

# Infodemics Influence on Ikorodu Residents in the Era of Covid 19 Pandemic

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## Abstract

This study seeks to investigate infodemic in the era of Coronavirus among Ikorodu residents in Lagos Nigeria. Studies have been conducted to unravel the effect of Coronavirus, its causes, and media coverage but there appears to be a paucity of literature with regards to people's perception of infodemic in the wake of COVID 19 pandemic. It is on this background that this study seeks to know how Nigerians had been influenced by infodemic in Coronavirus era. The Agenda Setting theory and the uses and gratification theory provided theoretical springboard to the study. The Survey method was adopted for the study. Ikorodu North, Lagos Nigeria was purposively selected among the five Local Council at Ikorodu, 100 residents were selected using a simple random sampling. Results were analyzed in frequency table format and percentages, the discussion done qualitatively. Findings from the study indicate that there was panic as a result of infodemic due to diverse information during the disease outbreak but Nigerians are willing to be vaccinated irrespective of the mal-information mainly circulated on social media about the rumoured danger of the vaccines. The Government, the media and relevant stakeholders, the NCDC, the minister for health and commissioner for health were able to manage information in the era of Coronavirus mostly the right information regarding persuading Nigerians to be vaccinated. The study recommends the need for Government and relevant agencies to engage the necessary stakeholders in Nigeria in producing vaccines and liaise with World Health Organization, the foreign nations in making the vaccines available.

**Keywords:** Covid 19 • Dis-information • Infodemic • Mis-information • Mal-information

## Introduction

At least one million people have died from coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) since January, 2020. Many more will die before we find better ways to manage or eradicate this disease, although, eradication seems increasingly unlikely. This is a tragedy of almost incomprehensible proportions.

That tragedy has combined with another potentially life-threatening problem, an alarming quantity of poor-quality and often directly harmful information about the pandemic and quack cures. World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned back in February 2021 about this "infodemic" [1]. This warning came a few weeks before the WHO declared in mid-March that COVID-19 was a pandemic, meaning a global epidemic.

The infodemic too appears to have had real health consequences: one study published in August 2020, estimated that alcohol poisoning killed almost 800 people from around the world who apparently believed an online rumour that drinking highly concentrated alcohol would prevent COVID-19.

The word infodemic is not the first term to describe our online world that has been borrowed from health. During the pandemic, researchers have talked about how social media companies should 'flatten the curve' of misinformation. Talking about computer viruses and infact, that terminology emerged in the

1990s from an analogy to the HIV/AIDS pandemic as Cait McKinney and Dylan Mulvin have shown. McKinney and Mulvin argue that "HIV/AIDS" discourses indelibly marked the domestication of computing, computer networks and nested digitized infrastructures [2].

Too often, platforms appropriate medical language. Twitter has talked for several years about wanting to promote "healthy conversations". But what does healthy mean online? An infodemic according to World Health Organization (WHO) is too much information including false or misleading information in digital and physical environments during a disease outbreak. It causes confusion and risk-taking behaviours that can harm health. It also leads to mistrust in health authorities and undermines the public health. An infodemic can intensify or lengthen outbreaks when people are unsure about what they need to do to protect their health and the health of people around them.

With growing digitization, an expansion of social media and internet use, information can spread more rapidly. This can help to more quickly fill information voids but can also amplify harmful messages. Infodemic management aims to enable good health practices through listening to community concerns and questions, promoting understanding of risk and health expert advice, building resilience to misinformation, disinformation and mal-information and also engaging and empowering communities to take positive action. An infodemic is an overabundance of information, some accurate and some not.

Whether, misinformation, disinformation or mal-information are all injurious to the cognitive sense of the people. Such information have jeopardized the interpretation of the true information in the society especially about the health related risks.

In Nigeria, people were almost made to believe in the 1990's that HIV/AIDS could be transmitted just by living in the same house with the carrier and a lot of people believe and started stigmatizing the victims. It took a cogent rampant campaign in the health sector to analyse that the disease could only be transmitted through the blood contact with the carrier.

