



Full Length Research

Influence of Social Media Covid-19 Messages on the Lifestyle of Students in Two Nigerian Universities

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Abstract: The advent of the corona virus disease has affected every facet of human existence including the way life is lived. To forestall the spread of the disease, lifestyle changes in form of safety protocols were advanced by health and medical experts. These protocols were propagated on the social media seeing that social media have been known to be veritable disseminators of health information. This study was conducted among students of Kogi state university and University of Nigeria to ascertain the influence of social media Covid-19 messages on their uptake of the new lifestyles promoted in form of safety protocols. The survey research design was adopted with questionnaire as instrument. Findings revealed that respondents were aware of the protocols and they made use of Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram platforms more frequently to access Covid-19 messages on the social media. Further findings show that they saw the safety protocols on the social media and their exposure to these messages influenced them to adopt the protocols, hence effecting a change in their lifestyles. It was also discovered that the influence was however not overwhelming as it was mild on protocols that encouraged shaking hands and receiving hugs. This implies a mild change in lifestyle effected by the social media. It was thus concluded that social media, no doubt, have a role to play in mitigating the contagion rate of the Covid-19. It was thus recommended that health communication planners should engage the social media in coming up with communication interventions for health emergencies.

Keywords: Covid-19: Social Media: Lifestyle: Students: Safety Protocols.

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1.0 Background of the Study

The world today is facing a health crisis which has affected virtually every facet of human existence. As the world continues to battle with the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, new areas of empirical enquiry keep opening up. Discovered somewhere in a city in China, the novel corona viral disease has become a global health worry which has been described as a global health pandemic on 12th March, 2020 by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020). The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the life of most people across countries, age, race and profession and it has made everything from world economies to social rituals devastated (Srivastava et al., 2020; Schulten, 2020). The novel corona viral disease is one that spreads fast from person to person (Gupta et al., 2020). As at the time of writing this (July 14th 2021), over 188 million cases have been confirmed globally with over 4 million deaths worldwide (WHO, 2021). Nigeria is not left out in this as there are (as at July 14th 2021) over 169, 000 confirmed cases with over 2000 deaths (Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, NCDC, 2021). This makes it not only a global phenomenon, but one which is local to our climate. This high rate of transmission has led scientists and governments to develop measures to contain the spread of the disease so as to mitigate, if not eliminate the negative effects of the virus on our world. This has led to the advisory given for people to minimise physical contact between and among people, hence a directive by various countries of the world to lockdown major sectors of the economy in order to handle the spread since it can be asymptomatic sometimes (WHO 2020; Khachfe et al. cited in Mishra et al., 2020).

The directive to lock down countries saw most sectors of countries going almost inactive for the period of the lock down as students were sent home from school, movements restricted, markets partially shutdown, offices considered nonessential were locked among others in order to control the spread. Hinting on the closure of schools, Viner et al. cited in Mahmood (2020) note that “107 countries implemented educational institutes closures” (p. 199) and this affected 1.5 billion students and 65 million educators who were left with no alternative than to adjust their usual ways of teaching and learning (World Bank 2020; UNESCO 2020). The lockdown directive due to the pandemic saw the promotion of the observation of Covid-19 ‘Safety Protocols’ which engendered a new set of social values and lifestyles. While the measures are necessary, they have led to various impacts on our social lifestyles (Deloitte, 2020). With the second wave of the pandemic coming to an end and the loosening up of lockdown restrictions, directives were given which altered the way in which humans were used to living their lives. The introduction of face masks, the use of hand sanitizers, coughing into bent elbows, the habitual washing of hands, the minimisation of physical contact, restriction of acceptable population for social events to maximum of 50 attendees, closure of places of worship, including social entertainment centres and the consequent uptake of social media channels to find succour were basic parts of the Covid-19 safety measures developed by the World Health Organization (WHO 2020) as a response to “stop the pandemic, mitigate its devastating effects and lay the foundation for long-term recovery” (UNESCO 2020b, p.4) . It is in recourse to this change in lifestyle that Deloitte (2020) advocated for a reset of mind-set, and not a restart of things as regarding the social impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Social lifestyle is conceptualised in this study as virtually uptake of the Covid-19 preventive measures, especially those that bother on social norms.

