

Analysis of Social Media Messages on COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

There is a rich literature on health communication generally. Most of these literatures dwell on diseases and viruses (see Kampf, Todt, Pfaender & Steiner mann, 2020). However, rarely is anything found on the emergent virus COVID-19 otherwise known as Corona virus. This gives impetus to the study which aim is to analyse messages people post on social media about the virus. A purposive sampling of selected messages on ASUU Congress Whatsapp platform of Academic Staff Union of Universities, University of Ilorin Chapter was used for the analysis between 1st January and 31st March 2020. Results show that most of the messages were on preventive measures as their hallmark was to create awareness on how to forestall people from being vulnerable to it. The study concludes that outbreak of novel diseases and viruses are bound to emerge, and social media will continue to serve as platforms for people to share messages about emerging diseases and viruses. Among other things, the study recommends sustained use of the social media by people to share not only preventive but also corrective measures about viruses as they emerge.

Keywords: COVID-19, bubble, self-isolation, social distancing, social media

1. INTRODUCTION

Long after the outbreak of the deadly Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) or Asian flu and Ebola virus, the emergence of COVID-19 otherwise known as Corona virus has shook the emotional foundation of the global community. The virus that causes global health concern causes severe respiratory tract infections in human beings. Traced to China, COVID-19 which is a scientific creation was allegedly leaked out of Wuhan P4 laboratory in China. Sequel to its outbreak in 2019, an alarm was raised by scientists and medical practitioners of its dire effect on human beings. The World Health Organisation alludes to this that as at February 12, 2020, there was recorded cases of 45,171 confirmed cases of pneumonia (cited in Kampf, Todt, Pfaender & Steiner mann, 2020). This figure continued to soar proportionate to magnitude the pandemic continued to spread to several world countries leading to alarming deaths.

Countries of the world initially seemingly demonstrated a lack of zeal to forestall the possibility of the droplet virus from spreading to and infecting their citizens probably due to the perceived long distance from the country it emerged. Even developed countries proximate to China with sophisticated medical facilities that could have taken the virus serious apparently proved to lack the medical capability to contain the novel virus when recorded cases of infection were made. The attention of the global community was, however, arrested when the virus started spreading to different countries beyond China as migrants became incontrovertible transmission agents.

The COVID-19 is transmitted from person-to-person through coughing, sneezing, or touching. The human-to-human transmissions has been described with incubation times between 2-10 days, facilitating its spread through droplets, and contaminated hands or surfaces (Kampf, Todt, Pfaender & Steiner mann, 2020). Therefore, those susceptible to it are the ones who are likely in physical contact with those infected. Manifestations of the virus include cough, sneezing,

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pneumonia or flu. Measures to combat the spread of the virus is primarily through self-isolation, observance of basic cleanliness like regular washing of hands with soap and clean water, and seeking of appropriate medical attention.

As expected, due to the widespread of the virus with devastating effect on human lives, the social media platforms came handy as means of disseminating information about the virus. People used the available social media platforms at their disposal including but not limited to Facebook, 2go, Instagram, Whatsapp, Blogs, Twitter, YouTube to post messages of different kinds. The reasons for use of social media are obvious. The social media are easily accessible; they enable users to create messages, and retransmit messages as they at the same time consume certain messages. Bradley and McDonald (2011) submitted that social media guarantee collaboration, where all invited participants can create, post, enhance, discover, consume, and share content without a direct intermediary.

The Corona virus outbreak was not the first to arrive in the age of social media. Sokolov (2020) argued that at least three other international pandemics occurred in the ten years preceding it. Sokolov (2020) went on to identify them to include the Swine flu pandemic, the Ebola epidemic and Zika outbreak all had prominence and widely documented on social media. However, COVID-19 being a novel virus, hardly has academic work been conducted on it particularly in relation to social media. This creates a research gap that needs to be filled. Filling the research void will expand the perimeters of literature on social media and health communication. To address this research problem, the study is based on the following research questions which are:

1. What issues do people report about COVID-19 on ASUU Congress Whatsapp Platform?
2. What is the tone of messages people post about COVID-19 on ASUU Congress Whatsapp platform?

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The broad objective of the study is to analyse the different kinds of COVID-19 messages people post on social media. In specific terms, the objectives are to:

1. Identify the issues people report about COVID-19 on ASUU Congress Whatsapp Platform.
2. Explain the tone of messages people post about COVID-19 on ASUU Congress Whatsapp platform.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study made use of Social Media Bubble Theory which antecedents is that there was a speculative boom phenomenon in the field of social media in the 2010s particularly in the United States of America. This development is linked to the ability of the social media as indubitable channel to access information, spread ideas, and influence opinion. As Moeller and Helberge (2018) observed, due to the exponential increase in available content online and technological developments, more and more citizens are informing themselves through customised and created sources.

