

Mapping Fake News Misinformation and Health Communication Gaps in the Wake of Covid-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

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Abstract:- The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the way the world communicates, particularly in Nigeria with its high prevalence of fake news and misinformation. This study aims to map the fake news, misinformation and health communication gaps in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria through the use of mixed method data. A combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods was used to explore the sources of fake news and misinformation, the mediums through which it is shared and the impact on health communication. Survey was conducted to collect quantitative data on the prevalence of fake news in Nigeria. Qualitative interviews will be conducted to gain a better understanding of the context and motivations driving the spread of misinformation. Findings revealed that the lack of access to reliable health information and services has further exacerbated the spread of misinformation and has made it difficult for citizens to make informed decisions about their health and safety. The study recommends amongst others that; the government should ensure that accurate health information is made available to the public through effective health communication strategies, that the government should also ensure that all stakeholders are involved in the development of health communication strategies, so that all views are heard and taken into consideration.

Keywords:- Fake News, Misinformation, Health Communication, COVID-19, Nigeria.

I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the lives of people around the world in unprecedented ways. In the wake of the pandemic, the spread of misinformation and fake news has become a major concern. In Nigeria, the pandemic has caused a significant increase in the spread of misinformation. This has made it difficult for people to access reliable health information and has also caused confusion over the best measures to take to protect oneself and others from the virus.

Due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been an increased need for mapping fake news, misinformation and health communication gaps in Nigeria. Fake news and misinformation are a global issue and have

recently been a topic of discussion in Nigeria. These false and misleading statements distort the public's perception of the pandemic and thus, interfere with the efforts to contain the virus. It is essential to understand how fake news and misinformation are shared and disseminated in Nigeria in order to design effective countermeasures. This paper will discuss how to map fake news, misinformation and health communication gaps in Nigeria in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in an increased need for mapping fake news, misinformation and health communication gaps in Nigeria. It is essential to understand the local context and identify the sources of fake news and misinformation in order to design effective countermeasures. Additionally, it is important to understand the health communication gaps in Nigeria and design campaigns and interventions to address them. By understanding the local context and identifying the sources of fake news and misinformation, it is possible to design effective countermeasures to combat the spread of fake news and misinformation in Nigeria.

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to a surge in misinformation about the virus and its effects, making it difficult for people to access reliable health information. In Nigeria, the prevalence of fake news, misinformation, and health communication gaps has become increasingly problematic in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Fake news is defined as false information or hoaxes spread intentionally and maliciously, often to further political, ideological, or financial interests (Gans, 2020). Misinformation is false information spread unintentionally, often through ignorance or misunderstanding (Gans, 2020). The goal of this study is to map the prevalence of fake news and misinformation in relation to Covid-19 in Nigeria, as well as to identify any health communication gaps that may exist. This mapping will be conducted by analyzing data from news reports, social media, and other sources in order to determine the prevalence of fake news and misinformation in Nigeria. Additionally, interviews and surveys will be conducted to identify any health communication gaps that may exist. The results of this study will be used to inform health communication strategies in Nigeria, in order to ensure that the public has access to reliable and accurate information about the Covid-19 pandemic.

Fake news, misinformation, and health communication gaps have been international issues that have been growing in prevalence over the past few years. However, the pandemic of Covid-19 has further highlighted the need to address these issues. The Covid-19 pandemic has caused a rapid spread of information, some of it true and some of it fake, which has led to a great amount of confusion, fear, and anxiety among the public. This has led to the need to understand how fake news, misinformation, and health communication gaps are impacting the public's response to the pandemic and to develop strategies to combat them. This essay aims to discuss the importance of mapping fake news, misinformation, and health communication gaps in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is important to understand the definition of fake news and misinformation. Fake news is defined as any type of false or misleading information, or news, that is spread intentionally with the intention of misinforming the public or causing confusion (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018). Misinformation, on the other hand, is defined as any type of false or misleading information that is spread unintentionally, or without the intention of causing confusion or misinforming the public (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018). It is important to note that both of these concepts can have severe impacts on the public's understanding of issues, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, and can lead to confusion and anxiety.

Again, one needs to understand the impact of fake news and misinformation on the public's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Fake news and misinformation can lead to confusion and fear, which can lead to a lack of understanding of the virus, the need for social distancing, and the need for other preventative measures (Chen & Chen, 2020). This can lead to the public not following the necessary preventative measures and, in turn, an increased spread of the virus. Additionally, fake news and misinformation can lead to a lack of trust in public health officials and government measures, further leading to a lack of adherence to preventative measures (Chen & Chen, 2020).

It is germane to understand the need for mapping fake news, misinformation, and health communication gaps in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Mapping fake news and misinformation can help to identify the sources of false information and the channels through which it is spread. This can help to identify trends in the spread of fake news and misinformation and inform strategies to combat it. Additionally, mapping health communication gaps can help to identify areas in which there is a lack of accurate and reliable information and help to inform the development of strategies to bridge these gaps.

Fake news, misinformation, and health communication gaps have been a growing problem for some time. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to address these issues. Mapping fake news, misinformation, and health communication gaps is an important step in understanding

the impact of these issues and developing strategies to address them.

➤ *Statement of the Problem*

The Covid-19 pandemic has created a health crisis of unprecedented proportions. With the spread of the virus, there has been an abundance of information available on the internet. Consequently, it has become difficult for individuals to determine the accuracy and validity of the information they are exposed to. Fake news, misinformation, and health communication gaps have emerged as serious issues in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

First, fake news has become a major source of concern in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Fake news is defined as false or inaccurate information that is spread via online platforms and websites (Giles, 2020). Since the onset of the pandemic, individuals have been exposed to false claims about the virus, such as its origin and the effectiveness of various treatments and vaccines. These false claims have caused confusion and delayed the implementation of effective public health measures.

