

**RESISTING INFODEMIC: INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS' RESPONSE TO COVID-19
PANDEMIC IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the availability, access, utilization, and challenges of individuals with regards to information shared on COVID-19 in Nigeria. The overwhelming bulk of information from different sources in various forms and formats has resulted in infodemic arising from fake news, disinformation and misinformation. It is the responsibility of information professionals like librarians to mitigate this infodemic. This study has the following research questions: What types of information sources are available to individuals for accessing COVID-19 information in Nigeria, what is the level of access to these information sources, what is the extent of Utilisation of the information sources and to ascertain the challenges are encountered individuals while accessing the information on COVID-19 in Nigeria. Quantitative method was adopted for this study using a descriptive survey design where a questionnaire was administered to 150 respondents and 122 was retrieved, sorted, coded and analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency and percentage. The study found out that individuals surveyed have at their disposals social media, online websites, online television, search engines such as Google search as the major source of COVID-19 Information which they find always accessible. Other accessible sources are online radio, online news websites, online friends and they sometimes have accessed instant messaging services, blogs and audio podcasts. This study also found out that the major challenges encountered by the respondents were that of the high cost of data subscription during the lockdown, lack of credibility of some information sources, inaccurate data and information from some sources, false and/or fake information from some sources and poor power supply to charge their gadget to receive timely information. Therefore, the task is to profile quality information at the right time via the right channel for effective decision making to curtail misinformation and disinformation. To address this contention intensely, therefore; the researchers, are calling on librarians, information scientists, and journalists on the need to work together to ensure that

information that is shared are censored, amended, sieved and filtered to mitigate another issue of infodemic in this pandemic era.

Keywords: *Covid-19, Infodemic, Information Sources, Information Professionals, Pandemic.*

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the novel coronavirus known as COVID-19 has greatly shocked the whole world. The global community are unanimously making collaborative all-inclusive efforts to provide a solution to this pandemic at different level. The World Health Organization (WHO), Commonwealth, and United Nations (UN) are all providing information through various platforms to people to prevent the continual widespread of the disease and ameliorate the effects on the world citizenry. All over the world, different nations, state governments and local government had some sources of information on COVID-19 and there were prominently feature COVID-19 Hotlines, an email address for general questions, graphic and text contents, which were updated daily, showing the confirmed COVID-19 cases, the number of deaths, and the distribution by countries. Different nations could view important links provided for feedback and contact on COVID-19 related issues for actions to be taken for daily actions and executive orders. There is information by various organization to provide means to donate personal protective equipment for health care personnel, organizations and individuals.

The global economy has been disrupted as a result there is a supersonic increase in information, news and conversation across the world via different platforms. This has produced one of the largest global health crises in modern history, leading to the emergence of many sources of information. At the same time, people are presented with multiple sources of information, fake news and misinformation. The first case of coronavirus was confirmed in Nigeria by the Federal Ministry of Health on the 27th of February 2020 in Lagos State (NCDC, 2020). After the first discovery, the Federal Government of Nigeria has joined countries of the world to embark on lockdown on Monday, 30th March 2020 in a bid to halt the spread of coronavirus in the country. Since then, schools, churches, Mosques and social gathering had been on locked own. Although the Federal Government of Nigeria announced the reopening of mosques and churches on Monday 2nd June 2020 two months after they were shut down while schools remained shuts, and the ban is yet to be lifted on the interstate on 1st of July 2020 outside curfew hours. Despite the measures put in place, the fear of the second wave requires that strict collaborative measures be enforced.

In Nigeria, the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on COVID-19, Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), National Orientation Agency (NOA), Information Centres, Libraries, Institutions, Universities and media houses and other NGO and community-based organization are making efforts to raise awareness and provide information concerning the COVID-19 pandemic. People are being counselled to provide trusted information from verified sources (Olapegba, Ayandele, Kolawole, Oguntayo, Gandi, Dangiwa, Iorfa, 2020; Patel, Kute, & Agarwal, 2019). There are many sources of information available to individuals about Covid-19. According to Ali et al (2020), Facebook was the second most popular social media platform, used by 69% of U.S. adults. In addition to its popularity, an advantage of Facebook over other online platforms is that 74% of adult users access it daily, and it is the social platform most frequently accessed by all age groups, including older adults. Due to the impact on this age group and low-income countries like Nigeria, there is, therefore, a need to collaborate with the international community to push even harder for the right type of information and the WHO to ameliorate the impact the pandemic is having on the world's most vulnerable people (Ali, Foreman, Capasso, Jones, Tozan, & Diclemente, 2020; Sheares, Miklencicova, & Grupac, 2020).