Social media channels have grown to become veritable health information sources and their significance seem to have gained more recognition due to its role in the spread of Covid-19 information (Obi-Ani et al., 2020). Owing to the internet penetration figure of Nigeria growing to over 141 million subscribers as at May 2020 (National Communications Commission, 2020), social media channels have become pervasive and influential in all sectors of the economy, especially in the health sector. In the wake of the pandemic, many advocacy efforts in creating awareness and improving knowledge about the pandemic were all over the media, especially the social media. From the World Health Organization’s Twitter handle, to that of the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, to that of the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Health, to those of social media influencers, health personnel and politicians, information counselling and warning Nigerians on what to avoid were churned out to audience members. While some people may be better informed via these channels about the pandemic and safety measures to take, others were probably at a disadvantage (UNHCR, 2020) but not students who have been found to be ardent users of the social media. This underscores the importance of the social media in the delivery of health information to the public. Messages like *stay back at home; always go with a mask; have you washed your hands today?* were all over the social media creating awareness and educating the populace of measures to take in containing the disease.

Research (e.g. Chaturvedi et al., 2021) has shown that the youth, especially students constitute majority of social media users and therefore seem to be affected more by information coming from the social media, owing to this fact, it becomes important to empirically ascertain the extent to which information on social media affected the social lifestyle choices of students during the lockdown and even now that we are grappling with a second wave. The researcher is aware that many forms of misinformation were spread on the social media, but the major protocols to observe remained the same in almost all messages observed, hence the misinformation on social media about Covid-19 was not a major consideration in this study. Past research efforts (Reyes, 2020; Aristovnik et al., 2020; Karunathilake, 2020) have looked into the general influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on the lives of people, but this present study tests the effectiveness of Covid-19 social media campaigns on the actual lifestyle of social media audience so as to provide insights regarding messages on the social media in health emergencies. Insights gathered from this study will help communication planners and policymakers with insights and empirically backed suggestions that will aid in planning communication endeavours for disease outbreak especially on social media that is targeted at the youth. It is on this basis that the following research questions were drawn out to guide this study:

1. What is the extent of students' awareness of Covid-19 safety protocols?
2. What Social Media Platforms were used in accessing Covid-19 social media messages?
3. What Covid-19 Protocols were respondents exposed to on social media?
4. In what ways did Covid-19 social media messages influence the lifestyle of respondents?

2.0 Literature Review of the Study

Studies have also shown how social media interventions help encourage positive health attitudes and uptake of responsible health behaviours. A study by Achampong et al. (2020) revealed that WhatsApp was the most used social media platform in receiving health information followed by Facebook and then, Twitter. In their study, they also discovered that respondents' exposure to social media did not influence them to take up any health treatment. They also asked a reliability check question, which also showed that social media did not influence respondents to stop any health treatment, generally leading to the conclusion that exposure to social media health information does not translate to uptake of disseminated positive health behavior. A study by Laranjo et al. (2015) conducted a meta-analysis of the influence of social media intervention in changing health-related behaviours. The authors reviewed studies carried out using the experimental design (Randomised Control Trials and Quasi-Experimental designs). They discovered a slight positive effect of social networking sites interventions on health behaviour change while also noting the prevalent use of Facebook as the social media platform used in the reviewed studies. A study by Asibey et al. (2017) among Ghanaian students drawn from three universities in Ghana to ascertain the influence of health information obtained online revealed that students used the internet for health purposes and this use served as a basis for lifestyle change among the respondents. It was concluded that students make use of messages gotten online for health lifestyle changes, showing an effect on young people. They hence recommended the exploration of the internet as a medium for reaching young people by health information experts to effect lifestyle changes.

