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Audience Perception of Forwarded Covid-19 Messages on Facebook and WhatsApp as Triggers of Misinformation

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Abstract

Misinformation is a problem that is much more prevalent in the social media than the traditional media. The social media is a sphere where individuals are both producers and consumers of information and so because of this a lot of information sent out during the Covid pandemic were sometimes misleading as individuals who sent out these messages have little or no regard for journalistic ethics. The impact of the covid-19 pandemic cannot be overlooked due to the flood of information that was spread about on the social network which could be false or true. The aim of the study is to find out if audiences consider the Covid-19 information from WhatsApp and Facebook as being credible and identify the perception of the audience on forwarded messages on Covid-19. The study adopts the Source Credibility as theoretical framework. The survey research method was adopted using questionnaire as the research instrument. The sample size for this study was 400 respondents selected from the total number of the population in Ikorodu; Maya and Ijede as study areas and only a total of 383 were collated and analyzed. The study used the stratified sampling technique. The findings show that majority of the audience make use of social media a lot and that during the Covid-19 pandemic they majorly got information from their social networks most especially WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook and findings revealed that audience considers all Covid-19 related messages on their Facebook and WhatsApp pages credible enough and are likely to forward them but in the intent to inform and not deceive. This study recommends that users of social media should properly verify information before forwarding them as this will ensure that the problem of misinformation is curbed in order to avoid individuals making agitated decisions regarding their health as regards the Covid-19 pandemic and other issues arising.

Keywords
Audience, Covid-19, Facebook, Messages, Misinformation, Perception, and WhatsApp

I. Introduction

Social media has been a highly valuable tool for facilitating communication, personal messages, and interacting with friends and family. According to Rajendran and Thesinghraja (2014), social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp are becoming a well-known tool and an absolutely essential part of people's lives that they no longer bother to use traditional media to obtain information, which is why mainstream media is already feeling threatened by the high usage of the digital sphere. According to Nejo (2021), the media is a very powerful aspect of human conversation and interaction that functions to inform, educate, and entertain people. However, with the rise of digital media, several blogs and websites have sprung up, making the process of sharing information much easier and faster.

According to Grinberg (2018), because social media is by far the preferred channel for individuals to stay informed, mainstream news stations has had to shift their news and stations to the digital domain to maintain relevance. Given the importance that the new media have gained, not all information on this platform is reliable or authentic enough, due to the sheer volume of information and the high percentage of citizen journalism, this site have been considered to be a source of rumors and intentional misinformation (Barbera, 2018).

For the context of this research, the main social media platforms involved in the spread of misinformation are Facebook and WhatsApp (Kurfi et al., 2021). WhatsApp and Facebook has been identified as a platform with a huge number of participants who simply forward messages without verifying their authenticity, and not all messages can be confirmed to be true, as many people are both producers and consumers of information these days (Hasim et al., 2019).

According to Nejo (2021, p.13), the emergence of Covid 19 in Nigeria can be traced back to the transmission of false information regarding the virus. The presence of the virus was widely circulated through diverse social media outlets, most of which cannot be verified. Unproven remedies and therapies were frequently distributed through digital media channels such as WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Misconceptions, disinformation, conspiracy, false cures, and other concerns arose as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic, posing a significant threat to global information circulation. Misinformation and disinformation, for example, are epidemics in Nigeria, affecting the public's perceptions and trust (Onyemelukwe, 2020).

Misinformation, according to Kamar and Shah (2018), is erroneous information that is given to deceive whether or not it is intended to do so. Misinformation is inaccurate information which has been passed on to someone or persons, and it can also refer to fake news or faulty information. Misinformation has become a global standard and an everyday issue in recent years, clouding the effectiveness of social media (Aondover et al., 2025).

In their study, Bapaye and Bapaye (2020) revealed that people over the age of 65 are more prone to disinformation, and that certain demographic features are more liable to fall for inaccurate information received over WhatsApp. Bapaye also admits that WhatsApp users have the potential to disseminate information without verifying the message's legitimacy due to the user interface the site has for communicating (Hile et al., 2022).

