

**How to Cite:**

Nnabuiife, S. O. (2022). Perception of students on the usefulness of social media in dissemination of COVID-19 information in Anambra state. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, 6(S2), 10727–10746. <https://doi.org/10.53730/ijhs.v6nS2.7852>

# **Perception of students on the usefulness of social media in dissemination of COVID-19 information in Anambra state**

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**Abstract**---This study investigated students' perception on the usefulness of social media in dissemination of covid-19 information in Anambra state. The study made use of survey research method to study 381 respondents selected from three higher institutions in Anambra State – Nnamdi Azikiwe University (UNIZIK), Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University (COOU), Igbariam campus and Paul University, Awka. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the respondents studied. Four objectives of study formulated for this study are to ascertain Anambra State students' level of exposure to social media for seeking information on COVID-19 pandemic, ascertain the students' attitude towards use of social media for information on Covid-19 pandemic, find out the type of information on COVID-19 they mostly sought from social media, and to find out their perception on the role played by social media in disseminating information on COVID-19 pandemic. The study was anchored on the Uses and Gratifications Theory. The study found that students in Anambra state depended greatly on social media for Covid-19 information during the pandemic. They also had positive perception of social media as tools for managing information on the pandemic and they had specific information on the pandemic they sought from social media among which are information on policies and actions of government on the pandemic, knowledge about emerging trends on the pandemic, survivors and casualty figures, among others.

**Keywords**---COVID-19, social media, perception students.

## **Introduction**

Studies reveal that wrong information about COVID-19 brings about false hopes, creates fear, and make people to look down on scientifically backed suggestions on how to stop the spread of the virus such as social distancing, staying at home, proper washing of hands and making use of hand sanitizers (Beetseh, Olise &

Tor-Akwer, 2021). This exposes lives to danger with fake or unsubstantiated news about the pandemic, which also spreads more and more in the face of misinformation.

Studies show that mass media are promising channels for providing information about health that potentially influences behavior of audiences on a large scale (Xavier *et al.*, 2013; Liu, 2020). People get to know about breaking news on COVID-19 pandemic when it is convenient for them, look up facts when they are faced with uncertainties, and acquire information they use for health management through diverse ICTs including social networking platforms such as twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp, among others. The social media are channels and messaging apps very effective in dissemination of information. Social media as a concept was first coined by Tim O'Reilly and Dale Dougherty (Beetseh, Olise & Tor-Akwer, 2021). These social media platforms have been described as places for adding or editing information or a web which allows people to make use of digital tools to create, change and publish dynamic content (Okike, Terna & Beetseh, 2019; Tion, Ilo & Beetseh, 2019; Tor-Akwer, 2019). O'Reilly (2005) states that social media can be referred to as the network of platform that span all connected devices.

The Nigerian government made efforts primarily aimed at enlightening the public on trends concerning the COVID-19 pandemic in the country. Various media outlets were used in passing across these messages to the public. President of the country, Mohammadu Buhari established a Presidential Task Force (PTF) on COVID-19 saddled with the responsibility of managing the outbreak of disease nationwide. The PTF had the mandate to work together with the Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH) and the Nigerian Center for Disease Control (NCDC) with a view to implementing various initiatives and strategies that could help contain spread of COVID-19 (Oleribe, *et al.*, 2020). While FMOH and NCDC had the responsibility to implement strategies to track the epidemic, including developing management guidelines, engaging and training field workers, the PTF was saddled with the responsibility to manage local and international relationships, mobilize and manage resources, together with organizing weekly briefings of the President and the Federal Nigerian Government. At state and local government levels, similar COVID-19 structures were established but they were all answerable to the local State governments of the Nigerian Federation (Oleribe, *et al.*, 2020).