The basic assumption of the theory is that social media provide opportunity for a community or cluster of persons who are likely to remain connected to share information among themselves. Users of social media platforms especially partisan ones are more likely to share articles with which they agree (Dimitar, Diego, Oliviera, Flammini & Menczer, 2015). Consequently, when searching for news, people are more likely to be exposed to like-minded opinion views and to stay connected and share information with others. Bubble experience is related to homophily that theorises that people tend to form connections with others who are similar to them in characteristics such as values, beliefs, or attitudes.

In his contribution to the theory, Ding (2013) elucidated that the desires and the delicate balancing act between the people and the self are typically sub-conscious and are not directly observable. However, some have seeped into the confines of their subconscious and emerged as overt individual preferences, expressed as his or her needs. The paramount bond between members of the cluster or bubble is their shared identity, interest and need; what Grevet, Terveen and Gilbert (2014) referred to as having similar interests and values; and these are some of the features that bind members of ASUU Congress Whatsapp platform, University of Ilorin Chapter.

4. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The 21st century has witnessed the emergence of Corona virus also known as COVID-19. The virus which is regarded as a pandemic was first confirmed by the Chinese authorities on January 7, 2020. The novel virus is a pandemic because of its world-wide spread. By March 30, 2020, more than 778, 000 cases had been confirmed worldwide across 200 countries (TVC News, 2020). With the devastating effect of the virus there arises the need for the global researchers to make inroads at all fronts to ameliorate the spread of COVID-19 as well as expand the frontiers of literature especially in health communication. The urgency to provide perspectives for greater understanding of the origin, evolution, transmission, prevention and curative measures of COVID-19 has prompted researchers to conduct relatively few studies within the short time of its outbreak (see Godfrey, 2020; McAteer, 2020; Lewnard & Clo, 2020).

A commonest way of contracting the contagious virus is through contact like touching. Touching, being a basic characteristic of human beings probably spurred a study with close reference to students. Finding showed that students touch their face with their own hands on average 23 times per hour, with contact mostly to the skin (56%), followed by mouth (36%), nose (31%) and eyes (31%) (Kwok, Galton & McLaws, 2015). The exposition is not too different from what other categories of people exhibit. Toddlers, teenagers and adults who are working class naturally exhibit the behaviour of frequently touching these sensitive and delicate parts of the body that are potentially vulnerable to diseases and viruses.

Informed by the need to understand the level of time spent on the social media following the outbreak of COVID-19, another study was undertaken known as The Influencer Agency study. In reference to the study, McAteer (2020) explained that the study analysed 200 of their own campaigns including more than 7.5 million Instagram posts and data from 2,152 influencers found 76 percent increase in daily accumulated likes on Instagram #ad posts over the last two weeks as of then. The study further unearthed that a 22 percent increase in Instagram campaign impressions from Q4 2019 to Q1 2020 and a 27 percent increase in engagement on average from February to March. The increased active engagement was linked to the upsurge in Corona virus worldwide.

Some of the information about the outbreak, dimension, incidents of death and infection emanate from health organisations only to be re-transmitted by early recipients. However, rather than offer enlightenment, some messages misinform and cause panic among people. In a study by MacMillan and Dunlop (2020) that made use of controlled test with more than 1,600 participants, findings show that false claims were shared in posts simply because people failed to think about whether the content was reliable. The approach adopted by the study was accuracy nudge intervention from social media companies could limit the spread of misinformation. This step confirms Sokolov's (2020) assertion that social media websites are actively fighting this misinformation. Sokolov further pointed out that the Chinese created WeChat platform which uses a popular fact checking device to dispel harmful misconceptions. Similarly, Western websites like Twitter and Facebook are also actively working to ensure that only correct sources get amplified.

5. METHADODOLOGY

The study made use of Critical Discourse Analysis which views text or language as a form of social practice. This means the theory deals with how language and text are positioned and the aim for the positioning. Researchers like Norman Fairclough, Teun Van Dijk, Wodak and Kristava agree that the complex interactions of discourse and social could not be analysed, unless it utilises the course of identity to bridge representatives of daily life. This is why Wodak (2001) has submitted that being critical does not entail taking things for granted but opening up complexity, challenging, reductionism and being self-reflexive, in one's research and through these processes, making opaque structures of power relations and ideological manifest (cited in Amoussou & Aliagbe, 2018). Based on this, this study relied on Norman Fairclough and Teun Van Dijk's social and literary studies which deal with discourse representation and intertextuality. Essentially, the study applied the linguistic aspect to reveal the hidden motives of the texts. Other researchers including Ulinuha, Udasmoro and Wijaya (2013) have adopted similar method. Therefore, the study analysed users' posts on ASUU Congress, a Whatsapp platform of the about 500 academic staff at the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria, which was purposively selected. The study covered a three-month period beginning from 1st January, 2020 to 31st March, 2020, which is the first quarter of the year the virus was on rampage. Choice of the period was informed by the rising incidence of deaths and infections of the Corona virus that triggered the posts on the platform. The posts which were purposively selected were thematically analysed descriptively. Themes included personality, preventive measures, curative measures, statistics, effects or consequences and satire or sarcasm,

6. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The data presentation was based on the several themes including the personalities infected, preventive measures, curative measures, statistics on those infected, effects or consequences, and sarcasm or satirical messages. Almost all the posts were retransmitted by the posters rather than being initiated by them. Personality means social status of those infected. They include scientists, public servants and their family members or relations as well as politicians and their family members and relations. Preventive measures refer to ways to avoid from being infected by the virus while curative measures refer to steps taken to address the virus. Statistics represents those infected expressed in quantitative terms. Consequences refers to outcome or fallout of the outbreak of COVID-19 while sarcasm or satirical messages stand for posts that are meant to ridicule those in leadership positions or post that are humorous and appear to douse the fear of the menace COVID-19 unleashes or is likely to unleash on humanity.

A. *Personality Infected*

i. February 10, 2020 - *Creator of US Bio Weapons Act says Corona virus is Biological Warfare Weapon. And the World Health Organisation knows about it* – www.zerohedg.com

Analysis – Looking at the post that emanates from the United States of America, it is not to simply inform but an indictment on China as the originator of the virus which US regards in the recent past as an arch rival in the context of world dominance. Mention of World Health Organisation can be inferred to be complicity or a witness. What is unclear is that target of the biological warfare is not mentioned, though it could be inferred, US is the target.

ii. February 19, 2020 - *This novel said that China will weaponise a virus in the city of Wuhan in 2020. A page posted reads: In around 2020 a severe pneumonia-like illness will spread throughout the globe, attacking the lungs and the bronchial tubes resisting all known treatments.*

Analysis – Going by this post, the book in question is a precursor that foreclosed what China had been planning to achieve for decades. It affirms the earlier post about power play between the Western and Eastern blocs. The post which was accompanied with the book referred to which title "The Eyes of Darkness" is authored by Dean Koontz on May 10, 1981 is in evidence to the

purported Chinese dream. The book title, in whatever consideration, reflects the gloomy experience the global community is presently facing.

iii. March 11, 2020 - *BBC News Coronavirus: Health Minister Nadine Dorries tests positive* <https://www.bbc.com>

Analysis – This is the first time a public figure is mentioned of being infected of the novel virus from Europe rather than Asia including China. It is ironical that the portfolio of Nadine Dorries is Health Ministry, which is a clear indication that everyone is susceptible to the virus.

iv. March 23, 2020 - *My son has tested positive to Corona virus @ NCDGov has been duly informed and he has been moved to Gwagwalada Specialist Teaching Hospital in Abuja for treatment and management. I will appreciate if you have him in your prayers. Stay safe, Corona virus is real* – AA.

Analysis – Former Vice-President Abubakar Atiku disclosed on social media platform that his son was infected of the virus. He went on to disclose where he was being managed and sought for prayers from the public for his recovery. Sympathetic and commendable as this may be, what he failed to disclose is the itinerary of his son, who was alleged to have come back from the United Kingdom but did not isolate himself and members of his immediate family contrary to the subsisting directive from the Presidency. The son's attitude and behaviour portends danger and prospects of escalating the contagious virus commonly transmitted through physical contact. A dimension to this development is that were the virus restricted to Nigeria, Abubakar Atiku would have jetted his son abroad for medical attention rather than resorting to an ill-equipped indigenous hospital, at least in the estimation of the rich.

v. March 24, 2020 - *Breaking: Bauchi Governor, Bala Mohammed Test Positive of COVID-19.* <https://www.intelregion.com>

Analysis - In hierarchy of democratic leadership, governors occupy the second tier of the executive which Governor Bala Mohammed is one. Contents of the full story reveal that the governor contracted the virus through a handshake with Abubakar Atiku's son when he returned from the UK. This underscores the fears expressed above that, result of negligence or arrogance on the part of Atiku's son had begun to manifest. The Governor himself, who was a stakeholder in making advocacy about the virus, should have also taken precautions, but his demeanour to shake hands put him at risk.

vi. March 25, 2020: *Breaking News: Prince Charles Tests Positive of Corona virus.*

Analysis – Like in the case of Nadine Dorries, the British Health Minister, the post about Prince Charles is of significance. The UK places high premium on both political leaders and institution of the Monarch. This could be the basis to which Charles' infection was also at the front burner among social media reports.

