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Prevalence Of Misinformation And Disinformation Of Covid-19 Pandemic Outbreak And Vaccine Uptake Among Nigerians In Southeast, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT
The outbreak of COVID-19 and its subsequent declaration as pandemic was greeted with a lot of misinformation, and disinformation which resulted to series of conspiracy theories globally from both developed and developing countries. This study examined the perceived prevalence of misinformation, and disinformation of COVID-19 pandemic outbreak among Nigerians, especially southeastern Nigeria. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. 6539 Nigerians from southeast responded to the online survey. Data collected were coded into SPSS version 22 and analyzed using frequency count, percentage, mean and standard deviation. While the null hypotheses were tested using t-test at 0.05 significance level. The findings revealed that, there is lots of misinformation, and disinformation on the outbreak of COVID-19 in Nigeria and among Nigerians, which have led to low uptake of COVID-19 vaccine among Nigerians in southeast, Nigeria. The major misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 are COVID-19 is a bioweapon, COVID-19 was created in the science laboratory and launched into the globe, COVID-19 is a consequence of 5G network, COVID-19 vaccine is the mark of 666 prophesized in the holy books, COVID-19 is end time virus, and after receiving COVID-19 vaccine, someone's body can magnet iron. The study also revealed that, Nigerians no longer trust the government, thus perceives the outbreak of COVID-19 as another plot to mismanage public fund. The study recommended adequate counter-information to any conspiracy theory should be provided with counter proofs so as to convince Nigerians that COVID-19 pandemic is real in Nigeria and that it's not a bioweapon among other misinformation, and disinformation.
Keywords: COVID-19, Virus, Vaccine Uptake, misinformation, disinformation, mal-information, Pandemic

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 pandemic is a global public health issues. COVID-19 is an emerging infectious disease caused by a novel coronavirus - SARS-CoV-2. The Corona Virus Disease of 2019, otherwise known as COVID-19, started in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, in December, 2019. The World Health Organization (2020), declared it a public health emergency of international concern on the 30th January, 2020, and recognized it as a pandemic on 11thMarch, 2020. Nigeria recorded her index case in February 2020, with an increasing number of cases every day. This led to lockdown in Nigeria to prevent the spread of the deadly virus. This total lockdown restricted physically engagements among Nigerians as schools, churches, mosques, businesses, markets and so on were closed down. As at September, 2021 Nigeria have recorded 204,456 cases with 2,677 deaths. According to Sauer (2020) COVID-19 can be contracted through mouth, nose, and, eyes. Through droplets from sneezes as well as coughs, near contact with someone that is affected by the virus and touching of contaminated surfaces such as books, table, metal among others and touching your nose, mouth, eyes among others parts. New cases are being recorded every day even after easing the lockdown.

A preliminary observation revealed that COVID-19 protocols are not being adequately observed in Nigeria because most Nigeria are yet to be convinced that there is COVID-19 outbreak in the country. COVID-19 protocols are not observed in the market, weeding ceremony nor worship houses anymore. Most time majority of Nigerians only wear face mask when they are entering an office. Traders no longer wear their face mask in the market or their shops. Students no longer wear face mask to lecturers unless the lecturer is strict with it compliance. Face mask is hardly seen during unofficial time. Izekor, Okpuzor, Mork, and Nnaji (2020) found out that a majority of Nigerians who cares to use face mask wears it improperly; some will place it on their jaw, while others will cover only their nose or mouth. This factors and other are responsible for the continue increase in new cases of COVID-19 daily and more deaths even with the present of COVID-19 Vaccine. For instance, Affe (2020) reported that during Edo governorship election, APC and PDP flout COVID-19 guidelines in campaign.

This non-challant attitudes of majority of Nigerians towards observation of COVID-19 protocols such as frequent washing of hands with running water and soap, use of alcohol based hand sanitizer, avoiding crowded places, wearing face mask to public events such as church, mosque, wedding ceremonies, football viewing centers among others might be the influence of the trend of myths and series of conspiracy theories spreading over the social medias. According to Bernard, Akaito, Joseph and David (2020) stated that one of the conspiracy argument about COVID-19 opines that Corona virus is not new, that the infection has existed for a very long time. Another set of conspiracy idea argued that COVID-19 is a bioweapon. Bernard, Akaito, Joseph and David, further stated that other set of conspiracy idea believes that COVID-19 was initiated in the Laboratory and released to cause harm. On the extreme cause of conspiracy ideas, some believed that it has something to do with 5G network. Similarly, Lois, Christian, Nkiru, Patricia, Onyechi and Eunice (2020) found out that myths as well as misconceptions about the origin of COVID-19 affected the perception of Nigerians thereby leading to poor adherence of the COVID-19 guidelines recommended by WHO among others.