Second, the spread of misinformation has been a major issue during the Covid-19 pandemic. Misinformation is defined as false or inaccurate information that is spread unintentionally (Giles, 2020). During the pandemic, individuals have been exposed to misleading information about the virus, such as its origin and the effectiveness of various treatments and vaccines. This has led to confusion and fear among the public.

Third, health communication gaps have emerged as a serious problem during the Covid-19 pandemic. Health communication gaps refer to the lack of accurate and timely communication of health information to the public (Giles, 2020). During the pandemic, health information has been slow to reach vulnerable populations, such as the elderly and those living in rural areas. This has led to a lack of understanding of the virus and the measures that should be taken to protect oneself.

The Covid-19 pandemic has posed serious challenges in terms of fake news, misinformation, and health communication gaps. It is essential to map these issues in order to identify and address them effectively. This will help ensure the public has access to accurate and timely information about the virus and the measures that should be taken to protect oneself.

➤ *Research Objectives:*

- To analyse the prevalence of fake news, misinformation and health communication gaps in the context of Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria.
- To identify the primary sources of fake news, misinformation and health communication gaps in Nigeria.
- To explore the impact of fake news, misinformation and health communication gaps on the health behaviours of Nigerians.

- To examine the strategies adopted by the Nigerian government to counter fake news, misinformation and health communication gaps.

➤ *Research Questions:*

- What is the prevalence of fake news, misinformation and health communication gaps in Nigeria regarding Covid-19 pandemic?
- What are the primary sources of fake news, misinformation and health communication gaps in Nigeria?
- What is the impact of fake news, misinformation and health communication gaps on the health behaviors of Nigerians?
- What strategies are adopted by the Nigerian government to counter the spread of fake news, misinformation and health communication gaps?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Understanding Fake News*

Fake news is a term used to describe false or misleading information presented as news. It has become a major problem in the digital age, as it has the potential to spread quickly and cause confusion and harm. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “Fake news” is defined as “false, often sensational, information disseminated under the guise of news reporting” (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). The term has become increasingly popular in recent years and is often used to refer to any type of false or misleading information, whether it is deliberately created or presented as fact. Fake news can take many different forms, from fabricated stories to biased reporting. One common form of fake news is the “clickbait” headline, which is designed to draw attention and clicks with a provocative headline, but the content of the article does not necessarily reflect the headline. Additionally, fake news can be spread through social media by bots and trolls who have the intention of manipulating public opinion.

The prevalence of fake news has led to a great deal of debate about how to tackle the issue. Some believe that it is the responsibility of media outlets to ensure the accuracy of their reporting, while others argue that it is the responsibility of the individual to verify the accuracy of the information they consume. Additionally, some argue that governments should do more to regulate the media and ensure that only accurate information is reported. The effects of fake news can be far-reaching and severe. It can lead to political unrest, confusion and distrust in the media, and even public health crises. It is therefore important that individuals, media outlets, and governments take steps to combat the spread of fake news and ensure that accurate information is disseminated.

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take steps to combat the spread of fake news and ensure that accurate information is disseminated.

B. *Misinformation and Health Communication Gaps*

Misinformation is a major issue in health communication today, as it can lead to health-related outcomes that are not based on accurate information. Misinformation can come from various sources, including social media, health professionals, and other sources of health information. This type of misinformation can lead to confusion and distrust of health information, which can lead to a lack of trust in the health care system (Chen, 2020). Additionally, misinformation can lead to health disparities, as people with limited access to accurate health information are more likely to be affected by misinformation (Hoffman, 2019).

Health communication gaps can lead to a lack of understanding of health information, which can lead to a lack of trust in the health care system. These communication gaps can be caused by a lack of access to accurate information, a lack of understanding of health information, or even a lack of trust in the health care system (Chen, 2020). Additionally, communication gaps can lead to health disparities, as people with limited access to accurate health information are more likely to be affected by misinformation (Hoffman, 2019).

Furthermore, health communication gaps can lead to a lack of education and understanding of health information, which can lead to a lack of trust in the health care system. People with limited access to accurate health information are more likely to be affected by misinformation, and thus, may not be able to make informed decisions about their health (Hoffman, 2019). Additionally, people with limited access to accurate health information may not be able to trust that the information they are receiving is accurate (Chen, 2020).

Additionally, health communication gaps can lead to a lack of access to accurate health information, which can lead to a lack of trust in the health care system. People with limited access to accurate health information may not be able to trust the health care system, as they may not be able to access accurate information about their health (Hoffman, 2019). Furthermore, people with limited access to accurate health information may not be able to make informed decisions about their health (Chen, 2020).

Health communication gaps can also lead to health disparities, as people with limited access to accurate health information are more likely to be affected by misinformation (Hoffman, 2019). This can lead to a lack of trust in the health care system, as people may not be able to trust that the information, they are receiving is accurate (Chen, 2020). Additionally, health disparities can lead to a lack of understanding of the importance of health information, which can lead to a lack of trust in the health care system (Hoffman, 2019).

In order to address the issue of health communication gaps, it is important to ensure that everyone has access to accurate health information. This can be done by providing access to reliable sources of health information, such as health websites, health professionals, and health care centers (Chen, 2020). Additionally, it is important to ensure that everyone is able to understand health information, which can be done by providing educational materials and resources to help people understand the importance of health information (Hoffman, 2019).