Social media played both positive and negative roles in managing information about COVID-19, especially at the outset of the pandemic. Despite the growth of and popularity of diverse digital channels and social networking sites as very useful tools for health information needs gratification among Nigerians, there is a paucity of studies that examined their impacts on behavioral outcomes in relation to management of COVID-19 information among students in Anambra state. It is based on this that this study investigated perception of students in Anambra state on the utilization of social media in managing COVID-19 information.

## Statement of Problem

Social media and networking sites constitute very essential channels of information disseminating among the public. Obi-Ani, Anikwenze and Isiani (2020) observe that with reference to the Nigerian situation, the social media pros and cons which make it possible for citizens to get information without impediments, yet misinforms them by circulating unverifiable and deceptive messages to them. Pazzanese (2020) observes that when an outbreak of disease gets the attention of people in the society, formal recommendations which come from medical experts tend to get muffled by several half-baked advice, remedies that are sketchy, and misguided theories which go into circulation, as people that are anxious make efforts to understand a new health risk. Such misinformation impedes success of efforts aimed at eradicating the disease. According to Obi-Ani (2020, p.4), the social media created “panic button” on the COVID-19 pandemic and this induced fear among the citizenry.

Baum *et al.*, (2020) ascertained after a study, that social media contributed to misinformation about COVID-19 during the pandemic. Their study concluded that this wrong information could in turn produce dire consequences which negatively influence individual behaviors and group attributions. According to Baum *et al.*; “Misperceptions, which can rapidly spread from obscurity to mass exposure via social media, may have the capacity to hinder the efficacy of public health efforts aimed at slowing the spread of the pandemic.” More worrisome is the fear that when people encounter false claims online, this may negatively affect their intention to get a COVID-19 vaccine or adhere to other preventive measures. Studies have been done in the area of public perception in Europe (Bol, Giani, Blais & Loewen, 2020) and the USA (Gollust, Nagler, & Fowler, 2020). Data gathered from information on such studies done could be made use of when coming up with plans, modifications and implementation of a meaningful response to epidemics presently and in the future, not just in Anambra state, but Nigeria in general. Since perception of the public and attitude of audience members are pertinent for success any health campaign, this study therefore aims to assess, document and evaluate students’ knowledge and perception of role played by the Social media in management of information about COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. Social media influence on information management during the COVID 19 pandemic in Anambra state has not ascertained to the best of this researcher’s knowledge. This study addressed an observed problem which is to ascertain the level and nature of influence social media had on management of COVID-19 information in Anambra State.

## Objectives of the Study

1. To ascertain the extent to which students in Anambra State used social media for seeking information on COVID-19 pandemic.
2. To ascertain the attitude of students in Anambra State towards use of social media for information on Covid-19 pandemic.
3. To find out the type of information on COVID-19 mostly sought from social media by students in Anambra State.
4. To find out the perception of students on the role played by social media in disseminating information on COVID-19 pandemic.

## Research Questions

1. To what extent did students in Anambra State use social media for seeking information on COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What is the attitude of students in Anambra State towards use of social media for information on Covid-19 pandemic?
3. What type of information on COVID-19 was mostly sought from social media by students in Anambra State?
4. What is the perception of students on the role played by social media in disseminating information on COVID-19 pandemic?

## Theoretical Framework

This study is premised on the Uses and Gratifications Theory. The Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&GT), also called Utility Theory, is based on the assumption which says that the reception of media content occurs in expectation of some rewards. According to Lariscy, Tinkham and Sweetser (2011), a major tenet of uses and gratifications theory is that people search and use specific media among others based on the ones that fulfill their needs and bring about ultimate gratifications. According to Agbanu (2013) this gave rise to the practice of selective exposure aimed at meeting the expectations.

Folarin (1998) says that Uses and Gratifications theory sees the recipients as actively influencing the effect process since they selectively choose, attend to, perceive and retain the media messages on the basis of their needs, beliefs, etc. The meaning of this is that audience members are very active, and decide on which media they would be exposed to, the channel of television to watch, the perception for any media message, and whether to remember or discard any message based on their desire or needs. Wimmer and Dominick (2006) observe that the uses and gratifications theory takes the view of a media consumer. This means that only the media consumer can determine what he wishes to use the media for. Also, this shows that the media have the option of doing their functions and the recipients are to have their own way in determining content consumption pattern.

