

## **INFORMATION SHARING AND COVID-19 INFORMATION SHARING PLATFORMS**

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### **Abstract**

The paper identifies information sharing and Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) information sharing platforms. It evaluates the types of information sharing platforms such as mass media, television, radio, and social media: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The paper also explicates the role of these media in sharing information in this period of pandemic. It also defines some concepts such as information, information sharing and attempts to provide brief history of Port Harcourt City and corona virus disease. The study depicts the relevance of this information sharing mechanism in curbing the spread of COVID19 pandemic in the Port Harcourt city. The study therefore recommended that the government should properly oversee the information industry in the state and democratized information sharing in the society. The stakeholders in information industry should also be trained in other to give a reliable broadcasting and to maintain a level of integrity in their information sharing in Port Harcourt.

**Key words:** Information, Information sharing, platforms, Corona virus 2019.

### **Introduction**

This definition indicates that motivations/interests/benefits of actors on both sides should be considered. Progress in all spheres of life generally is dependent on Information Sharing (IS). Individual, business, institution, organization, invests or engage in activity/technology to

facilitate and encourage information sharing. It is also the determinant factor of levels of advancement or growth either in technology, science, medicine, etc. Tajla (2002) defines information-sharing as collaboration between two groups of actors in order to exchange information with the purpose to achieve their individual or common interests, Mohamed H. K., & Abdul-Shukoor, C. K. (2010), identifies the act of sharing information as an attribute of humanity itself, Sharing information is performed regularly, even spontaneously, via formal and informal channels. Information is typically shared face-to-face, in departmental meetings. Written reports, telephone conversations, and other traditional forms. Information sharing is a process of exchanging information or transfer of information from one person to the other.

The process or activity always involves two categories of actors: information providers (or sharers/informants/disseminators) and information receivers (or recipients/ seekers). Some of the platforms that enhance information sharing are social media, mass media, mobile phones, web specific, virtual learning etc. Social media is one of the major means of communication during this pandemic. It is a platform that lets people participate in social networking. It is also use for news updates, marketing, education, entertainment etc. People can communicate by reading trending topics on twitter, and they are more likely to share a link to a friend's blog than MSN's homepage. Other types of social media are Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Printerest, Google etc. These media have increased human communication and interaction, and indeed made the world small by reducing the space or gap between sender and recipient of the information, (Ogonu, 2020).

Mass media have played a significant role in information sharing. The first media was print media via newspaper, after, radio was invented, followed by the television and now social and web media where the world is almost turned into a global village. It should be noted, that all these media have affected human lives in their information sharing behaviours. It is worthy of note that radio has even being translated into local dialects and languages in other to share information to the local or rural local communities. Information sharing has been a major means of creating awareness in combating and controlling the spread of this deadly COVID-19. This Corona virus disease is a novel disease that started at a region of Wuhan, China since December 2019 till date. According to the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control report (2021), It has caused the death of over one million people and has affected over 33milliom and spread almost all over the countries of the world. The best way to control and prevent the spread of the disease depend on non-pharmaceutical prescribed measures by the World Health Organization (WHO), Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and other health

professionals. Some of the measures are social distancing, hand washing and sanitizing, masking of faces, self- isolations etc. These measures cannot be put into use without adequate awareness, sensitization and information sharing to the people.

### **Over view of Port Harcourt city and information sharing platforms**

**Port Harcourt** also called Pitakwa is the capital and largest city of Rivers State, Nigeria. It lies along the Bonny River and is located in the Niger Delta. As of 2016, the Port Harcourt urban area has an estimated population of 1,865,000 inhabitants, up from 1,382,592 as of 2006. The city of Port Harcourt, according to Ogionwo (1979), the area comprising the municipality of Port was prior to 1918, largely farmland and secondary forest. The urban area was established by the colonial government when in May 1913, Lord Lugard acquired approximately 25 square miles of land from the indigenous Ikwerre and Okirika people. The author made it clear that Port Harcourt's origin is rooted in the 1909 discovery of coal in Eastern Nigerian's Udi division. Effective explanation of the coal fields required the development of distribution network to enable coal to be carried to Lagos and other West African Ports. The search for a site that would be suitable both as a seaport and a railway terminus led to the exploration of Bonny River and eventually to the discovery of natural harbour which was subsequently named after Lewis Harcourt who served as a secretary of state for colonies from November 7, 1910 to May 26, 1915.

