

**INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MESSAGES ON THE KNOWLEDGE,
PERCEPTION AND ATTITUDE TO COVID-19 GUIDELINES AND PROTOCOLS BY
MOUNTAIN TOP UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

BY

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CERTIFICATION

I certify that this work was carried out by Etta, Grace Ekong at the Department of Mass Communication, Mountain Top University, Ogun State, Nigeria under my supervision.

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DEDICATION

This work is humbly dedicated to God Almighty God for his divine guidance and strength to produce this work and to my loving parents for their support and encouragement.

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My most profound gratitude goes to God Almighty for guiding and sustaining me throughout this programme. I would not have gone this far but for him. I am immensely grateful for his provision, good health and the will power to embark on the degree program and much more.

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ABSTRACT

Social media is a convenient way to keep up with the large amount of information available on coronavirus and this information has the capability to affect people's emotions and as a result impact their behaviour. Individuals may change their unhealthy behaviours if they are aware of the messages that are harmful to their health. This research work examined the influence of social media messages and their influence on the knowledge, perception and attitude of MTU students towards the COVID-19 pandemic. The study adopted the survey method and questionnaire used to collect data from 310 respondents who were randomly sampled. The collected data were analysed and results presented using Tables, frequency and percentage. Findings from the study revealed that; Social media messages influence student's attitude positively towards adopting COVID-19 guidelines and protocols, WhatsApp and Facebook are the social media platforms mostly used to receive COVID-19 messages, Subjective Norms has a substantial influence on student's attitude towards Social media messages on COVID-19 and Students showed a high knowledge level about COVID-19. The study concludes that social media is a vital tool for disseminating health messages and shaping public attitude. The study recommended that COVID-19 messages should be sustained on various social media platforms to prevent students from neglecting the COVID-19 preventive measures they have acquired overtime.

KEYWORDS: *COVID-19, Preventive Measures, Influence, Knowledge, Perception, Attitude*

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Background to the Study

Social media is the platform used in the present era to allow for interaction among people. Social media platforms are the most widely utilized information channels in the world today; ease and low-cost internet access, as well as a vast number of registered users on these platforms, makes information sharing convenient and effective. (Gonzalez-Padilla and Tortolero-Blanco, 2020). The term “social media” refers to a set of websites and web-based technologies that enables mass engagement, communication and collaboration among members of its network (Murphy, 2013). Its superiority is grounded on real-time visuals captured by audio-visual recordings of events as it unfolds.

The prevalence of the social media has aided in promoting awareness about communicable diseases and also makes available current information on the disease’s status. “Evidence about social media’s impact on health knowledge, behaviour and outcomes shows that these tools can be effective in meeting individual and population health needs”, (Al-Dmour, Masa'deh, Salman, Abuhashesh & Al-Dmour, 2020) citing (Korda, 2013). The healthcare industry has benefited from the use of social media in the dissemination of messages and in the creation of public awareness promotions. The Nigerian Center for Disease Control (NCDC), through its Twitter accounts provides updates on the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases, number of deaths, prevention tips, safety protocols, etc.

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) is an infectious disease that results to respiratory infections stretching from the common cold to severe respiratory difficulties. The virus originated in the Hunan seafood market at Wuhan, China where live bats, snakes, raccoons, dogs, wild animals, among other things, were sold in December 2019 (Obi-Ani, Aikwenze & Isiani, 2020) citing (Shereen, Khan, Kazmi, Bashir & Siddique, 2020) the World Health Organization confirmed it as a pandemic on the 11th of March 2020 (WHO, 2020).

According to the Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC), the over-all number of confirmed cases in Nigeria as at the 15th of March, 2021, was 160,895, with 145,752 persons discharged

persons and 2,016 deaths. The Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC) has recommended frequent hand washing with soap and water for 20 seconds, use of alcohol based hand sanitizer, use of nose masks, regular cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces and avoidance of crowded places

The Nigerian president approved the COVID-19 regulations 2020, terming the disease as a “dangerous infectious disease” and enforced a nationwide lockdown beginning from March 30th, 2020. Restrictions on international, national and inter-state transportation linkages, market, office or business transactions, educational institutions (primary, secondary and tertiary), sports, religious and all other associated social gathering was imposed. (Adenubi, O., Adebawale, O., Oloye, A., Bankole, N., Ayo-Ajayi, P., 2020) citing (Olapegba, Ayandele, Kolawale, Oguntayo, Gandi, Dangiwa, Ottu & Iorfa, 2020). The attainment of this entire feat can be credited not just too appropriate healthcare services but also the role played by the social media in influencing health behaviour change among the populace. WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube are examples of social media platforms has developed into a variety of communication and engagement medium for both the government and the general populace during this period.

“COVID-19 is also the first pandemic to occur in the age of hyper connectivity, whereby 76% of people living in advanced economies are reported owning a smartphone and 67% are reported to using social media” (Hanafiah & Wan, 2020) citing (Pew Research, 2020). It is reported that Nigeria had 104.4 million internet users and 33.00 million social media users as at January, 2021 (Simon, 2021). Various social media platforms have issued different information on COVID-19 and have also laid out instructions on ways to prevent the spread of the virus. The messages people receive on various social media platforms shape their attitude on the pandemics risk, which in turn influences their behaviour.

Social media is a convenient way to keep up with the large amount of information available on the coronavirus, and this information has the capability to affect people’s emotions and as a result impact their attitude. In times of crisis such as the COVID-19 outbreak, social media has become a convenient tool for the circulation of false or specially personalized content. (Hamzat & Otulugbu, 2020) citing (Zarocostas, 2020). There are diverse fabrications in the social media space regarding the pandemic; some of these social media messages include the likely cure of

COVID-19 in India's native medicine and homemade medicines and this misinformation's increases people's terror.

It has been noted that a person's level of awareness has a direct impact on their assessment of disease vulnerability. The lack of awareness about the COVID-19 disease could play a role in the spread of the virus. The understanding of how an infection spreads and how to prevent it would change an individual's behaviour. (Ogolodom, Mbaba, Alazigha & Eke, 2020). Individuals may change their unhealthy behaviours if they are aware of the messages that are harmful to their health. (Hajara, 2014)

1.2 Statement of problem

People are now using social media platforms to acquire updates regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, as it is a platform utilized for information collection, sharing, discussion, etc. The most active users of numerous social media networks are university students. Their attitude and actions could have had a significant influence in the spread of a pandemic (Peng, Pei, Zheng, Wang & Zhang, 2020). They are exposed to variety of information on the social media that could positively or negatively influence their reasoning which in turn affects their decision concerning their compliance to the COVID-19 guidelines and protocols. This research intends to fill the knowledge gap of how the knowledge, perception and attitude of Mountain Top University students on COVID-19 are influenced by social media messages.

Universities provide the society with a forum to discuss major social, economic, cultural, moral and spiritual problems humanity may be facing. Its employees contribute to the development of the country by disseminating specialized knowledge and skills and mentoring the younger generation (Adenubi et al, 2020). Students are more likely to be carriers of this deadly infection as a result of their way of life and close proximity with other students. Furthermore, many students provide information to their family members, and thereby play a significant role in the transmission of information (Singh, Sewda & Shiv, 2020)

By accessing people's knowledge about diseases, deeper insights into public perceptions and practices can be gained, thereby helping to identify attributes that influence adopting healthy

practices and responsive behaviour (Adenubi et al 2020) citing (Richards, 2017; Al-Hanawi, Angawi, Alshareef & Alsharqui, 2020)

In the light of the above statement, this research work is set out to evaluate the extent to which social media messages influenced the knowledge, perception and attitude of MTU students towards the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.3 Objective of the study:

1. To find out the level of student's exposure to social media messages on COVID-19
2. To examine the knowledge level of MTU students about COVID-19
3. To examine how social media messages influenced the perception of students towards the virus
4. To find out how subjective norms impacts students attitude towards COVID-19 social media messages
5. To find out how COVID-19 messages on social media has influenced the attitude of students towards COVID-19 prevention.

1.4 Research questions:

- 2 To what extent are MTU students exposed to social media messages on COVID-19?
- 3 What is the knowledge level of MTU students about COVID-19?
- 4 To what extent do social media messages influence student's perception towards COVID-19?
- 5 To what extent do subjective norms influence student's attitude towards COVID-19 social media messages?
- 6 To what extent has the COVID-19 messages on social media influenced the attitude of MTU students towards COVID-19 prevention?