The goal of the research is to determine how Covid 19 forwarded communications on social media pages cause or spark disinformation, as well as the risk of a WhatsApp or Facebook user being exposed to forwarded messages and the actions they take when they get exposed (Msughter & Phillips, 2020). Many of these messages are frequently believed, due to people's strong dependence on social media, and as a result, so many of these messages are shared on people's feeds or with their contacts.

1.1 Problem Statement

Misinformation is a problem that is much more prevalent in the social media than the traditional media. The source of misinformation in regards to this study is forwarded messages. These Covid-19 forwarded messages are considered peculiar to WhatsApp and Facebook users and the information on these platforms cannot be determined to be true but many people just believe the information that are passed on without thinking the validity of the information (Hasim et al., 2019). Usman et al. (2022) remark that social media is an area where individuals are both producers and consumers of information, and so too

much information sent during the Covid pandemic were sometimes misleading as individuals who send these messages has little or no respect for journalistic ethics. This has led to a complete lack of proper information sharing behavior among social network users. This study aims to raise awareness about reading and sharing forwarded messages on WhatsApp and Facebook. It wants to analyze how the public perceives the messages transmitted by Covid19. It is imperative that all information is thoroughly checked before being transmitted, as this will ensure that the problem of misinformation is limited to prevent individuals from making chaotic decisions regarding their health.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To determine how often audiences get messages via WhatsApp and Facebook regarding covid-19.
2. To ascertain if the audiences consider the Covid-19 information from WhatsApp and Facebook as being credible.
3. To identify the perception of the audience on forwarded messages on Covid-19.

II. Review of Literatures

2.1 Understanding Covid-19 and Misinformation

According to Nejo (2021, p. 25), Covid 19 is a major global health hazard, also known as Coronavirus (2019nCov) or Severe Acute Coronavirus 2 (SARSCoV2). This virus emerged from bats and was transmitted to humans through an unidentified intermediate species in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China in December 2019. The pandemic began when the large numbers of individuals in Hubei began with acute pneumonia of unknown origin. China notified the World Health Organization on December 31, 2019, after sending samples to reference laboratories for evaluation. This virus has spread rapidly around the world, originating in China. Contact or contact with an infected person spreads the disease, affecting people of all ages. The fatality rate fluctuates between 2% and 3%. Antiviral drugs have yet to be recognized as having a role, and therapies are mostly supportive. The first approach is to maintain sufficient isolation to prevent the sickness from spreading, and the minor illness can be managed or treated at home through balanced diet, appropriate hydration, with the use of a face mask are all typical practices (Vitalis et al., 2023). As a result of the virus, all countries affected have faced economic, clinical, and public health challenges (Aondover et al., 2022).

The Coronavirus pandemic is a worldwide health problem that has spawned a new dimension: "an infodemic." When there is an outbreak, according to the director of infectious hazards management at the WHO emergency program, there is always a flood of information following it, and among that information is fake news, misinformation, and disinformation. Pennycook and Rand (2020) discover that misinformation regarding the Covid- 19 epidemic not only spreads, but also causes anxiety, discord, and even direct harm due to incorrect information about remedies or therapies.

According to Evanega et al., (2020), there have been various stories across the digital space on the different sources of the virus, untested remedies, and measures in the coverage of the information surrounding the pandemic. During a pandemic, misinformation is a severe global epidemic because if people obtain incorrect and unverified information about the virus, official and effective actions will be overlooked, contributing to the virus's spread, posing a threat to the health sector, and makes control difficult. However, it is often considered that misinformation is shared and amplified more frequently over the internet such as Facebook and twitter, not to say there are no

misinformed messages on the traditional media but it isn't as pronounced as it is in the new media because of how fast news travel (Vitalis et al., 2024).

Several communication channels claimed and fabricated information claiming that were some certain treatments for the virus, such as chloroquine, garlic, and the like that could cure the virus, and cases of Nigerians taking an overdose of chloroquine were brought to the attention of governments during the epidemic. Other claims, such as that the virus mostly affects the elderly and that the disease is killed by the sun's heat, were later debunked. As a result of this type of information, false rumors and conspiracies formed, making the epidemic even more difficult to control. As a result, it is vital to communicate reliable information that has been fact-checked (Nejo, 2021, p.30).

