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SEPT 2021

Compendium

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Photo by Jeff Ackley on Unsplash

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A selection of short pieces published

Between pulpit conspiracy and Covid-19 vaccine

By Jennifer Ugwa | July 16, 2021

In a world overrun with fake news and conspiracy theories, the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus ushered in a wave of global fear and doubt, especially on coronavirus vaccine. In this report, Jennifer Ugwa writes on how religious leaders' perspective of the vaccine sways pentecostalist acceptance of the jab.

For the second time that cold Sunday morning in her sparsely decorated sitting room in Iba Estate, Ojo, Lagos, Nigeria, Ngozi Obidike, 46, a devoted member of the Assemblies of God Church, emphatically reiterated that she was not going to take the COVID-19 vaccine. Her pastor's sermon about the jab was not positive – neither was it encouraging.

"Have you not heard what they (pastors) have said about it? Anybody who takes it does so at their own risks. It is part of the sign of end-time," she said.

Obidike had made her choice and joined the rapidly-increasing number of Pentecostalists saying that the vaccine contradicted their religious beliefs

Editor's Note:

The 'infodemic' has affected all religions and denominations: and of course, many atheists are superspreaders of fake news. But if a well-meaning but misinformed religious leader takes a stance on vaccines, in Nigeria, it can affect millions.

Despite many of these rumours starting out as fringe conspiracies in the West, and particularly American conservative groups, many are shared online and repackaged to appeal to 'African identity'.

Vaccine rejection is one of the few topics that would unite most ultra-orthodox jews, Boko Haram, and a number of Lagos' megachurches, no major world religious council is opposed to vaccination. Religious leaders from the Vatican to Jerusalem agree that is kosher, halaal, and morally acceptable to take the jab, and indeed are pushing for a fairer distribution of vaccines: and only immunised pilgrims were allowed to Mecca in 2021.



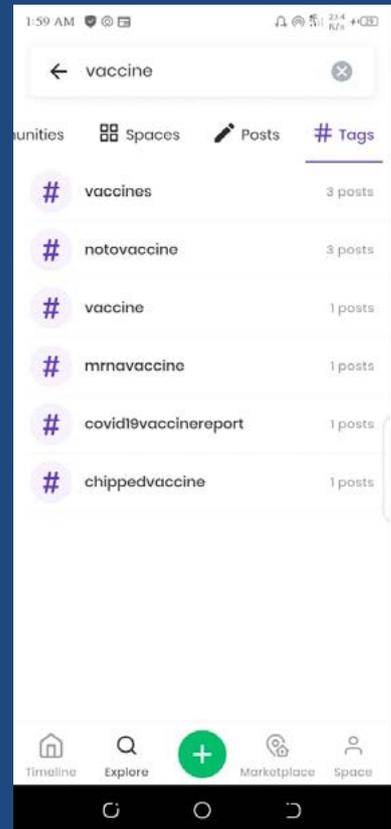
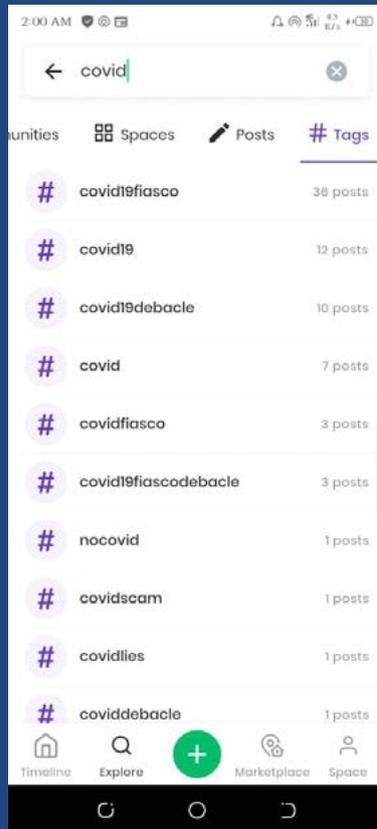
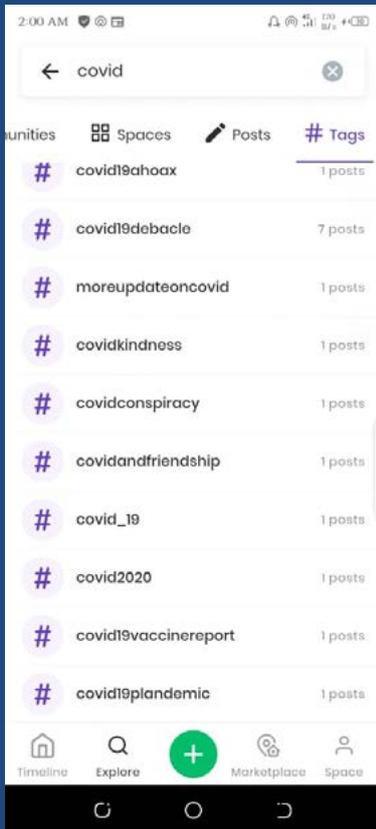
Just ahead of China's big Lunar New Year festival in 2020, health experts announced the outbreak of COVID-19, a novel virus similar to the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARs) that led to the death of nearly 800 persons globally between 2002 and 2003.

The virus' origin is yet to be identified, but it was reported to have first jumped from animal to human in Huanan seafood market in Wuhan, Central China. With 3.5 million deaths, preventive measures and vaccines are the world's main defence against the virus. However, conspiracy theories and unverified information have created an aversion for the shots even before the arrival of the first COVAX doses in Nigeria.

"What will happen to those who have already taken the vaccines? What will happen to them in five years? Normally, these things(vaccines) will be tested for 10 years.

"Those that are giving you the vaccine do not plan for you to ever again have a normal life. Forget it. The plan is for you to never have a normal life. And this is not a conspiracy theory."

These were the words of the popular televangelist, Chris Oyakhilome, founder of LoveWorld Incorporated —also known as Christ Embassy— in a live cable broadcast preached in 2020 during the early stages of the outbreak.



Oyakhilome claimed the virus was illusory and the Polymerase Chain Reaction(PCR) test was a fraudulent means to fulfil an inoculation ruse by world governments that would upturn the normalcy of life and Christian activities.

With a population of over 200 million and deep religious roots, where 45.9 per cent of the populace are Christians, 35.3 per cent as Pentecostalists or non-Catholics, the position of religious leaders on some issues often constitute the basis for some citizens' decision-making.

The position of religious leaders on some issues often constitute the basis for some citizens' decision-making.

For a Pentecostal megachurch like Christ Embassy with over 300 branches in Nigeria and an approximate 13 million members globally, the position of the Oyakhilome quickly became a footing for scepticism and distrust for the vaccine.

In Lagos, Sandra Enyinna, a member of Christ Embassy church, said she "won't take the vaccine for as long as it is not compulsory."

"If you listen to Pastor Chris's sermons, he said these things with facts, he has proof and who are we to question how he got them," she said.

Enyinna, who also acknowledged the possibility of the existence of the virus, said she got 'healed' when she contracted the virus by using herbal remedies.

"I have a lot of objections about that vaccines. Why are they not creating vaccines for sickness like Hepatitis B and all of a sudden COVID-19 came, and they already have a vaccine for it and are making it compulsory for people to take," she said.

A random search using 'covid' as a keyword on Yookos,

an online social networking platform owned by Oyakhilome exclusively for church members but later expanded to allow public access, revealed over 35 trending hashtags on the App like #covidfiasco #covid19debacle #covidscam #notovaccine #chippedvaccine.

Public discussions on Yookos about the virus and vaccine revealed antipathy for the jab and the coronavirus.

"As far as I am concerned it's (COVID-19) dead when the Man of God declared by the Spirit last year March 27 global day of prayer," said Tifaglor, a user on Yookos

Another user, identified as 'ikoso', shared a 2011 edition of The Sovereign Independent, a dissolved newspaper alleged to have published controversial opinion pieces and conspiracy theories that were reshared under other trends in support of this belief.

Perhaps, if the disposition of this Pentecostal assembly about the vaccine on Yookos were determined via popular opinions and video contents, a majority—if not all—members of the church might never accept the COVID-19 jab.

Oyakhilome's sermons on COVID-19 have been fined and criticised and may even rank top on the list of disputed religious leaders' opinions about the vaccine. However, he is not the only member of the clergy who believe there is a sinister motive to COVID-19.

Christopher Okotie is another influential televangelist and pastor who claims there are conspiracy agenda underfoot and says that Bill Gates, co-founder of Microsoft Foundation, is "the protagonist of everything (Coronavirus) we see today."

In a 15-minute video on Youtube, which he titled 'The COVID-19 Mystery', Okotie claimed the vaccine's introduction was "an attempt to copy the pattern of the communion" by the propagators of evil.

The video has over 1759 views.

Expert Perspectives

Conspiracy theories and doubts on the origin of the virus aside, rapid development and side effects of the

The position of religious leaders on some issues often constitute the basis for some citizens' decision-making.

vaccines are also reasons for apprehension by believers in Pentecostal circles who spoke with this journalist.

In a phone interview, Bola Oyefolu, a Professor of Virology with the Department of Microbiology at Lagos State University, said the distrust for the vaccine was not unfounded as new variants indicated that the virus epitope or antigenic determinant predictions were incomplete.

"There is more to this than the eye can see, and I don't understand why they are producing the vaccine and making it mandatory for people to take it," said Oyefolu.

"It is not the best to roll out a vaccine that is not totally protective. A vaccine should be all-encompassing in respect to what the pathogen could be."

The virologist said that the production of the vaccines was fuelled by international political propaganda.

Meanwhile, Doctor Tobin Ekaette, Consultant Public Health physician Irrua Specialist Teaching Hospital, Edo State, said popularly held opinions about the use of the vaccine and virus to usher in a 'new world order' was unfounded and 'very terrible information'.

"I understand that these developments could be scary for the layman, but it is about striking a balance between withholding and saving lives," she said.

Ekaette noted that under the emergency use authorisation, positive phases of laboratory results had proven the efficacy of the vaccine.

"The vaccine is still going through phase three—marketing evaluation—but nonstop research is still being carried out every day."

While some popularly held misconceptions about the coronavirus and the vaccines have been debunked, citizens' apathy still stalls the acceptance of the vaccine in Nigeria three months after the country received its first dose of the vaccine.

This is an edited version of a story by Jennifer Ugwa which originally appeared on ICIR Nigeria

Covid-19: Monitoring the social media pandemic

By Ileri Brian Murimi | July 21, 2021

Editor's Note:

Controversial French virologist Luc Montagnier did not say that Covid-vaccinated people will die within two years. This is good news, because in some countries – like Britain – almost 90% of adults have received the jab. Globally, this theory would involve the deaths of several billions.

Incidentally, one of the easiest ways to fake a video is to change the audio track. And one of the easiest ways to cover your tracks is to make sure that the new audio track is a translation, which explains why the original audio is absent. Or just add subtitles, as happened here.



Misinformation, always attributed to prominent figures to earn credence, has plagued the cyberspace and held back the fight against the pandemic.

“All vaccinated people will die within two years.”

That is the terse introduction to a widely-circulated WhatsApp message claiming Nobel Prize-winning virologist Luc Montagnier. It confirms that there is “no chance of survival” for people who have been vaccinated against the coronavirus.

“There is no hope and no treatment for those who have been vaccinated already. We must be prepared to incinerate the bodies.”

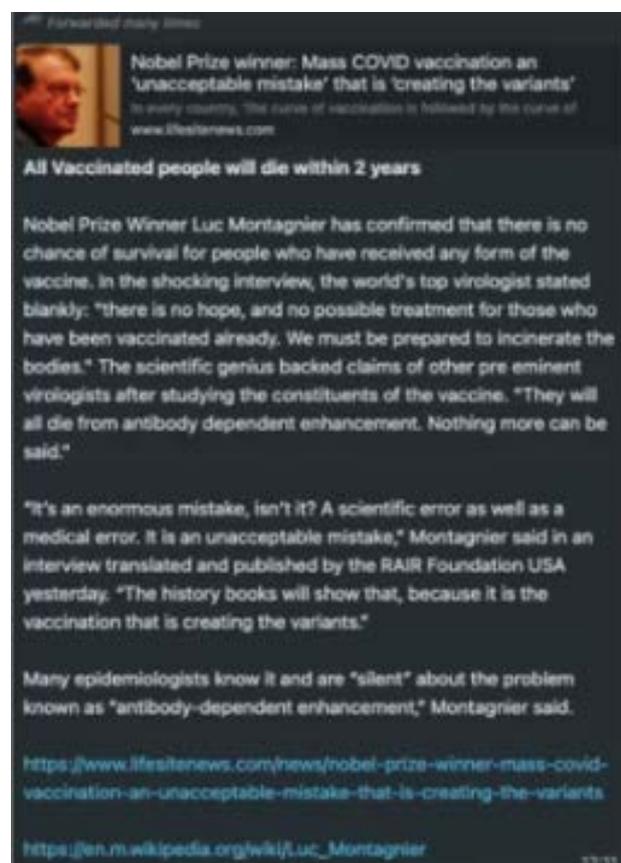
But the message, falsely attributed to Montagnier — who has made anti-vaccination comments in the past — is misleading and the claims are not backed by any science or data.

Such misinformation, always attributed to prominent figures to earn credence, has plagued the cyberspace and held back the fight against the pandemic.

The misleading information has circulated widely across Kenya via social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp.

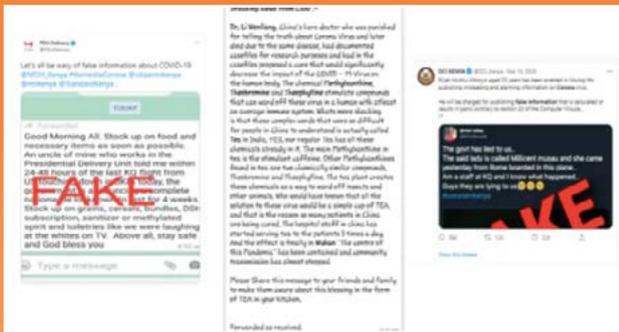
Even before Kenyan authorities announced the first confirmed case more than a year ago, videos and images fanning misinformation spread.

Empty grocery shops, long queues at checkout counters and the all-too-familiar snatched-up rolls of toilet paper are among the most typical photos and videos that permeated the internet.

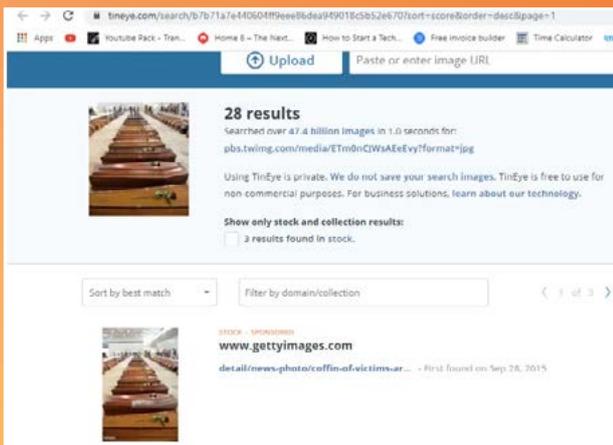


A screenshot of the WhatsApp message claiming falsely that vaccinated people will die within two years.

In mid-March 2020, people flocked to shops and supermarkets across the country to stock up before being ‘quarantined’ — grabbing whatever they believed necessary for survival.



Screenshots of some of the misinformation and disinformation that had a great impact in Kenya.



A screenshot of a Google Reverse Search of an image widely spread in Kenya to depict deaths caused by COVID-19 in Italy.

The deluge of misinformation took fact-checkers to task.

Africa Check, a fact-checking NGO, set up a live guide on coronavirus fact checks at the onset of the pandemic and has debunked tens of fake claims.

According to the Africa Check, misinformation around the country has spread in various forms, including hoaxes, falsified content, misleading claims, and scams. Most of the information points towards cures and vaccines. The ecosystem of false information has also proved effective by adding to the believability of the claims.

Debunking the myths

One recent claim was made on April 24, 2021 by Mercy Mwangangi, Cabinet Administrative Secretary for Health who overstated Kenya's position seven in terms of vaccination distribution.

"Right now, we are number seven on the leader board, and we intend to climb that leader board," Mercy Mwangangi said at a televised press briefing.



Kenyans line up at Quickmart supermarket in Nairobi a day after the first coronavirus case was announced in the country. Photo: Crime_KE/Twitter

The misinformation has served to stroke fear than encourage proper health guidelines. After the first case was confirmed in Kenya, an image of coffins with rosses atop went viral in country.

This is false. Available data shows that Kenya, although relatively ahead of its East African neighbours, has vaccinated less than 2% of its population.

A video of the misleading claim has at the time of publication been watched by 162,000 people on Twitter and Facebook.

By the time it was shared, Kenya had vaccinated 1.3 people per 100 against the average of 23 per 100 in the world. As of April 24, 2021, the top 10 countries had vaccinated between 47 and 121 people per 100, according to the Our World in Data coronavirus vaccinations tracker.

According to Dr Subiri Obwogo, a consultant in health policy and systems strengthening, leadership attitudes and perceptions matter a lot in any pandemic.

“Having a strong health care system counts just as much as a country’s leader’s perceptions in combating a pandemic. As we often say, the benefit of good information isn’t knowledge; its action,” said Dr Obwogo, who also sits at the advisory team of the government’s response to Covid-19 in informal settlements.

The misinformation has served to stroke fear than encourage proper health guidelines. After the first case was confirmed in Kenya, an image of coffins with rosses atop went viral in country.

Claiming to have been shot in Italy, it warned Kenya to avert a similar situation.

However, a quick image reverse search using TinEye backdates the photo to September 28, 2015. The photograph taken by AFP photographer Alberto Pizzoli shows coffins of victims seen in a hangar of Lampedusa airport on October 5, 2013, after a boat with migrants sank, killing more than a hundred people.



As the coronavirus pandemic enters its second year, many people have grown accustomed to coronavirus statistics, and record-breaking case counts. The internet appeals across the country show the severity of the problem and personalize it by focusing on people’s struggle for help – a potent reminder that the situation is far from over. 

This is an edited version of a story by Ileri Brian Murimi which originally appeared on Tv47

Do vaccines turn people into vampires?

By Bukola Ayeni | July 22, 2021

Editor's Note:

No. They don't.

These claims were made before vaccines had successfully completed trials: since the rollout of vaccines at the end of 2020, more than 3.74 billion vaccine doses of various types have been administered, mostly in richer countries that could afford to buy vaccines in bulk. It has been described as the biggest vaccination programme in world history.

To date, nobody has been turned into a vampire as a result of having taken the vaccines.



Pastor Chris Okotie

The claim that the vaccine will make people suck blood is false and should be disregarded.

Photo by Dylan Sauerwein on Unsplash

SENIOR pastor of Household of God Church International Ministries Reverend Chris Okotie claims that the Covid-19 vaccine turns people into vampires. He explains that Bill Gates' Genetically Modified Food (GM Food), when taken with the vaccine, puts people in communion with Satan.

