Effective Usage of Social Media Platforms as a Communication Tool Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic around the world completely changed how one thought about communication and engaged with one another. Hence, there is a need to critically explore the effective use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and YouTube as communication tools for information sharing amid the COVID-19 pandemic, which has become necessary for many different organisations. In the quest to avoid the spread of incorrect information and bad news that may cause panic from the general public, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, bloggers and news agencies call for proper and effective use of social media platforms as communication tools. This paper analyses the effects of the development of social media messaging platforms, alongside its inferences to the general society.

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has caused a lot of disruptions in the lifestyle and activities of everyone including individuals and organisations (Enaifoghe 2021a). To go forward despite the chaos created by the COVID-19 pandemic, the study explored the development and effective use of social media platforms amid the global pandemic as communication tools. Social media has gradually become a massively acceptable means to communicate and is getting bigger for organisations today (Enaifoghe 2021b). Reflecting on the use of social media platforms from the perspective of operation by an organisation, one wonders how dynamic it is for an organisation as a means of communication. It is a way for organisations to communicate with their audiences, create their identities, inspire their customers as champions of their organisations, and resolve issues in real time.

This paper attempts to show that using online tools and technology has not only facilitated communication in immeasurable ways but has completely changed the very ways one communicates and even the ways one engages in conversation. The advent of COVID-19 has also completely changed how one thinks about communication as a result (Enaifoghe 2021a; Ikwegbue et al. 2021). Using online tools and technology has not only facilitated communication in immeasurable ways but completely changed how one communicates and engages in conversation. It is acknowledged that social media has the potential to profoundly transform the character of one's social life, both on a relational, interpersonal, and community level (Enaifoghe et al. 2021c).

This paper attempts to analyse the effects of the development of social media, alongside its inferences to the general society, and it also tries to locate the usefulness of social media and technologies as a tool for communication. This study also examines the significance of using social media as a means of communication during the current world crisis of COVID-19 and how several methods of social media play diverse roles in distributing information across diverse audiences. In effect, the study attempts to rationalize how the government and regulating bodies can control the content and use of social media amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Objective

This study seeks to identify the underlining benefits that exists on the usage of social media as a communication tool within an organization.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study empirically examined how social media as a communication tool operates in South Africa across a few different social classes. The study utilized a qualitative approach, and a secondary data analysis to gather information on the subject. A thorough

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examination of pieces of literature (books, book chapters, journal articles, documents, and dissertations) were used as sources to give the information and findings legitimacy (Dey 2005).

Literature Consideration: The Role of Social Media in Crisis Communication

Social media has revolutionized how individuals communicate and obtain information about stories and issues that are of interest to them by enabling quick and effective communication (Kimibei and Wabwire 2021). Scholars like Hauer and Sood (2020), believe that social media may contribute significantly to crisis communication if the proper instruments are in place. In the contemporary digital era, using social media for crisis communication has become commonplace (Kimibei and Wabwire 2021). According to Kimibei and Wabwire (2021), the quick expansion and popularity of social media platforms like Facebook, Bandoo, Flickr, Twitter, and Whatsapp are evidence of the use of social media.

Given the above, this section explored the role of social media communication in crises like the COVID-19 global pandemic. The term "social media refers to the use of web-based and mobile technology to turn communication" into an engaging conversation. One of the most significant benefits of using social media as a means of communication is the online exchange of information and broadened knowledge among groups of individuals (Wendling et al. 2013: 3). Online information exchange also encourages improved communication among people, especially among students or learners in educational institutions during the pandemic time (Enaifoghe 2020). This study is qualitative research that primarily retrieves its data through secondary sources and adopts a content analysis method in reviewing the document collection.

According to a study, organizations can use new social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and others to lessen the impact of crises (Wendling et al. 2013). Wendling et al. (2013) noted in their study that communication has evolved. Previously, means such as radio, television, and newspaper were previously used to transmit valuable information Harris and Charles 2011). However now, we have platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and many more which can be used by organizations to disseminate information to people as well as receive feedback from people. This indicates that a business incorporates social

media technologies into its overall communication strategy.

