

Social Media Shared Video-Clips on Covid-19 and Undergraduates Perception of Health Realities of the Virus

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Abstract

During the outbreak of covid-19, the social media landscape was littered with different video clips showing different views of different people including pastors, medical experts, scientists and clergies. While some of these video clips show how the virus originated, others show the rate at which the virus claim victory over human life. All these video clips have some influence on the viewers. This paper therefore, examined undergraduates' exposure to these videos and how the videos influenced their perception of the realities of covid-19 pandemic. The study adopted the survey research method in studying 400 undergraduate students of NAU, Godfrey Okoye University Enugu and Ebonyi State University purposively selected for the study. The study was based on the technological acceptance and conspiracy theories. Findings revealed that the respondents are well exposed to the social media shared video clips on covid-19 and their exposure negatively influenced their perception of the health realities of the virus. The study therefore, concluded that the social media shared video clips on covid-19 exert drastic influence on the respondents' perception of the health realities of covid -19. It was recommended that absolute care be taken while exposing oneself to social media video clips as such exposure may be misleading to the extent of causing danger to the viewers.

Keywords: video-clips, covid-19, health realities, social media.

Introduction

Social media platforms and their shared-video clips as means of getting and sharing political, socio-cultural, ethno-religious and health information in the global community are gaining unprecedented attention among media scholars in this recent time. The reason for this cannot be dissociated from the fact that a greater percent of the population of the world are massively social media subscribers. Owing to the fact that the social media have been adjudged as an integral source of information for the youths, majority of what the people know about the society are what they learnt from the social media. In this regard, many of the youths subscribe to social media to share and gain information on happenings around the society. Considering its ability to share audio-visual contents and the fact that seeing commands believing, many social media users use video clips to authenticate their information and generate credibility among viewers.

With the shrinking nature of the rate of social interaction among the people, it can be seen that the social media is gradually replacing the usual physical interaction among the people globally. In this regards information that are shared physically among peers now lack means of dissemination save for the internet and social media platforms. All forms of information have little way of being expressed without the internet and social media platforms. This makes every social media users an automatic content

creator and disseminator. A situation which places the social media on the challenge of carrying and disseminating fake news. This places the credibility question on the role of social media in passing information especially on disaster and health emergencies. Despite being the most powerful and permeating means available to government authorities and NGOs in passing information in times of emergencies and disasters (Peary, Shaw, & Takeuchi, 2012; Slater, Nishimura, & Kinstrand, 2012a; Yoshimura & Inoue, 2012), the mainstream media of television and newspapers are still being considered reliable and credible than social media (Kimura, 2011; MIC, 2012). To secure credibility, the people adopted the idea of publishing social media stories with links, photos and video evidences of what happened and where it happened. With this fact in mind, social media shared video clips seem to be the best means of sharing and gaining credible information among the youths (Gangadharbatla, Bright, & Logan, 2014; Kaspar & Müller-Jensen, 2019). To this end, the youths heavily subscribe to social media shared video clips for the sake of information sharing and receiving which guide their opinion formation and decision taking on both local and international events (Schmidt, Hölig, Merten, & Hasebrink, 2017).

As a global pandemic that threatened the lives of the people, this pandemic attracted different video

clips from different individuals and organization who seek to gain certain interest and jettison the other concerning the coronavirus. In this regard, social media platforms were awashed with videos most of which peddle unverifiable claims about the pandemic from different interest seeking and protection groups around the world. The videos at different times control peoples' behaviours which expose them to certain unknown health risks which they may not have subscribed to take if objectively and credibly informed.

Considering the belief system attached to social media videos and photos in the minds of its users, the influence of such video clips on the users' perception of realities became very important especially in this coronavirus pandemic (Lewis, 2020). Drawing from the views among earlier media scholars on the powers of the mass media to control the people and shape realities, it becomes imperative that these social media shared video clips directly or indirectly influence the perception of the people who are exposed to them at all times. The way the people think and the images they bear in the brains according to the proponents of the agenda setting theory have been ascribed to the media power to manipulate the audience (McQuail, 2010; Asemah, 2011; Nwabueze, 2014). If the above scholarly assertion is true, it then means that those social media shared video clips on coronavirus must have influenced the youths significantly in

their perception of the realities of the virus.

Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter provide direct access to unprecedented number of audio-visual contents and as well have the power to amplify rumors and disseminate unverified information. Taking into account users' preferences and attitudes, procedures mediate and facilitate content promotion and thus information spreading (Kulshrestha, Eslami, Messias, Ghosh, Gummadi, and Karahalios, 2017). This shift from the traditional news paradigm profoundly impacts the construction of social perceptions ((Schmidt, Zollo, Del Vicario, Bessi, Scala, Caldarelli, Stanley and Quattrociocchi (2017) and the framing of narratives; it influences policy-making, political communication, as well as the evolution of public debate (Starnini, Frasca, & Baronchelli (2016); Schmidt, Zollo, Scala, Betsch, & Quattrociocchi, (2018)), especially in controversial issues (Del Vicario, Bessib, Zolloa, Petronic, Scalaa Caldarella, Stanleye, and Quattrociocch, 2016). Given the nature of the coronavirus and the interests attached to it by countries, different socio-religious and political organisations, video clips flooded the social media landscape on different ideologies concerning its origin, the transmission pattern, the mortality rate, the safety measures and myths about the virus. The impact and or influence of these video clips on the audience

means a lot and needs to be examined for future emergency management policies on health issues. Against this background, this study examined exposure to these video clips and audience perception of health realities of the virus.

Statement of Problem

At the outbreak of covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria, there was absolute shock and fear not only as a result of the deadly nature of the pandemic, but the corrupt nature of the leadership of the country and chronic decay in the health sector. These situations created an atmosphere of disbelief and skepticism on the realities of the claims by the government and the health agencies in Nigeria that the virus has penetrated the country. In the midst of these fear and skeptic views, there existed different video-clips shared through the social media concerning the origin, cause and effect of the virus. However, while some of the videos communicate the realities of the pandemic, others portray the pandemic as an intentionally designed bio-weapons to brutally reduce African population. Other social media shared video-clips make the people to see the pandemic as a result of advancement in technology whereas others portray the pandemic as the advent of the third world order and the struggle for international power. All these video clips that kept trouncing in through different social media platforms from different sources could cause confusion among social media users

and cause them to be exposed to certain views that can inform certain beliefs that may be inimical to their safety during the pandemic. Since the outbreak of the virus, researchers and scientists have embarked on different research to fish out one aspect of the virus or the other. Among series of media studies conducted on the virus, little or none has examined the social media users' exposure to these numerous social media shared video-clips on the peoples' perception of the health realities of the global pandemic that is threatening human existence in the world. This therefore means that empirically, the influence of these social media shared video-clips on the peoples' perception of realities of coronavirus cannot be verified without a study of this nature. Against this backdrop, this study examined the peoples' exposure to the video-clips and its influence on the peoples' perception of health realities in Nigeria.

Research Questions

This study is set to answer the following research questions

1. What is the respondents' level of exposure to social media shared video-clips on covid-19?
2. Which categories of the video clips are they mostly exposed to?
3. What is the respondents' perception of the realities of covid-19 based on the videos that they are exposed to?

4. What motivates the spread of social media shared video clips on covid-19 during the period under study?

Significance of the Study

This study is set to provide further understanding on how social media shared video clips on covid-19 exert influence on undergraduates' perceptions of health realities of the pandemic. This will be very important to government authorities and NGOs who are working on post-covid-19 recovery and health emergency management. It will, as well help the policy makers to secure a template for the formation of new policies for a better society ahead of further health emergencies. This study will also expose the readers to the power of the social media in fast transmission of audio-visual contents to the people through the respondents' level of exposure to the social media shared-video-clips on the virus under study. The research will expose the people to the kind of category of social media shared video clips that are rampant in the social media platforms during the pandemic period. This will help the government and NGOs to understand the category of people that mostly shared videos on the pandemic. The motivating factors for the spread of the social media video clips on the virus can also be exposed by this study to help in policy formation. Finally, this study will add to literature in health communication and emergency

management communication that can be used for further studies.