B. Preventive Measures

i. February 9, 2020 - *China seek courts official to kill the over 20, 000 coronavirus patients to avoid further spread of the virus* – <https://abtc.com>

Analysis – This post sounds absurd. Killing over 20,000 patients amounts to humanitarian disaster, irrespective of the large size of population in China. The action indicates compromising human right and dignity canvassed for in the International Charter of Fundamental Human Rights. However, going by the doctrine of deontology, if that action mean saving a comparable higher number of lives in the absence of vaccines for the COVID-19, that could be a justification. If the argument subsists, it means seeking legal backing is to avoid arbitrariness common with some world leaders in policy implementation.

ii. February 28, 2020 - *Protective Measures against Coronavirus (COVID-19) – WHO. Addendum to the post was the following kit contents: (a) reduce your risk of coronavirus infection*

(b) clean hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub (c) cover nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing with tissue or flexed elbow (d) avoid contact with anyone with cold or flu-like symptoms (e) regularly cook meat and eggs (f) no unprotected contact with live wild or farm animals.

Analysis – This is a preventive measure from the World Health Organisation, a body that midwifed health issues the world over. Due to its antecedents, there is believability in whatever policy that comes from it. Incidentally, people are generally familiar with these principles. Activating them at this time is to give confidence of hope. The extent to which people have been complying and how they will comply depends largely on several socio-economic, political and cultural factors.

iii. February 28, 2020 - *Novel Coronavirus Map TRACKING COVID-19 with a rider: outbreak in real time as thus: Dear All, The link is a guide for placing your travels and the world. It's a live count that keeps changing us and when it gets updated, gives you an idea where the Novel Coronavirus is spreading on daily basis. Please, be guided.*

Analysis – This post seemingly addresses everyone by introducing a link to guide travellers daily on incidents of Corona virus in different places for necessary precautions.

iv. March 6, 2020 - *Updated 5th March, 2020 with new guidance for schools in Nigeria. the message reads: the following resources #COVID-19 have been developed by the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (a) Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Health Workers (b) Protective Equipment for Health workers © Public Health Equipment for Health Workers (d) Case-definition to guide diagnosis in Nigeria (e) Answers to the Frequently Asked Question. All with the following website for access:*

https://ncdc.gov.ng/themes/common/docs/protocols/1.76_168410399.pdf

Analysis – The post is linked to Nigerian Centre for Disease Control, an apex body for management of viruses and diseases in Nigeria. The resources are to enable stakeholders to connect and explore if need arises.

v. March 24, 2020 - *COVID-19: Niger quarantines seven persons, warn residents not to travel out.* <https://pme/p2MFPx.1y0>

Analysis – As a prevention measure to de-escalate the spread of Corona virus, the Niger State government quarantined seven people infected with the virus as well as restricted intending travellers to put off their planned journeys.

C. Curative Measures

i. March 19, 2020 - *Breaking News! US approves chloroquine to treat COVID-19 – thenationonline.ng*

Analysis – In the midst of absence of cure for the Corona virus, a post was sent that the President of United States of America, Donald Trump endorsed use of chloroquine to treat the virus. Arising from this message is reservations about the lack of scientific procedure the efficacy of chloroquine was arrived at as well as explanation on usage. In order for critical minds not be easily convinced, endorsement of the World Health Organisation was not mentioned in the report.

ii. March 22, 2020 - *Breaking news found that CORONA VIRUS is already cured in Mozambique, just chew raw Okra for 3 days in an interpolated way, the virus does not resist Vitamins H, C, B12 which this plant even contains for flu is short and all.* By Sheik Abdala Laguto.

Analysis – This is another unguarded report from a questionable source, Breaking News that cites Sheik Abdala Laguto as the physician that invented the cure. According to the report, a cure was already found in one of the African countries, Mozambique which has never featured in lists of union of nations reputed for health care delivery. The overly simplistic application and material without scientific procedural backing is not convincing much as it might work.

D. Statistics

i. February 27, 2020 - *The Federal Ministry of Health has confirmed a Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) case in Lagos State, Nigeria. The case, which was confirmed on the 27th of February, 2020, is the first case to be reported in Nigeria since the beginning of the outbreak in China on January 2020.*

Analysis – From the Office of the Honourable Minister, Ministry of Health, the disclosure was Nigeria’s first recorded case of Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Place was Lagos State, a cosmopolitan and commercial city in Nigeria. In view of the source from where the information came, people have no cause to doubt the reality of the matter.

ii. March 17, 2020 - *Food for Thought: Till date Jamaica has not recorded a single case of Corona virus! Are you thinking what I’m thinking? Does weed kill the virus?*

Analysis – This post is humorous or satirical in tone and substance. The poster appeared to be lost in thought in attempt to fathom why there was yet a recorded case of the virus in Jamaica reputed for high in-take of marijuana when serial cases were being reported by other countries. Although the poster was not explicit, his mention of “weed” helps to infer what he was thinking. But as of then, Jamaica was not the only country with COVID-19 free.

iii. March 22, 2020 - *Coronavirus Cases in Nigeria so far: Lagos – 19, Abuja – 3, Ogun – 2, Ekiti – 1, Oyo – 1. Total – 26. Recoveries – 2. – Stay at home! Stay alive!*