2.2 Evolution of Social Media

Social media has been a phenomenon for a long time in human interaction, and it has changed the way and speed of communication around the world. In recent years, social networks have changed many aspects of human communication, making connecting quick and effortless. Because social networks and social networks are so intertwined, it would be impossible to discuss one without the other. According to Merriam Webster, "Social media is an interactive communication medium in which people create online communities and communicate messages, ideas, personal messages and other items such as videos, photos, audio and other materials such as video, photos, audio and other media content." Networking is defined as the basic exchange of information between people, groups and organizations around the world (Maiwada et al., 2025).

However, there are other beliefs about the development of social media, the oldest method of communication by writers dating back to 1972, and the use of the telegraph to send messages over a distance. In the late 1800s, Emile Durkheim, the French sociologist dubbed the "father of sociology", and Ferdinand Tonnies, the German sociologist, are credited with the development of the social network. Tonnies believed that social interaction could occur between members because of shared values and ideas, and Durkheim used a combination of factual investigation and sociological theory to create the medium. Electronic mail began in the 1960s and did not become widely available until 1991.

Originally, electronic mail was a method used to exchange messages from one computer to another that required a connection but today's mail servers allow users to send and then store them and can be conveniently viewed by the recipient, i.e. the recipient does not need to be online previously to be able to accept a message. In 1969, the Advanced Research Projects Agency created ARPANET, and it was one of the shared computer networks that shaped the birth of the Internet. CompuServe is also the third developer founded in 1969 with the mission to provide time sharing services by renting time computers. This service is too expensive for many people (Rimskii, 2011).

In the 1970s social media evolved and we have the MUD which originally stood for Maximum User Dungeon, Multi-User Dimension or Multi-User Domain and was a virtual space of real- time with role-playing games, interactive spaces and online chats. Text-based MUDs require the user to enter commands in natural language. Then BBS, short for Bulletin Boards, was founded in 1971. User's access BBS with a modem connected to a phone line to read the news, exchange messages with others, and download software. It was the forerunner of the popular World Wide Web. After BBS, Usenet was founded in 1979 and is very close to BBS and is allowed to publish articles and news (Ritholz, 2010). WELL, GEnie, Listserv and IRC were introduced in the 1980s. WELL stands for Whole Earth Electronic Link which was founded in Sausalito by Stewart

Brand and Larry Brilliant. Genie stands for General Electric Network for Information Exchange. Listserv was created in 1986 and was the first email software. IRC, which stands for Internet Relay Chat, is designed for group communication and text messaging over the Internet. Many social networking sites were created in the 1990s and in 2000 the social network saw the emergence of many social networking sites including fotolog, sky blog, MySpace, LinkedIn, Tribed, net and in 2004 Facebook was created and in 2005 Yahoo! 360, YouTube and others appeared.

2.3 Evolution of Facebook

According to Hall (2021), Facebook was created by Mark Zuckerberg, Eduardo Saverin, Dustin Moskovitz, and Chris Hughes in the year 2004 and is an American corporation. All of these individuals were Harvard University students. In 2012, Facebook surpassed MySpace as the highest recognized social networking site on the planet, with over a billion users. Its headquarters were in Menlo Park, California. In 2005, Facebook pioneered the idea of tagging individuals in photos, allowing users to identify themselves and others in the photograph. Users can also publish an unlimited number of times on Facebook (Onyejelem et al., 2024). With the use of Facebook, advertisers have found leads and built relationships and Facebook has made the use of social networks for marketing and advertising possible and this has resulted in large numbers of commitments (Oreoluwa et al., 2024). Facebook is a user-friendly application that is free to access and allows users to upload photos, join groups, chat with people, follow news and create profiles, tags, and more. Facebook earns revenue from advertising.

Despite the opportunities and advantages of Facebook, however, there are risks such as privacy issues. People can post too much personal information on their site. Also, cyber bullying is another risk as the platform might be toxic sometimes with the users. Another is misinformation. Misinformed messages can easily be spread swiftly as there are no ethical standards on the page.

