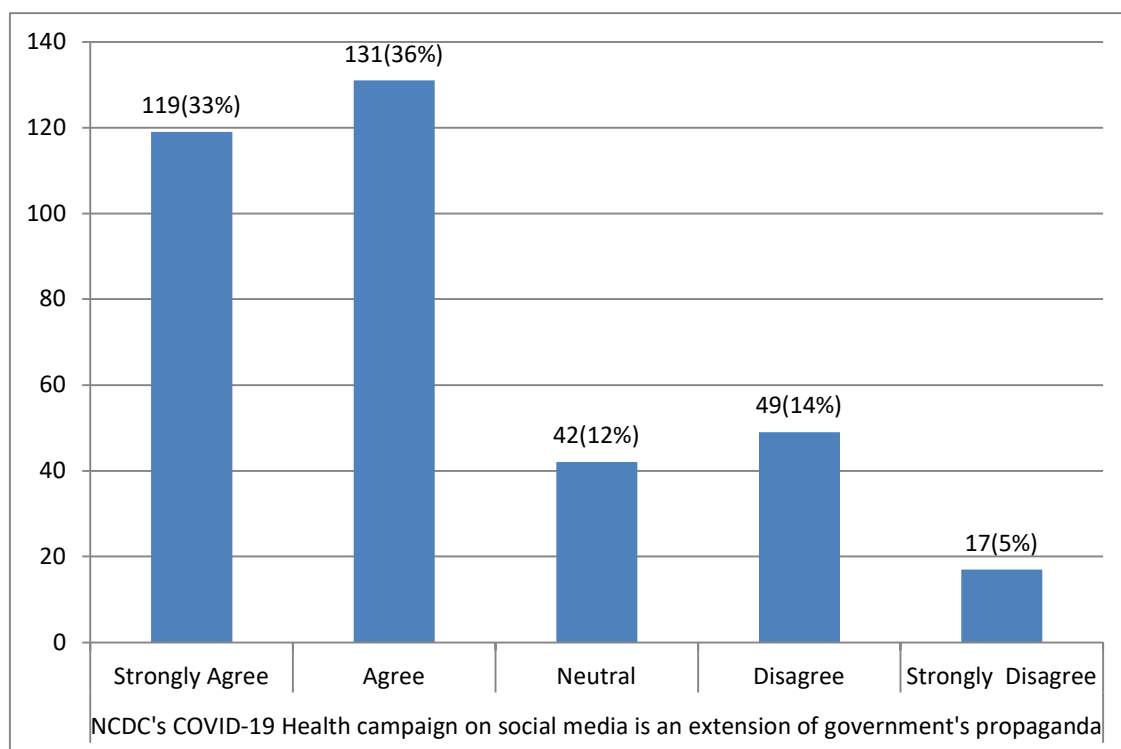


Figure 6. NCDC's COVID-19 campaign is an extension of government's propaganda.

Source: Field survey, 2024

Since the computed value (3.80) of the weighted mean score is greater than the mean of the aggregate weighting (3.0), it could be inferred that NCDC's COVID-19 health communication campaign on social media is an extension of government's propaganda.

This connotes that the respondents perceive the government to be using the NCDC to promote their propaganda on COVID-19. Albeit, previous data show that the people believe the campaign messages they receive, having the perception that the campaign is an extension of government's propaganda could affect their reaction towards the campaign messages.