1.5 Significance of Study:

This work is expected to draw attention to the role that social media plays in educating people, especially the students on ways of preventing COVID-19 amongst them.

The findings from this study are expected to aid media and health practitioners, university body, students and policy makers to redeploy their strategies and media activities towards the prevention of COVID-19.

The study aims to contribute to the literature on issues related to COVID-19 and social media, as future researchers may find it useful as a reference material.

This work will provide an insight into the use of social media platforms for health promotion and for the dissemination of health behaviour change messages.

1.6 **Scope of Study:**

The study focuses on the influence of social media messages on the knowledge, perception and attitude of Mountain Top University Students, other media forms like the broadcast and print media were not included. The respondents are strictly students of the Mountain Top University both male and female.

1.7 **Operational Definition of Terms:**

Influence: this refers to the capacity to shape or alter the behaviour or character of someone or a thing

Social Media: These are websites and application that allows its users to create and share content

Social Media Messages: This is made up of expressed ideas, information reported, and shared views which are communicated through social media platforms.

Knowledge: This refers to awareness or familiarity gained by experience (of a person, fact or thing)

Perception: This refers to the way individuals interprets information in order to create meaning.

Attitude: This refers to the an individual's feels towards something

Mountain Top University: Mountain Top University is a private university situated in Makogi Oba, Ogun State, Nigeria; it was established in 2015 by Dr. D.K. Olukoya, the founder and General Overseer of MFM Ministries worldwide.

COVID-19: This is a communicable disease caused by a type of virus that is capable of causing fever, cough and breathing.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, an attempt is made to review the related literature to form the background, and conceptual framework for the study. This review examines the influence of social media message on the knowledge, perception and attitude of Mountain Top University students towards COVID-19 guidelines/protocols. It also discusses the theoretical framework on which the research study finds its base and aids as a backup to the study. Finally, this chapter also looks at various works done by other researchers and scholars in relation to the research study under the empirical review.

2.1.1 Overview of COVID-19

Coronavirus was termed in 1968 after the diseases' "corona-like or crown-"like morphology (Etukudoh, Ejinaka, Olowu & Udoudoh, 2020). Coronavirus is the present-day epidemic that is affecting people all over the world, irrespective of gender, age, nationality, ethnicity, etc.

COVID-19 which is referred to as a novel virus was responsible for the first significant pandemic which was recorded amongst humans in 1918, animals in the 1930's and humans again in the 1960's, then in 2003, in 1997 and now in 2020 after 100 years (Etukudoh et al, 2020). The virus has the regular cold symptoms which include; stuffy nose, sore throat, and cough. Coronaviruses are zoonotic, which means they are typically spread from animals to humans. A novel strain of coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) that has previously been found in humans causes the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). (NCDC, 2020)

The epidemic was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern by the World Health Organization WHO and was pronounced a pandemic on the 11th of March, 2020.

2.1.2 Role of Social Media Platforms in the COVID-19 Pandemic

People's way of communication and sharing of information has changed as a result of social media (Kaplain & Haenlein, 2009), and health communication has not been immune to this new development. During the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, the first study on social media usage in a pandemic was conducted. (Ahmad & Murad, 2020)

Social media offers individuals a means to share their opinions, exchange views, information, and attitudes, express concern and inquire about current events. According to a current study on media behaviours during the pandemic, it was revealed that 40% of individuals use social media for news now more than they did before COVID-19 (Havas Media Group, 2020). In Sweden, a social media campaign to inform people about health hygiene and social street curfews has been established. Health's agencies can make use of the social media platforms to keep the public informed about the pandemics progress. It can also be used to gain a deeper knowledge of the misunderstandings around COVID-19 and the types of information that the average person requires.

People can make use of social media platforms to share perspectives on a variety of topics, as well as ask pertinent questions and even respond to those inquiries. In comparison to traditional media like television, blogs have more trust. (Johnson & Kaye, 2004) .The function of social media in propagating the COVID-19 pandemic includes not only creating awareness about the virus, but also to enlighten people about it. The distribution of knowledge about the epidemic has been aided significantly by social media platforms. In order to combat the pandemic, several social media sites are conducting awareness campaigns. During the pandemic, social media platforms aid to maintain emotional stability among individuals. Social media platforms help in the promotion of advertisements regarding the COVID-19 guidelines; these adverts were published by people in order to reach a large audience.

Obi-Ani et al 2020 cited AlSayyad & Guvenc (2015) in their investigation of the role of social media to the victory of the Arab Spring revolution, in their interview with Gigi Ibrahim, an Egyptian tweeter, who said:

“Social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook are very important. They can spread mass amounts of information...communication is key here. But in the end of the day, if people don’t decide to go to the streets...nothing will happen”.

According to a Ghanaian survey, Ghanaians received information and updates about the virus through social media, with Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram being the most popular platforms. According to a study, social media assisted the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in maintaining active communications with the public during the Ebola (2014) and Zika (2015) outbreak, evidence points out that when the WHO declared Zika virus a global threat in 2016, social media surveillance and preventative awareness helped save lives by improving risk control and disease management (Sahni & Sharma, 2020)

People receive messages about the virus almost immediately after the source distributes the information, and they are able to raise questions, seek answers, create online conversations, and so on, thanks to the immediate attribute of social media. The influence of the virus on human existence is better communicated through social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook which has aided in linking people to the website of the World Health Organization (WHO) in order to obtain reliable information. The World Health Organization (WHO) now has a verified WhatsApp account where individuals can access the latest information regarding the Virus. Through its twitter accounts, The Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and the Presidential Task Force (PTF) work to raise awareness about the virus by encouraging people to stay at home, wear a mask, dispel myths concerning the virus, etc. In the COVID-19 era, social media outlets have also assisted in mobilizing public support. With the ban on public gatherings, many use social media to communicate with their families and friends.

2.1.3. Social Media Campaigns to Combat COVID-19

In order to help fight the spread of the virus, various social media platforms launched different campaigns to raise awareness, educate, entertain and contribute to fight against the virus. Examples include;

1. Facebook Supports the Fight Against Coronavirus misinformation

Facebook is a social networking platform that allows users to interact with friends and family and send messages

Facebook has put in place policies to combat misinformation among its 2.5 billion users. Facebook is giving priority to its newsfeed to allow for reliable information from more authentic sources like the World Health Organization and other authoritative sites. Users are also encouraged to support in the fight against misinformation by reporting unverified messages. Facebook also employs a fact checking tool to assess and reveal false information as well as to notify users who share that information.(Reitere 2021)

2. TikTok collaborates with World Health Organization (WHO) and Broadcasts Daily Live Streams

The platform works together with the World Health Organization (WHO), in organizing a town hall style livestreams where viewers can ask health professionals direct questions. TikTok comprehends the need to keep people entertained during the pandemic and it has done its best to accomplish this whilst integrating informative content in its daily streams to keep its users well informed on the happenings around the world. During the isolation period TikTok also hosted daily #HappyAtHome livestreams to keep its followers engaged and entertained. TikTok has also placed links that helps people connects to The World Health Organization's website. (Reitere 2021)

3. YouTube Takes Down Advertisement on Virus Related content

YouTube is a video-sharing website that allows users to upload and view videos. With over two billion users globally, YouTube is a vital medium of information. Studies have evaluated YouTube as a source of information on the Ebola virus outbreak Shawn (Bash, Hillyer & Basch, 2020).

YouTube is assisting in the battle against false information. It has removed contents from its platform that teaches people to treat the virus at home rather than seek for medical assistance. The platform has removed all adverts around videos on COVID-19 and has returned video playback to standard definition by default

4. Snapchat Offers Resources for Mental Health

To encourage people to stay at home and avoid touching their faces Snapchat has introduced Bitmoji stickers. It also offers an interactive quiz that evaluates user's knowledge about the features of corona virus. It also has a campaign "Here For You", in which users can search for content from specialists on themes like suicide, depression, anxiety and so on, on this campaign as it has resources on mental health. (Reitere, 2021)

5. WhatsApp Launches the COVID-19 Information Hub

WhatsApp is a messaging service that allows users to communicate through texts, video and audio. The platform collaborates with organization such as; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) The World Health Organization and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) WhatsApp which has a global user base of 2 billion, has resorted to fighting misinformation about the pandemic on the network. It provides users with an avenue to receive current information about the virus. It also launched a Coronavirus Information Hub.

