

## **THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE PEOPLE OF DELTA STATE IN THE PERIOD OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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### **Abstract**

The paper x-rayed on impact of social media on the people of Asaba in Delta State in the period of COVID-19. The outbreak of corona virus, known as COVID -19 by the world health organisation has thrown the global community into fear and anxiety. In course of COVID-19, the use of social media contributed in the dissemination of information and information overload among individuals. Social media have long been recognized as powerful forces shaping how we experience the world and ourselves. The following sub-headings were discussed; concept of Coronavirus and COVID- 19, challenges of Asaba people in the period of COVID -19 pandemic, concept of social media, importance of social media and impact of social media during COVID 19 to Asaba people. The work emphasized the role social media platforms which really contributed a lot to the people of Asaba to

gain information about COVID-19. The following recommendations were made among others; a way to encourage Asaba people productivity and students' academic efficacy during this COVID-19 pandemic. It is equally important that government and school authorities checkmate and regulate the use of social media among people of Asaba. This would enhance in building on the positive use of social networking sites such as joining students in group and helping them meet other student groups online. By this, they can bring to limelight the risks and benefits associated with the use of the social sites and help students to overcome the vices behaviour associated with these sites as well as educating students on the best and most efficient ways of using these sites to support learning.

**Keywords:** Impact, social media, COVID-19

## **Introduction**

The outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has created a global health crisis that has had a deep impact on the way we perceive our world and our everyday lives. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses which may cause illness in animals or humans. In humans, several coronaviruses are known to cause respiratory infections ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The most recently discovered coronavirus causes COVID-19. COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus. 'CO' stands for corona, 'VI' for virus, and 'D' for disease. Formerly, this disease was referred to as '2019 novel coronavirus' or '2019-nCoV.' The COVID-19 virus is a new virus linked to the same family of viruses as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and some types of common cold.

The COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria is part of the worldwide pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The first confirmed case in Nigeria was announced on 27 February 2020, when an Italian citizen in Lagos tested positive for the virus, caused by SARS-CoV-2 (Maclean &Dahir, 2020). On 9 March 2020, a second case of the virus was reported in Ewekoro, Ogun State, a Nigerian citizen who had contact with the Italian citizen (Nigeria records second case of Coronavirus, 2020).Nigeria is currently battling the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. So far, Asaba of Delta State has some confirmed cases, according to information released by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC). Nationally, the federal and state governments initiated various policy frameworks and actions to stem the spread of the virus. Some of the actions, including strict social distancing, has had a deleterious effect on the livelihoods. In Asaba and elsewhere, state security agents enforcing government-imposed social distancing restrictions have violated the human rights of citizens, resulting in avoidable deaths. It has become clear that the harsh government policies and pronouncements are inflicting more pain on the citizens, as there are no adequate measures in place to cushion the effects on the populace.

Asaba is a city located at the western bank of the Niger River. It is the capital of Delta State, Nigeria. A fast developing urban area, Asaba had a population of 149,603 as at the 2006 census (Federal Republic of Nigeria (2016), and a metropolitan population of over half a million people. Asaba is well known for social activities due to the presence of large people and social amenities such as hotels, clubs, cinemas, malls, event centre, etc. It holds a yearly program named Delta Yaddah which always host series of gospel singers among others. Due to its large population, crime rate is high. Crimes such as pick pocketing, sideways

robbery, etc, is rampant in Asaba. Because of the existence of foreigners in the state, cost of living is high in Asaba (Okenwa, 2016).

The governor of Delta State (Ifeanyi Okowa) confirmed an index case of the novel coronavirus in Delta State, adding that the patient had been quarantined in a centre at Warri. This comes on the heels of announcement by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) of a confirmed case in the state. The Covid-19 pandemic affect the people of Asaba and Delta State as whole. The study disclosed that it was a tough challenge making the people of Asaba who relied on daily income to comply with the sit-at-home order of the state government. Okowa, said that the state provided palliatives to cushion the effect of the lockdown on those in the informal sector, especially the vulnerable. Another challenge in Asaba was the issue of stigmatisation, but assured that the state was tackling it head-on. “People of Asaba challenge in managing the COVID-19 is two-pronged; one is the problem of dealing with the issues of the economy of the people, particularly the informal sector, because in the process of trying to stop the chain of transmission, we have had to undertake a lockdown. “And, in dealing with that, it is actually very challenging for the fact that most of our people are in the informal sector and they have to live on a daily basis (Busari & Adebayo, 2020).

