

## **Analysing *Twitter's* Role in Disseminating Health-Related Information for Social Change in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

The paper was carried out to analyse Twitter's role in disseminating health-related information for social change in Nigeria. The library research method was adopted. Being a position paper, the researcher depended solely on secondary sources of data to arrive at a conclusion made in this paper. It was argued that Twitter's real-time nature, concise format, and interactive features enable health organizations, government agencies, and advocates to engage with the public, breaking down communication barriers and reaching diverse audiences. It was concluded that Twitter plays a vital role in organizing health conversations, while influencers shape health discussions by promoting behavior change and driving social change. Thus, it was recommended that by leveraging the transformative potential of Twitter, Nigeria can empower communities, promote public health, and drive positive social change.

**Keywords:** Health Communication, Social Change, *Twitter*, Nigeria, Health information

## **Introduction**

Social media is characterized as an online communication platform that promotes health awareness and discusses issues related to health in this study. The rise in social media users globally has prompted the need to utilize new technologies for health awareness, including prevention and control strategies. Technology is an innovative tool that plays a significant role in facilitating interaction and influencing the general public. According to Alsugharyr (2015), social media is a collection of online applications that allow individual users and organizations to exchange news, information, and links through online conversion channels. The rapid expansion of social media in recent times has been supplemented by the use and proliferation of technologies utilized by companies and individuals from various industries for interactive interactions with customers, friends, and family. The swift expansion of social media platforms in Nigeria has given rise to a new phase in the dissemination of health-related information among various sectors and individuals, including health organizations, government agencies, healthcare professionals, and advocates (Grajales et al, 2014; Robledo, 2012). Social media's interactivity and accessibility have enabled the transmission of health information to both urban and rural audiences, breaking down communication barriers (Luo & Smith, 2015). This has also enabled public awareness of preventive measures, treatment options, and health campaigns that are relevant to patients. Despite being the most populous country in Africa, Nigeria faces numerous health challenges such as infectious diseases, maternal mortality, and non-communicable diseases (World Bank, 2021). Effective health communication must be conveyed to diverse populations across vast geographical areas. By offering easy access to relevant health information through social media, Grahames et al (2014) found that these

methods offer a promising way to bridge communication gaps and provide individuals with timely and accurate health data. Among the various microblogging platforms, Twitter is the most prominent, known for its real-time information-sharing feature that requires only 280 characters per post and encourages user engagement and interaction (Steinert-Threlkeld, 2017).

Health communication is the use of communication methods to notify and motivate health decisions and engagements to improve healthcare issues, as defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) in the United States. Health communication involves educating, guiding, and persuading individuals, communities, or broader groups on health-related issues, as well as analyzing health policies, and acting to prevent or raise awareness of epidemics. Its overall goal is to improve the quality of life of people and society. Health communication is primarily concerned with improving society's overall health. The implementation of social marketing, media advocacy, and public relations strategies, as well as promotion tactics, leads to significant gains in improving health and spreading awareness across the nation. Health communication is one of the most fundamental systems that aid in conveying effective information to health institutions and organizations during public education campaigns. The study of health communication examines how all aspects of the communication process are interconnected in addressing health-related issues (Becerikli, 2013; Hoşgör, 2014; p 51-52).

The objective of the paper was to explore the impact of social media, with a specific focus on Twitter, on health communication and social change in Nigeria. By analyzing Twitter's role in disseminating health-related information, we aim to understand its transformative potential in improving public health outcomes. This paper delves into the strategies employed on Twitter to engage the public, the effectiveness of these

strategies in driving behavior change, and the influence of influencers in shaping health discussions. Additionally, how social media, including Twitter, has acted as a catalyst for social change in Nigeria, empowering communities to advocate for better healthcare services, demand accountability, and mobilize collective action for health-related causes were examined.

### ***Twitter Social Media Platform***

Twitter, the most popular microblog that restricts the number of "Tweets" to 140 characters, has been acknowledged as a powerful communication and engagement tool more than any other social media platform based on various studies. According to Twitter data is largely available for public access, surpassing other platforms like Facebook (Gallaugher, 2013). Furthermore, the platform is designed for research purposes. Researchers can import vast amounts of data quickly using the API, which enables the rapid sharing of large datasets. Steinert-Threlkeld (2017) notes that the most recent statistic indicates that approximately 500 million tweets are being tweeted daily. Additionally, Twitter provides users with access to real-time information and two-way communication, which can aid in establishing a dialogic loop through organizational communication (Heldman und et al, 2013). Through the frequent posting of short messages and other interactive features, Twitter provides users with an interactive experience. McCormick et al. (2013) argue that researchers can track human behavior without modifying the relevant behavior by using its real-time setting for observation.

