



Social Media and COVID-19 Pandemic: Enhancing Panic or Preventing It?

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Abstract: Social media has provided the best source of information about the COVID-19 pandemic across the world. Using best practices in crisis communication theory as the theoretical framework, this article investigates how social media informs people during the COVID-19 pandemic and its possible impact. This study employed an online survey to investigate whether social media platforms helped to educate and prevent the COVID-19 pandemic or have instead caused panic among the Ghanaian migrants in Beijing, China. The statistical population of this study consisted of the entire 472 members of the WeChat groups of Ghanaian migrants, while purposive sampling was used to select 460 Ghanaian migrants. The findings from this study indicated that the utilization of social media has dramatically caused panic among the Ghanaian Migrant community during the COVID-19 pandemic. Public educations regarding pandemics are done through social media; therefore, there is a need to monitor social media usage. From a critical search of the literature on studies on social media and COVID-19, this article happens to be among the very few papers on how social media has caused panic during the COVID-19 global public health crisis. Also, this study will contribute to both academia and policymaker's knowledge of how information disseminates on similar future public health crises. Also, the current research adds to the previous efforts by researchers and scholars to add to research on social media and pandemics.

Keywords: *Social media, COVID-19 pandemic, panic, public health crises, Ghanaian migrants, China*

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INTRODUCTION

Many scholars describe social media as a double-edged sword. At the beginning of 2020, studies on social media and notably the COVID-19 pandemic has attracted a lot of research, taking various perspectives in terms of investigation (Powell, 2020; Qalati, Ahmed, Mei, Thu, & Sohu, 2020). Pandemic such as the COVID-19 is among some of the severe episodes which directly influence the interaction of the population. Communications is therefore used as a means of preventing the spread of the pandemic or reduce the adverse effects that are associated with the virus. Communication fulfills information sharing and the persuasion effect. The messages create a rational understanding of the problem and persuade the populace to embrace actions that will help in reducing the spread of the pandemic and avoid possible threats. Information sharing or lack of it can easily influence the phases of the pandemic. In the COVID-19 case, social media has proven to be essential in the understanding of the virus and the associated implications (Limaye et al., 2020; Hua & Shaw, 2020).

Social media has gained eminence in the activities that entail different actors and enhancing actions of relief and provision of support to the affected people. The perspective is based on the perception of several previous works,

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whereby social media played a critical role in a mitigating tool that was available to the authorities. The actions created a public understanding of the risk of the event (Culp, 2020).

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in early January 2020 and its subsequent global spread, most of the literature on COVID-19 has centered on how the global pandemic has affected, education, the economy, political relations among others. Several articles on social media and COVID-19 could also be found on how social media is used to enhance the treatment of COVID-19 patients and improved social distancing. In sum, a good number of articles on social media and COVID-19 are primarily focused on, how social media could be utilized by institutions such as health facilities, trade and commerce, and other government ministries and departments during the COVID-19 era. Academic articles on the psychological implications of social media use during the COVID-19 and its effects on the general population are either absent or little, especially among migrants within China.

To effectively take care of the gaps identified by the researcher, this paper mainly aims at exploring the influence of social media and the Covid-19 pandemic, with particular interest this article has the following two objectives to guide this study: 1) identified whether social media is used as a tool to educate people on how to reduce or prevent COVID-19 pandemic, and 2) Does social media use cause panic in the course of COVID-19?.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media and Pandemics

During pandemics, the management of communication is one of the challenges that is faced by the people in authority. The unavailability of vital data among the major stakeholders is among the problems that are linked with the management of the pandemic. It contributes to the proliferation of myths from various genres such as those that are related to looting, social disorganization as well as other known criminal acts (El-Den, Adikhari, & Adikhari, 2017; Hornmoen & McInnes, 2018; Hua & Shaw, 2020; Merchant & Lurie, 2020; Limaye et al., 2020). In this sense, the primary aim of the research is to educate people on the pandemic, undertaking well-coordinated planning of relief work, and providing the necessary support to the affected people, the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the victims of the pandemic among the measures that are put in place. According to Reis, Mattedi, and Barrios (2017), the outbreak and the intensity of the pandemic is mainly depended on the level of vulnerability of the pandemic scenarios as well as the affected countries. The magnitude of the adverse events does not matter a lot as is always perceived (Lin et al., 2020; Simon, Goldberg, & Adini, 2015). Effective management of the pandemic relies on the system that is used to pass information, that is, issuing, distributing, and receiving information.