Organisations and Social Media Communication Tools

Social media has proven to be an effective communication tool during a crisis such as COVID-19. Organisations were forced to adopt different innovative measures to maintain social distance while ensuring the continuity of workflow by allowing employees to work from home (telework). Before COVID-19, social media usage has been shown to communicate information. Enaifoghe (2022), Kimibei and Wabwire (2021) and Pang et al. (2014) in their study noted that organisations that were susceptible to changes in technology have often used Twitter, blogs, and other social media platforms to disseminate information about the company.

Blogs have been asserted to be useful instruments for restoring an organization's credibility and reputation while averting bad publicity in times of crisis (Muzee and Enaifoghe 2020; Schultz et al. 2011). According to Jin and Liu (2010), the blog-mediated crisis communication paradigm aids organizations or crisis communicators in monitoring the blogosphere and responding to well-known bloggers during a crisis. While Stephens and Malone (2009) in a study claimed that individuals prefer to rely on word-of-mouth via social media rather than searching for information directly from a company website or blogs, Liu (2010) asserts that consumers seek immediate and in-depth information during a crisis.

This, according to Enaifoghe (2021a), is because blogs merely permit people to engage in information sharing, contemplation, and other such activities which typically promotes public readership and builds confidence after a crisis (Valentini and Romenti 2011). During a crisis, people choose to explore and use various social media platforms to learn as much as they can about the issue and the crises' responsibilities (Enaifoghe et al. 2021; Valentini and Romenti 2011).

Social Media Platforms as a Networking Tool

Blogs, cooperative tagging, and media file-sharing websites like YouTube and Flickr are a few examples of social media networking platforms (Xiang and Gretzel 2010). Social media is being used more frequently in social, business, and academic settings due to its capacity for collaboration, communication, and

sharing (White et al. 2011). Likewise, organizations can effectively use several social media channels to share information on a crisis. These channels include Microblogging, blogs, and social networking websites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, and YouTube (Walaski 2013).

Digital communication, for example, is a type of computerised communication technology that allows for the quickest and most effective networking of multiple audiences at the same time (White 2012). In times of crisis, social media can affect how people think, act and react to information and circumstances in general (Schroeder and Pennington-Gray 2014). During a crisis, social media plays a vital and inevitable function as a communication channel (Schroeder et al. 2013). Social networking can help enhance disaster preparedness and response, lower disaster costs, increase decision accountability, and increase future acceptance of outcomes. Indeed, after a tragedy, social media may be one of the key crisis coping strategies (Cho and Park 2013). According to Axel (2014: 5), "different types of social media are essential in ensuring successful crisis communication because of their ability to deliver the right information to the right people at the right time".

The Role of Social Media During a Crisis

Social media plays a crucial role in the dissemination of information globally. Social media platforms are faster, easier, and inexpensive. According to a report by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 53.6 percent of the global population, which is approximately 4.1 billion, uses the internet with China and India ranking first and second, respectively (ITU 2019). Social media platforms have become an avenue for searching, sharing, and distributing information such as health information, finance, weight loss, etc. among the general population.

A study conducted in 2014 by the "Digital Health Literacy among European citizens showed that fifty-nine percent of Europeans used the internet to check for health information", fifty-five percent requested general information, fifty-four percent were specific about an illness, twenty-three percent on diagnosis and ten percent are seeking a second opinion after consulting with the specialist.

Social media is another great tool for gathering information during a crisis. For instance, a 2014 survey by the Public Health Dentist of Bengalane, India found that a significant portion of its respondents chose to use the internet to look up pertinent information (Enaifoghe 2021a; Carey et al. 2020). Also, social media can be used to handle emergencies and stop outbreaks through its awareness and prevention messages aired (Carey et al. 2020). for instance, during the Ebola (2014) and Zika (2015) outbreaks, social media platforms were used to establish effective communication with the general public on awareness, symptoms, and resolutions expected of citizens who came in contact with or know anyone who has the disease.

Then the recent one is the coronavirus or COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 virus spread rapidly and has prompted countries and health authorities to protect the citizenry. One way this has been done is through social media. A major characteristic of social media since the beginning of COVID-19 is the rapid dissemination of information at the regional, national, and international levels. Protocols about PPE, prevention mechanisms, possible treatments, and now the vaccines have been swiftly shared. Schrag et al. (2020) in their study found that the top 100 YouTube videos with the keyword "coronavirus" had more than 165 million views as of March 5, 2020.

