

Public Trust in Health Messaging from Social VS Traditional Media in Abuja

Michael Idoko Ochogwu*, Oluwatoyosi Adekeye

Department of Community Medicine and Primary Health Care

ABSTRACT

The proliferation of both social and traditional media for health communication in Abuja, Nigeria, presents a critical challenge: navigating the balance between the reach of digital platforms and the credibility of established channels. Public trust is a fundamental determinant of message acceptance, yet comparative data on trust levels between these media types in Abuja is limited. This study aimed to assess and compare the level of public trust in health messaging from social media versus traditional media among residents of Abuja, Nigeria. A cross-sectional study was conducted among 398 adults aged 18 and above across three Area Councils (AMAC, Bwari, Gwagwalada), selected via a multistage sampling technique. Data were collected using a structured, interviewer-administered questionnaire. Descriptive statistics, paired t-tests, and chi-square tests were employed for data analysis using SPSS version 26. The study revealed a statistically significant difference in trust levels between the two media types ($p < 0.001$). The mean trust score for traditional media (3.12) was higher than for social media (2.73). However, trust in traditional media was polarized, while trust in social media was consistently low-to-moderate. A notable paradox was observed: 60.1% of respondents frequently verified health information from social media, compared to only 42.4% for traditional media. Significant demographic variations were found, with females and younger respondents demonstrating higher trust in social media, whereas older respondents trusted traditional media more. WhatsApp (39.7%) and Facebook (34.4%) were the most used social media platforms for health information. Key factors influencing trust included the presence of an official source, particularly for traditional media. While traditional media holds a higher level of trust for health messaging in Abuja, its credibility is not absolute. The public demonstrates active scepticism, especially towards social media. Health communication strategies should adopt an integrated approach, leveraging the credibility of traditional media for official announcements and the reach of visual platforms like YouTube and Facebook for engagement. Messages should be tailored to demographic profiles, and efforts to enhance public digital health literacy are essential for combating misinformation.