6. Instagram Encourages Self-Isolation and Social Distancing

Instagram is a video and photo-sharing platform. Instagram has placed a ban on searches for coronavirus related AR effects. Instagram has prioritized its feed with only credible sources of information. Its primary goal is to promote self-isolation; it has also distributed Stay Home stickers to persuade its users to stay home and stay safe. (Reitere, 2021)

7. Twitter Cares of its Users

Twitter is a micro-blogging platform that permits its users to interact through brief messages with a character limit of 280 characters.

The platform has prohibited tweets that could spread misinformation about the virus and encourages its users to get COVID-19 information from approved Twitter pages. Twitter supported quality journalism by donating \$1 million to the committee to protect journalists and the International Women's Media Foundation. It also designed a 'know the facts' pop up, this appears when you make searches for coronavirus related terms. (Reitere, 2021)

2.1.4 Social Media Influence on Health Behaviour

Communication is regarded as an essential tool in the promotion of health. Even if the health messages are comprehensive, remarkable, enlightening and beneficial, if they are not adequately communicated to the general public or even the target receivers, it may be difficult, if not impossible, for such messages to make an impact. Social media can be harnessed to influence positive health behaviors, in the case of the COVID-19; communicating reasons for social distancing and providing practical guidance on living in the era of coronavirus.

Ratna (2019) affirms that efforts to provide healthcare services to the populace will fail if communication is ineffective and social media plays an important role in conveying health messages. Uittenhout (2012) conducted a researchh to examine the usefulness of social media in transmitting health information about head lice and the study established that social media platforms were not effective in spreading information to parents about head lice with the goal to change behaviour aimed at preventing lice. According to the study, social media platforms may be used for health communication in conjunction with other media options. Hunter, Murray & Kee. (2019) in their research discovered that social media platforms are effective for interventions for health behaviours and outcomes and also that social media can influence behaviour in a short period of six months and also in a long period of over six months.

2.1.5 Over-view of COVID-19 Social Media Message's; The Good and the Bad

An occurrence of public concern such as health matters piques the interest of the media including social media. The level of messages on social media has the capability to influence to the views of users on its various platforms.

While some messages on social media are factual, helpful and educative others are deceptive, misleading and false. Most of these messages instilled fear in people, which resulted in food shortages, buying crisis, with people attempting to purchase toilet paper and other basic items due to the messages that induced fear in people. According to a research, false social media messages might cause serious health problems, such as the methanol poisoning that occurred in Iran (an Islamic country with restrictions on alcohol consumption) in March 2020, when 2100 Iranians ingested alcohol after being exposed to social media messages that stated they could prevent being infected by the virus by doing so. Approximately 900 individuals have

been poisoned by alcohols which lead to the death of 296 people. (Ukwuru & Nwankwo, 2020) citing (Soltaninejad, 2020). Others of such messages create confusion amongst people.

The aim of positive social media messages on COVID-19 includes;

1. To create public awareness about the virus, its symptoms and preventive measures:
COVID-19 social media messages aimed to inform the public about the symptoms to check out for if they are suspicious of a possible COVID-19 case and how to deal with it. For example, people who experience sudden trouble in breathing, loss of taste cough, and catarrh should go to the hospital to be tested. These social media messages tried to educate the public on the safety measures to take in order to avoid contracting the virus by sharing safety tips. These messages educated the public about how the virus spreads and warned them to avoid crowded places, wear a mask, wash their hands frequently and isolate themselves if they become infected.

2. To dispel myths and misconceptions about the virus:

Social media messages particularly those from official sources like the World Health Organization (WHO) aimed to correct people's preconceptions about the virus. Some of the messages, aimed to correct the myth that consuming alcohol protects people from contracting the virus. The messages addressed the issue of temperature which people claimed to be a defence against contacting the virus. Most people believed that the hot climate in Nigeria would kill the virus, thus making Nigerians immune to the virus

3. To encourage the people to take positive action:

Another goal of the social media messages was to mobilize the people to take positive steps in order to save lives and preserve humanity. Spreading information surrounding the virus would help curtail the spread of the virus and in turn help in the eradication of the deadly virus.

Samples of Social Media Messages on COVID-19;

➡ *Forwarded*

Dear family, friends,
colleagues etc;

Friends working in a London hospital have informed us that people are being brought to the hospital for developing DVT, Deep Venous Thrombosis (blood clots on the legs) and they are dying of this disease as well.

Everyone is advised to move around in the house (mobilise). Whether working on the computer at home or watching tv, ensure that you move about frequently.

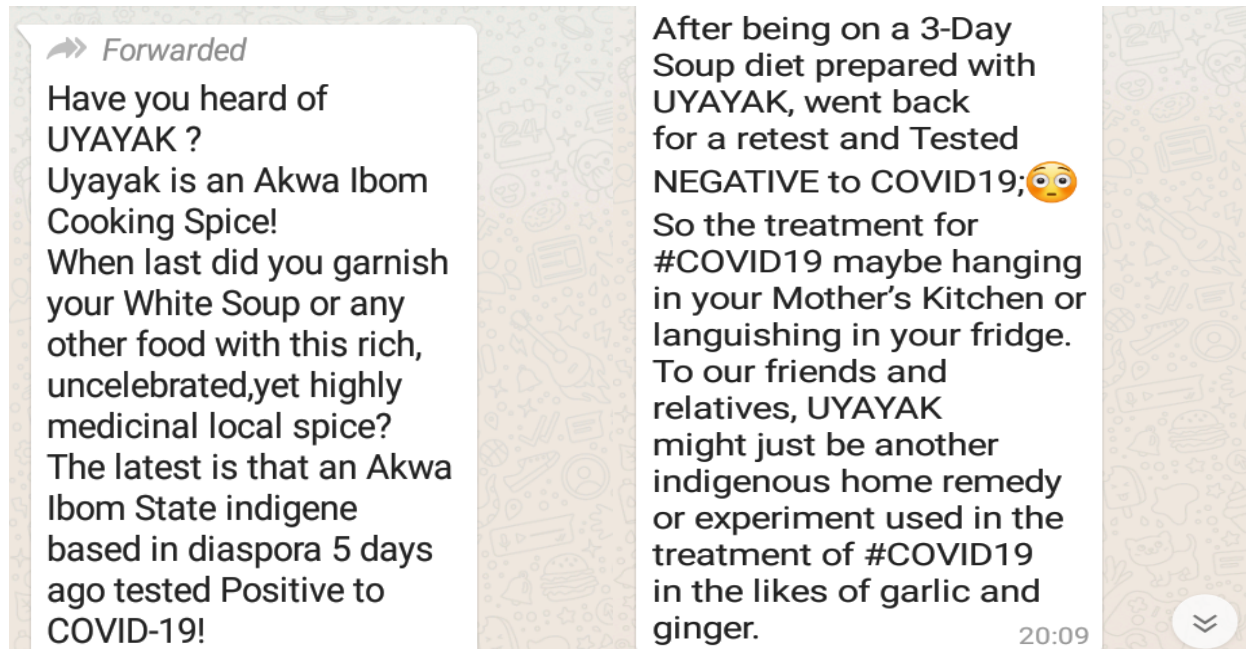
Do exercise as much as you can to prevent this deadly disease. It is not only Covid-19 that is killing people.

At this time when we are all locked in, you should not sit all day at the table reading and working on computers or watching TV all day. Please take a walk round in the house and in the compound.