Likewise, social media has been used to keep organisations, schools, and people active due to the observance of social distancing. For example, students can share information and take lectures through social media platforms like Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams, and Edmodo, while families and friends can connect using platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Zoom, Skype, etc. Documents were being transferred using platforms like Google Drive, Padlet, and WeTransfer. However, with its ability to bring people closer and share information, social media has been embraced with challenges such as misinformation. According to the Director-General of WHO, Dr. Tedres Adhanom, "*Misinformation creates confusion and spreads fear. Misinformation on the coronavirus might be the most contagious thing about it*" (Atlani-Duault et al. 2020).

Social media has been laced with scare tactics, misleading reports, and conspiracy theories, which has raised a panic alert within the populace. At a time when the vaccine is now available for the prevention of the virus, misinformation is still influencing people's decisions. The study by Wilson and Wiysonge (2020) showed that vaccine hesitancy surrounding the pandemic is a result of social media. Jaiswal et al. (2021) focused on a district in India and revealed

that due to the propaganda by the anti-vaccine groups on social media, a large number of citizens therein have refused to be vaccinated. Similarly, a survey conducted by Africa Centre for Disease Control in 15 countries within Africa reveals a high number of hesitant people due to the spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories (Menez et al. 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social Media: A Process to Misinform and Inform

Despite the good benefits accrued to social media platforms, it could also spread inaccurate information processes. Baruch Spinoza and René Descartes both had an impact on how people think about and process information. Humans frequently filter out and digest incorrect information shortly after exposure, yet they accept all knowledge as true and later verify or reject it. While many studies have been done on information processing by Spinoza and Descartes, psychologists have continued to do further research. Events like 9/11, elections, Ebola, Zika, and most recently COVID-19 have spurred a lot of research on the factors that influence people's choices to believe or disbelieve in misleading information or conspiracy theories.

The issue of whether people prefer to reject official answers for important issues (conspiracy ideation) or whether they have personal convictions about specific ideas (conspiracy beliefs) has received some attention (Klofstad et al. 2019). According to numerous studies (Klofstad et al. 2019; Business of Apps 2020; Uscinski et al. 2020), conspiracy theories are a better measure of someone's inclination to accept or reject erroneous information. Someone who is inclined to believe in conspiracies has an openness to knowledge, poor agreeability, mistrust, and Machiavellianism (Lantian et al. 2017).

According to Uscinski et al. (2020), other reasons why someone would embrace a conspiracy theory include ideological goals and the politicization of important events like COVID-19 (Ireton and Posetti 2018; Grohol 2018). Uscinski et al (ibid) in their study argued President Trump's reputation suffered because he had exaggerated the seriousness of COVID-19. Understanding the underlying patterns and factors that cause people to accept or reject disinformation is essential when creating effective, factual information. This is especially true when using social media tactics to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

Effectiveness of Social Media Platforms

Social media grew rapidly in popularity within a few years of its inception. At the initial state, it was used to socialise, and many people are amazed by the alteration of communication processes, particularly among Generation Y. Subsequently, its communication benefits and swift information process has been tapped on. Social media has shown to be as powerful, if not more effective than traditional marketing. Several firms are now struggling to have an online presence to interact with clients both close and far. Furthermore, some companies' usage of social media begins with straightforward marketing and raising awareness about their products or services.

Those have, however, progressed to public messages and engagement with consumers and other stakeholders. Despite these significant advantages, it is plagued with difficulties. This study looks at the benefits and drawbacks of adopting social media as a tactical tool for managing organizational marketing. A survey of the literature approach was determined to be the most effective method for determining the growing relevance and usage of social media as a communication tool. The observational approach was also used in this research.

The Effective Use of Social Media Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

The key research findings demonstrate the usefulness of adopting the right social media platform, with its best practice, the role of social networking, and its effectiveness as a communication tool amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the past ten years, there has been a rapid increase in the usage of social media as a platform or as a source of information and entertainment. Social media has been increasingly popular as a source of knowledge and entertainment during the past ten years. According to Ortiz-Ospina (2019). We Chat has roughly 1 billion users, YouTube has 1.9 billion, Instagram has 1 billion users, and TikTok has 500 million users (Ortiz-Ospina 2019; Carey et al. 2020; Statista 2020). Since users are often involved across many channels, estimating exposure to sensitive information is difficult.

