

# Adoption of Social Media during Covid-19 Pandemic by African Presidents: A Cross-Sectional Study of Selected Facebook Accounts

Journal of Communication Inquiry  
2023, Vol. 47(2) 145–167  
© The Author(s) 2022  
Article reuse guidelines:  
sagepub.com/journals-permissions  
DOI: 10.1177/01968599221144314  
journals.sagepub.com/home/jci



Janet Aver Adikpo\* 

## Abstract

This paper examined the adoption of social media to disperse information at the beginning of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Content analysis was employed to identify and select relevant posts for presidents of five African countries (Egypt, South Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, and Nigeria) from February to July 2020, which were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. Results indicate that African leaders utilized Facebook mostly in April, posting majorly in text form about issues centered on diplomatic ties, information and orientation, and preventive measures. Followers were more inclined to share the posts than they react by emojis and comments based on Facebook account, post form, and post topic. The findings demonstratively uphold the significance of social media in leadership communication, highlighting ways by which frequent and dominant content can be directed in messages during a crisis.

## Keywords

leadership communication, social media, Facebook, African leaders, Covid-19 pandemic

---

Faculty of Communication, Eastern Mediterranean University, Famagusta, North Cyprus, Turkey

\* Adikpo, J.A. is a PhD Candidate whose current research focuses on strategic leadership communication and country image.

## Corresponding Author:

Janet Aver Adikpo, Faculty of Communication, Eastern Mediterranean University, via Mersin 10, Famagusta, North Cyprus 99628, Turkey.  
Email: jar.adikpo@gmail.com

## Introduction

Social media characterized by information sharing, collaborations, and participation has significantly influenced all spheres of life. In concise words, social media are “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Social media platforms are designed to provide diverse services such as Facebook (social networking), Twitter (microblogging), LinkedIn (business and employment), YouTube (video sharing) as well as TikTok, and Instagram (photo and video sharing). Social media users have access to a torrent of lengthy messages, easy navigation, as well as content creation, and are at liberty to comment, share, and express emoji reactions. This dialogic dynamics of social media in the information society create a magnificent network, which serves as a conduit for leadership communication. It is not surprising that country leaders’ adoption of social media has attracted widespread research interest (Barberá et al., 2022). With the growing popularity of social media, leaders as custodians of information products and disseminate content for political and non-political gains alike.

Over time, debates surfaced on the need for leaders to adhere to effective communication through the use of creative and innovative media apparatuses. Scholars have long revealed interest in the adoption, use patterns, and gratifications in varied contexts (Kavanaugh et al., 2012). Most of the studies on social media use by country leaders are founded on political communication (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013), political mobilization (Shirky, 2011), citizen engagement (Warren et al., 2014), and to a lesser degree for socio-economic policy activity. Contemporary research posits a profusion of government activities on social networking sites (Yavetz & Aharony, 2020). While social media content is geared towards connectivity, reputation, and trust among users (Sobieraj et al., 2020), government communication on social networking sites focuses on popular achievements, exemplary acts, and self-positioning (DePaula et al., 2018). These platforms allow government stakeholders, especially country leaders, the leeway to mobilize and/or build the desired relationship with citizens.

Building on existing literature focusing on the adoption of social media by country leaders, currently, there is a lack of comprehensive study covering the adoption of social media by African presidents. Fewer studies with a similar focus are either limited in scope or appear to be random (Oginni & Moitui, 2015). The dire need is for the growing body of literature to systematically explore African leaders’ adoption of social media for copious reasons. First and foremost, for leaders to depict expertise and endearing leadership style it is essential to produce and share compelling content capable of engaging followership. Moreover, more research implies more practical implications suitable for communication policy improvement. Subsequent is that leaders ought to develop competence for enhanced routines of communication intended to reinforce social dynamics of information redistribution. Although generic literature exists, the utmost focus is on other developing countries (Waisbord & Amado, 2017) except Africa.

In recent times, African leaders have been grossly indicted for poor social media presence despite the growing acceptance and maximizing the potential of social networking platforms (Adesina, 2017). Social networking activities prove to benefit leaders in disproportionate yet, greatly influence their patterns of public engagement and information management. This study systematically purposes to: first, identify the pattern and level of Facebook usage; secondly, to identify the dominant forms and focus of Facebook posts content; and thirdly, to compare the pattern and form of Facebook posts by African leaders during the early stage of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. From the information society standpoint, knowledge gained will lead to improved best practices, especially towards the unparalleled digital savvy culture of information flow.

## Literature

### *Coronavirus Disease Pandemic: Africa in Context*

Novel coronavirus disease otherwise referred to as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-Cov-2) and coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19), was declared a global public health emergency by World Health Organisation (WHO) on January 30, 2020. In two months from 31st December 2019 when China made an official report, the impact of the pandemic was felt across all continents. As of December 25, 2020, the world had recorded 77,920,564 confirmed cases with 1,731,901 deaths (World Health Organisation, 2020a). Statistics show that countries worst hit by the coronavirus disease are found in the Americas, Asia, Great Britain, and Europe, while Africa trails with surging cases. By 25 December 2020, the dashboard of the World Health Organisation (World Health Organisation, 2020a) reported 1,794,576 confirmed cases and 19,667 deaths in the African continent.

The impacts of the coronavirus disease have been felt in socio-economic, cultural, and political spheres. Within the scope of short, medium, and long-term propositions, accurate approaches are required to topple widespread deficiencies especially as it pertains to information accessibility (World Health Organisation, 2020b). Due to the rattling number of infections and deaths, information preparedness has continued to intensify. Africa's equivocal impacts (Lone & Ahmad, 2020) brought about the caviling need for more suitable procedures to convey reliable health-based information while tacking unreliable narrations. In reality, Africa experience recurring and re-emerging disease outbreaks (Mboussou et al., 2019). The spread of new coronavirus shows unequivocal impacts in the various African countries, which has brought about the need to re-consider newer suitable procedures for conveying health information to benefit its populace.

Typically, leaders cast back to experiences of older epidemics and lessons previously derived to navigate possible solutions in the event of fresher occurrences. In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, managing information to impede contagion and lessen sporadic spread became the major focus (Zhang et al., 2020). Incontrovertibly, increased infections across the African continent despite stricter

preventive and control measures raise concerns. These bottlenecks are widely explored, which are highlighted as misleading information (Ahinkorah et al., 2020), undeserving health infrastructure (Rollston et al., 2020), and mythical misconceptions (Schmidt et al., 2020). A study argued that the threats posed by 'wet markets' similar to those of Wuhan, China pose uncondusive threats to the health situation across the continent (Bruinen de Bruin et al., 2020). It appears that communication apparatuses put in place have proven ineffective because of the unpalatability of healthcare, economy, and lackadaisical incredulity.