The online network is accessible for public information on COVID-19 and it involves different social media handles such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Google, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram etc. There is, therefore, a need to distinguish the various social media networking sites, sources of information from

national, international, and emergency preparedness sites, to determine the types of information one gets from them (Bratu, 2020; Kulkarni, Prabhu, & Ramraj, 2020).

El-Jardali, Bou-Karroum, and Fadlallah (2020) noted that the role of knowledge transformation platforms in pandemic responses is more important now than ever, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, where public health and health systems are already exploited and under-resourced, thus posing additional challenges to an effective response. Also apart from certain groups, many now doubt the seriousness of this pandemic both in terms of public health and economic health. As librarians and information scientist, we are called to point patrons to credible information resources.

This information has served the public by accurately describing the disease, its symptoms and its prevalence, and informing the public of prevention strategies. This calls for the reduction to the vulnerability to infodemic, fake news and misinformation about home remedies for the prevention and cure, or the use of medications untested for the coronavirus. There is, therefore, a need for credible information and quality education that will help the public manage their risk of contracting and spreading the COVID-19 disease. The news of the pandemic did not only present cases of self-isolation or lockdown but all over the world, people became afraid of the health risk it could cause and ultimately death. It was recommended that all people in different nations have adequate information and an emergency supply of food, alcohol-based sanitiser and other health gadgets to enable them to manage for some few months to encourage them to stay home (Ali, Foreman, Capasso, Jones, Tozan, & Diclemente, 2020).

Issues on when to seek care guidance by topic, community guidance, mental health and relieving anxiety, services, healthcare providers, and COVID-19 resources for children and elderly people are continually being sought for by people as their information-seeking behaviours have shifted towards the COVID-19 Information. The shocking effect as well as the transmission of the disease prompted an individual to source more information about it. People share all sort of information on the Internet most especially on social media without minding the authenticity of the sources. Brindha, Jayaseelan, and Kadeswara, (2020) thousands of people on social media spreads information, sensationalism, rumours, misinformation and disinformation about the Covid-19 pandemic which makes it crucial for Governments and experts to fight the pandemic as well as the infodemic. Nigeria is not left out in sharing information about this pandemic on social media because it is the easiest and fastest mean of creating and sharing information. Imagine a world where every human activity is on hold. An unknown yet deadly pandemic emerges and almost everyone is panicked, fear has engulfed many, nations, agencies, institutions, individuals alike are set to find a lasting solution to this unknown yet life taking pandemic called Corona Virus.

Information plays important role in the daily decision making of individuals, communities, countries and the global community at large. Access and use of the right information in any form and/or format at the right time influences successes in decision making at all levels of human endeavours. Access and utilisation of information is the full-fledged responsibility of library and information centres. Providing information on trends, issues, phenomenon and happenings around the users has always been a great desire of librarians. The emergence of the novel coronavirus known as Covid-19 has resulted to fear to the global community resulting in the shutdown of public spaces like schools, markets, shopping malls, worships centres etc. many travels were stopped to mitigate the onward spread of the virus.

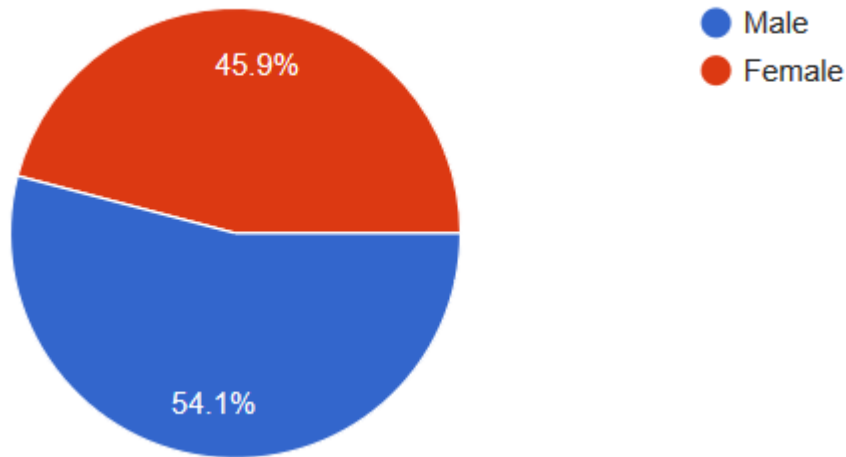
Despite the measures taken by the government and its agencies especially in Nigeria, a greater challenge of infodemic is emerging as fake news, false information, inaccurate data, rumours are being spread without proper verification and consultation by unauthorised persons resulting in disbelief, unreliable information, inaccurate information, unstable decision making amongst the people. Hence the need for this study is to identify the sources of information available to individuals on COVID-19, their access to these sources, utilisation and challenges encountered in the use of these information sources.