Twitter's low cost and ability to scale make it a valuable service, as stated by McCormick et al (2013). Organizations use social media platforms like Twitter to promote campaigns, provide campaign-related updates, and encourage individuals to engage in discussions, express their opinions, or take part in activities (Bravo & Hoffman-Goetz, 2017; Jacobson et al., 2016; Luo y Smith, 2015). Also, social media presents an

opportunity for users' bottom-up discovery to be recorded. Social media content from users provides insights on how to tailor conversations to suit the needs and levels of target audiences. Twitter, according to Stephen Thurlkeld, is a valuable resource for researchers looking for insightful perspectives on various topics, including health (Heldman et al, 2013). Social media platforms provide researchers with a means to gain insight into the structure and patterns of conversations (Steinert-Threlkeld, 2017). This contributes to the social impact of social media when organizations use these platforms to create ongoing dialogue and discussions with their audiences.

### **Health Communication: A concept**

Health communication plays an important role in public health promotion campaigns designed to prevent and control infectious diseases around the world. Health communication is the study and use of communication strategies to inform and influence individual and community decisions that enhance health. Ratzan (1994) opines that health communication is the art of informing, influencing, and motivating individuals, institutions, and public audiences about health issues through planned learning experiences based on sound theories. Health communication is the translation and distribution of health messages by health experts to the people who can relay these messages in different places simultaneously using different communication channels. Individuals consult different media channels to acquire health information and skills to improve their health decisions. It is also known as health education. The United States Department of Health and Human Services (2000) further posits that health communication is the study and practice of communicating recommended health information such as in public health campaigns, health education, and between doctor and patient. According to Akinfeleye (1987), health communication could be described as the form of communication that is disseminated by the mass media for adequate health care delivery. Health communication is a

broad and multidisciplinary concept that incorporates many different work fields (Schiavo, 2007). That is, it comprises different people from different professions like medicine, sociology, psychology, public health, and communication all working together for national and regional organizations to provide individuals with up-to-date and evidence-based health information. It is the process of promoting health by disseminating messages through mass media, interpersonal channels, and events.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The study is anchored on the Technology determinism theory and the uses and gratification theory. Technology determinism is a concept that posits technology's significant role in shaping human societies and cultures. It suggests that technological advancements drive social and cultural changes, often considered the primary force guiding historical development. Notable proponents include Thorstein Veblen, Marshall McLuhan, and Langdon Winner. Applied to this work, the theory explains the interplay of social and cultural factors in Twitter's use for health communication in Nigeria. Social norms, literacy, access to technology, and the broader media landscape influence the platform's impact. Integrating technology determinism enriches the analysis, providing a comprehensive understanding of Twitter's contributions to health communication and social change in the country.

The uses and gratifications theory is a communication theory that emphasizes how audiences actively choose and use media to fulfil their specific needs and desires. It challenges the idea of passive audiences and identifies key assumptions: an active audience, goal-oriented media use, media selection based on individual needs, and recognition of individual differences. The theory was developed by various researchers over time, with Elihu Katz being one of the key figures associated with its advancement during the 1970s. applied to this work, this theory explains how individuals in Nigeria actively choose Twitter for health

communication, seeking various gratifications such as health information, social interaction, identity reinforcement, and even entertainment and distraction. Understanding these motivations can inform the design of effective health communication strategies on Twitter, cater to the diverse needs of the audience, and facilitate positive social change by promoting informed health behaviors and addressing public health challenges in Nigeria. Additionally, leveraging Twitter's potential as a tool for disseminating accurate health information can contribute to improving health outcomes and fostering a more health-conscious society in the country.