Stakeholders who engaged in information collaboration to reach Africa's very active population distinctive include presidents, government agencies, faith-based organizations, civil society, philanthropists, and individuals. Noticeably, the knowledge modifications recorded in managing the new coronavirus pandemic are enormous. For example, social media have gained increasing attention for their significant influence, showing that users reached 3.80 billion in 2020, resulting in a 49% internet penetration worldwide (Kemp, 2020). In Africa, internet penetration in Africa which constitutes 39.3% of the global growth (Internet World Stats, 2021) has resulted in a soaring number of social media activities (Johnson, 2021). According to Tankovska (2021b), Facebook was the most used social networking site in 2020 with an estimated 2.7 billion global users, and over seventeen million were recorded on the African continent. Thus, that country leaders adopted social media for situational information dissemination during the pandemic is not farfetched.

### *Leadership and Crisis Communication: Social Media Relevance*

Recent technological transformations have given rise to newer forms of leadership communication. These unequivocal changes apparent in style, frequency, and effectiveness have fascinated research in leadership communication (Fontaine & Gomez, 2020). Before now, official messaging was exclusively done by circular orders published and broadcast in mainstream media. With the advent of the internet, computers, mobile phones, tablets, and other digital gadgets for communication have assumed central as the mainstay. Addendum to these hardware developments is the software aspect, which has yielded significant results for leaders all over the world.

The adoption of social media platforms for leadership communication has evolved exponentially (Barberá & Zeitzoff, 2018). Leaders seek to gain public acceptance, and prominence, to influence favourable opinions towards decision-making processes. Accordingly, country presidents utilize communication technologies to publicly address issues that require a clear stance by way of speeches, press releases, and briefings. Through social networking sites, the public has a way to easily access presidential communication. Waisbord and Amado (2017) emphasize that despite a deviation of the flattened structure of horizontal interaction from conventional media practices, it still allows public inclusion to take place. This dynamic shift has resulted in enhanced visibility on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter in citizen engagement.

Various perspectives on twitter's popularity and consequent use by country presidents reveal variations in the styles and purpose.

Realizing the vibrant impact of social media in communication, leaders utilize it for managing awareness during crises (Chen et al., 2020). This is characterized by a wider and solid user base to induce influence and the potential for mobilizing the public for several people-centric activities (Bossetta, 2018). On the fragmented media and public appeals of leaders, Heith (2015) maintains that leaders are maximizing the fusion of media for public appeals, relations with the public, and agenda setting on a large scale. For example, given the enervating perils of the recent coronavirus pandemic, social media became instrumental for leaders sustained priority of stakeholder communication. According to Arkorful (2022), incorporating social media made citizens widely informed thereby limiting widespread misinformation and half-truths. By and large, social media relevance leveraged for galvanising public trust, participation and engagement, which are critical issues during health crises.

Social media's emergent importance in health crisis communication is widely explored (Adikpo & Achakpa-Ikyo, 2021; Stawicki et al., 2020). Arguing on the need to develop a strategy for implementation during a crisis, Aleinikov et al. (2021) affirm that social media are major information channels for crisis response. Although the superfluous nature of information today tends to cause the widespread pandemonium of misinformation, innovations such as the use of hashtags, feedback, and timely updates enable adequate coordination of sources (Reuter & Kaufhold, 2018). Apart from building trust among the stakeholders, public awareness is enhanced during a crisis using social media. More users log onto these digital platforms in search of instant updates than turn to conventional media (evident in the surge of keywords search, and traffic of trending news). Among several relatively unique factors, the low distribution cost also renders newer means of reaching heterogeneous publics.

Research shows that social media give a facelift to communication during a crisis (Cheng, 2018), while also serving as a substantive alternative (Niles et al., 2019). This is affirmed by the one-to-many and interactivity, both of which enhance the speedy rate of information reach (Schultz et al., 2011). Stating elaborately, Milman et al. (2020) insist social media use majorly alleviates recurrent overwhelming effects. During a crisis, individual social media users strategically participate in framing messages, in what Ford (2013) describes as a new form of empowering the audiences. On the changing aspects of social media use in a health crisis, a study (Mirbabaie et al., 2020) emphasizes topical information frequency and the value attached to message influence on the general public. This study corroborates other debates that social media propel global health securities but ensuring consistency requires quality monitoring.

According to Zhu et al. (2020), social media promote trust in the event of a crisis, yet overwhelming outcomes continue to expose the dichotomy due to moderated defensive reactions. The government is criticized for the inability to accurately frame crisis-based messages devoid of being perceived as propaganda. In Le et al. (2019), inaction is found to amplify more harm than benefit crises, in this case, striking disadvantages

exist especially to the image and reputation of the leaders (Triantafillidou & Yannas, 2020). Since the disposition of leaders is adhering to consistency during an unprecedented crisis, means to quell a crisis are as pertinent as image restoration.

Various challenges militate against the use of social media during a crisis, and health pandemics are not an exception. Outlining the challenges involved, Aleinikov et al. (2021) identified the challenges of multiple information sources as a major barrier. At different stages of a health pandemic, developing facts are unveiled through messages that social media users can spread. Overcoming challenges require a beckoning for the public to shun messages emanating from undesigned sources. Even if (as widely suggested) a centralized information hub is implemented, cyberspace is replete with platforms for user-generated content. In other words, information fluidity has further enhanced misinformation and social media administrators, on the other hand, have recognized the need to curtail misleading messages. The paradox of this action is that, though considered to be mere regulation, critics of social media regulation largely perceive it as censorship (Dwivedi et al., 2018).

This 'ad-hoc' practice commonly implemented by country leaders is criticized, citing the need for a go-beyond-and-above approach, especially during crises (Aleinikov et al., 2021). Accordingly, the top-down vis-à-vis bottom-up approach to communication has evolved with the advent of social media. This has spurred the best strategies for the public's participation in the information exchange process. Leaders' constituted authority bestows the authorized source's status, however individual social media users influence the further distribution of information. To manage public expectations and enlighten the masses on precautions against the virus, social media use during the new pandemic has become necessary. Despite social media vibrance for information exchange in leadership, little or no research has adequately examined how African leaders utilized social media, particularly Facebook to disseminate information beginning and for the enduring period of the pandemic.

## **Methods/Materials**

### *Context of Study Selection*

By the time of conducting this study, African presidents have multiple accounts across social media platforms, however, only Facebook is considered. In recent times, Facebook has recorded a tremendous increase in users in Africa, showing a climb from 62.11% in February 2020 to 71.92% by February 2021 (StatCounter Global Stats, 2021). For example, Egypt and Nigeria attained the ninth and nineteenth positions in the global ranking for countries with leading Facebook audiences (Tankovska, 2021a). To examine the adoption of social media by African presidents in the early stages of the ongoing coronavirus disease outbreak, five African countries were selected as shown in Table 1.

Africa records the highest population indices for the selected countries representing north, south, central, east, and west geographical regions respectively. The selection of

**Table I.** Study Context.

Country	Country population <sup>a</sup>	Internet users <sup>a</sup>	% Internet penetration by population <sup>a</sup>	Facebook subscribers <sup>a</sup>
Arab Republic of Egypt	105,530,371	54,741,493	51.9%	51,286,200
Republic of South Africa	60,041,994	34,545,165	57.5%	24,600,000
Democratic Republic of Congo	94,152,930	16,355,917	17.4%	5,117,700
Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia	119,748,379	21,147,255	17.7%	7,535,700
Federal Republic of Nigeria	211,400,708	154,301,195	73.0%	31,860,000

<sup>a</sup><https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm> [Figures are estimations for 2022].