METHODOLOGY

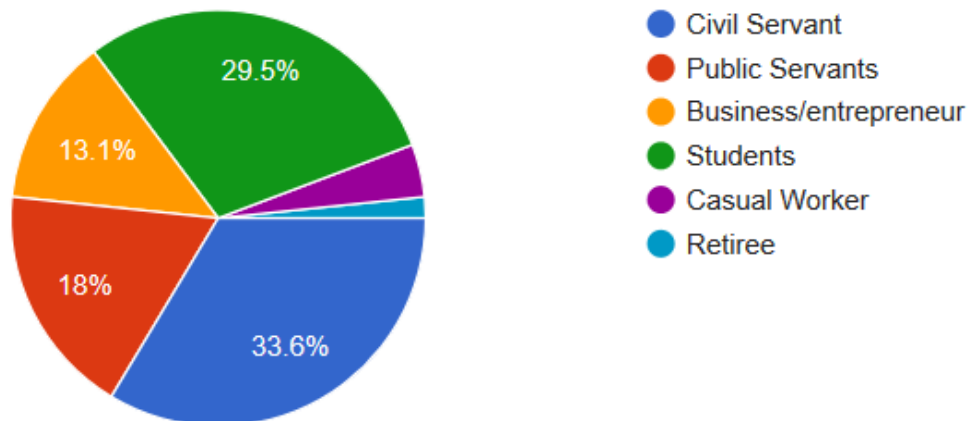
This study adopted a quantitative approach using a descriptive survey design where a questionnaire was adopted to elicit responses from respondents online. Data collected were cleaned, sorted, coded and analysed using descriptive statistics of frequencies, percentages and mean.

RESULTS

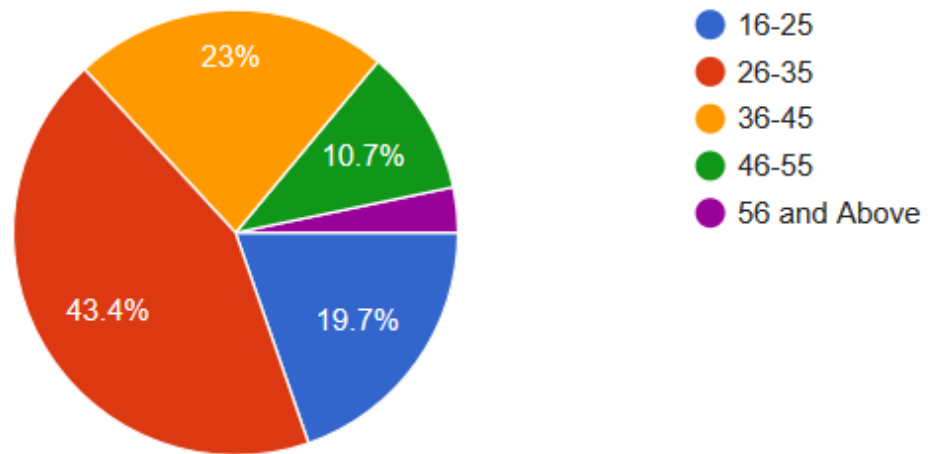
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF RESPONDENTS



The finding of the study revealed that out of 122 responses, 54.1% were male while 45.9% were female. This implies that is no gender disparity among the respondent used for this study.