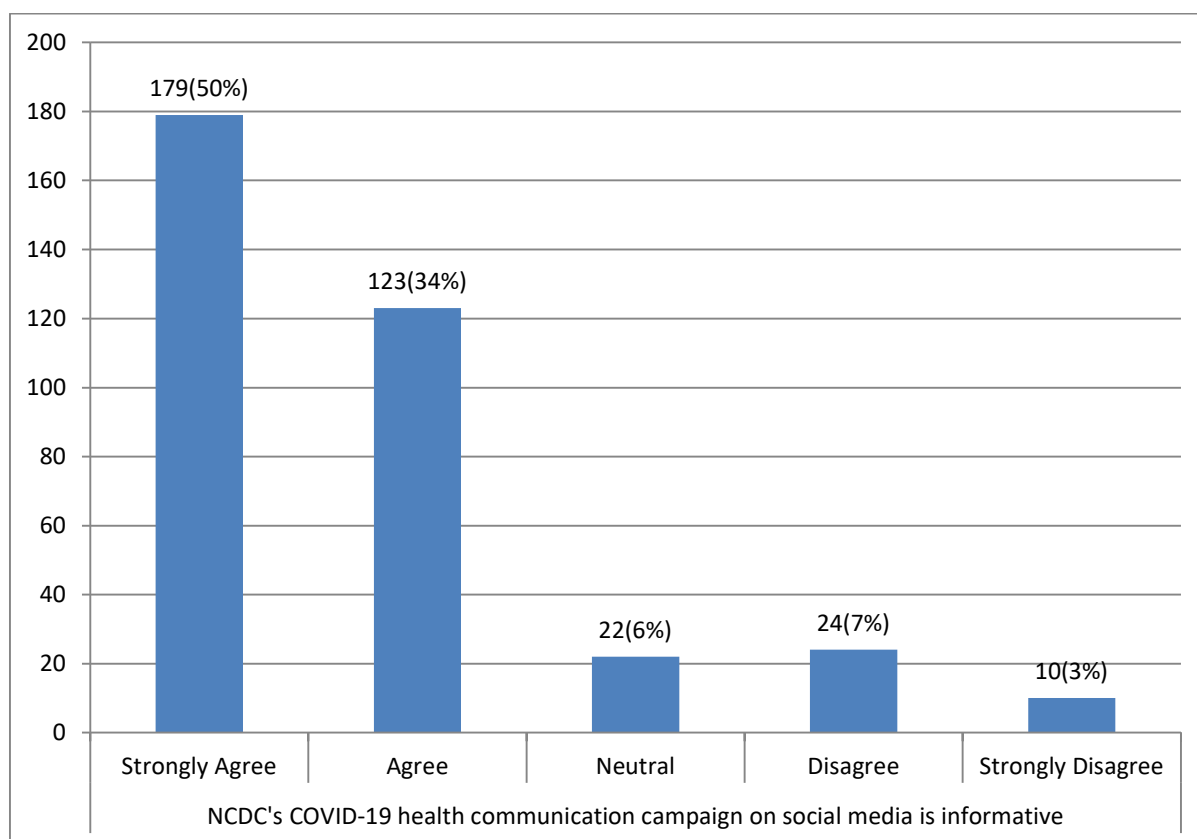


Figure 7. NCDC's COVID-19 health communication campaign is informative.

Source: Field survey, 2024

Since the computed value (4.22) of the weighted mean score is greater than the mean of the aggregate weighting (3.0), it could be deduced that NCDC's COVID 19 health communication campaign on social media is informative. This implies that the campaign content was rich enough to cater for the informational needs of the audience. This corroborates the previous data, which state that COVID-19 health communication campaign provide the audience with every information they need to know on COVID-19.