The achievement of communication management projects in areas that are facing crises is mostly dependent on both the communication and cordial relationship between the parties that are affected. Through dialogue between the government and the community, some level of confidence is created. This is a key element of interaction among the members of the coordination team (Hornmoen & McInnes, 2018; Maal & Wilson-North, 2019). In such a situation, collaboration among different actors is enhanced; therefore, planning becomes simple (Aisha, Wok, Manaf, & Ismail, 2015; Reuter & Kaufhold, 2017). This perspective is supported by Ghassabi and Zare-Farashbandi (2015) who argues that tragedies are socially constructed events and vulnerability to possible risks are among the dynamic processes that are mainly dependent on a sequence of contextual factors. Therefore, Ophir (2018) and Jiang and Ngien (2020) considers the knowledge about the criteria used for the publication of a new pandemic, very essential. There is also the framing of the themes, how coverage impacts the opinion of the public within various stages of the pandemic, and how informative agenda contributes towards the feelings of the populace.

Social Media and Panic during COVID-19 Pandemics

Currently, it is common knowledge of how news on COVID-19 is conveyed through social media. However, some of the information shared through social media can be misinformation. Wrong information, especially about the coronavirus is likely to cause panic (Ahmad & Murad, 2020; Kushner, 2020). With over 3 billion users of social media users, and with the number of subscribers increasing daily, social media provides a ground for people information that would otherwise spread it. Social media travelled much faster than corona (Depoux et al., 2020). A few weeks after the outbreak of the virus in China, there were misleading information and conspiracy theories about the source of COVID-19. The rumours spread in various parts of the world, creating fear among the populace. The information was associated with the current Infomedia systems of the 21st Century which dominated by social media (Aisha et al., 2015; Depoux et al., 2020).

A striking distinctiveness of the current crisis can be termed as a coincidence of virology and virility because the virus did not just spread at a high rate. Still, the information about it also spread like a bush fire, therefore creating a lot of panic among the public members. It is significant to harness social media in a way that can aid public health response. For instance, when China came up with the idea of massive community-wide quarantine, social media was used to communicate the message to the public and give reasons and the importance of the measure. It was also necessary to provide reassurance as well as practical advice to prevent any form of rumour and panic that may be associated with the disease (Hornmoen & McInnes, 2018; Kushner, 2020; Depoux et al., 2020).

Digital technology rise above the social distancing restrictions during the mass quarantine. This is possible through the provision of resources for mental health support with the people who are in a lock-down situation (Chiou & Tucker, 2020). The other means through which social media can cause panic among the public at the time of the pandemic is when the wrong information is allowed to spread. Unlike in the previous pandemics, the World Health Organization has recognized the role that has been played by the mainstream media as well as social media. They have played a critical role in trying to find a possible solution about the cure of the COVID-19 by sharing the necessary information about it. The 2019-nCoV outbreak, as well as response, was followed by a substantial 'infodemic', that is, an over-abundance of information that had both accurate and inaccurate information (Oloo & Demuyakor, 2020; Hua & Shaw, 2020; World Health Organization, 2020).

Social Media and COVID-19 Pandemic Prevention

Social media is a platform that provides one of the best ways of sharing news in the contemporary world, especially when someone is trying to alert people about some serious occurrence that requires immediate awareness and response. Whether it is news about COVID-19 from an individual or a national scope, social media ensures that the message travels as fast as possible (Niles, Emery, Reagan, Dodds, & Danforth, 2019; Gough et al., 2017). Kushner (2020) argues that most people were informed more about the pandemic through social media. Therefore, the purpose of social media during the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be only understood as a tool that is used to communicate and give a description of what happened but to keep the public well informed about what they need to do to control the spread of the disease.

Social media has proven to be one of the most significant vehicles that can be used to distribute information regarding specific risks and dangers (Kushner, 2020). Consequently, Hernández-García and Giménez-Júlvez (2020) and Chen et al. (2020) advises that social media should also contribute towards individual and any countrys preparedness, help in finding out possible threats, and provide a means through which countries can tap into experiences to on how to go about during challenges such as pandemics.

The coverage occasioned by social media can significantly promote measures that can help in the prevention and risk reduction of the pandemic both in public and political agenda (Chen et al., 2020; Volkin, 2020).