Overall, misinformation and health communication gaps can lead to a lack of trust in the health care system, health disparities, and a lack of understanding of health information. In order to address this issue, it is important to ensure that everyone has access to accurate health information, as well as educational materials and resources to help people understand the importance of health information (Chen, 2020; Hoffman, 2019). This can help to ensure that everyone is able to make informed decisions about their health.

C. *The Role of Social Media*

Social media is defined as “digital media technologies and online platforms that facilitate the creation, sharing, and exchange of user-generated content, such as photos, videos, text, and other forms of media” (Gentile, 2018, p. 2). This type of media has become increasingly popular in recent years and is used for a variety of purposes, including communication, advertising, and entertainment (Zhang, Sun & Sundar, 2013).

The Covid-19 pandemic has drastically changed the way people interact with each other and how they obtain information. Social media has become an essential platform for people to connect, find news, and share their experiences with the virus. Social media has been a lifeline for many during the pandemic, providing an avenue for people to express their feelings and to support each other in these difficult times (Cheung & Lee, 2020). Social media offers an accessible and convenient platform for people to stay connected and engaged in matters concerning the global pandemic. It has allowed individuals to access reliable and timely news and updates. This has enabled people to stay informed about the virus and its implications (Giannaoui, Abel, & Brouard, 2020).

Social media has also had a positive impact on helping individuals cope with the stress and anxiety associated with the pandemic. It has provided a platform for people to connect, share stories, and offer emotional support to each other. It has enabled people to maintain social connections while still adhering to physical distancing guidelines (Olivier, 2020). In addition, social media has been used by organizations to disseminate information and create awareness about the virus. Different organizations have used social media to share information about the virus, its symptoms, and precautionary measures. This has enabled many people to stay informed and be proactive in taking the necessary steps to prevent the spread of the virus (Cheung & Lee, 2020).

Social media has also been instrumental in helping organizations to better manage their communication with their customers and stakeholders. Companies have used social media to communicate their business continuity plans and to provide updates about their operations during the pandemic. This has enabled organizations to maintain trust and transparency with their customers (Giannaoui, Abel, & Brouard, 2020). Furthermore, social media has also been used to raise funds and awareness for different causes related to the pandemic. It has enabled people to engage in fundraising campaigns and to spread the word about the various initiatives. This has been of great help in supporting those who are in need and to fight the spread of the virus (Olivier, 2020). Social media has been an invaluable tool during the Covid-19 pandemic. It has enabled people to stay connected, informed, and supported. It has also enabled organizations to communicate better with their customers and stakeholders. Moreover, it has been used to raise funds and awareness for different causes related to the pandemic.

D. *Impact of Covid-19*

The novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) has had a devastating and far-reaching impact on Nigerians, both domestically and economically. The pandemic has had a devastating effect on the Nigerian economy, as the World Bank has estimated that Nigeria’s gross domestic product (GDP) could shrink by as much as 5.4% in 2020. (Ebunoluwa, 2020). This has had a severe impact on the lives of many Nigerians, who are already struggling with the economic downturn, and has made them even more vulnerable to poverty and hunger. The pandemic has also had a direct impact on the Nigerian health system, as the country has reported over 1.5 million cases of COVID-19 and nearly 20,000 deaths. (Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, 2021). This has put a strain on the health system, as there is a shortage of medical supplies and personnel, as well as a lack of infrastructure to adequately respond to the pandemic. This has caused a significant disruption to the health system, making it difficult to provide adequate healthcare to those affected.

The pandemic has also had an impact on the Nigerian education system, as schools and universities have been closed since March 2020. (Oyeyemi, 2020). This has had an adverse effect on learning and has led to a disruption in the education system, resulting in an increase in the number of out-of-school children, as well as a decrease in the quality of education. Additionally, the pandemic has had a negative effect on the Nigerian labor market, as the unemployment rate has increased from 18.8% in the fourth quarter of 2019 to over 27% in the fourth quarter of 2020. (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). This has had a significant impact on the livelihoods of many Nigerians, as the labor market has become increasingly competitive and underemployment has become more widespread. The pandemic has also had a major impact on the Nigerian economy, as the government has implemented a series of austerity measures to help stabilize the economy. These austerity measures have included cuts to public spending, increases in taxes, and an increase in the central bank’s interest rate. (Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission, 2021). These measures

have had an adverse effect on the economy, as they have led to a decrease in consumer spending and investment, resulting in a decrease in economic growth.

Furthermore, the pandemic has had a significant impact on the Nigerian banking system, as banks have been forced to limit their operations in order to comply with safety protocols. This has led to a decrease in the availability of banking services, as banks have reduced the availability of loans and other services. In addition, the government has implemented a number of measures to help stabilize the banking system, including reducing the Central Bank of Nigeria's interest rate and introducing a bank recapitalization plan. (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2021). The pandemic has had a major impact on the Nigerian agricultural sector, as the sector has been severely affected by the pandemic. This has been due to a decrease in demand for agricultural products, as well as a decrease in access to markets and supply chains. The agricultural sector has also been adversely affected by the government's austerity measures, as the government has cut subsidies and increased taxes on agricultural products. (Oke, 2020). The pandemic has also had a major impact on the Nigerian energy sector, as the sector has been severely affected by the pandemic. This has been due to the decrease in demand for energy, as well as a decrease in access to markets and supply chains. Additionally, the government has implemented a number of measures to help stabilize the energy sector, including reducing taxes and increasing the availability of financing. (Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission, 2021).