Facebook based on population brings to bare the fact that the distribution is uneven, which is further buttressed by an offering of internet penetration across five countries. By the end of 2020, Statistics (Internet World Stats, 2021) implies that despite holding the continent's highest population and internet users, Facebook users in Nigeria ranked less than Egypt, which ranks third in population and internet penetration by population respectively. Ethiopia whose population ranks second maintains the fourth position in internet penetration, internet, and Facebook users respectively. South Africa and DR Congo whose population is fourth and fifth among the countries selected ranked third and last for internet and Facebook users respectively. Given the recent theorizing of social media impact during the coronavirus pandemic (Goel & Gupta, 2020) particularly strong use patterns, purposes and impacts are expected in the use of Facebook by the African leaders.

### *Data Collection*

This study draws on a combination of primary and secondary data collection techniques. The primary data consists of posts on the five Facebook accounts of the selected African leaders. Facebook posts were identified and harvested using manual content analysis for a duration of six months from February to July 2020. This period represents what has come to be known as the first phase of the coronavirus disease outbreak. The sample was drawn from only posts related to the new coronavirus pandemic for further analysis. No threshold was placed on the number of posts because of obvious heterogeneity in available relevant posts.

### *Coding and Reliability Testing*

Facebook posts were categorized in the data items, namely: Facebook account, month of the post, form, topic, emoji reactions, comments, and shares. While month enabled

identifying the number of posts for the twenty-six weeks duration; the form showed whether the Facebook posts contained text, photos, and videos. To ascertain the purpose of the Facebook posts, the topic for posts was identified and categorized using attributes such as cases/deaths, palliatives, preventive measures, restriction/lock-down, policy directive/guideline, information/orientation, health workers/volunteers, and diplomatic ties. Lastly, follower reactions to the posts were considered to understand the interface of reactions with a pattern, frequency, and purpose of Facebook adoption by the leaders. The posts were categorized strictly based on the predominant content of data items to ensure consistency between variables.

The researcher collectively identified the coronavirus-related posts, assigned the variables, and coded separately for three weeks. Upon completion, the collation was reviewed and strengthened for clarity and consistency. For inter-coder reliability, ten percent of the study sample was coded at random. According to Lavrakas (2012), the proportion of agreement tends to be higher when reliability is calculated using fewer categories and contrariwise. Based on Holsti's method (Hosti, 1969, as cited in Lombard et al., 2002) interclass correlation for average measures high interrater reliability was recorded with the least score of 0.876 indicating that the categories were objective enough for use.

## **Data Analysis**

Data were imputed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26 and results were derived based upon a total of two hundred and seventy-six posts from the five selected Facebook accounts. The use of descriptive statistics was employed to visualize the Facebook adoption by African leaders presented. To analyze the frequencies obtained, the use of simple frequency, cross-tabulation, figures, and bar graphs were utilized for results presentation.

## **Results**

### ***Adoption of Facebook***

By 2014, African leaders adopted the use of Facebook. Table 2 indicates that President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi of Egypt [@AlSisiofficial] has the oldest of the selected accounts, which was created on March 30, 2014, followed by Nigeria's Muhammadu Buhari [@MuhammaduBuhari] created on December 22, 2014. South Africa's President Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa's account [@CyrilRamaphosa] was created two years later on March 11, 2018. This was followed by Congo's President Félix Tshisekedi's account [@CdPresidence] on July 29, 2019, and Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali's account [@PMAbiyAhmedAli] on October 16, 2019. For the type of account, South Africa's President Ramaphosa [@CyrilRamaphosa], Ethiopia's Prime Minister Ali [@PMAbiyAhmedAli], and Nigeria's President Buhari [@MuhammaduBuhari] are listed as a politician, Egypt's President el Sisi



**Table 2.** Adoption of Facebook.

Country	Egypt	South Africa	DR Congo	Ethiopia	Nigeria
Leader	Abdel Fattah el-Sisi	Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa	Félix Tshisekedi	Abiy Ahmed Ali	Muhammadu Buhari
Facebook account created	@AISiofficial March 30, 2014	@CyrilRamaphosa March 11, 2018	@CdPresidence July 29, 2019	@PMAbiyAhmedAli October 16, 2019	@MuhammaduBuhari December 22, 2014
Account type	Government official	Politician	Government organisation	Politician	Politician
Page followers	10 million	420 thousand	228 thousand	4.2 million	1.1 million
Covid-19 index case	February 14	March 1	March 10	March 13	February 27
First Covid-19 post	March 23	April 21	March 13	February 25	February 2
Total Covid-19 posts	16	29	72	139	20

Source. Author's Compilation (September, 2022).

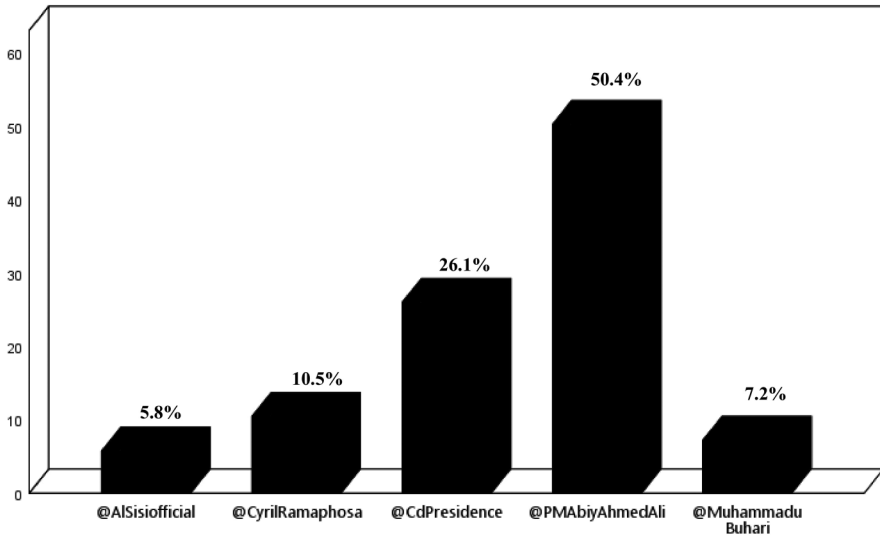
[@AlSisiofficial] is government official, while Congo's President Tshisekedi [@CdPresidence is a government organization].

Previous findings on the early adoption of social media by world leaders indicate that by the year 2015, Facebook was the second most used social media platform by world leaders (Waisbord & Amado, 2017). During this time, Africa recorded a heightened social media boom, spurred by political activism (Mateos & Erro, 2021), extra-curricular fan base (Essoungou, 2010), student riots (Oxlund, 2016), economic activities (Duffett & Wakeham, 2016), and social movements (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). It appears that since the time of the Egypt revolution, Facebook still maintains its popularity (Tankovska, 2021a, 2021b) in defining culture among the populace whose agitations still linger on.