2.4 WhatsApp; Its Conception

The idea of WhatsApp started when the founders quit their jobs to go around the world and then they started going bankrupt and needed a job. So, they applied for a job at Facebook and they were rejected. Then it brings the journey of WhatsApp. WhatsApp was founded in 2009 by Brian Acton and Jan Koum after leaving Yahoo! The idea of statuses displayed next to individual usernames was conceived by Jan Koum, who then discussed it with Acton and so they had to bring in an iOS developer who was a Russian developer named Igor Solomennikov. The journey wasn't as easy as we all thought and that's how Koum managed to develop the IOS app and incorporate WhatsApp Inc in California. He named it WhatsApp because it looks like anything has an idea of statuses (Pahwa, 2020). WhatsApp is the name of a mobile messaging app on android, Iphone, Windows phone or PCs that allows people to send messages, make voice calls and video calls by connecting to a WIFI or mobile data.

2.5 Message Forwarding Behaviour

In more than 100 countries, WhatsApp is the mobile messaging app that enables more than 1.4 billion users and over 60 billion texts, images, videos and audio messages to be sent daily transfers. In instant messaging apps like WhatsApp and Telegram, users have to select contacts on their device to send direct messages which are forwarded to those marked contacts most of the time without their consent, known as message delivery. Surahio et al., (2016) seek to create groups, share information and create mailing lists to

forward messages, most of the users use WhatsApp as their instant messaging client. WhatsApp is a more user-friendly interface than others and in 2014 had more than 500 million users and over 20 billion messages sent every day. The process of forwarding messages over WhatsApp can be explained as:

a. Users may not actively seek information, but come across information that they may find relevant or irrelevant, but receive messages from some of their social network contacts.
b. Furthermore, users interact with messages according to their emotions compared to the User may also take no action on received messages.
c. Message forwarding explains that when users send information to their mobile instant messaging app contacts, it allows message forwarding to continue.

Potnis et al., (2020) states that a user's feeling or emotional connection facilitates the dissemination of information on the Internet, and when the user feels a connection with the content of the message. According to Berger (2011), he clarifies that there are certain types of emotions that trigger or trigger or promote information sharing. Potnis et al., (2020) in their study also found that negative information is more likely to be shared by people and ultimately depending on whether the message is funny or hilarious it also can be transmitted.

2.6 Empirical Review

The Covid19 Pandemic: Combating Social Misinformation in Nigeria was investigated by (Umoh & Umana, 2020, P. 1). To obtain data, the study used a basic random sampling technique. According to a study, social media is the primary source of disinformation about Covid19, and numerous suggestions were made to restrict its spread, including carefully considering the source of information before using or sharing any messages to ensure "accuracy." Usman and Kumar (2020, p.63-65), in their paper on the Perspective and Impact of Social Media Disinformation and Fake News Reports on Coronavirus (Covid19) in India. According to the study's findings, the emergence of social media has resulted in a significant quantity of misinformation and fake news. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that the social media site WhatsApp is still the primary source of false information and misinformation concerning Covid19.

Sulaiman et al., (2020, P.65) in their work on “Information Sharing and Evaluation as Determinants of Spread of Fake News on Social Media among Nigerian Youths: Experience from Covid-19 Pandemic”. The study used a quantitative approach using an online questionnaire to examine how young Nigerians share information on their social networks during the Covid19 pandemic. Research states that a fair number of Nigerian youth share information on social media, relationships and as well have fun and that these relationships influence the sharing behavior of Nigerian youth during the Covid19 pandemic. The results also show that social networking sites are sharing fake news about Covid19, especially about treatments.

Misinformation, covid-19, social media, and fake news have all been the subject of previous research. In a study conducted by Umoh and Umana (2020, p. 1) on combating the issue of covid-19 and misinformation on social media in Nigeria. Research shows that social media is a major platform for covid19 misinformation, and emphasizes that the source of the news should be reviewed before consuming or sharing this news content to ensure authenticity.

In their study on the impact of social media fake news and misinformation in relation to Covid 19, Usman and Kumar (2020, p.63-65) discovered that social media has long paved the way for misinformation and that WhatsApp as a social media platform is

the main platform where misinformation about the Covid 19 pandemic is mainly found in India. Despite various studies on misinformation and social media related to covid19, none of these studies were able to capture forwarded messages on covid19 and how the public explain them. This study aims to address a vacuum in the field of audience perception of forwarded messages on social media sites in the context of the pandemic; specifically, it will look at WhatsApp and Facebook.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