### **Empirical Review**

Khamis, and Geng, (2021). The study titled *Social Media Usage in Health Communication and Its Implications on Public Health Security: A Case Study of COVID-19 in Zanzibar* explained the utilisation of social media in health communication during the COVID-19 pandemic in Zanzibar and its implications for public health security. A qualitative research approach was employed, involving 30 communication experts and health professionals. The study explored the role of social media in mitigating COVID-19 infections, its impact on health awareness, and the relationship between online information and offline health actions. The findings revealed that social media served as powerful platforms for disseminating health awareness information, leading to a better understanding of local medicines to combat COVID-19. Additionally, the study found a significant connection between online health information and people's offline health behaviors. While social media usage posed no direct threat to public health, it highlighted potential risks for individuals lacking internet media literacy. As a result, the study emphasized the importance of providing digital media literacy to optimize social media's effectiveness in mitigating infectious diseases without compromising public health in Zanzibar and Africa at large.

Ying-Ling Pan, (2021) in the study titled "Understanding message functions in health communication on Twitter: An analysis of the SunSmart campaign," social media, particularly Twitter, emerged as a vital tool for skin health organizations to promote health campaigns and encourage public engagement in response to the rising mortality of skin cancer. Individual users showed higher engagement levels than organizations, and variations in message functions and content usage were observed between the two groups.

Furthermore, the study by Ghahramani, Courten, and Prokofieva (2021) explored the potential of social media in health promotion, specifically focusing on behavior change. Out of 674 citations, 28 studies were included in the review. The analysis revealed that 10 studies used quantitative methods, five used mixed methods, and three used qualitative methods. Facebook and YouTube were commonly used for interventions, while Twitter and Instagram were used to observe changes in health behavior. Overall, the study highlights the significance of social media as a powerful tool in health promotion beyond creating awareness.

### **Methodology**

Being a position paper, the researchers depended solely on secondary sources of data to conclude. The researchers consulted empirical and theoretical studies from other researchers and scholars in the field of health communication, social media, and other works related to the topic. Data and conclusions reached were derived from extensive consultation with textbooks, journals, newspapers, magazines, and other online materials. This helped the researchers to arrive at the conclusions here.

### **Effective Health Communication on Twitter: Unraveling the Impact of Engagement Strategies**

Regarding how to best use Twitter for health communication, there are different opinions. Health organisations often adopt one-way



communication via social media by simply disseminating their message rather than engaging audiences via a two-way communicative approach (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010; Waters & Jamal, 2011; Xifra & Grau, 2010). Some papers suggest that one-way communication adopted by traditional mass media campaigns on Twitter is still the prevalent communication approach (Waters & Jamal, 2011; Xifra & Grau, 2010). Researchers state that it provides a point of contact to attract potential customers' attention and is essential to initiate a dialog (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Waters & Jamal, 2011). Some studies point out that one-way communication is particularly important in some circumstances, such as disease epidemics or disaster emergencies (Hughes & Palen, 2009; Merchant, Elmer & Lurie, 2011; Smith, 2010). Two-way communication on social media involves more engagement. However, little evidence shows that using Twitter as a one-way communication tool for health information dissemination is effective in improving health status (Neiger et al., 2013a). Instead, one-way communication eliminates opportunities to gain a better understanding of audiences.

It can be argued that engagement is the key to successful social media efforts (Korda & Itani, 2013; Li & Bernoff, 2011; Safko, 2010). Without continuous interaction with the target audience, it is hard to foster conversations and may hinder the public's engagement (Scott, 2015). Organisations also risk losing their audiences (Heldman et al., 2013). Furthermore, continuous interactions with audiences probably encourage actions on health campaign participation (Neiger et al., 2013a). Since social media offer a range of communication tools to engage the public, such as Like, Share, and Comment on Facebook (Cho et al., 2014), the two-way communication activities involve more engagement can favour the in-depth insights into the research reveals that people give weight to the message with a cognitive, affective.

### ***Twitter's Impact on Health Communication in Nigeria***

Twitter's impact on health communication in Nigeria has been transformative, revolutionizing how health organizations, government agencies, and NGOs disseminate health-related information to the public. The platform's real-time nature allows for rapid sharing of health updates, breaking news, and preventive measures during disease outbreaks and public health emergencies. This instant dissemination of information is crucial in addressing misinformation and ensuring that accurate and timely health messages reach a broad audience (Robledo, 2012).