Variation occurs in the number of followers for the Facebook accounts of African presidents. Of the selected five accounts, Egypt's @AlSisiofficial has the highest number of followers followed by Ethiopia's @PMAbiyAhmedAli, Nigeria's President @MuhammaduBuhari, before South Africa's @CyrilRamaphosa and Congo DR's @CdPresidence. Despite recording high numbers, the followers on the selected accounts are not considered to be *pari passu* with the countrywide population. Two striking results are those of Congo's leader [@CdPresidence] and Egypt's president [@AlSisiofficial], the earliest and latest accounts, recording the top two accounts with the most follows. Other contrasts occur in Africa's Facebook subscribers by country, date of account creation, and the number of page followers. Nigeria's @MuhammaduBuhari ranks second for Facebook users but holds third place for the number of page followers, while Ethiopia [@PMAbiyAhmedAli] is fourth in users but has second-highest followers over Congo DR [@CdPresidence] which was created earlier.

African presidents posted on Facebook during the early phase of the ongoing coronavirus disease pandemic in Figure 1. A combined total of two hundred and seventy-six posts centered on the diffusion of messages to benefit the information needs of the public. Overall, Ethiopia [@PMAbiyAhmedAli] was more prolific in the adoption of Facebook than the others with 50.4% posts, followed by 26.1% on Congo DR's @CdPresidence, 10.5% on @CyrilRamaphosa of South Africa, 7.2% on Nigeria's @MuhammaduBuhari and 5.8% on Egyptian president [@AlSisiofficial]. The dissimilarity in the patterns of adoption is noticeable. Despite recording a high number of followers, Egypt's @AlSisiofficial trailed behind Nigeria's @MuhammaduBuhari. Accordingly, Congo DR's @CdPresidence held the least number of followers despite having the second-highest number of posts considered in this study.

Ethiopia's @PMAbiyAhmedAli had the second highest followers, yet, the highest number of Facebook posts. Nigeria's @MuhammaduBuhari and South Africa's @CyrilRamaphosa appeared to transpose positions as third and fourth for followers and posts. This implies that some of the African leaders posted more about coronavirus than others. Notably, the most recent accounts of Ethiopia [@PMAbiyAhmedAli] and Congo DR [@CdPresidence] recorded the highest posts, while both Egypt [@AlSisiofficial] and Nigeria [@MuhammaduBuhari] are the oldest accounts to be created, yet they record the least coronavirus-related posts.



**Figure 1.** Total Posts on Selected Facebook Accounts.

Noticeably, the arrival of coronavirus disease across the globe was sporadic. In the case of the selected African countries in Table 2, index infection concentrated in February (Egypt on 14 and Nigeria on 27) as well as March (South Africa on 1, DR Congo on 10, and Ethiopia on 13) respectively. Posts identified on the Facebook accounts show that African leaders did not post immediately. The delay is recorded for all the accounts, for example, Egypt's leader [@AlSisiofficial] first posted five weeks after (on March 23) the initial index diagnosis; south Africa's leader [@CyrilRamaphosa] posted eight weeks later (April 21) while Congo DR's leader [@CdPresidence] posted three days later (March 13). However, early posts by Nigeria's leader [@MuhammaduBuhari] first on February 2 but did not post until March 1 and Ethiopia's leader [@PMAbiyAhmedAli] posted first on February 25, until March 9 when the second post was identified.

By April 2020, the WHO declared that global infections had reached one million sending a shockwave. The Facebook posts of African leaders became more frequent. Frequency distribution in Table 3 shows African presidents posted more in April constituting 34.4% followed by 26.8% for March, 19.9% in May, and 13% for June 2020. Overall, this indicates that Ethiopia's president [@PMAbiyAhmedAli] posted more during the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic, most of which occurred in April, March, and May. The frequency of posts by month suggests incongruities, for example, the low frequency of posts by South Africa's leader [@CyrilRamaphosa], Nigeria's leader [@MuhammaduBuhari], and Egyptian leader [@AlSisiofficial] except Ethiopian leader [@PMAbiyAhmedAli] and Congo DR [@CdPresidence], whose high number of posts is glaring, indicates direct divergence. Firstly, it shows

**Table 3.** Facebook Account by Month.

Account	Month						Total
	February	March	April	May	June	July	
Egypt [@AlSisiofficial]	0	7	6	1	0	2	16
South Africa [@CyrilRamaphosa]	0	0	5	12	4	8	29
Congo DR [@CdPresidence]	0	16	21	17	18	0	72
Ethiopia [@PMABiyAhmedAli]	1	46	54	24	11	3	139
Nigeria [@MuhammaduBuhari]	1	5	9	1	3	1	20
Total	2	74	95	55	36	14	276
%	0.7	26.8	34.4	19.9	13	5.1	100

Source. Author's Compilation (September, 2022).

there was no quick response to the impromptu outbreak and secondly, the leaders were inconsistent in using Facebook to disperse information.

### *Dominant Forms*

As shown in Table 4, African leaders posted on Facebook in text-only form constituting 45.3% followed by posts made up of 'text and photo' represented as 35.7%, and 'text and video' held 9.8%. Most of the posts by Ethiopian leader [@PMABiyAhmedAli] were in 'text only' by 55.2% as well as 'text and photo' represented by 56.6%. South Africa's president [@CyrilRamaphosa] posted 70.4% were 'text and video' and Congolese leader [@CdPresidence] posted 36.4% 'text and photo'. The 'other' category represents links to other websites and shared posts. Facebook like other digital platforms allows users to freely produce and distribute content (Sobieraj et al., 2020). African leaders utilized their Facebook accounts for sharing information accompanied using graphical forms.

The extent of text-only posts by Egyptian leader [@AlSisiofficial], Nigerian leader [@MuhammaduBuhari], Congolese leader [@CdPresidence], and Ethiopian leader [@PMABiyAhmedAli] indicate a majority preference except for South African leader [@CyrilRamaphosa], who posted most of the video content. Leaders adopt text, photos, and videos in persuasive communication for emotional appeal on character, image, and style. Using photo alongside text enhances precision, and largely harmonize symbols that integrate information for better cognition (van Rompay et al., 2010). Thus, the graphical contents captivate the indulgence of the digital audience just as the effect of mainstream broadcast and print media influence was deliberated over time.

### *Post's Topic*

African leaders adopted Facebook use at the beginning of the coronavirus disease to post messages about the pandemic. Data indicate that 25.4% focused on diplomatic

**Table 4.** Facebook Account by Account.

Account	Form												
	Text only	%	Text/ video	%	Text/ photo	%	Video only	%	Photo only	%	Other	%	Total
Egypt [ @AlSisiofficial]	16	12.8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16
South Africa [ @CyrilRamaphosa]	0	0	19	70.4	2	2.0	1	50	1	16.7	6	35.3	29
Congo DR [ @CdPresidence]	27	21.6	2	7.4	36	36.4	0	0	3	50	4	23.5	72
Ethiopia [ @PMAbiyAhmedAli]	69	55.2	6	22.2	56	56.6	1	50	2	33.3	5	29.4	139
Nigeria [ @MuhammaduBuhari]	13	10.4	0	0	5	5.1	0	0	0	0	2	11.8	20
Total	125		27		99		2		6		17		276
%	45.3	100	9.8	100	35.7	100.1	0.7	100	2.2	100	6.2	100	100

Source. Author's Compilation (September, 2022).

ties, 19.6% contained information and orientation, 9.4% on preventive measures, and 9.1% were concerned with health workers. Other categories include policy directive 7.6%, palliatives 6.9%, cases and deaths 6.5% as well as restriction 5.1%, while posts containing all the above categories held 10.5%. Although the presidents were not evenly frequent in posting about the new pandemic, all the topic categories were mentioned in all the accounts. The findings of this study further concur with reports that social media use during the ongoing coronavirus crisis is dominant in seeking, making, and distributing related information (Tsao et al., 2021). While information posted by African leaders can be grouped under different forms, this study concentrated on the broadly listed areas, seeing how the selected leaders imbibed deliberate posture about their messages Table 5.