In the same vein, a study conducted by Shubha (2015) among students in India showed how 2/3rd of the respondents have changed a particular behaviour/habit as per the advice found on the Internet. Al-Dmour et al. (2020) carried out a similar study to ascertain the impact of using social media platform applications on health and safety during the Covid-19 pandemic in Jordan. Using the survey research design, the authors discovered first that Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp social media platforms ranked highest (in that order) as to the most used social media platform for receiving Covid-19 health information. It was further revealed that social media exposure had influence on respondents' behavioural disposition in the Covid-19 era as information gleaned from Social media helped enforce lifestyle changes that led to public protection against the pandemic. Giustini et al. (2018) also carried out a systematic review of articles published as regards the effect of social media use in public health and medicine and discovered from the studies reviewed that social media had mild positive effect on responsible health behavior uptake while noticing that Facebook and Twitter were among the most utilised platforms for health between 2011 and 2016. Ahmad & Murad (2020) in their study of how social media were used to spread panic in the Covid-19 pandemic discovered that Facebook was the most used medium in Iraq to spread information about Covid-19.

Sadore et al. (2021) conducted a similar study in Ethiopia and discovered that exposure to social media messages on Covid-19 had a positive influence on Covid-19 preventive measures uptake leading to social lifestyle changes orchestrated by uptake of the Covid-19 protocols. Smailhodzic et al. (2016) showed in their systematic review that social media exposure effected lifestyle changes among their studied subjects (who were patients) in the areas of disease management and control. The studies reviewed here however do not fully capture the exact scope of the present study as the researchers here seek to gather empirical data as regards the reality in Nigeria with students as the main subjects seeing that (Pálsdóttir, 2014) has reported that youth, most of whom are students are the most active users of social media. The present study also seeks to ascertain the adoption of each Covid-19 safety protocol and measure the effectiveness of social media messages about them. The reviewed studies where Covid-19 was the disease subject studied did not factor this in and many others were not about Covid-19, hence, this study fills that gap and presents a Nigerian perspective to the narrative seeing that no known published Nigerian study on the subject has been noticed by the researchers. Herein lies the justification for this study.

3.0 Research Methodology

The survey research design was employed for this study with questionnaire as instrument for data collection. To arrive at relevant data, students of two Nigerian Universities - University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN) and Kogi State University (KSU) Anyigba were randomly sent a web-based questionnaire through google form links sent to departmental WhatsApp groups. The Cronbach alpha was used to test the reliability of the questionnaire after a pilot study where 20 copies of questionnaire were administered to 20 members of the respondents twice with two weeks interval. The instrument yielded an overall internal consistency of .87, rendering the instrument reliable. The criteria for being involved were for the respondents to be student (undergraduate and/or postgraduate) of the select schools at the time and must be exposed to social media channels and messages on Covid-19. All members of the social media groups where the questionnaire link was sent were encouraged to respond. The questionnaire had two parts which were meant to

elicit demographic data and psychographic data. While the demographic section sought to get basic data about the respondents, the psychographic section presented respondents with items raised to answer the research questions. The four point Likert scale was used for the items on the questionnaire while descriptive statistics using weighted mean score and standard deviation was used for analysis on SPSS 23. The criterion for the acceptance of a questionnaire item is that the weighted mean score is 2.50 and above. Any item with score below 2.50 was rejected.

4.0 Data Analysis and Results

From the questionnaire link sent out, 38 respondents from both universities attended to the questionnaire and analysis was done based on the responses generated.

Table 1: Respondents’ Awareness of Covid-19 Safety Protocols

Research Question 1: To what extent are respondents aware of Covid-19 safety Protocols?