The demolition illegal erected structures by the state government’s plan to keep Asaba clean led to the bulling down of many shops believed to have been built on the state’s right of way. With the demolition, Abrakar traders have joined the list of thousands of displaced traders in the state capital territory even in this Coronavirus (COVID–19) pandemic period when most businesses in Nigeria and globally are negatively impacted as a result of lockdown. Governor Okowa said in the government’s plan, to secure Asaba, it was agreed that there was the need

for the whole of that place to be bulldozed and people there relocated to another part of Asaba. He said that relocation has already been done and the place has been brought down. Social media had played an important role to the people of Asaba in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Social media comprises of activities that involve socializing and networking online through words, pictures and videos. Kaplan and Haenlein (2015) defined social media as a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web2.0, and that allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content. It depends on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss and modify user-generated content. In line with this, Overholser (2014), stated that social media introduced substantial and pervasive changes to communication between organizations, communities and individuals. These changes are the focus of the emerging field of techno-self-studies.

Today, social media such as, Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp and Twitter, have become primary sources of information. They are also vehicles for fake news and disinformation. During COVID-19, the use of social media contributed to spread information and information overload among individuals. To boost individuals' motivation to adopt preventive measures such as self-isolation, actions should focus on lowering individuals' perceived response costs in addition to informing them about the severity of the situation. In Asaba during this covid-19 pandemic, companies use social media for commercial purposes or for communal purposes.

In other words, Asaba companies use social media to brand, sell, market their business (which is close to traditional marketing efforts using mass-media) versus using social media to connect with and co-create with customers and more

importantly to provide a platform to customers to bond together. You can see this as the distinction between using social media to talk to your customers versus using social media to talk with your customers and have them talk to each other through your brand (Agbanu & Nwabueze, 2020). With companies of all sizes under threat due to the impact of coronavirus, social platforms are introducing new features specifically to help small businesses survive through the pandemic. Therefore, this paper seeks to discuss the impact of social media on the people of Asaba in the period of covid-19.

### **Concept of Coronavirus and COVID-19**

The coronavirus belongs to a family of viruses that may cause various symptoms such as pneumonia, fever, breathing difficulty, and lung infection (Wuhan Municipal Health and Health Commission (WMHC), 2020). These viruses are common in animals worldwide, but very few cases have been known to affect humans. The World Health Organization (WHO) used the term 2019 novel coronavirus to refer to a coronavirus that affected the lower respiratory tract of patients with pneumonia in Wuhan, China on 29 December 2019 (Guan-X, Wang-X & Zhou, 2020). The WHO announced that the official name of the 2019 novel coronavirus is coronavirus disease (COVID-19). And the current reference name for the virus is severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). It was reported that a cluster of patients with pneumonia of unknown cause was linked to a local Huanan South China Seafood Market in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China in December 2019.

In response to the outbreak, the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (China CDC) dispatched a rapid response team to accompany health authorities of Hubei province and Wuhan city to conduct epidemiological and etiological investigations. The WHO confirmed that the outbreak of the

coronavirus epidemic was associated with the Huanan South China Seafood Market place, but no specific animal association was identified (WHO, 2020). Scientists immediately started to research the source of the new coronavirus, and the first genome of COVID-19 was published by the research team led by Prof. Yong-Zhen Zhang, on 10 January 2020. Within 1 month, this virus spread quickly throughout China during the Chinese New Year – a period when there is a high level of human mobility among Chinese people. Although it is still too early to predict susceptible populations, early patterns have shown a trend similar to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) coronaviruses. Susceptibility seems to be associated with age, biological sex, and other health conditions. COVID-19 has now been declared as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern by the WHO.

Given the spread of the new coronavirus and its impacts on human health, the research community has responded rapidly to the new virus and many preliminary research articles have already been published about this epidemic. They conducted a scoping review to summarize and critically analyze all the published scientific articles regarding the new coronavirus in January 2020. This review aims to provide the evidence of early findings on the epidemiology, causes, clinical diagnosis, as well as prevention and control of COVID-19 in relation to time, location, and source of publication. This review can provide meaningful information for future research related to this topic and may support government decision-making on strategies to handle this public health emergency at the community, national, and international levels (WHO, 2020).