The vibrant nature of social media leads to the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic through relating it to the experiences as well as the concerns of the audience. However, behind the journalistic essence to carry out the coverage, there is a need to focus on the main agenda, which places the pandemic at the pedestal and helping to find solutions in reducing its spread. Social media should serve to disseminate the information, assist in guiding the populace, educate, persuade, and minimize peoples concern (Hornmoen & McInnes, 2018). According to the Centre for Disease Control (CDC), it is essential to include social media in the development of both local and national plans as far as the pandemic and the associated risks are concerned. Institutions must-see social as part of the solution and response effort and be able to include in during the planning or any form of prevention exercise. Among the responsibility for the difficulty mainly lies with the emergency response team officials, who according to Chen et al. (2020); Hornmoen and McInnes (2018), have a mixed feeling about including social media in the planning.

It is important to note that with the spread of the virus and proliferation of social media in recent years, various researchers have been mainly focused on reflecting and researching more on the subject (Back, Tulskey, & Arnold, 2020). The research community can play an even more significant role through helping in the development of communication technologies in terms of how the pandemic can be effectively managed to lead to a resilient strategy. This will involve the formulation of policies and making important administrative decisions that must be implemented during and after the pandemic to create a significant impact on the joint capacity that can help in fighting the pandemic (World Health Organization, 2017; Back et al., 2020). One of the most significant challenges is to have social media as allies. This form of relationship enhances the minimization of the associated risks. This ensures that there is education and participation of society in a positive way (Powell, 2020). The coverage of the pandemic through social media should

not be instantaneous or episodic; neither should it centre on survival or emergency services.

This can quickly weaken community resilience and the possibility of reflecting more seriously on the essence of collective pandemic risk reduction (Back et al., 2020). The various approaches allow improving the number of innovative local, national, as well as regional initiatives that will strengthen a formidable resilience.

According to Chen et al. (2020), it is worth strengthening the relationship between social media and the various government structures. Those who are highly vulnerable to the pandemic must also be brought on board to contribute towards finding a strong cohesion and understanding. The need for strong public policies that are aimed at fostering well-coordinated social media citizen participation is essential in the ineffective management of the pandemic (Chen et al., 2020; Siddiqui & Singh, 2016; Smailhodzic, Hooijsma, Boonstra, & Langley, 2016).

Conceptual Framework

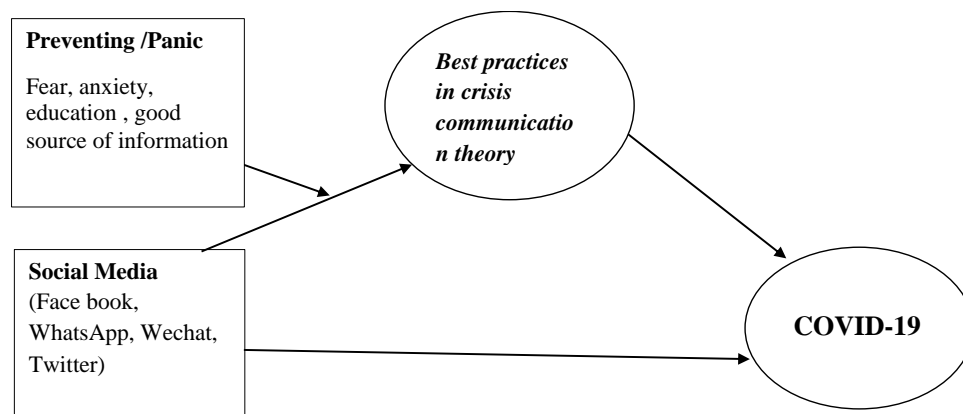


Figure 1 *Conceptual Framework*

Figure 1, The conceptual framework explains the varied social media platforms used by respondents to exchange information during the COVID-19, and implications on respondents, the theory of best practices in crisis communication were adopted. It enables the researcher to identify the actual impact of using social media platforms on Ghanaian migrants in China. The respondents have the choice of selecting which social media platform and other media outlets that will help them get updates on the COVID-19 pandemic. In the end, the majority of respondent feels that social media has caused a lot of panic and anxiety instead of providing very educative measures of combating the COVID-19 pandemic.