Gender might also play a role in the level of acceptance of conspiracy theories about the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, Stoica and Umbres (2020) found out that gender do not significantly influence the adherence and acceptance of conspiracy theories about the outbreak of COVID-19. On the contrary, Schaffer (2020) found out that females are more likely to accept conspiracy theories about COVID-19 pandemic than males. This conflicting results from difference studies shows that there is no consensus among researchers on the influence of gender on the perceiving COVID-19 pandemic as a conspiracy. This study will contribute to the existing discourse by examining the influence of gender on both the perceiving COVID-19 as a conspiracy and the factors that influence the level of acceptance of COVID-19 as a conspiracy.

If Nigeria keeps recording new cases of COVID-19 as we as deaths after more than one year of her index case, then effort must be taken to investigate the cause. It is believed that if the COVID-19 protocols and guidelines recommended by World Health Organisation as well as other regional and national health

institutions and organisations are religiously adhered to, they will be no new case of COVID-19 in Nigeria. From the forgoing, this study seeks to empirically examine the extent to which Nigerians perceives the series of conspiracy ideas and stories about the origin and treatment of COVID-19 and how this perceptions of the influence their desire to observe the professional guidelines and protocols recommended by WHO, NCDC, CDC, among others on how to prevent and manage COVID-19 from spreading among the population of a country.

It is from the forgoing that the present study seeks to empirically examine the prevalence of misinformation, and disinformation of COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and vaccine uptake among Nigerians in Southeast, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to examine the prevalence of misinformation, and disinformation of COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and vaccine uptake among Nigerians in Southeast, Nigeria, Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 pandemic outbreak among Nigerians in Southeast, Nigeria.
2. Identify the factors influencing the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 pandemic outbreak among Nigerians in Southeast, Nigeria.
3. Proffer strategies to manage the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 pandemic outbreak among Nigerians in Southeast, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 pandemic outbreak among Nigerians in Southeast, Nigeria?
2. What are the factors influencing the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 pandemic outbreak among Nigerians in Southeast, Nigeria?
3. What are the strategies to manage the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 pandemic outbreak among Nigerians in Southeast, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were postulated to guide the study and was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Ho_1: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female Nigerians from Southeast, Nigeria on the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and vaccine uptake.

Ho_2: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female Nigerians from Southeast, Nigeria on the factors influencing the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and vaccine uptake

LITERATURE REVIEW

The emergence of COVID-19 in 2019 and the declaration of the virus by WHO as a pandemic was received with lots of misinformation, disinformation and malinformation, which resulted to conspiracy theories from both developing and developed countries; literate and illiterate, urban and rural dwellers as well as individuals and groups. Some of the population conspiracy theories are; COVID-19 is a bioweapon made by one of the Major powers in their struggle for super power. COVID-19 is a means of controlling world population. COVID-19 is end time virus and warning from almighty God. Olajide, (2020) found out that majority of Nigerians believes that COVID-19 is not real in the country for various reasons. Similarly, Healthwise, (2020) found out that some people believed that gargling salt and warm water can cure COVID-19. Also, Izekor, Okpuzor, Mork, and Nnaji (2020) stated that some people believed the conspiracy theories that taking vitamin C and D can cure COVID-19. While others argued that African immune are so strong and thus resistant to COVID-19. COVID-19 is a means of controlling world population (Ryder, 2020; WHO, 2020; Md et al., 2020). In their study, Gagliardone, Diepeveen,

Findlay, Olaniran, Pohjonen, and Tallam (2021) found out that the two most popular conspiracy theories about COVID-19 are the 5G conspiracy theorists and the Bill Gates conspiracy theorists. While the 5G conspiracy theorist argued that the development of 5th generation network popularly known as 5G is responsible for the emergence of the virus or a way of accelerating it spread from country to country, the Bill Gates conspiracy theorists argued that Bill Gates want to seize the opportunity of vaccines against the deadly virus to execute a world-wide surveillance regime (Havey, 2020; Shahsavari et al., 2020).