The virus is transmitted through direct contact with respiratory droplets of an infected person (generated through coughing and sneezing). Individuals can also be infected from and touching surfaces contaminated with the virus and touching

their face (e.g., eyes, nose, mouth). The COVID-19 virus may survive on surfaces for several hours, but simple disinfectants can kill it. The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, dry cough, and tiredness. Other symptoms that are less common and may affect some patients include aches and pains, nasal congestion, headache, conjunctivitis, sore throat, diarrhea, loss of taste or smell or a rash on skin or discoloration of fingers or toes. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually. Some people become infected but only have very mild symptoms. According to Xu, Chen, Wang, Feng, Zhou, and Li (2020). There is currently available vaccine for COVID-19. However, many of the symptoms can be treated and getting early care from a healthcare provider can make the disease less dangerous. There are several clinical trials that are being conducted to evaluate potential therapeutics for COVID-19.

The coronavirus entered Nigeria through an infected Italian citizen who came in contact with a Nigerian citizen who was subsequently infected with the coronavirus. The coronavirus then spread to other citizens in Lagos and to other parts of the country. Some reported cases are shown in table;

**Confirmed COVID-19 cases in Nigeria  
as at the period of research**

<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Confirmed cases</b>	<b>Affected states</b>
17/03/2020	3	Lagos
21/03/2020	22	Lagos, Abuja and Ogun
30/03/2020	131	Lagos, Abuja, Bauchi, Enugu

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**Source:** Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC)

In Nigeria, after the confirmation of the first case on the 27th February 2020, and for the first time, researchers from the Centre for Human and Zoonotic Virology in Lagos University Teaching Hospital/College of Medicine of the University of Lagos, African Centre for Genomics of Infectious Diseases in Reedemers University and the Nigeria Institute of Medical Research Lagos successfully perform the genome sequencing of COVID-19. According to the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, a second confirmed case was detected in the country on the 9th March 2020. This case was a contact of the index case. Out of a total of number of people screened for COVID-19 so far in Nigeria, there are 51 confirmed cases from 9 States of Bauchi, Edo, Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Oyo, Rivers and the Federal Capital Territory. Lagos State with a current population of over 20 million is leading with over 30 confirmed cases. One death has been recorded in the country while two cases including the index and first contact have been discharged to go home on the 13th March 2020 after testing negative to the virus twice consecutively (NCDC, 2020). Normally, COVID-19 patient is expected to have cleared the virus and can be discharged after two to four negative qRT-PCR tests on nasopharyngeal and throat swabs sampled at 24 h interval (ECDC, 2020).

### **Challenges of Asaba People in the Period of Covid-19 Pandemic**

The governor, in the Skype programme, monitored in Asaba, said that though the state provided palliatives to cushion the effect of the lockdown on those in the informal sector, especially the vulnerable, another challenge in the state was the issue of stigmatisation, but assured that the state was tackling it head-on.

According to Agbanu and Nwabueze (2020), the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in Asaba is the high cost of commodities and food items prices as a result of business stoppages and lockdown which critically affect daily income-earners. The rate at which the virus was spreading, and the heightened uncertainty about how bad the situation could get, led to flight to safety in consumption and investment among consumers and investors (Ozili and Arun, 2020). There was a general consensus among top economists that the coronavirus pandemic would plunge the world into a global recession and Covid-19 pandemic would trigger a recession in Asaba.

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This pandemic had caused some people in Asaba unemployment and poverty, especially those working in private enterprises or companies are sacked. The covid-19 pandemic lead Delta State Government, established food bank to alleviate the suffering of the people resulting from the lockdown to contain the spread of Coronavirus to the state upon that majority of people (80%) in Asaba did not received all these food items because of the people are not aware of the

food items and other items shared by the government in Asaba. Also, the issue of brutality and intimidation of citizens by security agents because of coffin and other nonsense things, criminal cases as a result of the quarantine, cases of Fulani herdsmen and house people conflict against the people of Asaba people because of demolition of Abraka Market which put fear in people, humiliation of people by government arm forces because of face mask and so on affect the people of Asaba during the covid-19 pandemic.

In the first few months of 2020, information and news reports about the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) were rapidly published and shared on social media and social networking sites. While the field of infodemiology has studied information patterns on the Web and in social media for at least 18 years, the COVID-19 pandemic has been referred to as the first social media infodemic. However, there is limited evidence about whether and how the social media infodemic has spread panic and affected the mental health of social media users. It is understandable that people living in quarantine, isolation, or at risk of infectious disease outbreak are likely to experience psychosocial stress and adverse health outcomes, which may evoke interests in learning more about the disease. However, such situations require assurance complemented by flow of correct information.