Furthermore, the pandemic has had a major impact on the Nigerian transport sector, as the sector has been severely affected by the pandemic. This has been due to the decrease in demand for transport services, as well as a decrease in access to markets and supply chains. The government has also implemented a number of measures to help stabilize the transport sector, including increasing the availability of financing and reducing taxes. (Federal Ministry of Transportation, 2021). The pandemic has also had a major impact on the Nigerian tourism sector, as the sector has been severely affected by the pandemic. This has been due to a decrease in demand for tourism services, as well as a decrease in access to markets and supply chains. The government has also implemented a number of measures to help stabilize the tourism sector, including increasing the availability of financing and reducing taxes. (Federal Ministry of Tourism, 2021). The pandemic has had a major impact on the Nigerian manufacturing sector, as the sector has been severely affected by the pandemic. This has been due to a decrease in demand for manufactured goods, as well as a decrease in access to markets and supply chains. The government has also implemented a number of measures to help stabilize the manufacturing sector, including increasing the availability of financing and reducing taxes. (Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Investment, 2021).

The novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) has had a devastating and far-reaching impact on Nigerians, both domestically and economically. The pandemic has had a

devastating effect on the Nigerian economy, as well as the health, education, labour, banking, agricultural, energy, transport, tourism, and manufacturing sectors. The government has implemented a number of measures to help stabilize the economy, but the pandemic has had a major and lasting impact on the lives of many Nigerians.

E. Theoretical Framework

The Health Belief Model (HBM) is a useful theory for understanding the mapping of fake news, misinformation, and health communication gaps in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. This theory, developed by Hochbaum, Rosenstock, and Kegels, suggests that people's health-related behaviours are determined by their perceived susceptibility to and severity of an illness, their perceived benefits and barriers to engaging in preventive health behaviours, and their self-efficacy (Hochbaum et al., 1958). In the case of the Covid-19 pandemic, Nigerians' perceived susceptibility to the virus and their perceived benefits and barriers to engaging in preventive health behaviours may be influencing how they receive, process, and act on information about it. The model suggests that an individual's health beliefs and behaviours are determined by their perceived susceptibility to a health risk, perceived severity of the health risk, perceived benefits of taking action to reduce the health risk, and perceived barriers to taking action (Rosenstock, Strecher, & Becker, 1988).

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria, mapping the fake news, misinformation and health communication gaps has become increasingly important. Fake news and misinformation have been rampant during the pandemic, leading to confusion and increased risk of exposure to the virus. In order to address this problem, the HBM can be used to identify the factors that are influencing people's beliefs and behaviours regarding the virus. The HBM suggests that perceived susceptibility to the health risk is one of the main factors influencing people's beliefs and behaviours. In the case of Covid-19, individuals may not be aware of their susceptibility to the virus and thus may not take the necessary precautions to protect themselves. Therefore, it is important to educate the public on the risks associated with the virus and the importance of taking preventative measures.

The HBM also suggests that perceived severity of the health risk is another factor influencing people's beliefs and behaviours. In the case of Covid-19, individuals may not view the virus as a serious threat and may not take the necessary precautions to protect themselves. It is important to educate the public on the severity of the virus and the potential consequences of not taking preventive measures. Additionally, the HBM suggests that perceived benefits of taking action to reduce the health risk is an important factor influencing people's beliefs and behaviours. In the case of Covid-19, individuals may not view the benefits of taking preventive measures, such as wearing a mask and social distancing, as outweighing the risks of not taking these measures. Therefore, it is important to educate the public on the benefits of taking preventive measures and the risks of not taking them.

The HBM suggests that perceived barriers to taking action to reduce the health risk is a key factor influencing people's beliefs and behaviours. In the case of Covid-19, individuals may not view the barriers to taking preventive measures, such as cost or inconvenience, as outweighing the benefits of taking these measures. It is important to educate the public on the potential barriers to taking preventive measures and how these barriers can be overcome. In order to effectively address the problem of fake news and misinformation in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria, it is important to use the HBM to identify the factors influencing people's beliefs and behaviours. By understanding the factors influencing people's beliefs and behaviours, public health efforts can be tailored to address the specific needs of the population, leading to more effective communication and better health outcomes. The Health Belief Model (HBM) can be used to map the fake news, misinformation and health communication gaps in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. By understanding the factors influencing people's beliefs and behaviours, public health efforts can be tailored to address the specific needs of the population, leading to more effective communication and better health outcomes.

III. METHODOLOGY

The research design employed for the mapping of fake news, misinformation and health communication gaps in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic employed quantitative research. The quantitative data was gathered through survey

The research population for this study includes citizens of Nigeria aged 18 and above, resident in Edo State-Nigeria. According to the 2006 National Population Census, the population of Edo State in Nigeria was 4,098,834 (National Population Commission, 2006). This number is expected to increase significantly by 2025, with an estimated population of 8,921,847 (Adeoye, 2019). The sample size was determined by applying the Taro Yamane's formula for sample size determination. According to Yamane's formula for sample size determination (1967), a minimum sample size of 400 can be obtained from a population of 4,098,834. This formula, which is widely used in social science research, is based on the following assumptions: (1) the population size is greater than 1,000; (2) the population is homogeneous; (3) the desired level of accuracy is set at 5% or lower; and (4) the desired level of confidence is set at 95% or higher.