Theoretical Framework

Studies in crisis management make use of different approaches based on how communication about the crisis is carried out. There are five different theories and approaches that were summarised by (Goldfine, 2011). They include contingency theory, attribution theory, and the best practices in crisis communication theory. This study makes use of best practices theory as it investigates whether social media use during COVID-19 is causing panic or rather use as a useful tool for educating and preventing COVID-19 among the Ghanaian Migrant community in Beijing China.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the first choice social media platforms used during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How do participants exchange COVID-19 pandemic information?
3. What is the frequency at which participants receive COVI-19 pandemic information on social media?
4. What are the positive feelings gained from receiving COVID-19 information on social media?
5. What is the negative impact of receiving COVID-19 pandemic information?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research utilized both qualitative and quantitative approaches; where a cross-sectional online survey was used to explore whether social media utilization during COVID-19 caused panic among the Ghanaian Migrant community in

Beijing, China, or had rather educated on COVID-19 prevention. An online survey questionnaire was used. Online survey questionnaires are regarded as one of the best research designs. Communication researchers hold the view that the popularity and increase in internet usage help in getting a variety and a huge number of the sampled population to participate in the study. It is also the best and recommended means for researchers to collect data from a wide range of participants (Fox et al., 2020; Nie, Hillygus, & Erbring, 2002). The researcher distributed among 461 Ghanaian Migrants in Beijing between April and May 2020. Out of the 492 questionnaires distributed, 472 returned, of which 460 were valid. This represents 93.6%.

To investigate the leading social media platforms use (WeChat, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, WhatsApp, and blogs) during the COVID-19 pandemic, a 5-point Likert scale was used, responses are 1 = (never) to 5 = (always). Secondly, to investigate how participants receive and share COVID-19 pandemic information on social media, two measures were used. First, explored how COVID-19 pandemic information is an exchange on social media, with a 5-point Likert scale. The items ranged from 1 = (Never) to 5 = (Always). For instance, I had updated information about COVID-19. I included five questions, including the measure. The Penn State Worry Questionnaire (PSWQ) was used to measure a persons tendency to panic (worry) or the negative impact of receiving, reading, and sharing COVID-19 on social media.

To analyze the frequency at which participants receive, read, and sharing COVI-19 pandemic information with friends and family members, a 5-point Likert scale was used to measure. The response items were ranging 1 = (never) to 5 = (every day). An excellent example of such an item for the measure is I receive/read/share coronavirus data to my friends/family members/relatives. The measure included five items.

The study also sought to find out the positive feelings that were obtained from receiving, reading, as well as sharing coronavirus information through social media. 5-point Likert scale was used to take the measurements, and the response is 1 = (strongly disagree) to 5 = (strongly agree). The best example of an item that was obtained for this form of measure is, after receiving, reading or sharing the information about the pandemic, I feel that someone cares for me. This measure had five items. Some variables were used during the study. These variables were also subjected to a reliability test. Cronbach's alpha values showed that the measures that were used were a highly reliable registering score of about 90 93 and each question is depended on the type of answer that was assigned a code. After extraction, there is coding that took place and transfer of the information to a computer as well as the frequency. There is also the percentage of the gathered data calculated through the assistance of the Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS).

RESULTS

This section analyses the data of the study and discusses the result. The areas discussed in the section are the demographic characteristics of respondents, the number one specific social media platform use to source information about COVID-19, the frequency of COVID-19 pandemic information received and shared on social media, how information about the virus is exchanged, the positive impact of reading or receiving information, the negative impact (panic/worry) of receiving, reading, and sharing of COVID-19 pandemic information. In the survey process, the researcher sent questionnaires link to be administered to respondents. However, 460 were completed.

Respondents Demographic Characteristics

From the analysis of the responses received, a majority of them (58.3%) were male while the female gender was represented by 41.5%. The rest were (0.2%). It is essential to note that gender imbalance did not affect the study because the nature of the research, as well as the questions asked, was not in any way gender-sensitive in nature. Additionally, there was no possibility of error as a result of gender imbalance. Nevertheless, because most of the responses to the research questions were mainly dependent on opinions as well as perception, the gender distribution is expected to accommodate both the understanding and opinion of both genders.