Accordingly, Ethiopia's @PMAbiyAhmedAli has the overall highest number of posts on diplomatic ties as well as information and orientation, while Congo DR's @CdPresidence recorded high numbers on diplomatic ties as well as health workers and volunteers. The duo posted more during the coronavirus pandemic than any of the other presidents. The South African leader [@CyrilRamaphosa] and Nigerian leader [@MuhammaduBuhari] posted more about orientation and diplomatic ties while @AISisiofficial focused more on preventive measures, orientation, and diplomatic ties. The accounts were consistent with policy directives and guidelines, which concerns updates about government activities and resolution. In this category, the Congolese leader [@CdPresidence] posted more, followed by the south African [@CyrilRamaphosa] and Ethiopian [@PMAbiyAhmedAli] leaders respectively. Granting African presidents used Facebook at a differing rate, posts were mainly

**Table 5.** Number of Post Topic.

Topic	Account					Total	Percent
	Egypt	South Africa	Congo DR	Ethiopia	Nigeria		
Case(s)/Deaths	1	2	4	10	1	18	6.5%
Palliative(s)	1	0	3	13	2	19	6.9%
Preventive measures	3	4	7	10	2	26	9.4%
Restriction/Lockdown	2	1	5	5	1	14	5.1%
Policy directive/ guideline	1	4	11	4	1	21	7.6%
Information/ Orientation	3	7	5	33	6	54	19.6%
Diplomatic ties	3	5	18	42	2	70	25.4%
Health workers/ Volunteers	1	2	13	8	1	25	9.1%
All of the above	1	4	6	14	4	29	10.5%
Total	16	29	72	139	20	276	100.0%

Source. Author's Compilation (September, 2022).

focused on diplomatic ties. Using contingency analysis, the majority of diplomatic relations posts occurred in April, the same as posts on information and orientation. Thus, constituting the peak of frequency from the selected accounts as presented in Figure 2.

### Follower Reactions

Given that this study primarily focused on African Presidents' use of Facebook to disperse information about the pandemic, followers came into consideration. Follower responses by the manner of emoticon reactions (in form of like, love, care, haha, wow, sad and angry), comments, and shares were also examined. Overall, emoticon reactions between one to fifty thousand constituted 62.7%, while those less than one thousand were 30.8%. In the same vein, the majority of comments between one to fifty thousand were 53.3% while those less than one thousand had 45.3%. Most of the shares occurred in the range of one to five thousand represented as 44.2% and 21.7% were in the category of less than a hundred. Fewer posts contained videos, which summed up to only 8%.

Data indicate that the means score for follower reactions in form of like emojis, comments, and shares are significantly different. Posts recorded a higher number of shares than emojis and comments. Based on the simple bar means, the error bars for shares do not overlap indicating that the values for shares across the Facebook accounts are different. For example, despite recording the least number of posts related to the coronavirus disease pandemic, Egypt's leader [@AlSisiofficial] recorded the highest reactions in terms of the number of emojis, comments, and shares, followed by Ethiopia's leader [@PMAbiyAhmedAli]. This corresponds with the findings that Egypt's leader [@AlSisiofficial] is the oldest Facebook account.

Visibly, data in Figures 3 and 4 indicate that the follower reactions appear to have an almost similar pattern across the categories of post form and post topic. In both illustrations, data points for shares show most reactions, which is where possible

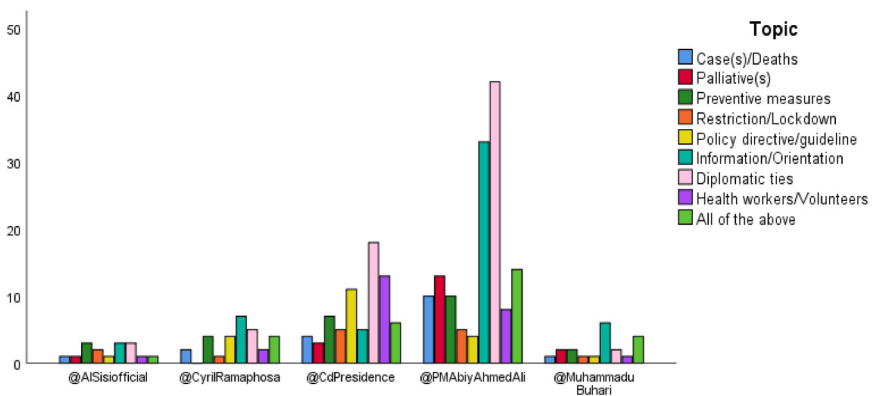


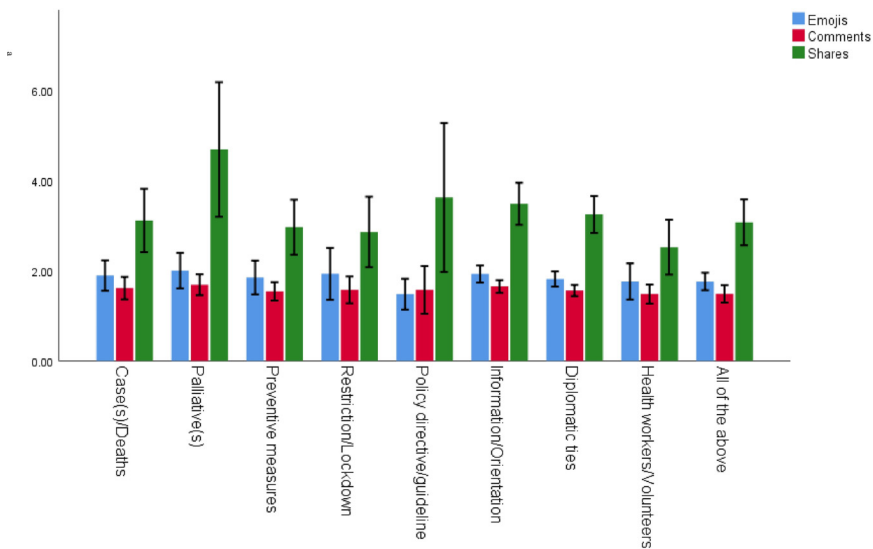
Figure 2. Cross Tabulation of Facebook Account by Topic.

uncertainty occurs in the distribution. Similarly, the plotted average values were more likely in emojis and comments, which is where the concentration in data points. In other words, it appears two separate concentrations occurred in data points for emojis, comments, and shares for video only as well as shares for photos only can be grouped as one, while the remaining values mostly overlap indicating no significant difference, and the likelihood for similarity.