The study adopted Source Credibility Theory. Carl Hovland and Walter Weiss proposed the source credibility theory in 1951, and it is a well- established theory that states that communication credibility is determined by how trustworthy the sender is seen to be, and that expertness and integrity as a factor is highly essential (Anaeto et al., 2008, p.75). Source credibility is the situation in which a message is judged credible by the public or users based on the communicator's positive character or credibility status. This theory was first studied academically in the twentieth century, and it gained popularity during World War II, when the US government attempted to persuade the public to support the war effort. In an attempt to affect public opinion, the US government created the CPI, or committee of public information, based on early theoretical theories of source trustworthiness. CPI was formed in order for the government's communications to have the desirable impact on intended recipients, as well as to urge the general public to engage in the war effort. Carl Hovland and his colleagues tested the source credibility theory and the transmission process of communications traveling from the source to receivers for the war department in the 1940s and the source credibility theory was birth.

In the writings of Aneto et al., (2008), they describe the notion of source credibility theory, which was founded by Aristotle, who agreed that before a speech can be accepted, a speaker must first establish his or her credibility. He divided persuasion strategies into three categories: ethos, logos, and pathos. Trustworthiness is represented by ethos, emotion is represented by pathos, and logic is represented by logos. Both Baudhin and Davis (1972) and McCroskey (1958) believe that the ethos (credibility) of a communicator is crucial in influencing recipients.

Subsequent studies by Hovland and Weiss in McCroskey (1958) attempted to investigate the source's influence on persuasiveness by comparing reliable and unreliable sources with the same message to see whether if the source is considered reliable or trustworthy it can influence the reception of the message, and the results confirmed the hypothesis. According to McCroskey (1958), senders with a high degree of trust or confidence in the eyes of the receiver usually respect all that they say and their words are received easily and quickly. According to Aneto et al., (2008), four main points should be considered when assessing the credibility of a source which is trustworthiness, professionalism or competence, dynamism and objectivity and one of the theoretical assumptions is that having the right sources can improve the effectiveness or reliability of messages.

Regardless of how widely accepted the theory is, it is not without flaws. The source credibility theory has been criticized because it is scientific in nature and so can be falsified. Many researchers have sought out the best way to disagree with what the theory claims, and the theory has also been determined not to be internally inconsistent. Thus, according to the source credibility theory, people are more likely to believe information when the origin is credible; but when talking about social media, this is not always the case, as many users simply post and pass on information without regard for journalistic ethics. The information from that source is not always credible but we still find

people who probably because of the popularity and respect of the social media, receivers easily view and accept the messages on that platform as credible.

III. Research Methods

This study uses a survey research approach to obtain the required data. Onabajo (2010, p.9) describes survey research as a method applied to collect information from a sample of people through their different responses to questions and to evaluate the data in such a way incorporate importance in your field of study. The population of this study is the population of the State of Lagos with a total of 9,013,534 persons (Lagos Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Stratified sampling technique was used to select respondents for this study. To obtain the required sample size accurately, the method of sample size determination of Taro Yamane (1967) will be used.

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

n - Specify sample size

N - means the people under study e- indicates the margin error

$$N = \frac{9,013,534}{(1+ 9,013,534(0.05)2)}$$

$$n = \frac{9,013,534}{1+ 9,013,534(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{9,013,534}{1+22,533.8}$$

$$n = \frac{9,013,534}{22,534.8}$$

$$n = 399.9$$

n = 400 approximately

The sample size of this study is 400

The data collected via survey will be analyzed using descriptive statistics including frequency table.

IV. Results and Discussion

Table 1. Social media platform respondents' engage with the most

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Instagram	72	18.8
Facebook	68	17.8
WhatsApp	116	30.1
Twitter	91	23.8
Telegram	21	5.5
Others	15	4
Total	383	
N	400	100%

In table 1, it showed the social media platform respondents' use the most and therefore, the table indicates that WhatsApp is the number one social media platform the respondents visits the most (30.1%), followed by Twitter with 23.5%, after which we have Instagram with 18.8%, Facebook with 17.8%, Telegram had 5.5% and others was 4%.

Table 2. How often respondents' listen, read or view Facebook and WhatsApp news contents

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Regularly	198	51.7
Rarely	102	26.6
Occasionally	65	17
Never	18	4.7
Total	383	
N	400	100%

Table 2 above indicates the frequency at which the respondents' listen, read or view news contents on Facebook and WhatsApp platforms. As the table shows, 26.6% of them rarely access these platforms for news contents, 51.7% of them regularly access them, 17% access these platforms occasionally and 4.7% never access Facebook and WhatsApp for news contents. In order to show the specific frequency to how regularly they access these platforms.