Many factors influence the misinformation and disinformation about the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic among Nigerians; some of such are poor reportage of COVID-19 related, high rate of political corruption and loss of confidence, lack of evidence of reported cases of COVID-19 among others. Raghuvir, Anila, Pawan, Jayesh & Krishnadas, (2020) found out that poor reporting of COVID-19 related information, censorship and the lack of transparency on the part of government are the major factors influencing the rise of misconception and conspiracy theories about COVID-19. Abati, (2020) stated that superstitious and fetish belief among some Nigerians led to the misconception that herb can cure COVID-19. In another study, Gambo and Shem (2021) found out that, illiteracy, religious radicalism, lack of censorship of misinformation, and insufficient counter information on social media platforms by the health organization were the factors that influenced the spread of COVID-19 conspiracy theories.

Some measures can be put in place to manage the factors influencing the rise of misinformation and disinformation about the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. some of these measures are; adequate reporting of COVID-19 related information with evidence since the citizens has lost trust of the government, involving prominent Nigerians such as celebrities, religious leaders among others. According to Gagliardone, Diepeveen, Findlay, Olaniran, Pohjonen, and Tallam (2021) recommended that conspiracy theories about COVID-19 should be taken seriously by the government of any country where such clam is prevalence by providing adequate information to the general population to counter the existing conspiracy theories. Similarly, Lucas, Targema, Jibril, Sambo, and Istifanus, (2020) suggested that traditional means of communication can be used to tackle and fight the rate of misinformation and conspiracy theories about COVID-19. The authors also suggested proactive sensitization of rural communities about the real information on COVID-19, it origin, preventive measures among others. Gambo and Shem (2021) in their study suggested adequate dissemination of counter-information with sufficient proof as a measure to manage the prevalence of COVID-19 conspiracy theories.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. Descriptive survey research design aims at collecting data on and describing it in a systematic manner, the characteristics, features or facts about a given population (Nworgu, 2015). The descriptive survey was considered suitable because this study seeks to collect, describe and summarize empirical data on the perceived prevalence of misinformation, and disinformation of COVID-19 pandemic outbreak among Nigerians in Southeast, Nigeria. The population of the study is the entire Nigerians in Southeast, Nigeria. The study employed snowball sampling technique to collect responses from 6539 Nigerians from Southeast, Nigeria. Online structured questionnaire using Google form was used to elicit response from Nigerians. The structured question was titled: *Perceived prevalence of Misinformation, and Disinformation of COVID-19 Pandemic Outbreak Questionnaire.* In order to elicit high responses, the link to the form was shared using the various social media platforms, especially undergraduates and professional group WhatsApp forum. Data collected were coded into SPSS version 22 and analyzed using frequency count, percentage, mean and standard deviation. To accept an item, its mean will be equal to (=), or greater (>) than the criterion mean of 2.50, thus any mean less than 2.50 will be rejected. While the null hypotheses were tested using t-test at 0.05 significance level. The null hypotheses will be accepted when the P-value is less than the alpha value, but where the p-value is greater than the alpha value, the null hypotheses will not be rejected.

RESULTS

A total of 6539 Nigerians from Southeast, Nigeria responded to the online survey.

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	4165	63.7%
Female	2374	36.3%
Total	**6539**	**100%**

Table 1 shows that out of 6539 Nigerians that responded to the survey, 4165 representing 63.7% were male while 2374 representing 36.3% were female.

Research Question 1: *What are the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 pandemic outbreak among Nigerians in Southeast, Nigeria?*

Table 2: Mean Responses on the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 pandemic outbreak among Nigerians in Southeast, Nigeria

S/N	Items	SA	S	D	SD	Mean	St. D	Remark
1	Africans has strong immune system which is resistant to COVID-19	1952	3781	497	309	3.13	0.74	Accepted
2	COVID-19 is a bioweapon	2539	2185	1024	791	2.99	1.01	Accepted
3	Gargling salt and water can cure COVID-19	1909	2941	1261	428	2.97	0.86	Accepted
4	COVID-19 can be cured by hydroxychloroquine	2175	2318	1385	661	2.92	0.97	Accepted
5	COVID-19 was created in the science laboratory and launched into the globe	1688	2869	1664	318	2.91	0.84	Accepted
6	COVID-19 is a consequences of 5G network	1960	2402	1737	440	2.90	0.91	Accepted
7	COVID-19 vaccine is the mark of 666 prophesized in the holy books	1755	2818	1475	490	2.89	0.88	Accepted
8	COVID-19 is not real in Nigeria just a political tool for fraud	1718	2919	1109	793	2.85	0.95	Accepted
9	COVID-19 is end time virus	2451	1757	1105	1226	2.83	1.12	Accepted
10	After receiving COVID-19 vaccine, someone's body can magnet iron	1887	2304	1654	694	2.82	0.97	Accepted