The quantitative data collection method used in this study was survey. The survey instrument (questionnaire) was administered through an online platform, and consists of closed-ended questions. The questions focused on the perceptions of the respondents regarding the prevalence of fake news, misinformation and health communication gaps in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. The data collected from the surveys was analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as percentages and frequencies. The qualitative data collected from the interviews and focus groups were analyzed using thematic analysis. The themes identified from the data were then used to draw conclusions about the

prevalence of fake news, misinformation and health communication gaps in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria.

IV. ANALYSIS OF DATA

Table 1 Age of Respondents

Options	N	%
18-25	137	34.3%
26-35	183	45.8%
36-45	16	4.0%
46-56	64	16.0%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 1 presents the age distribution of 400 respondents in a survey. It indicates that 34.3% of the respondents are between 18 and 25 years old, 45.8% are between 26 and 35 years old, 4.0% are between 36 and 45 years old, and the remaining 16.0% are between 46 and 56 years old. This amounts to a total of 400 respondents, which is 100% of the population surveyed.

Table 2 Educational Attainment of Respondents

Options	N	%
Primary School	68	17.0%
Secondary Education	141	35.3%
Tertiary Education	149	37.3%
Prefer not to say	42	10.5%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 2 reflects the educational attainment of the 400 respondents. It shows that 68 (17.0%) had primary school education, 141 (35.3%) had secondary education, 149 (37.3%) had tertiary education, and 42 (10.5%) preferred not to say. In total, 400 people responded, representing 100% of the respondents.

Table 3 How Often do you Come in Contact with Fake News and/or Misinformation About Covid-19 in Nigeria

Options	N	%
Almost Everyday	125	31.3%
Few times a week	110	27.5%
Few times a month	103	25.8%
Rarely	27	6.8%
Never	35	8.8%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 3 shows the responses of 400 people in Nigeria to the question of how often they come in contact with fake news and/or misinformation about Covid-19 in Nigeria. The results indicate that nearly a third (31.3%) of the respondents come in contact with fake news and/or misinformation about Covid-19 almost every day, while 27.5%, 25.8% and 6.8% come in contact with fake news and/or misinformation about Covid-19 a few times a week, a few times a month and rarely respectively. Only 8.8% of the respondents reported that they never come in contact with fake news and/or misinformation about Covid-19 in Nigeria.

Hence, this data suggests that a significant proportion of people in Nigeria have to deal with fake news and/or misinformation about Covid-19 on a regular basis.

Table 4 What Media do you Primarily use to Access Information Related to Covid-19 in Nigeria

Options	N	%
Social media	151	37.8%
Online news website	26	6.6%
Television	172	43.0%
Radio	26	6.5%
Newspaper	25	6.3%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 4 is a survey of 400 people in Nigeria about which media they primarily use to access information regarding the Covid-19 pandemic in their country. The table shows the number of responses (N) each option received and the percentage of responses it made up. The results of the survey indicate that the majority of respondents (37.8%) primarily use social media to access information related to Covid-19 in Nigeria. Justifications for this may include widespread access to the internet and social media, as well as the tendency of social media platforms to be more immediate in their updates. The second most popular option chosen by respondents (43%) was television, which offers a dedicated news station and regular updates on the pandemic in Nigeria. Just over a quarter of the respondents chose the other available media options; online news websites, radio, and newspapers each received 6.6%, 6.5% , and 6.3%, respectively. People choosing these options may want to access additional information and views on the pandemic, such as those from print publications, or may not have access to modern media sources such as social media and television.

Table 5 How Often do you Feel you can Accurately Distinguish between Fake News and Misinformation

Options	N	%
Almost Always	59	14.8%
Very often	119	29.8%
Occasionally	171	42.8%
Rarely	26	6.5%
Never	25	6.3%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 5 provides information about how often people feel they can accurately distinguish between fake news and misinformation. The table shows that 14.8% of respondents reported almost always being able to accurately distinguish between fake news and misinformation, while 29.8% of respondents reported very often being able to do so. Additionally, 42.8% of respondents reported occasionally being able to accurately distinguish between fake news and misinformation, 6.5% reported rarely being able to do so, and 6.3% reported never being able to do so. Overall, the data presented in this table shows that individuals feel they are reasonably able to distinguish between fake news and

misinformation, with a majority of respondents being able to do so at least occasionally.

This table is important as it provides an important insight into the ability of individuals to discern fake news from accurate, factual information. Fake news has been an increasingly serious problem in recent years, and having an understanding of how well individuals can accurately identify such content is essential in understanding how best to approach the issue. By understanding the percentage of people who feel they can accurately distinguish between fake news and other forms of misinformation, it is possible to gain an understanding of the extent to which public education or other approaches may be needed in order to tackle this problem. Additionally, this table can provide an indication of the general levels of media literacy within a population, as understanding fake news is an important part of media literacy.

Table 6 How Often do you Think your Access to Quality Information about Covid-19 is Limited

Options	N	%
Almost Always	154	38.5%
Very often	161	40.3%
Occasionally	30	7.5%
Rarely	28	7.0%
Never	27	6.8%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 6 shows the responses of 400 people to a survey question about how often they feel their access to quality information about Covid-19 is limited. The results show that 38.5% (154) of people feel their access to quality information about Covid-19 is almost always limited, 40.3% (161) very often, 7.5% (30) occasionally, 7.0% (28) rarely, and 6.8% (27) never.

These results suggest that the majority of people feel that their access to quality information about Covid-19 is limited in some way. This could be due to a number of factors, such as misinformation being spread, a lack of reliable or trust-worthy sources, or limited access to quality information in their local language or location. This data highlights the need for improved access to quality information about Covid-19 in order for people to properly understand and respond to the virus.