An instance of the above was the circulated infodemics during the Ebola virus outbreak online that only those who could use salt to bathe would be free from the virus. A lot of the people just swallow the information hook line

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**Received:** 01 May 2023, Manuscript No. jmcj-23-97501; **Editor assigned:** 03 May 2023, Pre QC No. P-97501; **Reviewed:** 15 May 2023, QC No. Q-97501; **Revised:** 20 May 2023, Manuscript No. R-97501; **Published:** 27 May 2023, DOI: 10.37421/2165-7912.2023.13.517

and sinker and started bathing with salt. A baby died as a result of salt bath all as a result of false information (infodemics). The widespread use of social media represents an unprecedented opportunity for health promotion. We have more information and evidence-based health related knowledge about healthy habits or possible risk behaviours. However, these tools also carry some disadvantages since they also open the door to new social and health risks in particular during health emergencies. This systematic review aims to study the influence of infodemics on Nigerians in the era of Coronavirus outbreak. So much research have been carried out on the determinant of these infodemic during disease outbreak but none has been researched on the real influence of infodemics among Nigerians the gap which this study wants to fill.

### **WHO works with the government of the United Kingdom to tackle misinformation?**

A review of the campaign tagged by the World Health Organization "Protect yourself and others by reporting misinformation", in the context of the strategic partnership with the Government of the United Kingdom, WHO has joined forces with its communications teams to raise awareness of misinformation around COVID-19 and encourage individuals to report false or misleading content online. This cooperation started with the joint Stop the Spread campaign in May-June 2020, which encouraged the use of trusted sources such as WHO and National Health Authorities for accurate COVID-19 information. The new phase of the joint campaign focuses on proactively identifying and reporting potentially wrong or misleading information as part of WHO's efforts to address the spread of inaccurate and harmful information during the pandemic.

Common COVID-19 vaccine misconceptions addressed. A year into the pandemic, vaccines are being rolled out and information about them with some reliable and some not reliable is everywhere. In response, the Government of the United Kingdom and WHO have produced a digital series to address common misconceptions circulating online and explain the safety of approved COVID-19 vaccines.

In early April 2020, WHO has convened a public consultation to crowdsource ideas for an infodemic management framework with a whole of society perspective? Everyone has a role to play in infodemic response and from the response it became clear that establishing the foundations of the science of infodemic management was a priority for all regions of the world.

In June 2020, WHO was convening the first WHO Infodemiology Conference to discuss formation of a trans-disciplinary science that will underpin infodemic management and inform evidence-based infodemic management interventions.

A Review of the Literature, "The Covid-19 Pandemic in Nigeria: Citizens Perceptions and the secondary impacts of Covid-19. by United Nations Development Programme Nigeria. May 19, 2020.

At a time when a whole-of-society approach is required to combat COVID-19, this brief collates the perspectives and experiences of Nigerians as they react and cope with their new realities. It attempts to identify challenges and emerging trends to allow for evidence driven policy interventions as Nigeria and Nigerians navigate through this uncertain period.

Without timely access to vaccines to counter the sustained and corrosive primary and secondary impact of COVID-19, the country's social economic and security conditions will remain fragile. In mid-December 2020, Nigeria confirmed that a second wave of the pandemic was underway with daily growth rates of new cases averaging nine percent at the height of the first wave. The second wave also appears to be more lethal with the average rate of new fatal cases rising much more rapidly when compared to the first wave. This brief focuses on the socio-economic implications of delayed access to vaccines.

A Review of the Literature" Willingness to accept a COVID-19 Vaccine in Nigeria: A Population based Cross sectional Study. by Central African Journal of Public Health on January, 2021.