The Scope of the Study

This study covers only undergraduate students of NAU, Godfrey Okoye University Enugu and Ebonyi State University Abakiliki, and selected on the basis of conveniences and discretion. The study also covered exposure to video clips shared on WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter social networking sites which formed the basic means of exposure to news and information about the virus during the lockdown period. The study covered from March to May 2020 which is the main heat of the pandemic. Videos shared on other things that are not related to covid-19 are covered in the study. The study also did not cover videos on the virus shared after the period selected for the study. Any video clips shared on any of the platforms above on the negative effect of the coronavirus vaccine are not covered in the study. This study examined undergraduate exposure to social media shared video clips on coronavirus, it did not look at the factors that motivate exposure to these contents such as income, age and gender. So, another study can examine whether these factors influence the exposure to the video clips. Again, this study did not look at whether the students use free or paid data for their exposure to social media-video-clips on coronavirus. To this end, another researcher may look at the kind of the data that the students make use in

exposing themselves to social media information concerning the origin, spread and pattern of killing people by the virus.

Theoretical Framework

The relevant of theories to social science research make it very important for theories be adopted while embarking on social science research. In this regard, this study is based on the technological acceptance and conspiracy theories of the media.

Technological Acceptance Theory

Technological acceptance theory explains the use of the new technology by the people and its perceived ease of use. The theory supports this research at the acceptance level of the social media technology as a means of sharing and receiving information in the covid-19 pandemic era. The theory which originated from the fields of information systems, according to Chen, Li and Li (2011), is one of the most influential research theories in the studies of the determinants of information systems and information technology acceptance in predicting intentions to use and acceptance of information systems and technology by individuals. Using the Technological Acceptance theory, Davis explained the reasons why society or individuals accept a particular technology. The theory according to Mohammed and Suleiman, (2013), explains acceptance from three distinct but related perspectives which includes perceived

ease of use; perceived usefulness; and attitude towards the technology. Advancing on the above perspectives, Chuttur (2009, p. 2) affirmed that “the attitude of a user towards a system is the major determinant deciding whether the user will actually accept or reject the system. Here lies the basic objective of this study which is to ascertain the respondents’ perception of the health realities based on their exposure to social mediashared-video-clips on coronavirus.

Several studies such as (Nagy, 2018; Munoz-Leiva, Climent-Climent, and Liébana-Cabanillas, 2017; Niehaves and Plattfaut, 2014; Wallace and Sheetz, 2014; Joo and Sang, 2013; Liu, Chen, Sun, Wible, and Kuo 2010; Park, 2010) have revealed that there is a positive relationship between the perceived ease of use and the perceived usefulness of a given technology. Moreover, studies (Tefertiller, 2020; Yang and Lee, 2018; Cha, 2013) which were related to this current one, have proved that perceived advantages of online shared video clips are also influenced by the perceived ease of use of the technology. This means that if the people consider the use of social media for sharing and receiving video clips on coronavirus as more advantageous among other means, they are most likely to subscribe to its use.

In another development, it will be pertinent to acknowledge the fact that the attitude of the user is prone to being influenced by two other factors which are the individuals like or

dislike of the technology or the contents disseminated using the technology. The import of this postulation to our current study is that the acceptance of the social media shared-video-clips on coronavirus as a true position of realities is a factor of what the audience like and what they initially want to accept to be real or not.

This study was also based on the Conspiracy theories. The conspiracy theories are peoples attempts to explain the ultimate causes and effect of significant socio-political, cultural and or religious events and circumstances with claims that there are secret plots by some powerful actors leading to the origin of the identified event (Coady, 2006; Aaronovitch, 2010; Byford, 2011; Dentith & Orr, 2017). The position of the conspiracy theorists is that there are secrets behind any action or event that influenced the peoples' lives and social relationships. If the secret is not from the government, it must be from its opposition. The conspiracy theorists always find a group to accuse for the cause of an event that took place at a time. The 9/11 case in America is an example of how conspiracy works. After the attacks, Bush administration, the Saudi Government, corporations, the financial industry, and the Jews were accused of being responsible for it and this went down well with some conspiracy believers. If the perpetrators are ready to look at climate change disaster, they will blame the scientists and the

government, the industry among others.