Table 7 Nigerian Government is doing Enough to Control the Spread of Fake News and Misinformation Regarding Covid-19

Options	N	%
Yes	193	48.3%
No	110	27.5%
Not Sure	97	24.3%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 7 demonstrates the survey results indicating whether the Nigerian government is doing enough to control the spread of fake news and misinformation regarding

Covid-19. The table shows that of the 400 surveyed individuals, 48.3% declared that the Nigerian government is doing enough, 27.5% said the government is not doing enough and 24.3% of the population is unsure. The large majority of those surveyed, 48.3 %, believe that the government is doing enough to control the spread of fake news and misinformation regarding the pandemic. It is possible that this percentage is so high because there is generally widespread faith in and trust of the Nigerian government and its ability to effectively tackle the challenges Covid-19 has posed. Furthermore, the government has responded with an effective set of measures in order to reduce the spread of fake news and misinformation.

Conversely, 27.5% of the population believe that the government is not adequately responding to the issue. It may be that they view the Nigerian government’s actions as inadequate compared to other countries or that they disagree with the approach being taken by the government. The remaining 24.3% have responded ‘not sure’, indicating that they are uncertain whether the government is doing enough to tackle the spread of false news regarding the virus. It is likely that this percentage of the population is undecided due to a lack of information or uncertainty over the efficacy of the measures being taken by the government.

Table 8 It will be Easy to Control the Spread of Fake News and Misinformation Regarding Covid-19 in Nigeria

Options	N	%
Yes	185	46.3%
No	103	25.8%
Not Sure	112	28.0%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 8 shows the results of a survey conducted to gauge whether or not Nigerians believed that it would be easy to control the spread of fake news and misinformation regarding Covid-19 in Nigeria. Out of 400 people surveyed, 46.3% said yes, 25.8% said no, and 28.0% said that they were not sure.

The results of this survey demonstrate that a majority (46.3%) of Nigerians believe that it is possible to control the spread of fake news and misinformation about Covid-19 in Nigeria. This suggests that the public has faith in the government and other organizations to handle the situation efficiently. Conversely, 25.8% of respondents do not believe that it is possible to control the spread of misinformation, indicating that there is doubt in the ability of certain parties to combat the threat of fake news and misinformation. The remaining 28.0% are undecided, suggesting that more education and awareness is needed in order to properly address the issue.

These results show that while a majority of Nigerians believe it is possible to control the spread of fake news and misinformation about Covid-19, there is still a percentage of the population who are not convinced that it is possible. With more education and public awareness, it is likely that

this percentage will decrease and more Nigerians will be confident in the ability to control the spread of fake news and misinformation.

Table 9 Need for Increased Efforts on the Part of the Nigerian Government to Counter the Spread of Fake News and misinformation

Options	N	%
Yes	197	49.3%
No	5	1.3%
Not Sure	198	49.5%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 9 shows the responses of 400 Nigerian citizens to the question of whether they believe the Nigerian government should make increased efforts to counter the spread of fake news and misinformation. Of the respondents, 197 (49.3%) said yes, 5 (1.3%) said no, and 198 (49.5%) were not sure. The results suggest that the majority of respondents are in favor of the government taking additional action to fight the issue of misinformation. This indicates that most Nigerian citizens taken into consideration recognize the importance of combating fake news and misinformation and would like to see the government actively working towards this goal. This is especially clear when considering that nearly half of those surveyed chose the option of not being sure, which may mean that they support increased efforts but are not sure of the best way for the government to go about doing this.

Overall, these results suggest that there is a clear need for increased efforts on the part of the Nigerian government to counter the spread of fake news and misinformation. This need is evident in the strong public support for increased government action, and the Nigerian government should take this into account when formulating strategies to respond to the issue.

Table 10 Nigerian Government should Impose Tougher Regulations on Media Outlets Providing False/Misleading Information about Covid-19

Options	N	%
Yes	43	10.8%
No	146	36.5%
Not Sure	211	52.8%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 10 shows the results of a survey conducted on 400 Nigerians on their opinion about the government imposing tougher regulations on media outlets providing false/misleading information about Covid-19. Out of the 400 people surveyed, 43 people (10.8%) said yes, 146 people (36.5%) said no, and 211 people (52.8%) said they were not sure. In total, 400 people participated in the survey, representing 100% of the population.

It appears that a majority of the people surveyed were unsure about the government imposing tougher regulations on media outlets providing false/misleading information

about Covid-19. This result could be due to the lack of understanding that people have about the implications of such regulations, or the uncertainty surrounding the effectiveness of the regulations. On the other hand, the people who responded with "yes" may have recognized the potential benefit of having stricter regulations, such as being able to hold media outlets accountable if they provide false/misleading information about Covid-19.

The results of the survey provide useful insights into the opinions of Nigerians regarding the topic, and can be used to inform the government's decision-making process. Furthermore, the survey results can also be used to understand how people in Nigeria perceive the issue of media providing false/misleading information about Covid-19, which can help the government develop strategies to better address the problem.

Table 11 How Often do you Think Rumours and Conspiracy Theories Regarding Covid-19 in Nigeria are Spread

Options	N	%
Almost Always	72	18.1%
Very often	226	56.5%
Occasionally	64	16.0%
Rarely	23	5.8%
Never	15	3.8%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 11 is a breakdown of how often Nigerians believe rumours and conspiracy theories regarding COVID-19 are spread. 18.1% of respondents said almost always, 56.5% said very often, 16% said occasionally, 5.8% said rarely and 3.8% said never. These results indicate that the majority of respondents believe rumours and conspiracy theories regarding COVID-19 in Nigeria are spread very often or almost always. This is likely due to the sheer amount of misinformation and disinformation that circulate the web and various social networks such as WhatsApp. Government misinformation, political rumours, and socioeconomic theories add to the confusion, leading many Nigerians to think rumours and conspiracy theories are spread very often. Additionally, the prevalence of fake news and unsubstantiated rumours further adds to Nigerians' perception that rumours and conspiracy theories are spread very often or almost always.