In Nigeria, where there is a growing digital presence, Twitter has become a preferred platform for health communication due to its widespread usage among diverse demographics. The concise format of tweets allows health organizations to craft succinct yet impactful messages that capture users' attention in a sea of information on their timelines. By using engaging language and visual content, health communicators can effectively convey health messages and encourage users to take proactive health measures (Steinert-Threlkeld, 2017). Furthermore, Twitter's interactive features, such as mentions, replies, and direct messages, facilitate direct engagement between health organizations and the public. Users can seek clarifications, ask questions, and share their experiences, fostering a sense of community and trust. This two-way communication enables health organizations to better understand the needs and concerns of their audience and tailor their messages accordingly (Eysenback, 2008).

During disease outbreaks or health campaigns, hashtags play a vital role in organizing conversations and disseminating information to a targeted audience. Health organizations use hashtags strategically to categorize content and increase its discoverability. Hashtags related to specific health topics, such as *#HealthyNigeria* or *#MaternalHealth*, help users

find relevant information quickly and join discussions on those topics (McCormick et al., 2013). The retweet feature on Twitter amplifies the reach of health messages exponentially. When users engage with health-related tweets by retweeting them, the information reaches not only their followers but also potentially a broader audience. This viral effect significantly enhances the visibility and impact of health campaigns, making Twitter a powerful tool for spreading health awareness across Nigeria (Grajales et al., 2014).

Twitter's impact on health communication in Nigeria extends beyond disseminating health information. It also serves as a platform for public health advocacy and social change. Citizens, activists, and organizations use Twitter to raise awareness about health disparities, advocate for improved healthcare services, and drive policy changes. The platform's user-generated content enables individuals to share their stories and experiences, humanizing health issues and generating empathy and support from the wider community (Robledo, 2012). However, as with any social media platform, Twitter comes with challenges. The rapid dissemination of information can lead to the spread of misinformation and rumors, posing a risk to public health efforts. Health organizations must remain vigilant in verifying information before sharing it and collaborate with credible sources to ensure that only accurate and evidence-based content is disseminated (Steinert-Threlkeld, 2017).

### **Social Media as a Catalyst for Social Change**

Social change refers to the transformation of societal structures, norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors over time. It involves shifts in the way individuals, communities, and institutions interact and function within a given society. Social change can occur gradually or rapidly, driven by various factors such as technological advancements, cultural shifts, economic developments, political movements, and advocacy efforts. It encompasses both positive and negative changes, ranging from

advancements in human rights and public health to challenges like environmental degradation and social inequality (Giddens, 2006; McAdam, 2012). Social media, including platforms like Twitter, has played a significant role in catalyzing and driving social change in modern times. The accessibility and widespread adoption of social media have empowered individuals and communities to raise their voices, advocate for causes, and mobilize like-minded people around various issues. Social media platforms have become virtual town squares where discussions, debates, and awareness-raising campaigns take place on a global scale. The ease of sharing information, images, and videos on social media has led to the rapid dissemination of ideas and messages, making it a powerful tool for promoting social change (Castells, 2015; Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

Social media's role in promoting social change is further supported by research and empirical evidence. Studies have shown that platforms like Twitter have facilitated the organization of collective action and activism, allowing diverse groups to unite around common goals and advocate for social justice (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). Hashtag campaigns, in particular, have emerged as a potent tool for drawing attention to social issues and driving widespread engagement and support (Bruns et al., 2014). The viral nature of hashtag activism on Twitter has the potential to amplify marginalized voices and bring critical issues to the forefront of public discourse (González-Bailón et al., 2017). Moreover, the speed and reach of social media have enabled the mobilization of global movements, leading to increased pressure on governments, corporations, and institutions to address societal concerns (Earl et al., 2015; Lotan et al., 2011). Additionally, the interactive nature of social media platforms like Twitter has fostered a sense of online community and connectedness, encouraging individuals to engage in pro-social behaviors and support social change initiatives (Valenzuela et al., 2012; Hsieh & Counts, 2016). Through retweets, likes, and

comments, users can actively participate in spreading awareness, expressing solidarity, and sharing informative content related to various social issues (Himmelboim et al., 2018). The digital activism facilitated by Twitter has also extended beyond virtual spaces, leading to offline mobilization and concrete actions, such as protests, fundraisers, and community-driven initiatives (Bail et al., 2018; Johnson & Benoit, 2020).