Conspiracy is a true causal chain of events while its theory is an allegation conspired by conspiracy makers targeted at accusing a particular group of people for being responsible for an action or misfortunes which may or may not be true. Conspiracy theorists are known for their ability to accuse any group perceived as powerful and malevolent in a given situation. Relating these to the coronavirus pandemic, there existed different video clips designed to appeal to different categories of the social media audience on the cause of the global pandemic. Some who see it from the angle of power tussle between America and China portray the pandemic as a virus targeted to reduce American population and make Trump loose second tenure. Economically, the virus was seen as an intentionally created problem to put China ahead of the world as they will provide relief material and vaccine in exchange for one thing or the other. Religiously, different video clips portray the virus as a means of enthroning anti-Christ through insertion of micro-chips that can track human beings in the body for them to be controlled by an accused set of people like Bill Gate. It is imperative to understand that conspiracy survives because of audience bias against powerful disliked groups and official accounts of the events upon which conspiracy theories are propagated

(Wood, Douglas, & Sutton, 2012; Imhoff & Lamberty, 2018).

Relating this theory to the current study, it is clear that the world never wanted to see the virus to be real and killing as portrayed in the media. This affected the belief that the people hold about the realities of the virus. China as a country of origin of the virus became completely suspicious following their advancement in technology and needed to be the world power. These two reasons make the audience of social media to agree and believe that the virus is a bioweapon and an intentionally built laboratory technology to humble human beings and make money through vaccine and gain the needed world power over all other countries. This made the conspiracy to sell more in Africa and other developing countries.

Empirical Literature

This study aligned itself to other studies that examined social media use and the covid-19 crisis, as well as audio-visual contents presented through social media to the consumers within the pandemic era. The target of this study is to explore how the virus was presented in video-clips and the influence the video-clips have on the peoples' perception of health realities of the virus.

Vasconcelos, Pereira, Guimarães, Ribeiro, Melo and Benevenuto, (2020) examined YouTube videos shared by political-oriented public groups on WhatsApp for a month during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study

compared videos on only COVID-19 related themes with others which contained political themes being shared in the groups and found that videos that combined political themes with the pandemic attracted more emotional attributes than those with only pandemic themes. This study is related to the current one but applies the content analysis in exploring the themes of the videos. Again, while the current study is looking at the themes of the videos, this study is looking at the influence of the videos of the audience and their perception of the videos in terms health realities of the pandemic.

In another study Basch, Hillyer, Jaime (2020) examined a total of 117 videos with about 1.2 billion views concerning coronavirus. A critical review of this video which was shared through TikTok, a popular video-based social media platform shows that there was little or no useful information to the public. These kinds of video clips pass trivialities about the virus to the people which can make them act otherwise or even take the realities of the virus for a joke.

Another study conducted by Li, Bailey, Huynh and Chan (2020) on 113 shared video clips on the virus revealed that over quarter of the total videos spread misinformation to the audience.

Joel and Williams (2020), concluded that the outbreak of covid-19 has encouraged the proliferation of misleading social media posts and videos around the globe. In their study,

on investigation of the roles of physicians in the spread of the virus, they argued that the public physicians and doctors who view a public presence as a large segment of their mission emerging force in this information infodemic. The study recommended that public physicians on social media are a new occurrence and are an important part if online misinformation can be controlled. This study is closely related this current one but differs in perspective. While the previous study is looking at the physicians as source of misinformation on the pandemic, this current study is looking at the influence of the already disseminated information by the source on the audience belief and perception of the virus.

