DIGITAL HUMANITIES | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Social media literacy: fake news consumption and perception of COVID-19 in Nigeria

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Abstract: The emergence of social media in the late 90s resulted in information dissemination and consumption transformation. Social networking sites have increasingly been popular and appealing to youths, who often spend much time navigating across the platforms, exploiting the communication affordances. Whereas social media eases the consumption of news and information, it nurtures the spread and consumption of fake news which tends to influence users' perceptions, particularly, those lacking the requisite literacy to guide safe consumption of fake news. Unfortunately, during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, despite efforts to enlighten people on the safety measures against the disease, the spread of misinformation and disinformation about the pandemic through social media platforms tends to undermine adherence to preventive measures advised by health experts and results in incautious behavior that can worsen, instead of flattening the curve on the COVID-19. This study, therefore, examines the students' consumption of COVID-19 related fake news on social media and the extent to which social media literacy moderates its effect on their perception of the disease. A survey design has been adopted, a convenience sampling was used where a questionnaire was formed on google form and distributed to the students of the two selected polytechnics through Facebook and WhatsApp. A total of 108 responses were

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This interrogates the ability of youth to detect fake news on social media; the effects of the fake news on their perception of the disease, and their behaviour towards COVID-19 protocols. Media literacy is needed nowadays than at any other time due to the influx of multifaceted and complex information disseminated through the Internet, particularly new media platforms. Despite the mainstream media's efforts to enlighten people on the safety measures against the disease, the spread of misinformation and disinformation about the pandemic spread through social media tends to undermine adherence to preventive measures advised by health experts. The implication is risky behavior that can worsen, instead of flattening the curve on the COVID-19. Within this context, the result revealed a significant relationship between the fake news consumption, their perception of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this direction, the study is fundamental to scholars, media practitioners, teachers and students alike.
generated; thus, descriptive and T-test analyses were run and the result revealed that the students possess the requisite literacy to identify fake news on social media platforms, and that has a significant on their perception of COVID-19, despite consumption of fake news related to the disease based on the T-test p = 0.05. Therefore, the result suggests that the effectiveness of media literacy as inoculant moderates the effect of fake news, as asserted by the inoculation theorists, it has no bearing on the long established stereotypical notion that certain diseases are conspiracies to reduce the population of the world.

Subjects: ICT; Interpersonal Communication; Mass Communication

Keywords: Consumption; fake news; media literacy; perception; social media

1. Introduction

Media literacy is most needed nowadays than at any other time in the past due to the influx of multifaceted and complex information disseminated through the Internet, particularly new media platforms. Although those with the requisite literacy and skills are bound to enjoy safe consumption of their ability to discern and disregard fake news, naïve and unguided consumer are prone to the influence of propaganda. Advancements in Internet technologies over a couple of decades have transformed human communication unprecedentedly. In its novelty days, internet technology was mostly used for security or defence and later extended to banking, media, and a few other sectors. Nowadays, modern technologies changed the way people produced, disseminate, and consume news and information. The invention of minicomputers, tablets, and smartphones, coupled with the proliferation of the internet ushered in the social networking websites, like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and other Web2.0 applications (Ahmed & Aondover, 2022).

Unlike mainstream media, the seamlessness of the internet has succeeded in integrating the cyber community in a way that allows social media users to interact with netizens all over the technology-driven world. Sharing diverse news and information across boundaries, cultures, and identities enhances communication experiences, though, with the adverse effect of increased consumption of misleading fake news, hate speech, provocative comments, and disinformation that can result in conflict and other stinking consequences. The new media embodies multimodality of instruments and contents, portability, high connectivity, diversity of consumption, and high interactivity as features that differentiate them from the old media.

Since the eruption of COVID-19 in Wuhan China in the eleventh hours of 2019 and its subsequent declaration as a global pandemic due to its rapid spread, there have been information and disinformation about the novel disease on the media, particularly social media has been the centre stage of spreading multimedia messages across the globe. These social networking sites, on the one hand, play a pivotal role in enlightening, informing, educating, and creating awareness about the disease; its causes, and preventive measures like wearing a mask, social distancing, washing hands and staying at home, on the other hand, it spreads fake news and misinformation (Aondover & Yar’Adua et al., 2022). Fake news related to the COVID-19 pandemic is gradually getting much popularity and increasing the threat facing humanity about the unprecedented spread of the virus to virtually all nooks and crannies of the globe irrespective of one’s location. Although some of this fake news may be mildly misleading. They mostly pose a grave threat of misleading people to rely on baseless and unjustified assumptions at the expense of scientifically proven guidelines offered by experts and influence people’s response to the pandemic (Ahinkorah et al., 2020).