Analysis – As world statistics on Corona virus soared, the picture did not mask or neutralise the figures that continued to trickle in countries and their states or regions. That is why in Nigeria a cumulative of 26 cases was reported with a caveat for citizens to be more cautious.

iv. March 22, 2020 - *Update: Another Coronavirus patient confirmed in Abuja. Cases now 27 nationwide.* <https://www.nigeriancablenews.com>

Analysis – On the same day shortly after 26 cases were reported, an additional one was reported increasing the number to 27 through a verifiable source.

v. March 23, 2020 - *Coronavirus latest: Global infection pass 300, 000.*

Analysis – This was a worldwide statistic indicating a steady increase in the rate people were infected of the virus. This round figure masks individual countries’ figures.

vi. March 26, 2020 - *Breaking: Six Coronavirus patients recover in Lagos, set to be discharged.* www.thecable.ng

Analysis – This post is significant in the sense that it indicates aura of hope for those who contracted and even those who may possibly be infected. The message further shows that Nigerian hospitals especially the Lagos State Centre for managing the virus is promising and people should be confident in it.

E. Effect or Consequences

i. March 19, 2020 - *Federal Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education, Unity Colleges closed.*

Analysis – In view of the outbreak of COVID-19, Federal government directed the closure of institutions of learning under her watch. The decision is commendable since it is one of the possible ways to avoid concentration of large numbers of people in particular settings and schools are hubs of such settings. Fallout of this decision is distortion of academic programme. There is also the challenge of students to quickly get means of transport to their respective destinations.

ii. March 20, 2020 - *Postponement of Ilorin 2020 PSSN Conference. Due to the effects of Corona virus (COVID-19) that is ravaging the entire world at the moment and sequel to the decision of the Federal Government of Nigeria to close down all the Federal institutions including universities in*

Nigeria in order to curtail the spread of the virus I...regret to announce the postponement of the 4th National Conference of PSSN scheduled to hold from 20th to 23rd of April, 2020 to a later date.

Analysis – Schools of learning are appropriate places to host academic programmes like conferences and seminars. Even as the PSSN had concluded arrangements to hold a conference at the University of Ilorin, the conference was postponed indefinitely in response to directives by the Federal government for suspension of all academic programmes that would lead to physical contact of many people. In order to authenticate the postponement, the convener duly signed the post. By this action, there is bound to be distortions in plans and logistics on the part of organisers and intended participants.

iii. March 21, 2020 - *Social gathering of more than 20 people is prohibited in Lagos.*

Analysis – The prohibition of group of persons which posts were about schools of learning seems to have no bounds as this post shows. It indicates that people should eschew from all social gatherings like get together parties, clubs, elaborate marriage celebrations and burials. This action leads to adjustment to a new way of life that may not be so easy and pleasurable.

iv. March 23, 2020 - *IMPORTANT INFORMATION: Based on letters which the Vice-Chancellor has received from the Federal Ministry of Education...and National Universities Commission...the Vice-Chancellor, on behalf of Senate, has directed that all academic activities on campus should be closed with effect from Monday, 23rd March, 2020 – Dr. Fola Olowoleni, Registrar.*

Analysis – This post shows absolute loyalty by the Vice-Chancellor of one of the Federal Universities in Nigeria, University of Ilorin, Ilorin. Through the Registrar, he had formally complied with the Federal government directives to close down schools as a measure to contain the COVID-19. The Vice-Chancellor's directive clearly makes reference to two earlier letters emanating from the supervisory Federal Ministry of Education and National Universities Commission that regulates activities of universities in Nigeria. This means academic activities would be grounded and students' duration in school for their academic programmes will be elongated.

v. March 24, 2020 - *The Eagle Online Update Breaking: Lagos orders shut down of markets, stores.*

Analysis – This post shows that apart from schools of learning and social gatherings there was need for closure of markets which are designated places people buy and sell. Prospects of physical meetings and ultimately transmission of the deadly Corona virus can therefore not be overemphasized. Noteworthy is the link of the post to the cosmopolitan city of Lagos, which attracts numerous people, local and international on daily basis. The implication is that potential families would be deprived access to where they could buy their wares. On their part, traders will not be able to sell their wares. Consequently, starvation, spoilage of perishable produce and government revenue will plummet.

vi. March 24, 2020 - *COVID-19: Bayelsa gives order on maximum number of passengers in tricycle.* <https://wpine/p2MFPx1yhS>

Analysis – A twist to the restriction order is embedded in the post that is linked to Bayelsa State, Nigeria which embargoes number of passengers that operators of tricycles would carry. Tricycles complement taxis and motorcycles in transport architecture of Nigerian transport system. Operators of tricycles are sometimes accused of carrying passengers beyond capacity. This is why they were directed not to carry more than two passengers per trip.