In a video interview published on 12th, July 2020 on YouTube, which has been viewed 375,000 times, Okotie described the COVID-19 vaccine as satanic. He said, "What Bill Gates is doing under the auspices of the United Nations is to make sure that you receive the food, the GMOs. When you eat that Genetically Modified Food that you eat and you take the vaccine, you have entered into communion with Satan, Lucifer. And that communion involves blood.

"Now, since the blood of Jesus is not what he is talking about, or what he has to offer, he will require you to seek blood somewhere else. And the only place where you can find blood is in another human being. So, one of the things that the vaccine will make you do is to become a vampire who needs to drink blood for sustenance.

"But we, as Christians, don't drink the blood, we drink wine, which is an emblem of the blood and that sustains us spiritually. But his communion will require you drinking blood consistently so that you are a vampire for your sustenance."

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), "GMO foods are foods derived from organisms whose genetic material (DNA) has been modified in a way that does not occur naturally, e.g. through the introduction of a gene from a different organism."

The blood of Jesus for Christians symbolises being bought back to God and for the cleansing of sins inherited from Adam, Christians say.

Vampires are creatures that feed and live on the blood of humans.

Chris Okotie claims that the GMO symbolises the bread and the vaccine symbolises blood, and taking both means being in communion with Satan, just like Christians take communion in remembrance of Jesus Christ.

In August 2020, via WhatsApp broadcast, he instructed his members not to wear face masks, claiming that "when a man is standing before God in church wearing a shield or mask, he is denying the finished work of the cross." According to him, wearing a face mask is 'denying the finished work of Christ.'"

This WhatsApp broadcast was a major news story in several newspapers. His instruction came before Covid-19 vaccine was available in Nigeria.

The Nigerian government imported four million doses of the first batch of AstraZeneca COVAX in early March, and President Muhammadu Buhari and Vice President Yemi Osinbajo were vaccinated publicly on Saturday, March 6, 2021, to encourage citizens to also take the vaccine.

Executive Director of the National Primary Health Care Development Agency (NHCA) Faisal Shuaib disclosed this in a press conference held on the 1st of June, 2021 which was also published on the NHCA website. He said nearly that two million of targeted



eligible Nigerians had been vaccinated with their first dose of the Oxford/Astrazeneca vaccine.

“There have been cases of mild, moderate and severe and adverse effects following immunisation (AEFI) since we officially rolled out COVID-19 vaccination on March 15, 2021. The AEFIs symptoms ranged from pain and swelling at the site of vaccination to more serious symptoms such as headaches, abdominal pain, fever, dizziness and allergic reactions.”

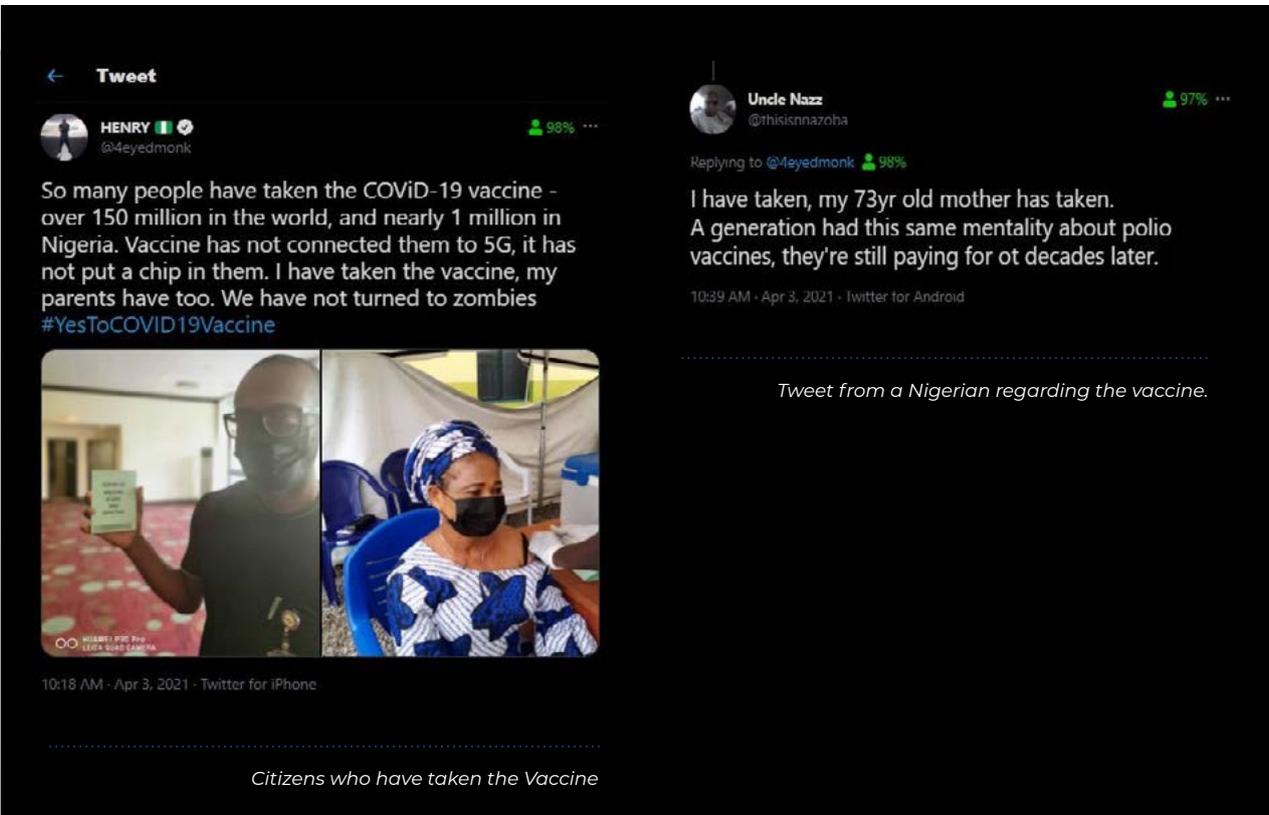
Globally, as of 6:45pm CEST, 14 June 2021, there have been OVER 175,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19. As of 10 June 2021, over two million vaccine doses had been administered, as provided by the WHO.

Responses from a few that have taken the vaccine in Nigeria are as follows (see box below):

The WHO, NHCDA and Nigerians that have taken the vaccine affirm that it does not turn people into vampires as Chris Okoties claims. The claim that the vaccine will make people suck blood is false and should be disregarded. 

This is an edited version of a story by Bukola Ayeni which originally appeared on ICIR Nigeria

The Nigerian government imported four million doses of the first batch of AstraZeneca COVAX in early March, and President Muhammadu Buhari and Vice President Yemi Osinbajo were vaccinated publicly on Saturday, March 6, 2021, to encourage citizens to also take the vaccine.



Tweet

HENRY @4eyedmonk 98%

So many people have taken the COVID-19 vaccine - over 150 million in the world, and nearly 1 million in Nigeria. Vaccine has not connected them to 5G, it has not put a chip in them. I have taken the vaccine, my parents have too. We have not turned to zombies #YesToCOVID19Vaccine

Uncle Nazz @thisisnnaoaha 97%

Replying to @4eyedmonk 98%

I have taken, my 73yr old mother has taken. A generation had this same mentality about polio vaccines, they're still paying for ot decades later.

10:39 AM · Apr 3, 2021 · Twitter for Android

10:18 AM · Apr 3, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

Citizens who have taken the Vaccine

Tweet from a Nigerian regarding the vaccine.

Factcheck: Do Covid-19 vaccines hamper fertility?

By Adeola Ogunlade | July 14, 2021

Editor's Note:

No. But the persistent false rumour that vaccines affect fertility has been around since before the pandemic. But since Covid-19, the myth has resurfaced. It is possibly based on the 'cautious' way in which all new drugs are tested: a 'healthy adults' group is tested, which excludes pregnant women and other potentially vulnerable groups. As the safety of a particular drug is proven, more real-world data is gathered. Almost four billion vaccine doses have been administered to date, including many women who have successfully conceived. We know that vaccines do not contain ingredients that are known to be harmful to pregnant women.

The medical advice for women who want to conceive is to take a vaccine.

Photo by Jonathan Borba on Unsplash

False claims that a vaccinated person can “shed” spike proteins, which allegedly causes menstrual irregularities or other harmful effects on the reproductive health of unvaccinated women who are in proximity to them have circulated on the Internet.

“I heard that COVID-19 vaccine affect the fertility of unmarried women and is something to really worry about especially for some of us who still want to give birth to children”.

Titi Akosa, is asking the question, at a training workshop for people involved in the vaccine rollout in Lagos. She got the information from a women's group on social media.

Even though she works as a frontline worker for the Lagos health ministry, a false claim she fears would lead to vaccine hesitancy among unmarried women in the state.

Records from the Lagos State the Ministry of Health COVID-19 Vaccine Analysis show that more than 318,000 people have been vaccinated so far, according to estimates. The number of female who came out to receive the vaccines are 158,279 with males constituting 159,637.

To combat the COVID-19 virus that has ravaged the world in the last 16 months, the World Health Organisation (WHO) in December 2020 rolled out its first set

The screenshot shows a news article from Baptist News Global. The title is "Anatomy of a lie: How one private school amplified a persistent COVID vaccine myth" by Mark Wingfield, dated July 22, 2021. The article features a photograph of three people: a man in a dark polo shirt, a man in a blue suit, and a woman in a colorful patterned top. The text below the photo states: "The misinformed but determined founder of a private school in Miami has been identified as a key link in perpetuating one of the most convincing lies about the COVID-19 vaccines." It further explains that an analysis by NPR tracked down the source and communication path of the false claim that COVID vaccines affect female fertility. A sidebar on the right offers to get BNG headlines in the inbox and features a link to an analysis about the Black experience at Colonial Williamsburg.

Screenshot from Baptist News Global Website

of approved vaccines. The vaccination programme has been undermined by a wide range of misinformation.

One of these myths, is that it affects conception in women.

How then did this misinformation originate and how widespread has it become?

The vaccination programme has been undermined by a wide range of misinformation.



vaccinated teachers in the future, causing a controversy in a country which, has seen more than 600, 000 Covid-related deaths and in which 160 million people have been vaccinated, according to WHO statistics.

Using the Yandex search engine, it appears that the misinformation about the link between COVID-19 and infertility in women may have originated from an article by Lance D. Johnson in Naturalnews.com, a website which is described by Wikipedia as 'a far-right, anti-vaccination conspiracy theory and fake news website.'

Despite the fact that these theories are not based on scientific consensus, and originate from within fringe groups in North America, they are spread widely on social media across Africa.

As Titi Akosa noted earlier, there is growing concern within Nigeria's medical and public health community about the web of misinformation regarding the harmful effects of COVID-19 vaccines, in particular, its link to infertility in women.

In an interview with this reporter, Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist Dr. Samuel Oluwatosin Adu, he explained that there is no conclusive medical evidence he is aware of at this time that covid-19 vaccine adversely affects the reproductive health of any woman or man of reproductive age.

The Yandex fact-checking tool shows different articles and pictures about the effect of vaccines on women's health. Different sources wrote for and against the claims with various pieces of evidence to support their positions.

False claims that a vaccinated person can "shed" spike proteins, which allegedly causes menstrual irregularities or other harmful effects on the reproductive health of unvaccinated women who are in proximity to them have circulated on the Internet.

These claims were cited by the Centner Academy, a private pre-school in Miami, Florida, which is owned by an antivax campaigner. It removed vaccinated teachers from its classrooms in April 2021 and has refused to hire

“I drank black tea with salt to keep Covid-19 away”

By **Tabitha Otieno** | July 20, 2021

Editor's Note:

In the early days of the pandemic, very little was known about the disease. Rumours were rife, and with no cure in sight, bizarre, fake stories started to circulate with alarming speed; and not just amongst the superstitious. Educated and professional people, even a handful of medical professionals, were known to spread rumours without factchecking their source, although most of these 'endorsements' were as fake as the cures themselves. Variations of the idea that salty or hot water could prevent the disease were a global phenomenon: in mid March 2020 a meme suggesting that 'doctors in Japan' advise gargling with saltwater was widely factchecked and found to be false, but continues to resurface even now.

Tana River, Kenya: Busara Naaman was deep in her sleep at 3 AM when a loud knock at her bedroom door interrupted her sleep.

Her nanny was standing at her door, phone in her hand, saying she had urgent news to tell her. Her parents had called her at 2 am with news of a possible cure for COVID-19.

There was no time to waste for the nanny, so she woke her boss.



Photo by Mukul Madwa on Unsplash



Busara Naaman

"I drank tea with salt, not sugar. So it was a lot of tea leaves and salt so that we protect ourselves from coronavirus," Naaman narrated.

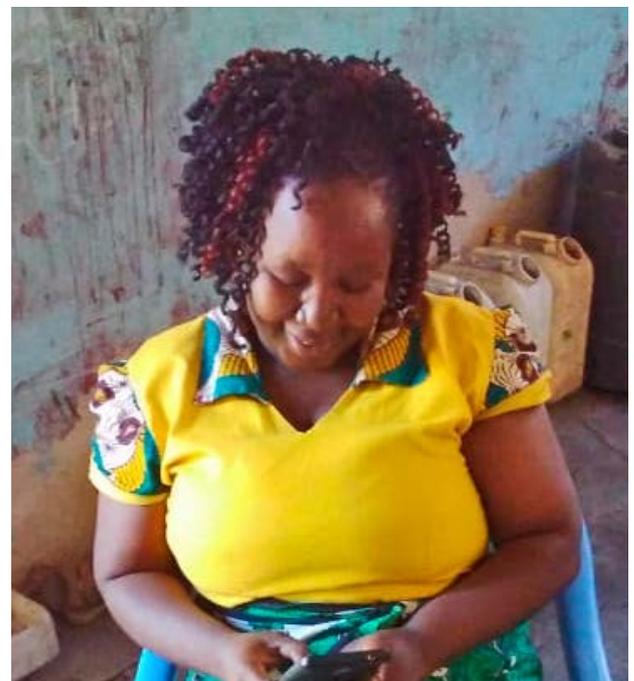
"According to a story from the village, a baby was born and that baby spoke for a few seconds. He told people that they should drink tea and salt as early as 3 am so that they can protect themselves from corona, so that is what we did," she recalls.

Naaman's village is in Tana River county, located in the Coast of Kenya. The only person she trusts and thought could be easy to reach at that particular hour to verify the information is her father. The reason being he stays within the area and the message about black tea came from him as they have a tight father-daughter relationship.

"I called my father at 3 am and asked him, did you hear the story? He said yes. So I asked him, what do you think we should do?" Said Naaman, mimicking her conversation with the father.

"He told me it is good to do what people are doing because if you don't, what if it is the last time many people are going to heaven and you don't do it? It means that you stay behind. So don't lag behind," narrates Busara.

"I look up to my father so much. I ask him for any kind of advice and he told me, you know what? Just drink it, so we drank it," she reveals.



Hayo Nuru

She also woke up her eight-month-old baby who was deep asleep only to observe her struggle with this magical drink.

"My daughter was an infant. It was so painful to watch her drink that thing (Black tea with salt)," she said.

During this time, classroom education had been suspended in Kenya to minimize the spread of

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has encountered a surge of misinformation. This began at the onset of the pandemic in March 2020 with social media platforms being the major interactive technologies used in sharing leading to infodemic, a case in point being rumors about black tea.



coronavirus. One of the children who received a phone call from a relative is a student who also passed messages to her elderly parents.

Hahoya Nuru, also a resident in Tana River county, narrates how she also drunk the miraculous tea.

"When my daughter came with the information she told me she had received a message in her phone that before midnight everyone must have boiled tea and drink to protect themselves from getting coronavirus. Because of fear, panic, and how threatening news about COVID-19 pandemic sounded we had no other choice but to drink the black tea," narrates Hahoya.

The 39-year-old who had not been using tea, recalls how she ended up seeking medical attention following the repercussions of the hot black tea.

"I better take the vaccine than boiling black tea or doing any other thing that has not been verified that can cause me more harm. I remember when I drank black tea, I had to see a doctor because of my ulcers," said Hahoya.

The message about black tea was an audio recording. It went viral through a WhatsApp. Those who received the message forwarded it to their relatives and made phone calls that particular night. Even though Busara Naaman, got the first message from her nanny, she confirms to have later received the same audio through her WhatsApp number. She can neither remember who sent it to her nor how she lost it since she got a new phone.

"It sounded like some witchcraft because they insisted that a baby boy from Tana River who was born talked a few minutes then died. So I wanted to confirm this because it was so weird but then everyone believed it that time. Even my dad drunk the black tea and it is so funny, we have a Whats App group for family, almost everyone in our family drunk salty tea," says Naaman.

Looking back a year later, she says she is disappointed in herself that despite being an educated woman, she fell into the trap because of peer pressure of not wanting to be left out.

"You know it's so ironic, I am the journalist here, I am supposed to be having facts. I think I was confused, it was very fast and it was late at night and everyone is drinking so quickly. You see, it was so weird that I the person who is supposed to be having information did not have," she says.

Busara says no one in her family who drunk the salty tea either got sick or died. All thanks to the fact that it was not poisonous.

"We add sugar in our tea always but for once we did it differently. It did taste weird because salt is for stew and maybe a salad and any other dish, not tea, so nothing bad happened. I took half a cup only at that time," she says.

"I cannot do something like that again. Now I know better, I understand coronavirus better. Like the other

Looking back a year later, she says she is disappointed in herself that despite being an educated woman, she fell into the trap because of peer pressure of not wanting to be left out.



Twitter Post on Black Tea and Covid-19

day someone sent some misleading information about the COVID-19 vaccine in a WhatsApp group, I decided to verify it with my assignment editor and we found out that the message was from a fake news website," she concludes.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has encountered a surge of misinformation. This began at the onset of the pandemic in March 2020 with social media platforms being the major interactive technologies used in sharing leading to infodemic, a case in point being rumors about black tea.

Google search gives various results of black tea. One is a YouTube audio of an elderly male Muslim asking Muslim faithful not to fall victims to misinformation but to pray to God. The message is recorded in the Swahili language which is commonly spoken in the Coastal region of Kenya. This clip was uploaded on March 29th, 2020, and has over 6, 000 views. The speaker says clip and calls about black tea and COVID-19 were shared a night before his recorded message and says the message was false.

Facebook search also gives feedback of Melissa Fleming who is the Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications at the United Nations. On 29th March 2020, her post raised a concern on increase in the rapid spread of unreliable information about COVID-19. She said that in order to overcome coronavirus, there was a need to urgently promote facts, science, hope, and solidarity over despair and division.

"My global communications team at the United Nations will be stepping up our communications efforts to make sure people have the best, most credible information and also inspiration from examples of global cooperation and viral acts of humanity," reads part of Melissa Fleming's Facebook post.