S/N	ITEM	FA	A	U	TU	Total	Mean	Decision
		(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	X	
1	Washing of hands	86.8	7.9	-	5.3	100	3.76	Accepted
2	Avoiding parties/ clubs/worship centres	73.7	23.7	-	2.6	100	3.68	Accepted
3	Avoiding spaces of over 50 persons	73.7	26.3	-	-	100	3.74	Accepted
4	Refusing handshakes	76.3	23.7	-	-	100	3.76	Accepted
5	Avoiding hugs/ embraces	73.7	26.3	-	-	100	3.74	Accepted
6	Sanitising one’s hands	92.1	7.9	-	-	100	3.92	Accepted
7	Coughing into your elbow rather than palm	71.1	28.9	-	-	100	3.71	Accepted
8	Continuous use of face mask	97.4	2.6	-	-	100	3.97	Accepted
9	Not touching random spaces and points	57.9	36.8	5.3	-	100	3.53	Accepted

Key: FA- Fully Aware; A- Aware; U- Unaware; TU- Totally Unaware

Data in table one above show that respondents are aware of the major covid-19 protocols which adoption could influence social lifestyle as all the items were accepted based on the mean score decision rule as mentioned earlier in the methods section. With an average of 78.1% of fully aware respondents across all items, it is taken that respondents were properly exposed to the Covid-19 safety protocols. This implies that respondents are aware of the safety protocols and awareness is the first step of the trio of awareness, acceptance and adjustment, hence, adjustment (influence on social lifestyle) becomes a possibility due to awareness.

Table 2: Social Media Platforms used in Accessing Covid-19 Messages

Research Question 2: What Social Media Platforms were used in accessing Covid-19 social media messages?

S/N	ITEM	MT	ST	S	N	Total	Mean	Decision
		(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	X	
1	Facebook	60.5	21.1	15.8	2.6	100	3.39	Accepted
2	Twitter	28.9	7.9	15.8	47.4	100	2.18	Rejected
3	LinkedIn	18.4	2.6	13.2	65.8	100	1.74	Rejected

4	WhatsApp	57.9	26.3	7.9	7.9	100	3.34	Accepted
5	Instagram	44.7	13.2	15.8	26.3	100	2.76	Accepted
6	Tiktok	10.5	15.8	18.4	55.3	100	1.82	Rejected
7	Others	26.3	13.2	26.3	34.2	100	2.32	Rejected

Key: MT- Most of the Time; ST- Some of the Time; S- Seldom; N- Never.

Table two reveals that Facebook and WhatsApp were the social media platforms most frequently used in accessing Covid-19 messages. In addition, Instagram came as a distant third most used social media platform for accessing Covid-19 messages. Other platforms tested were rejected as being majorly used in accessing Covid-19 messages. The implication of this is that only Covid-19 messages via Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram could be said to have reached respondents frequently and hence, any influence social media covid-19 messages had on them could be most likely traceable to their use of the three aforementioned three platforms than other platforms.

Table 3: Covid-19 Safety Protocols Respondents were Exposed to on Social Media

Research Question 3: What Covid-19 Protocols were respondents exposed to on social media?

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Decision
		(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	X	
1	Washing of hands	86.8	7.9	2.6	2.6	100	3.79	Accepted
2	Avoiding parties/ clubs/worship centres	71.1	23.7	2.6	2.6	100	3.63	Accepted
3	Refusing handshakes	63.2	31.6	2.6	2.6	100	3.55	Accepted
4	Avoiding hugs/ embraces	71.1	18.4	7.9	2.6	100	3.58	Accepted
5	Continuous use of face mask	86.8	7.9	2.6	2.6	100	3.79	Accepted
6	Using hand sanitizer frequently when outside	84.2	13.2	-	2.6	100	3.79	Accepted
7	Coughing into your elbow rather than palm	63.2	26.3	7.9	2.6	100	3.50	Accepted
8	Avoiding spaces of over 50 persons	57.9	28.9	7.9	5.3	100	3.39	Accepted
9	Not touching random spaces and points	55.3	36.8	5.3	2.6	100	3.45	Accepted

Key: SA- Strongly Agree; A- Agree; D- Disagree; SD- Strongly Disagree

Results in table three above show that respondents were exposed to all the measured covid-19 protocols via the social media. This finding underscores the importance of the social media in bringing to the knowledge of the public, issues of public health like safety measures to adopt in the pandemic era. The finding here implies that social media platforms are important in disseminating knowledge about health issues in emergency disease outbreaks like the Covid-19 outbreak.