In Nigeria, the index of COVID-19 cases as of February 2020 called for concern, hence, authorities, private organisations, media outlets, and concerned individuals took it as a responsibility to sensitise and enlighten citizens on the disease to cushion the spread of the
novel disease. Fake news about the pandemic deluge social particularly on social media including narratives like Corona is a conspiracy, exaggeration of several victims, certain concoctions can cure the disease, COVID-19 is an elitist disease, and coronavirus is spread by the 5 G network among other misleading information that is inimical to the safety measures and preventive protocols. Particularly in societies whose people lack adequate knowledge and skills to detect, identify and discard falsehood (Aondover & Phillips, 2020). Besides, exposure to disinformation can easily breed wrong perceptions and risky behavior that undermines the effort put in place to rid our societies of the disease. Martens et al. (2018) suggest that strengthening media literacy may help consumers to better assess the quality of news articles but also shifts the burden of quality control from distributors to consumers. Whereas many studies have been conducted on the spread of fake news on social media and its tendency to influence users’ perceptions and behaviour (Lee et al., 2017; Panwar & Arora, 2019a) (Reuter et al., 2019), the role of media literacy in shaping the right perception of social media messages particularly about COVID-19 is scarcely explored. Therefore, this study examines the students’ consumption of COVID-19 related fake news on social media and the extent to which social media literacy moderates its effect on their perception of the disease.

1.1. Purpose and objectives of the study
This study aims to examine social media literacy within the context of fake news consumption and perception of COVID-19 among students of Federal Polytechnic, Mubi and Adamawa State Polytechnics. To achieve this broad aim, the following objectives are set:

1. To examine social media literacy among students of Federal Polytechnic, Mubi and Adamawa State Polytechnics.
2. To find out fake news consumption on social media among students of Federal Polytechnic, Mubi and Adamawa State Polytechnics.
3. To ascertain the extent to which the literacy moderate perception of COVID-19 among students of Federal Polytechnic, Mubi and Adamawa State Polytechnics.

1.2. Media literacy and digital (social) media literacy
Media literacy is a multi-disciplinary terrain cutting across fields of human endeavor including sociology, mass communication, and education; hence, the concept is viewed from different standpoints of scholars. It refers to the ability of users to access, evaluate, analyse, integrate, manage, (re)create, synthesize and communicate information for action or transmission through ‘on or offline media. Media literacy means skills to think critically, analyse, evaluate and consume mediated messages consciously and cautiously. It generally entails the critical examination and understanding of the techniques, technologies, and institutions of media messages for analysis consumption and recognition of media influences on the audience vis-a-vis societal socio-cultural and economic conditions. It also involves the ability to select, analyse, discover, and use mass-mediated messages with due recourse to societal laws, ethics, norms, and values.

The idea of media literacy was born in the 1960s in response to growing skepticism, fear, and resistance to broadcast and mass culture media perceived as agents of reshaping and conditioning peoples’ thinking in line with the imposed technological domination. In 1970 and 1980, media literacy was mainstreamed to change that notion to the fact that television and films are legitimate forms of expression and communication like print media by promoting skills of critical inquiry and analysis at schools, family levels, and other avenues. Initially, the concept was peculiar to mainstream media but extended to digital media with the proliferation of digitised media technology and the internet (Aondover, 2020).

Digital media literacy is the ability to access, understand, evaluate and create online communication. Social media literacy also refers to skills and competencies required to enable cybersecurity to access, manipulate and think critically in creating, analysing, disseminating, and consuming content.
using the available digital technologies in a manner that enhances communication experience and builds seamless communication devoid of risk. It is associated with positive development and empowerment of young people who consume news regularly to be more careful and critical in consuming, producing, and sharing media content using different technologies to promote civic engagement and problem-solving (Shin & Zanuddin, 2019). Social media literacy, a subsection of digital literacy gained popularity as a result of a paradigm shift in communication occasioned by the advent and proliferation of the internet and computer technologies which bolster the digitization of virtually all spheres of human endeavors (Aondover, et al., 2022).