The study assessed the intention to accept a future COVID-19 vaccine in Nigeria and associated factors Materials and Methods between July 2020

and August 2020, a cross-sectional study was conducted using an online questionnaire that captured demographic data, risk perception, trust in government and public health authorities and willingness to accept a future COVID-19 vaccine. Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science version 21.0; Chi-square and logistic regression were carried out at a 95% confidence interval. Appropriate institutional ethical board approval and informed consent were obtained from all participants. Results: 1,228 responses were received over the study period. The mean age of respondents was 32.8 years (SD 10.4), 12.7% (156/1,228) were health workers, 70.1% (861/1,228) had tertiary level of education. Intention to accept a future COVID-19 vaccine was expressed by 50.2% (617/1,228) of respondents. Increasing age, male gender, trust in government, trust in public health authorities, confidence in vaccine developers, willingness to pay for and travel for a vaccine and vaccination during an outbreak were significantly associated with COVID-19 vaccine acceptance. Healthcare workers and respondents with pre-existing medical conditions were not significantly different from non-healthcare workers and persons without medical conditions respectively with regards to the willingness to be vaccinated. Conclusion: One in two persons would accept a COVID-19 vaccine when it becomes available in the country. The government should take pro-active steps to address the factors that may potentially impact on the benefits expected from the introduction of COVID-19 vaccine and scale-up vaccine sensitization to improve potential acceptance for uptake across the country. However, this study only focuses on sensitization of Nigerians on COVID-19 vaccines and not on how infodemics influences their decisions in taking the vaccines and obeying the COVID-19 protocols, the gap this study like to fill.

### **The medium is the message**

"The medium is the message" is a phrase coined by Marshall McLuhan introduced in McLuhan's book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of man* published in 1964. It means that the nature of a medium (the channel through which a message is transmitted) is more important than the meaning or content of the message. McLuhan tells us that a "message" is, "the change of scale or pace or pattern" that a new invention or innovation "introduces into human affairs. "McLuhan uses the term 'message' to signify content and character. The content of the medium is a message that can be easily grasped. And the character of the medium is another message which can be easily overlooked. McLuhan says "Indeed, it is only too typical that the 'content' of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium."

For McLuhan, it was the medium itself that shaped and controlled "the scale and form of human association and action. Taking the movie as an example, he argued that the way this medium played with conceptions of speed and time transformed "the world of sequence and connections into the world of creative configuration and structure. Therefore, the message of the movie medium is this transition from "lineal connections" to "configurations. Extending the argument for understanding the medium as the message itself, he proposed that the "content of any medium is always another medium" thus, speech is the content of writing, writing is the content of print, and the print itself is the content of the telegraph.

McLuhan understood "medium" in a broad sense. He identified the light bulb as a clear demonstration of the concept of "the medium is the message". A light bulb does not have content in the way that a newspaper has articles or a television has programs, yet it is a medium that has a social effect; that is, a light bulb enables people to create spaces during nighttime that would otherwise be enveloped by darkness. He describes the light bulb as a medium without any content. McLuhan states that "a light bulb creates an environment by its mere presence." Likewise, the message of a newscast about a heinous crime may be less about the individual news story itself — the content — and more about the change in public attitude towards crime that the newscast engenders by the fact that such crimes are in effect being brought into the home to watch over dinner. Hence in *Understanding Media*, McLuhan describes the "content" of a medium as a juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind. This means that people tend to focus on the obvious, which is the content, to provide us valuable information, but in the process, we largely miss the structural changes in our affairs that are introduced subtly, or

over long periods of time. As society's values, norms, and ways of doing things change because of the technology, it is then we realize the social implications of the medium. These range from cultural or religious issues and historical precedents, through interplay with existing conditions, to the secondary or tertiary effects in a cascade of interactions that we are not aware of.

According to Garcia the Social Media integration works well when examining communications channels or online marketing implementation. However, the interactive Social Media Platform (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube) have radically changed the communication paradigm.

The exposure, feedback, engagement and exchange that Social Media platform provides have created a major change for the traditional communication understanding. Essential information flow is no longer considered a way affair in which the audience received messages. Rather, Social Media integration is seen as an interactive process that enables same level information exchange among the audience and the brand, creating a long lasting feedback communication process and giving to the brand a total engagement relationship.