Table 3. On a scale of 1-5. How frequently do respondents receive messages about Covid-19 on Facebook and WhatsApp Platforms?

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
1	78	20.4
2	63	16.4
3	101	26.4
4	85	22.2
5	56	14.6
Total	383	
N	400	100%

In Table 3, the respondents were asked to choose between 1 and 5 with 5 being maximum and 1 being minimum. As shown above, 26.6% which is (3), 22.2% which is (4) and 14.6% which is (5) of respondents indicated that they frequently receive messages about Covid-19 on their Facebook and WhatsApp platforms while 20.4% (1), 16.4% (2) indicated that they rarely receive messages about Covid-19 on these platforms.

Table 4. If respondents consider the entire information seen on Facebook and WhatsApp regarding Covid-19 as true?

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Yes	154	40.2
No	150	39.2
Indifferent	79	20.6
Total	383	
n	400	100%

Table 4 presents that do respondents' consider all the information seen on Facebook and WhatsApp regarding Covid-19 as true. The table shows that most of the respondents agrees that all news regarding Covid-19 on Facebook and WhatsApp platforms are true with 40.2% while 39.2% of respondents disagrees that information seen on these platforms are not true and 20.6% of respondents are indifferent about the authenticity of information on Covid-19 on these platforms. That is, they cannot say if they are true or not.

Table 5. How respondents react to Covid-19 information forwarded to their Facebook and WhatsApp platforms.

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Interested	155	40.5
Not Interested	128	33.4
Indifferent	100	26.1
Total	383	
N	400	100%

Table 5 presents how respondents react to Covid-19 information forwarded to their Facebook and WhatsApp platforms. The table indicates that majority of the respondents are interested in the information forwarded to their WhatsApp and Facebook platforms as regards Covid-19 with 40.5% while 33.4% showed not to be interested and 26.1% are indifferent about the information forwarded to their platforms regarding Covid-19.

Table 6. Do respondents' share messages received on their Facebook and WhatsApp

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Likely	108	28.2
Not Likely	275	71.8
Total	383	
N	400	100%

This table indicates that majority of the respondents are not likely to share messages received on their Facebook and WhatsApp (71.8%) while another set with 28.2% indicates that they are likely to share.

Table 7. If respondents forward messages regarding Covid-19 in the intent to inform and not deceive

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Strongly agree	68	17.8
Agree	169	44.1
Undecided	36	9.4
Disagree	75	19.6
Strongly disagree	35	9.1
Total	383	
N	400	100%

Table 7 presents if respondents forward messages regarding Covid-19 in the intent to inform and not deceive. As the table shows, majority of the respondents agreed to

have forwarded messages in the intent to inform and not deceive (44.1%) while 19.6% disagrees to have forwarded messages regarding Covid-19 in the intent to inform and not deceive and 9.4% are undecided.

Table 8. If all forwarded Covid-19 messages are fake?

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Strongly agree	36	9.4
Agree	42	11
Undecided	143	37.3
Disagree	113	29.5
Strongly disagree	49	12.8
Total	383	
N	400	100%

Table 8 presents if all forwarded Covid-19 messages are fake. 37.3% are undecided if the messages are fake or not. 29.5% disagrees that all forwarded Covid-19 messages are fake, 11% agrees that all forwarded Covid-19 messages are fake while 9.4% strongly agrees that all forwarded messages are fake and 12.8% of the respondents strongly disagrees. Therefore, this infers that majority of the respondents were undecided to if all forwarded covid-19 messages are fake or not.

4.1 Discussion of Findings

a. Research question 1: How often do audiences get messages via WhatsApp and Facebook regarding covid-19?

