

GOVERNMENT SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS AND PUBLIC TRUST DURING DISEASE OUTBREAKS

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Abstract

Government campaigns on social media have become indispensable in mitigating public health crises and building public confidence amid disease outbreaks. This paper looks at government social media communications concerning the general well-being, exploring public perceptions of communication from Nigeria Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (NCDC) messaging within Lagos State. The study employed the descriptive documentary research design methodology and relied on secondary sources gathered from scholarly journals, textbooks, NCDC reports, and publications by WHO, UNICEF, relevant government policy documents and other available literary works. Result reveals that social media campaigns by the NCDC were largely able to improve public awareness due to provision of information relating to disease transmission symptoms, modes of prevention and treatment, reporting mechanisms and health advisories within a short span. The quality of messages, reliability, comprehensiveness and transparency contribute to their effectiveness in fostering public trust, while misinformation, divergent views, high content flow (overload), tardiness in responses and lack of confidence in institution cause mistrust. Government's social media engagement in Public health crisis communication should however be dynamic, transparent, time-sensitive, and

sensitive to the target public (audience driven).

Keywords: Government Social Media Campaigns; NCDC Messaging; Public Health Trust; Disease Outbreak Communication; Misinformation.

Introduction

Public health outbreaks are one of the most important national public health concerns. In these events, a responsible government must be able to clearly and concisely distribute trustworthy information to communities about illness details, causes, routes of exposure, early warning symptoms, prevention and care that may be accessed (Ojeka et al, 2023). Clear health education reduces panic, encourages people with healthy ways to access medical help and facilitate compliance with safe practices recommended. A response during an outbreak not only involve a report of an occurrence but involve risk assessment communication, public explanation, clarification of uncertainties and debunk of rumours (Ojekah et al, 2024). Since the population decision depends heavily upon its interpretation of a governments report, high trust, consistency and speed, are very necessary for decision making during this crucial period.

Social media has a revolutionary impact on public health communication in emergencies. Social media platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram, WhatsApp can be utilized to deliver accurate and timely information to a mass audience, while providing a platform where the public can communicate, comment, and re-share content (Santas et al, 2022). In comparison to other communication channels, social media affords immediate two-way communication, and is thus highly effective for dispersing fast updates when a complex outbreak continues to develop (Asamah, 2021). Government bodies are employing social media to broadcast preventative measures, updates on outbreaks, media-rich resources, emergency notices, and immediate corrections of misinformation. Consequently, digital media have developed into an indispensable component of Contemporary public health messaging, public

communication, and risk messaging during public health emergencies (Ajihson, 2024).

However, the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (NCDC), an agency responsible for the maintenance of national mechanisms for disease surveillance, Preparedness, Prevention and Risk Communication is key on managing national health communication (Adullateef & Okonkwo, 2021). As one of its key roles to inform the public; through its messaging, NCDC relays specific information to the public such as; status of outbreaks, manifestations of diseases, transmission pathway, means of prevention and also directs people who need report and also how they should report their situation. Direct Messaging using of digital application also makes the NCDC to have direct relation with the public, this allows NCDC to react in real time to an unfolding health emergency situations. During outbreak periods, direct messaging is an essential practice in that, the general public fear of virus or bacteria; makes them become anxious, which leads to quicker dissemination of rumor (Rachael et al, 2024). Thus, the function of communication by NCDC, therefore acts at the level of both information passage, as well as shaping public perception on an issues.

However, effective official information campaigns in times of health crises, people respond to trustworthy, capable and open actors, and they are more likely to believe official health communication if they trust health institutions (Owolabi, 2025). These trusted institutions lead citizens to take a more favorable view of official announcements, support preventive measures, and comply with recommended strategies, as well as outbreak control interventions, while perceived political interference, inconsistent messages, lack of transparency and delayed communication decrease confidence in institutions. In the age of social media this trust is increasingly important as official information needs to engage constantly with influencers, traditional and news media outlets and even with online discussions in unofficial networks and channels (Sylvanus-Killian, 2023). In the end, the perceived trustworthiness and reliability of NCDC information must be the

factor to be considered if its health messages are effective.

Lagos State provides an important context for examining government social media communication and public trust during disease outbreaks. As one of Nigeria's most populous and highly urbanized states, Lagos has extensive social interaction, economic activity, mobility and digital-media engagement, characteristics that can facilitate both the transmission of diseases and the rapid circulation of health information (Yamah & Folorunso, 2026). The state's position as a major commercial and transportation centre also creates conditions in which outbreaks may generate considerable public concern and require coordinated communication responses (Ibenye-Ugbala, 2026). Residents may encounter official NCDC messages alongside information from state authorities, healthcare professionals, traditional media, social-media users and interpersonal networks. Understanding how these different information environments influence perceptions is therefore important to effective outbreak communication in Lagos.