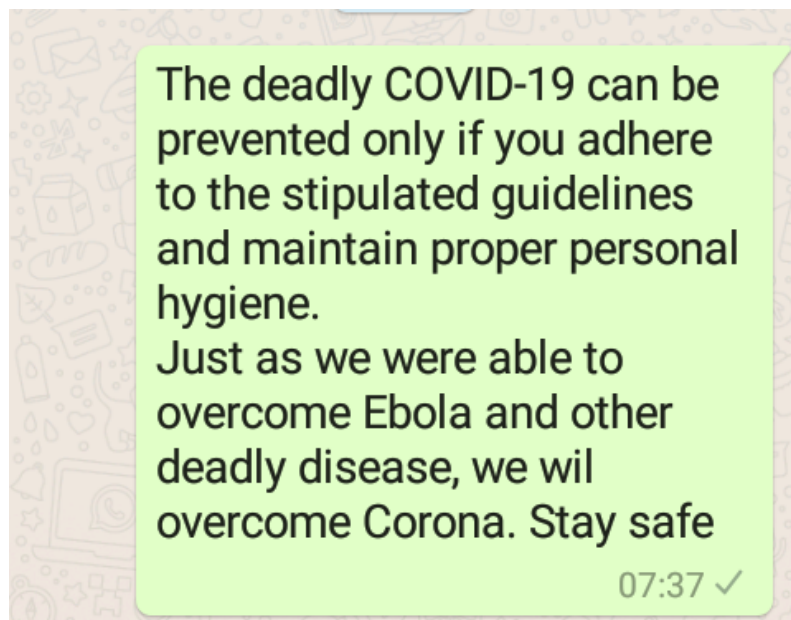
We need to pass round this information to support one another..Forwarded as received.

20:32

WhatsApp communication (2020)



WhatsApp Communication (2020)



WhatsApp Communication

(2021)



NCDC @NCDCgov · Feb 6

Prevention is better than cure.

#TakeResponsibility to reduce the risk of spread of #COVID19.

- ✓ Wear your mask covering your mouth & nose
- ✓ Wash your hands regularly
- ✓ Cough/sneeze into your elbow
- ✓ Maintain physical distance from the next person
- ✓ Avoid large gatherings



NCDC @NCDCgov · Jan 14

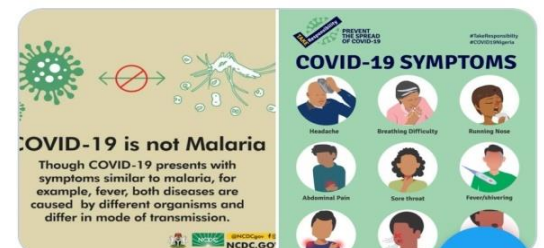
#COVID19 is not malaria

If you have COUGH or FEVER & 1 of these symptoms:

Loss of taste/smell
Difficulty breathing
Diarrhea
Catarrh
Fatigue
Shivering
Body pain
Headache
Sore throat

Do call your state hotline
covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/contact/

#TakeResponsibility



(Twitter, 2020)

Mar 22, 2020 at 6:57 PM • 👤



👍 43

17 Comments

👍 Like

💬 Comment

(Facebook, 2020)

2.1.6 The Connection between Attitude and Behaviour

The construct attitude has been utilized in the social sciences over time, in its early phases, the strong relationship between attitude and behaviour was primarily an article of faith among social scientists. Theories of attitude structure from the beginning expressly argued that behaviour and attitude were inextricably linked. (Guyer & Fabrigar, 2015)

Attitude is a psychological inclination that is represented by judging a certain entity with some degree of favour or dislike. (Ajilore, Atakiti & Onyenankaya, 2017) citing (Eagly and Chaiken, 2007). Scholars have suggested that this binary or dualistic interpretation of attitude is flawed. (Ajilore et al 2017) .Clayton and Myers (2009) propose that attitudes are more than just a positive or negative evaluation of an attitude object. Ajilore et al (2017) citing (Main, 2004) suggests that individuals have the ability to hold positive and negative attitude concurrently.

A person's attitude towards an object, whether favourable or negative, does not always convert into actual conduct. Ajilore et al (2017) citing (Clayton & Myers, 2009). A person may be well versed on COVID-19 prevention/Safety guidelines but his behaviours may not reflect this. The circumstance in which ones attitude does not translate to action as "value-action-gap", which he blames on a number of social and contextual reasons. Ajilore et al (2017) citing (Blake, 2009). An individual who has direct encounter with an attitude object is likely to cultivate robust attitude towards that object and is more probable to see the attitude object as essential and this, eventually, impacts his or her behaviour to the object. Ajilore et al (2017) citing (Clayton & Myers, 2009; Crano & Prislin, 2006)

2.1.7 Perception of Nigerians Towards COVID-19

This is the procedure by which we apply external sensory messages in connection with other internal cognizant and unconscious mechanisms of the brain to bring out sense of the world (Barry, 2002).

Nigeria is a populous nation with people from various cultures and religions, who hold different opinions on the various issues going on around them. People do not exist alone, they interact with others at their work-place, at the bus stop, social media, market, church, mosque, etc.as such

individuals interaction with one another influences their perception and reception to various things and with the occurrence of COVID-19, an individual's thought process is controlled by what he/she hears and perceives to be relatively accurate.

A study conducted in the North Central Nigeria, revealed that the public opinion around the virus is that COVID-19 is a “*big man's disease*” and also 68.1% and 45.5% of the respondent do not trust the intervention of the Chinese doctors in the fight against virus in Nigeria. Another study showed that the respondents believed that COVID-19 doesn't exist in Nigeria. While other citizens believed that Nigerians are immune to the virus due to the hot climate, others believed that “the virus is an avenue for the government to exploit money from other countries”.

Nnama-Okechukwu, Chukwu & Nkechukwu (2020), in their research interviewed members of a community in Anambra state, and they had this to say regarding they virus: “*I don't believe that there is something like coronavirus in Nigeria. Our governors and the people at the top just want to spend money... sometimes our medical doctors will just come up with something to build fear in people to make them to go for medical check-up ... yes most medical doctors don't have work again because all this herbal doctors are taking over their jobs and healing people...this coronavirus is just a way to force people to the hospital*”.” *Coronavirus is a curse from God on the world for our sin and disobedience... God is sorting out sinners from believers through the sickness and the sinners will die of the disease.*”, “*that disease is not for our people; it is the white man's disease ...I don't even believe anything about this coronavirus as it is what you believe that you will suffer.*”, “*The disease is not here and will not come here... I don't do any of those things like washing hand...the person that will die will certainly die even if you wash your hand every second.*”

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Theories are needed in research because they serve as basis for the explanation of the phenomena being observed. Hence, this research study will be built on the theory of planned behaviour.

2.2.1 Theory of Planned Behaviour

The Theory of Planned Behaviour was promulgated by Fishbein and Ajzen in 1980. The theory of planned behaviour is a theory which predicts cautious behaviour, because behaviour can be deliberative and planned. The theory posits that behaviour is determined by behavioural

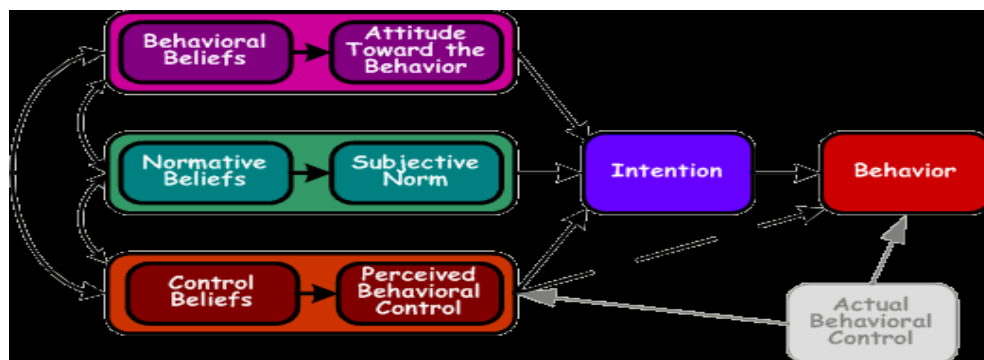
intention, which in turn is predicted by Attitude to the Behaviour, Subjective Norms and Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC). (University of Twente, 2019)

Attitude is reflected by the beliefs on the values of carrying out the behaviour (e.g. “it will save time”) measured by the assessment of those behavioral outcomes (e.g. “saving time would be a good/bad thing”). Attitude is divided into two components, it includes; Affective attitude which reflects enjoyment or pleasure linked with the performance of the behaviour and Cognitive attitude which highlights supposed importance. (Utalor, 2019) citing (Paisley and Sparks, 1998). Subjective Norms are built on the beliefs on whether people of importance would support an individual in performing the behaviour in question. Perceived Behavioural Control can be defined as the supposed ease or difficulty related with carrying out or abstaining from certain behaviour.