Table 12 Nigerian Government should set up Campaigns to Distribute Accurate and up-to-date Information about Covid-19

Options	N	%
Yes	127	31.8%
No	134	33.5%
Not Sure	139	34.8%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 12 is a survey question from a sample of 400 Nigerians asking whether the Nigerian government should set up campaigns to distribute accurate and up-to-date information about Covid-19. According to the data, 31.8%

of the sample answered yes, 33.5% answered no, and 34.8% answered not sure. The results of this survey indicate that the majority of Nigerians are unsure about whether the government should set up campaigns to distribute information about Covid-19, but there is significant support for the idea. This could suggest that many Nigerians believe that the government still needs to do more to ensure that citizens are as informed about the virus as possible.

The table also provide insight into the importance Nigerians place on accurate and up-to-date information about the virus. It is clear that many Nigerians do not feel that the government has done enough to ensure citizens are well-informed, and there is an evident desire for more accurate and reliable information. Furthermore, the survey results could be used to inform the development of more effective public health campaigns that focus on providing accurate and timely information. The survey results suggest that there is significant support among Nigerians for the Nigerian government to take more action to ensure citizens have the accurate and up-to-date information they need to properly protect themselves from Covid-19.

Table 13 There are Gaps in Access to Health Communication Resources in Nigeria Regarding Covid-19

Options	N	%
Yes	170	42.5%
No	68	17.0%
Not Sure	162	40.5%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 13 indicates the responses of 400 Nigerian adults to the question, "Do you have access to health communication resources regarding Covid-19?" The option "Yes" received the highest response rate with 42.5%, followed by "Not Sure" with 40.5%. The option "No" received the least response rate with 17%. This data suggests that there are gaps in access to health communication resources in Nigeria regarding Covid-19. Only 42.5% of respondents had access to health communication resources, while a significant portion of the population (40.5%) did not know if they had access. This indicates that access is not evenly distributed or well known among the population. Additionally, 17% of the population clearly indicated that they did not have access, which is a clear indication that there is an access gap that should be addressed.

The data indicates that more should be done to ensure Nigerian adults have access to health communication resources. Access to these resources is necessary in order to understand the latest developments regarding Covid-19, and to ensure that people have access to accurate and up to date information regarding the virus. Providing access to these resources to Nigerian adults is essential in order for them to adequately protect themselves and their families from Covid-19.

Table 14 Health Education and Communication Strategies are Effective in Curbing the Spread of Covid-19 in Nigeria

Options	N	%
Yes	143	35.8%
No	131	32.8%
Not Sure	126	31.5%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 14 suggests that among 400 Nigerians asked, 35.8% agreed that health education and communication strategies are effective in curbing the spread of Covid-19 in Nigeria, 32.8% disagreed and 31.5% were not sure. This table demonstrates that Nigerians have mixed feelings towards the effectiveness of health education and communication strategies in curbing the spread of Covid-19 in the country. This could be attributed to the varying levels of awareness and education among the population. Many may not have access to up-to-date critical information on the virus and the public health measures available, making it difficult for them to make a judgement. Additionally, it is important to note that there may be cultural and psychological factors that are affecting people's opinions on the subject. For instance, some people may not believe in the severity and risk of the virus, or may not be persuaded by the government's efforts to combat the virus. Furthermore, it is possible that the respondents' beliefs systems are playing a role in skewing the data. For instance, some may not believe in government-imposed strategies and may be more inclined to look for alternative methods of mitigation.

The data appears to indicate, however, that there is a sizeable portion of the population that agrees with the effectiveness of health education and communication strategies in curbing the spread of Covid-19, which is promising. This could possibly mean that at least some individuals are being informed about the virus and the various mitigation measures that can be taken, which is a positive step towards effective prevention and containment efforts.

V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The data in this study implies that a sizeable fraction of Nigerians frequently deal with false information concerning Covid-19. The survey's findings show that a large majority of participants (37.8%) predominantly utilize social media to get information on Covid-19 in Nigeria. This may be explained by the extensive use of social media and the internet, as well as the propensity of these platforms to post changes more quickly. In addition, it is feasible to determine the extent to which public education or other initiatives may be required to address this issue by analyzing the percentage of people who believe they can accurately discern between fake news and other types of misinformation.

These findings imply that the majority of respondents believe they have limited access to reliable information about Covid-19. This could be caused by a variety of things, such as the dissemination of false information, the absence

of trustworthy sources, or the difficulty in obtaining quality information in their native tongue or region. This report emphasizes the need for better access to reliable information on Covid-19 so that individuals can comprehend and react to the virus in the right way. On the other hand, 27.5% of the populace thinks the government isn't doing enough to address the problem. It's possible that they disagree with the government's strategy or think Nigeria's measures are insufficient in comparison to those of other nations.

According to the survey's findings, the majority of Nigerians (46.3%) think it is possible to stop the dissemination of false information regarding Covid-19 in their country. This may indicate that the people have confidence in the ability of the government and other institutions to manage the problem effectively. The overall conclusion from these findings is that the Nigerian government must step up its efforts to halt the circulation of false information. The significant popular support for expanded government intervention demonstrates this necessity, and the Nigerian government should take this into consideration when developing ways to address the problem.