COVID-19's rapid global spread placed people on a pedal of sourcing for information about the virus. According to a survey by Havas Media Group (2020), the number of people surfing social media for news increased by forty percent since COVID-19

(Havas Media Group 2020). Although, the veracity of the news remains unchallenged. Axios-Harris in a survey discovered a high number of its respondents trusted news or information posted on social media (Harris Insights and Analytics 2020). Social media can play a constructive role if it is used to promote factual information about COVID-19, even though there is a lot of false information online as well (Posetti and Matthews 2018).

According to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (2017: 5), social media has become a routine practice following emergencies. In their words, "*we can understand what people are worried about; we can see news they are sharing; and we can respond decisively, accurately, and collaboratively*". Organisations such as those for healthcare may use social media to quickly disseminate information and keep the public informed. It also allows health agencies to obtain a better understanding of common myths about COVID-19 as well as facts that the public seeks. To catch the public's attention and prevent disinformation, it is critical to understand how to design and frame successful social media content in an engaging and approachable manner.

The Use of Social Media Platforms as a Communication Tool: The Virtual Community

Social networking, collaborative tagging, and media file-sharing websites like YouTube and Flickr are examples of social media platforms and the virtual community, which includes the use of blogs as virtual communities. Social media's ability to connect, share and interact has become more widely accepted in personal, corporate, and educational settings (White et al. 2011). Microblogging, blogs, and social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, and YouTube, according to Walaski (2013), are examples of social media platforms and approaches.

Organisations nowadays are opportune to digital methods in relaying messages across, especially during crisis because they are fast and efficient in reaching a large audience simultaneously (White 2012). According to a study by Axel (2014), various social media platforms are crucial for providing successful crisis communication since they can provide the correct information to the right people at the right time. Social media plays a vital and inevitable role as a communication medium (Schroeder and

Pennington-Gray 2014). In period of crisis, social media impact how people think, react and respond to information and events (Schroeder et al. 2013). The various platform helps to enhance disaster planning and response, lower catastrophe costs, boost decision transparency, and boost possible acceptance of results (Wendling et al. 2013).

According to Cho and Park (2013), social media is a key communication tactic highly utilized during crisis. Organisations that are responsive to "changes in technology and internet usage frequently utilise Twitter, blogs, mobile phones, and other social media platforms to disseminate crisis information" (Pang et al. 2014).

Schultz et al. (2011), on the other hand, believe that blogs are good tools for rebuilding an organisation's image and reputation while averting a boycott during a crisis. To enable "an organisation or crisis communicators to monitor the blogosphere and respond correctly to powerful bloggers during a crisis", Jin and Liu (2010) introduced the blog-mediated crisis communication paradigm. This seeks to prevent the public from receiving erroneous information, particularly from bloggers, who can harm an organisation's reputation and image.

According to Liu (2010), consumers desire immediate and comprehensive crisis information during a crisis, while Stephens and Malone (2009) contend that customers would rather rely on social media for word-of-mouth recommendations than go directly to a firm website or blog for information. According to Stephens and Malone (ibid), blogs promotes readership as individuals are forced to read the information being shared. (Valentini and Romenti 2011). People prefer to explore and use various sorts of social media during a crisis to obtain as much more information as possible about the event's hazards and obligations (Valentini and Romenti 2011).

Furthermore, according to Hysenlika (2012), Facebook has over one billion members globally, making it the most popular social networking network. During a crisis, according to Hysenlika (2012), Facebook allows communicators (individuals or organisations) to send messages depending on their requirements fast and efficiently. Energex (Australia), a company that effectively "communicated and shared information with the public through social media technologies, can attest to this approach" (Church and de Oliveira 2013). Giving examples from a British company, Energex created and maintained a

Facebook social media networking page intending to provide information such as power outages, safety, and storm information, energy-saving suggestions, sponsorship possibilities, and community projects. The company sent out invitations to provide input on specific topics and notify the public about new material on digital platforms (Energex n.d.).

Elaborating on what social media platform is, Walaski (2013) in their study categorized Blogs, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, and You Tube to be examples of social media platforms. Organisations can use a range of social media channels to disseminate information that can effectively address particular issues of concern through digital, "computerised and communication technology that allows networking in the fastest and most efficient ways to different audiences simultaneously" (White 2012).