He adds that Port Harcourt is lying about forty feet above sea level and a very few degree above equator, Port Harcourt has the reputation of being next to Lagos, the mostly climatically comfortable city in Nigeria. Because of its location on the edge of the Niger Delta's mangrove foreshore, much of Port Harcourt was not habitable, consisting in main of winding creeks and muddy swampland. In the early 60's the city's population was spread among a number of dry-land residential lay-outs ranging from the plush, low density Europeanized sections that accommodated the city's expatriates and Nigeria upper-class to the mud and thatch villages of Port Harcourt's small indigenous settlements. Then the greatest population of Port Harcourt was concentrated within the medium-to-high density sections known as the Main Township and Mile 2 Diobu.

The main city of Port Harcourt is the Port Harcourt City in the Port Harcourt Local Government Area, consisting of the former European quarters now called Old GRA and New Layout areas. The urban area (Port Harcourt metropolis), on the other hand, is made up of the local government area itself and parts of Obio-Akpor and Eleme accordingly. Port Harcourt, which

is the current capital of Rivers State, is highly congested as it is the only major city of the state. In 2009, a law was passed by the Rivers State House of Assembly and governor Amaechi's administration to spread development to the surrounding communities as part of the effort to decongest the Port Harcourt metropolis. The Greater Port Harcourt region, spans eight local government areas that include Port Harcourt, Okrika, Obio-Akpor, Ikwerre, Oyigbo, Ogu-Bolo, Etche and Eleme. Its total population was estimated at 2,000,000 as of 2009, making it one of the largest metropolitan areas in Nigeria. But that number has greatly increased according to recent studies.

Port Harcourt is a major industrial centre as it has a large number of multinational firms as well as other industrial concerns, particularly business related to the petroleum industry. It is the chief oil-refining city in Nigeria and has two main oil refineries located at Eleme. Both refineries process around 210,000 barrels of crude oil a day, both operated by the Port Harcourt Refining Company. Rivers State is one of the wealthiest states in Nigeria in terms of gross domestic product and foreign exchange revenue.

### **Brief history of Corona virus**

The coronavirus disease 19 (COVID- 19) is a novel transmittable disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 SARS-CoV- and 2. The Covid-19 outbreak was first reported to World Health Organization (WHO) on the 31 December, 2019 in Wuhan, China's Hubei Province, as a localized disease. Coronaviruses are said to be a large family of viruses that are known to cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). According to Qiu, (2018), coronavirus is thought to be an animal virus arising from an as-yet-unknown animal reservoir (perhaps bats and snakes) that spread to other animals (Civet Cats) and then to the first infected human in Southern China in 2002. COVID- 19 initial transmission appeared to be from an animal source, but there are also strong evidences now that it can be transmitted from (person-to-person) who are just mildly ill or not even showing symptoms yet. World Health Organisation (WHO) has just described the new Coronavirus outbreak as pandemic and a global health emergency as its spread within a short continues to rapidly increase unimaginably across countries and continents affecting not just lives but also threatening livelihoods. It is now national and international security.

The virus has affected millions of people causing widespread serious illness across a large population and many deaths across many countries since its inception. According to Chikwe Ihekweazu, the Director, National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), at a press conference of the Presidential Taskforce on COVID-19 held at Abuja, the number of cases from over the world has raised to over thirty million with over 1,000,000m deaths. The viral outbreak has posed a major destabilizing threat to the global economy.