Social media, particularly platforms like Twitter, has emerged as a powerful catalyst for social change in Nigeria. The country's diverse population, with various ethnicities, languages, and cultures, faces a wide range of social issues, including poverty, corruption, human rights violations, and gender inequality. In this context, social media has provided a unique and inclusive platform for Nigerians to express their voices, mobilize communities, and advocate for positive change. One of the significant ways social media has catalyzed social change in Nigeria is by breaking down barriers to communication and information dissemination. The widespread adoption of smartphones and the increasing availability of affordable internet access have facilitated the growth of social media usage across the country. Nigerians from different regions and backgrounds can now access information, participate in online discussions, and engage with social issues that matter to them. This connectivity has fostered a sense of virtual unity, transcending geographic boundaries and allowing individuals to rally around common causes (Omokri, 2018; Yusuf et al., 2020).

Social media has also played a crucial role in amplifying marginalized voices and promoting social justice in Nigeria. Activists, human rights advocates, and grassroots organizations use platforms like Twitter to shed light on injustices, demand accountability from those in power, and call for reform. Hashtags have become powerful tools for raising awareness and organizing movements around issues such as police

brutality, gender-based violence, and environmental degradation (Okuneye & Adeola, 2018; Adalakun, 2020). Social media campaigns have led to offline protests, advocacy efforts, and legal actions, demonstrating the potential of digital activism in driving tangible social change in Nigeria. Moreover, social media serves as a valuable tool for promoting civic engagement and political participation in Nigeria. During election periods, Twitter becomes a platform for citizens to discuss political issues, share information about candidates, and express their opinions on governance. Political candidates and parties utilize social media to reach a wider audience, share their policy agendas, and connect with potential voters (Ganimu, 2015; Nwosu, 2016). This increased political discourse and engagement contribute to a more informed and active citizenry, laying the groundwork for accountable governance and transparent decision-making processes.

However, as with any tool, social media's impact on social change in Nigeria comes with challenges. The spread of misinformation and fake news is a prevalent concern, which can fuel social tensions and polarize communities. It is essential for users to critically evaluate information and verify sources before sharing content. Additionally, the digital divide remains an obstacle, with rural and underserved communities having limited access to social media and online information (Adua & Mukosolu, 2019). Bridging this gap is crucial to ensuring that social media's potential as a catalyst for social change is accessible to all Nigerians. In conclusion, social media, particularly Twitter, has played a pivotal role in catalysing social change in Nigeria. Its ability to connect people, amplify voices, raise awareness, and promote civic engagement has transformed the way Nigerians interact with social issues and advocate for positive transformations. By leveraging social media responsibly and addressing its challenges, Nigerians can continue to harness its power for meaningful social change, empowering communities, and promoting a more inclusive and just society.

### **Impact of Twitter on health-related information dissemination**

Analyzing the impact of Twitter on health-related information dissemination reveals the platform's significant role in transforming how health information is shared, accessed, and engaged with by the public. Twitter's real-time nature and concise format make it an ideal medium for rapid dissemination of health updates, preventive measures, and public health campaigns during disease outbreaks and emergencies. Health organizations, government agencies, and healthcare professionals leverage Twitter to reach a vast audience, including individuals who may not have access to traditional healthcare information sources (Thackeray et al., 2012; Robledo, 2012). One of the key strengths of Twitter in health-related information dissemination is its ability to break down communication barriers and reach diverse demographics. Nigeria, with its large and diverse population, faces challenges in reaching all communities with health information due to language differences, geographical distances, and varying levels of education. Twitter's accessibility and widespread usage across the country enable health communicators to share vital health messages in multiple languages and target specific regions or communities with tailored content (Luo & Smith, 2015). The use of hashtags on Twitter is particularly valuable in organizing and categorizing health-related conversations, making information retrieval more manageable for users. By incorporating relevant hashtags, health organizations can amplify the visibility of their messages and ensure they reach the intended audience. For instance, hashtags like *#COVID19 Nigeria* or *#VaccinationDriveNigeria* can facilitate information dissemination during public health crises or vaccination campaigns, respectively (Funk, 2011; Steinert-Threlkeld, 2017).