Behavioural beliefs creates a favourable and unfavourable attitude towards the behaviour; normative beliefs result in perceived social pressure or subjective norm; and control beliefs gives rise to perceived behavioural control. The establishment of a behavioural intention is influenced by a mix of attitudes toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceptions of behavioural control. When attitude and subjective norms are more favourable and perceived control is higher; the stronger an individual’s intention to make evident the behaviour. Finally, people are expected to perform their intents when given an adequate degree of tangible control over the behaviour. Intention is thus presumed to be the instant antecedent of behaviour. (Utalor, 2019) citing (Ajzen, 2012).

Individuals are likely to aim at having a healthy behaviour, if they have positive attitudes and behaviours, have confidence that subjective norms are advantageous towards those behaviours and believe they can carry out those behaviours appropriately. They more resilient an individual’s aim to have a healthy behaviour, they more likely that individual will truly carry out that behaviour.

This theory of Planned Behaviour is a valuable means here to explore vital aspect as to the student’s willingness to act or not and influence of subjective norms towards COVID-19.



Source: Communication Theories of the University of Twente

2.3 Empirical Review

In a research conducted by Adrian Wong, Serene Ho, & Olusegun Olusanya, (2020) titled: “**The use of social media and online communications in times of pandemic COVID-19**”. Results revealed that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of social media has increased to the extent that it has become a ubiquitous part of contemporary healthcare system. Social media has brought a new aspect to healthcare by providing a common means for healthcare professionals, the public and patients to interact about issues pertaining to health, with the ability to increase health results.

Muhammad Saud, Musta'in Mashud & Rachmad Ida (2020) in their study: **Usage of social media during the pandemic: Seeking support and awareness about COVID-19 through social media platforms**, assert that social media have become prevalently used to seek for medical information and has captivated the collection of information about the pandemic from various perspectives.

The study analyses the ‘map’ of social media usage for looking for information for COVID-19 and discovers that a majority (39.7%) of its respondents use WhatsApp as a more precise and up-to-date application for information while Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Line are perceived as useful applications for the sharing of information and awareness surrounding the pandemic. The study observed that the usage of social media platforms is easy and handy for sharing, posting, and reacting to information about the pandemic

The research also accessed if information obtained from social media has helped to change people's behaviour or not. 34.5% of the respondents felt good with the information gained from the social media and it has influenced their behaviour regarding precautions or safety in the society

Al-Dmour H, Masa'deh R, Salman A, Abuhashesh M, & Al-Dmour R (2020), carried out a study on the: **Influence of Social Media Platforms on Public Health Protection Against The COVID-19 Pandemic via the Mediating Effects of Public Health Awareness and Behavioural Changes: Integrated Model**. Findings from the study showed that public awareness and public behavioural change greatly influenced public protection directly. Also the use of social media platforms had a significant positive influence on health protection against COVID-19 as a pandemic. Results from the study indicated that Social media platform use has an important and a direct positive effect on public health protection.

The research recommends that social media campaigns should be considered as a serious part of the methods to improve public health behaviour and the role of social media in promoting public health consciousness and behavioural health changes should be well-thought-out in any health promotion plan.

Xiaojing Li and Qinliang Liu (2020) **Social media use, eHealth Literacy, Disease Knowledge, and Preventive Behaviours in the COVID-19 Pandemic: Cross-Sectional Study on Chinese Netizens** revealed that social media use frequency, disease knowledge all positively established on an individual's precautionary behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study revealed that social media provides individuals with a convenient medium to obtain news or diseases knowledge and delivers information effectively. The predictive ability of social media use proposes that social media is useful to pass across news and knowledge about the pandemic which can help individuals to collectively take on the required preventive measures for disease control.

Petru Curseu, Andra Coman, Oana Fodor, Lucia Ratiu and Anton Panchenko (2020) **Let's Not Joke about It Too Much! Exposure to COVID-19 Messaging, Attitudes and Protective Behavioural Intentions** The study assesses the role of exposure to COVID-19 messaging in negativity towards COVID-19 and the intentions to involve in protective behaviours. The goal of the research was to explore the interplay between exposure to general informative messages and

exposure to humoristic messages in public health communication associated to the COVID-19 pandemic. The study revealed that exposure to general information connected to COVID-19 creates negative attitudes to the virus and the perception of a wide social consensus in relation to the virus, as well as the intent to involve in protective behaviour.

The results derived from the study highlights the negative influence of humoristic communication in the perspective of the pandemic. Exposure to such humoristic messages weakens the positive link between exposure to general information and negative emotions, as well as attitudes towards COVID-19. It also disclosed that exposure to information concerning COVID-19 shapes the emergence of attitudes and subjective norms in relation to COVID-19

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is focused on the methodology as well as research design for the research study. It is focused on the instrument which the researcher intends to use to gather the necessary data for the study. The chapter also discussed the population and the sample size of the study.

3.2 Research Design

According to Kinnear & Taylor (1996) research design is the basic plan which guides the data collection and analysis phases of a research project.

For the purpose of this research study, the research design to be used is the Descriptive survey research design because it is suitable for studies that deal with impact or public perception.

Using the survey method is quite beneficial since it is flexible and can provide valid results which can lead to generalizations for the study. Surveys are the most effective and trustworthy research methods to use. The Instrument is questionnaire. It is important to determine the method and procedure adopted in this research report.

3.3 Source of Data

The data for this research work was collected from primary source of data. The primary data used for this research work obtained through questionnaire conducted by the researcher on the Influence of Social Media Messages on the Knowledge of, Perception of and Attitude towards COVID-19 Protocols and Guidelines by Mountain Top University Students. The aim was to get their personal views on this issue.

3.4 Population of Study

The population of this study is undergraduate students of Mountain Top University (MTU) in Prayer City, Nigeria.

3.5 Sampling Techniques

The Sample technique adopted for this study is the probability and non-probability sampling technique.

Stratified sampling technique is used to divide the colleges into two. Simple Random sampling technique was used to select eleven (11) departments out of the available twenty four (24) departments and convenience sampling technique was used to distribute the questionnaire amongst the selected departments. This includes;

College of Humanities and Management Social Sciences: Mass Communication, Accounting, Economics, Music, Business Administration, Languages

College of Basic and Applied Science: Computer Science, Micro Biology, Bio Chemistry, Bio Technology and Food science and Technology

3.6 Sample Size

To obtain the sample size for the study Yaro Yamani formula (1986) was applied.

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where n=sample size

N= total population size

1 is constant

e = the assume error margin or tolerable error which is taken as (0.05)

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where N=1,385

$$e = (0.05)^2 = 0.0025$$

$$n = \frac{1,385}{1 + (1,385 \times 0.0025)}$$

$$\frac{= 1,385}{4.4625}$$

N=310

3.7 Research Instrument

The questionnaire used for the study is divided into 5 sections. The questionnaire was constructed using the close-ended question. Major constructs are measured using a 5 point Likert scale item.

3.8 Reliability and Validity of Research Instrument

According to Okoro (2001) validity refers to the correctness of an instrument i.e. how well it measures what it is meant to measure. The questionnaire was reviewed by the supervisor who assessed all the features and component parts of the questionnaire for grammatical and ambiguity errors. Creswell (2014) a scale is reliable if it reaches 0.60 0.70. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the questionnaire is .768

3.9 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection is a process of collecting information from all the relevant sources to find answers to the research problem, questions and evaluate the outcome.

The study was conducted using the questionnaire to the respondents by self-administration; the questionnaires were administered amongst students of the Mountain Top University (MTU). The respondents ranged from 100level to 500level students in the university.

3.10 Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis refers to the way in which the data collected is presented and also interpreted in a meaningful manner with explanations.

Data generated from the questionnaire was scientifically processed through the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

In analysing the data collected using the questionnaire; the researcher used the simple percentages methods of data analysis. The analysis was represented in tabular forms for easy assimilation and it consist the number of respondents and the corresponding percentage.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is designed to present and analyze data generated from responses to the research questionnaire. It deals with the presentation, analysis and interpretation of the data collected to achieve the objectives of this study. For any research work to be meaningful the data collected must be analyzed and interpreted to facilitate the process of decision making. In order to allow easy understanding, the data is presented in Tables and frequency percentages.