While on Twitter a Social media platform the story was carried by a local media house NTV with experts dispelling the myth of black tea as a cure of Covid19. 

This is an edited version of a story by Tabitha Otieno which originally appeared on Talk Africa.

Misinformation blocks vaccination response in Borno State

By Jack Vincent Fidelis | July 20, 2021

Editor's Note:

WhatsApp, the marketplace, and public transport are all ideal breeding grounds for false information to spread, causing a headache for public health officials trying to combat the disease. As false rumours spread, it is up to journalists and communicators to provide evidence-based, factual, and balanced reporting.

“White people told us to do family planning, but we refused. Now they have come up with Covid-19 vaccine which we were told causes infertility,” a 29-year-old petty trader, Falmata Kale, said during a vox pop gathered at Shehuri North area of Maiduguri and other parts of the city.

In a similar vein, Idrisa Saleh, a 35-year old shopper at the popular Kasuwan Jogol (market) in Maiduguri said: “I heard that whoever takes Covid-19 vaccine will eventually run mad.”

On her part, Dorcas Yakubu, a 26-year old student said: “Many people who got vaccinated fell ill as a result and were admitted in hospitals. In short, Covid-19 causes illness.”

Photo by Pongsawat Pasom on Unsplash

These respondents, Falmata, Idrisa and Dorcas, like many others in society, constitute purveyors of myths, rumours and conspiracy theories that are peddled in their peer group meetings (known locally as 'Majalisa' in Northern Nigeria) where friends hang out, usually in the evenings, to discuss trending and sundry issues.

The originators of such misinformation are often lost in the long line of information transfer from one person to the next. Such stories, however, have negative consequences on the health and general wellbeing of the people affected, especially in the war-torn region.

Commercial Keke Napepe tricycles [a form of cheap public transport known as moped rickshaws in some countries] is another place where stories on Covid-19 are heard on the grapevine. From one point to another the rider and his passengers often engage in discussing topical societal issues such as Covid-19 pandemic, distribution and use of vaccine in Borno State and so on.

During the ride, myths, rumours and conspiracy theories are shared.

Whatsapp group chat is another major culprit in the fake news and false information business. Purveyors make use of the app to spread misinformation about Covid-19 vaccines. The following was reported in Washington Post:

"Hours after Nigeria confirmed its first case of coronavirus Friday, Olumide Makanjuola, who lives in the state of Lagos, opened WhatsApp and was bombarded with a "sense of panic."

"Users on the messaging service had copied, pasted and forwarded notes warning that local flights, hotels and schools might have been contaminated. None of the information had been verified, Makanjuola said, but multiple versions of it snaked their way through private WhatsApp groups, some with hundreds of participants.

"The virus is closer to us than we think," two of the messages ominously concluded.

As government leaders and health professionals race to contain an outbreak, they are simultaneously battling another hard-to-defeat scourge: the explosion of half-truths and outright falsehoods online. Nowhere is the threat direr

than on WhatsApp, a service largely hidden from public scrutiny, vast in its global reach and often at the centre of some of the world's most panic-inducing conspiracy theories.

Tech firms take a hard line against coronavirus myths. But what about other types of misinformation?

People in Nigeria, Singapore, Brazil, Pakistan, Ireland and other countries say they have seen a flood of misinformation-

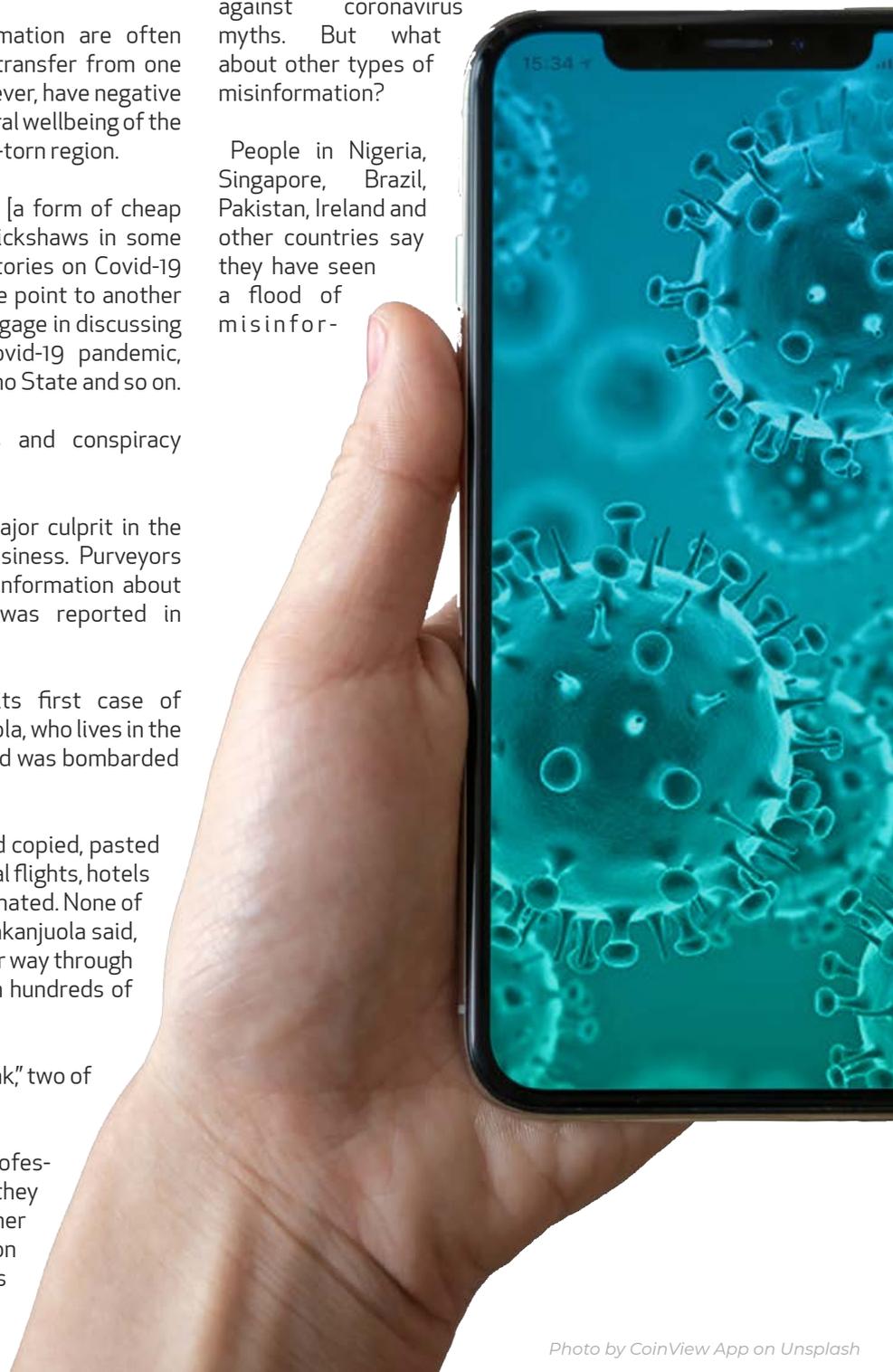


Photo by CoinView App on Unsplash

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mation on WhatsApp about the number of people affected by coronavirus, the way the illness is transmitted and the availability of treatments. The messages and voice memos have instilled fear, troubled businesses and created public health headaches for governments.

The respondents, Falmata, Idrisa and Dorcas, attested to getting their information from Majalisa, Keke Napep and Whatsapp group chat. From these places, misinformation about Covid-19 pandemic and vaccines are originated and spread to people in the communities, market places, worship centres, football viewing centres and so on. It is funny and vague how regular everyday people on the streets generate and spread Covid-19 related misinformation, thereby obstructing effective response to the pandemic as stated in United Nations Nigeria website:

“I doubted the reality of Covid-19 until I found myself struggling for breadth.”

“I was among those who thought and touted that Covid-19 is a scam by government to embezzle money. But now I know better.”

Hassan Alhaji Gado, from Gwange 3 Ward in Maiduguri Municipal Council (MMC), Borno State, is a 26-year old Nigerian youth who had plans for himself and his family, until Covid-19 pandemic struck and put all plans in abeyance.

As the virus spread and the Federal Government of Nigeria, in collaboration with development partners responded, misinformation and fake news started circulating in the public space, especially in the social media. Notable in the widespread misinformation was the reference to Covid-19 as being non-existent, and a scam being perpetrated by the government. This dangerous narrative about a public health emergency of Covid-19 devastation became an ‘infodemic’ obstructing effective response to Covid-19 pandemic.

Just as many Nigerian youths bought into the fake news, Hassan also questioned the existence of Covid-19 and believed it was a scam to embezzle money. However, the turning point came when he fell sick and presented symptoms such as shortness of breath, headache and high fever. He got tested and his Covid-19 test returned positive.

“Honestly, I doubted the reality of Covid-19 until I found myself struggling for breadth, headache and high fever,” Hassan said at the launch of ‘Covid-19 Heroes Campaign,’ organised by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in collaboration with partners, to recognise and designate Covid-19 survivors as heroes and heroines -as part of the ongoing response to the Covid-19 outbreak in Borno State, North East Nigeria.

Borno State Deputy Governor and Chairman of the State Task Force on Covid-19 Response Usman Umar Kadafur said at the launch that the campaign aimed to demystify and de-stigmatise survivors by declaring them heroes and heroines of a disease that had claimed many lives in the state.

Borno State is at the centre of a decade-old insurgency in north-east Nigeria, which has claimed several lives and displaced millions of people internally.

Contrary to what Falmata Kale, one of the respondents in Maiduguri, was made to believe, Covid-19 vaccines do not cause infertility. According to the data from Our World in Data, a research-based organisation that focuses on poverty, disease, hunger, climate change, war, existential risks and inequality, updated on the 21st of June, 2021, over 20 per cent of the world population had received at least one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine.

About 2.6 billion doses have been administered globally, and 36.1 million [more] are now administered each day.

Only 0.8 per cent of people in low-income countries have received at least one dose.

Invariably, there are no data that Covid-19 vaccines cause infertility, even though nearly 3 billion people have had one or both jabs of the vaccines worldwide so far.

According to UNICEF: The vaccine against Covid-19 DOES NOT cause sterility.

For the publication 'Science in Serbia', Milos Babic, a molecular biologist and neurobiologist, answered some of the frequent questions related to coronavirus and the vaccine, among which was: "Do vaccines cause sterility?" to which he replied: "Vaccines do not cause sterility."

This inaccurate rumour was started by two German pseudo-scientists and spread further on the internet. According to verified data, infection with the virus can harm male fertility, and that is another reason why vaccination is needed to protect against such effects from coronavirus."

UNICEF's young reporters also asked experts from the Public Health Institute of Montenegro (IJZCG) about this.

"Verified information regarding the virus is that it can lead to impaired fertility in men. That is one of the reasons why vaccination is recommended – in order to reduce such effects of the virus. On the other hand, in the clinical research of the companies Pfizer and Moderna, 30 women who remained pregnant participated, which

again indicates that there is no direct effect of vaccines on fertility," Marija Božović from the Public Health Institute of Montenegro said.

The same message was given by doctors from the Clinical Centre of Montenegro (KCCG).

"Vaccines against Covid-19 cannot have any long-term consequences.

"These vaccines have all passed clinical studies that have proven that this vaccine is not harmful to the human body. For now, there is no study or any research that confirms that these vaccines can have such an effect on our health," said Djordje Krnjevic of KCCG.



Given that a large amount of misinformation is circulating in the media and on social networks in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic and during vaccination against this disease, it is extremely important to get information from credible sources.

Given that a large amount of misinformation is circulating in the media and on social networks in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic and during vaccination against this disease, it is extremely important to get information from credible sources.

UNICEF's young reporters invite all their readers to check all the information on the websites of the World Health Organization, the Public Health Institute, the Clinical Centre of Montenegro, the Ministry of Health and UNICEF.

In an effort to contribute to preventing the dissemination of coronavirus misinformation and to promoting credible sources of information, UNICEF's young reporters have decided to check the accuracy of information published on social media and in the media that has attracted public attention.

In verifying the accuracy of information, they have followed the example of the Public Disclosure Platform 'Raskrinkavanje' and partly used its publicly available methodology.

Photo by Shingi Rice on Unsplash

The falsehood stated by the second and third respondents, Idrisa Saleh and Dorcas Yakubu, that Covid-19 could cause insanity and illness is absurd and has no basis in fact.

According to the following fact check by USA TODAY: "The first claim that 'Cov-19 Vax clinical trials have caused brain damage, paralysis and many illnesses in previously healthy volunteers' does not come with any sourcing or evidence.

"The U.S. Food and Drug Administration's emergency authorization review of Pfizer and Moderna vaccines details common minor adverse reactions – injection site pain, fatigue, headaches, muscle pain, joint pain and chills – which are side effects typically shared post- vaccination with any vaccine."

Invariably, no evidence suggests that the claims are true.

Yet the consequences of Covid-19 vaccine related misinformation are glaring.

Abubakar Ahmed, a radiologist in private practice in an interview in Maiduguri, said: "there is no documented evidence that Covid-19 vaccine can cause illness or lead to a patient being admitted in hospital.

"Drugs and even food intake have side effects and Covid-19 AstraZeneca vaccine or any other vaccine for that matter is no exception.

"These vaccines have benefits and side effects.

"The standard practice is to weigh the benefits and side effects.

"If the benefits outweigh the side effects, then you use it. Eating too much kose (bean-cake) can cause abdominal bloating for some people.

"Should everybody else stop eating the snack because it causes bloating for some people?" Ahmed asked.

It's important to note the significant influence that religious and opinion leaders have in Borno in particular and Northern Nigeria in general.

They can effectively influence the decision of the masses to accept Covid-19 vaccines. 

africa 
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A selection of long pieces and discretionary awards published

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Vaccines: when megachurch pastors misinform

Editor's Note:

Pentecostalism grew out of African-American churches in early twentieth-century America; its lively atmosphere and non-hierarchical structure is part of the appeal. In contrast to Catholicism, for example, there is no central authority, like the Vatican: which has actively advocated for fairer vaccine distribution, and encourages its members to take the vaccine. Having said that, there are still strong American influences on Pentacostal churches in Africa.

Much of the false information spread by Nigerian megachurches during the pandemic, such as the fabricated link between vaccines and the 5G network, was originally born in the USA.

By **Nelly Kalu** | July 20, 2021

Erabor is an evangelical Pentecostal Christian living in Lekki, an affluent suburb in Lagos for the widely travelled, well-educated upper-middle-class Nigerians.

She does not trust the speed with which they produced these vaccines. "And these mRNA/DNA vaccines that change a person's DNA nucleus are a "no-no", she says.

She adds she will not be taking any vaccine made from aborted fetal tissues. But, she need not worry, vaccines cannot alter DNA because it does not function that way.

These claims are false, and only a few of the misleading information about COVID-19 vaccines found in social media communities. No matter how many times they debunked these, they continue to inform vaccine choices.

This hesitancy for COVID-19 vaccines is because of false narratives and misinformation about the vaccine, especially by influential evangelical Pentecostal pastors. Some of these pastors spread disinformation, not only from the pulpit but through social media.

Nigerians are at risk of the dangers of false information as they are from the virus. Like most of the world, the country is experiencing an infodemic.

Even as COVID-19 vaccination campaigns are ongoing, false information on these vaccines spread even faster. These sources of false information are often people within social networks of trust. They are family and friends or influencers on whom they rely.

For many Nigerians, it is the religious leader. For Christian evangelicals, it is the pastor, the overseer, the man of God.

When these pastors misinform on vaccines or other issues on health and well-being, their followers consider it factual.

This hesitancy for COVID-19 vaccines is because of false narratives and misinformation about the vaccine, especially by influential evangelical Pentecostal pastors. Some of these pastors spread disinformation, not only from the pulpit but through social media. In videos and recorded

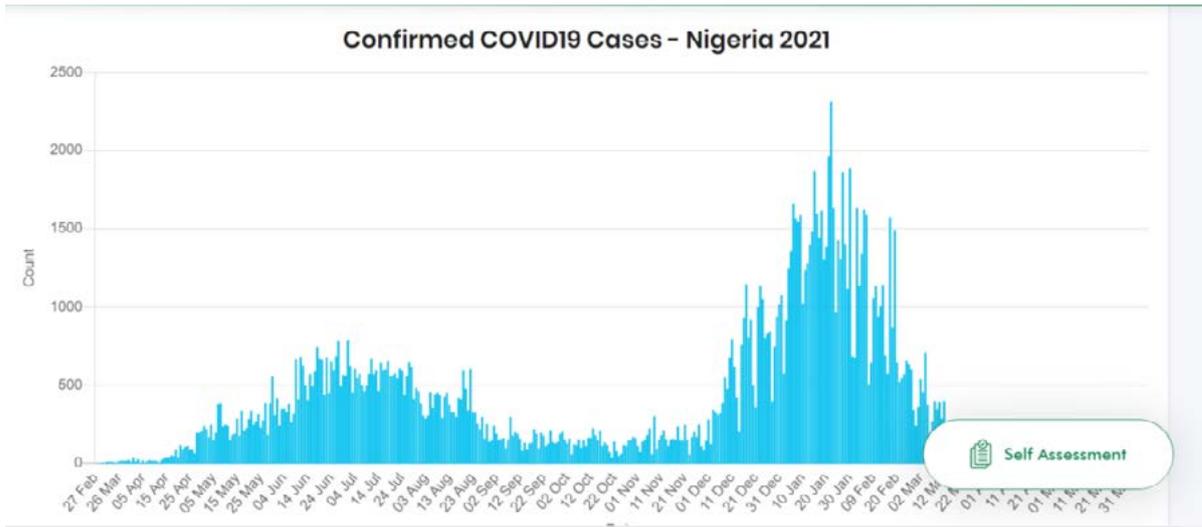
sermons distributed on closed groups like WhatsApp or even open groups on Facebook. Some of their claims have become hashtags and memes on Twitter.

Yet, no matter how ridiculous the claim might be, their followers believe them and decide on these vaccines from what their pastor's preach.

Professor Ajala, a medical anthropologist from the University of Ibadan, speaks of an intersection between religion and health advocacy. He says that many of the doctrines of religion favour well-being, with strong implications for the religious because they see their religion as an emotional and tangible resource. And when the science around health interventions are unclear or misinformed, people find comfort and hope in religion.

Some estimates have Nigerians almost evenly split between Christianity and Islam, making religious leaders powerful influencers.

In late March, the country sent some vaccines to Ghana and Togo to avoid them expiring. These vaccines



Confirmed COVID-19 Cases – Nigeria 2021

supplied had a short shelf life. AstraZeneca vaccines, for instance, could be stored in the refrigerator for six months, but on arrival to Nigeria, it already cost months of storage.

Since Nigerians were reluctant to take these vaccines, it served better to send them to other countries.