The study by Chadwick Martin Bailey and Immoderate research technologies found that 67% of what made a social media discussion become the major news in the mainstream media and according to this study, the public agenda which is the issue trending on social has now become the basis of media agenda. Hence, audience set what becomes news and any journalists who would not keep abreast of prevalent on social media would be working in a lonely world as people determines what make up the news. Social media tend to institute issues of public interest and once there is a public uproar on any issue on social media as McLuhan stated the medium is the message, the tempo built on social media makes the issue, "news", this cannot not be ignored by the conventional media especially, if it has to do with public interest.

It is only too typical that the 'content' of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium." Social media tends to spread propaganda easily among the masses, McLuhan "the medium is the message". Any issue of public concern on social media becomes so popular that it cannot be ignored by the conventional media, even if they wanted to. Hence, journalists who want to be abreast with current happenings cannot joke with social media.

Social Media is the message. It is a powerful medium that builds perceptions, influences the people and changes opinions through its stories. The diverse information circulated on social media during the corona virus outbreak tends to make Nigerians confused about the pandemic.

## Agenda setting theory

The theory was postulated by Maxwell EM and Donald L Shaw in 1972. The major assumption of the theory is that the media sets agenda for the public to follow. In explaining this theory, Asemah holds that, "most of the pictures we store in our heads, most of the things we think about, most of the issues we discuss are based on what we have read, listened to, or watched in different mass media [3]." The media make us to think certain issues, they make us to think or feel that certain issues are more important than others in the society.

Wimmer RD and Joseph R. Dominick, observes that the theory on agenda setting by the media proposes that the public agenda or what kind of things people discuss, think and worry about is powerfully shaped and directed by what the media choose to publicize [4].

Based on the study of the media's roles in the 1968 presidential election, Maxwell EM and Donald L Shaw wrote in 1972 that "in choosing and displaying news editors, broadcasters play an important part in shaping realities [5]. People learn not only about a given issue but how much importance attached to the issues from the amount of information in a news story and its position."

Agenda setting theory is relevant to this work as it posits that media are not always successful at telling us what to think, but they are quite successful at telling us what you think about. This theory is good at explaining why people with similar media exposure place importance on the same issues. Although different people may feel differently about the issue at hand but most people feel the same issues are important. In relation to this study, campaign against

Coronavirus becomes an agenda to the audience; the mass media contents are capable at telling the audience what to think about, that is, to be aware of the outbreak of the virus, its preventions and the need to be vaccinated and follow all the precautionary protocols.

## Uses and gratification theory

The uses and gratification theory was propounded by Blumler and Katz which pointed five (5) ways in which media audiences find media content useful. These are as follow: escape, social interaction, identity, information and education and entertainment. As a form of escapism, media can be an outlet for the audience to drift away from reality. With regards to social interaction, people relate with character found in the media context. In this interaction, they may not realize that they are dealing with an aspect of social interaction that is not real. In identification, people are able to associate themselves with a media presentation. People also use media as a source of information when they listen to the news and they can learn some skills from the media. Thus media is also said to be educative. Furthermore, media can be a source of entertainment.

Use and gratification theory attempts to explain the uses and functions of the media for individuals, groups and society in general. There are three objectives in developing uses and gratification theory: to explain how individuals use mass communication to gratify their needs. "What do people do with the media;" to discover underlying motives for individuals' media use.

The uses and gratification theory, according to Katz quoted in Okunna is concerned with the social and psychological origins of needs, which generate expectations of the mass media or other source, which leads to differential patterns of media exposure or engagement in other activities, resulting in need gratification and other consequences, mostly unintended ones [6].

The uses and gratification theory according to Folarin, perceives the recipient as actively influencing the effect process, since he selectively choose, attends to, perceives and retain the media messages on the basis of his needs, beliefs, etc. the focus is thus shifted from media production and transmission function to the media consumption function [7]. Instead of asking: "what conditions?" the question became: "who uses, which contents, from which media, under which conditions and from what reasons?" The question of effect, as Folarin further holds, was now rather tangential or indirect to the analysts concerned.

## The scenario is:

- An individual has some needs to communication
- He/she selects the media that appear likely to satisfy those needs.
- An effect may or may not occur.