Television news could be defined as the dissemination of current events through the medium of television. Television news is very image-based, showing video footage of many of the events that are reported; sometimes with still pictures (Obiakor & Nwabueze, 2019). That is to say that television news cannot exist without images or pictures. In relation to this work, students in Anambra state are exposed to social networking sites based on the gratifications they derive from such channels. It could be to get updates on news about the COVID-19 pandemic and how to prevent further spread of the disease. This underscores the significance of this study because if these students are exposed to misinformation about the pandemic which is peddled in any social networking site they are exposed to, such message will be detrimental to their well-being and ability to avoid contracting the disease.

## Health Information Acquisition and Preventive Behaviour

Health information is very essential in helping people take decisions on how to prevent contracting a disease, whether it is COVID-19 or other illnesses. Literacy is very relevant in facilitating good health, getting individuals empowered to be part of and take action in their own healthcare, leading to impact on health outcomes (Silva & Santos, 2021). According to Liu (2020), when COVID-19 health crisis occurs, providing timely and adequate information helps in keeping the public informed and assists in curbing future outbreak of the disease.

Furthermore, health literacy plays very essential roles in improving health and well-being, addressing health inequalities, and building individual and community resilience (Silva & Santos, 2021). Studies have revealed that there exists more than a bivariate association between health information acquisition and preventive behaviors (Norr, Capron & Schmidt, 2014; Liu, 2020). The cognitive-behavioral theory (CBT) is proposed with a view to articulating the cognitive process between life events and the way people respond to environmental cues (Gonzalez-Prendes & Resko, 2012). Specifically, the CBT suggests that illness-related information consumption is likely to cause worry or anxiety regarding someone's health (Hadjistavropoulos, *et. al.*, 1998; Salkovskis & Warwick, 1986). For instance, Norr, Capron, and Schmidt (2014) after a study revealed that people who have browsed medical Web sites and got information regarding certain disease symptoms showed higher levels of health anxiety. Someone getting health-related information could be experiencing a state of worry over falling sick and it is likely this is as a result of the nature of information being received. This is especially true in the information age when one considers the volume of health information that exists on-line (Liu, 2020). In order to reduce worry, there is this desire to search for double-assurance of good health like medical checking and adhering to good behaviour and disease prevention advice according to information received from the media (Hadjistavropoulos, *et. al.*, 1998; Liu, 2020).

There is limited research evidence which specifically links health behavior to health literacy but there are some other studies that have reported a relationship between general literacy level and substance use (Arnold *et al.*, 2001; Fredrickson *et al.*, 1995). There is the possibility based on empirical evidence that people who have lower health literacy are more likely to express negative health behaviors among which are smoking, drinking, illegal substances abuse, and adoption of sedentary lifestyle (Cho & Lee, 2008). It is conceivable that this attitude could result partly due to such persons' limited access to and their ability to make meaning out of health and medical information.

An understanding of health literacy shows it does not have to do with only basic skills but consists of the ability to engage in communication about health issues, and this depends on individual and systemic factors among which are beliefs, culture, education, and health services organization, which are based on healthcare needs and context demands (Silva & Santos, 2021). Health literacy makes it possible for people to opt for better health decisions and possess very strong commitment and efficiency levels that are very high (Santos, Sá, Couto, & Hespanhol, 2017). It has also been found that possession of low literacy is linked

to higher mortality and higher morbidity, including higher rates of depression, and very low willingness to adhere to medications, and this commonly correlates with absence of education, poverty, unemployment, and socioeconomic status that is low (Bennett, *et. al.*, 2009; Sheridan, *et. al.*, 2011; Berkman, *et. al.*, 2011; Hersh, Salzman & Snyderman, 2015).