However, since the emergence of social networking sites in the 1990s, platforms including globe.com, geocities.com, tripod.com, and six degrees took a stride step further by allowing users to socialize through chat rooms share news and information, and exchange pleasantries with friends and family members. The sites enjoy fast spread and enhancement with many fascinating features for sharing pictures, (live) video, audio, and text. This has invariably triggered a great shake-up that reduced communication to a palm-size device and bred citizen journalism, online news, blogging, etc. Social media also enhanced communication processes and nurtures sharing culture, easy access to news and information, news aggregation opportunities, multiple means of news distribution, and availability of a plethora of real and fake news. The technological realities eased access to information and heighten the challenges of fake news distribution and consumption with perilous effects on individual consumers and society at large.

1.3. Social media fake news’ influence on perception
Fake news can simply be referred to as a modern form of propaganda. Baran and Davis (2012) see propaganda as a communication strategy adopted to propagate specific ideologies, beliefs, opinions and expectations often to influence people’s perceptions and behaviours through changing the way they conceive themselves and their social environment using mass media outlets. Usually, it is designed and disseminated mostly through media (mainstream and social media) to influence audiences’ perception, opinion and conception of a particular matter in order to reflect the certain goals of the propagandist(s) (Courtney, 2018). It is often deliberately spread to promote a definite political, economic or social motive (Ajakaiye & Dean, 2019). Okoro et al. (2018) categorize fake news into serious fabrications, hoaxes and humorous.

Although the concept of fake news is relatively new, propaganda enjoyed decades, changing proportionately to unfolding global realities. For example, this approach was chosen by Hitler and Joseph Goebbels to brainwash Germans to unleash a memorable terror against Jews. The proliferation of social networking sites prompted an upsurge of fake news to an unimagined degree, particularly among platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Peddlers of fake news usually exploit the popularity of social media to spread falsehood to spreads across multiple platforms to accomplish their mischievous mission (Pate & Dauda, 2019). Despite decades of its existence, studies suggest that fake news gains more popularity than ever due to the prevalence of viable technologies for disseminating various forms of information (Vargo et al., 2017); hence, its adaptation in the U.S. presidential election in 2016 triggered a resurgence of the fake news and sparked debates at both scientific and public domains over its potentiality to influence social media experiences and important social dynamics (Reuter et al., 2019).

Consumption of fake news usually has a grave adverse effect on individuals and society. The tactical deception underlying the fake news contravenes principles of truthfulness, balance and factuality of ideal news, such messages largely influence the way people interpret and respond to real news. It also triggers confusion that impedes people’s ability to detect and forestall the negative effects of fake news (Shu et al., 2016). Hence, a study by Powell (2018) found that (60.9%) believe “fake news is having a harmful effect on its consumer’s well-being by increasing levels of anxiety, damaging self-esteem and skewing their world view.” Although not all fake news are malicious, they are mostly misleading, so those spread through social networking sites are
easily accessed, hence its chances to influence consumers particularly, those with difficulties differentiating the truth from falsehood (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

Fake news is a universal phenomenon prevalent in all communities, though its magnitude varies from one country to another. In Nigeria, fake news enjoy widespread chiefly among youth who constitute the largest percentage of the social media users in the country. A report in 2019 indicates that 95% percent of internet users have engaged social media accounts, and 49% percent of the mare youth between the age of 18–35 (NOIPolls, 2019). During this period of the COVID-19 pandemic, social networking sites appear to be the most popular channel for spreading news about the disease; hence, fake news peddlers utilise the opportunity to spread unfounded information about the pandemic. Usually, consumption of health-related fake news tends to influence the Nigerians’ perception of the pandemic (Ugwuanyi, 2017) and any manipulation of perception affects how individuals interpret the world around them and the events that unfold therein (Kastanakis & Voyer, 2014).