### **Concept of Social Media**

Kaplan, and Haelein (2014), defined social media as a group of internet based application that allows the creation and exchange of user generated content. Gross (2016), emphasized that social media is that means that employs mobile and web based technology to create highly integrative platforms via which individuals and community share, create, discuss and modify users' generated content. Sometimes called social networking, social media is a collaboratively produced

and shared media content to network communities. Enang. (2014), further explained that social networking sites are applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other. It is a web site that provides a venue for people to share ideas, information, knowledge and the like together which can come inform of videos, audio, audio-visual, charts, text messages and so on (Okekeokosisi & Obi, 2019). Giving examples of social media, (Gupta, 2017) enumerated social network sites like *Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, Internet forums, chatrooms and message boards* where people meet and discuss topics of interest, *Flickr and vimeo, blogs, wikis, and socialbook marking*. Since the year 2000, the world has been witnessing exponential presence of social networking sites which continues to drive interaction of individuals and organizations that have common interest, not only in music, movies, friendship, but in education and business relations.

Kaplan, and Haelein (2014), categorized social media into seven type search indicating the purpose for which it could be utilized: collaborative projects (Wikipedia); Blogs and micro blogs(*Twitter*); social news networking sites (*Digg and Leakernet*);content communities (*YouTube and Daily motion*); social networking sites (*Facebook, Instagram and whatsapp*); virtual game worlds (world of *warcraft*); and virtual social worlds (*second Life*). Meanwhile, it does seem that very thin line exists regarding what uses these sites could be put as many of the sites are amenable to multiple applications.

### **Importance of Social Media**

The issue of whether social networking sites are helpful or not is often couched in larger issues identified with the overall use of social media – psychological effects, privacy and safety concerns, individual self-discipline and self-regulation concerns, human adaptability concerns. Generally, the benefits of using social

network according to Zwart, Lindsay, Henderson & Phillips, 2013; Rosen, 2015; Conolly, 2018), include: encouraging greater social interaction through electronic media; providing greater access to information and information sources; encouraging creativity among individuals and groups; creating a sense of belonging among users of common social media tools; providing more choices to promote engagement among different individuals and groups; reducing barriers to group interaction and communication such as distance and socio-economic status; and increasing the technological competency level of users of social media. These benefits are expanded as follows:

1. **Connectivity to friends and relations:** Social networking sites started as a place to connect with your friends in an easy and convenient way. Many found their old pals from school or college who were out of touch due to one reason or the other and reconnected to them. Social networking sites provide the opportunity to connect with people and build better relationships with friends and keep them abreast with happenings around them.
2. **Reducing communication barriers:** With social networking sites, thoughts and perceptions over different issues and topics are shared with large audience. The sharing feature available on the social networking sites makes opinions about issues reach a large number of people at a time, including those who are not on the sharers friend list. Social networking sites provide opportunities to make group with people of like minds and share opinions and inputs about issues with them.
3. **Business opportunities:** Social networking sites have become a crucial part of many people. This is more obvious when laptops and desktops are opened, and the web accessed, as social sites are sub-consciously, there is a unconscious business updates received. This shows that businesses have notices the value of social networking sites to human life and therefore, are

using various techniques to promote their products. Also, a number of customized applications are made on the social platform with the aim of promoting products and services. Social marketing is also seen as cost-effective, so businesses are shifting towards that.

Potential drawbacks identified with the use of social networking sites include risks of psychological disorders and health problems such as anxiety, depression, poor eating habits, and lack of physical exercise; increasingly short attention spans and subverted higher-order reasoning skills like concentration, persistence, and analytical reasoning among frequent users of social sites, a tendency to overestimate one's ability to multitask and manage projects; seeing technology as a substitute for the analytical reasoning process (Zwart, Lindsay, Henderson & Phillips, 2013; Rosen, 2015; Conolly, 2018).

### **Impact of Social Media During COVID-19 to Asaba People**

The outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has created a global health crisis that has had a deep impact on the way we perceive our world and our everyday lives. Not only the rate of contagion and patterns of transmission threatens our sense of agency, but the safety measures put in place to contain the spread of the virus also require social distancing by refraining from doing what is inherently human, which is to find solace in the company of others. Within this context of physical threat, social and physical distancing, as well as public alarm, what has been (and can be) the role of the different social media in the lives of Asaba people during covid-19 pandemic?