### **COVID-19 Management Efforts in Nigeria**

With significant challenges posed by COVID-19 outbreak especially in the areas of public health, research and medical communities, what followed was introduction of governmental policies and processes aimed at curtailing the spread of the virus (Fauci, Lane, & Redfield, 2020). Among the introduced policies are restrictions on travel to different places and this led to dramatic drop in number of travellers, self distancing, self isolation, implantation of rules that quarantine international travellers, washing hands regularly and the use of face masks (Fauci, Lane, & Redfield, 2020; Van-Bavel, *et al.*, 2020; Raju, & Ayeb-Karlson, 2020). These policies came with economic implications which affected both developed and developing nations, such as Nigeria (Barnett-Howell & Mobarak, 2020; Oleribe, *et al.*, 2020).

Nigerian government also adopted and implemented most of these global policies but they did not consider their effectiveness and what they meant to the sociocultural climate of the nation. According to Barnett-Howell and Mobarak (2020), poor people are not as willing as rich people to make economic sacrifices, not because they have higher value for their means of livelihood than contracting COVID-19, but because they do not have the resources and social protections to isolate themselves and make sacrifices in the face of economic opportunities. The country came up with new policies, made new guidelines and standard operating procedures, and put together diverse committees including the National Emergency Organizing Committee and Presidential Task Force (PTF) to respond to the pandemic (Oleribe, *et al.*, 2020). There were donations from organizations in the private sector, health professional associations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and individuals all in a bid to complement governmental efforts at all levels (Oleribe, *et al.*, 2020).

Nigeria made vivid efforts to reduce the spread of Covid-19 by implementing immediate lockdown of high epicenters of Lagos, Ogun, and Abuja: and these are commercial and administrative centers of the country which had witnessed spike of coronavirus cases (Obi-Ani, *et al.*, 2021). At the state level, some governors also took proactive actions and closed their “borders” in a order to curb the spread of the virus. Among other strategies was prohibition of gatherings involving high number of people at churches, sports arenas and burials even as schools were shut down nationwide (Obi-Ani *et al.*, 2021). The success of these measures was not only because of existence proper healthcare facilities but also the role social media played in information dissemination during that time. Such channels as WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube came in handy as active tools used in disseminating information, communication and engagement between and among government and Nigerians. Social media also played negative roles as propaganda tools in disclosing news and information mostly premised on assumptions and speculations (Obi-Ani, 2020).

## **Social Media and COVID-19 Information Management**

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic across the world, large number of data emerge on daily basis from numerous official and non-official sources in a bid to keep the public informed (Abel & McQueen, 2020). There have been diverse reactions, comments and explanations from experts and opinion makers which were disseminated through the media. According to Silva and Santos (2021), information on COVID-19 became saturated and this made it difficult to distinguish between correct and wrong information, making it possible for misconceptions and wrong beliefs to be introduced mostly under the cover of scientific presentations. Evidence shows that the way people in different parts of the world access information has changed over the years. The popular option for the younger population is use of internet which has substituted the mainstream media as the preferred source of mass information, with easily accessible and comprehensive content (Santos & Silva, 2021).

Sulaiman, Adeyemi and Ayegun, (2020) observe that dissemination of fake news sparked off unnecessary panic, fear, distraction and tension in Nigeria, particularly during the time COVID-19 pandemic initially broke out worldwide. They argue that during this troubling time it very essential to spread information and news with a view to enlightening people to keep them abreast of the latest concerning the disease. But what happened during that period was that many people spread inaccurate and unverifiable news about the pandemic (Sulaiman, Adeyemi & Ayegun, 2020). Many people did not go the extra mile to confirm whether COVID-19 related information received through the media, especially social media, were true due to their quest to be informed about the disease. This information behaviour constituted a hallmark which probably influenced the spread of fake news and misinformation during the pandemic (Sulaiman, Adeyemi & Ayegun, 2020).