Table 4: Influence of Social Media Covid-19 Messages on Lifestyle of Respondents

Research Question 4: In what ways did Covid-19 social media messages influence the lifestyle of respondents?

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Decision
		(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	X	
1	I avoided parties and clubs	52.6	26.3	15.8	5.3	100	3.26	Accepted

2	I stopped receiving and giving hugs	34.2	18.4	42.1	5.3	100	2.82	Accepted
3	I stopped shaking hands with people	26.3	31.6	34.2	7.9	100	2.76	Accepted
4	I started coughing into my elbows instead of my palms	31.6	39.5	21.1	7.9	100	2.95	Accepted
5	I started using face masks whenever I'm in the public	73.7	21.1	2.6	2.6	100	3.66	Accepted
6	I stopped going to gatherings of over 50 attendees	36.8	28.9	23.7	10.5	100	2.92	Accepted
7	I consciously stopped touching random places with my hands	46.1	28.9	21.1	7.9	100	3.05	Accepted
8	I moved about with hand sanitizer	36.8	31.6	18.4	13.2	100	2.92	Accepted
9	I started washing my hands at regular intervals	52.6	36.8	5.3	5.3	100	3.37	Accepted

Keys: SA- Strongly Agree; A- Agree; D- Disagree; SD- Strongly Disagree

Table four here reveals that social media Covid-19 messages influenced the lifestyles of respondents as all the items measured were accepted based on the weighted mean scores. However, many of the items did not have highly convincing scores even though they were accepted based on the criterion for acceptance. Aside the use of face masks, avoiding parties and clubs, and washing hands at intervals, the other items raised had quite low acceptance scores which shows a form of mild influence instead of an overwhelming influence. This implies that social media communication on covid-19 had influence on the social lifestyles of respondents, howbeit, the influence was mild.

5.0 Discussion of Results

The study was carried out to ascertain the effectiveness of social media covid-19 messages in effecting lifestyle changes among students of two Nigerian universities. The study came up with many revelations as regards the findings. These findings are discussed in this section of the study. Data generated from the field revealed that the students surveyed are fully aware of the covid-19 safety protocols promoted by the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and World Health Organization (WHO). The use of face masks, hand sanitisers, washing of hands and refusal of handshakes (in that order) ranked as the protocols that respondents were properly aware of. In fact, the average percentage figure for the fully aware response for that research question was over 79%, showing that these protocols are really known by the respondents. This finding puts to death any form of doubt as to respondents' ignorance or otherwise of the Covid-19 safety protocols while it lays the groundwork for a credible finding as regards the influence of social media messages on them. The triple A (AAA) model of communication helps explain it better. The model espouses the idea that some factors must be a given before influence is measured; it says that there must be awareness and acceptance before adjustment (influence) can take place. The research question here measures the awareness aspect of the model, and it has been found that respondents are aware, making way for influence to be measured since they cannot claim ignorance of the protocols. In fact, Okpoko (2013) in explaining the Health Belief Model talks about how the model is targeted at encouraging the people to adopt positive/responsible health behaviour while minimising the harmful consequences of the health issue. How can this uptake of responsible health behaviour be possible if subjects are not aware of it? That was why this research question came up and cleared the question of awareness. This finding implies that respondents are aware of the protocols creating a pathway for consequent influence or not. Inasmuch as awareness does not automatically transmit to acceptance, then consequent influence, the findings here provide preliminary evidence for a possible influence.