Method

This study adopted the survey research method in studying 400 students out of the total population of 48, 459 regular students of the three Universities selected with the population of NAU as 24,706 students, EBSU as 19,753 students and the Godfrey Okoye University as 4000 students. The instrument of data collection was the questionnaire while the sample technique was purposive sampling which enabled the researchers to study only the students who are exposed to different social media-shared-video-clips on covid-19 pandemic. The researchers also adopted the use of quantitative contents review to examine the motivating factor for video-clips shared on the social media

concerning covid-19 pandemic. Out of the 400 copies of the questionnaire dispatched, only 334 copies were validly filled and successfully returned.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Showing respondents’ level of exposure to social media shared video-clips on coronavirus

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Very highly exposed	158	47.3%
Highly exposed	121	36.2%
Not exposed	0	0%
Moderately exposed	55	16.4%
Total	334	100

Source: Researchers’ field survey, 2021

This table shows the respondents’ level of exposure to social media shared video clips on coronavirus pandemic. This table shows that the respondents are well exposed social media shared video clips on the pandemic. This implies that social media have been an avenue for message dissemination of information to the public.

Which categories of the video-clips are they mostly exposed to?

Category of social media shared video-clips exposed to	Frequency	Percent
Religious & 3 rd world order motivated video-clips	112	33.5%
Economic motivated video-clips	56	16.7%
5G technology conspiracy	88	26.3%
The Chinese need to	47	14.7%

be the leading world power		
The virus as a target to reduce African population	35	10.4%
Total	334	100

Source: Researchers' field survey, 2021

This table revealed the categories of social media shared video clips on coronavirus and how popular each is

among the respondents. From the data, the religious and third world order as a factor dominated the video clips categories. This implies that Nigerians see the virus more from the perspective of religious and technological perspectives.

Table 3: Influence of Exposure to these social media shared videos clips on the audience. 5-point Likert scale table

Variables	SA	A	UN	DA	SD	Total	X	Rmks
Respondents' exposure to these video-clips makes them to believe that the virus is not natural	101	89	110	19	15	334	3.7	Accepted
Their exposure to this video-clips makes them to accept that 5G network is actually lethal to human lives	505	356	330	38	15	1244		
Exposure to these video-clips draws the people closer to the believe that third world order is here	152	55	46	38	43	334	3.7	Accepted
Actually, these videos suggest that the virus has economic undertone	760	220	138	76	43	1237		
	122	84	80	35	13	334	3.7	Accepted
	610	336	240	70	13	1269		
	103	76	70	52	33	334	3.4	Accepted
	515	304	210	104	33	1166		

Source: Researcher's field survey, 2021

The information in the above table is very significant on the likely behaviours that the social media users who are exposed to these videos can exhibit. It shows that the social media shared video clips on the virus drastically shaped and influenced the people's sense of reasoning concerning the virus.

Discussion of Findings

Drawing from the data on the first research question posed to ascertain the respondent's level of exposure to social media shared video clips on the covid-19 pandemic, the research found that the respondents are well exposed to the videos both factual and non-factual. This finding shows that social media is one of the most vibrant means

of disseminating information to the masses. It equally justifies the power of the social media networks to spread misinformation faster to the people too. The rate of exposure as presented in the data confirms earlier media scholars' views in which social media platforms were described to have the capacity to provide direct access to contents to an unprecedented number of people. The fact that both factual and non-factual contents find their ways into the social media landscape justifies the claims that it can amplify rumors and encourage distribution of questionable information to the people (Cinelli¹, Quattrocio¹, Galeazzi, Valensise, Brugnoli¹, Schmidt, Zola, Zollo¹, & Scala¹, 2020). The findings further corroborate that of Bao, Sun, Meng, Shi and Lu, 2020) who found that social media is one of the main channels of updating information on COVID-19 globally. The level of exposure to the social media shared video clips is a factor of the perceived ease of use (Tefertiller, 2020; Yang and Lee, 2018; Cha, 2013), usefulness of the videos (Nagy, 2018; Munoz-Leiva, Climent-Climent, and Liébana-Cabanillas, 2017; Niehaves and Plattfaut, 2014; Wallace and Sheetz, 2014; Joo and Sang, 2013; Liu, Chen, Sun, Wible, and Kuo 2010; Park, 2010) and the attitudes towards social media (Chuttur, 2013).