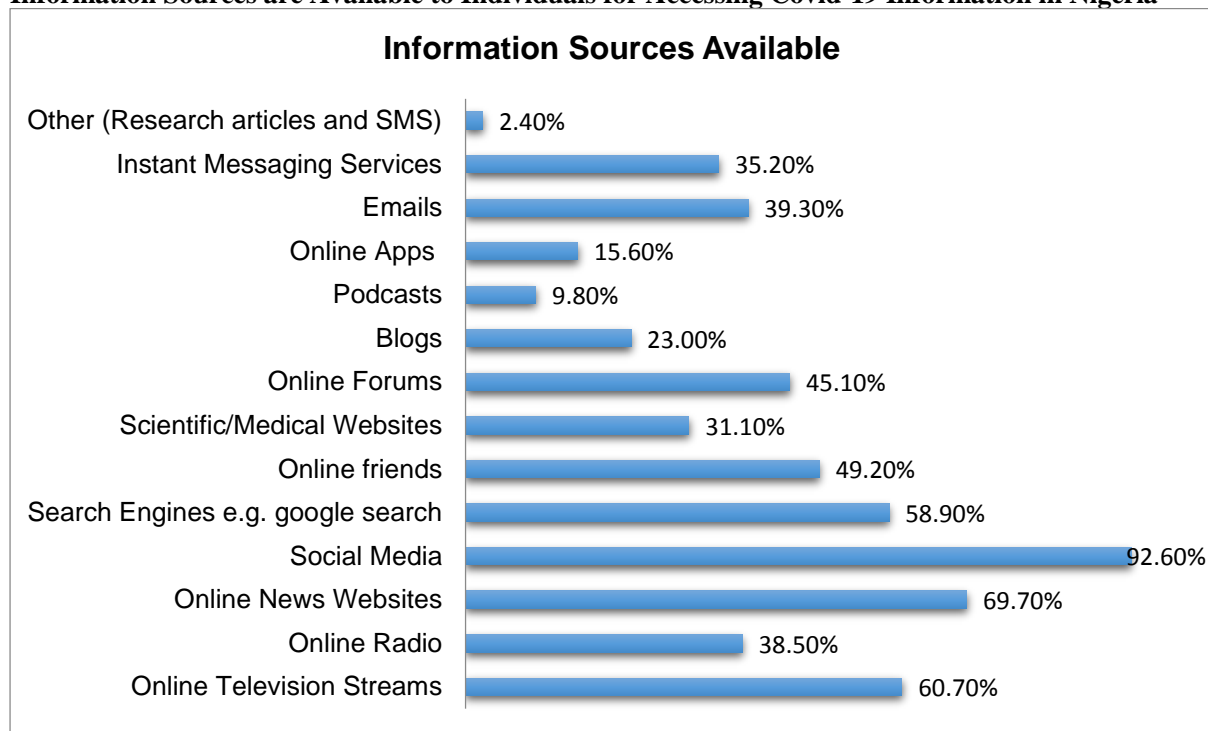


The findings of the study revealed that 33.6% of respondents were civil servants, 18.0% were public servants, 13.1% were business/entrepreneur, 29.5% were students, 4.1% were causal worker while 1.7% were retiree. This, therefore, implies that this study cut across different occupation.



The findings of the study show that out of 122 responses, 19.7% were between the age range of 16 – 25, 43.4% were between the age range of 26-35, 23.0% were between the age range of 36 – 45, 10.7% were between the age range of 46 – 55 while the remaining 3.2% were between the age range of 56 and above. This implies that ages 16 – 55 were active users of online media in accessing covid-19 information.

Information Sources are Available to Individuals for Accessing Covid-19 Information in Nigeria



The finding of this study shows that 60% of respondent agreed that Online Television Streams is a type of information sources available to individuals for accessing COVID-19 Information in Nigeria while the remaining 40% disagreed. 38.5% of the respondents agreed that online radio is a type of information sources available to individuals for accessing COVID-19 Information in Nigeria while the remaining 61.5% disagreed. 69.7% of the respondents agreed that Online News Websites is a type of information sources available to individuals for accessing COVID-19 Information in Nigeria while the remaining 30.3%