Table 2 shows the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 pandemic outbreak among Nigerians in Southeast, Nigeria. from the results the major of Nigerians believes that Africans has strong immune system which is resistant to COVID-19, with 3.13 mean score. Followed by the conspiracy theory that, COVID-19 is a bioweapon, with 2.99 mean score. Others agreed that, gargling salt and water can cure COVID-19, with 2.97 mean score. Some Nigerians also agreed that, COVID-19 can be cured by hydroxychloroquine, with 2.92 mean score; COVID-19 was created in the science laboratory and launched into the globe, with 2.91 mean score; COVID-19 is a consequence of 5G network, with 2.90 mean score; COVID-19 vaccine is the mark of 666 prophesized in the holy books, with 2.89 mean score. The least conspiracy theory among Nigerians studied is that, after receiving COVID-19 vaccine, someone's body can magnet iron. This implies that only few Nigerians agreed that, after receiving COVID-19 vaccine, someone's body can magnet iron.

Research Question 2: *What are the factors influencing the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 pandemic outbreak among Nigerians in Southeast, Nigeria?*

Table 3: Mean Responses on the factors influencing the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 pandemic outbreak among Nigerians in Southeast, Nigeria

S/N	Items	SA	S	D	SD	Mean	St. D	Remark
1	Lack of confidence in the integrity of government officials among Nigerians	4275	1752	512	0	3.58	0.63	Accepted
2	Inability of the Federal Government to provide proof of recorded cases of COVID-19	3411	3128	0	0	3.52	0.50	Accepted
3	Alleged manipulation of COVID-19 cases in Nigeria	3154	2755	510	120	3.37	0.71	Accepted
4	Poor reporting of health information related to COVID-19 by the government agency	2487	3517	535	0	3.30	0.61	Accepted
5	Low level of literacy among Nigerians	2890	2840	677	132	3.30	0.73	Accepted
6	The drama between Kogi State Governor and NCDC officials in the state which made the state to record the least case and no death	2623	3134	782	0	3.28	0.66	Accepted
7	Religious belief	2890	2588	881	180	3.25	0.80	Accepted
8	Lack of confidence in the integrity security agents	2215	3616	708	0	3.23	0.63	Accepted
9	Lack of confidence in the integrity health officials	1671	4508	360	0	3.20	0.52	Accepted
10	High level of superstitious beliefs among Nigerians	2890	2840	809	0	3.19	0.95	Accepted

Table 3 showed that the major influencing the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 pandemic outbreak among Nigerians in Southeast, Nigeria are Lack of confidence in the integrity of government officials among Nigerians, with 3.58 mean score; Inability of the Federal Government to provide proof of recorded cases of COVID-19, with 3.52 mean score; Alleged manipulation of COVID-19 cases in Nigeria, with 3.37 mean score; Poor reporting of health information related to COVID-19 by the government agency, with 3.30 mean score; Low level of literacy among Nigerians, with 3.30 mean score also; The drama between Kogi State Governor and NCDC officials in the state which made the state to record the least case and no death, with 3.28 mean score. Other factors are Religious belief, with 3.25 mean score; Lack of confidence in the integrity security agents, with 3.23 mean score; Lack of confidence in the integrity health officials, with 3.20 mean score; while the least factor is High level of superstitious beliefs among Nigerians, with 3.19 mean score.