A majority (42.6%) of the respondents were between 31-40 years, 28.9% were 41-50, 20.9% were between 20-30 years, 6.5% were 51-50 years, and 1.1% of the respondents were 60+ years' old. Males primarily head many Ghanaian immigrants. Therefore respondents were largely 31-40 years or more and predominantly in the youthful and economically active bracket of the Ghanaian migrant community in China. The study aimed to find out the level of education of the people that were selected to respond to the interview questions. This is because the level of education was likely to influence their ability to respond to the questions asked effectively. And according to the responses, a majority (49.1%) had masters, 30.0% had Bachelors degrees, 9.1% had trade/vocational/Technical education, 7.1% had Doctorate, 3.0% others and 1.1% had High school. The study also describes the frequency of the careers of respondents

such as Student 106 (34.8%) Government employee 79 (17.2%), Private sector employee 196 (42.6%), unemployed 25(5.4%).

Table 1 *Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents*

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	20-30	96	20.9
	31-40	196	42.6
	41-50	133	28.9
	51-60	30	6.5
	61+	5	1.1
Gender	Male	268	58.3
	Female	191	41.5
	Others	1	.2
Education Qualification	High school	5	1.1
	Trade/Vocational/Technical	42	9.1
	Bachelors	138	30.0
	Masters	226	49.1
	Doctorate	35	7.6
	Others	14	3.0
Career	Student	160	34.8
	Government employee	79	17.2
	Private sector employee	196	42.6
	Unemployed	25	5.4

The Number One Specific Social Media Platform Use Respondents Use to Source Information About the Covid-19 Pandemic

In the table below, respondents were asked the number one specific social media platform they use to source information regarding the virus. This includes the social media platform(s) used by respondents, specific social media for information on COVID-19, social media used for credible and reliable information on the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings on social media platform(s) used by respondents are as follows, 112 of them representing 24.3% use WeChat, 157(34.1%) WhatsApp, 174(37.8%) use Facebook, 12(2.6%) use Twitter, 4(.9%) use YouTube, and 1(.2%) use others.

On the Specific social media, that is mostly used by respondents to source information about the COVID-19 pandemic. The table below of the study describes the total number of respondents, along with the frequency of each option. The data is presented in descending order as follows, 'Facebook' 311 with the percentage of 67.6 next 'whatsapp' 117 with the percentage of 25.4, next 'weChat' 22 with the percentage of 4.8 next 'Educative and source of learning' 30 with a percentage of 12.2, next 'Twitter' 4 with a percentage of .9, again "Others" 4 with a percentage of .9, lastly, "YouTube" 2 with a percentage of .4.

Lastly, the social media platform(s) is used for credible and reliable information on the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 2 also shows the frequency of each choice such as from Government(s) official social media pages 109 (23.7%), From WHO official Social Media Pages 173 (37.6%) From Group Social Media Pages 104 (22.6%) From TV/Radio official social Media Pages 35 (7.6%) From individual Social Media Pages 30 (6.5%), and Others 9(2.0%).

Table 2 *The Specific Social Media Platform Used by Respondents to Source Information on the COVID-19 Pandemic*

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Social media platform(s) used by Respondents			
	WeChat	112	24.3
	whatsApp	157	34.1
	Facebook	174	37.8
	Twitter	12	2.6
	YouTube	4	.9
	Others	1	.2
Specific social media sources do you mostly get COVID-19 pandemic information.			
	WeChat	22	4.8
	WhatsApp	117	25.4
	Facebook	311	67.6
	Twitter	4	.9
	YouTube	2	.4
	Others	4	.9
Which of the following particular social media handles do you get credible and reliable information on COVID-19			
	From Government(s) official social media pages	109	23.7
	From WHO official Social Media Pages	173	37.6
	From Group Social Media Pages	104	22.6
	From TV/Radio official social Media Pages	35	7.6
	From individual Social Media Pages	30	6.5
	Others	9	2.0

The Frequency of Covid-19 Pandemic Information Received and Shared on Social Media

The frequency of COVID-19 pandemic information received and shared by respondents discussed in this part of the study. The main areas discussed were how frequently they receive or read COVID-19 Pandemic information on the social media platform(s), and how constantly they follow all COVID-19 Pandemic news updates on social media. The descriptive result is presented in Table. In this section, the interviewees were required to indicate their answer by choosing from the questions. The responses are; strongly never (1) and every day (5). The level of agreement of respondents is deduced from the mean response values attached to each measurement item.

Aesthetically, many of the respondents receive or read COVID-19 pandemic information on social media platforms ($\mu = 4.58$), and I constantly follow all COVID-19 pandemic news updates on social media ($\mu = 4.79$). The standard deviation of .34 and .24 respectively indicate that responses do not vary too much from each other.