disagreed. 92.6% of the respondents agreed that Social Media is a type of information sources available to individuals for accessing COVID-19 Information in Nigeria while the remaining 7.4% disagreed. 58.9% of the respondents agreed that Search Engines e.g. google search is a type of information sources available to individuals for accessing COVID-19 Information in Nigeria while the remaining 41.1% disagreed. 49.2% of the respondents agreed that Online friends are a type of information sources available to individuals for accessing COVID-19 Information in Nigeria while the remaining 50.8% disagreed. 31.1% of the respondents agreed that Scientific/Medical Websites is a type of information sources available to individuals for accessing COVID-19 Information in Nigeria while the remaining 68.9% disagreed. 45.1% of the respondents agreed that Online Forums is a type of information sources available to individuals for accessing COVID-19 Information in Nigeria while the remaining 54.9% disagreed. 23.0% of the respondents agreed that Blogs is a type of information sources available to individuals for accessing COVID-19 Information in Nigeria while the remaining 77.0% disagreed. 9.8% of the respondents agreed that Podcasts is a type of information sources available to individuals for accessing COVID-19 Information in Nigeria while the remaining 90.2% disagreed. 15.6% of the respondents agreed that Online Apps is a type of information sources available to individuals for accessing COVID-19 Information in Nigeria while the remaining 84.4% disagreed. 39.9% of the respondents agreed that Emails is a type of information sources available to individuals for accessing COVID-19 Information in Nigeria while the remaining 60.1% disagreed. 35.2% of the respondents agreed that Instant Messaging Services is a type of information sources available to individuals for accessing COVID-19 Information in Nigeria while the remaining 64.8% disagreed. 2.4% of the respondents agreed that Research articles and SMS are other types of information sources available to individuals for accessing COVID-19 Information in Nigeria while the remaining 97.6% disagreed. The findings of this study, therefore, identified four (4) information sources which are social media, online news websites, online television streams and search engine as most acceptable and commonly used for accessing COVID-19 Information in Nigeria.

Level of Accessibility of Information Sources Available to Individuals for Accessing Covid-19 Information in Nigeria

S/N	Information Sources	Always Accessible	Sometimes Accessible	Rarely Accessible	Not Accessible
a	Online Television Streams	48(39.3%)	48(39.3%)	13 (10.7%)	13 (10.7%)
b	Online Radio	33(27.0%)	48(39.3%)	20(16.4%)	21(17.2%)
c	Online News Websites	73(59.8%)	39(32.0%)	8(6.6%)	2(1.6%)
d	Social Media	92(75.4%)	27(22.1%)	1(0.8%)	2(1.6%)
e	Search Engines e.g Google	64(52.5%)	38(31.1%)	10(8.2%)	10(8.2%)
f	Online friends	51(41.8%)	46(37.7%)	19(5.6%)	6(4.9%)
g	Scientific/Medical Websites	41(33.6%)	44(36.1%)	20(16.4%)	17(13.9%)
h	Online Forums	47(38.5%)	46(37.7%)	11(9.0%)	18(14.8%)
i	Blogs	31(25.4%)	54(44.3%)	15(12.3%)	22(18.0%)
j	Podcasts	22(18.0%)	52(42.6%)	20(16.4%)	28(23.0%)
k	APPS	34(27.9%)	47(38.5%)	17(13.9%)	24(19.7%)
l	Emails	49(40.2%)	40(32.8%)	12(9.8%)	21(17.2%)
m	Instant Messaging Services	47(38.5%)	50(41.0%)	13(10.7%)	12(9.8%)

The finding of this study shows the level of accessibility of information sources available to individuals for accessing COVID-19 Information in Nigeria. 78.6% agreed that Online Television Streams are accessible to them while 21.4% disagreed. 66.3% agreed that Online Radio is accessible as a source of information while 33.7% disagreed. 91.8% agreed that Online News Websites are accessible to them while 8.2% disagreed. 97.5 agreed that Social Media is accessible to them as their source of information while only 2.5% disagreed. 83.6% agreed that Search Engines e.g Google search while 16.4% disagreed. 79.5% agreed that Online friends are their source of information while 20.5% disagreed. 69.7% agreed that Scientific/Medical Websites are their sources of information while 30.3% disagreed. 76.2% agreed that Online Forums is their