The Potential Benefit of Social Media Communication

Social media as a communication tool has been shown to have positive prospective advantages. Social media can affect how people perceive, process, and respond to information and events in general, particularly crisis period (Schroeder and Pennington-Gray 2014). It is an essential and unavoidable communication tool during times of crisis (Schroeder et al. 2013). Social media is capable to improve disaster preparedness and response, reduce disaster costs, increase decision transparency, and possibly increase results acceptance (Wendling et al. 2013). In times of tragedy or disaster, social media has proven to be a major communication tactic through which people are kept informed and knowledgeable (Cho and Park 2013).

The research by Axel (2014) demonstrates how the two are different. According to Axel (2014), multiple forms of social media are vital in providing successful crisis communication because of their ability to offer the correct "information to the right people at the right time. The Japanese government planned rescue operations, gathered money, and offered emotional support to the victims and their families during an earthquake by using social media platforms to convey information (Cho et al. 2012). On March 16, 2011, the government launched a Twitter page in English and one in Japanese to share crucial emergency protocols in case the catastrophe reoccurs (Wendling et al. 2013).

Twitter has been successful in keeping the public abreast of recent happenings going on. For instance, the 2007 and 2008 California wildfires, the 2008 Mumbai massacre, the 2009 crash of US Airways Flight 1549, the 2010 Haiti earthquake, and the 2011 Tunisian uprising (Beaumont et al. as cited by Veil et al. 2011). Twitter proved to be a helpful resource during the 2010 Haitian earthquake 2010. The importance of social media is a useful tool for public communication, particularly in emergencies. While tornadoes decimated the region in April 2012, the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport used Twitter to distribute safety instructions, flight updates, and passenger safety information (Schroeder and Pennington-Gray 2014).

Twitter also assist organisations in communicating and disseminating information to the public during a crisis like natural disaster. For example the 2011 January Brisbane and South East Queensland and the February 2011 Christchurch earthquake. People have applauded the way energy organisations like Energex (Australia) communicated efficiently through social media, and they have got great comments. Energex has created a Facebook page to provide information on power outages, as well as safety and storm information (Energex n.d). As a result, as seen by the case studies above, social media may be a useful instrument not only for lessening the effects of a crisis but also for sharing information and crisis management (Yates and Paquette 2011).

Wendling et al. (2013) asserted that "new forms of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, are recognised as an organisation's chance to decrease the effect in times of crisis while also sharing expertise and information". Malaysian Airlines (MAS) has been chastised by the general public and public relations professionals across the world for allegedly failing to use social media effectively during a crisis (Sheikh et al. 2021). Although MAS' social media platforms were used continually during the crisis, particularly Twitter, Facebook, and Google+," MAS made little effort to ensure that its social media messages were included in the online conversation streams while the crisis was occurring (Voysey et al. 2021). Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, etc has surpassed other forms of media as the most widely used platform for the public to access crisis information (Jin et al. 2014).

According to Cru's City's social media 2016 report, up to seventy-three percent of Americans

have a social media profile (Penny 2018). More people own a smartphone than a toothbrush on the planet. Whether one is a leader, millennial, volunteer, or staff member, social media is a crucial aspect of reaching out to the world, and a how-to guide is a fantastic place to start for one's ministry. This online how-to guide includes examples and connections to effective social media material for the ministry. Examine daily verse visuals, Christmas campaign photographs, and other ways to utilise visuals to spark spiritual dialogue (Penny 2018).

According to Kevin et al. (2011), social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram can connect and engage individuals from all walks of life. Where else can one talk to their grandmother and their high school best buddy at the same time? Sorescu et al. (2011), state that "social media can spread the news across the world faster than your Aunt Sally's latest gossip at a family reunion". It can make one feel more connected to people and a member of a group. All of this can be accomplished with a few mouse clicks while sitting at home.

Yes, social media may be strange. Strange, amazing, and powerful are all words that come to mind when the researcher thinks of this song. It is because of this sense of power that social media may be terrifying. If one is like most people, one is reading this lesson because one is intimidated by the prospect of utilizing social media at all, let alone effectively for ministry. One is not on their own! Social media has the potential to be a monster (Taylor et al. 2012). Its "monsters", on the other hand, are what provides its incredible potential for reaching people with the gospel. One can reach tens of thousands of people at once, and it is free!