John B. Watson argues that the entirety of human action is a conditioned response to external environmental stimuli as against the assertions that, higher mental processes direct human action (Baran & Davis, 2012). Reuter et al. (2019) argue that perception of fake news influence people’s attitudes and shape social media users’ experiences and behavior to a larger degree. Perception constitutes an essential factor for understanding social media messages and responsive behavior. Although a study shows that the behavior of social media users who are not interested in reading news are rarely affected by the fake news (Panwar & Arora, 2019b). While the prevalence of social fake news among Nigerians is high, frequent exposure to online false information articles impacts news consumption behavior and captures consumer attention longer than true news, particularly when it conforms to their biases (Martens et al., 2018).

1.4. COVID-19 perceptions and fake news
COVID-19 is a short form of Coronavirus disease 2019, a novel disease alias SARS-CoV-2. The disease was discovered first in Wuhan, Hubei province of China on 17 November 2019 (Amzat et al., 2020), henceforth, it kept spreading within the Chinese and subsequently to the entire world wreaking havoc that left millions of families in the state mourning (Ferguson and Bargh (2004). The disease is infectious in nature, with symptoms like cough, fever, loss of smell and difficulty in breathing (Ahinkorah et al., 2020). It is a communicable disease that spreads fast through contact with droplets from particularly the mouth and nose of an infected person, or a surface of the virus carrier and touching mouth, nose, eyes and ears afterwards. With the unprecedented increase in the number of people tested positive for the disease worldwide, The Director-General of the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the outbreak of the disease as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (World Health Organisation, 2020).

Nigeria recorded its first case of COVID-19 case on 27 February 2020 in Lagos, when an Italian citizen who was isolated at the point of arrival at the Lagos Airport tested positive for the virus. Similarly, on 8 March 2020 a Nigerian returnee from Milan was isolated and tested positive for the virus, and subsequently the disease continued to spread throughout the country. Perpetual increase in the disease warranted lockdown in phases in the strongholds of the disease and subsequently, the entire country to cushion the spread of the virus. During the quarantine period, offices, business sectors, markets, religious centres, schools, public institutions and spaces were shut down except for essential services (Ahmed & Aondover, 2022).

Since the eruption of the disease, it has been popular on media pages enlightening and educating people on the Pandemic. The Internet and social networking sites have been at the forefront of spreading information on the symptoms of the disease, preventive measures and much more about the Coronavirus (Ugwuanyi, 2017). However, social media have also been used as a channel for spreading fake news about the pandemic which hampers adherence to protocols recommended by health experts. This prevails at the detriment of the concerted efforts of authorities, individuals and
sctors to combat the transmission of the Virus among citizens. Agusi et al. (2020) lament that compliance with the NCDC directives has been a challenge as people fail to adhere due to either ignorance, misinformation or complete defiance (Ahinkorah et al., 2020).

1.5. Theoretical framework
Social media is an important tool for conveying news and information to a diverse audience in multimedia. Advancement and pervasiveness of technologies empowered everyone with access to the internet to be an originator of multidimensional messages using the available devices for surfing the internet. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, in the last quarter of 2019, social media play a pivotal role in spreading content meant for creating awareness and enlightening people about the disease, including the precautionary measures, signs and symptoms of the disease, free toll numbers to call and the disease hotspots amongst other vital information. The openness of social media platforms bolsters the influx of information from mostly anonymous and unauthenticated sources, which fuels the dissemination of fake news.

In Nigeria, fake news about COVID-19 is ubiquitous on social media platforms orchestrated largely by youth who are the major users of the sites. Hussain et al. (2019) found that university students are the most dependent on social networking sites. The narratives underlying the misinformation include pseudo-therapy, falsification of the pandemic, blaming the 5G network for the spread of the disease, refuting the existence of the virus and portraying quarantine and isolation as financially motivated conspiracies planned by government officials. The widely popular platforms (WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Telegram) have been the grand conduits for transmitting misinformation through peer2peer sharing, postings, charting and binging. Consumption of COVID-19 related fake news on the sites can have a devastating effect in volatile societies like Nigeria as it can easily shape the perception of youth in a manner that exposes them to the hydra-headed disease (Ugwuanyi, 2017).

