

Innovations

Fake News and Threat to Democracy: The Nigeria perspective

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Abstract

The focus of this study is to investigate fake news and its threat on Nigeria's democracy. The study is anchored on three objectives which are to: examine the rate of the spread of fake news among Nigerians, on both social and traditional media; find out the effect of fake news on Nigeria's democracy and determine actions that can be appropriate in combating it. The study used purposive sampling and surveyed 60 social media users from Delta and Edo states (using 30 respondents from each of the two states) and administered questionnaire appropriately. The study found that despite the awareness of fake news among respondents, there is still increase of fake news because; majority of people do not take time to verify the source of information before sharing and acting on it, hence, they unintentionally propel the spread of fake news. Most respondent feel fake news circulates and ends only in social media and does not have any effect on democracy. The study also found that politics and crisis often suffer more fake news than any other issue. To guard against the spread of it, the study submits that awareness creation and enlightenment of people should be carried out so that one can be knowledgeable about the catastrophe fake news can cause. Furthermore, government should put an end to the hoarding of public information as well as the creation of penalty for the initiators and circulators of fake news.

Keywords: 1.Freedom of expression; 2.Democracy; 3.Fake news; 4.New media.

1.0 Introduction

Fake news has gain disturbing publicity in recent times because of its impact on contemporary democracy. According to Iredia (2020), fake news is disinformation which is false information that is deliberately created; and spread for the purpose of influencing public opinion or to cover up the true story.Like many

nations, Nigeria practical democracy; joining other parts of the world in providing an environment for its citizens to hold, form and express opinions that propel participation in good governance. Chinchilla (2019) opine that freedom to speak, which is the base of democracy, empowers citizens, individually or collectively, to advance their interest and shape the institutions whose decisions impact their lives.

With the emergence of the Global System of Mobile Communications (GSM) in Nigeria, during the civilian administration of General Olusegun Obasanjo, and the evolution of the internet and social media at the turn of the millennium, Nigeria has been rated “partly free” in terms of freedom of expression on the Internet (Paradigm Initiative Nigeria, 2017). People can design platforms such as websites and blogs to form and disseminate information or comments while others generate social media account to say their opinions. All of these take place without obstructions by constituted authorities or restriction by law. With reference to persistent corruption, poverty and negligence to the common man, Nigerians has however, expressly took advantage of their right of freedom of expression through social media to backlash the government who seems to be insensitive to the agony of the people (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Groshek & Koc-Michalska, 2017). Designed Information’s laced with fake news are often used as tools to discredit government policies and information, probably as a reprisal attack to a corrupt government. Fake news has become a real challenge in Nigeria, especially with the country’s fragile social setting, loose democratic culture, poverty and illiteracy, depressing human conditions, inflation, weak economy, and intolerance, which have result to the high tendencies of disenchantment among the people (Ogola, 2017).

In spite of the extensive list of legislation, governing the telecommunications and internet sector, Innes (2020) attest that policies of the Federal Government of Nigeria, particularly the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) law that was draft to regulate communication and therefore introduced Nigeria’s Cybercrime Act, fake news still pervert diverse aspect of the society. Because it has the capacity to distort the eventual truth, especially sensitive information that bothers on government policies Fake news has become a threat to democracy, with social media as a contemporary warfare ground. The challenge however, lies in the ability to discern fake news from an original news and to also guard against the practice and spread of it.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Fake news is no doubt a threat to Nigerian democracy and has created a tensed political environment where citizens have lost credibility on the government. The consequences of fake news on social media platforms have brought about political turbulence in Nigeria. Nigeria, been a democratic country with a large population that embraces several religious and ethnic group, have continue to experience the spread of fake news, making the occurrence of it to almost become the norm, especially during electoral season (Iredia, 2020). The negative practices quite often result to religious and ethnic crises. During Nigeria’s October 2020 #ENDSARS protests, the use of disinformation by both pro-police and anti-police sources, led to fake claims of brutality amidst the conflict and in turn, spread mistrust among the people and aggravated an already chaotic situation (Africa communication, 2020). A picture circulated of a woman named Ugwu Blessing Ugochukwu for example, with a caption stating that her three brothers had been killed by the police, caused an added disorder to an already bad situation. Though Ugochokwu had briefly been detained by the SARS (Special Armed Robbery Squad), it was however not true that her brothers had been killed (Common Wealth security, 2020).