Table 4.1.1: Demographic data of respondents

	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Age		
15 - 19 years	163	52.6
20 - 25 years	143	46.1
26 years and above	4	1.3
Above 35 years	3	0.8
GENDER		
Male	145	46.8
Female	165	53.2
LEVEL		
100 Level	80	25.8
200 Level	92	29.7
300 Level	47	15.2
400 Level	85	27.4
500 Level	6	1.9

Demographic Data of the Respondents

Evidence given on Table 4.1 shows that 163 (52.6%) of the respondents are within the age group 15 to 19 years, 143 (46.1%) are within the age group of 20 to 25 years, while 4 (1.3%) are within the age group 26 years and above.

On respondent's gender, 145 (46.8%) respondents are male while 165 (53.2%) are female.

On the respondent's educational level, 80 (25.8%) are in 100 level, 92 (29.7%) are in 200 level, 47 (15.2%) are in 300 level, 85 (27.4%) are in 400 level, while 6 (1.9%) are in 500 level.

Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question 1: To what extent are MTU students exposed to social media messages on COVID-19

Table 4.1.2: Frequency Distribution of Respondent's Exposure to COVID-19 Social Media Messages

	Frequency	Percentage
Do you make use of social media?		
Yes	310	100.0
No	0	0.0
Did you come across any COVID-19 message on social media?		
Yes	310	100.0
No	0	0.0
Which social media did you receive information on COVID-19		
Facebook	48	15.5
Twitter	5	1.6
Instagram	6	1.9
YouTube	7	2.3
Snapchat	11	3.5
WhatsApp	72	23.2
Telegram	9	2.9

Facebook and Twitter	3	1.0
Facebook and Instagram	3	1.0
Facebook and YouTube	12	3.9
Facebook and Snapchat	6	1.9
Facebook and WhatsApp	34	11.0
Facebook and Telegram	4	1.3
Twitter and Instagram	9	2.9
Twitter and YouTube	2	0.6
Twitter and Snapchat	1	0.3
Twitter and WhatsApp	6	1.9
Instagram and WhatsApp	8	2.6
Instagram and Telegram	1	0.3
YouTube and Snapchat	10	3.2
YouTube and WhatsApp	5	1.6
Snapchat and WhatsApp	8	2.6
WhatsApp and Telegram	19	6.1
Facebook, Twitter and Instagram	2	0.6
Facebook, Twitter and Telegram	1	0.3
Facebook, Instagram and YouTube	2	0.6
Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp	2	0.6
Facebook, Snapchat and WhatsApp	2	0.6
Facebook, Snapchat and Telegram	2	0.6
Twitter, Instagram and YouTube	3	1.0
Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat	2	0.6
Twitter, WhatsApp and Telegram	2	0.6
YouTube, Snapchat and WhatsApp	2	0.6

Snapchat, WhatsApp and Telegram	1	0.3
What type of messages did you get from these social media platforms?		
Text	29	9.4
Audio	4	1.3
Video	2	.6
Graphics	2	.6
Text and Audio	21	6.8
Text and Video	63	20.3
Text and Graphics	37	11.9
Audio and Video	3	1.0
Audio and Graphics	8	2.6
Video and Graphics	12	3.9
Text, Audio and Video	35	11.3
Text, Audio and Graphics	7	2.3
Text, Video and Graphics	47	15.2
Audio, Video and Graphics	3	1.0
Text, Audio, Video and Graphics	37	11.9
What topics are addressed in the messages?		
Origin of COVID-19	31	10.0
COVID-19 preventive measures	58	18.7
Treatment Procedures	37	11.9
COVID-19 Funding	19	6.1
COVID-19 survivors' stories	30	9.7
COVID-19 myth busters	40	12.9
COVID-19 case update	39	12.6

Lockdown information	28	9.0
COVID-19 and 5G network	28	9.0
How often do you use your preferred social media?		
Always	223	71.9
Often	59	19.0
Occasionally	15	4.8
Rarely	13	4.2
How often do you get COVID-19 messages on social media?		
Always	193	62.3
Very often	57	18.4
Sometimes	54	17.4
Rarely	6	1.9

Source: Field work (2021)

On the usage of the social media, 310 (100%) respondents confirmed they make use of the social media and as well as come across COVID-19 messages on the platforms.

On the social media platform through which respondents received COVID-19 information from, 72 (23.2%) use WhatsApp only, 48 (15.5%) use Facebook only, 34 (11.0%) use Facebook and WhatsApp and 1 (0.3%) make use of YouTube, Snapchat and Telegram.

On the type of messages received on social media, 63 (20.3%) received text and video messages and 47 (15.2%) received text, video and graphics messages and 2 (0.6%) received graphic messages.

On the topics addressed in the COVID-19 messages, results shows that 58 (18.7%) of the respondents claim the messages addressed COVID-19 preventive measures, 39 (12.6%) claimed the message addressed COVID-19 case update and. 19 (6.1%) said the messages addressed COVID-19 funding.

On respondents use of social media, 223 (71.9%) respondents make use of the social media always (more than 12 hours), 59 (19.0%) makes use of it often (between 6 and 12 hours), 15 (4.8%) uses the social media sometimes (between 2 and 5 hours), while 13 (4.2%) rarely use the social media (between 30 minutes and one hour).

On the rate at which respondents get COVID-19 messages on their social media platforms, 193 (62.3%) respondents receive COVID-19 messages always, 57 (18.4%) receives it very often, 54 (17.4%) respondents receive it sometimes while 6 (1.9%) rarely receives it.

Research Question Two: What is the knowledge level of MTU students about COVID-19?

Table 4.1.3: Frequency distribution of respondent's Knowledge on COVID-19

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Currently, there is a vaccine for COVID-19	276 (89.0%)	17 (5.5%)	7 (2.3%)	4 (1.3%)	6 (1.9%)
COVID-19 is a communicable disease	249 (80.3%)	25 (8.1%)	16 (5.2%)	9 (2.9%)	11 (3.5%)
COVID-19 was first reported in China	204 (65.8%)	64 (20.6%)	4 (1.3%)	4 (1.3%)	34 (11.0%)
COVID-19 can't be cured by chewing garlic	245 (79.0%)	46 (14.8%)	14 (4.5%)	1 (0.3%)	4 (1.3%)
The signs and symptoms of COVID-19 includes: coughing, sneezing, catarrh	256 (82.6%)	50 (16.1%)	3 (1.0%)	1 (0.3%)	0 (0.0%)
Using nose mask alone doesn't prevent the spread of the virus	242 (78.1%)	52 (16.8%)	3 (1.0%)	1 (0.3%)	12 (3.9%)
COVID-19 can be contracted through mosquito bites	12 (3.9%)	12 (3.9%)	23 (7.4%)	142 (45.8%)	121 (39.0%)
The virus is spread through respiratory droplets from infected persons	229 (73.9%)	68 (21.9%)	7 (2.3%)	3 (1.0%)	3 (1.0%)

The use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers helps to kill the virus	204 (65.8%)	77 (24.8%)	7 (2.3%)	13 (4.2%)	9 (2.9%)
The virus does not kill within 30 minutes	216 (69.7%)	53 (17.1%)	31 (10.0%)	4 (1.3%)	6 (1.9%)

Source: Field work (2021)

Result shows that majority of the respondents are knowledgeable on COVID-19. For instance, 276 (89.0%) respondents strongly agree and 17 (5.5%) agree that at the moment, there is a vaccine for COVID-19, while 4 (1.3%) disagree and 6 (1.9%) strongly disagree.

On the signs and symptoms of COVID-19, 256 (82.6%) respondents strongly agree and 50 (16.1%) agree that the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 includes coughing, sneezing and catarrh while 1 (0.3%) disagree with the statement.

On the mode of transmission, 12 (3.9%) respondents strongly agree and 12 (3.9%) agree that COVID-19 can be contracted through mosquito bites while 142 (45.8%) disagree and 121 (39.0%) strongly disagree with the statement

Research Question Three: To what extent does Social Media Messages Influence student's Perception towards COVID-19?