Social Media Beyond Communication

The bulk of people in today's society relies on various social media to stay in touch with their peers, especially young people. Social media is a subset of social interaction that goes beyond social communication. Social media usage has benefits and drawbacks. One of the biggest advantages is the ease with which different groups of individuals may share expertise and information online. Another advantage of this online information exchange is that it improves interpersonal communication, particularly among learners and students in educational institutions. Using social networking sites has drawbacks as well. The odd privacy invader may take advantage

of these technologies. Such scenarios could spiral out of control in terms of the moral ramifications of using such media.

Social media platforms have virtually brought individuals closer together, especially those who live in far-flung locations. It has been noted, though, that the majority of companies today use social networking to advertise their goods and services. CEOs of companies frequently seek to maintain a good relationship with their significant clients and social media affords them this opportunity. Nowadays, social networking sites are seen as a necessity that every organisation PR should embrace. Due to its immediacy, social media as a marketing tool fosters positive and direct contact between businesses and their customers in an online setting. The audience may be present, interact, influence, and keep a deeper relationship with businesses thanks to this immediateness.

Businesses are using social networks more and more to monitor talks about their sector, competitors, and products as well as to communicate with customers about what they are about to offer. Presently, social media is altering how organizations communicate since the different social technologies readily available today are significantly less expensive than conventional techniques like email and television advertising. Companies can utilize blog posts and tweets to create communities and offer quick support and feedback. Other platforms like Facebook, Orkut, LinkedIn, and others are also means companies communicate in this digital age.

One of the key advantages of using social media is the online exchange of knowledge and information among individuals. People are also encouraged to develop their communication skills through this online information exchange, especially learners and students at educational institutions. How people interact, as well as how they talk and think about communication, are evolving as a result of the various ways in which online tools and technology have mediated conversation. On both an individual and communal level, technology has the power to fundamentally affect social lives.

Sitaram Asur and Bernardo A. Huberman wrote a study *Predicting the Future of Social Media*. They show how social media material may be utilised to forecast real-world events or outcomes. They go on to show how sentiments gathered from Twitter may be used to increase the predictive potential of social media. In their research titled "Workplaces and

Social Networking," Andrea et al. (2010) address the policy and practice around employee usage of social media. This was guided by the fact that they had previously conversed somewhat about social media, what it would mean for their company, and how they intended to create and explain a policy to employees of two significant UK businesses- British Telecom (BT) and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC).

Using a prediction model, Gilbert and Karahalios (2009) connects social media data to tie strength. The algorithm operates beautifully and accurately and is based on a dataset of more than 2,000 social network relationships and works admirably, correctly discriminating between strong and weak links with an accuracy of over eighty-five percent.

CONCLUSION

The study indicated that social media communication forms include but are not limited to the following magazines, internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, microblogging, wikis, podcasts, images or photos, videos, reviews, and social bookmarking. This paper shows that using online tools and technology has not only facilitated communication in immeasurable ways but has completely changed the very ways one communicates and engages in conversation, as well as changing how one thinks about communication as a result.

The study utilized a secondary approach to analyze the growing relevance and usage of social media as a communication tool. The influence and use of social media in the social environment, as well as its potential for future development, was also explored using secondary sources such as the internet, magazines, books and journals. Likewise, the study stressed the important and underlining benefits of social media during a crisis. Social media, which goes beyond communication and information sharing to a forecast of real-world events, has become much more visible and acceptable with COVID-19.

People and organisations had to be susceptible and embrace technological means by moving towards various social media platforms like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Telegram, etc. to keep running the day-to-day activities. Despite the progressive nature of social media to keep people safe, informed, and connected, it has proven to be a threat as well due to misinformation. The pandemic exposed the harm associated with misinformation via social media. Like the coronavirus to global health, various misconstrued information emanating from these platforms constituted threat to individuals and organisations. For instance, due to a lot of misinformation spreading through social media platforms, quite a high number of people particularly in Africa are still hesitant to take the COVID-19 vaccine.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study argues that social media is a key tool for communication and a strong tactic to use during a crisis. However, it can wreck efforts due to various misconceptions it can spread. On this basis, this study recommends the blog-mediated crisis communication paradigm. This paradigm emphasises the filtering of erroneous information. Other suggested methods include a regulated policy with strict penance for people who circulate incorrect information and timely expert advice from a specific and authorised source.

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