The popularity of social media has grown over the years as one of the most used sources of information across the world. Abd-Alrazaq et al. (2020) state that social media is treated as a tool for driving of economic growth based on its use for disseminating information about innovations, digitalization, and IT development. However, this growth of social media has also increased the spread of fake, including vague news especially during the global pandemic (Yas et al., (2021). Social media have also contributed immensely in mitigating psychological effects of the virus because these platforms provide communication networks (Yas et al., 2021). As the pandemic grew, physical movement and communication gradually became difficult which meant that families and friends became isolated from each other. This was the point social media have become essential as primary source of information for most people across the world. People relied on social media to get expert opinions, virtual conversations, and information about the COVID-19 ailment and this was very helpful information management strategy during that period (Yas et al., 2021).

## **Research Method**

The survey research method was used for this study. This research design helped in eliciting data from users of social networking sites among students in Anambra

on their perception of these platforms in management of COVID-19 related information. Anambra state constituted the area of study of this research work. Students in this state who use social networking platforms were the focus of this study. Facebook users were identified using the purposive sampling technique. The students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University (UNIZIK), Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University (COOU), Igbariam Campus, and Paul's University, Awka were selected for the study. This selection was based on the discretion of the researcher and the fact that one federal, one state, and one private university in the state were selected for study.

The population of this study was made up of students of the three universities selected for study. The population breakdown shows that Nnamdi Azikiwe University has 34,432 students, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University (COOU), Igbariam Campus has 14,322 students while Paul University, Awka has 4,232 students (Academic Planning Unit of the three schools, 2021). The total population is 51,342. Given the large number of the population of study, a sample size of 381 respondents was used. It was determined using Cozby's (2004) table of sample size determination which states that at  $\pm 0.05$  error margin, a population of 50,000 will have a sample of 381. Thus, the sample size for this study is 381 respondents. The proportionate allocation procedure was used to determine the number of persons to be studied in university. Proportionate allocation is a procedure used in dividing a sample among sub-samples in a stratified sample survey such that sub-samples that have large numbers of units in their populations would receive more sample, whereas small strata receive less sample. It then follows that UNIZIK got 197, COOU got 121 and Paul University got 63.

The study adopted the stratified sampling technique to separate the students into three universities – COOU, UNIZIK, and Paul University. The purposive sampling technique, otherwise known as judgmental sampling was used in identifying the respondents that were studied. This was done first, by ensuring that respondents are students of the selected schools for study. Next was to ensure that these selected respondents have social media accounts which they visited frequently. Then the researcher ensured that the respondents were exposed to COVID-19 related information on social networking sites. The researcher used a structured questionnaire to elicit responses covering the demographic and psychographic details required. Two research assistants were recruited by the researcher to help with the study. The assistants are graduates of Mass Communication resident in the state capitals where the study was carried out. This made it easier for the researcher to be in touch with the respondents. The assistants were part of the administration of the copies of the questionnaire to the respective state capitals to be studied.

## **Findings**

The data were presented and analysed using frequency tables, simple percentages, and mean scores. Copies of a questionnaire were administered to 381 respondents. A total of 372 copies were returned and found usable, representing 97% return rate.



Table 1: Questionnaire Distribution and Return

School	No. Distributed	No. Returned
UNIZIK	197	191
COOU	121	118
Paul University	63	63
Total	381	372

Table1 above shows that out of 197 copies of a questionnaire distributed in UNIZIK, 191 were returned; 118 out of 121 copies distributed in COOU were returned, all the copies distributed in Paul University (53) were returned and found useable. The demographic factors considered relevant for this study are age, gender, marital status and educational level of respondents. These data which are presented here provided detailed description of respondents.