Table 3 *COVID-19 Pandemic Information Received and Shared on Social Media*

Measurement Items	Mean	SD
I frequently do receive or read COVID-19 Pandemic information on the social media platform	4.58	.34
I continuously follow all COVID-19 Pandemic news updates on social media.	4.79	.24

Note: [Never (1), Less than once (2), Few times a month (3), At least once a week (4), & Every day (5)].

How Information on Covid-19 Is an Exchange on Social Media

How information on COVID-19 is exchange on social media are discussed in this part of the study. How information on COVID-19 is an exchange or got on social media discussed were related to the use of social media as the only source of looking for information about COVID-19 Pandemic, how often respondents talked to their families and friends on social media relating to COVID-19 Pandemic and the number of times, respondents do actively look for COVID-19 Pandemic information per day.

Table 4 *How Information on COVID-19 is an Exchange on Social Media*

Measurement Items	Mean	SD
I use social media as the only source of looking for information about COVID-19 Pandemic	2.45	1.04
I often talked to my family and friends on social media, concerning COVID-19	2.32	.65
How many times do you actively look for COVID-19 Pandemic information per day?	4.23	.35

Note: [Never (1), Rarely (2), Sometimes (3), Often (4), Always (5)].

In how information on COVID-19 is an exchange or get on social media, respondents that use social media as the only source of looking for information about COVID-19 Pandemic with the mean ($\mu = 2.45$) indicating a low percentage of respondents using only social media for information on COVID-19 only, how often respondents talk to their families and friends about COVID-19 was not left out with a mean of ($\mu = 2.32$), meaning very few of them do talk to their families and friends about the virus. Also the number of times respondents actively look for information about the COVID-19 pandemic is encouraging with a mean of ($\mu = 4.23$) indicating that the majority of respondents do search for information about the virus daily.

The Positive Impact of Reading or Receiving Covid-19 Information on Social Media

The study also analyzed the positive impact of receiving COVID-19 information. Among the key questions, respondents answered are; the positive effects of receiving COVID-19 information, do respondents feel good getting information concerning COVID-19 on social media, and how they think the misinformation on social media on COVID-19 impacts their emotions. Respondents' perceived information they read or received o social media about COVID-19 as very effective as most of them highly agreed to the positive impact it has on them. The Positive effects of reading or receiving COVID-19 information ($\mu = 3.72$), I feel good each time I get information on social media about COVID-19($\mu = 4.22$), I think the misinformation on social media about COVID-19 impacts my emotions positively ($\mu = 4.22$).

Table 5 *The Positive Impact of Reading or Receiving COVID-19 Information*

Measurement Items	Mean	SD
The Positive impact of receiving COVID-19 information on social media	3.72	.34
I feel good each time, I get information on social media concerning COVID-19	4.12	.99
I think the misinformation about the pandemic impacts my emotions positively	3.87	1.02

Note: [Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), & Strongly Agree (5)].

The Negative Impact (Panic/worry) of Receiving, Reading, and Sharing of COVID-19 Pandemic Information on Social Media

This part analyzed the negative impact (panic/worry) of receiving, reading, and sharing COVID-19 pandemic information. These negative impacts (panic/worry) were viewed as how often respondents thought of the pandemic, reading from social media, I panic about contacting the COVID-19 infection, the descriptive result is presented in the table below. Among The negative impact (panic/worry) of receiving, reading, and sharing COVID-19 pandemic news,

I think about the COVID-19 Pandemic ($\mu = 3.87$), From my reading on social media, I panic about contacting the COVID-19 infection ($\mu = 4.12$), I often have difficulty sleeping by being worried about the COVID-19 pandemic ($\mu = 3.84$), I frequently feel negatively affected by the posts about COVID-19 infections on social media ($\mu = 3.32$), and I often do not have the idea of COVID-19 infection freak I outpost on social media ($\mu = 3.10$).

Table 6 *The Negative Impact of Receiving or Sharing COVID-19 Information on Social Media*

Measurement Items	Mean	SD
I do often think about the COVID-19 Pandemic	3.87	.98
From my reading on social media, I panic about contacting the COVID-19 infection	4.12	.99
I often have problem sleeping because of the worries concerning the COVID-19 pandemic	3.84	.87
I often feel negatively affected by social media posts regarding coronavirus infections	3.32	.87
I often do not have the idea of COVID-19 Infection freak I outpost on social media	3.10	.67

Note: [Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), & Strongly Agree (5)].