Nigeria is collaborating with other African countries and international agencies with others for vaccine delivery by the end of July. The aim is to ensure their goal of vaccinating 20% of the population.

Osagie Enahire, Nigeria’s Minister of Health, says they are working with COVAX and the West African Alliance (WAHO) to get enough vaccines to vaccinate approximately 40 million people this year. There is also a partnership agreement with the African Vaccination Acquisition Task Team organised by the African Union, to secure these vaccines at a lower rate. It only works if African nations can source for these vaccines together as a collective.

However, there is a challenge, Nigerians are hesitant about the vaccine.

Data from the National Primary Health Care Development Agency (NPHCDA), in charge of vaccination campaigns in Nigeria, says that only half (50%) of the population are willing to get vaccinated. But we need to vaccinate at least 70% to achieve herd immunity.

You can see the influence of evangelical Pentecostal Christianity in Nigeria as you walk along any street in

These men are neither scientists nor epidemiologists, so why do people believe them as authorities on Covid-19 vaccines?

urban areas. Take Lagos, for example, there’s a church in almost every street, and the crusades cause so much traffic that Lagos is uninhabitable than usual.

Pastors Chris Okotie, David Oyedepo and Chris Oyakhilome are mega pastors that top the list of super-spreaders of disinformation around the vaccine.

Chris Okotie, the founder of the Household of God Church International Ministries said the Covid-19 vaccine will turn people into vampires. In a video he shared on WhatsApp, which eventually went viral, he claimed to prove, in inexplicable equations, that the names of the members of the Gates family (Bill Gates, his wife and son) show a relationship between the family, Covid-19 and the antichrist.

He also believed that wearing a mask in the church creates a barrier between God and man.

Pastor Chris Okotie is a lawyer and a popular musician in the 80s. He is not a qualified scientist. Yet, his followers believe him.

Okotie is not the only pastor employing equations with no meaning to prove conspiracy theories.

These pastors have millions of followers and vast information networks to spread misinformation and disinformation around the Covid-19 vaccine.

These men are neither scientists nor epidemiologists, so why do people believe them as authorities on Covid-19 vaccines?

Another famous pastor peddling COVID-19 disinformation is Chris Oyakhilome, the charismatic leader and founder of Christ Embassy Church who believes that pastors who support the vaccine betray their faith in God's healing power.

In the months of lockdown in Nigeria, he went viral for a sermon that blamed the virus on the new world order, the antichrist and the false claim that the 5G network causes the covid-19 virus and the vaccine injects trackable nanochips into humans, making them cyborgs.

It reads of the vivid imagination of a child obsessed with movies and believes it is all true.

He continued spreading disinformation on Covid-19 between April to September as Nigeria's Covid-19 cases rose.

On the 5 April 2020. He published his video on 5G technology on his YouTube channel. A month later, it had 148,000 views.

But it was not well-received by non-members.

In his defence, his followers started the hashtag #IStandWithPastorChris on Twitter.

Experts say that people ascribe a prophetic quality to movies when something happens in reality that can echo a film plot. The case of art becomes life. It explains renewed interest in the 2011 pandemic film Contagion in the early months of the pandemic.

Oyakhilome is a charismatic televangelist and a firm believer in the new world order, an ideology that a cruel, one-world government will exist by the end of times to end freedom, democracy and Christianity, the world as we know it will be over.

This government will also brand unbelievers or negligent Christians with the "mark of the beast".

Oyakhilome owns a media enterprise that includes a very effective digital media team and a social media app, Yookos.

As 2020 rolled by with the possibility of breakthrough vaccines and social media censoring, he began spreading conspiracy theories about the vaccine within his digital media space and discussions about mis- and disinformation around the vaccine spread unchecked on Yookos.

He accused pastors and Christians who accepted the vaccine of losing faith in God's healing power.

OPEN SOURCE INVESTIGATION (OSINT)

It is important to see the network of support that confirms Oyakhilome's position on the virus and his theories about it. So I checked.

First, through advanced searches on Google, Yandex and Twitter, then through Hoaxy, a fact-checking and visualization program.

Using Twitter advanced search, I traced tweets and patterns of Christ Embassy members on two different hashtags they supported, the #IStandWithPastorChris and #NotoVaccineForWork.

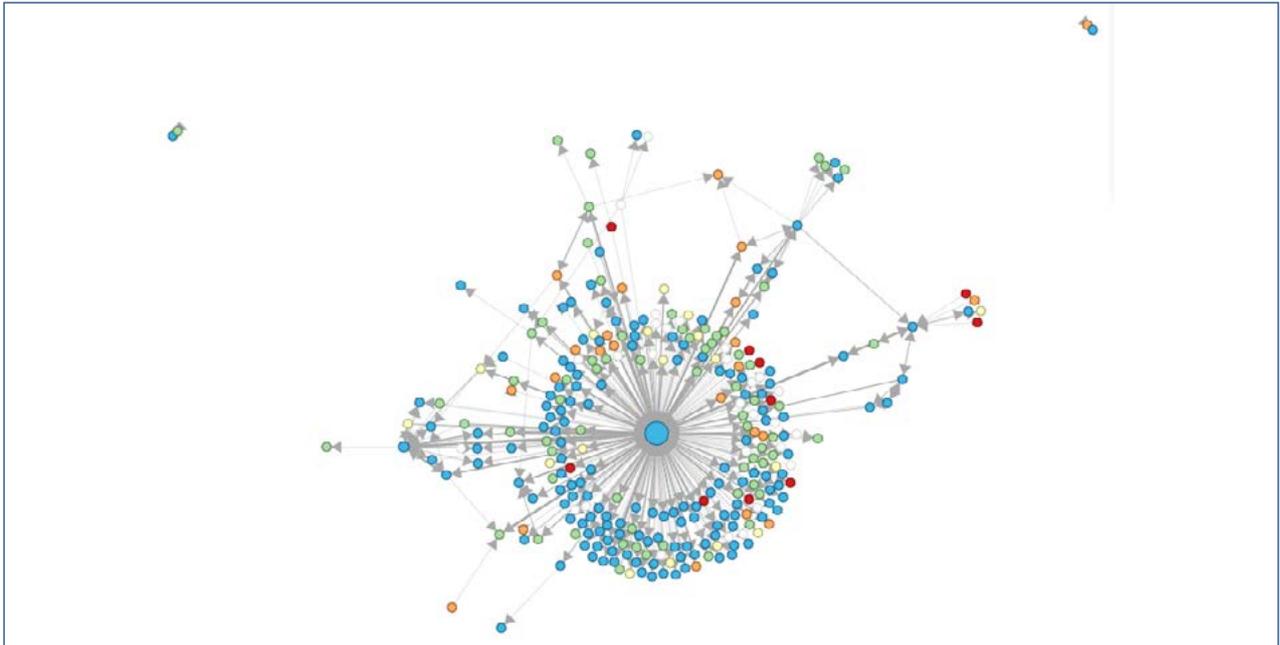
Some accounts have a large following from 10000 to 98000.

What many of these accounts have in common is their descriptive bio. They also share these keywords, LoveWorld, Righteous, First Flight Gang, First Flight Ready or some other variation of First Flight. I learned First Flight means Rapture. So First Flight Ready is Rapture Ready.

For this investigation, I spoke with a young Christ Embassy pastor who permitted me to use his comments on Twitter, but he declined to comment on his role as a pastor within the church.

Pshegs, on Twitter, is a dedicated anti-vaxxer, anti-covid vaccine at least, and he is a super-spreader of misinformation and disinformation on Covid-19 and Covid-19 vaccines.

During our brief chat via WhatsApp, I mentioned that Pastor Chris's theories about the vaccine were false and considered misinformation and disinformation.



Hoaxy diagram showing connections to pshegs twitter account

He disagreed, saying that "It is misinformation to conclusively assume that his points are mis / disinformation, especially when there is abundant information out there, and several flip-flopping from WHO (most recent, Social Distancing).

Let me know when you have any debates around the corner. I'll sit on science to debate this, outside Christianity.

Thanks and enjoy the rest of your day!'

Experts say that people ascribe a prophetic quality to movies when something happens in reality that can echo a film plot. The case of art becomes life.

A study of social media engagements on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube shows that replies to posts, shares, likes and retweets by Christ Embassy Church or Pastor Chris's account are predominantly by church members all over the world. It tells of an information echo chamber and bubble created within the digital Christ Embassy community where information, authentic or not, supports their shared beliefs.

What then is a bubble and echo chamber? We often use these terms in a digital investigation to understand the process of information in a community.

An echo chamber is an environment where you only experience information that reflects and reinforces your own. You are in a bubble when you find you interact and share ideas and information only with people who have the same views as you do. It encourages confirmation bias and spreads misinformation which twists our perception until we cannot consider contrary opinions or even discuss complicated topics.

These pastors are not without social influences, and just like their followers, they also exist in a bubble. I analyzed Twitter and Facebook postings and engagements of Oyakhilome and Oyedepo, two preachers famous for prosperity gospel sermons and miracle healing. Using Hoaxy, I found connections to famous American televangelists who preach prosperity gospel sermons and miracle healing like Kenneth

Religious leaders who are pro-COVID vaccines inspire pro-vaccine followers.

GAVI is the vaccine alliance working to make sure that even the world's poorest countries get vaccinated.

It may seem worrisome on the surface that this vaccine technology was approved so quickly when we are just getting to know about it, but in reality, there have been many studies of DNA and mRNA vaccines in humans and animals.

They published the first report of a successful mRNA test in 1990 when mRNA injected into mice produced the required protein. Scientists behind Moderna have been working on this technology for 15 years, hoping to vaccinate against the Nipah virus, then came Covid-19.

Vaccines like Pfizer/BioNtech and Moderna use messenger RNA or mRNA technology.

COVID-19 VACCINES

As it stands, vaccines are the only way to keep us safe. There are a few vaccines approved by WHO for emergency use for Covid-19. You can find a list of these vaccines on their website.

The AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine administered in the country already, and Johnson & Johnson vaccine use viral vector technology in production. This is a method of vaccine production where the vaccine is created using a virus (vector) that has been made safe for humans.

They produced the AstraZeneca vaccine by inserting a tiny piece of genetic code from the COVID-19 virus into a deactivated adenovirus. The code tells our cells to make a single protein of the COVID-19 virus which the immune system recognizes and produces antibodies to attack the virus if we ever come in contact with it.

Vaccines must be safe and efficient to prevent disease and infection. They pass through different

phases to determine if the vaccine is safe and capable of preventing diseases or infection or both.

First, the preclinical phase or animal testing phase, if this is successful, they move on to three clinical trials. They conduct the first phase of the trials with a small sample size of fewer than 100 people. If this is successful, then phase 2, increasing the sample size to 100-1000, and if there is a breakthrough, the sample size increases to the tens of thousands for phase 3.

There are several other steps involved in this but, if all goes well and there is a pandemic, they get approved for emergency use authorization.

In Nigeria, before they administer vaccines to the public, NAFDAC, Nigeria's drug and food agency, must license it. Licensing takes 120 working days.

In an interview with Channels Television, Moji Adeyeye, the NAFDAC Director-General said WHO must declare vaccines outside Nigeria safe for use before they consider it for NAFDAC approval.

For this to happen smoothly and efficiently, WHO presents NAFDAC with enough data to decide for Emergency use authorization.

Not all evangelical Pentecostal pastors are anti-vaccine. Pastors like Paul Adefarasin, Senior Pastor of House on the Rock churches.



He suffered a loss to coronavirus and preaches in the church and on social media on vaccine acceptance. Tony Rapu, a trained doctor and senior pastor of the House of Freedom whose workers organised a COVID-19 awareness campaign educating traders on safety protocols while distributing face shields and face masks.

Religious leaders who are pro-COVID vaccines inspire pro-vaccine followers.

Or at the least, people who develop the -wait and see- approach. These people wait to see how the vaccine affects their family, friends, and neighbours.

If they judge the outcome positively, they get vaccinated too.

The Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, the national body that oversees Pentecostal churches in the country, encourages vaccine acceptance and safety protocols. In February, it held a virtual conference on Covid-19.

According to their Facebook page, it was to encourage prayers and faith in these times. Showing that you can listen to science while holding on to your faith.

One does not negate the other. Besides, religious faith promotes well-being.

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This is an edited version of a story by Nelly Kalu which originally appeared on NewsWireNGR

Anti-vaxxers exploiting Delta variant to fuel job apathy

Editor's Note:

It's not that the jab is ineffective against the Delta variant. The problem is that 98% of people haven't been vaccinated. So the fourth wave will be worse for Kenya, and other countries where people remain unvaccinated. Real-world data suggests that the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine is initially 92% effective against hospitalisation after 2 doses.

By Sigomba Ramadhan Omar | August 23, 2021

Throughout the pandemic, Covid-19 sceptics have exploited misinformation and misrepresented official reports to undermine confidence in vaccines and restrictions.

Their new battlefield is the highly contagious Delta variant.

Misleading information has swept across social networking platforms to falsely imply vaccines are ineffective against the variant.

On August 6, 2021, Citizen TV shared on Twitter a syndicated health story from the UK-headquartered Reuters news agency with a repackaged titled 'Vaccines may not stop Delta variant.' (The original title for the story published on Reuter's website reads "Early signs COVID-19 vaccines may not stop Delta transmission, England says").

It set off a chain of reaction with many questioning the point of vaccination under the post.

Misleading information has swept across social networking platforms to falsely imply vaccines are ineffective against the variant.

Many users jumped on the confusion to push the false narrative that vaccines do not work against the fast-spreading variant.

The report, quoting scientists at Public Health England, was however speaking about the transmission of the variant.

It said there were early signs that people who have been vaccinated against Covid-19 may be able to transmit the Delta variant of the virus as easily as those who have not.

“Vaccines have been shown to provide good protection against severe disease and death from Delta, especially with two doses, but there is less data on whether vaccinated people can still transmit it to others,” an excerpt read.

A few weeks earlier on July 5, the Daily Nation newspaper claimed in a front-page headline that ‘AstraZeneca vaccine works against Delta Variant but not Alpha.’



Front-page headline from Daily Nation newspaper which claimed that ‘AstraZeneca vaccine works against Delta Variant but not Alpha.’



A screengrab of comments expressing doubt on vaccination.

In a swift rejoinder, Amref Health Africa CEO Dr Githinji Gitahi — a commissioner with Africa Covid-19 Response – refuted the claim. He cited an article from the medical journal Lancet saying, “both vaccines (AstraZeneca and Pfizer) are effective for both alpha and Delta variant but a little less effective on the latter.”

The local daily has since corrected the online version of the story.

Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) deputy director professor Mwatilu Mwau has dispelled the narrative that some vaccines are infective against the notorious variant.

“Vaccines might not be perfectly effective against all variants but they are significantly effective against all of them including Delta,” he said.

Professor Mwatilu affirmed that “it is false that vaccines work only against a particular variant and not against other variants.”

Citing a study in the New England Journal of Medicine, Professor Mwatilu said that two doses of any of the approved vaccines are enough to offer protection against the Delta variant.

The study, however, outlines that the Delta variant is slightly less susceptible to neutralization than the original strain.

“But most convalescent serum samples and all vaccination serum samples showed detectable neutral-

ization activity,” writes the American Society for Microbiology.

Researchers have concluded that mRNA vaccines are effective against the Delta variant.

DELTA ALARM

The Delta variant was first detected in India where it began circulating around April. It is now present to varying degrees in at least 100 countries, including Kenya, where it has spread its foothold to become the dominant variant.

The World Health Organisation describes the variant as “fastest and fittest”.

Compared to other strains, various studies have outlined that Delta variant’s symptoms differ but are not any severer.

“Fever, headache, sore throat and runny nose are common symptoms, while cough and loss of smell are not,” writes the American Society for Microbiology.

There is no data in Kenya showing to what extent the Delta variant is responsible for the Covid-19 cases in Kenya but Professor Mwatilu Mwau confirmed that the Delta variant is now dominant in Kenya.

“We have not yet done any survey to say Delta variant is responsible for a certain percentage of the

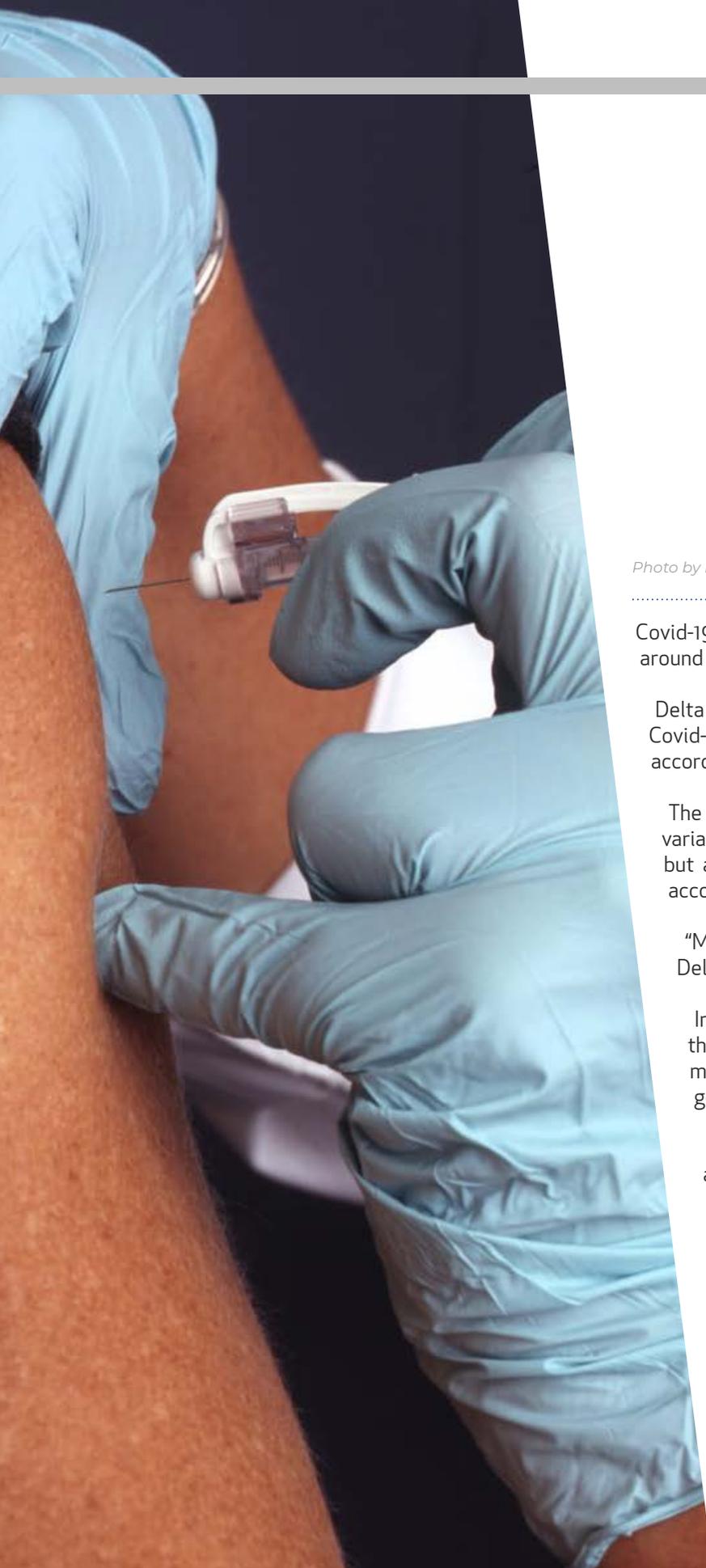


Photo by National Cancer Institute on Uns

Covid-19 cases in Kenya at the moment but it is roughly around the US' rate," he said by phone.