Table 4.1.4: Frequency distribution of the Influence of Social Media Messages on respondent's Perception towards COVID-19

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
COVID-19 is a punishment from God	142 (45.8%)	48 (15.5%)	37 (11.9%)	52 (16.8%)	31 (10.0%)
COVID-19 was manufactured in a lab	155 (50.0%)	60 (19.4%)	36 (11.6%)	49 (15.8%)	10 (3.2%)
COVID-19 vaccine is a form of 666	63 (20.3%)	15 (4.8%)	34 (11.0%)	149 (48.1%)	49 (15.8%)
COVID-19 came as a result of the greed of Bill	36 (11.6%)	13 (4.2%)	32 (10.3%)	138 (44.5%)	91 (29.4%)

and Melinda Gate's Foundation					
COVID-19 is a big man's disease	45 (14.5%)	20 (6.5%)	24 (7.7%)	145 (46.8%)	76 (24.5%)
COVID-19 came as a result of the sins of humans	85 (27.4%)	40 (12.9%)	28 (9.0%)	134 (43.2%)	23 (7.4%)
COVID-19 is caused by climate change	43 (13.9%)	19 (6.1%)	25 (8.1%)	162 (52.3%)	61 (19.7%)
COVID-19 is not real, it is a political and economic strategy	34 (11.0%)	5 (1.6%)	37 (11.9%)	165 (53.2%)	69 (22.3%)
Africans are immune to COVID-19	26 (8.4%)	17 (5.5%)	29 (9.4%)	184 (59.4%)	54 (17.4%)
COVID-19 is real and can be contacted by anyone	217 (70.0%)	71 (22.9%)	6 (1.9%)	14 (4.5%)	2 (0.6%)

Source: Field work (2021)

Results reveals that majority (94.2%) of the respondents do not believe the statement Social Media messages makes me perceive that Africans are immune to COVID-19 while 13.9% of the respondents believe this statement. While the statement social media messages makes me perceive that COVID-19 is as a result of Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 73.9% of the respondents do not believe this statement while 15.8% believe this statement to be true.

Research Question Four: To what extent do Subjective Norms Influence student's Attitude to COVID-19 Social Media Messages?

Table 4.1.5: Frequency distribution of Subjective Norms Influence on respondent's Attitude towards COVID-19

Statement	Very Untrue	Untrue	Don't Know	True	Very True
My Family/ Friends/ Neighbors/ Colleagues/Mentor					
Think that I should forward verified messages on COVID-19	15 (4.8%)	14 (4.5%)	45 (14.5%)	100 (32.3%)	136 (43.9%)
Would appreciate it if I adopt the guidelines stated in the messages	3 (1.0%)	9 (2.9%)	30 (9.7%)	111 (35.8%)	157 (50.6%)
Think I should ignore unverified messages on COVID-19	8 (2.6%)	39 (12.6%)	68 (21.9%)	72 (23.2%)	123 (39.7%)
Are weary of COVID-19 messages shared on social media	2 (0.6%)	9 (2.9%)	55 (17.7%)	99 (31.9%)	145 (46.8%)
Think that I should consider COVID-19 messages as part of government propaganda to siphon money	46 (14.8%)	96 (31.0%)	63 (20.3%)	42 (13.5%)	63 (20.3%)

Source: Field work (2021)

Results reveals that majority of the respondents (86.4%) believe that their Subjective norms would appreciate it if they adopt the guidelines stated in the messages and 3.9% of the respondents do not believe the statement.

Also most respondents (62.9%) believe that their Subjective Norms are weary of COVID-19 messages shared on social media while 15.2% do not believe. While most respondents (76.2%) believe that their Subjective Norms think they should forward verified messages on COVID-19 while 9.3% do not believe this statement.

Research Question Five: To what extent has the COVID-19 messages on social media influenced the attitude of MTU students towards COVID-19 prevention?

Table 4.1.6: Frequency distribution on the Influence of Social Media Messages on respondent's Attitude towards COVID-19

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Exposure to social media messages makes me isolate myself when I feel the symptoms	121 (39.0%)	78 (25.2%)	42 (13.5%)	54 (17.4%)	15 (4.8%)
Due to the information from social media messages, I wash my hands regularly	192 (61.9%)	76 (24.5%)	11 (3.5%)	27 (8.7%)	4 (1.3%)
I avoid touching my face due to the messages from social media on COVID-19	173 (55.8%)	76 (24.5%)	11 (3.5%)	30 (9.7%)	20 (6.5%)
Exposure to Social media messages on COVID-19 prompts me to use a nose mask to avoid contracting the virus	198 (63.9%)	97 (31.3%)	5 (1.6%)	9 (2.9%)	1 (0.3%)
I avoid close contact with people when I am in public due to enlightenment from social media messages	189 (61.0%)	95 (30.6%)	11 (3.5%)	14 (4.5%)	1 (0.3%)
Due to the COVID-19 messages I received on social media, I am indifferent to all the COVID-19 prevention guidelines because I don't believe that COVID-19 is real	11 (3.5%)	14 (4.5%)	22 (7.1%)	171 (55.2%)	92 (29.7%)

Source: Field work (2021)

Results reveal that social media messages have a positive influence on respondents. For instance the statement, Exposure to social media messages makes me isolate myself when I feel the symptoms, 121 (39.0%) of the respondents strongly agree and 78(25.2%) agree that they isolate themselves when they feel the symptoms while 54(17.4%) disagree and 15 (4.8%) strongly disagree.

The statement I avoid touching my face due to the messages from social media on COVID-19, 173 (55.8%) respondents strongly agree and 76 (24.5%) agree to this statement and 30 (9.7%) disagree and 20 (6.5%) respondents strongly disagree with the statement. While 189 (61.0%) strongly agree and 95 (30.6%) agree to the statement, I avoid close contact with people when I am in public due to enlightenment from social media messages while 14 (4.5%) disagree and 1 (0.3%) strongly disagree.

4.2 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research question 1

To what extent are MTU students exposed to social media messages on COVID-19?

The aim of this question was to find out the level of student's exposure to social media messages on COVID-19.

Evidence shown on Table 4.2, reveals that all (100%) of the respondents are well exposed to social media messages on COVID-19, 23.2% of the respondents receive more messages on WhatsApp with 11.95% of the respondents claiming to have received COVID-19 messages in form of text, graphics, audio and video and 18.7% of the respondents have come across messages addressing COVID-19 preventive measures. This is supported by Sanghamitra, Shashilata & Ritika (2020) which revealed that majority of its respondents (92.4) received COVID-19 information through WhatsApp and findings from Peng, Pei, Zheng, Wang, Zhang, Zheng and Zhu (2020) which showed that respondents had adequate information on COVID-19 through the internet.

Research Question 2

What is the Knowledge level of MTU students on COVID-19?

The aim of this question was to examine the knowledge level of MTU students about COVID-19.

As shown in Table 4.3, 98.7% of the respondents agreed that coughing, sneezing and catarrh are the signs and symptoms of COVID-19.

On the treatment procedures, 93.8% agreed that COVID-19 can't be cured by chewing garlic and 94.5% agreed that there is currently a vaccine for COVID-19.

On COVID-19 preventive measures 90.6% of the respondents agreed that the use of alcohol based hand sanitizers helps to kill the virus. This result is supported by Taghrir, Borazjani & Shiraly (2020) which reported a high knowledge level on COVID-19 from their study.

Research Question 3

To what extent does Social Media Messages Influence Student's Perception towards COVID-19?

The aim was to examine how social media messages influenced the perception of students towards the virus.

In Table 4.4, Most of the perceptions stated were not held by the respondents of this study most of them (64%) disagreed that COVID-19 came as a result of the greed of Bill and Melinda Gate's foundation, (77%) disagreed that Africans are immune to COVID-19 and also (64%) disagreed that COVID-19 vaccine is a form of 666 This findings contrast that of Olapegba, Ayandele, Kolawole, Oguntayo, Gandi, Dangiwa, Ottu & Iorfa (2020) which discovered that internet users have negative perception about the COVID-19 pandemic. Some respondents (47%) from that study believe that COVID-19 is a biological weapon.

Research Question 4

To what extent does Subjective Norms Influence Student's Attitude to COVID-19 Social Media Messages?