Moreover, Twitter's interactive features, such as mentions, replies, and retweets, enable direct engagement between health communicators and the public. Users can seek clarifications, share their experiences, and ask

questions, fostering a sense of community and trust. This two-way communication allows health organizations to address misinformation, debunk myths, and tailor their messages to better resonate with the audience's needs and concerns (Grajales et al., 2014; Robledo, 2012). Twitter's impact on health-related information dissemination is not limited to official health organizations and agencies. Individual healthcare professionals, researchers, and advocates also contribute to the sharing of evidence-based health information on the platform. This democratisation of health information empowers users to be more proactive in managing their health, seek appropriate medical advice, and participate in public health efforts (Neiger et al., 2013a).

However, challenges exist in analyzing the impact of Twitter on health-related information dissemination. The vast volume of tweets and the dynamic nature of the platform make it challenging to analyze data comprehensively. Researchers must employ sophisticated algorithms and data mining techniques to identify patterns, sentiments, and key influencers in health-related conversations on Twitter (Thackeray et al., 2012). Additionally, the spread of misinformation and fake news on the platform remains a concern, emphasizing the need for robust fact-checking and credible sources in health communication on Twitter (Steinert-Threlkeld, 2017).

### **Leveraging Twitter for Health Communication in Nigeria: Addressing Challenges and Enhancing Effectiveness**

Overcoming barriers and enhancing social media strategies in the context of health communication in Nigeria is crucial to maximizing the impact of Twitter and other platforms in disseminating health-related information. Several challenges exist that can hinder the effectiveness of social media campaigns, but with thoughtful approaches and innovative strategies, these obstacles can be addressed. One of the significant barriers to effective health communication on social media is the spread



of misinformation and fake news. In a country as diverse as Nigeria, with various cultural beliefs and languages, misinformation can quickly spread and lead to confusion and mistrust in health information. To counter this, health organizations and professionals must prioritize accuracy, credibility, and evidence-based content in their social media posts. Fact-checking should be a standard practice before sharing any health-related information, and efforts to collaborate with trusted experts and institutions can enhance the reliability of the content being disseminated (Yusuf et al., 2020).

Another critical challenge is the digital divide, which restricts access to social media and online information for certain segments of the population, particularly in rural and underserved areas. To ensure that health information reaches all communities, social media strategies should be complemented with traditional communication methods, such as radio broadcasts, community gatherings, and print materials in local languages. Collaborating with community leaders and influencers can also facilitate the dissemination of health information to a broader audience (Adua & Mukosolu, 2019). Enhancing social media strategies involves more than just sharing information; it requires engaging and fostering ongoing relationships with the target audience. Health organizations should actively encourage user participation through interactive campaigns, polls, and quizzes. Utilizing engaging visuals, videos, and infographics can also increase the appeal and shareability of health messages. Moreover, acknowledging and responding to user comments, questions, and concerns demonstrates a commitment to transparency and builds trust (Neiger et al., 2013b).

Leveraging the power of influencers and key stakeholders is another strategy to enhance the impact of health communication on social media. Collaborating with healthcare professionals, celebrities, and community leaders can extend the reach of health campaigns and lend credibility to

the information being shared. Influencers can serve as advocates for health issues, encourage behavior change, and amplify health messages through their networks (Yusuf et al., 2020; Okuneye & Adeola, 2018). Measuring and evaluating the effectiveness of social media campaigns is vital for continuous improvement. Health organizations should set clear objectives and define key performance indicators (KPIs) to assess the impact of their efforts. Analyzing engagement metrics, such as likes, shares, retweets, and comments, can provide insights into the resonance of health messages with the target audience. Periodic evaluations can guide adjustments to social media strategies and ensure that health communication efforts remain relevant and effective (Neiger et al., 2013b).