According to John Hopkin's University Hospital United State of America (USA) report on 14 January 2021, the virus has affected over 215 countries and territories around the world and has claimed at least 1,963,169 deaths lives globally, while more than 90,759,370 million cases are still suspected. Based on these, experts across the world expressed worry and panic over the effect of this pandemic, its negative impacts on population, health and bringing the global economy to a recess. The recent outbreaks compared side-by-side with the devastating effect has become international problems and speedy calls for urgent international actions. Part of the actions to contain the widespread of the virus was adoption of precautions such as: Mandatory Movement Restrictions within countries and nation, restrictions on international travelling and airlines, land and sea boundaries of countries worldwide. Tourism (International and Local) has also been lockdown, ban for public gatherings, ban on churches and mosque activities, sit-at-home directive, closing of business sectors. Factories, schools, churches etc. It is an indisputable fact that these decisions taken have a devastating socio-economic effect but the whole world has to abide considering the fact that there is no clear solution to the pandemic yet. Nigeria as a member of International Community is experiencing her unpleasant share in this ugly unfortunate devastating development. Nigeria in like manner recorded her first infection index case of coronavirus in Lagos on 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2020. The rate of confirmed cases has reached more than 100,087 and the death is above 1,358 as at 10th January 2021, (w.w.w.who.int). The Rivers State shares of this experience, on 25 March 2020, with a case from a girl who came from outside the country and visited Ozuoba in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. This became the genesis of the pandemic in the state. The rate of confirmed cases has reached more than 3,913 and the death toll is above 67 as at 10th January 2021, (covid19.nede.gov.ng).

### **Information Sharing**

Information sharing is an activity through which ideas, opinions, facts and documents are transferred or transmitted from an individual (or group) to other people, The most common

verbs depicting the viewpoint of transmission include disseminate, give and provide. Information may be shared at different levels in private and public spaces, at work or non-work settings, by people from different disciplines and depending on the content requested. According to Rafaeli and Ravid (2003), information sharing is simply the act of disseminating messages... the messages may be communicated in written, verbal, visual forms. Information can also be shared on websites and through conventional media. Web-based information sharing technologies and social networking have played major roles in this period of pandemic where personal contact is highly restricted. Social networking sites are built and designed to provide online services and a platform for people to socialize and exchange information. Ogonu, (2020) outlined some social network platforms as follows Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Google+ etc.

Which have enhanced information sharing. Communication and interaction thereby reducing gap between sender and recipient of the information. Social media are online platform created by people using highly accessible and scalable publishing technologies. At its most basic sense, social media is a shift in how people discover, read and share news, information and content. It is a fusion of sociology and technology, transforming monologues (one to many) into dialogues (many to many) and is the content democratization of information, transforming people from content readers into publishers. Social media has become extremely popular because it allows people to connect in the online world to form relationship for personal, political and for the sake of information sharing. Therefore, it is a platform that lets people participate in social networking.

Social networking sites are built and designed to provide online services and a platform for people to socially interact and exchange information. Social networking service such as twitter has garnered attention from researchers and practitioners due to its considerable potential for information sharing or diffusion. Twitter is a posted 140- character messages (a.k.a. "tweets") networking service that has a tremendous influence on individuals. It is believed that individuals' perceptions of the argument quality and source credibility of a received tweet play a major role in their information sharing behavior via the perceived level of usefulness of the information and self- efficacy in regard to the sharing of a received tweet. Tweets on the danger of corona virus pandemic created a serious awareness in the Port Harcourt metropolitans and in addition the existence of external links in a tweet about COVID 19 moderated the impact of argument quality on users' attitudes toward received tweets. Based on these, right judgments, decisions and safety measures.

Were taken to avoid the contamination of the virus by the people Furthermore, Facebook is undoubtedly the most popular social media platform available for interaction among the users. It is primarily a social network site; however it can be used for promoting. Advertising a business and other social campaign like COVID-19 pandemic. We can use face book to promote a brand, market a company, or create awareness about a service or product. Facebook service can enable awareness and reach out to a wider audience, as a social networking provider, it lets you invites and connect with friends, send messages and pictures like and comment or share them. It becomes a handy tool in informing the people about the social happening around them, especially this period of corona virus disease in the world. It can be used to share network with friends and colleagues, and share information with them about the danger of the corona virus disease.