Delta variant accounts for more than 80 per cent of Covid-19 cases being reported in the United States according to the Wall Street Journal.

The spike of Covid-19 cases being linked to Delta variant has nothing to do with vaccine efficacy but another major factor like low vaccination rate according to Professor Mwatilu.

"Most people infected with new cases of Covid-19 Delta variant are unvaccinated," he said.

In Kenya, a country of 52 million people, less than two per cent of the population at a paltry 1.9 million people have been vaccinated, according to government figures.

The Director of the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Dr Rochelle Walensky cautioned that the spike of Covid-19 cases "is becoming a pandemic of the unvaccinated."

KEMRI Deputy Director Professor Mwatilu, however, says that the highly infectious Delta variant can be transmitted to anyone whether vaccinated or not.

"If fully vaccinated people contract Covid-19 (Delta variant), they have very minimal chances of being hospitalized or even die of Covid-19 complications," said Professor Mwatilu. 

Debunking the claim that heat kills Covid-19 in Nigeria

By Ishaya Ibrahim | August 11, 2021



Confirmed COVID-19 cases as of June 13

When the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) reported new COVID-19 cases for June 13, 2021, to be seven, the majority of the feedback on the agency's Facebook page where the announcement was made, mocked the number.

The reason is the false claim that COVID-19 in Nigeria is not real, with the hundreds of comments denying any existence of the pandemic in the country.

Incidentally, Nigeria has barely tested one per cent of its population. The NCDC director-general, Chikwe

The pandemic has caused the deaths of at least 3.8 million people in the world as of June 13, 2020. Nigeria's official share of the global death is about 2,000 people, a tiny fraction of the global mortality count. This may yet be another reason many citizens are feeling immune to the virus.

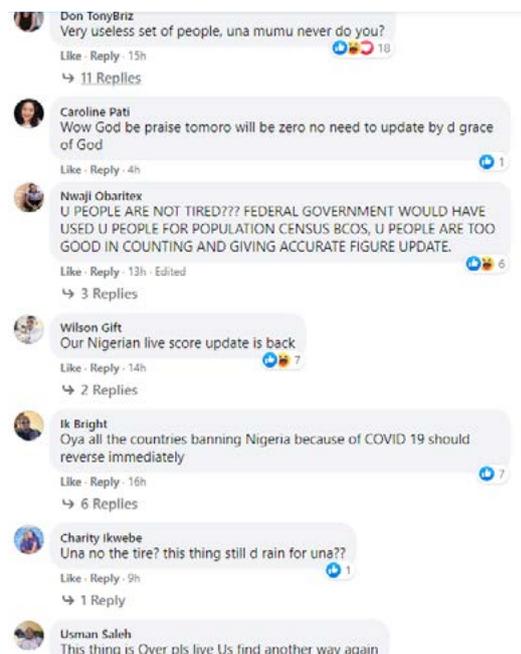
Namnsio Ukpanah on Unsplash

Ihekweazu, has also lamented that many states have not been testing enough, in a report published by the Premium Times of December 11, 2020.

THE FALSE CLAIMS

The negative responses of Nigerians to the recent NCDC infectious data are consistent with a survey carried out by NOI Poll, a polling services firm in March 2020. The result of the poll showed that 26 per cent of Nigerians believe that they were immune to COVID-19.

Among the group feeling immune to COVID-19 are 40 per cent who say God is the source of their immunity. Another 30 per cent think being black confers on them a strong gene against COVID-19. At least 17 per cent believe that the country's weather makes it impossible for COVID-19 to affect them. Eight per cent say they have taken strong herbs that won't allow COVID-19 thrive in their body.



NCDC-Facebook-page-with-denials



Mr Ibu, who made provably false claims about weather

NARROWING ON HOT WEATHER

The claim that hot weather kills COVID-19 is widespread in Nigeria, and could explain why face masks and social distancing are considered unnecessary preventive measures against the pandemic by some people.

The pandemic has caused the deaths of at least 3.8 million people in the world as of June 13, 2020. Nigeria's official share of the global death is about 2,000 people, a tiny fraction of the global mortality count. This may yet be another reason many citizens are feeling immune to the virus.

Some even insist that no Nigerian has died of the COVID-19. A Nollywood actor and comedian, John Okafor, popularly known as Mr Ibu, makes this claim in The Nation Newspaper of July 15, 2020. Many other news websites and blogs have amplified it, making it go viral.

"My brother, COVID-19 or 20 is not here, I don't care. COVID whatever is not in Nigeria. We have hot weather here; the disease is scared of us just as we are scared of it so it can't come here," he said.

VERIFYING THE CLAIMS

The NCDC has said that the claim of hot weather killing COVID-19 is not backed by any scientific proof. "From the evidence so far, the virus causing COVID-19 can be transmitted in ALL AREAS, including areas with hot and humid weather," says the NCDC on the FAQ section of its website.

A study on the Effects of temperature and humidity on the spread of COVID-19 by scientists in Brazil, published in PLUS ONE journal of September 18, 2020, found that while warm and wet climates may reduce the impact of COVID-19, it does not eliminate the virus.

"Based on a low level of evidence, the spread of COVID-19 seems to be lower in warm and wet climates. Furthermore, temperature and humidity alone do not explain most of the variability of the COVID-19 outbreak. Public isolation policies, herd immunity, migration patterns, population density, and cultural aspects might directly influence how the spread of this disease occurs," the researchers say.

A virologist and Country Director, Avigo Health Care, Dr Femi Funso-Adebayo, also argues that while the Nigerian environment may present adverse conditions for COVID-19 to spread easily, that alone does not kill the virus.

"Every virus has its specific mode of transmission. And for SARS COV2, which is referred to as COVID-19, it needs a particular environment that is enclosed to spread. If four people, for example, are in a vehicle that is enclosed and they put on an air-conditioner and one of them is infected, the chances of every other person catching or getting infected are higher, even with a nose mask. So, it is advisable that when you are in a vehicle, you roll down the windows," he said.

Twitter and Facebook search using keywords combination: 'weather Nigeria COVID-19,' throw up tons of claims that are not supported by any scientific proof.



Death rate in Nigeria

← Tweet



Vanessa@ The plotted garden
@plottedgarden

EXCERPT: Extremely hot temperatures may make it impossible for Covid-19 to take root in tropical African countries like Nigeria or Ghana...These diseases tend to spread best in cold weather & low humidity which is why...

[ccn.com/coronavirus-ma...](https://www.cnn.com/coronavirus-matters)
#coronavirus

1:32 AM · 26 Feb 20 · Twitter Web App

Experts and scientific publications dismissing the claim that hot weather can't halt COVID-19 have not stopped the online and offline spread of misinformation.

Twitter and Facebook search using keywords combination: 'weather Nigeria COVID-19,' throw up tons of claims that are not supported by any scientific proof.

Some claims are even mischievous, like the one by @plottedgarden on February 26, 2020, which presented what appears like an excerpt of a scientific paper on hot weather and COVID-19.

"Excerpt: Extremely hot temperatures may make it impossible for COVID-19 to take root in tropical African countries like Nigeria or Ghana...These diseases tend to spread best in cold weather & low humidity," the tweet reads.

HIGHER DEATH RATE

The American based Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has said that older unvaccinated



adults are more likely to be hospitalised or die from COVID-19, especially folks aged 60 years and above.

According to data from the World Population Prospects, the Population Division of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Nigeria recorded more deaths of adults over 60 years in the year 2020 than at any time in its history. 2020 was the year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The data reveals that in the year 2020, the 60+ mortality rate rose the highest in Nigeria. The last count was in 2015, and the data shows a ratio of 22 per cent deaths per 100 population. In 2020, it jumped to 24 per cent per 100 population.

Deaths of prominent individuals and an unusually high number of burials were widely reported in the media in the early start of the pandemic in Nigeria.

For instance, within four months – April and August 2020, Chief of Staff to Nigeria's President, Abba Kyari, and another close confidante of the President, Ismaila Isa Funtua, an ex-governor, Abiola Ajimobi, two senators; Buruji Kashamu and Bayo Oshinowo, were among those whose deaths were attributed to COVID-19.

In the Bayero University Kano (BUK), at least seven professors died between April and May 2020, three of the deaths occurred within 48-hours, reports the Thisday Newspaper of April 27., 2020.

The poor also died. For instance, according to the Daily Trust report of April 21, 2020, graveyards that were recording less than five burials per day in Kano, suddenly started witnessing more than 20 burials. On one particular day, the newspaper reported burials of at least 150 people in three Kano cemeteries, an average of 50 burials per cemetery



Photo credit – World Bank Blogs

The outbreak of COVID-19 has improved the hygienic habits of many Nigerians which Dr Funso-Adebayo said should become part of people's lives.

Nigeria's Health Minister, Osagie Ehanire, confirmed that the higher deaths in Kano were COVID-19 related.

A public health consultant at the Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH) who asked that her name not be mentioned because of a new directive by the government that they should stop granting interviews to journalists, explains why the deaths may have occurred in such large numbers.

"You notice that most of the people who died are elderly people. And we know that in the presence of underlying medical conditions like cancer, diabetes, hypertension, even HIV, the issue is that immunity has already crashed. It's just like cough and catarrh, cough and catarrh are nothing. It's flu. But if your immunity is down, anybody that sneezes around you, you will get it. So, in the presence of a medically debilitating disease that is not properly managed, that already has rendered the person immune suppressed, COVID-19 can gain access and do harm," she said.

LESSONS FROM COVID-19 AND HYGIENE

The outbreak of COVID-19 has improved the hygienic habits of many Nigerians which Dr Funso-Adebayo said should become part of people's lives.

He said: "The first time I went to Japan in 2005, I noticed that it was the culture to wear a facemask when you have the flu. So, even after SARS COV2, another virus is going to come. The new normal for us, washing your hands, putting on facemasks should continue. Your mask is preventing you from transmitting or infecting other people," he said."

LESSONS FROM COVID-19 AND MISINFORMATION

Health misinformation easily goes viral for the main reason that people want to stay healthy, says an Optometrist, Dr Amaka Madu. But it usually turns out to be more deadly than the problem they are trying to solve, she says.

She recalled one misinformation about Ginger and Gallic as a cure for COVID-19, which could become harmful to ulcer patients.

She recommends regularly sensitization of the people to always check with their doctor for medical advice. 

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This is an edited version of a story by Ishaya Ibrahim which originally appeared on The Niche.

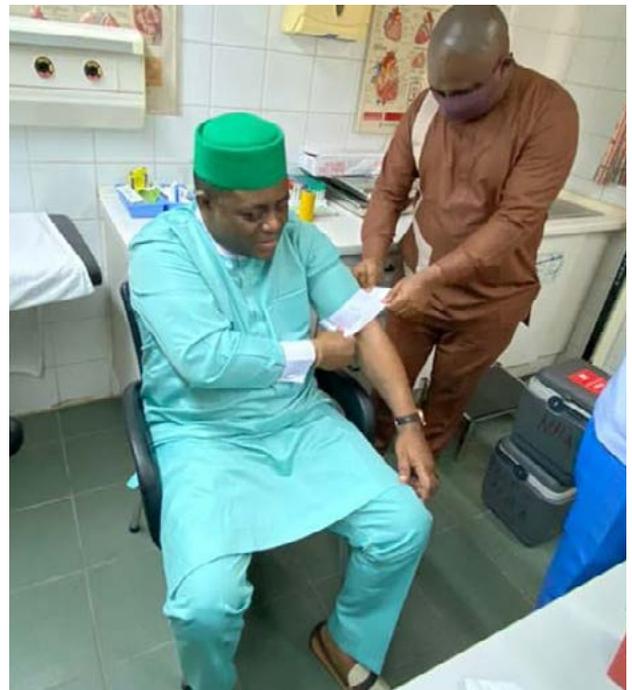
Nigeria: anti-vaccination champion, takes jab

By Kemi Busari | August 11, 2021

Until March 20 when he suddenly announced that he had taken his first jab, Femi Fani-Kayode was at the forefront of the campaign in Nigeria against COVID-19 vaccines.

On March 30, a former Nigerian minister announced on Twitter that he had taken the COVID-19 vaccine. Strange news! For over a year since the virus was first detected in Nigeria, his name, Femi Fani-Kayode, rang a deterrent bell of anti-vaccination.

Apart from his many political jabs against the ruling party, fraud allegations and their resultant court cases, Mr Fani-Kayode had before that date, played a leading role in the league of COVID-19 vaccination opposers and confronters.



Femi Fani-Kayode (via [Twitter](#))

A regular reference for journalists, Mr Fani-Kayode was once described by a fact-checker as one who makes “bogus statements, capitalising on his large social media followership to spur the spread of disinformation and misinformation.”

Photo by Joshua Oluwagbemiga on Unsplash

At one time, he described the vaccine as a ploy to create a new world order, at another he tagged vaccination an exercise that would result in the deaths of millions. To further dissuade his followers, he would tweet unconfirmed information and conspiracy theories being peddled against the virus.

A regular reference for journalists, Mr Fani-Kayode was once described by a fact-checker as one who makes “bogus statements, capitalising on his large social media followership to spur the spread of disinformation and misinformation.”

All reports on his conversion (those encountered in the course of research for this report) made references to his earlier comments on the virus but none made pragmatic efforts in measuring the former minister’s previous disparaging comments on his followers.

On Twitter, the announcement was greeted with mixed reactions. To some, it was only a matter of time, they knew all along he would be vaccinated for travel access. To others, mostly those who refused to be

converted alongside him, another soldier in the fight against vaccination had deserted. A few questioned his advertent mislead of many followers.

The numbers before conversion

One of the first notable, misleading COVID-19-related tweets by Mr Fani-Kayode was on March 29, 2020, when he claimed that the virus was a ploy to create a new world order and get the United States President, Donald Trump, out of power. Elections in the U.S. were about seven months away then.

“One of the many objectives of the Illuminati & those that are behind the coronavirus pandemic & the emergence of a New World Order is to get @realDonaldTrump out of power in this year’s pres. election by sparking off a massive recession & crashing the American & world economy,” he tweeted.

The tweet as of Monday, June 14, had garnered 6,904 retweets, likes and comments and thousands of duplication across many platforms. Some fact-checking efforts were deployed to counter these claims but

Perhaps this reply captures the question you might readily want to ask; “You got convinced by your sister and friend. What about the thousands you convinced and made to see the vaccine as devil products?”

not long enough, Mr Fani-Kayode released two more fearsome tweets about COVID-19 vaccines.

On April 30, he warned Nigerians not to take vaccines which by then were in the trial stages. In doing so, he made three unfounded, totally false claims. Firstly, that vaccination would result in millions of deaths; secondly, that Nigeria was about to enact a law to make vaccination compulsory for all, and thirdly, that the vaccines are meant to depopulate the world.

The first of these three claims conform with the popular misconstrued comment of Robert Young, an alternative medicine practitioner, who at a meeting of a conspiracy theory group said that vaccination is a chemical warfare to depopulate the world. The video was widely shared by many but a fact-check revealed that the comment was made earlier in 2019, before the detection of COVID-19, in respect of the different vaccines given to children in the first six years. Despite the fact-checking efforts, Mr Fani-kayode still shared the video in January 2021.

Two days later, on May 2, Mr Fani-Kayode tweeted again, “@WHO are set to begin Covid 19 vaccine trials in our country. EVIL! Not only have our people been turned into Guinea pigs to test Gates’ killer vaccine but our leaders are also passing a law which will make the use of that evil vaccine compulsory. What a mess! I weep for Nigeria.”

Some of his tweets may, at this period (with multiple vaccine roll out in many countries) come as laughing items, but they were sacred voices of caution when they were made. They were tweeted when a large part of Nigeria was on lockdown enforced to curtail the effect of the virus.

The lockdown notwithstanding, over 200 people, including Abba Kyari, the then Chief of Staff to the President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari, had died of the virus; confirmed cases were in total of thousands; patients were treated in isolation centres with close monitoring; worse still, researches on the virus had not reached advanced stages, hence, conspiracy theories held sway. In short, it was a time of panic and tweets by Mr Fani-Kayode readily reinforced people’s fears and biases.

How then did a panic monger convert?

The conversion and the dangers inherent in peddling falsehood

Against the nature of his comments, Mr Fani-Kayode announced on March 30, 2021, that he had taken a jab. “Despite my initially strong reservations I bowed to sound logic and superior reasoning and took my Covid 19 vaccine today,” he wrote in a thread of tweets.

He went further to explain the ‘sound logic’ and ‘superior reasoning’ to include persuasions from his political associates and the fact that his hero, Donald Trump, had taken it, despite his initial opposing stance.

As of the morning of Monday, June 14, his announcement tweets had a total of 1,173 likes, comments and retweets; a less than 10 per cent fraction of interaction when compared to four of his falsehood spreading tweets examined in this piece.

This confirms the concerns of some researchers who have discovered that a good percentage of people who come in contact with false information don’t care about the follow-up fact-checks. A recent survey by Zignal labs



showed that 86 per cent of Americans who read news articles on social media do not always fact-check.

Not done, the ex-minister still used the opportunity of his vaccination to peddle falsehood about vaccines.

He wrote in the thread, "The Covid vaccines we are taking in Nigeria are not Bill Gates' vaccines and neither are we being used as Guinea pigs. These ones are tried & tested, have already been approved & have been administered successfully throughout the world. This is the Oxford Azrazeneca brand.

"There is a world of difference between what we are being given in Nigeria & the exploratory vaccines that @WHO had wanted to test Africans with which we spoke against & resisted last year. Most importantly Bill Gates & his foundation have no connection with Oxford Azrazeneca.

"I would not touch anything Bill Gates with a barge pole for obvious reasons. Mark it."

One notices that he recounted some of his earlier misinformation about the vaccines but not all that came in contact with the falsehood are impressed.

One of his followers replied sarcastically; "I praise your patriotism for agreeing to be one of our guinea pigs. Well done." Another wrote; "nonsense" with rolling eyes emoji.

Perhaps this reply captures the question you might readily want to ask; "You got convinced by your sister and friend. What about the thousands you convinced and made to see the vaccine as devil products?" 

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This is an edited version of a story by **Kemi Busari** which originally appeared on All Africa.