### **Influencers Shaping Health Discussions in Nigeria**

The influence of influencers in shaping health discussions on social media platforms, including Twitter, has become increasingly significant in recent years. Influencers are individuals who have established a sizable and engaged following on social media, often due to their expertise, credibility, or relatability in a specific niche or field. In the context of health communication, influencers can play a vital role in amplifying health messages, promoting behavior change, and driving engagement with health-related content. Influencers possess the power to reach and connect with diverse audiences, including those who might not typically engage with traditional health communication channels. Their authentic and relatable approach to discussing health topics makes them attractive to followers, fostering trust and a sense of connection. As a result, influencers have the potential to bridge the gap between healthcare organizations and the public, making health information more accessible and relevant (Osterrieder et al., 2019). One key aspect of influencers' impact on health discussions is their ability to humanize health-related content. By sharing personal experiences, health journeys, or testimonials, influencers can break down complex medical jargon and engage their audience in relatable and approachable ways. This approach

not only demystifies health information but also encourages followers to take an active interest in their well-being and healthcare choices (Abbasi & Mohammadbeigi, 2021).

Influencers also contribute to disseminating evidence-based health information through their social media platforms. Many health-related influencers are healthcare professionals, nutritionists, fitness experts, or individuals with specialized knowledge in specific health domains. Their expertise lends credibility to the health information they share, making it more reliable and trustworthy for their followers (Tasnim et al., 2020). Moreover, influencers can shape health discussions by raising awareness of specific health issues or advocating for health campaigns and initiatives. Through hashtag activism and viral content, influencers can mobilise their followers to support and participate in health-related causes, driving social change and collective action (Kim et al., 2021). However, it is essential to recognise that influencers' impact on health discussions is not without its challenges. There is a need for transparency and ethical considerations regarding sponsored content and endorsements related to health products or services. Health organisations and influencers should prioritize providing accurate and evidence-based information to avoid promoting misleading or potentially harmful health practices (Manganello et al., 2020). In conclusion, influencers play a pivotal role in shaping health discussions on platforms like Twitter, bringing health information closer to the public and fostering engagement with health-related content. By leveraging their authenticity, expertise, and ability to connect with diverse audiences, influencers can promote positive health behaviors, raise awareness about health issues, and drive social change in the context of health communication in Nigeria and beyond.

### **Ethical Considerations and Responsible Health Communication**

Responsible health communication on Twitter plays a crucial role in disseminating health-related information in Nigeria, impacting public

perception, behavior, and decision-making. To ensure accurate information dissemination, protect the well-being of individuals and communities, and maintain public trust, adherence to ethical principles is essential (Vezyridis & Timmons, 2021; Bernhardt et al., 2020).

### **Transparency and Accountability**

Transparency is a fundamental aspect of responsible health communication on Twitter. It involves being open and honest about the sources and origins of health information shared on the platform. By attributing information to credible sources, communicators can establish trust with their audience (Fung et al., 2021). Public health information must be backed by reliable data and evidence to ensure that the information disseminated is accurate and trustworthy (Thompson et al., 2011; Greysen et al., 2010). In addition to providing credible sources, acknowledging potential biases and conflicts of interest is crucial. Health organizations and communicators should be transparent about any affiliations or funding sources that might influence the information they share (Vezyridis & Timmons, 2021). Furthermore, responsible health communication on Twitter requires communicators to clarify the stage of ongoing research or clinical trials when sharing updates. Specifying the study's current phase and potential limitations of findings ensures that the public comprehends the preliminary nature of the information and does not misinterpret it as conclusive evidence (Fung et al., 2021).

### **Avoiding Sensationalism and Fear-Mongering**

Sensationalism and fear-mongering are practices that leverage exaggerated, alarming, or emotionally charged language to attract attention and engagement. While these tactics might garner short-term attention, they can have detrimental effects on public health. Twitter's fast-paced nature and the prevalence of clickbait content make it tempting for communicators to resort to sensationalism (Gallagher & Updegraff, 2020). Responsible health communication, however,

demands a commitment to providing balanced, evidence-based, and measured health messages. By presenting information in a clear and actionable manner, communicators can empower the public to make informed decisions about their health (Flickinger et al., 2018; Peña, 2019). This approach fosters a sense of agency and enables individuals to take appropriate actions while avoiding unnecessary panic or fear (Gallagher & Updegraff, 2020). Maintaining a responsible tone on Twitter helps promote accurate understanding, reduces misinformation, and encourages the public to seek additional information from reputable sources (Flickinger et al., 2018).