This theory is relevant to this research under study because it provides a profitable purview for the analysis of the relationship of people and the media they use. Unlike the stance of the media effect theory where the question is what the media does to the people, use and gratification places the onus of debate in the hands of the media consumers as active users who deliberately choose and use the media to satisfy their needs and desires. When applied to this study – Infodemic influence on Ikorodu residents in the era of Coronavirus, the assumption is that mass media audience in this context, selectively chooses, attend to, perceives and retain campaign on the deadly Coronavirus and how it can be prevented.

## Methodology

The survey method was used to gather data to address the questions posed in this study. Tejumaiye AJ, highlight the importance of survey as the most often used method in social and behavioural sciences in general and mass communication [8]. According to Traudt, "A survey is a data collection device where respondents answer one or more questions posed by the researcher." Survey methods are popular because they can generate a good deal of data of a uniform nature from as many respondents as can be included



in the sample. The choice of survey method for the study was to gather data capable of leading to generalizations.

The study used a 25-item questionnaire structured to appropriately answer the research questions and to gather vital demographic information. For easy quantifiable analysis, the items in the questionnaire were mainly close-ended. Ikorodu is a large city in Lagos State, Nigeria. It is located to the north-east of Lagos City along the Lagos Lagoon and shares a boundary with Ogun State. The current metro area population of Ikorodu in 2021 is 989,000, a 5.44% increase from 2020. The metro area population of Ikorodu in 2020 was 938,000, a 5.75% increase from 2019. The metro area population of Ikorodu in 2019 was 887,000, a 5.85% increase from 2018. The population figure was obtained from the National Population Commission (NPC) [9]. The Division consists of Ikorodu Local Government and five Local Council Development Areas including: Igbogbo-Baiyeku, Ikorodu North, Ikorodu West, Imota and Ijede. By virtue of its location, the division serves as the gateway to the country's hinter-land.

The researcher purposefully chose Ikorodu North where there are much elite especially due to Lagos State Polytechnic permanent campus in that area, since these residents were purposed to be able to understand the meaning of infodemic in this Coronavirus era.

100 copies of questionnaire were administered on the residents of Ikorodu North Local Government using a simple random sampling. Sample size of the study is 100 residents. The one hundred questionnaires were returned calculated in percentages which were used for the analyses. The sampling was conducted using purposeful and simple random sampling irrespective of whether male or female among the residents of the Ikorodu North area, thereby, all the residents have equal chance of being selected in filling the questionnaire. Frequency tables were used to represent each finding. The frequencies were also expressed in percentages in the tables. While discussion and the conclusion analyzed qualitatively.

## Results

### Level of awareness to infodemics in Coronavirus era by Ikorodu residents

The findings of this study indicate that there are various media campaigns on Coronavirus and the 51.2% respondents are highly aware of infodemic which create confused information leading to panic in the Coronavirus era 39.3% are averagely aware of misinformation in the era of health information as regards COVID-19, 4% respondents awareness level are low and 4% also claimed that they don't know about infodemic in this era of Coronavirus., the Ikorodu residents response when asked "What is your level of awareness to infodemics in Coronavirus era? Reveal that 90.5% residents are aware of diverse information in the era of Coronavirus (Table 1).

### Influence of Infodemic on the desire to take COVID-19 precautionary measures

The study reveals that 36.9% respondents were being influenced diverse information to a very great extent and 39.3% were influenced to great extent which amount 76.2% respondents were being influenced by various information in the media towards embracing the usage of all COVID-19 precautionary measures, 15.5% were indifferent while 8.3% seldom influenced by diverse much information in obeying the precautionary protocols as specified by the World Health Organization which washing of hands, sneezing on the elbows, maintenance of social distancing, avoiding a crowded place and quarantine when engage in a long travelling to different location (Table 2).

