



## The Role of Social Media Platforms in Facilitating COVID-19 Pandemic Protocols

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><i>Received: 10 December 2021</i></p> <p><i>Reviewed: 03 January 2022</i></p> <p><i>Revised: 15 January 2022</i></p> <p><i>Accept: 20 January 2022</i></p>	<p><b>Purpose:</b> The COVID-19 pandemic led to pain and panic across the globe and social media became the base for information sharing and communication. The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of social media platforms in facilitating COVID-19 pandemic protocol in society.</p> <p><b>Methodology:</b> The study looks at the role of social media facilitating COVID-19 pandemic healthcare protocols. The study deployed desktop research methodology to address the research objective.</p> <p><b>Findings:</b> Through the study, the research established that social media assist people to understand different protocols to protect themselves, keep social or physical distance, stay at home and many more.</p> <p><b>Originality/Value:</b> The role of social media in society is no longer new, research on the impact in observing COVID-19 pandemic protocols is missing in the literature.</p> <p>Social media provides a decentralized platform for bidirectional communication, information sharing, and the flow of content from different sources. The platforms allow users (individuals) and organizations to generate content and distribute it among the audience in real-time during a crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic is a global health crisis that exposed the world's weak health systems and brought about national lockdowns in different parts of the world. The lockdown measures saw an increased dependence and application of social media platforms to distribute information, communication and content among users. This article looks at the role of social media platforms in facilitating COVID-19 pandemic protocols across the globe</p>
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## **1. Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic was declared a global pandemic in 2020 due to its global spread, impacts, and threats [2, 4]. The human race has experienced different forms of pandemics in the past, and different printed and online media have been used to deliver content to the public. However, the current penetration of social media users has made communication and content sharing faster and more efficient. According to Abbas et al. [1], the human race has witnessed different pandemics that have changed various aspects of human existence and well-being, as in the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic dealt a heavy blow to the global health system and every aspect of human life [7]. The huge blow left the world and its citizens to source information about the pandemic, the history, the control, prevention, management, and way forward. Social media became a suitable platform for many individuals, healthcare organizations, healthcare workers, government, and other stakeholders to provide answers to worrying questions and inquiries from the public. However, the infodemic keeps increasing and creates confusion and panic in society due to widespread content on social media platforms. Many studies have been conducted looking at the role of social media in distributing awareness and prevention of the pandemic [2]. However, little is known of the role of social media platforms in facilitating the declared and existing COVID-19 pandemic protocol globally.

## **2. Methods**

There is no human contact in this study, only secondary literature data was used. This article adopted a desktop literature review in looking at existing literature on academic online databases. The literature was sourced from Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and many others. The search only considers academic papers that discuss the title, the headings, and the subheadings. The evaluation of the suitable articles began with the paper title, abstract, and introduction.

## **3. Social Media**

Social media platforms provide the means for information and news distribution, but propaganda and infodemic exist [11]. The lockdown period made it easy for people to depend on social media platforms to interact and engage with family, friends and colleagues [6]. Nozari et al. [10] used a Neutrosophic Fuzzy Programming Method to Solve a Multi-Depot Vehicle Routing Model under Uncertainty during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Never in the history of pandemics have information and news become as quickly accessible by humans. However, social media platforms made quicker access and news communication of pandemic news to the public [5, 16]. Then, the role of social media platforms in pandemics cannot be underrated in the present generation. Social media platforms can link audiences from around the globe with their content and information.

## **4. Social media roles on the COVID-19 pandemic protocols**

Governments and healthcare organizations initiated many prevention and mitigation protocols worldwide to control, manage and mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic spread and slow down the curve. The protocols are social or physical distancing, washing hands, wearing face masks, lockdown, work and school from home, avoidance of large crowds, and many others. These protocols are widely

discussed on social media platforms, and much misinformation was generated in the process in the form of infodemic. Social media platforms provide immediate news and information about the COVID-19 pandemic, and the public spends enough time searching and reading news and content watching videos on these platforms [1]. The heavy dependence on social media news and content can be worrying because of the distribution of infodemic. According to Cinelli et al. [4], infodemic is regarded as misinformation about a pandemic and management of the outbreaks. The presence of infodemic is felt across social media platforms because the platforms allow users to generate their content and publish them (self-journalism) and share it among interest groups. The penetration and diffusion of infodemic on social media platforms place huge challenges on authorised healthcare organisations and government health ministries to deliver the true message and protocols to the public. However, the positive roles of social media platforms in facilitating COVID-19 protocols cannot be undermined. According to Cinelli et al. [4], social media information has the potential to influence public behaviour and attitudes. Social media platforms such as Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and many others are used to distribute large amounts of content to downplay the rumours and infodemic about the COVID-19 pandemic. In the COVID-19 pandemic, some countries implemented their own protocols to control, manage and mitigate the spread. In enforcing and spreading the message on the COVID-19 pandemic protocols, social media platforms were used. According to Centres for Disease Control and Prevention [3] and World Health Organisation [17], here are some of the commonly known COVID-19 pandemic protocols and slangs:

**Protect yourself:** This is a broader slang used in the campaign as initiated by international and local health organisations on social media platforms and other media as a protocol to manage the COVID-19 pandemic spread. Hashtags were immediately begun on social media platforms such as #Corona, #InThisTogether, #COVIDIOTS, #FlattenTheCurve, #COVID-19, #COVID19, #HealthForAll, #Coronavirus and #VirusCorona [20, 12, 14].

**Social or physical distancing:** This protocol aimed to prevent and slow down the COVID-19 pandemic person-to-person contact and spread. The protocol has a 1-meter, 1.5-meter, or 2-meter distance from the next person with hashtags such as #SocialDistancing [8, 15].

**Stay at home:** This protocol was initiated to close human contact and to minimise the spread. Over social platforms, hashtags such as #StayHome, #StayHomeStaySafe, StayHomeStayHome, and #TogetherAtHome [8, 15] were used to encourage and enforce those not feeling well to stay indoors to slow down the infection curve.

**Avoid large crowds:** This was a protocol used to encourage the public to avoid crowded places such as bars, pubs, clubs, restaurants, movies and cinema houses or theatres, and many others. The protocol generated #Crowdedplaces, #Safety, and many others.

**Washing of hands:** The washing of hands often was an early initiative or protocol declared by healthcare organisations for the public to use to prevent, control, and mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. This slang flooded social media platforms. Among the hashtags are #WashYourHands and #KeepHandsClean. Washing of hands campaign should be done after using the restrooms, before and after eating, touching of faces, caring for another person, visiting out, and many more.

**Wearing of face masks:** Wearing of face masks is now a norm as a protocol measure. Some hashtags were used such as #WearYourFaceMas, #WearAMask and #MaskItOrCasket #MaskOn vs. #MaskOff, #MasksKill vs. #MasksSaveLives, #MasksDontWork vs. #MasksWork, #NoMaskMandates vs. #MaskMandate and #NoMaskNoEntry started trending [9].

**Clean and disinfect:** Always clean your surfaces such as home and car door handles, phones/smartphone, laptops, keyboards, toilets, and many other places.

**Cough and sneeze in the elbow:** When wearing a face mask, cough and sneeze inside the mask and always change the mask often. Hashtags such as #Cough were used on social media to encourage and enforce compliance.

**Lockdown:** As the COVID-19 pandemic was declared a pandemic, many countries went into national lockdown to flatten the curve and the spread. Hashtags such as #LockdownChallenge, #LockDown, #COVID-19, #FlattenTheCurve, #LockDownNow [13], #FilmYourHospital and many others were used to enforce and connect with the people.

**Daily monitoring of one's health:** Monitor COVID-19 pandemic symptoms such as fever, coughing and shortness of breath. Immediately, a hashtag #Health and ProtectYourself was used to encourage and enforce COVID-19 pandemic protocols.

**Meet people outdoors:** Outdoor gatherings are safer than indoor gatherings are. However, limited numbers are permitted in the gathering.

**Get vaccinated:** The general public is encouraged to get COVID-19 vaccinations. This protocol will help in reducing casualties and fewer consequences of the pandemic. #Vaccinated, #GetVaccinated, #VacciNation, #Jab, #AstraZeneca, #LetsGetTheJabDone, #VaccinePassports, #Vaccine, #StayHomeSaveLives, #Vaxxie, #PlanYourVaccine, #StopTheSpread, #IGotVaccinated, #CovidVaccine, #CoronavirusVaccine and so on.

**Screening:** This protocol was implemented at the point of entry to shopping malls, airports, shops, religious centres, learning institutions, financial institutions, and many others places. The screening mainly involves checking a person's temperature to determine whether any COVID-19 symptoms, such as a fever, could manifest.

**Isolation and quarantine:** This protocol was used to isolate people who might show any COVID-19 pandemic symptoms. This protocol was implemented to slow down the spread and flatten the curve. This generated hashtag such as #QuarantineAndChill, #Isolate, #Isolation over social media platforms to enforce and stress the importance of fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 5. Conclusion

Humans and their societies are no longer independent from each other. Globalization is a reality, and social media platforms are making it more real. Social media platforms provide community sharing of information and content. This article presented the role of social media platforms in facilitating COVID-19 pandemic preventative and mitigation protocols. Effective usage of social media platforms lies in the user community and intentions. In future, researchers can consider researching social media platforms' roles in facilitating these protocols from countries, regions, and individuals' perspectives.

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