Whilst social media provides opportunities for swift health communication, it also provides fertile ground for the quick dissemination of misinformation, rumours, and contradictory arguments, especially during an outbreak (Okpongkpong et al, 2025). Incorrect health information related to disease etiology, treatment, vaccine, and malicious government actions have the potential to fast overwhelm the credibility of official public health messages. The problem also leads to information overflow, making it difficult for the public to distinguish information that is correct from that which is incorrect and the multiplicity of public health pronouncements creates considerable confusion among the public (Nasidi et al, 2026). Thus, a government will require more than regular post to communicate effectively via social media, and such communication is needed to be sustainable in reliability, reliability, consistence, openness, public engagement and to ensure reliable information from fake news.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEMS

While significant concern has been raised regarding digital health

communication, misinformation, the public response to outbreak, it has been argued that more conceptual attention be given to how government social-media campaigns influence public perception on official health messaging and consequently public health trust in Nigerian specific contexts. The discourse tends to focus either on the use of social media, vaccine hesitancy, misinformation, or outbreak communication in isolation as compared to NCDC message perception on the one hand, and public health trust on the other among residents of Lagos State.

Research Objectives

The major aim of this paper is to analyze government social-media campaign on the public health trust on Disease Outbreaks; An Examination of NCDC Messaging Perception among Lagos Residents. In this study, (i) we intend to analyze the impact of government social-media campaign in public opinion perception regarding health message from NCDC during a disease outbreak in Lagos State; (ii) we aim to investigate the consequence of public opinion on social media messages about NCDC and public health trust on health communication and disease-outbreak communication in Lagos State.

Review of Related Literature

Government Impact on Social Media Campaign in Public Awareness of NCDC Message

According to Egba et al (2026), during outbreaks and emerging threats, many public health organisations now utilise social media as one of their communication tool, since it allows health authority to get information across to broad, and in a cost-effective way to the general public. This also provides health messages with current alerts and guidance during crisis, or an instant information during the progressing of the disease outbreak through digital avenue like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp (Branda et al, 2026). Public health messages distributed through these social media can encourage interaction, or conversation and exchange of experience among members of the public, and between the relevant governmental institutions.

For residents of Lagos city, such exposure via digital media access make them have the potential opportunities to gain health knowledge regarding outbreak information; meanwhile, due to broad access, the official communication on social media will need to counter not only real news but also information about rumors and unofficial news (Aleshinloye & Mogbogu, 2026). Therefore a valid outbreak through social media information can increase outbreak communication only, if authorities make their messages reliable and responsiveness.

The NCDC uses varied messaging strategies in an effort to educate the public and reinforce preventive practices during a disease outbreak. Strategies range from providing outbreak alerts, guidance, public advisories, and public safety warnings, to the use of infographics, and videos with the aim of simplifying complex health information (Olaniyi et al, 2026). These strategies allow for efficient dissemination of symptoms and mechanisms of transmission, guidelines for protection, information on how to report cases, and how and when to seek healthcare, in ways best suited for online reach (Adebajo et al, 2025). The use of graphics helps communicate information more efficiently and make it easier for people who might have trouble accessing information from wordy text. It is vital to ensure effective messaging by regularly updating strategies and information, and that it always remains consistent and reactive to the concerns of the audience. NCDC messaging needs to remain scientifically correct yet audience responsive, in order to retain public interest and trigger desired behavioral change (Obituyi et al, 2025).

There is mixed public response to NCDC health messaging within the population of Lagos, depending on message clarity, pertinence and cultural compatibility (Odoemela & Okpoko, 2025). The use of intricate medical terminology becomes a cognitive barrier, whilst the use of informal language and relatable scenarios results in a higher level of public comprehension (Awagu, 2025). Moreover, prior experience with state administered health

care programs influences public interpretation of new health information, with social networks, personal beliefs and life experiences helping to consolidate or contest the messages (Oladimeji et al, 2026). As such, delivery alone does not ensure message reception, with citizens filtering information through the lens of their knowledge base, in addition to their social networks. Therefore, NCDC must deliver relevant messages, translate complex health information into simple language, and provide effective means for clarifying doubt and engaging the public directly with the agency (Bakare et al, 2026).