vii. March 24, 2020 - *Imams suspend congregational Friday, five daily prayers in Kaduna.* <https://wpine/p2MFPx1yhW>

Analysis – While it could be seen that the restriction was not extended to religious activities, this post proves otherwise. The suspension order from leadership of Islam in Kaduna State, Nigeria is

auspicious more so as it is emphatic on the Jumat prayer. This means the valued Jumat prayer in particular which Muslims hold to high esteem is compromised.

viii. March 25, 2020 - *COVID-19: Atiku Asks FG to Pay Each Household #10,000.*

Analysis – In anticipation of the untold hardship Nigerians would undergo, former Vice-President Abubakar Atiku called on the Federal Government of Nigeria to consider alleviating all households with #10,000. The request is coming at a time when restrictions are placed on movement and some economic activities which are indispensable avenues people raise money. He, however, failed to suggest the source from where the money would be raised. One is curious on how equitable the money would be distributed even if it is available for lack of dependable data on Nigerian households.

ix. March 26, 2020 - *COVID-19: FG Deploys Nigerian Researchers to search for cure.*
www.thisdayonline.com

Analysis – The post is not just a clarion call by the Federal Government of Nigeria but decisive action on researchers in the country to go to the trenches. What agitates the mind is where and with what will the researchers start. This question is germane considering the decay of research institutes and Universities which is a reason the Academic Staff Union of Universities, ASUU recently embarked on industrial action for non-vitalisation of universities that the laboratories are integral part.

x. March 28, 2020 - *COVID-19 Relief Fund Donation by ten private individuals, 4 corporate Donations including Access Bank, Guaranty Trust Bank, Zenith Bank and Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation.*

Analysis – This post is about a novel gesture by individuals and corporate institutions in response to a novel virus. Hardly have individuals and corporate bodies contributed for a cause especially with unprecedented amount of money. However, as it is said, desperate situations require desperate efforts and the gesture of those who contributed appear to be acting on this theory. Even then there are more than ten rich people in Nigeria and more than four corporate organisations. But as the post indicates, only these developed a sensitivity to contribute their quota.

F. Sarcasm or Satire

i. February 10, 2020 - *Dear Corona Virus, I want to beg you in the name of Jesus. Please don't listen to the empty boasts of our Nigerian leaders. Our leaders don't know what the (sic) are saying. How can they say they are ready and prepared for you?*

Analysis: The post is in reaction to the level of preparedness of Nigerian leaders to confront COVID-19. The post suggests that Nigeria is rich in terms of human and natural endowment. However, its leaders lack the political will to develop sectors that will meaningfully impact on citizens particularly during emergency situations. Due to insensitivity of leaders to execute programmes as professed, the post creates the impression that the writer is not convinced about the level of preparedness. There is a religious dimension to the post. The mention of "Jesus" gives an insight into the Christian religion he professes and ultimately the need to look up to God as our redeemer.

ii. February 10, 2020 - *The Group Admin is informing all those using Chinese phones to leave the group, because they are suspected of having CORONA VIRUS. If not, they would be quarantined for some months before been (sic) readmitted into the group.*

Analysis – Despite the seriousness of the impact of the Corona virus, the post brings in a dimension of humour. Suffice it to say that the virus is traced to be of China origin. This is akin to most of the handsets Nigerians use. The administrator's directive for those using the handset to evict themselves from the platform creates the impression that they are already infected with the

virus and would be quarantined. The post fails to clarify whether who will be quarantined would have been retested and confirmed negative before re-admission into the group.

iii. February 29, 2020 - *Dear wife, we have a visitor in our office that is now suspected of having infected by Corona virus. We have been put in quarantine for two weeks. We are not allowed to receive visitors. The office will take care of all our needs. Thanks for understanding. See you in two weeks.*

Analysis – This post seeks to expose how people with depraved tendencies take advantage of situations of the moment, unpleasant the situation may be. It puts to question the character of the female visitor who visited at a suspicious time and the impudence or craftiness of the husband that writes to his presumably innocent and unsuspecting wife about what had befallen him. According to the letter, they would be quarantined to an undisclosed place for two weeks – the standard period of confirming and declaring one's COVID-19 status. To the writer, he should be taken to be a caring husband who did not want any member of the family especially his wife to be infected of the contagious virus in case he is a victim. Whether the wife believes the letter or not depends on how much she understands and trusts her husband.

iv. March 3, 2020 - *I don't want to scare anyone but the Corona virus will spread irreversibly soon. The way we get infected is through money bills. Collect all your notes with gloves and place them in a seal and envelope and keep outside your door. Tomorrow morning I'll come and collect the envelope. I will do it for public health. No need to thank me.*