This study, even though is first about the Covid-19, is coming from the media perspective of the divide, hence the need to ascertain the social media platform used by respondents in accessing Covid-19 messages. It is as a result of this that research question 2 was asked as the data generated here will help health communication planners know the social media platform to adopt in communicating health messages to youths, especially university students. Finding here (as shown in table 2) disclose that respondents made use of Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram to access covid-19 messages on the social media than other social media platforms tested. Respondents were asked as to the frequency of their usage of the platforms in accessing Covid-19 messages and they really showed that neither Twitter, LinkedIn nor Tiktok constituted part of the major social media platform used in getting messages on the disease. It is not the aim of this research to ascertain if there were messages on Covid-19 on the social media platforms, the mandate here was to ascertain the ones respondents used in accessing the messages more and that is what is reported here. Giustini et al. (2018) in their own study discovered that Twitter and Facebook constituted the major social media platforms used by respondents in accessing

public health-related messages. The slight difference in the findings could be due to the nature of the level of exposure of respondents due to environmental factors as their research was conducted in countries more developed than Nigeria.

This finding is also corroborated in the works of Laranjo et al. (2015); Achampong et al. (2020); Al-Dmour et al. (2020); Ahmad & Murad (2020) where Facebook appeared consistently as the most used or one of the most used social media platforms in accessing public health information. This shows that this finding is not a deviation from previous findings which have reiterated the importance of Facebook as a veritable social medium in delivering public health information. The Facebook as a social media platform ranked highest among the most used in accessing Covid-19 messages. This could have been due to Facebook's popularity as the most visited social media platform in the world with an average of 2.85 billion monthly active users as at May 2021 (Statista.com, 2021). Facebook as a platform, has once again made a mark in the communication of health information as a result of this finding. The implication here is that the Facebook ought to be given higher consideration when aggregating social media platforms used in getting health interventions across to the public, especially youths of the generation z who are majorly digital natives (Demir & Sonmez, 2021). The place of the social platforms used in accessing Covid-19 messages is really an important one, equally important to this work is the question of respondents being exposed to Covid-19 safety protocols via the social media. Research question three was a query into respondents' exposure to the Covid-19 protocols via the social media since we cannot really measure influence on behaviour if we have not tested social media messages' influence on knowledge. This is different from the first research question in that the first one checked general level of awareness while this checks the influence of social media platforms on that awareness. From this question, responses showed that university students (who responded) saw these protocols on social media as majority of the items (protocols) measured were accepted based on the weighted mean score decision criterion. Sadore et al. (2021) and Ahmad & Murad (2020) corroborate this finding as they discovered that audience accessed Covid-19 messages on the social media.

Issues relating to the use of face mask, hand sanitiser and the washing of hands had the highest mean scores, showing that they were the most hammered upon issues on the social media as regards safety Covid-19 protocols to adopt. The implication of the finding here is that social media platforms also constitute part of the sources of covid-19 information to the respondents. In addition, this finding shows that social media highlighted the major Covid-19 safety protocols in the messages disseminated as all the items were accepted based on the decision criterion for mean scores. As regards research question four, respondents reported that exposure to Covid-19 messages on social media effected lifestyle changes among them, hence recording an influence of the social media messages. This shows that due to the messages seen on social media about Covid-19, respondents' lives changed according to the new lifestyle regime proposed by experts and scientists to contain the growing transmission of the Corona viral disease. This finding further underscores the power of the social media in improving knowledge, creating acceptance and powering uptake of responsible health behaviour in the society. The social media have been described as great tools for the dissemination of health information (Korda & Itani, 2013) and they have thus become ubiquitous in health communication. Despite the fact that social media messages helped in effecting lifestyle changes among respondents, it is worthy to note that the responses were not overwhelmingly positive as some of the items had mean scores lower than 3.0 out of 4.0, showing that a significant percentage of respondents had claimed that the messages did not influence them to the extent of them picking up new habits that culminated into the adoption of new lifestyles. This finding is in line with Laranjo et al. (2015) who, in their study, discovered a slight positive effect of social media public health interventions in the behavioural domain. Hence, more needs to be done to make messages on social media create an overwhelming influence on the behaviour of audience members since the findings are showing an unconvincing influence.