Moreover, media literacy among the country’s students is nothing to write home about. Moscadelli et al. (2020a) found that proper social media literacy will help cushion the spread of the disease (Jones-jang et al., 2019) as perceived competence in media literacy leads to greater identification of fake news stories (Hussain et al., 2019). Social media literacy in this context is a cogent perception shaper, capable of equipping individuals with the requisite knowledge and skills to critically interpret media content for resistance against any harmful influence of fake news and mediate the relationship between the consumption of harmful messages and subsequent decision-making (Jones-jang et al., 2019). Hence, social media literacy is a sustentative inoculant against fake news (Banas & Rains, 2015) prevalent on social media. It forestalls the harmful effects of fake news by enhancing understanding of COVID-19 to detect ill-motivated information from the plethora of information on the sites. Media literacy inoculates social media news consumers against the harmful influence of fake news by furnishing them with knowledge and skills for critical interpretation and safe consumption of the diverse news stories deluging the platforms.

The inoculation theory posits that prior exposure of an individual to impending persuasive attacks and forewarning them thereupon procreates resistance to attacks on their perception and attitude, the way body systems of immunised persons resist disease (McGuire, 1961). It suggests that pre-exposure to the negative effects of the persuasive attack and conversance with facts strengthen resistance and cushion the effects of Fake news. Whereas medical inoculation involves injecting or feeding an individual a weakened form of a disease to enable them to develop resistance against the disease, in communication inoculation refers to knowledge, skills and competence required to guide the critical creation, interpretation, analyses, dissemination and consumption of media messages (Jones-jang et al., 2019).

Compton et al. (2016), categorised threat and refutational pre-emption as two crucial components of Inoculation messages that bolster recipients’ attitudinal resistance (Banas & Rains, 2015). Whereas Threat means the ability of the message recipients to recognise the vulnerability of their
position on a particular issue and stimulate a protective response, refutational pre-emption exposes receivers to specific content that strengthens their resistance to change.

Therefore, during this pandemic period, when all countries are committed to flattening the curve on coronavirus, new media literacy is crucial to inoculate social media users against the consumption and spread of dangerous fake news that can worsen the situation. An accurate and well-developed health communication tilted towards propagating adherence to safety tips is a key to lives saving during this COVID-19 pandemic crisis as it cushions the spread of the deadly virus (Finset et al., 2020). Therefore, media literacy is an Inoculant that fosters sharing of genuine COVID-19 related information on social networking sites in a manner that shapes understanding for proper argument and counter-argument. It also triggers scepticism and inquest of the motive and pattern of a story to discern and subdue the threat of spreading dangerously misleading news. Moreover, media literacy skills and competencies inoculate social media users against the reckless consumption of fake news, bolster critical thinking ability, encourage proper analysis of COVID-19 related contents and concretise resistance and refutation.

Furthermore, media literacy skills enable social media consumers to identify COVID-19 related fake news on social media and outrightly disregard the content. Thus, the fake news shall have little or no impact on the consumers’ perception, attitude and behaviour towards the disease despite their exposure to the plethora of the COVID-19 related fake news floating on the pages of various social networking sites.

2. Methodology
The researcher adopted a descriptive survey research design to guide the study (Bunz, 2021; Cascini et al., 2022) and a quantitative approach was employed. Hence, a questionnaire was used as a tool for data collection. Thus, the questionnaire was designed using Google form (Al-Naam et al., 2022; Dzieciolowska et al., 2021; Joseph, 2021), and the link extracted thereof was purposively shared (Lucia et al., 2021) with the students of the selected tertiary institutions (Federal Polytechnic, Mubi and Adamawa State Polytechnic) via Whatsapp and Facebook. A total of 108 responses were generated and the data were duly transferred to SPSS for analysis. Consequently, descriptive and inferential analyses were conducted using SPSS. The result of the descriptive analyses and T-test analyses were presented and discussed accordingly.

3. Discussion of the results
Table 1. The demography indicates that the majority of the respondents are male students who constitute 76.9% of the respondents, and female students constitute only 23.1% of the total respondents. Moreover, Table 2 shows that most of the respondents are youth between the ages of 18–25 who constitute 80.6% of the respondents (NOIPolls, 2019), which is followed by those between the ages of 26–35 who constitute 14.8% of the total respondents. Those respondents ranging between the ages of 36–45 constitute only 4.6% of the total respondents, while none of the respondents exceeded 45 years. This shows that social media users are mostly youths as revealed by (Stewart, 2019).