COVID-19 Vaccines: Religious Perspectives And Vaccine Hesitancy

By Sekyen Dadik | August 11, 2021

Misinformation driven by some clerics has become one of the major reasons why a majority of people are refusing to take the COVID-19 vaccine even when it is available, a situation known as vaccine hesitancy.

Photo by Annie Spratt on Unsplash

“I was one of the first to take the vaccine in Katsina, some people at home kept asking why I took the vaccine but it boils down to your ability to know what is real and what is fake and your ability to decipher what is happening around the world”.

Naufal Ahmad, took the bold step to take the first jab of the COVID-19 vaccine amidst fears and concerns raised by family and friends.

He is a Youth Advocate and Peacebuilder from Katsina State in Northwest Nigeria.

He said “I took the vaccine and my decision was informed by the fact that I am social media literate; I know how to find my way around what is real and what is fake, so I was not really influenced by the scepticism that surrounds the vaccines.

Religious stance, indeed plays a major role in people’s vaccine adherence, as was the case with Naufal who said “What also gave me a lot of boost of confidence is the fact that some religious leaders in my community took it first and they started promoting and encouraging people to take it so it was a boost for me.

Regrettably, not all youths will be as fortunate as Naufal to be exposed to perspectives that promote vaccines or knowledgeable enough to decipher COVID-19 misinformation (that is false information one spreads believing it is true) or disinformation (false information that one spreads even though they know it is false with the intention of misleading the public) on social media.

Misinformation driven by some clerics has become one of the major reasons why a majority of people are refusing to take the COVID-19 vaccine even when it is available, a situation known as vaccine hesitancy.

Sadly, these religious leaders falsely believe the disease does not exist, some advance the propaganda that the vaccine is a ploy to reduce Africa’s population while others believe that taking the vaccine is against one’s belief in God.

In a viral video on Karfi TV Youtube, an itinerant preacher popularly known Malam Bakwana na Yar Mariya, who spoke in Arabic and Hausa, and transcribed in part said “:.....“I greet you all my fellow Muslims, I am here to address the crises that is upon our nation and the world at large.... our refusal to walk with God is responsible.... right from the beginning we have had pandemics and people have recovered...together with Jews, Christians....so the issue of corona is a futile idea and child’s play....the idea of corona virus is false; it is a huge lie’. In a second video, he also postulated that corona virus does not exist. He criticized Governor Nasir El-Rufai of Kaduna state for closing down mosques and schools because of Corona which does not exist.

A search on Malam Bakwana reveals his name is Sule Mohammed and he is in a community called Yar Mariya in Kano state North West Nigeria. Until his retirement from civil service, he served as an Arabic Teacher for 35 years with the Kano State government.

An analysis of the videos shows a wide engagement with the video by social media users in the North. The first video had over seventy one thousand views as at 7th June 2021 with 288 thumbs up and 28 thumbs down, while the second video had about forty thousand views and over 150 likes.



Photo by Edwin Andrade on Unsplash

Most of the comments that followed Yar Mariya's video in Hausa language show most people in agreement with his position and praying blessings upon him.

Also a video premiered on YouTube through Apokalupsis Channel on 12 July, 2020, titled 'The Mystery of Corona', Reverend Chris Okotie said taking the COVID-19 vaccine means going into an agreement with Satan and the vaccine will make the recipient become a vampire.

Christopher Oghenebrorie Okotie is a Nigerian televangelist and the pastor of the Household of God Church International Ministries, a Pentecostal congregation in Lagos since February 1987.

The full video, which had almost four hundred thousand views as at 2 June 2021, had transcripts and videos shared on different mediums, it read in part:

"what Bill Gates is doing under the auspices of the United Nations, is to make sure that you receive the food ... when you eat the genetically modified organisms..., and you take the vaccine, you've entered into communion with Satan..... So, one of the things that the vaccine will make you do, is to become a 'vampire', who needs to drink blood for sustenance".

Nigeria is a highly religious country with different religious faithful holding strongly to their leaders' perspectives on issues, this is not different with COVID-19 infodemics. Many of these positions and those not captured here have influenced positively or negatively on responses of people especially youths to the COVID-19 vaccine.

Response from Youths

This reporter spoke to youths across northern Nigerian to gauge their responses based on the religious perspectives they have heard.

Sharing her experience, Grace Maikano a social media marketer and resident of Kaduna said "recently while

waiting for a cab I heard an itinerant preacher in a moving vehicle with loud speakers saying..‘anyone who takes the COVID-19 vaccine will lose his salvation, anyone who takes the COVID-19 vaccine will go to hell!’

I stood there in shock looking as the vehicle sped pass me blaring that information loudly! My first thought was, how did he come about such information, why will he use this means of communication to convey it and then I thought of those that will hear this information and actually believe it...

These could be people who follow him and because they know him or they are naïve or they already have doubts and now ‘someone’ is bold enough to air it out, will believe and finally relay this same information to others that were not there.

Personally, I have not taken the vaccine yet because I believe it is not an obligation and I have heard of one side effect or the other from those vaccinated so I need to prepare myself physically and mentally before taking the shots”.

“We have had people also asserting that taking the vaccine shows lack of faith or it the new world order and 666 coming into play.”

Idris Mohammed, a Lecturer of Mass Communication in Usmanu Danfodio University Sokoto, said most of the religious leaders in the region believe the vaccine is from the western world and is aimed at reducing the population of Muslim communities; by affecting the fertility in male and females.

But, he said, this is just a conspiracy theory fuelled by merchants of fake news, misinformation and disinformation. This can be traced to the wide gap in governance as people no longer trust government so anything that comes from government become suspicious.

“This misinformation is shared on social media and you see videos gotten from movies being shared as real videos of people reacting badly or dying from taking vaccines thereby derailing the public. But for me, in spite of these positions I am going to take the vaccine, I had COVID-19 at some point, though I was asymptomatic and did not go through the pains others went through. So I believe it is real and I will take the vaccine anytime soon”.

For Kaltumi Ahmed, a Public servant in Kaduna the disease is being overrated by government for its selfish gain and she would not in any way take the vaccine.

She said, “From what we have seen and heard even from some of our religious leaders, we are not even sure if this disease was created or it was intentionally brought to cause destruction not just to humans but the economy. So there is a lack of trust because we have seen a lot of videos on social media, discussions among leaders where some even make some derogatory statements on how Africa will be used as a sample to test these things.

This has created doubts in our minds, So I do not see any big deal around the whole hauling about the pandemic. I just feel it is over rated and there is more to it than what we see, what people say and what they want us to believe”.

Response from Religious Leaders

According to Pastor Lanre Fashanu, who serves with

In spite of the perspectives on COVID-19 Vaccines, vaccines according to the World Health Organization remain key in achieving a pandemic free world.

the King of all Kings Church of the Capstone, Kaduna, Nigeria, "I have heard quite a couple of takes by religious leaders most of which is not founded and not balanced, that we a plagued as a nation and the world at large is clear to everybody. This pandemic is real, COVID-19 is real and whatever the origin or the theories behind it, it is still ravaging and killing people, and it is still being studied. So it is real.

"As per the vaccines, I will not say people should not take it, as long as the government have done their clinical test, verified it and are satisfied that it is safe to be injected into a human body, why not? There are various vaccines out there, children take vaccines right from when they are a few weeks old, so this is one such vaccine. There is a lot of fear out there but we need our government to assure people it is safe, they should honestly show what steps they have taken to test this vaccine and be sure we are not taken in poison that will harm us in future.

"Once this is in place I will advise that we take the vaccines, it has nothing with losing your salvation. Some postulate that it is part of the mark of the beast, 666 but I tell people by the time the anti-Christ will show true believers would have been raptured, so we have nothing to fear; you will not lose your salvation nor become a vampire; it is unfounded. I have not seen someone become a vampire yet and it is not against scripture to take vaccination.

Responding also, Imam (Dr) Mohammed Ashafa, Co-Executive Director of Interfaith Mediation Centre, Kaduna Nigeria, said different religious perspectives have been peddled with the emergence of the virus and the introduction of vaccines.

"some see it as the consequence of sin and until we repent and turn from our ways then healing will come, others see it from the angle of conspiracy theories that the aim of the vaccines is to reduce population. Yet others believe the closure of mosques and churches mean they are against religion and a manifestation of end time.

Religious communities are divided on this issue; within Islam, the Sufi and reformists movement hold different worldviews on the disease, the puritans believe it is nothing and you do not need their drugs but only the power of prayer and fasting as the healing process. On the Christian side you have the voices of the Pentecostal, evangelicals on one side, then the orthodox, conservatives on another and all these inform the questions around the vaccine. This has been a difficult challenge for the religious community.

Unfortunately, till date the experts do not have a uniform approach as well, we have a competitive vaccine community with so much political interest being pushed by manufacturing countries. These has also created a lot of doubts in the minds of so many of our followers. So



like the experts, the religious community is also divided, therefore we are currently working on a book titled: 'Interfaith Protocol for prevention of COVID 19 and other epidemics' which highlights and demystifies some of the myths on COVID 19 and the vaccines

Experts Speak

"The issue of vaccine hesitancy is a major problem for us in the public health field and this is largely shaped by what people believe which consequently shapes their behaviour", said Dr. Daniel Meshak, a Public Health Specialist with the Jos University Teaching Hospital.

Meshak who is also a Consultant Family Physician said, "You could see that religion and culture are the major things that have a major influence on the believe system that people adopt and invariably it will affect their behaviour.

"We have had people also asserting that taking the vaccine shows lack of faith or it the new world order and 666 coming into play."

"The social media has not helped matters because distribution of information is now so fast and wide; and when you have respected men of God coming out to say they do not believe in the vaccine, of course it then has influence on a lot of people who hold their words in very high esteem and this has influenced a lot of behaviour concerning vaccine hesitancy".

Meshak said "Vaccine is very important because it fortifies our immunity and enables us to fight disease causing organisms, usually there are two ways either through the natural way that is allowing the person to be infected with the disease and then the person develops immunity or it could be through an artificial means that is vaccines, in which none dangerous organism of virus or bacteria is introduced into the body and it will trigger an immune reaction and it will be able to build the immune system.

The essence of a vaccine is that it protects individuals and the population and we have seen in the history of the world how vaccines have saved millions of lives from getting infected with diseases that would have killed them, that is why vaccine remains the best bet for us to return to our normal way of life".

CONCLUSION

In spite of the perspectives on COVID-19 Vaccines, vaccines according to the World Health Organization remain key in achieving a pandemic free world. With this, it becomes imperative for government, experts and religious leaders to work together to counter misinformation and address vaccine hesitancy especially among young people who are a part of the key population.

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This is an edited version of a story by Sekyen Dadik which originally appeared on Africa Prime News.

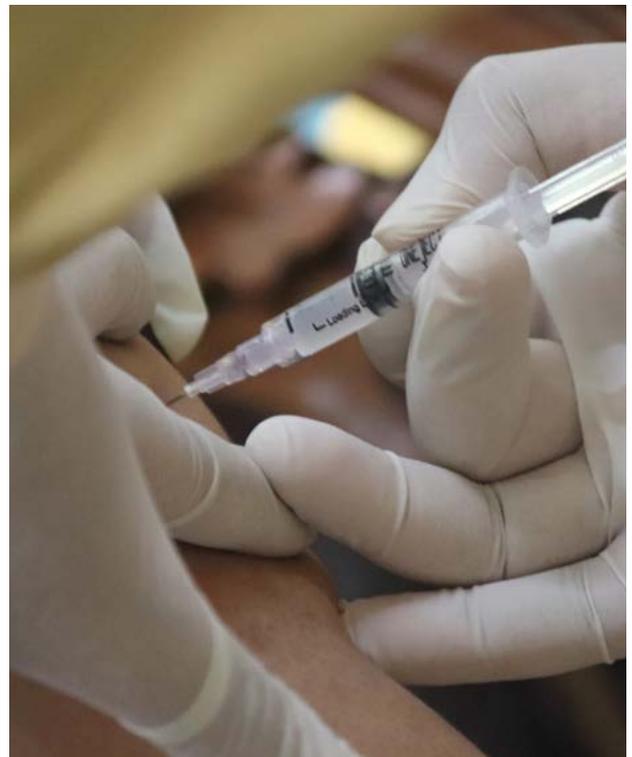
Covid-19 and Malaria: Demystifying The Dissimilarities

By Inyali Peter | August 12, 2021

Nigeria has tested more than two million Coronavirus (COVID-19) with one hundred and sixty confirmed cases and more than two thousand death recorded, a number that continues to rise.

Despite this, many Nigerians have continued to doubt the existence of the novel Coronavirus in the country, with insinuations that everything about the virus is politicized and an avenue for corrupt government officials to steal from public coffers. Some believe that what has been reported so far as Covid-19 is nothing but overhyped Malaria.

Although there've been no empirical evidence to support this claim, the disinformation which was first made public by Chief Raymond Dokpesi, Chairman of Daar Communication and reechoed months later by



Many Nigerians have continued to doubt the existence of the novel Coronavirus in the country, with insinuations that everything about the virus is politicized and an avenue for corrupt government officials to steal from public coffers. Some believe that what has been reported so far as Covid-19 is nothing but overhyped Malaria.

Photo by Viktor Forgacs on Unsplash

Governor Yahaya Bello of Kogi State between May and August last year had been spreading like wildfire both on and offline in Nigeria.

Dokpesi and seven members of his family had contracted the virus and were admitted into the Abuja Covid-19 isolation Centre on the 1st of May 2020. Fortunately for him, 15 days later, the medical team were able to manage him and others to a point of successful discharge.

However, instead of commending the efforts of the health workers, in his first interview after his discharge, he rather came out with the claim that what he suffered was malaria as there was no clear difference between the two diseases. He further challenged relevant authorities to educate him on the difference between the diseases claiming that throughout his stay in the isolation centre, he was managed with anti-Malarial drugs.

Bello on the other hand has been promoting different conspiracy theories about COVID-19 ranging from

refusing to adhere to all standard COVID-19 prevention protocols, insisting it's a hoax while describing the virus as an overhyped malaria and more recently, refusing to take the vaccine with the claim that, it was poisonous and designed to kill.

Despite Nigeria's national Public Health Institute in charge of detection and response to infectious disease outbreaks, Nigeria Centre For Disease Control (NCDC) coming out with several campaigns, promoted in the social media with Twitter as primary channel as well as during the frequent briefing of the Presidential Steering Committee On COVID-19 (formally known as Presidential Taskforce on COVID-19) to counter them, the disinformation continued to generate debate in the country.

A twitter User, @Crusader even started a campaign last year with the hashtag, #EndCovid-19scamnow" in support of Dokpesi's position that the Nigerian government had been reporting Malaria cases as COVID-19. The tweet launching the campaign generated 78 retweets, 266 likes and 15 replies.

Recall that the first COVID-19 case in Nigeria was confirmed on the 27th of February 2020. It was imported into the country by an Italian businessman who flew in from Milan for a business meeting in Lagos, Nigeria's commercial capital. Since this period, the number has continued to increase and a lot of Nigerians, including prominent citizens like the Late Chief of Staff to the President, Alhaji Abba Kyari, former Governor of Oyo State, Abiodun Ajimobi, Sen. Buruji Kashamu and most recently, a popular activist and Spokesman of Yoruba apex socio – political group, Chief Yinka Odumankin have all died from the virus. Despite this and other empirical evidence, the debate on whether COVID-19 exists or not still making waves.

Samuel Ushie, a University Don who lives in Calabar, explained why he supports the claim that Covid-19 is the same as Malaria.

According to him, "it all started with my wife. She was so sick, I was scared initially because she had all what they claim were symptoms of COVID-19 – loss of sense of smell, cough, fever and others. But after praying, I bought malaria drugs for her and she recovered. Few days later, I felt sick myself with the same symptoms. I went to the hospital, ran some tests but nothing came out negative. I had a little malaria which wasn't enough to cause the kind of symptoms felt.

To be honest with you, I thought I was going to die because even my skin changed. But my wife gave me the malaria drugs she took and since then, I've regained myself. So, I believe that if at all there's COVID-19 in Nigeria, we're yet to discover it because what we've now maybe another family of malaria which is yet to be discovered because if Malaria drugs can cure it, why is it given another name?" he queried.

Asked why they didn't test for COVID-19, he said: "I knew that there's no way we would have gone there



Photo by Engin Akyurt on Unsplash

and returned home. The fear of being kept in an isolation centre for what we believe is Malaria scared us. See, we're Christians, even though some of our friends presumed what we suffered was COVID-19, we don't believe it and that's it. It can only be Covid-19 to people who believe it. For me and my household, we don't believe it exists. But we believe malaria does."

Also, a medical practitioner with the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital, Dr. Samuel Bitty said that even as a health expert, he believes that COVID-19 doesn't exist in Nigeria. He said that what people may call COVID-19 is nothing but acute malaria which most times also affects the brain.

"I will give you my honest opinion. I think what we've here is cerebral malaria. Cerebral malaria is part of a multi-organ disease, it causes fever, headache, even loss of sense of taste. It can even cause severe acute respiratory syndrome. People may see it like COVID-19. For some time now, there is no accurate proof about COVID-19 in Nigeria", Dr. Bitty said.

From Bitty's opinion, it's clear that even some health professionals who are frontliners in the fight against COVID-19 believe that it is another form of Malaria and as such are also helping in spreading the disinformation. However, findings have proven that COVID-19 does exist and it is not Malaria.

To understand the difference, it's important to understand what the two diseases mean.

FACTS

According to World Health Organization, WHO, "COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 but were not traced to human".

Malaria on the other hand is described by WHO as a "preventable and treatable disease caused by

plasmodium parasites that are transmitted to people through the bites of infected female Anopheles mosquitoes".

SYMPTOMS

Similarly, although some Malaria symptoms like fever, headache, and chills which show up between 10-15 days of mosquito bites are also found in COVID-19 infected persons. Others like loss of sense of smell/taste, difficulty in breathing, diarrhea, catarrh, fatigue, body pain and sore throat are not very common symptoms of malaria.

Malaria and Covid-19 also differ in terms of transmission. While malaria according to WHO is "transmitted through the bites of female Anopheles mosquitoes which are more than 400 species with around 30 as malaria vectors of major importance". Covid-19 according to NCDC on the other hand is spread from "infected people's mouth or nose in small liquid particles when they cough, sneeze, speak, sing or breathe".

NCDC further emphasized that the virus spreads mainly between people who are in close contact with each other, typically within 1 metre. "A person can be infected when aerosols or droplets containing the virus are inhaled or come directly into contact with the eyes, nose, or mouth". Malaria doesn't spread between people but by female mosquito bite.

Prevention

The NCDC has advised that to prevent the spread of COVID-19, people should wash their hands regularly with soap and running water, or an alcohol-based hand sanitiser, maintain social distancing from people coughing or sneezing, wear a face mask, cover nose and mouth with a bent elbow or a tissue when coughing or sneezing. None of these preventive measures can work with malaria because the mode of transmission is through a mosquito bite and not human.