Messages reliability, accuracy, and timeliness are essential features that drive and impact the reception of any form of health communication on communities of individuals (Adewumi, 2025). Outbreak response should strive for rapid response to prevent an information vacuum (which gives rise to unsubstantiated rumours to occupy the space); a false response would serve to undermined any confidence on the institution for providing any form of communications; while the need for up-to-date information in event of evolving situation remains unshakeable (Asakitikpi, 2025). For instance, for individuals to have enough confidence on NCDC as a point of contact that can provide authentic information, communication to them must be timely and open. Eventually, modern digital healthcare communication has gone beyond just truthful; it would include rapidity of information delivery, openness and comprehensibility, consistent messaging in relation to updates, and comprehensive communications in terms of explanation when new updates are given (Fasuan et al, 2025)

Social media message comprehension is influenced by several intersecting, cross-level factors, such as education level, health literacy, past experiences with the government, trust in the institutions, exposure to media and friend influences (Bawa, 2025). Having higher levels of health literacy improves citizens' abilities to process the message, assess official information and recognised misinformation, while past negative interactions with official bodies could have led some citizens to be dismissive of official

communications regardless of factual accuracy (Alhassan et al, 2025a). Social context further plays a significant role, such as through peer exchange and validation in social networks; in these settings, people validate, critique, and comment on government health messages in social media. As such, personal understanding of messages competes directly with other information circulating in their social networks. A message needs to navigate the 'social terrain' (including the social, educational, media, and digitally informed community of people) in order to communicate successfully (George & Adamolekun, 2025).

Social Media Communication and Public Trust in Government

Effective social media messaging contributes to building public trust when content is truthful, clear, transparent, consistent with other NCDC communication, and when it responds to questions and concerns expressed by the public (Lawal et al, 2026). During outbreaks, governments are primary sources of guidance on the personal risk associated with infectious diseases and the protective measures individuals may need to adopt (Alhassan et al, 2025b). While consistent NCDC communication during the outbreak communicates institutional preparedness and capabilities to manage threats to the public, messaging should be specific, timely, and adaptable. On the contrary, any communication delays or conflicting directions will breed mistrust leading many to seek for information elsewhere (unverified reports) to fill information vacancies (NCDC, 2022). For the Lagos public, social media also functions as a structural site for negotiating, reinforcing and rebuilding trust. Ultimately, its success in building can be evaluated on whether messages appear trustworthy, timely relevant and the willingness of the government to address threats and issues concerning the community health.

The NCDC communication role faces a significant barrier to effective engagement from widespread misinformation during outbreaks; unverified claims disseminate quickly through the internet and various social network

platforms and are easily subsumed alongside true information. Outbreaks typically lead to various competing messages concerning disease evolution, signs and symptoms of the virus or infection, treatment methods, and concerns surrounding vaccine safety and government plans (Ariwodola et al, 2026). Such false information can erode Public trust in information and authority when appealing or passed by close acquaintances. When official or institutional response are late, slow excessively, such responses also lend credibility to competing nonofficial or spurious arguments (Patrick et al, 2025). For effective counter to false narrative the NCDC needs to respond through an anticipatory process of predicting and addressing public rumours, producing understandable yet empirically verified evidence and then effectively counter acting misrepresentation. Public access to health literacy and digital literacy through various forums will allow the populace to adequately differentiate information on line to reliable, truthful and trustworthy outbreak messages (NSDC, 2026).

Public trust underpins individuals' adherence to government's health advisories during a disease outbreak (Erim, 2026). When people consider the health authorities to be a trustworthy agency, then they are more likely to engage in precautionary behaviors, seek prompt treatment for ailments, alert them about symptoms, and comply with public health measures. A lack of trust, on the other hand, will result in individuals disregarding official advisories, postponing a visit to the medical center, or turning to unofficial alternatives (Lassa Fever Situation Report, 2026). In a mobile city with high population density, where there is a fast spread of infection such as Lagos, the public must cooperate with these advisories for containment. Therefore, NCDC should aim at gaining the people's trust in these advisories rather than solely focusing on conveying basic facts (Majekodunmi & Iyobhebhe, 2025). A clear explanation of why preventive measures are put in place and transparency in terms of risks and scientific uncertainties will enhance the public's perception and ensure that people conduct themselves accordingly (Adewojo et al, 2025).

Governments face several challenges in their social media communication with members of the public during outbreaks (Purushothaman, 2025). Information overload and misinformation makes it difficult for the population to navigate the various sources to pinpoint reliable and authoritative guidance (Ifejika, 2025). Communication between different government departments is inconsistent or even clashing, while previous political distrust makes it difficult to trust the motives behind the messaging. On top of that is the digital divide which limits the access of population not having internet access to communicate with the governments, and not to understand official communications being delivered only using formal English (Owutuamo & Chilaka, 2025). Late communication is an opportunity for rumor to be rampant, and prolonged health crises will result in saturation, desensitization and burnout in message communication.