Another networking platform used during this COVID 19 era to sensitize the Port Harcourt residents is Instagram. It is an online photo sharing social web service that lets people share their life and experiences with friends and others through a series of pictures captured with a mobile device or any other camera. Instagram also supports video uploads and lets the users instantly share photos on several social sites. Pictures of effected people within and outside the country were displayed in the instagram page and the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and other safety apparatus. These serve as lessons and made the people take adequate precautionary measures against COVID-19. Instagram as one of the fastest growing social platforms has gained immense popularity over the years. It has also become one of the most essential social networks amongst people, and continties to develop in popularity with over 400+million dynamic users a month (Goecks and Elizabeth 2004). It is no wonder that Nigeria Centre for Disease Control NCDC uses it to create awareness of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the same vein, mass media played significant roles in information sharing during this COVID-19 pandemic eras among residents of Port Harcourt metropolis. Some of the media used in reaching the general public during this pandemic era include broadcast news (radio and television), the internet (online newspapers, news blogs, news videos, live news streaming, etc.) or social media. The printed media forms such as newspapers, magazines, journals, newsletters etc., were rarely in use during this era because of the avoidance of infection. Although print media readership seems to be reduced in the last few decades, but many residents of Port Harcourt still read newspapers every day or news magazine on a regular basis. Some readers gather every day in newspaper selling spots, reading, arguing and debating on one issue or the other thereby creating awareness in the society. Newspapers cover wide variety



of fields such as politics, business, sports and arts, and often include materials such as opinion columns, weather forecasts, and reviews of local services. Others are obituaries, birth notices, crosswords, editorial cartoons, comic strips, current events like COVID-19 and advice columns.

Newspapers have traditionally been published in print (usually on cheap. Low-grade paper called newsprint) this made the cost to be very cheap and affordable to the general masses. However, today most newspapers are also published on websites as online newspapers. In this information age, journalists, information professionals and the news media (new and old) play a central role in providing us with access to information beyond our immediate experience, and in facilitating citizen participation in good governance, open democratic stable and healthy societies. The influence of print media is therefore significant and has helped the people so much especially during this period of COVID-19 in informing them about the disease. Another media that play a major role in sharing information about COVID 19 pandemic is the radio. According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2012). A radio is a piece of electronic equipment, which is used to listen to programmes that are broadcast, such as, music news, drama lectures and other bits of information. The radio is the most popular and commonly used of all the electronic media. This is because the radio can be operated with both electricity and batteries. Pocket size transistor radio sets are affordable and can be purchased and used by rural dwellers that do not have electricity and in the urban city in case of power outage. It is the most convenient way of getting information across to the populace, in their house, offices, farms etc. Many automobiles have installed radio sets, so that information can reach the user even as he is travelling. It is worthy of note that radio has even been translated into local dialects and pidgin English in order to cover the less literate dwellers of Port Harcourt metropolis, (Ogonu, 2020).

Television is another media whose role on information sharing is vital. TV as it is popularly called is an electronic media system for transmitting visual and sound that are reproduced on screens, chiefly used to broadcast programs for entertainment, information, and education. The television set has become a commonplace in many households, businesses, and institutions. It is a major vehicle for advertising and publicity, it is known to be pervasive audiovisual electronic medium that cut across geographic, ethnic class and cultural diversity. Television is the single binding thread of these urban dwellers like Port Harcourt, the one experience that touches young and old, rich and poor, learned and illiterate.



From mechanical television to electronic television, there continues to be a shift in how televisions are viewed today. TV is very popular, not only could you hear the information being transmitted over TV waves, you could also get a visual to what you hear. This made TV media system unique and information powerful that attracts the attention of masses especially a metropolitan city like Port Harcourt. Government and other health agencies use it during this pandemic to sensitize the citizens about the disease and its preventive measures.

This media created awareness among the Port Harcourt city dwellers and became a source of precautionary measure to the people. It is a thing of note that all these media have affected human life in their information sharing.