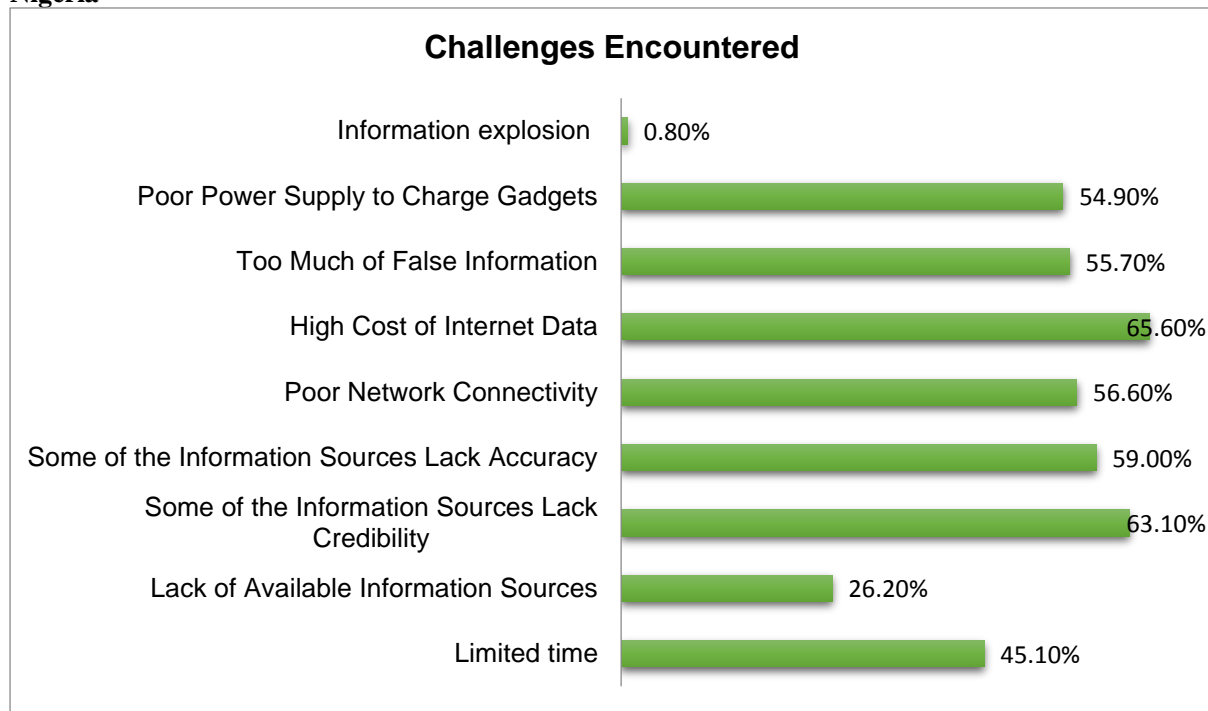
source of information while 23.8% disagreed. 69.7% agreed that blogs are their source of information while 30.3% disagreed. 60.6% agreed that they use Podcasts in assessing information while 39.4% disagreed. 66.4% agreed they use Apps in accessing information while 33.6% disagreed. 73.0% agreed that they use Emails in accessing information while 27.0% disagreed. 79.5% agreed that they use Instant Messaging Services as their source of information while 20.5%. It is therefore revealed that individuals use different information sources in accessing COVID-19 Information in Nigeria.

The extent of utilization of information sources available to individuals for COVID-19 information in Nigeria

S/N	Information Sources	Very High Extent	Rare Extent	Moderate Extent	Low Extent
a	Online Television Streams	35(28.7%)	14(11.5%)	59(48.4%)	14(11.5%)
b	Online Radio	26(21.3%)	20(16.4%)	54(44.3%)	22(18.0%)
c	Online News Websites	52(42.6%)	8(6.6%)	57(46.7%)	5(4.1%)
d	Social Media	64(52.5%)	8(6.6%)	49(40.2%)	1(0.8%)
e	Search Engines e.g Google	43(35.2%)	15(12.3)	57(46.7%)	7(5.7%)
f	Online friends	38(31.1%)	16(13.1%)	54(44.3%)	14(11.5%)
g	Scientific/Medical Websites	30(24.6%)	21(17.2%)	50(41.0%)	21(17.2%)
h	Online Forums	33(27.0)	21(17.2%)	49(40.2%)	19(15.6%)
i	Blogs	16(13.1%)	24(19.7%)	53(43.4%)	29(23.8%)
j	Podcasts	15(12.3%)	23(18.9%)	47(38.5%)	37(30.3%)
k	APPS	30(24.6%)	23(18.9%)	48(39.3%)	21(17.2%)
l	Emails	35(28.7%)	20(16.4%)	46(37.7%)	21(17.2%)
m	Instant Messaging Services	39(32.0%)	19(15.6%)	49(40.2%)	15(12.3%)