Similarly, finding of the social media literacy, which is crucial for recognising and detecting fake news, the result as presented in Table 3, revealed that 52.8% and 28.7% check the sources of news content posted on social media. Therefore, checking the sources of information consumed on social media indicates the respondents’ skepticism, which is informed by an awareness of fake news on social networking sites and the ability to detect such fake news on the platforms. Similarly, Table 4 revealed that 30.6% and 50.0% of the respondents check the date of the news story to make sure the story is relevant and up to date, and only 3.7% do not care to check the veracity of the news consumed on social. This tallies with the finding of Koeophanuek et al. (2018) that most students have the fundamental skills and capacity for properly using digital tools for communication and daily life actions. Shin & Zanuddin, (2019) found that countering fake news
Table 1. The demography indicates that 76.9% of the respondents are male while 23.1% are female students

| Gender | N   | %    |
|--------|-----|------|
| Female | 25  | 23.1%|
| Male   | 83  | 76.9%|

Table 2. The finding indicates that, 80.6% of the respondents are between the ages of 18–25, while 14.8% range between the ages of 26–35, and only 4.6% are between the ages of 36–45. Hence, none of the respondents exceeds 45 years. This shows that social media users are mostly youths

| Age Group | N   | %    |
|-----------|-----|------|
| (a) 18–25 | 87  | 80.6%|
| (b) 26–35 | 16  | 14.8%|
| (c) 36–45 | 5   | 4.6% |

Table 3. The result of the study revealed that the students are capable of detecting fake news on social media, with 52.8%, and 28.7% checking the sources of news content posted on social media

| Social Media Literacy | N   | %    |
|-----------------------|-----|------|
| I usually check the date of the news story to make sure the story is relevant and up to date. | | |
| Agree                 | 54  | 50.0%|
| Disagree              | 4   | 3.7% |
| Neutral               | 17  | 15.7%|
| Strongly Agree        | 33  | 30.6%|

requires critical thinking, evaluation, and judgment of the public who used to be the victims of misleading information.

Moreover, fake news consumption on social media. The result on the news consumption on social media in Table 5 indicates that 25.0% and 57.4% agreed and strongly agrees to have preferred consuming news on social media. Hence, the heavy usage of social media platforms as indicated in Table 6 which shows that most of the respondents subscribe to more than one social media platform and 28.7% of the respondents use the platforms for more than 5 hours daily, while 6.5% and 19.4% navigate across social media for 3–4 and 2–3 hours daily, respectively. Furthermore, despite the preference for news shared through social media platforms and the hours spent on the sites, the respondents are conscious of the prevalence of the fake news spread on social media (Pate & Dauda, 2019). This is evident in Table 7, which shows that 40.7% and 29.6% agreed and strongly agreed, respectively, that there is misleading information on social media.

Aondover (2020) found that whereas citizens are interested in COVID-19 related information, it is distorted with false news spread on social networks as instant messages. Internet affordances promote the sharing of fake news related to the Coronavirus pandemic among social media platforms users in Nigeria. Aondover and Usman (2022) revealed that cognitive biased influences
Table 4. Similarly, 30.6% and 50.0% strongly agree and agree that they check the date of the news story to make sure the story is relevant and up to date, and only 3.7% do not care to check the veracity of the news consumed on social media.

| I usually check the date of the news story to make sure the story is relevant and up to date. | N   | %  |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----|----|
| Agree                                        | 54  | 50.0% |
| Disagree                                     | 4   | 3.7%  |
| Neutral                                      | 17  | 15.7% |
| Strongly Agree                               | 33  | 30.6% |

Table 5. In the same vein, the results also revealed that the respondents preferred consuming news on social media platforms as 25.0% and 57.4% agreed and strongly agrees to have preferred to consuming news on social media.

Fake news consumption on the social media

| I prefer reading/watching/listening to news and information posted on social media. | N   | %  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|
| Agree                                                                            | 62  | 57.4% |
| Disagree                                                                         | 1   | 0.9%  |
| Neutral                                                                          | 17  | 15.7% |
| Strongly Agree                                                                  | 27  | 25.0% |
| Strongly Disagree                                                               | 1   | 0.9%  |

Table 6. The result revealed that the respondents most of them subscribe to more than as social media platform and it also reveals that the respondents are heavy social media users as 28.7% of them use the platforms for more than a 5 hours daily, 6.5% and 19.4% navigate across social media for 3–4 and 23 hours daily respectively.