According to Allcott, Gentzkow and Yu (2020), social media have long been recognized as powerful forces shaping how we experience the world and ourselves. This recognition is accompanied by a growing volume of research, that closely follows the footsteps of technological transformations (e.g. radio, movies,

television, the internet, mobiles) and the zeitgeist (e.g. cold war, 9/11, climate change) in an attempt to map social media major impacts on how we perceive ourselves, both as individuals and citizens. Within this ample framework of complexity, the researcher welcome research addressing media impact and its role to Asaba people during the COVID-19 pandemic, in the following ways:

- ❖ Fundraisers organized and distributed on social help raise money for those in need: COVID-19 has put many people in Asaba, especially the elderly, those with disabilities, working parents who are losing childcare, and those who are losing their jobs, in challenging situations. Communities are rallying together to support organizations and individuals by sharing fundraisers with large audiences on social media.
- ❖ People are also taking to social media to offer support in any way they can, such as picking up groceries for individuals who are unable to leave home or sharing information on how to support local businesses who are struggling to pay their employees (Ahmed, Alhassan and Alshammari, 2020).
- ❖ People are posting pictures and videos to share their experiences through social media: Posts from people quarantined at home have ranged from videos of living room yoga to pictures of snuggly pets who are thrilled their owners are with them 24/7. There have also been posts acknowledging how difficult and frightening this time is. Posts have ranged from commiseration to overwhelming support — neighborhood rainbow hunt to this “mental health check-in” on a Facebook neighbors group.
- ❖ A source of information: Never have we had more realtime information available at our fingertips in the face of a worldwide event. Social media information help us keep safe, providing us with a better understanding of what is occurring and how it might impact us and those we love (Jackson, 2020).

- ❖ Social distancing and home quarantine are trending: Until a few weeks ago, many of us hadn't even heard of "social distancing," which refers to staying at least 6 feet away from others to help prevent the spread of infection. Now, social media users, from friends and family to celebrities and governments, are regularly calling for social distancing.
- ❖ An influence on public response to the outbreak: Billions of people are free to publicly share their opinions on COVID-19 across various social platforms. In the past few weeks, we've seen individuals, organizations, and businesses use social media to spread awareness of COVID-19, as well as the public actions that can be taken.

The combination of quick and targeted interventions oriented to delegitimize the sources of fake information is key to reducing their impact. Those users voicing their views against the conspiracy theory, link baiting, or sharing humorous tweets inadvertently raised the profile of the topic, suggesting that policymakers should insist in the efforts of isolating opinions that are based on fake news. Many social media platforms provide users with the ability to report inappropriate content, which should be used. social media can also spread falsehoods, including miracle preventative measures, false claims about the implementation of martial law, conspiracy theories, and more.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the situation survey, Asaba and Delta State as whole is yet to grow technologically, especially in social media information awareness and use. Sharp growth on new cases based on daily update indicate that there is lack of authentic information that will aid in tracking victim contacts. Irregular statement by government based on prevailing information has created doubt in the mind of citizen regarding the authenticity of the news on COVID-19 in Nigeria.

Furthermore, social media really contribute to spread information aimed to curtailing the spread of the virus, such as social distancing, latest confirm cases, online businesses and so on to people of Asaba which have been ignored by the peasants and religious sycophants who see the pandemic as farce.

Social media has it positive vibes which it may offer to other sectors for productivity, but the persuasive interactive nature of various social media platforms and the multiple content and varieties it offers can lure people of Asaba rather than been helped or improved radio or television channels. The paper conclude that social media platforms really contribute a lot to the people of Asaba to gain information about COVID-19. The nature of the impact of social media panic among people varies depending on an individual's gender, age, and level of education. Social media has played a key role in spreading various information about the COVID-19 outbreak in Nigeria and Asaba in particular.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the conclusion, the paper recommends that;

1. As a way to encourage Asaba people productivity and students' academic efficacy during this covid-19 pandemic, it is important that government and school authorities checkmate and regulate the use of social media among people of Asaba. Countries like china have strict restrictions for social media use, especially among people, which has helped the country's productivity and output.
2. Students should be able to rightly place their priorities in their academic work social networking rather than misuse their times in non-profitable things.
3. School administrators on their own should be able to build on the positive use of social networking sites such as joining students in group and helping them meet other student groups online. By this, they can bring to limelight the risks

and benefits associated with the use of the social sites and help students to overcome the negative behavior associated with these sites as well as educating students on the best and most efficient ways of using these sites to support learning.

4. The study recommends that parents should keep their eyes on the children to ensure that their use of the social media does not interfere with their studies and help the teenagers to achieve effective time allocation to tasks and management. This will help achieve efficiency and high productivity during this covid-19 pandemic.

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