Although Egyptian [*@AlSisiofficial*] and Congolese [*@CdPresidence*] leaders were more active on Facebook by posting more frequently in the overall assessment, the follower reactions happened to have no direct relationship with the pattern of use. Both post form and topic spurred more follower shares than emoji reactions and comments. The reason post form of video only category appears very distinctive as is obtained in Table 4, one post each on South Africa [*@CyrilRamaphosa*] and Egypt [*@AlSisiofficial*]. Posts in the photo-only category also recorded fewer frequencies when compared with the other four categories. Based on a 95% confidence level, there is a clear indication that when it comes to follower reactions, Facebook accounts, post form, and post topic were more likely to influence post sharing.

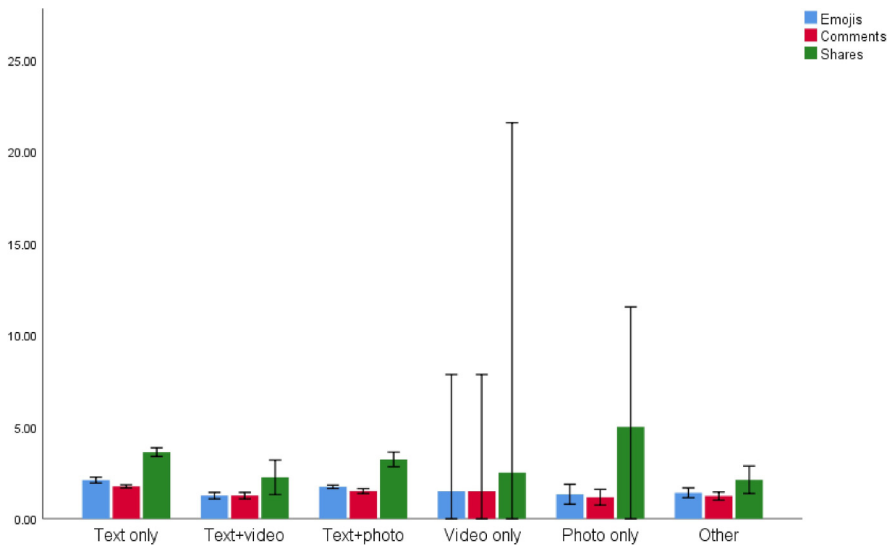
### Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined how African presidents used Facebook during the new coronavirus outbreak. Findings reveal a concentrated yet sparse distribution in the frequency of Facebook use among the selected African presidents. The varying levels of adoption of



**Figure 3.** Simple Bar Means of Emojis, Comments and Shares Reactions by Post Form.





**Figure 4.** Simple Bar Means of Emojis, Comments and Shares Reactions by Post Form.

Facebook in this exploration uphold wide debates about the viability, speed, and popularity of social media platforms used by leaders. This is coupled with changing dynamics of society which necessitate the use of social media to supplement the growing information needs of an increasingly heterogeneous public. This cross-sectional study focused on the leaders of five African countries which were selected using a population index for five regions, however, other factors can be explored in future research.

Broadly speaking, results indicate that overall, the African leaders maximized knowledge about digital media platforms to create awareness using Facebook accounts. Results suggest that the leader with the foremost adoption of Facebook is Ethiopia’s President Abiy Ahmed Ali. Comparably, this account received fewer follower reactions than President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi of Egypt, whose pattern of adoption assumes the least of the selected accounts. President Ali posted the highest number of posts according to the identified post topic, most of which were diplomatic ties as well as information and orientation. President Democratic Republic of Congo, Félix Tshisekedi also recorded a high adoption pattern. Just like Ahmed Ali, most of the posts by Tshisekedi were diplomatic ties, but he posted more about health workers and volunteers followed by policy directives and guidelines.

Convincingly, statistics displayed by the Facebook quarter report show an intensive increase in social media use on the African continent. Indicative studies upholding the role of social media across Africa tag Facebook as an influential platform in recent times. This early influence of Facebook in Africa’s north region (Wolfsfeld et al.,

2013) possibly explains the oldest account and the high number of followers as seen on the page of the Egyptian leader [@AlSisiofficial]. Egypt's hype in social media use during the Arab spring appears to have experienced a quiver and as it appears, the large number of followers was inconsequential for the Egyptian leader [@AlSisiofficial].

By the time Africa reported the first case on February 14 in Egypt, countries in Asia, Europe, The Americas, and Great Britain announced several cases of infected persons (Sadeghmoghadam et al., 2020). Measures of mitigation towards the covid-19 pandemic became fundamental, including the declaration of a public health emergency, launching of travel bans and border closures, evacuation of foreign nationals commenced, and quarantine protocols were initiated. Information and orientation became the most resourceful approach to sensitize the public about government regulations, preventive measures, and welfare. Post's topics identified on the different Facebook accounts indicate that African leaders recognize the relevance of government relations and citizen sensitization during a global health situation.

Relatedness in the precedence on topics of posts during the pandemic suggests that information needs in the uniquely diverse continent appear to be the same. The Facebook accounts recorded early posting by the time the five countries had reported cases of the virus, however, the conclusion that African leaders adequately utilized social media at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic cannot be drawn. This is due to several discoveries, for example, by the time the global state of emergency was declared, African leaders were not posting about the pandemic, and even when they did it was mostly about issues bothering diplomatic ties, information and orientation, and preventive measures.

Although population appears to be the central indicator among the selected countries, other criteria can be used to examine the adoption of social media during the coronavirus pandemic. Accordingly, presidents are major agenda setters for policy implementation (Gilardi et al., 2022), however, including government establishments and cabinet members would have better positioned the findings for generalization. Also, only the five African leaders cannot adequately be used to generalize the patterns of social media adoption for their respective regions. This is because there are dissimilarities in the statistics of Facebook use across countries (Cheng et al., 2021), the same way despite recording high numbers of Facebook posts, some presidents recorded fewer frequencies of followers' reactions.

The communication of African presidents during the new coronavirus pandemic finds relevance and paves way for possible research explorations. The global policy during the coronavirus pandemic as enshrined in World Health Organisation's communication framework emphasized the need for leaders to manage the crisis in real-time. According to (Markowitz, 2022), the organization's efforts to combat the pandemic are relevant to model other stakeholders, and in the current context, country leaders. As of the time of conducting this study, no other review on the current topic has been carried out, however, for an enhanced generalization, the new coronavirus pandemic can serve as an incentive for possible research bothering on rhetorical appeals, style of leadership, and dimensions of personality traits such as ideology and image.

From the foregoing, this study enriches the dimension of social media relevance during crises situation but is constrained in the area of measuring the government's policy during the pandemic and other related circumstances. African leaders championed several measures at the commencement of the pandemic especially those that were inclined to improve the socio-economic wellbeing of their nations. This study explored fewer than necessary countries whereby had there been a wider selection, the patterns of use would have revealed better scopes of results and debates. Other dominant government apparatuses such as political office holders, inter-governmental spokespersons, and even non-governmental organizations, if included, would have presented picture-perfect representations of the crisis. Consequently, other methods need to be used to examine this issue to augment the limited patterns obtained by the sporadic and uneven posts across the selected countries.


### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### ORCID iD

Janet Aver Adikpo  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9634-120X>

### References

- Adesina, O. S. (2017). Foreign policy in an era of digital diplomacy. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 3(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2017.1297175>
- Adikpo, J., & Achakpa-Ikyo, P. (2021). Social media alternative for health communication in Nigeria. In A. Akwala, J. Ngetich, & A. Theuri (Eds.), *Dialectical perspectives on media, health, and culture in modern Africa* (pp. 19–38). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-8091-1.ch002>
- Ahinkorah, B. O., Ameyaw, E. K., Hagan, J. E., Seidu, A.-A., & Schack, T. (2020). Rising above misinformation or fake news in Africa: Another strategy to control COVID-19 spread. *Frontiers in Communication*, 5, 45. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2020.00045>
- Aleinikov, A. V., Kurochkin, A. V., & Maltseva, D. A. (2021). Information management under the conditions of global pandemic. *Scientific and Technical Information Processing*, 48(1), 38–44. <https://doi.org/10.3103/S0147688221010068>
- Arkorful, V. E. (2022). Unpacking the blackbox of responsible pandemic governance: Of COVID-19, multilevel governance and state capacity in Ghana – A review. *Public Organization Review*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S11115-022-00622-Z/TABLES/1>

- Barberá, P., Gohdes, A. R., & Zeitzoff, T. (2022). Distract and divert: How world leaders use social media during contentious politics. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612221102030>
- Barberá, P., & Zeitzoff, T. (2018). The new public address system: Why do world leaders adopt social media? *International Studies Quarterly*, 62(1), 121–130. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqx047>
- Bossetta, M. (2018). The digital architectures of social media: Comparing political campaigning on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat in the 2016 U.S. election. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 95(2), 471–496. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699018763307>
- Bruinen de Bruin, Y., Lequarre, A. S., McCourt, J., Clevestig, P., Pigazzani, F., Zare Jeddi, M., Colosio, C., & Goulart, M. (2020). Initial impacts of global risk mitigation measures taken during the combatting of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Safety Science*, 128, 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssci.2020.104773>
- Chen, Q., Min, C., Zhang, W., Wang, G., Ma, X., & Evans, R. (2020). Unpacking the black box: How to promote citizen engagement through government social media during the COVID-19 crisis. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 110, 106380. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106380>
- Cheng, C., Lau, Y. C., Chan, L., & Luk, J. W. (2021). Prevalence of social media addiction across 32 nations: Meta-analysis with subgroup analysis of classification schemes and cultural values. *Addictive Behaviors*, 117, 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.ADDBEH.2021.106845>
- Cheng, Y. (2018). How social media is changing crisis communication strategies: Evidence from the updated literature. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 26(1), 58–68. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12130>
- DePaula, N., Dincelli, E., & Harrison, T. M. (2018). Toward a typology of government social media communication: Democratic goals, symbolic acts and self-presentation. *Government Information Quarterly*, 35(1), 98–108. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2017.10.003>
- Duffett, R., & Wakeham, M. (2016). Social media marketing communication effect on attitudes among millennials in South Africa. *The African Journal of Information Systems*, 8(3), 1–26. <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/ajis/vol8/iss3/2>
- Dwivedi, Y. K., Kelly, G., Janssen, M., Rana, N. P., Slade, E. L., & Clement, M. (2018). Social media: The good, the bad, and the ugly. *Information Systems Frontiers*, 20(3), 419–423. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10796-018-9848-5>
- Essoungou, A.-M. (2010). *A social media boom begins in Africa: Using mobile phones, Africans join the global conversation*. Africa Renewal. <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/december-2010/social-media-boom-begins-africa>
- Fontaine, S. A., & Gomez, D. M. (2020). Going social: A comparative analysis of presidents' official and social Media messages. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 50(3), 507–538. <https://doi.org/10.1111/psq.12676>
- Ford, T. (2013). *Social Media and Crisis Communication: Theories and Best Practices*. <https://curve.carleton.ca/ddcff2d7-8736-42cd-95e9-49ff576ae048>
- Gilardi, F., Gessler, T., Kubli, M., & Müller, S. (2022). Social media and political agenda setting. *Political Communication*, 39(1), 39–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2021>
- Goel, A., & Gupta, L. (2020). Social media in the times of COVID-19. *Journal of Clinical Rheumatology*, 26(6), 220–223. <https://doi.org/10.1097/RHU.0000000000001508>

- Heith, D. (2015). *Presidential Road Show: Public Leadership in an Era of Party Polarization and Media Fragmentation*. [https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=FxceCwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=Heith,+D.+J.+\(2016\).+The+presidential+road+show:+Public+leadership+in+an+era+of+party+polarization+and+media+fragmentation.+&ots=nx6vCawQL-&sig=tNNIhwMqSSNiD5h8nJuNK8cqSj4](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=FxceCwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=Heith,+D.+J.+(2016).+The+presidential+road+show:+Public+leadership+in+an+era+of+party+polarization+and+media+fragmentation.+&ots=nx6vCawQL-&sig=tNNIhwMqSSNiD5h8nJuNK8cqSj4)
- Internet World Stats (2021). *Internet penetration and users statistics for Africa's population*. <https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm>
- Johnson, J. (2021). *Internet penetration in Africa, by country*. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1124283/internet-penetration-in-africa-by-country/>
- Kaplan, A., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59–68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003>
- Kavanaugh, A. L., Fox, E. A., Sheetz, S. D., Yang, S., Li, L. T., Shoemaker, D. J., Natsev, A., & Xie, L. (2012). Social media use by government: From the routine to the critical. *Government Information Quarterly*, 29(4), 480–491. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2012.06.002>
- Kemp, S. (2020). *Digital 2020: 3.8 billion people use social media*. We Are Social. <https://wearesocial.com/blog/2020/01/digital-2020-3-8-billion-people-use-social-media>
- Lavrakas, P. (Ed) (2012). *Encyclopedia of Survey Research*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Le, P. D., Teo, H. X., Pang, A., Li, Y., & Goh, C. Q. (2019). When is silence golden? The use of strategic silence in crisis communication. *Corporate Communications*, 24(1), 162–178. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-10-2018-0108>
- Lombard, M., Snyder-Duch, J., & Bracken, C. C. (2002). Content analysis in mass communication: Assessment and reporting of intercoder reliability. *Human Communication Research*, 28(4), 587–604. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.2002.tb00826.x>
- Lone, S. A., & Ahmad, A. (2020). COVID-19 pandemic-an African perspective. *Taylor & Francis*, 9(1), 1300–1308. <https://doi.org/10.1080/22221751.2020.1775132>
- Markowitz, D. M. (2022). How experts react: The world health organization's appraisal of COVID-19 via communication patterns. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 41(2), 209–218. [https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X211026346/ASSET/IMAGES/LARGE/10.1177\\_0261927X211026346-FIG1.JPEG](https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X211026346/ASSET/IMAGES/LARGE/10.1177_0261927X211026346-FIG1.JPEG)
- Mateos, O., & Erro, C. B. (2021). Protest, internet activism, and sociopolitical change in sub-saharan Africa. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 65(4), 650–665. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764220975060>
- Mbousso, F., Ndumbi, P., Ngom, R., Kassamali, Z., OgunDIRAN, O., van Beek, J., Williams, G., Okot, C., Hamblion, E. L., & Impouma, B. (2019). Infectious disease outbreaks in the African region: Overview of events reported to the World Health Organization in 2018 – ERRATUM. *Epidemiology and Infection*, 147, 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0950268819002061>
- Milman, E., Lee, S. A., & Neimeyer, R. A. (2020). Social isolation and the mitigation of coronavirus anxiety: The mediating role of meaning. *Death Studies*, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2020.1775362>
- Mirbabaie, M., Bunker, D., Stieglitz, S., Marx, J., & Ehnis, C. (2020). Social media in times of crisis: Learning from Hurricane Harvey for the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic response. *Journal of Information Technology*, 35(3), 195–213. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268396220929258>