The data show how often audiences get messages via WhatsApp and Facebook regarding Covid 19. It was discovered that more than 50% of the audience got messages via their WhatsApp and Facebook regarding Covid-19 very frequently. In 2020, issues around Covid-19 pandemic dominated the media, both traditionally and online. This brought about a large scale of attention that was paid to it by the masses (Nyilasy, 2020). Also, table 5 showed the social media made use of WhatsApp, twitter with 23.8% and Facebook with 17.8% and this is in confirmation with the Statista (2021) on what social media platform is widely used, Facebook is seen to be the largest social media platform with over 2.74 billion users followed by WhatsApp with (2 billion users) and Instagram with (1.22 billion users). Table 7 shows how often respondents' listen, read or view Facebook and WhatsApp news contents and the results showed that more than half of the respondents frequently listen, read and pay attention to news contents and the table 6 shows how regular the respondents' access Facebook and WhatsApp for news content and it indicated that 50% access these platforms hourly, 43.4% was daily and 6.6% was weekly.

However, this study established that the rate at which messages spread on the social networks is quite swift. This study corroborates the findings of Hudson (2019) with the conclusion that the traditional media was not swift in bringing information and feedbacks couldn't be received as well or can be delayed and therefore the advent of social media brought about a large scale of interaction and made the dissemination of information more effective and so during the Covid-19 pandemic, there were floods of information which couldn't be authenticated.

b. Research question 2: Do audience consider the Covid-19 information from WhatsApp and Facebook as being credible?

The study examines if the audience considers the Covid-19 information from WhatsApp and Facebook as being credible. The results produced in table 8 reveal that 40.2% of the audience agrees to consider the information from these platforms as credible enough. This anchor on the source credibility theory on its assumption that communication credibility is found to be influenced by how credible the sender is perceived to be. This explains the role the media plays and its capacity to influence individual views and decision on issues. Covid-19 outbreak became one of the most talked about national and global issue which also required maximum attention from every individual across the globe and so this explains it in table 9. The table further investigated to know how the audience reacts to these messages and 40.5% of the population ascertained to be interested in messages around the most talked pandemic. This led to the forwarding of these messages as explained in table 8, it shows that because the audience sees the information from their Facebook and WhatsApp pages to be true, it brought about their interest and likelihood to share these messages to people but in the intent to inform rather than deceive.

Ademosu and Oyeleye (2019, P.7) in their study agrees that one of the importance of social media is to drive news irrespective of the truth and the lack of information filtering allows for all manner of information diffusion and flow across the internet which can sometimes result into fake news or misinformation and thus continue to spread like wildfire. In the basic propositions of Rokeach and DeFleur, they find that the greater the instability of a society, the greater the audience's dependency on the media and then the greater the effects of the media on the audience. As such, the effect could be negative or positive.

c. Research question 3: What is the perception of the audience on covid-19 forwarded messages?

The third research question produces results on people's perceptions of forwarded messages regarding the Covid-19 pandemic. The results reveal that some audience, up to 42.3% disagrees that not all forwarded Covid-19 messages are fake. Nejo (2021, P.58) in her findings explains that it is safe to say that social media platforms are not only vehicle for transporting fake news; they thoroughly serve the purpose of informing during the Covid-19 pandemic. As such, this study correlates with the findings of Vinney in Nejo (2021) that the uses and gratifications theory rests on two principles about media users. First, the media users are characterized as active in their selection of the media consumed. From this point of view, it is seen that people don't use the media passively but instead they are active, engaged and interested in the way they select their media. This could mean that because the people use the media to satisfy their basic needs unlike the magic bullet theory that tells what the media does to the audience, they therefore select what they want from the media to satisfy a need and could sieve the truth from the floods of information on the internet that could either be true or false.

V. Conclusion

From the findings, the study discovered that the majority of the audience uses social media extensively, and that during the Covid-19 pandemic, they relied heavily on their social networks for information, particularly WhatsApp, Twitter, and Facebook. The study also revealed that the rate at which people use social media is alarming, as the majority of

the audience uses their social networks hourly. Covid-19's proliferation in several nations throughout the world, including Nigeria, prompted a global lockdown and increased access to and use of social media. As a result, participation and news consumption increased. As a result of the high exposure to the digital media and news regarding Covid-19, the study finds out that majority of the audience considers all Covid-19 related messages on their Facebook and WhatsApp pages as credible enough and could likely be the reason why they forwarded a lot although in the intent of informing and not necessarily to deceive. Findings revealed that majority of the audience do not think that all forwarded messages regarding Covid-19 are false. They disagreed that not all forwarded Covid-19 messages are fake.

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