As the world continue to battle with virus, every responsible Nigerian is expected to take responsibility and play a part in winning the war against the virus by always passing the right information.

The WHO World Malaria report indicates that Vector control, sleeping under treated mosquito nets, using insecticide are some of the measures that can be applied in the prevention of malaria.

DIAGNOSIS/TREATMENT

According to United States Centre for Disease Control (CDC), malaria parasites can be identified by examining under the microscope a drop of the patient's blood, spread out as a "blood smear" on a microscope slide. Prior to examination, the specimen is stained (most often with the Giemsa stain) to give the parasites a distinctive appearance". It can be treated using antibacterial and antiparasitic medications such as Chloroquine phosphate, (Coartem), etc.

Nevertheless, there's still doubt about the efficacy of some vaccines approved by WHO for the prevention of COVID-19 infection. The National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) in Nigeria, has approved the Oxford AstraZeneca and Pfizer Covid-19 vaccines for the treatment of the virus in Nigeria.

Chief Medical Director of Omega Clinic and General Secretary, Association of General and Private Medical Practitioners of Nigeria (AGPMPN), Cross River State Chapter, Dr. Godwin Agbor clarified that: "Covid-19 is real. It's unfortunate that alot of wrong information are in the social media space about COVID-19 from some people who may not be professional but disguising as one. The fact is that this strain of virus is relatively new to us and much more facts are yet to be presented about its genomics. Researches and more studies are

currently underway to unravel the pathophysiology of the COVID-19 infection".

He added that, "My candid opinion is that it is real and not overhyped Malaria as insinuated by many. It is a RNA virus that affects the respiratory system leading to a cascade of reactions from inflammation to even death. It has nothing to do with malaria which is a protozoa transmitted to man by the bite of its vector- mosquito. Though malaria presents as a non specific systemic illness. It means that some signs and symptoms of malaria can be seen in Covid-19 infection. But they are not the same".

Agbor added that the misinformation and disinformation about the virus is hampering to a large extent the fight against the pandemic in Sub-Saharan Africa, especially Nigeria. He advised that people should not take hook line and sinker, things they read on both electronic and print media but should verify from established authorities and professional bodies.

As the world continue to battle with virus, every responsible Nigerian is expected to take responsibility and play a part in winning the war against the virus by always passing the right information. One of such information that should remain in the lips of everybody is that as majority experts and established authorities have said, COVID-19 may present some symptoms that are similar to those of Malaria, it's however distinct.

This is an edited version of a story by Inyali Peter which originally appeared on June 10, 2021 on Najla Voice.

Watch out: How to spot false Covid-19 stories on social media

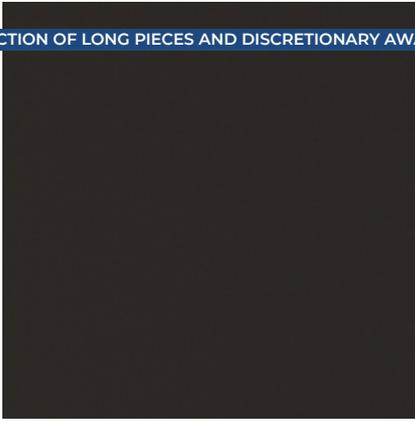
By Jacob Nyongesa | August 16, 2021

I am in a public transport vehicle one evening and I strike a conversation with a woman seated next to me. We talk about the new regulations by government to have public transport resume normal services amidst the surging Covid-19 numbers in the country.

Photo by Maxim Ilyanov on Unsplash

I inquire whether she has been vaccinated and her response was a straight no. She gives two reasons: one, was that she might eventually turn into an alien and, two, the vaccine interferes with the DNA of the host. Source of info? She belongs to a WhatsApp group where such issues are discussed.

On March 2, a year after the first case was reported in the country, Kenya received 1.02 million doses of the AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccines. This marked a great milestone in the fight to liberate the country from the virus. While receiving the vaccines, Health Cabinet Secretary Mutahi Kagwe shared a deployment plan with priority given to healthcare workers and security personnel.



Currently, only 1.79 million Kenyans have been vaccinated. This leaves out a considerable number of people who are yet to be partially or fully vaccinated. There have been concerns from the public on the efficacy of the vaccines, with many casting aspersions on the uptake of the vaccine.

Some of the questions and myths raised and shared about the vaccines include concerns about side effects. Whether one could suffer blood clots, or be infected thereafter, safety of the jab for pregnant mothers and whether the vaccine can alter the DNA of the host.

These myths have led to a lot of fear amongst people leading to reluctance to get vaccinated. The biggest enablers in the spread of misinformation are reported to be blogs and other social media platforms. Here are seven ways one can easily identify fake COVID-19 stories shared on social media.

1. **Is it a 'breaking news' story?** During the pandemic a lot of content has been shared on social media with the 'breaking news' tag. This is a very common trick used by blogs to catch users unawares. A click on such links leads to an undated story. The best way to check the 'breaking news' stories is simply look for the date when it was published.
2. **Unknown web addresses:** It is important for any user to always check the source of information found online. The URL of any website that looks suspect should be keenly checked. An example is who.int and who.org. If one is not careful, they can easily mistake the later as the site for World Health Organisation. A little keenness and scrutiny are needed to save one from being misinformed.
3. **Who else is talking about the story?** In this pandemic there has been an abundance of information and chances of misinformation are high. When one gets information from any source, check with other reputable media houses to see if they covered or shared the story. In most cases a fake story will be confined to questionable sites. This calls for more research to corroborate the information provided.
4. **How sensational is the headline?** To grab the attention of their readers online, most purveyors of misinformation will use catchy headlines and phrases to attract people to read through. With the increase in competition for eyeballs online, content creators will use overly sensational headlines as click baits. 'Seven facts about COVID-19, the last one will shock

Some of the questions and myths raised and shared about the vaccines include concerns about side effects. Whether one could suffer blood clots, or be infected thereafter, safety of the jab for pregnant mothers and whether the vaccine can alter the DNA of the host.

Photo by Gilles Lambert on Unsplash

you'. Such a headline will interest a lot of people to read the article that ends up giving obvious facts. This trend has become common during the pandemic and most content creators are taking advantage to mislead the public.

5. **Bias:** Journalism calls for objectivity in reporting. Now, any deviation from it could be interpreted as being partial. Unless an article is an editorial or opinion piece then all news articles must give all sides a fair chance to be heard. As one reads any information, the big question should be what they stand to gain from the story.
6. **Who is the author?** Has the person who has shared the story or article published anything else? Always check the byline of the person writing the story and do a search. Most fake news websites will pick people who have no journalistic skills to write stories.
7. **Hoaxes:** Those who purvey misinformation will use falsified celebrities accounts to advance their narrative. In some instances, fake twitter, Instagram, TikTok and Facebook accounts and pages of celebrities have been created and used to share false information.



Finally, there is a need for continuous awareness creation on what is false and what is not on social media platforms. Helping journalists and online users understand that when they share misinformation, they become part of the vicious web that 'pollutes the information' ecosystem. This can only be done when we collaborate in our efforts.

In view of this, you can always get in touch with MCK's fact-checking desk at editor@mediaobserver.co.ke, and we will support all your fact-checking needs.

The writer is senior officer research, planning and strategy at MCK

How conspiracy theories surrounding deaths of African leaders fuel COVID-19 misinformation

By Jack Vincent Fidelis (Maiduguri, Nigeria) & Thomas Bwire (Nairobi, Kenya) | August 17, 2021

Photo by Eyasu Etsub on Unsplash

“If the west doesn’t have a lot to hide, why are sitting African leaders who oppose COVID-19 vaccination in their countries dying mysteriously?”

It’s a controversial claim. The idea that those who oppose the vaccine are being killed has no factual basis. But such rumours are commonplace.

Probed further, Bulama Grema, a 44-year-old civil servant in Maiduguri, North-East Nigeria, who made the statement, attested to getting his information from ‘informed sources’ at his local majalisa (an informal assembly of peer groups in most parts of northern Nigeria).

Such rumours have permeated into the African society and unconscionably affected COVID-19 vaccine reception from the fringes of the Sahel in Northern Nigeria to the coastline of Kenya on the Indian Ocean.

This, according to Nigeria Health Watch, does not come as a surprise considering the amount of misinformation about the vaccine online and in the public domain.

Misinformation, as purveyed by Bulama and his ilk, could be responsible for why many people in Africa shun

COVID-19 vaccines and stigmatise those that contract the disease.

The situation in northern Nigeria is not different from Kenya’s where Agostina Mbwaya, a 35-year-old mother of two living with her husband at Kibera Slum, a neighbourhood in Nairobi, was practically ostracised for having contracted and recovered from COVID-19.

“Neighbours stopped visiting our home and they warned their children not to come play with our daughter. The message was clear. We had become outcasts in our own community. I didn’t understand why people well-known to us could turn their backs on us like that.

“Now that I think of it, I felt sad deep down in my heart. In the first place, I never wished to be picked up by an ambulance at my doorstep because of the dreaded disease. We got healed from COVID-19 and came back to continue living our normal lives,” she said.

Godiya Bitrus, a 30-year-old resident of Goni Kachallari on the outskirts of Maiduguri, Borno State capital in Nigeria, recovered from COVID-19 and was discharged from an isolation centre. She had to relocate to her sister’s house in Bulumkutu, far away from home, to

There is no evidence that the former leaders of Tanzania, Ivory Coast, Eswatini, Burundi and even Haiti were killed for refusing to vaccinate their countries against COVID-19.

Photo by CDC on Unsplash

avoid the 'hatred' and stigmatisation meted to her for being 'a potential carrier' of the disease, according to her.

In a similar vein, Mohammed Ibrahim, a 29-year-old resident of Bulabulin Anda, a suburban area of Maiduguri, lamented how close friends deserted him when he returned from the isolation centre fully recovered. According to UNICEF, knowing the facts is key to being properly prepared, and protecting oneself and loved ones.

Sadly, there's a lot of information out there that is incorrect. Misinformation during a health crisis leaves people unprotected and vulnerable to the disease and spreads fear and stigmatisation.

Opposition to COVID-19 vaccination and reported death of some African leaders

African leaders from Tanzania (John Magufuli), Ivory Coast (Hamed Bakayoko), Eswatini (Ambrose Dlamini), Burundi (Pierre Nkurunziza) and even the President of the Caribbean island of Haiti (Jovenel Moise) died in active service.

Coincidentally, before their deaths, they had had issues with COVID-19 vaccination in one form or another. As a result, conspiracy theorists interpreted their demise to mean that they were eliminated by 'the powers that be' for their convictions.

But several prominent anti-vaxxers have died from COVID-19 across the world. Stephen Karanja, a Kenyan

doctor who became a vociferous opponent of COVID-19 vaccine, died of COVID-19 on April 29, 2021, in Nairobi.

Stephen Harmon, a 34-year-old vocal opponent of vaccines, died on July 7, 2021, in California, USA.

Alan Scott Laniox from Texas, 54, who thought vaccines were 'poison' died on June 9, 2021, from COVID-19, after spending 17 days in a hospital on a ventilator.

On July 22, 2021, Reuters Fact Check team did a comprehensive report on the stories and debunked the fallacy for what it was:

"Following the assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moise on July 7 [2021], a new meme circulating on social media presents the unfounded claim that he and four other leaders, who also died while in office, were killed for opposing COVID-19 vaccines."

Reuters has debunked similar claims on other posts, which can be found [here](#).

The meme ([here](#), [here](#)) includes the photos of five leaders: Jovenel Moise of Haiti, John Magufuli of Tanzania, Hamed Bakayoko of Ivory Coast, Ambrose Dlamini of eSwatini and Pierre Nkurunziza of Burundi.

"All refused the vaccine," the text on the meme reads.

What killed the African leaders?

In March, 2021, the late President John Magufuli of

Tanzania died of heart disease according to the current president Samia Suluhu Hassan.

Before his death, the Vice President of Tanzania's semi-autonomous island of Zanzibar Seif Sharif Hamad had died in February, 2021, weeks after getting COVID-19.

The late Prime Minister of Ivory Coast Hamed Bakayoko, 56, died of cancer at a hospital in the German city of Freiburg, as reported on March 10, 2021, by Al Jazeera and the BBC.

Reuters reported on Dec. 13, 2020, that the Prime Minister of Eswatini (known until recently as Swaziland) Ambrose Dlamini died at the age of 52 after battling a COVID-19 infection for four weeks.

The Government of the Republic of Burundi announced the death of Pierre Nkurunziza on June 8, 2020, saying it was caused by heart attack.

The verifiable fact that the African leaders died of COVID-19 and other natural causes means, simply, that it would be impossible to surmise that their deaths had been caused by some non-existing pro-vaccination cabal.

Verdict

False. There is no evidence that the former leaders of Tanzania, Ivory Coast, Eswatini, Burundi and even Haiti were killed for refusing to vaccinate their countries against COVID-19.

Bulama Grema, the respondent in Maiduguri who amplified the misinformation, and those at Kibera Slum in Nairobi who victimised Agostina, Godiya and Ibrahim even though they were certified free of COVID-19, are easily deluded given the power of narratives created to misinform and mislead unsuspecting members of the public.

Conspiracy theories and misinformation must be combated to standstill

According to Nigeria Health Watch, the fight against COVID-19 vaccine misinformation is an aggressive one—one that requires everyone to play their role.

Founder and CEO Daktari Msafiri LTD Initiative in Kenya Jeremy Gitau HSC, a doctor, said: "The best way families can handle misinformation on Covid-19 is to engage a clinician to disclose the positive results to close family members. Positive tests conducted can be shared as evidence too to eliminate stigma and mistrust by family members."

While the doctor has a strong point, relevant stakeholders must do the needful to effectively combat conspiracy theories and misinformation, which are the banes of COVID-19 vaccination acceptance, experts say.

This publication was produced as part of IWRP's Africa Resilience Network (ARN) programme administered in partnership with the Centre for Information Resilience (CIR), the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR) and Africa Uncensored. For more information on ARN, please visit the ARN site: <https://africa-resiliencenetwork.com/>

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A look at the story behind the story

Kenya: Dispelling Myths About Vaccines and Male Virility

By Athuman Luchi | August 24, 2021

Mombasa reporter describes how solid research and frank conversations can combat Covid-19 disinformation.

A rumour that Covid-19 vaccines causes erectile dysfunction, infertility and generally damages male potency has become a big issue in Mombasa, where I'm based, and across the coastal area of Kenya. A lot of men in the rural areas believe these false rumours, leading to vaccine hesitancy.

The story has spread online, mostly via WhatsApp Groups and Facebook, and also by word-of-mouth at public gatherings.

The ongoing coronavirus outbreak has triggered an unprecedented financial and economic crisis - many people here on the coast depend on fishing and small-scale farming in order to feed their families - and bringing tremendous uncertainty to all sides of human life.

It has also led to the spread of disinformation and misinformation, with many rumours about



*IWPR trainee
and contributor
Athuman Luchi.*

coronavirus spreading on social media platforms. Investigating the erectile dysfunction story, I heard that drinking black tea cures coronavirus, that those who were vaccinated will die after two years, and disinformation that those with sickle cell disease cannot get Covid-19 and many more.

To debunk the erectile dysfunction story, I carried out my research using open-source intelligence (OSINT) research which I'd learnt as part of the **Africa Resilience Network Project (ARN)**. I particularly focused on video research tools and reverse images searches in order to find out the information being shared was false.

In WhatsApp groups, I identified those who were vaccinated and those who are not. I then decided to interview men who are opposed to the vaccine, as well as those who were vaccinated, in order to find out if the myths were real. The men who were vaccinated made it clear that the rumour that Covid-19 vaccine causes erectile dysfunction is false, because their erectile status is intact. I also got the doctors' side on the story and they proved that there is no medical evidence that the vaccine causes erectile dysfunction.

I decided to become a reporter so as to live life with a curious nature, to disseminate information and to shape



Being able to spot misinformation disguised as legitimate news enables journalists to combat the widespread distribution of harmful, misleading and false information.

Photo by Charles Deluvio on Unsplash

the public perception of key figures, places and events. I still want to develop my communication research and investigative skills, and OSINT skills can be used to debunk fake news.

Being able to spot misinformation disguised as legitimate news enables journalists to combat the widespread distribution of harmful, misleading and false information.

I now apply these skills on a daily basis in my work as an online editor, news anchor and news sub-editor at Radio Rahma, based in Mombasa.

The economic crisis and uncertainty caused by the pandemic has hit the journalism sector too. Many media houses are facing a lack of advertising, hence leading to salary delays and redundancies. Many radio stations are closing down.

But journalism is an essential part of a functioning society, and we are especially needed now to identify fake news and ensure reporting is fair and accurate.

With the OSINT skills I learned with ARN, I will make sure that I can verify all misinformation, and will also teach fellow journalists so as to build a strong network that will fact check the spread of misinformation in our country.

My plan is to start making radio programs to inform society about the dangers of misinformation and disinformation so that more people will become aware of the fake news spread on a daily basis in my country. 

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This publication was produced as part of IWPR's Africa Resilience Network (ARN) programme, administered in partnership with the Centre for Information Resilience (CIR), the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR), and Africa Uncensored.

Nigeria: No, the Covid-19 Vaccine Won't Turn You Into A Vampire.

By Bukola Ayeni | August 27, 2021

How one reporter calmly combatted disinformation spread by a religious leader.