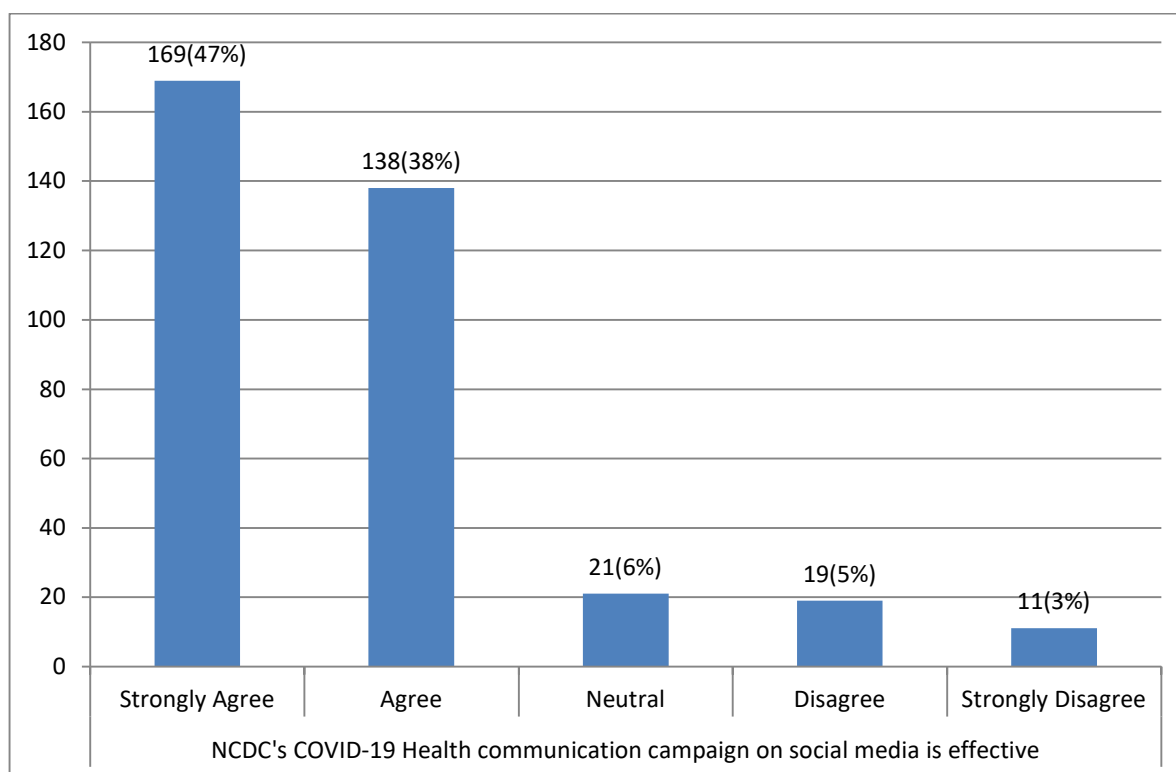


Figure 8. NCDC's COVID-19 health communication campaign is effective.

Source: Field survey, 2024

Since the computed value (4.21) of the weighted mean score is greater than the mean of the aggregate weighting (3.0), it could be deduced that NCDC's COVID 19 health communication campaign on social media is effective. This gives credence to previous data which show that the respondents believe the NCDC's COVID-19 health communication messages they receive on social media which could be a major contributing factor to the effectiveness of the campaign.

In-depth Interview Data

In-depth interview was conducted to elicit qualitative data from the participants of the study. A total of fourteen (14) participants were interviewed to complement the survey data collected as well as to make up the remaining sample size of the study. Names and other personal biodata of the respondents were not included in the study for anonymity. Many official ethics guidelines recommend disguising and/or anonymising the personal identities of research participants as a default position in qualitative research (Saunders et al., 2014). These respondents were codified in the study using Participants 1 to 14 (P1 to P-14). The questions asked were crafted in line with the research questions for the study and presented thus:

What is the level of awareness of Jalingo residents towards social media campaign for health communication by Nigeria Centre for Disease Control on COVID-19?

The study revealed that all the participants interviewed were aware of the social media campaign for health communication by NCDC on COVID-19. In addition to that, most of them got exposed to NCDC health communication campaign on majorly Facebook and Twitter. Participant 2(P2) stated thus;

I've really noticed the widespread of publicity bringing awareness, especially to the citizens of the country on the events and the danger of COVID-19. It's a very good one because there are areas whereby electricity is a challenge, but every person, you will see them with almost Android phone. So which help this campaign to even spread even wider than where they cannot have access to television, to TV, to radios, and all of those things. So once you, any young lady, any young boy goes through her phone, at least the display is there. So you have an information; even if you cannot access it through the TV, the radio, at least your phone is close to you. The information, you are not deprived of that information" (P2)

It is apparent that the use of social media for NCDC's health communication campaign on COVID-19 amplified the campaign to different places that might not have been reached ordinarily.

What is the perception of residents in Jalingo metropolis towards social media campaign for health communication by Nigeria Centre for Disease Control on COVID-19?

The general perception of the participants on the use of social media by the NCDC for health communication campaign on COVID-19 was positive. The respondents also stated that the use of social media for health communication is a welcome development that should be sustained. This has proven how popularly accepted social media have become in the society today. Participant 7 opined thus:

It is a welcome development to have seen the campaign on social media using very relatable contents to tell us the effects, the challenges, and safety measures to take for the COVID-19. So it is very much appreciated (P7).

Participant 2 added that:

It's a very good one because it speeds up the information you're passing through. Once you're passing an information, information goes faster than any other means or through paperwork. It goes faster with the social media because, almost like I said, almost everybody is using the Android phone today. So a very negligible amount of people, you will see them without using Android phone. So if many people are using Android phone, at least the information moves very fast (P2)

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study have been discussed thematically in line with the objectives of the study. Research objective one (1) sought to examine Jalingo residents' level of awareness of social media for health communication by NCDC on COVID-19. The respondents' level of awareness is a precursor to determining their perception. Hence, the need to ascertain the level of awareness of Jalingo residents towards social media health communication messages on COVID-19.