This table shows the extent of utilization of information sources available to individuals for COVID-19 information in Nigeria. 40.2% agreed that Online Television Streams are on highly utilised available source of information while 59.8% disagreed. 37.7% agreed that Online Radio is highly utilised available source of information while 62.3% disagreed. 49.2% agreed that Online News Websites are on highly utilised available source of information while 50.8% disagreed. 59.1% agreed that Social Media are on highly utilised available source of information while 40.9% disagreed. 47.5% agreed that Search Engines e.g Google search is highly utilised available source of information while 52.5% disagreed. 44.2% agreed that Online friends are on highly utilised available source of information while 55.8% disagreed. 41.8% agreed that Scientific/Medical Websites are on highly utilised available source of information while 58.2% disagreed. 44.2% agreed that Online Forums are on highly utilised available source of information while 55.8% disagreed. 32.8% agreed that Blogs are on highly utilised available source of information while 67.2% disagreed. 31.2% agreed that Podcasts are on highly utilised available source of information while 68.8% disagreed. 43.5% agreed that APPS are on highly utilised available source of information while 56.5% disagreed. 45.1% agreed that Emails are on highly utilised available source of information while 54.9% disagreed. 47.6% agreed that Instant Messaging Services are on highly utilised available source of information while 52.4% disagreed. The findings of this study revealed that social media is the most used information sources for COVID-19 information in Nigeria.

Challenges Encountered by Individuals in Accessing Information Sources Available on COVID-19 in Nigeria



This chart shows the challenges encountered by online users in accessing information sources available to individuals for accessing Information on COVID-19 in Nigeria. It shows that out of 122 responses, 0.8% agreed that information explosion is the challenge encountered by online users in accessing information. 54.9% agreed that power supply to charge gadget is the challenge encountered by online users in accessing information. 55.7% agreed that there is a problem of false information on Covid-19 in Nigeria. 65.6% agreed that there is a problem of the high cost of Internet data in accessing information sources available. 56.6% agreed that poor network connectivity is a challenge encountered by online users in accessing available information sources. 59.0% agreed that some of the available information sources lack accuracy. 63.1% agreed that some of the available information sources lack credibility. 26.2% agreed that there is a dearth of information sources on Covid-19 while 45.1% agreed that there is limited time on available information sources. The findings of this study, therefore, shows that the high cost of Internet data, lack of credibility, poor connection, and erratic power supply are the major challenges encountered by online users in accessing information sources available to individuals for accessing Information on COVID-19 in Nigeria.

This survey finds out that:

1. The information sources most commonly available to individuals on Covid-19 were Social Media, online news websites, online television streams and search engines.
2. The study also revealed that individuals always have access to social media, online news websites and search engines. Other sources of information sometimes accessible were blogs, instant messaging services and podcasts.
3. The study revealed that social media and online news websites were the highly utilised information sources by the individuals above other sources of information available on Covid-19.
4. The major challenges encountered by the individuals as revealed by the study were the high cost of internet data, lack of credibility of some information sources, inaccurate information from sources, redundancy of false information, and poor network connection and poor power supply to charge their gadget to connect online to search information on COVID-19.

CONCLUSION

People have the right to understand what is happening and to trust that the measures taken are in their own and the community's best interest. People have the right to clear, transparent and understandable information concerning the outbreak, the actual danger and what is expected of them (Sphere, 2020). It is expected that librarians and other information professionals stand at the forefront of information flow to curtail the continual growth of fake news. Infodemic can cause great harm to the nation if not curtailed. Information sharing platforms and mediums should be properly oriented on the needs to share factual and timely information that is void of negative reactions. Information can add to societal growth if shared rightly to the right audience (users) at the right time via the right medium.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study, therefore, recommends the following:

1. More sources of information should be made available as information forms a major part of the decision making of individuals. This information sources should be made affordable and easily accessible by all and sundry as at such a time information is a life-saving resource and sought after with all commitment.
2. In such a time of lockdown, subsidy on data subscription and rates should be made available to allow individuals access information remotely and cheaply. This will enhance the information sharing process of individuals, organisations, agencies and government should be outlined to avoid sharing fake news that would misinform and disinform individuals.
3. Collaborative, multi-disciplinary and all-inclusive community acceptable awareness campaigns and sensitisation should be encouraged, strengthened and supported to ensure individuals are well-informed about the prevention, mitigation and safety measures.
4. It is the however needful for libraries and librarians to evaluate the information users access and how often they use them and find out the possible challenges encountered in their search for these information sources.

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