### **Protecting Privacy and Confidentiality**

Respecting individuals' privacy and confidentiality is paramount in health communication on Twitter. Health practitioners and organizations must respect the privacy of individuals and refrain from sharing sensitive health details or identifying patient information without explicit consent (Han et al., 2020; Tikkanen et al., 2020). In the context of social media, inadvertent breaches of privacy can occur, especially when individuals share personal stories or experiences related to health conditions. Responsible health communicators should exercise caution and ensure that they maintain individuals' anonymity and dignity when discussing such experiences on Twitter (Han et al., 2020). Additionally, health organizations and professionals should adhere to established ethical guidelines and legal regulations related to patient confidentiality (Tikkanen et al., 2020). By prioritizing privacy protection, health communicators build trust with their audience and demonstrate a commitment to respecting individuals' rights and well-being (Han et al., 2020).

### **Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusivity**

Twitter is a global platform with diverse audiences representing various cultures, languages, and backgrounds. Responsible health

communication should consider this diversity and be culturally sensitive and inclusive (Flickinger et al., 2018; Ozdalga et al., 2012). Communicators must recognize that health beliefs, practices, and norms can vary significantly across different cultures. To ensure the relevance and effectiveness of health messages, adapting content to different cultural contexts becomes crucial (Flickinger et al., 2018). This approach helps prevent the dissemination of information that may inadvertently conflict with cultural norms or beliefs (Ozdalga et al., 2012). Furthermore, communicating health information in multiple languages enhances accessibility for diverse audiences. Language barriers can limit individuals' access to critical health information, making multilingual communication a valuable strategy to ensure inclusivity and reach broader segments of the population (Ozdalga et al., 2012). By incorporating cultural sensitivity and inclusivity into health communication on Twitter, communicators can foster greater engagement and resonance with their audience, ultimately leading to more impactful public health outcomes.

### **Engaging with Scientific Community and Fact-Checkers**

Engaging with the scientific community and partnering with fact-checking organizations bolster the credibility and accuracy of health information shared on Twitter (AMA Journal of Ethics, 2020; Lagu et al., 2016). Collaborating with experts and researchers helps ensure that the information communicated aligns with the latest evidence and best practices in the field (Lagu et al., 2016). By involving fact-checkers, communicators can combat the spread of misinformation and disinformation on the platform. Twitter, like other social media platforms, may be susceptible to the rapid dissemination of false or misleading health information (AMA Journal of Ethics, 2020). By subjecting health messages to rigorous fact-checking processes, communicators can enhance the reliability and trustworthiness of their content (Lagu et al., 2016). Moreover, engaging with the scientific

community and fact-checkers demonstrates a commitment to evidence-based communication. It reflects the communicator's dedication to providing accurate and reliable health information to the public, reinforcing their credibility as a trusted source of health knowledge on Twitter (Lagu et al., 2016).

### **Promoting Health Literacy and Critical Thinking**

Promoting health literacy and critical thinking is a vital aspect of responsible health communication on Twitter (Koh et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2021). Health organizations and communicators should go beyond simply sharing information; they should empower the audience to understand evaluate, and act upon health information independently (Peña, 2019; Ozdalga et al., 2012). Providing context, explanations, and links to reputable resources allows individuals to verify the information and deepen their understanding of health topics (Koh et al., 2020). Encouraging the audience to ask questions and seek additional information fosters a sense of agency and ownership over their health decisions (Ozdalga et al., 2012). By promoting critical thinking skills, health communicators equip the public to discern credible information from misinformation (Huang et al., 2021). In an era when false information can spread rapidly on social media, critical thinking becomes a valuable defense against the inadvertent sharing of inaccurate health content (Huang et al., 2021). Empowering the audience with health literacy and critical thinking skills can lead to more informed and health-conscious individuals, contributing to improved health outcomes and better-informed health-related discussions on Twitter (Koh et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2021).

### **Conclusion**

Twitter's impact on health communication in Nigeria has been transformative, revolutionizing the dissemination of health-related information and empowering communities to advocate for positive

change. Its real-time nature and interactive features have facilitated rapid information sharing, breaking down communication barriers and reaching diverse audiences. Hashtags and influencers play critical roles in organizing conversations and shaping health discussions, fostering engagement and behavior change. Ethical considerations, including transparency and cultural sensitivity, are essential in ensuring responsible health communication. By leveraging Twitter responsibly and addressing challenges, Nigeria can maximize its potential for public health awareness and social change, empowering communities and promoting a more inclusive and just society.

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