In a typical day, how much time do you spend using social media?

| In a typical day, how much time do you spend using social media? | N   | %  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|
| 0–1 hours                                                       | 27  | 25.0% |
| 1–2 hours                                                       | 22  | 20.4% |
| 2–3 hours                                                       | 21  | 19.4% |
| 3–4 hours                                                       | 7   | 6.5%  |
| 5 hours or more                                                 | 31  | 28.7% |

users sharing of unconfirmed news on social media. WhatsApp and Facebook are found to be the most common COVID-19 information distribution social media platforms. Reuter et al. (2019), on the other hand, observe that people often interact with fake news without really identifying or knowing it. Shin & Zanuddin, (2019) stressed that concerted efforts of public and private institutions are crucial in tackling fake news.

Compton (2016) observe that consumers of online news were able to access unlimited reports about the spreading of the disease; however, it might be dangerous as some of them are fictitious.

Moreso, Fake news consumption on social media. The result on the news consumption on social media revealed that in Table 5 25.0% and 57.4% agreed and strongly agreed to have preferred consuming news on social media. Hence, the heavy usage of social media platforms as indicated in Table 6 which shows that most of the respondents subscribe to more than one social media.
Table 7. The result shows that 40.7% of the respondents agreed while 29.6% strongly agreed that there is misleading information on social media, only 5.6% disagree, while 3.7% strongly disagree. A 20.4% of the respondents did not decide.

|                  | N  |   %  |
|------------------|----|------|
| Agree            | 44 | 40.7%|
| Disagree         | 6  | 5.6% |
| Neutral          | 22 | 20.4%|
| Strongly Agree   | 32 | 29.6%|
| Strongly Disagree| 4  | 3.7% |

Table 8. The table suggests that 37.0% agree and 18.5% strongly agree, coronavirus was prepared in a laboratory to target certain countries. While 18.5% Disagree and 3.7% strongly disagree. A 22.2% remain undecided.

|                  | N  |   %  |
|------------------|----|------|
| Agree            | 40 | 37.0%|
| Disagree         | 20 | 18.5%|
| Neutral          | 24 | 22.2%|
| Strongly Agree   | 20 | 18.5%|
| Strongly Disagree| 4  | 3.7% |

Moreover, despite the preference for news shared through social media platforms and the hours spent on the sites, the respondents are conscious of the prevalence of the fake news spread on social media (Pate & Dauda, 2019). This is evident in Table 7 which shows that 40.7% and 29.6% agreed and strongly agreed, respectively, that there is misleading information on social media. Almansa-mart,(2021) found that whereas citizens are interested in COVID-19 related information, it is distorted with false news spread on social networks as instant messages. Internet affordances promote the sharing of fake news related to the Coronavirus pandemic among social media platforms users in Nigeria (Apuke & Omar, 2020). WhatsApp and Facebook are found to be the most common COVID-19 information distribution social media platforms.

Reuter et al. (2019), on the other hand, observe that people often interact with fake news without really identifying or knowing it. Shin & Zanuddin, (2019) stressed that concerted efforts of public and private institutions are crucial in tackling fake news. Moscadelli et al. (2020b) also observed that social media companies have a significant role to play in improving, strengthening, and reinforcing their policies against the spread of “fake news”, particularly during this period of COVID-19. Vraga & Jacobsen (2020) observes that consumers of online news were able to access unlimited reports about the spreading threat; however, it might be dangerous as some of them are fictitious (Kaeophanuap et al., 2018).

3.4. Perception

On the contrary, findings in Table 8 suggests that 37.0% agree and 18.5% strongly agreed that Coronavirus was prepared in a laboratory to target certain countries, while 18.5% disagree and 3.7% strongly disagree and 22.2% did not decide. Therefore, whereas the result shows that the respondents can identify fake news and often check the veracity of information, their perception
that the virus is prepared in a lab to target certain people might be influenced by either the fake news on social media as a result of inadequate concerted sensitization efforts. Hussain et al. (2019) observe that students’ perception of social media message credibility is a predictor of fake news perception.