Data show that 78 respondents (21%) were aged 18-25, 105 of them (28%) were aged 26-35, 96 of them (26%) were between 36-45 years, 65 (19%) between 46-55 years old, while 24 (7%) were 56 years and above. This shows the age range of respondents was evenly spread to accommodate different categories of people in terms of age. Also, 139 of the respondent (37%) are male while 233 (63%) are female. It further shows that 29 respondents (8%) had no formal education, 43 (12%) had primary education, 119 (31%) had secondary education, while 181 (49%) had tertiary education. In terms of marital status, 245 (66%) of respondents are single while 127 (34%) are married.

### Answers to Research Questions

The researcher formulated four research questions for this study. The findings are presented below.

Research Question 1: What is Anambra State students' level of exposure to social media for seeking information on COVID-19 pandemic?

Table 2: Responses on Level of level of exposure to social media for Information on Covid-19 Pandemic

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Very Often	109	29
Often	157	41
Sometimes	70	10
Rarely	14	4
Very Rarely	22	6
Total	372	

## Field survey 2022

Table 4.3 shows 29 percent of respondents (n=109) were exposed to social media to seek information on Covid-19 pandemic very often, 41 percent (n=157) did so often, 10 percent (n=70) did so sometimes, 4 percent (n=14) did so rarely while 6 percent (n=22) did so very often. These findings show that most respondents were well exposed to social media to seek information on Covid-18 pandemic as majority of them did so often and very often.

Research Question 2: What is the attitude of students in Anambra State towards use of social media for information on Covid-19 pandemic? Table 4 contains data generated based on this research question.

Table 3: Mean Distribution of Responses on attitude towards use of Social Media for Seeking Information on Covid-19

S/N	What is your attitude towards use of Social media for seeking on Covi-19 pandemic?	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Total
Mean							
1	I believe information on COVID-19	127	110	37	73	25	
372	3.7						
	From social media	(635)	(440)	(111)	(146)	(25)	
	(1357)						
2	I don't believe information on	23	58	107	96	88	
372	2.6						
	COVID-19	(175)	(76)	(261)	(162)	(150)	
	(824)						
3	I see it as a waste of time	35	19	87	81	150	
372	2.2						
		(710)	(544)	(135)	(48)	(25)	
	(1462)						
4	I skip such information when I see them	19	46	85	124	98	
372	2.4						
	on social media	(95)	(184)	(255)	(248)	(98)	
	(880)						
5	I see it as a great idea	62	180	59	39	12	
372	3.5						
		(310)	(720)	(177)	(78)	(12)	
	(1207)						
6.	I share most of the information on	142	136	45	24	25	
372	3.9						
	Covid-19 I get from social media	(175)	(76)	(261)	(162)	(150)	
	(824)						

Table 3 shows that the first item had a mean score of 3.7 indicating that believe information on Covid-19 they get from social media. The second item indicated a mean score of 2.6 which indicates that respondents do not agree with the statement that they “don’t believe” the information on Covid-19 they get from social media. The third item has a mean score of 2.2 showing that respondents don’t see information on social media about Covid-19 as a waste of time. The fourth item has a mean score of 2.4 showing that respondents don’t skip such information when they see it on social media. The fifth item has a mean score of 3.5 indicating that respondents see use of social media as means of getting information on Covid-19 as a great idea. The sixth item has a mean score of 3.9 showing that respondents share most of the information on Covid-19 they get from social media. In all, the findings on this research question indicate that respondents have a positive attitude towards use of social media for Covid-19 information needs gratification.

Research Question 3: What type of information on COVID-19 was mostly sought from social media by students in Anambra State?