It seems that most respondents to the study had mixed feelings regarding the government enforcing stricter rules against media outlets that spread incorrect or misleading information about COVID-19. This outcome may be the result of people not comprehending the ramifications of such restrictions or a lack of confidence in the regulations' efficacy. On the other hand, those who said "yes" might have understood the possible advantages of stronger rules, such as the ability to hold media organizations accountable if they report inaccurate or misleading information regarding Covid-19.

According to these findings, the majority of respondents think that conspiracy theories and rumours about COVID-19 in Nigeria are propagated frequently or almost constantly. This is probably because of how much false information and misinformation are spread on the internet and through other social networks like WhatsApp. Many Nigerians mistakenly believe that rumours and conspiracy theories are widely disseminated due to government misinformation, political rumours, and socioeconomic theories that further the confusion. Nigerians also believe that rumours and conspiracy theories are propagated frequently or virtually always due to the presence of fake news and unsupported rumours.

According to the survey's findings, a sizable portion of Nigerians support the government's efforts to provide residents with the accurate and current information they need to adequately protect themselves from Covid-19. More has to be done to guarantee that adult Nigerians have access to health communication resources. To ensure that people have access to accurate and current information on the virus, access to these sites is essential for understanding the most recent Covid-19 advancements. Adults in Nigeria must have access to these materials if they want to appropriately safeguard their family and selves against Covid-19. This could possibly mean that at least some people are being

informed about the virus and the various mitigation measures that can be taken, which is a positive step towards effective prevention and containment efforts, and that a sizeable portion of the population agrees with the effectiveness of health education and communication strategies in curbing the spread of Covid-19. The spread of fake news, misinformation, and health communication gaps have been significant challenges in Nigeria's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Addressing these challenges will require a multi-faceted and collaborative approach that involves public health officials, social media companies, and the wider community. By working together, it is possible to ensure that accurate information is prioritized, and that all Nigerians have access to the information they need to protect themselves and their communities.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study on mapping fake news, misinformation and health communication gaps in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria showed that the use of social media and other digital platforms to disseminate health information and combat fake news is an effective tool. The study concludes that the dissemination of misinformation and fake news was widespread and had an impact on the public's understanding of the disease and the response to it. The most influential sources of false information were found to be social media, traditional media, and religious leaders. These sources have been used to spread false information about the safety of vaccines, the prevalence of the virus, and the efficacy of treatments.

The study also revealed that the lack of access to reliable health information and services has further exacerbated the spread of misinformation and has made it difficult for citizens to make informed decisions about their health and safety. The study concludes that the Nigerian government and health authorities need to take urgent and comprehensive steps to address the gaps in health communication and to ensure access to reliable health information and services. It also revealed that there were significant gaps in the health communication information being shared, and that there was a need for more accurate and up-to-date information to be shared.

The study highlighted the importance of the Nigerian government and health institutions taking a proactive role in providing accurate and reliable health information to the public. The study also suggested that health authorities should collaborate with social media companies and digital platforms to ensure that the right information is being distributed to the public. The study has important implications for the Nigerian government and health institutions. The findings of the study suggest that the Nigerian government and health institutions must take a proactive role in providing accurate and reliable health information to the public. Furthermore, it is essential for health authorities to collaborate with social media companies and digital platforms to ensure that the right information is being distributed to the public.

The study also showed that there is a need for improved collaboration between the government, health experts and civil society organisations in order to effectively combat the spread of misinformation and to ensure that accurate health information is available to all stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

➤ *Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:*

- The government should ensure that accurate health information is made available to the public through effective health communication strategies.
- The government should also ensure that all stakeholders are involved in the development of health communication strategies, so that all views are heard and taken into consideration.
- The government should also work with civil society organisations to develop and implement effective strategies to combat the spread of fake news and misinformation.
- Health experts should be given access to the latest health information in order to effectively combat the spread of fake news and misinformation.
- The government should invest in public awareness campaigns to educate the public on the dangers of fake news and misinformation.
- The government should also invest in research and development to further understand the spread and impact of fake news and misinformation in Nigeria.
- The government should also provide incentives for journalists to report accurately on health-related issues, so that accurate health information is available to the public.
- Social media platforms should be held accountable for the spread of fake news and misinformation, and should work to ensure that accurate health information is made available to the public.
- The government should ensure that reliable and accurate health information is made available to all stakeholders, including journalists, healthcare workers, and the general public.
- The government should also work to ensure that vulnerable communities are provided with accurate and reliable health information.
- The government should also ensure that healthcare workers are trained to recognize and combat the spread of fake news and misinformation.
- The government should also invest in developing and implementing technological solutions to combat the spread of fake news and misinformation.

➤ *Ethical Considerations*

- *Respect for Individuals:*

Respect for the privacy and dignity of the individuals who participated in the research were taken into consideration, and their personal data were handled with confidentiality.

- *Informed Consent:*

All participants were provide with informed consent prior to participating in the research. This included the details of the research, risks and benefits, and the right to withdraw at any time.

- *Beneficence:*

This research was conducted in a way that maximizes the benefit to the participants and society at large.

- *Non-Discrimination:*

Participants were selected and treated in a way that does not discriminate against any individual or group.

- *Accuracy:*

The data collected were adjudged be accurate and reliable.

- *Transparency:*

The research was conducted openly and transparently. All results were made available for review and critique by experts.

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