### **Information Sharing in Port Harcourt**

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused a limit or inhibition to the traditional means of information sharing like face to face communication, storytelling, conversation, meetings etc, and information is generally disseminated to the people through radio, television, and the internet. The government owns a number of the existing communications media, although, some private media is also permitted to operate. As a regulatory authority, the Rivers State Ministry of Information and Communications is responsible for overseeing the entire broadcasting system, as well as promoting competition, and ensuring the provision of qualitative services throughout the city. Since English is much more popular in the country's urban areas, media content such as publications, news, radio and television programmes are available mostly in the English language. Many of Port Harcourt's radio stations are in private hands with just a few which are state owned. Radio Rivers, founded 1981 offers programs in English and various indigenous languages.

Its operator is the Rivers State Broadcasting Corporation (RSBC), As of December 2013. More than 5 local FM stations some of which were privately owned by media conglomerates Silverbird Group, South Atlantic Media, Globe Broadcasting and Communications and The Multimesh Company were already commercially licensed and Rivers State Television Government owned TV station on UHE channel 22. There are some social media platforms in Port Harcourt which are used in sharing information such as: Port Harcourt Specials which is the fastest growing Social media platform in Port Harcourt having over thousands of people following. It gives updates on what's happening in the city and people that are in the city. It is popular on Instagram and Facebook and was established in 2018. Again, Port Harcourt Blog

which is also major social media platform for information, news and advertisements from around Port Harcourt and Rivers State at large. Port Harcourt blog's social media pages are known for posting only true information alongside funny yet honest feedback about Port Harcourt from residents of Rivers State thereby making them one of the most trusted social media platforms/brand with the highest level of integrity, great audience and a very high level of advert conversion rates (Rivers State 2010 gazette). These media are used to sensitize the people of Port Harcourt Metropolis on the danger and remedy of corona Virus disease.

### **The Relevance of Sharing Information on COVID-19 pandemic**

Information Sharing is relevant because we all need to be aware of what is going on and understand the consequences of what may occur especially at this period of world devastation through COVID-19. The knowledge we gain through information sharing at this time becomes the only hope to cushion the effect this deadly disease in our society.

The channels of control or prevention are through the mobile phone messages, social media transmission, and other ways, the spread of all kinds of rumours through these media cannot be overlooked which exacerbated the spread of social panic and buying of drugs (Chloroquine) as rumour has it to prevent and control COVID-19 as mentioned by an Officer of International Organization, (World Health Organisation report 2020). Some others dwelled on mixture therapy of garlic, lemon juice and warm water etc; but whether these were effectives for COVID-19 was not scientifically established at this time.

Based on this. Dr. Chinwe Ihekweazu, the Director, National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) during The Presidential Task Force on Covid-19 Press Conference at Abuja (Nigeria Centre for Disease Control report 2020), warned that the use of Chloroquine and its derivative for the management of COVID-19 disease has not been validated and approved by the WHO. These information sharing platforms really assisted the state in fighting against the pandemic. The prescribed measures to curbing the pandemic would have been futile without an adequate information through these platforms put in place by media and the government agencies sensitizing the people on the menace of this deadly disease called Covid-19. As a result, the harm from COVID-19 was significantly mitigated with a timely response. This has ameliorated the rate of the infection in the state comparing to other state like Lagos, which was declared an epicenter to COVID19 in Nigeria, knowing full well that Rivers State is the second commercial hub of the nation and center of the oil producing state where expatriate with the oil and gas

workers live. This earlier awareness created by the state government and the people through information sharing platforms reduced the rate of the infection drastically.

## Conclusions

This paper explores the information sharing platforms as a means of controlling and preventing the spread of corona virus disease COVID 19 among inhabitants of Port Harcourt metropolis. The study also evaluated the contribution of some information sharing media during the period such as, television, social media, etc. It is proved that this media are effective and supportive during this period in fighting against the spread of this devastating disease in Port Harcourt.

## Recommendations

The study proposes the following recommendations:

1. The media staff should be trained adequately to make a proper broadcasting in order to curb, prevent and control the spread of Covid-19 in our society.
2. The people should be sensitized on the way to make a relevant information to the different platforms to benefit the people especially in this time of pandemic.
3. Government should fund the information infrastructures to make information platforms affordable by the private companies in the state
4. Democratization of media should be enhanced by the government, so that people will be willing to share information to one another through the various platforms in order to avert an impending harm of Covid-19 on the citizens.

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