Analysis – This is another way people take advantage of situations to swindle unsuspecting publics. That notwithstanding, a critical mind would know that the virus cannot be reversed soon based on the unscientific proof. Besides, even if mode of transmission is through money not withdrawn that moment but weeks or months earlier, it is unconventional to ask one to envelope it and keep it outside to be dispensed of by an unknown person. Noteworthy, too, is the beginning of the post that "I don't want to scare anyone" which is a shrewd way of scaring his target.

v. March 12, 2020 - *Hand sanitiser n face mask for 15k? How much is corona virus itself? Virus data is not even original...Made in China, it won't last.*

Analysis – This post seems to be reaction to another undisclosed message about cost of sanitiser and mask which amounted to 15 thousand naira. But the question about price of Corona virus that is not sold or bought introduces element of humour in the post; and the dimension of artificiality of the virus is to amplify the stereotypical perception of some Chinese products that are fragile and not durable.

vi. March 12, 2020 - *Friends, I am still very much confused here. Since the Corona Virus issue, ALL Our Politicians have suddenly stopped needing treatment abroad for various sicknesses. Even those with regular medical trips to the UK are suddenly healthy, What a WONDERFUL WORLD!*

Analysis – This post is aimed at satirising the rich, who have penchant of going abroad for regular medical tourism. It is not surprising that since the outbreak of the virus that is spreading and claiming lives across countries of the world including developed countries they visit being worse hit, none of them has indicated intent to embark on such trip. The central thing is to remind our leaders on the need to revitalise not only the health sector but all sectors of the country.

vii. March 13, 2020 - *This Corona virus is now out of control, please wash your hands before you post anything on this group and wash your phone after the group chat please.*

Analysis – The piece of advice would be valid if people normally wash hands before posting messages on social media or wash their handset after group chat. Saying that is to indirectly reinforce the need to observe rules guiding against contraction of the virus.

viii. March 21 - *So any child born at this period has already gotten a prefix attached to his or her name e.g. Corowale, Corowole, Corosuyi, Corowunmi, Corolola, Coroseyi, Corobiyi etc.*

Analysis – The post tries to emphasise on how names are giving to children in Africa and Nigeria in particular. Typical examples encapsulated in the post represent names from Yoruba extraction meaning the poster himself is likely from Yoruba ethnic group.

ix. March 27, 2020 - *All Governors, Senators, Reps or Ministers etc who have contacted COVID-19 should be treated in his or her State Hospitals, in order to enjoy the benefits of their GOOD GOVERNANCE.*

Analysis - This post is another way of ridiculing those in leadership positions that are not disposed to improving wellbeing of subordinates. Rather they deprive them by misappropriating public funds. This is why projects are never executed including healthcare delivery which should be a way of successfully fighting the novel virus. The idea of treating such leaders in their immediate vicinities is a way of reminding them of their failure in governance.

7. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study was carried out to analyse messages people post on the social media relating to the pandemic COVID-19 which emerged at the twilight 2019. The analysis was based on posts on ASUU Congress Whatsapp platform. Interest in the social media is borne from the conviction that they have quickly become prevalent channels to access information, spread ideas, and influence opinions (Dimitar, Diego, Oliviera, Flammini, & Menczer, 2015). The analysis which was streamlined along two research questions is revealing.

Regarding the first research question: What issues do people report about COVID-19 on ASUU Congress Whatsapp platform? Data show that issues posted on the social media platform are about the caliber of people affected, how to prevent and control infection of the virus, rate by which the virus spread, consequences of the virus and of course posts that ridicule especially those in leadership positions.

All the messages posted concerning personalities revolve around top politicians like former Vice-President of Nigeria, Atiku Abubakar, whose son was the first victim. Considering the circumstances his son's status became public knowledge is of public concern. In contravention of government's violation that everyone who returned from abroad should self-isolate for 14 days to ascertain their statuses, Atiku's son, on arrival had allegedly attended social gatherings and physically interacted with people. This disclosure was made when Bauchi State Governor, Bala Mohammed was tested positive and revealed his source of contact to Atiku's son. What is not surprising about misconduct of Atiku's son is a re-enactment of excesses of those who feel they are above the law. In the case of the British Minister of Health, Nadine Dorries and Prince Charles, it is a demonstration of the fact that the infection is boundless and not discriminatory between the low and mighty.

Stretching the answer to research question one is analysis of posts concerning numerous messages that came to focus. Essentially, these messages are about fundamental measures like observance of hygiene, avoiding handshake, social distancing, isolation and quarantine, restriction of movement and closure of public places. These get the endorsement of the World Health Organisation (WHO), a body acknowledged for global health issues. So, information coming from it is likely to be complied with. Probably, inclined by the WHO's endorsement, governments and individuals at different levels keyed into these directives as selling points of their advocacy. Actions of governments are consistent with what Lewnard and Clo (2020) posit that in response to COVID-19, China resorted to closure of schools, workplaces, roads, and transit systems; cancellation of public gatherings, mandatory quarantine of people. What is appalling in one of the posts is the request to get Chinese court injunction to exterminate about 20,000 people infected of the Corona virus in China. If, the unverifiable information is true, it puts to question the aspect of human sanctity which is also enshrined in the Universal Charter on basic human rights.