Based on these analyses, agencies such as NCDC and partners should leverage the space for social-media communication for trust building rather than just a means of dispersal. Remaining transparent about rising risks; changing science; and uncertainties built trust in agencies like the center for disease control and public health (Onwuta et al, 2025). Engaging with the audience by responding to messages directly and providing accurate information in local languages, local formats; and dispelling rumours quickly helps build this trust; as would working with journalists, researchers; scientists, community leaders and those who are digitally savvy,” that can amplify reliable data (Aluko et al, 2026). Above all else, communications should be ongoing, coherent and audience-focused, ensuring reliable information reaches Lagos citizens prior to, throughout, and following outbreaks and consequently enhances preparedness, co-operation and public-health response.

Methodology

A descriptive documentary research design based on secondary data was used in this paper, investigating the effectiveness of government social-media campaigns, public perception of NCDC messaging and public trust

during epidemics in Lagos State. This design was suitable, as the paper was not based on primary data; secondary data obtained from existing academic and institutional literature was used to build the discussion. Available data and information was drawn from, but not limited to: peer reviewed journal articles, academic books, NCDC literature, documents from WHO (World Health Organizations and UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund), applicable policy documents from the government, Nigerian and international papers on social media communication, misinformation, trust and disease containment. All selected documents were critically assessed, cross examined and thematically interpreted in line with the objectives of the research, information and claims made were appropriately cited and attributed.

Findings

The use of social media marketing and public awareness campaigns by the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (NCDC) in cases of disease outbreak in Lagos is essential for effective public reach. Health education campaigns on issues such as transmission methods, symptoms and disease prevention methods delivered through digital avenues like Facebook and X platforms, inform citizens through the help of animated pictures and videos, real-time reports and real-time awareness campaigns (Ade-Johnson, 2025). Public reaction and comprehension to messages varies according to different level of health literacy and socioeconomic status of members of society (Ikiba, 2025). Information that involves simple language and are readily interpreted by a wider section of the public could get higher levels of recall, and instead cognitive hurdles introduced by too much complex medical terminology in a message could lead the citizens of Lagos to interpret state messages through the prism of their own social contexts (Ogunbamowo et al., 2025).

The study also emphasized the crucial impact of message reliability, transparency and timing of NCDC digital communication on public health trust, ultimately determining the success of its message strategy. Immediate

and regular communication leads to effective institutional recognition, compared to delay which produces a dangerous communication vacuum (Labaran et al., 2026) exploited by pervasive misinformation, rumors without facts, and conflicting information on disease aetiology and safety of vaccine (Jimoh et al., 2025). Also, the speed of communication content stream on social media cannot give citizens adequate time to discern truth from falsity. Hesitant communication gives room to widespread mistrust on public and causes undesirable spread of non-credible information on health to alternative sources which citizens readily take seriously (Lawal et al., 2025).

In such an immensely populous and commercially thriving nation state, Lagos itself provides a social and contextual setting for health campaign processing within and between different networks that could be challenging. Its density and significant connectivity (both movement and the digital) mean transmission of disease is equally matched with viral information flows about health, intensifying citizens' level of anxiety at times (Oduoye et al., 2026). This creates a milieu where NCDC health communication messages constantly jostle for attention and meaning with reports from established online and electronic media, those from online 'bloggers and peers in digital networks and spaces (Adesina et al., 2025) thereby leading public trust to be perpetually renegotiated and established in response to the ability of the government to convincingly negotiate locals' perceived fears and community health issues. Structural digital divide exacerbates social disparity, causing some areas of urban populations to feel left out unless targeted information delivery strategies are genuinely local (Gbekeleoluwa et al., 2026).

Drawing on these conclusions from the reviewed literature suggests that the governmental agency as the NCDC needs to move from one-way information transmission via social media to two-way social media channels based on audience engagement and trust building (Okorie & Olagunju,

2025). Future prevention of health crises needs to ensure timely, real-time institutional communication that is transparent of its scientific uncertainty or changes of evidence (Ologunebi & Taiwo, 2025). In conclusion, the provided evidence indicates that the rebuilding of health trust will depend on continuous, geographically embedded, and communicative digital presence, addressing the concerns of the urban population, combating the spread of misinformation streams (Sogbesan et al., 2026

Conclusion

Government led social media campaigns play an indispensable role as public health communicators, and in public trust management during an epidemic. From analysis conducted, NCDC social media messaging could enhance public awareness through up to-date dissemination of information about threats, symptoms, prevention strategies and health practices and its effectiveness, which heavily relied on the message being clear, credible, accurate, consistent, and responsive. Public viewing of the campaign relied on education status, health literacy level, prior experiences, confidence in the government, networks of contacts, and exposure to counter messages. From these, mistrust in government, lack of information, confusing messaging, conflicting views, digital exclusion and late responses could negatively affect public confidence in official social media messaging. Public confidence is important to prompt preventive health practices, health seeking behaviour, symptom reporting, participation in outbreak management measures, and further showed from this study how important public confidence is to disease outbreak response in Lagos state.

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