The aim was to find out how subjective norms impacts students attitude to COVID-19 social media messages

In Table 4.5, Subjective Norms (Family/Friends/ Neighbors/ Colleagues/Mentor) has more positive than negative influence on student's attitude towards adopting COVID-19 guidelines (86.4%) and towards forwarding verified messages on COVID-19 (76.2%).

This result corroborates with the theory of Planned Behavior which notes that subjective norms has a significant influence on individuals. (Bronfman, Repetto, Cisternas and Castaneda, 2021)

Research Question 5

To what extent has the COVID-19 messages on social media influenced the attitude of MTU students towards COVID-19 prevention?

The aim was to find out how COVID-19 messages on social media have influenced the attitude of students towards COVID-19 prevention.

According to Table 4.6, social media messages has more positive influence on respondents attitude towards COVID-19 guidelines and prevention with majority of them (95.2%) agreeing to use a nose mask when out in public due to exposure to social media messages, (91.6%) avoiding close contact due to enlightenment from social media messages and (86.4%) washing their hands regularly due to the information from social media messages.

This is opposed to the findings of Alshareef, Yunusa & Al-Hanawi (2021) which revealed that social media information were linked with lower optimistic attitudes towards COVID-19 prevention.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Summary

The study examined the influence of social media messages on the Knowledge, Perception and Attitude to COVID-19 guidelines/protocols by MTU students. The theory of Planned Behaviour was reviewed in the course of this study. In order to achieve the objective and answer all research questions, the primary method of data collection was adopted and the research instrument used was questionnaire. This study made use of SPSS to analyse the data. The following are the findings that emanated from this study;

1. Students showed a high level of knowledge about COVID-19
2. Social media messages influenced student's attitude positively towards adopting COVID-19 guidelines and protocols.
3. WhatsApp and Facebook are the social media platforms mostly used to receive COVID-19 messages.
4. Subjective Norms has a substantial influence on student's attitude towards Social media messages on COVID-19.
5. MTU students are all aware of COVID-19 social media messages.

6.2 Conclusion

This research project concludes that social media has become a significant part of human existence and it is a vital tool for disseminating health messages and shaping public attitude.

Results derived from the study shows that MTU students demonstrated good knowledge on COVID-19, social media messages had positive influence on student's perceptions towards COVID-19 and students demonstrated positive attitude towards COVID-19 guidelines/ protocols due to social media messages.

6.3 Recommendations

1. Universities should introduce courses that teach students how to search for and evaluate health information.

2. Health Practitioners, Media agencies and Academic Institutions should utilize social media platforms to disseminate accurate messages to the public during a pandemic.
3. COVID-19 social media messages should be sustained to prevent students from neglecting the COVID-19 preventive measures they have acquired overtime.
4. The use of social media to disseminate health messages should be intensified.
5. Students should verify health messages with credible sources before consuming such information and sharing it.

5.4 Limitation of the study

When conducting this research, time constraint was a major challenge encountered, that is the time which was meant for studying and gathering of the data was not convenient and at the same time not sufficient.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

Dear Respondent,

I am Grace Etta, an undergraduate student of Mountain Top University, currently working on a research project **“Influence of Social Media Messages on the Knowledge, Perception and Attitude to COVID-19 Protocols and Guidelines by Mountain Top University Students”** for my BSc project. The research work is aimed at finding out the influence of social media messages on students’ knowledge, perception and attitude to COVID-19 protocols so as to properly strategize COVID-19 media campaigns for more effectiveness. The information provided would be treated with utmost confidentiality and solely for academic research purposes. Thank you for your co-operation.

SECTION A: Demographic characteristics

Please tick [] as appropriate

1. Age:(a) 15-19yrs () (b) 20-25yrs () (c) 26yrs and above ()
2. Gender:(a) Male () (b) Female ()
3. Level: (a) 100 () (b) 200 () (c) 300 () (d) 400 () (e) 500 ()

SECTION B: Exposure to COVID-19 Social Media messages

Please tick as it applies to you.

1. Do you make use of social media? YES () NO ()
2. Did you come across any COVID-19 message on social media? YES () NO ()
3. Which of the following social media did you receive information on COVID-9?

You can pick more than one

- (a) Facebook () (b) Twitter () (c) Instagram () (d) YouTube ()
- (e) Snapchat () (f) WhatsApp () (g) Telegram () (h) others specify ()

4. What type of messages did you get from these social media platforms?

You can pick more than one

(a) Text () (b) Audio () (c) Video () (d) Graphics ()

5. What topics are addressed in the messages?

(a) Origin of COVID-19 ()

(b) COVID-19 preventive measures ()

(c) Treatment Procedures ()

(d) COVID-19 funding ()

(e) COVID-19 survivors stories ()

(f) COVID-19 myth busters ()

(g) COVID-19 case updates ()

(h) Lockdown information ()

(i) COVID-19 and 5G network ()

6. How often do you use your preferred Social Media?

(a) Always - more than 12 hours ()

(b) Often - 6-12()

(c) Occasionally - 5-2 hours ()

(d) Rarely- 30 minutes -1 hour ()

7. How often do you get COVID-19 messages on social media

(a) Always () (b) Very often () (c) Sometimes () (d) rarely ()

SECTION C: KNOWLEDGE OF COVID-19

Please respond by ticking the appropriate response for each item: SA= Strongly Agree, A=Agree, UD=Undecided, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree

	Statements	SA	A	UD	D	SD
a.	Currently there is a vaccine for COVID-19					
b.	COVID-19 is a communicable disease					
c.	COVID-19 was first reported in china					
d.	COVID-19 can't be cured by chewing garlic					
e.	The signs and symptoms of COVID-19 includes; Coughing, Sneezing, Catarrh					
f.	Using nose mask alone doesn't prevent the spread of the virus					
g.	COVID-19 can be contracted through mosquito bites					
h.	The virus is spread through respiratory droplets from infected persons					
i.	The use of alcohol based hand sanitizers helps to kill the virus					
j.	The virus does not kill within 30 minutes					

SECTION D: PERCEPTION TOWARDS COVID-19

Please respond by ticking the appropriate response for each item: SA= Strongly Agree, A=Agree, UD=Undecided, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree,

COVID-19 social media messages makes me perceive that:

	Statement	SA	A	UD	D	SD
a.	COVID-19 is a punishment from God					
b.	COVID-19 was manufactured in a lab					
c.	COVID-19 vaccine is a form of 666					
d.	COVID-19 came as a result of the greed of Bill and Melinda's Foundation					
e.	COVID-19 is a big man's disease					
f.	COVID-19 came as a result of the sins of humans					
g.	COVID-19 is caused by climate change					
h.	COVID-19 is not real, it is a political and economic strategy					
i.	Africans are immune to COVID-19					
j.	COVID-19 is real and can be contacted by anyone					

SECTION E: INFLUENCE OF SUBJECTIVE NORMS ON ATTITUDE TOWARDS COVID-19 MESSAGES

Please respond by ticking the appropriate response for each item

My Family/ Friends/ Neighbours/ Colleagues/Mentors:

	Statements	Very true	True	Don't know	Untrue	Very untrue
a.	Think I should forward verified					

	messages on COVID-19					
b.	Would appreciate it if I adopt the guidelines stated in the messages					
c.	Think I should ignore unverified messages on COVID-19					
d.	Are weary of COVID-19 messages shared on social media					
e.	Think that I should consider COVID-19 messages as part of government propaganda to siphon money					

SECTION F: INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MESSAGES ON THE ATTITUDE TOWARDS COVID-19 PREVENTION

Please respond by ticking the appropriate response for each item: SA= Strongly Agree, A=Agree, UD=Undecided, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree

	Statements	SA	A	UD	D	SD
a.	Exposure to social media messages makes me isolate myself when I feel the symptoms					
b.	Due to the information from social media messages, I wash my hands regularly					
c.	I avoid touching my face due to the messages from social media on COVID-19					

d.	Exposure to Social media messages on COVID-19 prompts me to use a nose mask to avoid contracting the virus					
e.	I avoid close contact with people when I am in public due to enlightenment from social media messages					
f.	Due to the COVID-19 messages I received from the social media, I am indifferent to all COVID-19 prevention guidelines because I don't believe that COVID-19 is real					