The messages about curative measures revolve around use of chloroquine advocated by President of the United States of America, Donald Trump without scientific backing. Similarly, the advice of chewing Okra for three days as suggested by Sheik Abdala Laguto is another doubtful remedy. These posts that appear to lack merit evoke the idea of fake news that is damaging. If this line of thought is sustained it reinforces Sokolov's (2020) assertion that social media have become both dispensable source of vital information and fertile ground for dangerous rumour mongering, with claims of equal shock value and with varying truth making waves across the world. The unverifiable information of this nature on social media prompts the World Health Organisation to fashion out strategies to combat fake news when it states that they are not just fighting an epidemic, but they are fighting an information denial (cited in Sokolov, 2020).

Statistics provide quantifiable indices to measure trend of a phenomenon. In this study, statistics that show the trajectory of rate of infection and fatality come from recognised bodies, government circles are personalities. Examples of these reputable bodies are the World Health Organisation, Nigerian Centre for Disease Control, State governments, Ministry of Health. In all cases the trend shows a steady increase in the rate of infections and deaths.

Given that whatever happens has consequences positive and negative, the posts analysed are able to bring this to the fore. A key consequence is the colossal loss of lives the world over. The meteoric rise in death rate as data show specifically affirms the submission that by March 30, 2020, more than 778, 000 cases had been confirmed worldwide across 200 countries (TVC News, 2020). The consequences extend to closure of institutions of learning, work places, markets, stoppage of political rallies, and restriction of movements. All these led to untold hardship to citizens. For example, while students and staff had to embark on compulsory break that truncate academic calendar, business activities and financial inflow plunged. The multiplier effect is the challenge of means of livelihood especially for those that live on wages. On account of this, individuals, corporate organisations and government at different levels resorted to provision of welfare packages to alleviate particularly those at the margin of poverty. The sudden emergence of testing centres and laboratories across different parts of the world and Nigeria in particular would remain a wishful thinking without the outbreak of COVID-19. The question however is sustenance of the facilities after containment of the virus.

Answers to research question two (What is the tone of messages people post about COVID-19 on ASUU Congress Whatsapp platform?) are derived from posts from data under satire. Despite the rampage of COVID-19 on humanity, posts featured in this regard are either to allay fear, emotions, worry and anxiety or to ridicule those in leadership positions. Humorous posts like the ones about a letter to a wife from her husband who claimed to be quarantined with a female visitor, and advice to people with cash to envelope and keep outside their houses for reason of getting rid of the virus attest to this. On account that people in leadership positions especially in Nigeria fail to deliver on their mandate, a post is pellucid that those in leadership positions who are infected with Corona virus should be taken to their constituencies for medical attention which is lacking. A related post expresses surprise in the sudden lack of indication of our leaders to go abroad for medical check-up is a scorn in view of their hitherto penchant to fly abroad for any slightest ailment. If Corona virus was limited to developing countries where leadership normally fails to invest in healthcare system, Abba Kyari, the Chief of Staff to President Muhammadu Buhari, Bauchi State Governor Bala Mohammed, and Abubakar Atiku's son would have been flown abroad for treatment the moment their Corona virus status was confirmed positive. But for the exigency of the moment, they are being managed in the ill-equipped hospitals in Nigeria.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on findings, the study recommends that:

Users of ASUU Congress Whatsapp platform should sustain interest in posting messages that will educate, inform and entertain readers. This will reinforce the advocacy embarked on by different other stakeholders to contain the novel virus.

Users should try to be media literate and avoid posting unverifiable messages that could be misleading. For example, a post that suggests chewing of Okra for three days as curative measure without scientific backing is shrouded with doubt rather than the efficacy of the prescription from an inconsequential person.

Governments of world countries should be circumspect and improve on their healthcare systems. This is more crucial to developing countries like Nigeria which healthcare system attracts negligible investment that render them incapacitated in event of outbreak of diseases and viruses. In addition, by investing in indigenous healthcare system, leadership will shelve the idea of depending absolutely on healthcare of developed nations which they consider their exclusive preserve and give a boost to local hospitals for the benefit of all strata of society especially in event of expediency as we have today.

9. CONCLUSION

The study is about a novel global pandemic, COVID-19 also known as Corona virus. The conclusion drawn is that social media platforms, which Whatsapp is one, have come to stay and people will continue to use it from time-to-time and for different reasons and purposes. New platforms may emerge but may only succeed in expanding the perimeters of the existing ones. As such there is no escape for users, who are caught in the web of social media in the 21st century digital ecosystem. Above all, becoming social media literate equips users with the competence to access and assess messages and determine their merit before they post for public consumption.

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