The second research question, the researchers tried to identify the motivating factor that led to proliferation of social media shared video-clips on covid-19. In this regard,

it was found that the dominant factors that controlled covid-19 shared video clips on social media was Religious and 3rd world order motivating factor. This shows how religious the people of Nigeria are. The proliferation of religious motivated videos on the pandemic shows that the people have lost hope in modern medicine and have subscribed to God for every solution including health care facilities. At the outbreak of the covid 19 pandemic, the social media in Nigeria was awashed with messages from different pastors on the virus. While some claim that the third world order is here, other claim that the world have committed more sins and have lost the mercy of God which brought the virus. However, there are videos on the virus which emanated from politics and the struggle for power as propagated by the video makers but the most rampant that dominated the videos were the ones pointing to the virus as lack of commitment to the worship of God, immoralities in the world, third world order and other spiritualities which the church agreed were the cause of the virus. The clergies who share these videos find some groups to blame for the pandemic or reasons that brought about the virus which can be or not be verifiable. Significantly, these video clips influenced the people into believing their pastors and the clergies based on what they hold sacred. This finding justifies the claim among conspiracy theorists that people tend to believe conspiracies especially when the accused group is within their

latitude of rejection. The people's rejection of the devil and all that connects to it compels their belief in what their various pastors said about the virus.

On the third research objective that sought to examine whether the exposure to these unverified videos influence the people, it was found that the respondents are grossly influenced to think along-side the videos that they have been exposed to. This is because the more people are exposed to the same message from the media, the more likely it will override their personal beliefs and force them to accept that which they were exposed to over time (see Gerbner, et al., 1980) cited in Mitomo, Otsuka, and Jeon, (2015). Again, the more closely related a media message is to a situation on ground, the more likely the people are forced to believe them to be true. This means that the closer resemblance the media information is to respondent's previous experience, the stronger the influence of the media message will have on them. This finding corroborates that of Cheng, Mitomo, Otsuka, and Jeon, (2015) which concluded that the media exert significant effects on an audience perception especially of the disaster and as well changes their behavior intention on the emergency situation that they found themselves in. This finding is also in tandem with that of Joel and Williams (2020) that massive propagation of misleading information through social media shared video-clips can be very inimical to human

safety because of its ability to expose the people to avoidable danger. This finding also corroborates the findings made by Allington, Duffy, Wessely, Dhavan and, Rubin (2020), that exposure to social media shared contents among individuals especially those who use social media as their primary source of information is very dangerous because such video contents can force the people to act in line with the conspiracy thereby ignoring the covid-19 health safety measures.

Conclusion

Drawing from the data obtained from the study, this paper concluded that the respondents are not only well exposed to social media shared video clips on covid-19 but they are also influenced by their exposure to the videos. This study confirmed that covid-19 attracted a lot of social media videos making certain unverifiable claims which find their ways into the public domain forming part of the public discussions which in turn led to adoption of the communicated behavioural intentions of the audience. The study also concluded that social media shared videos have the potential to lure people into taking unhealthy health actions that can expose them to dangers of contacting the virus. We concluded that the video-clips shared on social media concerning covid 19 was dominated by religious and third world order motivating factor which doubles as the most rampant contents among the people.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommended as follows:

1. That everyone using social media should be very careful to be able to sieve the social media video clips that are shared on daily bases in order to stay away from accepting what one may wish to have rejected.
2. That social media platform should strive to ensure that their platforms are guarded against the spread of unverified and public-misleading contents in any form for the security and safety of the society.
3. That Nigerians should endeavor to reduce their love and belief in religion and their religious leaders to help them make the right judgment on issues at hand at each point in time. This will save them from being deceived in taking actions that one would have loved to ignore if well informed.
4. Further studies should look at the thematic configuration of social media shared video clips on covid-19

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