Research Question 3: *What are the strategies to manage the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 pandemic outbreak among Nigerians in Southeast, Nigeria?*

Table 4: Mean Responses on the Strategies to Manage the prevalence of Misinformation and Disinformation about COVID-19 Pandemic Outbreak among Nigerians in Southeast, Nigeria

S/N	Items	SA	S	D	SD	Mean	St. D	Remark
1	Mass media education should be provided to Nigerians	4051	1880	608	0	3.53	0.66	Accepted
2	COVID-19 cases should be reported comprehensively with proof	2890	3096	553	0	3.36	0.63	Accepted
3	All the stakeholders involved in COVID-19 related tasks should work together in synergy to re-orient Nigerian on the reality of COVID-19 outbreak in the country	2890	3049	480	120	3.33	0.69	Accepted
4	The government should be more transparent in their dealings	2215	3356	848	120	3.17	0.72	Accepted
5	Agency in-charge of COVID-19 should utilize social media platforms to counter conspiracy theories online	6538	1807	2879	1752	3.01	0.74	Accepted
6	Traditional system of information dissemination should be employed in communicating with rural dwellers on COVID-19 related issues so as the close the gap which can encourage conspiracy ideologies.	2078	1972	2368	120	2.93	0.86	Accepted
7	Federal government should take and case of conspiracy theories or assumption seriously	1399	2140	2872	128	2.74	0.81	Accepted
8	Religious leaders should be used to make Nigerians to believe that COVID-19 is real in Nigeria	1535	2612	1393	999	2.72	0.99	Accepted

Table 4 showed that the major strategies to manage the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 pandemic outbreak among Nigerians in Southeast, Nigeria are: Mass media education should be provided to Nigerians, with 3.53 mean score; COVID-19 cases should be reported comprehensively with proof, with 3.36 mean score; All the stakeholders involved in COVID-19 related tasks should work together in synergy to re-orient Nigerian on the reality of COVID-19 outbreak in the country, with 3.33 mean score; The government should be more transparent in their dealings, with 3.17 mean score; Agency in-charge of COVID-19 should utilize social media platforms to counter conspiracy theories online, with 3.01 mean score. Other strategies are traditional system of information dissemination should be employed in communicating with rural dwellers on COVID-19 related issues so as the close the gap which can encourage conspiracy ideologies, with 2.93 mean score; Federal government should take and case of conspiracy theories or assumption seriously, with 2.74 mean score; while the least strategy is that, Religious leaders should be used to make Nigerians to believe that COVID-19 is real in Nigeria, with 2.72 mean score.

Test of Hypotheses

Ho_1: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female Nigerians from Southeast, Nigeria on the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.

Table 5: t-test analysis of mean ratings of male and female Nigerians from Southeast, Nigeria on the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.

Gender	N	Mean	St. D	Df	t-cal	Sig	Decision
Male	4165	2.86	0.95	6537	0.606	0.545	Not significant
Female	2374	2.84	0.94				

P>0.05

Table 5, shows that the t-test value 0.606 is significant at 0.545. Since the significant value of 0.545 is greater than 0.05 level of significance at which the null hypothesis is tested, the null hypothesis is therefore upheld. Hence, there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female Nigerians from Southeast, Nigeria on the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.

Ho_2: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female Nigerians from Southeast, Nigeria on the factors influencing the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.

Table 6: t-test analysis of mean ratings of male and female Nigerians from Southeast, Nigeria on the factors influencing the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 pandemic outbreak

Gender	N	Mean	St. D	Df	t-cal	Sig	Decision
Male	4165	3.29	0.61	6537	-4.403	0.161	Not significant
Female	2374	3.31	0.61				

P>0.05

Table 4, shows that the t-test value -4.403is significant at 0.161. Since the significant value of 0.161 is greater than 0.05 level of significance at which the null hypothesis is tested, the null hypothesis is therefore upheld. Hence, there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female Nigerians from Southeast, Nigeria on the factors influencing the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The findings revealed that there are prevalence of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and vaccine uptake among Nigerians in Southeast, Nigeria. This implies that many Nigerians perceives the outbreak of COVID-19 in the country as an act of conspiracy by the ruling class in Nigeria. The major misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 outbreak in Nigeria among Nigerians are the belief that, Africans has strong immune system which is resistant to COVID-19; COVID-19 is a bioweapon; gargling salt and water can cure COVID-19; COVID-19 can be cured by hydroxychloroquine; COVID-19 was created in the science laboratory and launched into the globe; and that COVID-19 is a consequence of 5G network. The finding is in accordance with that of Olajide, (2020) who found out that majority of Nigerians believes that COVID-19 is not real in the country for various reasons. The findings also correspond with that of Ryder, (2020) and Md et al., (2020) who found out that there is a conspiracy theory that, African immune are so strong and thus resistant to COVID-19. The findings on the 5G conspiracy theory further validates the earlier findings of Gagliardone, Diepeveen, Findlay, Olaniran, Pohjonen, and Tallam (2021) who in a content analysis of tweets revealed that 5G conspiracy theory about COVID-19 is prevalence online.