Reverend Chris Okotie
photo credit: <https://koko.ng>

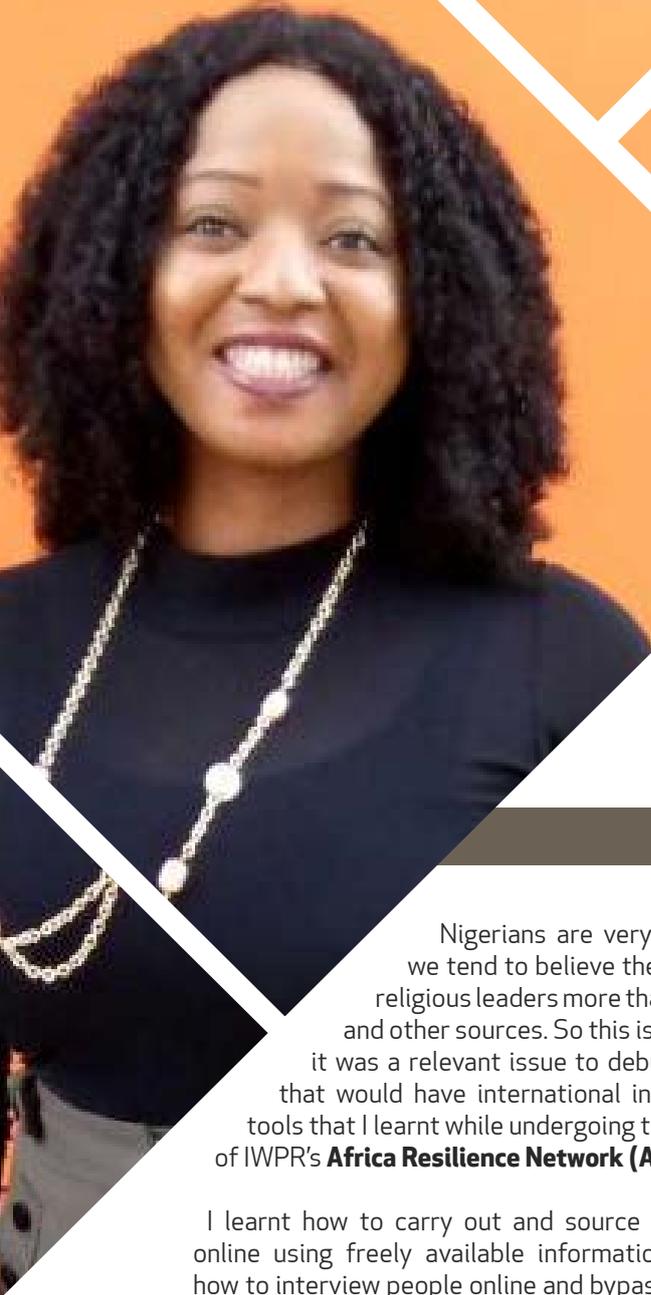
I stumbled upon a weird and false claim that the Covid-19 vaccine has the capacity to turn its recipient into a vampire, and decided to dig deeper into the story.

The story gained popularity through Reverend Chris Okotie, the senior pastor of Household of God Church International Ministries, a Lagos megachurch. He's a former presidential candidate too.

Okotie claimed that "one of the things that the vaccine will make you do is to become a vampire who needs to drink blood for sustenance".

"But we, as Christians, don't drink the blood, we drink wine, which is an emblem of the blood and that sustains us spiritually. But his communion will require you drinking blood consistently so that you are a vampire for your sustenance."





*IWPR trainee
and contributor
Bukola Ayeni.*

Nigerians are very religious and we tend to believe the words of our religious leaders more than our families and other sources. So this is why I thought it was a relevant issue to debunk – and one that would have international interest - using tools that I learnt while undergoing training as part of IWPR's **Africa Resilience Network (ARN)** project.

I learnt how to carry out and source investigations online using freely available information, as well as how to interview people online and bypass some of the traditional channels. I use a lot of these new tools almost every day in my work. I learnt how to use Google Earth, and advanced settings on Google Trends and Twitter. Hoaxy is a fantastic tool that tracks misinformation online. It's helped my work in network analysis and investigations.

I got people talking about the story by sharing it on my social media platforms and via WhatsApp. People need to understand which claims are false. I bring out facts, although it's hard to say things against priests and imams. I comment on Tweets and debunk myths, giving examples.

From what I saw online, I believe that very few people actually believe that taking the vaccine will turn you into a vampire. I think the government got it right on the vaccine publicity. Lots of people have taken the vaccine and nobody has turned into a zombie - or had a chip put in their skin. Testimony from vaccinated people worked. People got a little fever, and that's all.

There are definitely some strange rumours and fake cures. Some people believe that if you take a lot of immune boosters you will not get Covid-19, and there are some other concoctions too.

Since high school I wanted to be a newscaster. My own media career has been online, and I work as a content creator, digital marketing executive and freelance writer, covering a wide range of topics that take my interest.

I am passionate about my work against disinformation and misinformation, and ARN has definitely stretched me. Because of the help I got from international and Nigerian mentors, I could reach out for help whenever I wanted. I see covering Covid-19 related disinformation as an opportunity to set people free from lies. 

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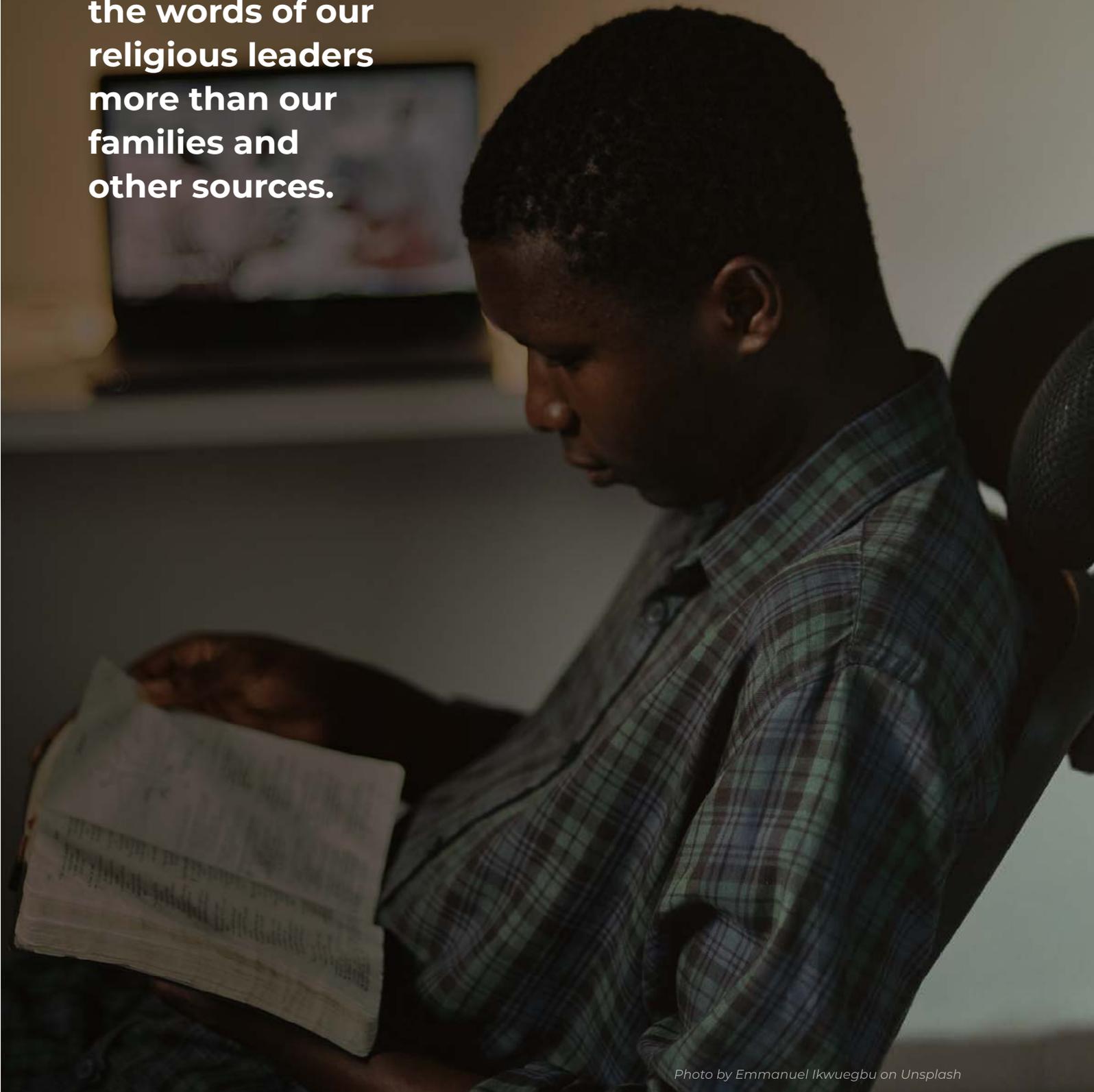


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A look at participants profiles

Published by IWPR for
World Press Freedom Day 2021

Nigeria: Media Still Used As a Tool of Control

“The more we fight for transparency, the more it will help people be accountable.”

By Nelly Kalu | May 1, 2021

Nigerian journalist and member of the Africa Resilience Network





Youth Christian leaders listen to the pastor during Easter mass as they follow the new directive of Kenya's President to curb the spread of the Covid-19 coronavirus at Revivlist Outreach Church Kenya in Nairobi on April 4, 2021. © Yasuyoshi CHIBA / AFP via Getty Images

Fake news is a problem in Nigeria, like it is in every part of the world. I think that we have a particular problem in Nigeria because of a deep-seated mistrust for the government - or indeed any form of authority.

This mistrust has been cultivated over decades of being lied to and bullied by authority figures. For many years, Nigerian media was controlled by the government and still is to a large degree. The media served as a propaganda tool for different governments, from the military era to of course, the now seemingly democratic era. It's still used as a major form of control.

Nigeria is only 60 years old as an independent country, and many of those years were spent under a military dictatorship. So the generation that lived through these dictatorships still see the media as a propaganda tool for the government.

“Mistrust has been cultivated over decades of being lied to and bullied by authority figures.”

We are hoping to change that, as independent media keeps trying to free itself from government interference. With the spread of social media, we're hoping that in the next decade or so we can get people to choose the right news for themselves.

I'm a broadcast journalist and fact checker, working in a freelance capacity with AfricaCheck on Covid-19 and political stories. I write and interview for Newswire and worked in radio for almost seven years, on one of the country's biggest stations, Nigeria Info FM. I also worked in TV just before the virus hit.

I like the dialogue and communication with mentors and the team in general as part of the Africa Resilience Network project, who are always there to answer questions and to help. One of the big limitations for Nigerian journalists, whichever platform they're on, is being able to find someone to guide and give you the resources that you need to pursue the stories you want to, as safely and as professionally as possible.

My investigation looks at the bias religious leaders have towards the Covid-19 vaccines, and the dynamic between their personal claims or beliefs, how that affects people who listen to them and how that also affects the vaccination exercise in Nigeria.

One example is the Catholic Church, for instance, which during lockdown and the early months of coronavirus was very vocal about mask wearing and social distancing. But there's been almost complete



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silence since the vaccine has been out. Of course, the papacy has said to go ahead and take the vaccine, but within Nigeria there have been just one or two bishops saying they have no problem with it. What I'm investigating is whether this silence is damaging vaccination efforts.

Information as a public good is not really a concept that many Nigerians are familiar with, although we are working towards that every day.

Foreign journalists used to come in, investigate and tell stories through their own lenses. Now local journalists, our perspective and our views, are being engaged and that's a good thing. But on the other hand, we have a lot

of disinformation campaigns coming from foreign sources. They are hard to pin down, and they come via all forms of media. Some countries have strong influence in media in Africa, in Nigeria. We're still seeing how that plays out. For that reason, I'm grateful to be where we are now in the fight against misinformation and disinformation.

The more we fight for transparency, in the name of fact checking and fighting disinformation and misinformation, and this infodemic we are in now, the more it will help people be more accountable in the stories and the narratives that they choose to push.

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This publication was produced as part of IWPR's Africa Resilience Network (ARN) programme, administered in partnership with the Centre for Information Resilience (CIR), the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR), and Africa Uncensored.

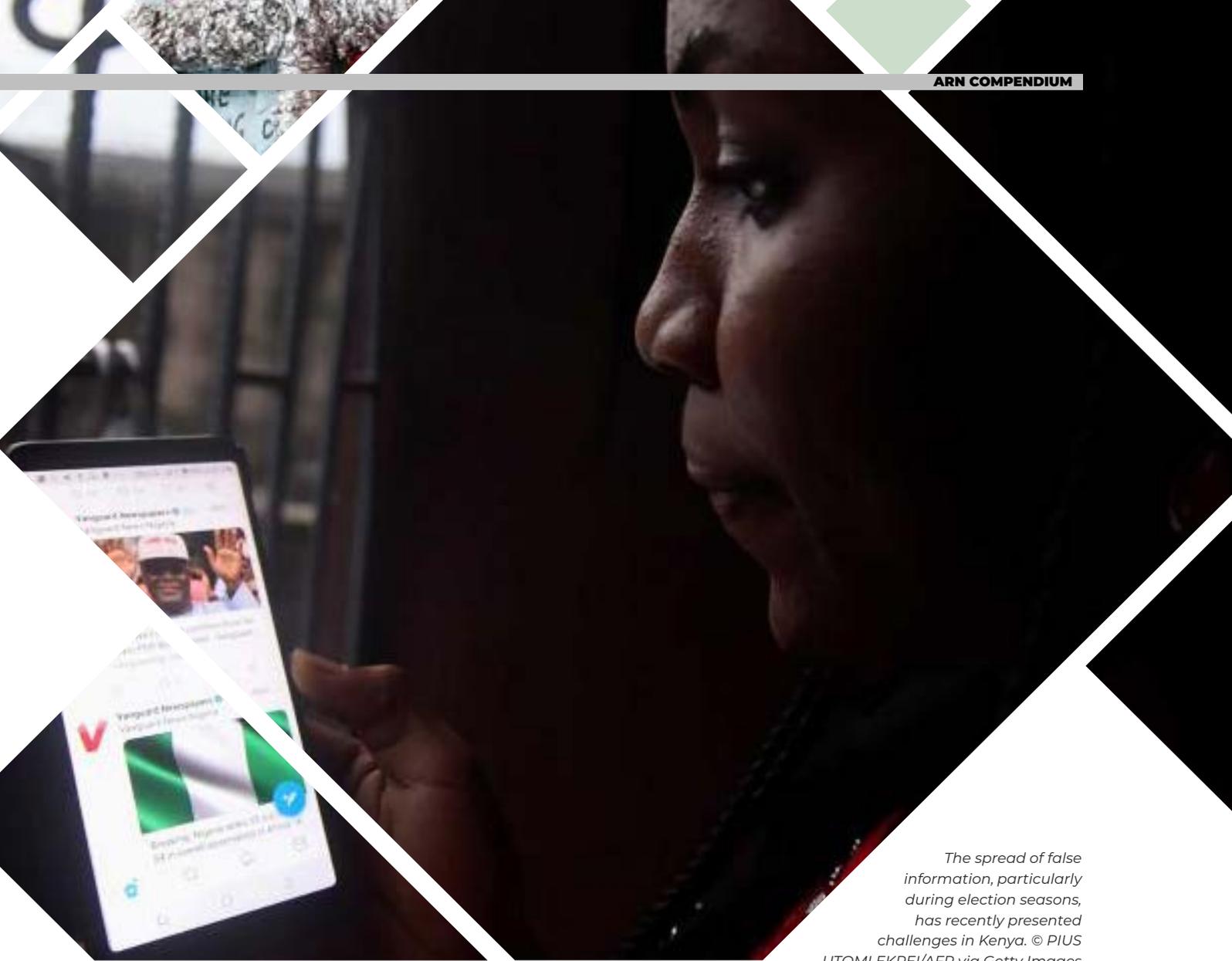
Kenya: Combating Extremist Narratives Around Covid-19

How local journalists are working to stop radicals exploiting the pandemic as a recruitment tool.

By Abjata Khalif | May 1, 2021

Kenyan journalist and member
of the Africa Resilience Network





The spread of false information, particularly during election seasons, has recently presented challenges in Kenya. © PIUS UTOMI EKPEI/AFP via Getty Images

The big story in Kenya right now is the weaponisation of Covid-19.

Non-state actors are spreading the message that this disease came to 'cleanse' certain communities and religions.

For instance, one story designed to promote interfaith violence was that the vaccine contained enzymes from pigs.

Such narratives are being used as a recruitment tool by violent armed groups, and the containment measures and the lack of proper security have allowed them to take this opportunity.

The best weapon to overcome these challenges is to use what we call vernacular language local radio, It's a powerful tool.

The border is porous and there is a flow of information from the other side of the border; [extremists] want to use that information also, to ensuring that they control that vast and unmanned region.

I'm a science and development journalist based in Northern Kenya, and have experience in solutions-based journalism on climate change and health, as well as cross-border investigative journalism.

I'm founder of a nonprofit community media organisation called Kenya Pastoralists Journalists' Network which produces untold and under-reported stories from the northern Kenya Region.

We translate material into local languages that people can understand and digest. We help people make informed decisions based on that information, and hold community radio listening groups. People in remote villages sit together under a tree, and listen to a solar powered radio for an hour away from their livestock. Sometimes they listen to a program on a flash disk using the radio's USB slots. Attendance is often 100 per cent.

After they listen to the program, they sit down and have a conversation about what action they should take, what

Photo by Francesca Noemi Marconi on Unsplash

to do next. I work between Wajir and Mandera, and there are remote areas away from regular radio frequencies, so cut off from communication.

These communities are an easy target for misinformation and radicalisation. The border areas are also an easy target for armed extremism, but the listening programme is a very powerful tool. People are kept abreast of the news, they listen and learn to see how they can replicate ideas from around the world into their own remote setting.

In some places you can't bring a health visitor because they would be abducted, but you can train people to use the USB radios, and they'll have a session and discuss solutions.

The border is porous and there is a flow of information from the other side of the border; [extremists] want to use that information also, to ensuring that they control that vast and unmanned region.

Their strategy now is to weaponise Covid-19, but even before that they were packaging misinfor-

mation, telling people that the government was not developing the region because they don't like you. It triggered hatred, and took advantage of the anger that local people had. They said that Covid-19 was manufactured in an American lab to wipe out our [Muslim] religion.

The IWPR training was a godsend. It is useful to find out how extremists are operating in the region using geolocation, and I'm now using Twitter, checking Facebook and Instagram, and using network analysis for my stories. This is new for me, and a wonderful skillset. I'm using these skills for my IWPR assignment which is an investigation into non-state actors in northern Kenya.

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*Abjata Khalif
 engaging with
 rehabilitated ex-conflict
 concubines in Bulla Game,
 Garissa County, Kenya. Photo
 courtesy of A. Khalif*

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Podcast: Covid-19 The Africa Story

**You've probably
heard the Covid story
before. But have you
heard it from the
African perspective?**

Photo by Emmanuel Ikwuegbu on Unsplash

Click on the title to listen:

Covid-19

The Africa

Story



By **Nelly Kalu**

We'll hear the voices of people who don't believe the virus exists. As well as those in the frontline of the battle to convince people that the whole thing isn't a hoax.

We'll look at how misinformation, disinformation and downright lies have infected Kenya and Nigeria. The influence of religion, and foreign money.

My name is Nelly Kalu, and over the next six weeks, Covid-19: the Africa Story, will take you on a journey. From Lagos megachurches to the deserts of the Kenya Somalia border, where al Shabaab terrorists deny the existence of the disease: but kidnap the women they secretly suspect of bringing it into the country.

We'll look at some of the strangest rumours about the disease – from garlic to vampires.

And we'll show you the tips and tricks that professionals use to spot fake coronavirus information on the Internet.

Covid-19: the Africa Story, was produced as part of IWPR's Africa Resilience Network (ARN) programme, administered in partnership with the Centre for Information Resilience (CIR), the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR), and Africa Uncensored.

<https://africaresiliencenetwork.com>

About: *The podcast features Nigerian, Kenyan, and international experts and is aimed at a general audience although will be of particular interest to community leaders, health professionals, and concerned citizens looking for the truth about the global pandemic.*

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