### Influence of infodemics on Ikorodu residents in taking COVID-19 vaccines

In response to the question "How has infodemics by the media persuade you in taking COVID-19 vaccines? 26.2% respondents were persuaded to a very great extent, 47.6% were persuaded to a great extent which amount to 73.8% larger percent of the respondents were persuaded by various information

**Table 1.** Respondents awareness towards misinformation in the COVID-19 era.

Awareness	Response	Percentage
High	51	51.2%
Average	39	39.4%
Low	5	4.7%
I don't know	5	4.7%

**Table 2.** Respondents influence towards taking COVID-19 precautionary measures.

Perception	Response	Percentage
Very great extent	37	36.9%
Great extent	39	39.3%
Indifferent	16	15.5%
Seldom	8	8.3%

**Table 3.** Respondents level of persuasion towards taking COVID-19 Vaccines.

Level of Persuasion	Response	Percentage
Very great extent	26	26.2%
Great extent	48	47.6%
Indifferent	13	13.1%
Seldom	13	13.1%

from diverse media of information towards taking COVID-19 vaccines despite the misconceptions, misinformation, mal-information, dis-information in the era of Coronavirus. 13.1% were indifferent and also 13.1% rarely persuaded by the infodemics in the era of Coronavirus which amount to 26.2 respondents, a few percentages of the respondents (Table 3).

## Discussion

The findings of this study show that Nigerians are aware of diverse information that is, infodemics in the era of Coronavirus and this effort being attributed to various media campaigns carried out on radio, television, newspapers, magazines and new media in managing information as specified by the World Health Organisation.

Apart from the awareness, majority of the populace are influenced by the various media campaign in following the COVID\_19 protocols. all this effort were from various media of information although, there were also misinformation as to taking Chloroquine as a cure and preventive measures to COVID\_1! (But the conventional media through the effort of the NCDC were about to manage this rumour unlike the era of Ebola when people were misled to be using salt to bath to avert the disease [10]. More so, when asked "Do you think fear and panic level increase because of the use of media and technology during COVID\_19? Majority strongly agree to this view but the conventional media with the help of Lagos State Government which is the center of information management of the deadly pandemic, people were greatly influenced in following the precautionary order, though, government had to mandate people to wear their nose masks in public places, by suspending public gathering including religious centers and clubs and a total lock down in the early stage of the pandemic.

Larger percentage of the respondents believe in the vaccines due to the media campaign on it despite diverse information spreading majorly on social media on fake vaccines or that the vaccines is an anti-Christ or if someone takes it, the person would die. People by this report turned a deaf ear to all these assertions but they are being persuaded in taking vaccines irrespective of infodemic.

## Conclusion

It is better to be late than to be the late. In this era of Coronavirus, diverse information are going on globally and also among Nigerians about which one to believe, but with an agency like the NCDC and WHO, Nigerians must rely on this credible organizations to managed this pandemic era to avert the rumour

of usage of chloroquine, just like when people were told to be using salt for bath in the era of Ebola.

All hands must be on deck, the media passing information across to the masses on relevant information from credible agencies and the media campaign to center on sensitizing the people to verify information on the social media.

Nigerians are willing and ready to be vaccinated. The relevant stakeholders including the government, doctors, health ministers, commissioner for health should make the vaccines available and accessible to people to avoid further spread of the pandemic.

## Recommendations

The Media saddled with the responsibility of management of information in the era of disease outbreak should keep on the good task. The Nigerian Media managed Coronavirus information should also continue to be on their toes to caution the effect of misinformation, disinformation and mal-information especially, in the era of diseases outbreak to safeguard human lives.

As a result of this report, Nigerian Government through the help of NCDC should engage all health stakeholders towards producing COVID-19 vaccines in Nigeria and for the meantime, Government needs to make the vaccines available since Nigerians are ready to be vaccinated but majority of the populace have not been vaccinated, they were willing but the Government needs to make the vaccines available and easily accessible to all Nigerians. This would not only avert the death of people but also would help to curtail the spread of the virus in the country.

Also, Nigerians should always verify authentic information especially in the era of disease outbreak. Not all information available on social media is from the credible source to avert untimely death due to diverse information parading the masses during the era of diseases outbreak.

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**How to cite this article:** Bolanle, O. Idowu and Nwantah Nkiruka Favour. "Infodemics Influence on Ikorodu Residents in the Era of Covid 19 Pandemic." *J Mass Communicat Journalism* 13 (2023): 517.