DISCUSSION

Generally, the results of this study show that using social media to share information is a very vital platform during the COVID-19. This finding from this study is in line with Das & Ahmed, (2020), who in their study on COVID-19 and social media concluded that, despite major concerns on social media utilization, social media is a very essential tool for information exchange.

According to this study, the predominant social media platforms used by respondents, during the COVID-19 were Facebook, WhatsApp, and WeChat. The findings from this study concluded that Facebook was the leading social media platform used by Ghanaian migrants in Beijing, China to access information on the COVID-19. The dominance of Facebook as the social media platform mostly used by people is in line with studies by [González-Padilla and Tortolero-Blanco \(2020\)](#); [Sahni, Sharma, et al. \(2020\)](#). However, the use of WhatsApp and Wechat as other sources of COVID-19 information among migrants in China is unique to this study.

This study finds out that respondents were vigorously on social media during the pandemic, mainly to share information on COVID-19 ([Cinelli et al., 2020](#); [Oloo & Demuyakor, 2020](#)). The study also concluded during the pandemic respondents needed 24-hour updates and information; hence most of them did not have time to television, newspapers, and radio. This article also concludes that, due to how potable mobile phones were, respondents used it as the most important communication tool during the pandemic. All these interesting findings indicated are unique to this study within the context of China.

This study also reported that due to the youthful age of the respondents of this study, it was evident that they will be more savvy to the new modes of communication technology; therefore they would be easily able to adapt to the use of social media and compared to other traditional media outlets. This finding is again in line with [Taylor \(2018\)](#), who did a study on how age influences social media behavior and usage and concludes that 65% of the people between 18 and 45 years prefer to use social media for accessing information than other traditional media sources.

One of the very significant objectives of this study is to determine if social media use during the COVID-19 has caused panic among the sampled population of this research. The finding from this research clearly shows that sharing of COVID-19 information; especially on Facebook, WhatsApp, WeChat, did significantly caused panic among the Ghanaian Migrant community in Beijing, China. This panic resulting from social media usage by the respondents made them unwilling to share any COVID-19 information they acquired from friends and other news networks. This study also found out that, respondents believe and, prefer to share information obtained from interpersonal sources, for instance, face-to-face contact, with the reason being that, those sources are more reliable and do not cause panic. In most cases, the information that comes from social media is mostly from multiple sources and is not easily verifiable. Additionally, the positive findings obtained from the respondents during the COVID-19 pandemic from information sharing indicate that anxieties, as well as uncertainties experienced by respondents during COVID-19, can be reduced through sharing information that is verified and well-updated about the COVID-19.

Again, this study also reported some positives and benefits of social media use during the COVID-19. Some respondents in this study believe that social media can play a very pivotal and positive role in COVID-19 education and prevention. The respondents hold the view that social media during COVID-19, especially during lockdowns and isolations have helped reduced psychological impacts on them to a little extent. These findings are also in line with a study by [Hernández-García and Giménez-Júlvez \(2020\)](#) [Chen et al. \(2020\)](#), who have all concluded that social media has helped to reduce the psychological impacts of COVID-19 on the affected communities and countries.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

It is evident from the findings of this study, that social media utilization caused high panic among Ghanaian migrants in Beijing, China, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, it is recommended that social media users need to practice a lot of caution when especially when using social media for information sharing during pandemic like COVID-19. It also recommended that people who shared COVID-19 information through social media platforms cross-check for accuracy and reliability of that information before it is shared with the general public, to help facilitate a more efficient COVID-19 prevention. The study serves as an essential point of reference for researchers, policymakers, and individuals in the field of social media and health communication. Nevertheless, because of the constraints in time, the researcher was only able to analyze only a selected number of communication platforms with only one country as a target. It is expected that further studies will look into other media outlets and use other countries for comparative analysis.

This research made use of qualitative analysis with descriptive statistics. It is therefore expected that further quantitative analysis will assist find more information about what has been proposed by the researcher. The researcher did not, in any way try to claim that the outcome of the study is safely generalizable. However, they believe that the investigation is significant as an initial step towards deciphering the attitude of the populace as articulated in social media.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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