Chapter 2

Social Media Alternative for Health Communication in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

In the changing media and health landscapes, health communication requires more ways to improve and sustain new practices for health advocacy. The same way global population is soaring, people are becoming more urbane, and these vicissitudes are accompanied by the need to access new forms of media to meet information needs. This chapter assesses social media relevance as an alternative tool for health communication and clearly established that social media holds an integral locus in the day-to-day activities of the people, the same way it has for health communication. The growing concern is for stakeholders who are government and non-government agencies actors like traditional rulers, faith-based organisations, and international bodies to adopt the use of social media as an alternative for health communication in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

With the changing dynamics in developed and developing economies of the world, technological innovations have ushered in new ways of communication and information sharing. This way, the use of internet has become part and parcel of daily routines for individuals, businesses, organisations and governments. In the case of Africa as a whole, the global statistics on internet use indicate that from year 2000 up to date, there is a penetration rate of 35.2% (Internet World Stats, 2018). As of year 2000, there were barely two hundred thousand internet users in Nigeria. Fast-forward to 2018, the internet population has grown to over 98 million people. According to Internet World Statistics (2018), this shows a penetration rate of 50.2% by the estimated population. By this global increase in internet use, social media tend to also offer a suitable platform for the projection of health communication to benefit citizens with varied levels of exposure across ages.

Global reports on world population shows an explosion and Africa alone has experienced a rapid population growth (van Bavel, 2013). Data available through the United Nations project that by the year 2050, more than half the world's global population growth rate will be that of Africa (UNDESA, 2017). This population surge is not alien to Nigeria, whose widely popularised giant of Africa holds sway. Today, the World Population review approximate Nigeria's current population to be 206.14 million people. There is no doubt that with such increase, there is also a great possibility that the continent will record an all high increase rate in health concerns.

Most recent disease outbreaks on the Africa continent include ebola virus, cholera, meningitis, yellow fever, zika virus plague, lassa fever, bird flu, measles, polio, typhoid, hepatitis, diarrheal, malaria (CDCP, 2017). These reported cases have variously claimed lives of unsuspecting victims, who ought to (if only they had the required information) have taken preventive measures. Hence, the need to use all available means to match the information needs of such growing population.

Using the backdrop of these statistics, it is clear that there is a growing population in Nigeria. To match the needs of the people, certain factors have the ability to ensure effective health communication. Among other relative issues are improved literacy, access to internet - specifically use of social media. In very common cases, internet users are able to search health-related information on the cyberspace but those who are unable to extensively navigate, social media becomes the easiest means to access the needed information. The potential benefits of using social media are vast because information and communication technologies have transformed web interaction a face-to-face process.

The health sector has experienced laudable improvement in service delivery, and the use of communication techniques to promote public health. Apart from using the mass media and other more traditional means (such as word of mouth, public

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