Findings from the study revealed that there was high level of awareness among residents in Jalingo metropolis towards health communication campaign on COVID-19 via diverse social media platforms. In addition, the respondents were exposed to the campaign messages via social media on regular basis, thereby providing them with every piece of information they need to know about COVID-19.

This aligns with Ehondor and Unakalamba (2021) found out in their study, that overwhelming majority of the audience were aware of Nigeria Centre for Disease Control's (NCDC) health communication campaign on social media, and there was also a public behavioural adjustment to NCDC's recommended preventive behaviours. Evidently, the awareness level of Nigerians was very high due to the use of social media platforms by the NCDC, which made the health communication messages to go viral beyond the limitations of electricity, geographical location, language, time, and financial constraints, among others. Similarly, Nwamuo and Nwachukwu (2021) also discovered that majority of the respondents have been highly exposed to NCDC's social media messages on COVID-19 thereby indicating that there is a high level of awareness to NCDC's health communication campaign on COVID-19.

Indubitably, social media have made NCDC's health communication campaign on COVID-19 popular and widely accessible to large population of residents. It is safe to say that there was information overload on COVID-19 courtesy of the use of social media platforms by the NCDC to disseminate health messages to the people.

Objective two (2) of the study examined the perception of Jalingo residents towards social media campaign for health communication by NCDC on COVID-19. Perception study is paramount to determining the success and/or failure of communication campaigns, as it constitutes a major determinant to the outcome of any campaign.

Results from the study revealed that the perception of Jalingo residents towards NCDC's COVID-19 health communication campaign on social media is factual and reliable by a great percentage (82%). This implies that the residents perceive the information they access to be credible and therefore believe the COVID-19 health communication campaign they receive on social media. Moreover, the respondents opined that the social media health communication on COVID-19 is an extension of government's propaganda, although without affecting the credibility they attach to the campaign messages. In addition, the respondents also stated that the social media COVID-19 messages are informative and effective. One of the major postulations of perception theory is that audience members perceive communication messages based on their previous experiences and current dispositions. This postulation is in line with the findings of the current study, which demonstrates how media messages influence the perception of the audience, as it forms part of their experience and disposition.

This is in consonance with the findings of Abubakar et al. (2021) who found out that the messages sent by the NCDC raised people's awareness and consciousness about COVID-19. More so, the awareness of COVID-19 created through Facebook, NCDC, and Twitter had many impacts on the prevention and control of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is apparent to note that media messages do not only stop at influencing audience members' perception, the messages go further to make impact on the audience, which always translate into desired action for which the message was communicated.

In addition, the findings of Sandhu et al. (2023) aligned with the finding of the current study, where he also found out that the participants perceived social media as a positive tool for communicating health information, considering the high reach of such platforms being noted during the COVID-19 outbreak. Where communication message elicit positive perception, it is always likely that the action will not negate the perception of the audience who received the communication message.

In contrast to the findings of the current study, Olapegba et al (2020) disagreed where he stated that about half of the respondents perceived COVID-19 to be a biological weapon designed by the government of China, while 41.93% identified it as a severe illness transmitted to people from wild animals. The aforementioned empirical studies and the current research show there are varied perception on the use of social media by the NCDC for health communication on COVID-19 in Nigeria. While the former have positive perception on the use of social media for health communication on COVID-19, the latter hold a negative perception toward same. Audience members who accessed more of credible information on COVID-19 from social media are likely to be favourably disposed to the platforms, while those who got exposed to more of fake news and conspiracies are negatively disposed to the platforms.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it could be deduced from the study that the audience members' perception of NCDC's health campaign messages on social media was consequent upon the robust awareness strategies deployed by the NCDC and other non-governmental organisations on different social media platforms. This accentuates the suitability of social media as effective tools for health communication in this digital age. The study also established the prominent role social media played in proliferating NCDC's health communication campaign to a wide range of audience as well as providing the appropriate avenue to counteract fake news and conspiracy theories online. This helped to consolidate government's efforts in fighting COVID-19 virus. This study has brought to the fore the significant of targeting audience perception in achieving any campaign, particularly in health communication.

Recommendations

Sequel to the findings arising from the study, the following recommendations were made:

There is the need for sustained engagement by the NCDC's on their social media page in order to keep the online audience abreast with relevant health communication messages and to ensure high awareness level during any public health emergency.

Deliberate and consistent efforts should be made by NCDC to maintain the positive perception they have earned from the COVID-19 health communication campaign on social media. This will engender the reception of continuous positive attitude from public towards health communication campaigns on social media.

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