This research, as different from previous research efforts on the Covid-19 issue has shown that social media messages on social media get to influence respondents by making them pick up behaviours that they hitherto were not accustomed to. The African society is one that is, to a large extent known for giving and receiving handshakes, hugs, partying and celebrations, and attending religious functions to say the least. But the advent of the Covid-19 disease has disrupted the normal way of doing things via the instrumentality of the social media as discovered here. This underscores the power of the social media to mobilise the public and enforce a positive change for overall societal wellbeing since the adoption of these protocols has been found to be largely influenced by exposure to social media messages on Covid-19. The findings here have proven once again, the social media's power to effect lifestyle changes amongst the public as was also discovered in Ghana by Al-Dmour et al. (2020); Asibey et al. (2017); Shubha (2015). One other thing to note about the findings here is the fact that it can safely be inferred that Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram effected the changes in lifestyle as they were the social media platforms frequently used by respondents in accessing Covid-19 messages. The power of Facebook in health information dissemination and effect on responsible health behaviour uptake is well documented in research (e.g. Achampong et al., 2020; Al-Dmour et al., 2020; Ahmad & Murad, 2020). The implications of the findings are that social media had a role to play in the mitigation and control of the spread of the Covid-19, which is still ravaging the world. In fact, the social media contributed to the low mortality figures in Nigeria as regards the disease. Therefore, efforts by the WHO, NCDC, the Federal Ministry of Health and the presidential Covid-19 task force to adopt the social media in disseminating Covid-19 safety protocols did not waste, the efforts rather paid off. This shows that the social media can be used in times of health emergencies to mobilise the public to take up responsible health behaviours that will be of benefit to the society at large. Research works of this manner do not come without limitations in the areas of methods adopted and difficulties encountered in the course of the work. The first limitation is in the design and instrument adopted in gathering the data. The use of self-reported data from the questionnaire limits this study to a large extent as the true state of things will not easily be ascertained by self-reported data are

susceptible to being falsely reported. Data gathered from self-reported questionnaires get to have veracity issues and this might have affected the results generated for this study. In view of this, an experimental research design is counselled for future researchers to gather solid data regarding the subject matter as the present study presents only preliminary data for further exploration by other researchers. The use of online survey in the study limited the number of responses gotten also. A high rate of questionnaire apathy was recorded in the study as majority of those on whose groups the questionnaire link was posted failed to respond to the survey. This shows that the physical questionnaire is more potent in gathering relevant data among Nigerian tertiary institution students. This made the data gathered not representative enough of the population of study. It is therefore counselled that future researchers make use of the physical questionnaire in Nigeria as it will encourage a higher response rate. In addition to the limitations, the research questions were not an exhaustive list of what should be asked to get all the concrete evidence as regards social media's effectiveness in influencing lifestyle changes during the Covid-19 pandemic. Future researchers can consider looking into the specifics as to which social media platform influenced the uptake of what safety protocol, then the communication factor that effected change in lifestyle as well as the factors that mitigate effectiveness of social media health messages could also be explored.

6.0 Conclusion of the Study

Based on the findings, it is hereby concluded that social media played a vital role in keeping the mortality figures of Covid-19 in Nigeria low as they helped in effecting lifestyle changes that discouraged the contagion rate of the disease in the country. Messages from social media are thus powerful in promoting responsible health behavior among students who are predominantly youths. Based on the conclusion, it is recommended that health communication planners include social media as a major media component while planning any health intervention campaign. In addition, these people should know that Facebook is about the most popularly used social media platform among students and hence, should have a pride of place in health communication plans as this will help deliver the message to the highest number of targets possible.

7.0 References of the Study

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