The findings revealed that the major factors influencing the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 pandemic outbreak among Nigerians in Southeast, Nigeria are Lack of confidence in the integrity of government officials among Nigerians; Inability of the Federal Government to provide proof of recorded cases of COVID-19; Alleged manipulation of COVID-19 cases in Nigeria; Poor reporting of health information related to COVID-19 by the government agency; Low level of literacy among Nigerians; and the drama between Kogi State Governor and NCDC officials in the state which made the state to record the least case and no death. This implies that Nigerian government and the agency responsible for reporting cases of COVID-19 has lost the trust of Nigerians, who no longer believe in them due to long age prevalence of corruption. Also, the refusal of Kogi State governor to accept the 5 cases of COVID-19 in the state without proof which led to sudden disappearance of COVID-19 in the state is also another factor that strengthened the conspiracy theories of the outbreak of COVID-19 in Nigeria. This finding is in accordance with that of Raghuvir, Anila, Pawan, Jayesh & Krishnadas, (2020) who found out that poor reporting of COVID-19 related information, censorship and the lack of transparency on the part of government are the major factors influencing the rise of misconception and conspiracy theories about COVID-19. The findings are also in agreement with that of Gambo and Shem (2021) who found out that, illiteracy, religious radicalism, lack of censorship of misinformation, and insufficient counter information on social media platforms by the health organization were the factors that influenced the spread of COVID-19 conspiracy theories.

It was also revealed that, the major strategies to manage the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 pandemic outbreak among Nigerians in Southeast, Nigeria are COVID-19 cases should be reported comprehensively with proof; all the stakeholders involved in COVID-19 related tasks should work together in synergy to re-orient Nigerian on the reality of COVID-19 outbreak in the country; the government should be more transparent in their dealings; and agency in-charge of COVID-19 should utilize social media platforms to counter conspiracy theories online. This implies that if these strategies are proactively implemented by the major stakeholders responsible for COVID-19 related issues, it will help to manage the rate of the prevalence of conspiracy theories among Nigerians. The findings correspond with the earlier strategies suggested by Gagliardone, Diepeveen, Findlay, Olaniran, Pohjonen, and Tallam (2021) that, conspiracy theories about COVID-19 should be taken seriously by the government of any country where such clam is prevalence by providing adequate information to the general population to counter the existing conspiracy theories. The findings also further validate the recommendations made by Gambo and Shem (2021) that, adequate dissemination of counter-information with sufficient proof is a measure to manage the prevalence of COVID-19 conspiracy theories.

In terms of the influence of gender on the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation about the outbreak of COVID-19 in Nigeria and the factors influencing the misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. The Findings revealed that gender is not a significant factor. This finding is in accordance with that of Stoica and Umbres (2020) who found out that gender do not significantly influence the adherence and acceptance of conspiracy theories about the outbreak of COVID-19. This implies gender do not significantly determine the conspiracy theory perception of the outbreak of COVID-19 in Nigeria among Nigerians.

CONCLUSION

The study examined the perceived prevalence of misinformation, and disinformation of COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and vaccine uptake among Nigerians in Southeast, Nigeria. Based on the findings, the study concluded that there is prevalence of misinformation, and disinformation on the outbreak of COVID-19 and vaccine uptake among Nigerians in Southeast, Nigeria. These series of misinformation, and disinformation if not adequately countered will act as a constraint to effective managing the spread of the virus in Nigeria. It was also concluded that Nigerians no longer trust the government, thus perceives the outbreak of COVID-19 as another plot to mismanage public fund. Thus, to manage the prevalence of misinformation, and disinformation among Nigerians in Southeast, Nigeria, the government as well as the

agencies responsible for reporting COVID-19 related cases and updates must be report the information with adequate proof and tangible evidence which are verifiable. Most importantly, adequate counter-information to any conspiracy theory should be provided with counter proofs so as to convince Nigerians that COVID-19 pandemic is real in Nigeria and that it's not a bioweapon among other conspiracy theories.

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