- Niles, M. T., Emery, B. F., Reagan, A. J., Dodds, P. S., & Danforth, C. M. (2019). Social media usage patterns during natural hazards. *PLOS ONE*, *14*(2), e0210484. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0210484>
- Oginni, S. O., & Moitui, J. N. (2015). Social Media and Public Policy Process in Africa: Enhanced Policy Process in Digital Age. In *JSTOR* (Issue 14). <https://about.jstor.org/terms>
- Oxlund, B. (2016). #Everythingmustfall: The use of social media and violent protests in the current wave of student riots in South Africa. *Anthropology Now*, *8*(2), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19428200.2016.1202574>
- Reuter, C., & Kaufhold, M.-A. (2018). Fifteen years of social media in emergencies: A retrospective review and future directions for crisis informatics. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, *26*, 41–57. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12196>
- Rollston, R., Wilkinson, E., Abouelazm, R., Mladenov, P., Horanieh, N., & Jabbarpour, Y. (2020). COVID-19: Africa needs unprecedented attention to strengthen community health systems. *The Lancet*, *396*. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)31532-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)31532-4)
- Sadeghmoghadam, L., Daneshfar, M., Sharifi, F., & Alizad, V. (2020). How the first cases of COVID-19 in 10 countries become infected? A case series. *Respiratory Medicine Case Reports*, 101219. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rmcr.2020.101219>
- Schmidt, T., Cloete, A., Davids, A., Makola, L., Zondi, N., & Jantjies, M. (2020). Myths, misconceptions, othering and stigmatizing responses to COVID-19 in South Africa: A rapid qualitative assessment. *PLOS ONE*, *15*(12), e0244420. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0244420>
- Schultz, F., Utz, S., & Göritz, A. (2011). Is the medium the message? Perceptions of and reactions to crisis communication via twitter, blogs and traditional media. *Public Relations Review*, *37*(1), 20–27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2010.12.001>
- Shirky, C. (2011). The political power of social media: Technology, the public sphere, and political change. *Foreign Affairs*, *90*(1), 28–41. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25800379>
- Sobieraj, S., Masullo, G. M., Cohen, P. N., Gillespie, T., & Jackson, S. J. (2020). Politicians, social media, and digital publics: Old rights, new terrain. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *64*(11), 1646–1669. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764220945357>
- StatCounter Global Stats (2021). *Social Media Stats Africa*. <https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/africa>
- Stawicki, S. P., Firstenberg, M. S., & Papadimos, T. J. (2020). The growing role of social media in international health security: The good, the bad, and the ugly. In A. Masys, R. Izurieta, & M. Reina Ortiz (Eds.), *Global health security. Advanced sciences and technologies for security applications* (pp. 341–357). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-23491-1\\_14](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-23491-1_14)
- Stieglitz, S., & Dang-Xuan, L. (2013). Social media and political communication: A social media analytics framework. *Springer*, *3*(4), 1277–1291. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13278-012-0079-3>
- Tankovska, H. (2021a). *Countries with the most Facebook users 2021*. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/268136/top-15-countries-based-on-number-of-facebook-users/>
- Tankovska, H. (2021b). *Global social networks ranked by number of users 2021*. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>

- Triantafyllidou, A., & Yannas, P. (2020). Social media crisis communication in racially charged crises: Exploring the effects of social media and image restoration strategies. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 24(1), 106. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106269>
- Tsao, S.-F., Chen, H., Tisseverasinghe, T., Yang, Y., Li, L., & Butt, Z. A. (2021). What social media told about us in the time of COVID-19: A scoping review. *The Lancet Digital Health*, 3(3), e174–e194. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2589-7500\(20\)30315-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2589-7500(20)30315-0)
- Tufekci, Z., & Wilson, C. (2012). Social media and the decision to participate in political protest: Observations from tahrir square. *Journal of Communication*, 62(2), 363–379. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01629.x>
- van Rompay, T. J. L., de Vries, P. W., & van Venrooij, X. G. (2010). More than words: On the importance of picture-text congruence in the online environment. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 24(1), 22–30. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2009.10.003>
- Waisbord, S., & Amado, A. (2017). Populist communication by digital means: Presidential Twitter in Latin America. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(9), 1330–1346. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1328521>
- Warren, A. M., Sulaiman, A., & Jaafar, N. I. (2014). Social media effects on fostering online civic engagement and building citizen trust and trust in institutions. *Government Information Quarterly*, 31(2), 291–301. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2013.11.007>
- Wolfsfeld, G., Segev, E., & Sheaffer, T. (2013). Social media and the Arab Spring: Politics comes first. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 18(2), 115–137. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161212471716>
- World Health Organisation (2020a). *WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard – Global situation*. <https://covid19.who.int/>
- World Health Organisation (2020b). *Critical preparedness, readiness and response actions for Covid-19: Interim guidance*. [https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331494/WHO-2019-nCoV-Community\\_Actions-2020.2-eng.pdf](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331494/WHO-2019-nCoV-Community_Actions-2020.2-eng.pdf)
- Yavetz, G., & Aharoni, N. (2020). Social media in government offices: Usage and strategies. *Aslib Journal of Information Management*, 72(4), 445–465. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AJIM-11-2019-0313>
- Zhang, D., Zhou, L., & Lim, J. (2020). From networkin the role of social media and analytics in combating the COVID-19 pandemic. *Information Systems Management*, 37(4), 318–326. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10580530.2020.1820635>
- Zhu, Z., Liu, Y., Kapucu, N., & Peng, Z. (2020). Online media and trust in government during crisis: The moderating role of sense of security. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 50, 101717. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdr.2020.101717>

## Author Biography

**Janet Aver Adikpo** is a PhD Candidate in the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Eastern Mediterranean University, Cyprus. She is a graduate of the University of Pune, India (MSc) and Benue State University, Nigeria (BSc). She is currently conducting researches on the role of governance on country reputation and its implication on environmental externalities in developing countries. Her main research interests are media literacy, strategic communication and environment communication.