The result on COVID-19 perception: The result in Table 9 revealed that 47.2% agreed and 27.8% strongly agreed that Coronavirus is real, while, 8.3% disagreed and 16.7% remained neutral. However, not a single respondent strongly disagrees. However, on the contrary, the findings in Table 8 suggest that 37.0% agree and 18.5% strongly agree that Coronavirus was prepared in a laboratory to target certain countries, while 18.5% disagree and 3.7% disagree strongly disagree and 22.2% did not decide. Therefore, whereas the result shows that the respondents can identify

Table 9. The table above indicates that 47.2% agreed and 27.8% strongly agreed with Coronavirus really exists, while, 8.3% disagreed and 16.7% remained neutral. However, not a single respondent strongly disagrees.

| Corona virus really exists. | N   | %    |
|---------------------------|-----|------|
| Agree                     | 51  | 47.2%|
| Disagree                  | 9   | 8.3% |
| Neutral                   | 18  | 16.7%|
| Strongly Agree            | 30  | 27.8%|

Table 10. The results indicate that 39.8% strongly and 37.0% agreed to have been washing their hands regularly with soap and alcohol base substances to avoid contracting COVID-19. While 6.5% disagreed and 0.9% strongly disagreed with the statement about hand washing.

| I wash my hands regularly with soap and alcohol base substances to avoid contracting COVID-19. | N   | %    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|------|
| Agree                                                                                  | 40  | 37.0%|
| Disagree                                                                                | 7   | 6.5% |
| Neutral                                                                                | 17  | 15.7%|
| Strongly Agree                                                                         | 43  | 39.8%|
| Strongly Disagree                                                                      | 1   | 0.9% |

Table 11. The table indicates that 47.2% and 35.2% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed, respectively, that staying at home and avoiding crowded places to cushion the spread of COVID-19. While 2.8% disagreed and strongly disagreed 0.9% do not take the required precautionary. A 13.9% of the respondents did not indicate their position.

| I stay at home and avoid crowded places to cushion the spread of COVID-19. | N   | %    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|------|
| Agree                                                                    | 51  | 47.2%|
| Disagree                                                                 | 3   | 2.8% |
| Neutral                                                                  | 15  | 13.9%|
| Strongly Agree                                                           | 38  | 35.2%|
| Strongly Disagree                                                        | 1   | 0.9% |
fake news and often check the veracity of social media information, their perception that the virus is prepared in a lab to target certain people might be influenced by either the fake news on social media as a result of inadequate concerted sensitisation efforts. Hussain et al. (2019) observe that students’ perception of social media message credibility is a predictor of fake news perception. The implication of these results revealed that, whereas the respondents believe in the existence of coronavirus, they are sceptical about the source of the disease.

4. Conclusion
The study examined social media literacy within the context of fake news consumption and perception of COVID-19 in Nigeria. The study established that social media has provided a platform for access to news and information related to COVID-19; however, they are left with the tasking challenge of determining what news to trust.

Relevantly, there was a high level of awareness about what constitutes fake news, and this empowered the respondents to distinguish between fake and factual news in order to protect themselves against the effects of fake news. Regardless of the site, they get their news from, young adults feel the need to confirm the information they see on social media through other sources. It also discovered that those with perceived competence in media literacy lead to greater identification of fake news stories. Moreover, it also revealed that the students possess the requisite literacy to identify fake news on social media platforms, and that has significance on their perception of COVID-19, despite consumption of fake news related to the disease based on the T-test p 0.05.

Therefore, the result suggests the effectiveness of media literacy as an inoculant to the effect of fake news, as asserted by the inoculation theorists. However, social media literacy lacks the potential of inoculating students against the societal established stereotypical notion that certain diseases are conspiracies to reduce the population of the world. Therefore, whereas media literacy is crucial, measures towards dispelling people from bowing to societal apocryphal and superstitious beliefs are equally pivotal. Thus, further studies can be conducted to ascertain the effect of societal stereotypical notions on media literacy efforts. Moreover, since, the findings of this study suggest that the percentage of male students held sway, female reluctance to participate in an online survey should be investigated as shown in Table 10 and 11.

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Data availability statement
The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article. The study is a quantitative method whereby data were generated using primary sources and the data can be found in the study. The study used Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) to analyse the data.

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