Table 4: Mean Distribution of type of information on COVID-19 was mostly sought from social media by students in Anambra State

S/N	What type of programme influences	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Total
Mean	To engage in binge viewing?						
1	Prevention measures	127	110	37	73	25	
372	3.7	(635)	(440)	(111)	(146)	(25)	
							(1357)
2	Update on pandemic (number of	118	132	80	23	19	
372	3.8	(590)	(528)	(240)	(46)	(19)	
	casualties, survivors, etc.)						(1423)
3	Government policies and announcements	146	103	45	51	29	
372	3.8	(730)	(412)	(135)	(102)	(29)	
	on the pandemic						(1408)
4	Knowledge about the virus	115	106	81	51	31	372
3.7		(575)	(424)	(243)	(102)	(31)	
							(1375)
5	Public reactions to the pandemic	72	59	171	66	16	
372	3.4	(360)	(236)	(515)	(132)	(16)	
							(1259)
6.	No specific information	31	41	87	86	127	

372	2.4	(155)	(164)	(261)	(172)	(127)
(879)						

Table 4 shows the mean score for the type of Covid-19 information respondents seek from social media. The table shows that the first item had a mean score of 3.7 indicating that they sought information on preventive measures of Covid-19. The second item indicated a mean score of 3.8 which indicates that they sought for update on the pandemic such as casualty rates and survivors of the disease. The third item has a mean score of 3.8 showing that they sought information on government policies and announcements on Covid-19 pandemic. The fourth item has a mean score of 3.7 showing that they sought information about knowledge of the virus. The fifth item has a mean score of 3.4 indicating that they sought information on public reaction about the pandemic. The sixth item has a mean score of 2.4 showing that they did not agree with the statement that they did not have any specific information they were looking for on social media about Covid-19 pandemic. In all, the data gathered on this research question showed that respondents had specific information they sought from social media about the Covid-19 pandemic and this information ranged from casualty rats, knowledge of the pandemic, to government policies and announcement on the pandemic.

Research Question 4: What is the perception of students on the role played by social media in disseminating information on COVID-19 pandemic?

Table 5: Mean Distribution of Responses on the Role Social Media Played in Disseminating Information on Covid-19 Pandemic

S/N	What is your perception of the role	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Total
Mean	Social media played in disseminating information on Covid-19 pandemic?						
1.	It helped inform the public on trends	123	119	75	50	17	
372	3.9		(615)	(476)	(225)	(100)	(17)
(1433)	about the virus						
2.	It was used to effectively manage	98	96	115	51	24	372
3.6	Information on Covid-19	(490)	(384)	(345)	(102)	(24)	(1345)
3.	It did a bad job by creating panic,	86	127	96	57	18	
372	3.7	(430)	(508)	(288)	(114)	(18)	
(1358)	panic, spreading misinformation and						
	fake news on the Covid-19 pandemic						
4.	It made it difficult for government	21	70	70	91	132	372
2.4	and health agencies to fight the spread	(105)	(280)	(210)	(182)	(132)	(909)
	of the pandemic.						

Table 5 shows the mean score for respondents' perception on role social media played in managing information on Covid-19 pandemic. The table shows that the first item had a mean score of 3.9 indicating that respondents believe that social media helped to inform the public on trends about Covid-19 pandemic. The second item indicated a mean score of 3.6 which indicates that respondents believe that social media was used to effectively manage information on Covid-19 pandemic. The third item indicated a mean score of 3.7 which shows that respondents believe that social media created panic by spreading misinformation and fake news about the pandemic. The fourth item indicated a mean score of 2.4 showing that respondents do not agree that social media made it difficult for government and health agencies to fight the spread of the pandemic. A summary of data from this research question shows that respondents generally believe that social media did a good job in managing information on the pandemic though they also think that at some point this social media platform created panic through fake news that affected the management of the pandemic.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The first research objective aimed at ascertaining Anambra State students' level of exposure to social media for seeking information on COVID-19 pandemic. Data revealed that respondents were well exposed to social media for information on Covid-19 pandemic and they did so frequently. People definitely received gratification of Covid-19 information needs through exposure to social media as the data reveal. Just as the Uses and Gratifications theory posits, media audience members actively use the media to gratify their own needs and motivations (McQuail, 2005; Agbanu, 2013; David, 2016). According to Ahmad & Murad (2020), people relied on social media for diverse information including COVID-19 information during the pandemic. These assertions are in support of the finding of this study in relation to the first objective which support that respondents relied on social media for Covid-19 information.

The second research objective aimed at ascertaining the attitude of students in Anambra State towards use of social media for information on Covid-19 pandemic. The findings showed that the respondents had positive attitude towards use of this social media platform in managing Covid-19 information as they saw it as a way of spreading knowledge and awareness of the pandemic. Emanuel et al., (2020) observe that social media and other social networking sites have played enormous roles in different ways especially in managing Covid-19 information. According to them, among the most relevant characteristics of social media platforms during the pandemic was been the rapid dissemination of protocols at regional, national, and international levels. This also reflects why students in Anambra had positive attitude towards Covid-19 information on Facebook. Yas et al (2021) after a study also found that many people relied on social media for information on Covid-19 during the pandemic. This also lends support to this finding of the present study and shows why respondents had positive perception of social media as an information source on the pandemic.

The third objective of study aimed to ascertain the type of information on COVID-19 mostly sought from social media by students in Anambra State. Data generated based on this objective revealed that students went to social media to

specifically look for information on government policies and announcements on the pandemic, casualty rate, survivors, and such other updates on the pandemic that will keep them aware and alert. It goes to show how they relied heavily on social media for vital information on the pandemic.

This supports the Uses and Gratifications theory which primarily states that people choose specific media based on the gratifications they derived from such channels (Folarin, 1998; Agbanu, 2013), in this case social media. As McQuail (2010) observes, there is an intentional decision by the audience to choose which medium to use to satisfy their information needs and this is based on which one would help them become more knowledgeable, have relaxation experience through diversion and social interactions. In this case, students in Anambra State intentionally went to social media for Covid-19 related information during the pandemic. Michailina, Masouras and Papademetriou (2015) further state that social media make it possible to overcome physical boundaries and create new interactive ways through organized online communities. The fourth objective of study investigated the perception of students on the role played by social media in disseminating information on COVID-19 pandemic. Data revealed that respondents

had a positive perception of social media role in information management during the pandemic. They said this platform helped in effectively managing information on the virus, creating awareness and keeping people abreast of trends about the pandemic, though they noted that social media was also used in spreading misinformation about the pandemic. On the issue of spread of fake news on the pandemic through social media, Sulaiman, Ayegun and Adeyemi (2020) posit that the use of social media to disseminate information during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria constituted a major concern due to increased misinformation and fake news which these platforms facilitated. Despite this development, students in Anambra state still gave a pass mark to social media in management of Covid-19 information as this platform was used to create awareness on the pandemic.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusion has been drawn on the perception of students on the usefulness of social media in dissemination of covid-19 information in Anambra state; Students in Anambra state were well exposed to social media for information on Covid-19 pandemic and they did so frequently. Students in Anambra state had positive attitude towards use of this social media platform in managing Covid-19 information as they saw it as a way of spreading knowledge and awareness of the pandemic. Students in Anambra state went to social media specifically to search for information on government policies and announcements on the pandemic, casualty rate, survivors, and such other updates on the pandemic that will keep them aware and alert. It goes to show how they relied heavily on social media for vital information on the pandemic.

Exposure to information on social media about Covid-19 greatly influenced Anambra state students' attitude towards the pandemic. As was found in the

field, such information made them more alert and careful, though a lot of fake news was also disseminated online. Students in Anambra state had a positive perception of social media role in information management during the pandemic. They said this platform helped in effectively managing information on the virus, creating awareness and keeping people abreast of trends about the pandemic, though they noted that social media was also used in spreading misinformation about the pandemic. Social media remain very vital tools in dissemination and management of health information as seen during the Covid-19 pandemic. This explains why organizations have increased their use of social media to enhance their online presence, convince the public to develop interest in their organizations, and create relationships with online community in the interest of their establishment. The relationship developed through social media does not only bring potential and actual customers close to the organization but also helps organizations to acquire information about the market trends, customer's needs and wants.

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