False news of violence regularly raised on social media platforms are interfering with the real work of emergency services. In Plateau State, for instance, there was an alarm of violence happening in a remote location only for police officers to arrive at the scene and discovered that it was a fake alarm. The act wasted the time of the officers and prevented them from doing the much needed police work. Given the frequency of fake news in Nigeria the need to constantly monitor social media for fake news, consumes resources that are already overstretched. Disinformation in this vein has exacerbated tensions in Nigeria and contributed to ongoing violence as well as making it more difficult to identify real acts of injustice. During 2019 election, some state of Nigeria, for instance plateau, Kaduna, Imo, Kano and Lagos, to mention but a few, was subject to

violence due to fake news stories that were circulated via Facebook (Adegoke, 2019). Many areas in Nigeria are already susceptible to violence and a post in social media can trigger an existing grudge and dissatisfaction that the people already have, and may lead to violent protest, capable of destroying lives and properties. In June 23, 2018, a picture showing a man and a baby's skull that was open, with machete wounds across its head and jaw, went viral on Facebook and was viewed 11,000 times. The news which was circulated by the user was said to intensify the growing violence in the Gashish district of Plateau State, Nigeria. According to the source, a tribe called the Fulani Muslims was reported to be killing Christians of Berom ethnic minority. This news snowballed into hatred among Nigerians, claiming the lives of Many Fulani Muslims in the region (Abubakar, 2020)

The more fake news keep emerging,, the more the spread will continues to cause set back to true journalism in Nigeria and this, will stand as a threat to democracy because it can "skew the political discourse and influence voters decision" (Sanchez, 2019). The problem is not only distinct to online environments; it is also present in the traditional media despite the prevalent gatekeepers.

Studies on fake news and democracy have been conducted in many parts of the world; however, there is not enough information about fake news that specifically capture its threat to Nigeria's democracy. It is in order to fill this gap that this study will attempt to examine Fake News and threat to Democracy: the Nigeria perspective.

1.2 Goal and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study is to examine Fake news and its threat to Nigeria's democracy while the specific objectives are to determine:

1. The spread of fake news among social media users in Nigeria on both social and conventional media.
2. The influence of fake news on social media platforms on Nigeria's democracy.
3. What measures can be appropriate in countering fake news.

1.3 Research Questions

To achieve the above objectives, the research will answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of the spread of fake news among social media users in Nigeria?
2. What is the influence of social media fake news on Nigeria's democracy?
3. What measures can be appropriate in countering fake news?

1.4 Significance and Justification of the Study

Democracy is based on strict commitment to the leaders' and followers' precepts and propositions, and Nigeria, with its twenty-first-century democracy, has come a long way in pursuing it. Much has been have been accomplished in different areas despite evident challenges. There is no doubt that the media have aided the all-inclusive citizens' participation and societal progress through purposeful journalism and dogged effort in information dissemination. However, when negligence is found in gate keeping of both the new and conventional media, fakes news becomes inevitable. Based on the premise of the right of expression, the growing trend of fake news has caused serious chaos in diverse aspects of societal endeavors. The reality of what is been faced, with regards to the spread of fake news, is that, if this challenge is not curtailed, its effects on Nigeria's tender democracy could be dashed.

Since all effort tilts towards guarding against fake news in other to achieve societal growth, this study will examine the threat of fake news on Nigeria's democracy. Findings from of this study will enable government, civil society organizations (CSOs) and all other pro-democratic groups to fathom strategies and techniques that will guard against fake news and equally ensure quality journalism and accountable expression by all.

Findings from the work will also help individuals and media professionals; make use of fact findings apparatus as the success of every democracy lies on the media. Also, outcome of the study will provide materials for policymakers in restricting deceit in both conventional and new media industry which will invariably encourage responsible opinions that will strengthen a democratic society.

1.5 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to Delta and Edo states. With consideration to proximity, the researcher benched the study to the above aforementioned states, to represent Nigeria. Also, owing to the fact that the above states have suffered from several political and communal clash, the likelihood of spreading and believing all kinds of news without fact checking has enabled the spread of fake news, leading to violence and clash in the region.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Democracy and freedom of expression in Nigeria.

Equality and Human Right Commission (2021), sees freedom of expression as ones right to hold ones opinion and express them freely without government interference. The natural configuration of Nigeria is diverse in terms of ethnicity, religion, ideology, life style and so on. Since contemporary democracy is governed by pluralism, the need to synergize multiple and conflicting patterns of life, ideas and ideologies has become essential in ensuring orderliness and equal representation in a pluralistic society as Nigeria (Wilson and Umar, 2019).

Though the right to communicate and to be heard promote the effectiveness of democracy; which enable equality before the law, citizens should however, demonstrate this rational commendably. While Citizenries who are ethical and upright members of the society must be unrestricted to obtain and express their views, it is also expected that they owe the utmost obligation of expressing their views, responsibly.

2.2 Freedom of expression on social media and fake news

West (2017) has observed that journalism is in a state of considerable flux because the new digital platform has unleashed innovations where people can freely communicate without restriction. Article 19 (2016), a digital right company notes that there is a strong link between fake news and social media because in any discuss of fake news, social media have been credited to create an echo chamber in which the noise of such fake news can be amplify to an unprecedented volumes. Gottfried and Shearer (2016) attest that the internet has become the 21st century battleground because individuals, journalists, communications professionals and others, weaponize it by spreading fake news with it. The open nature of social media and the lack of total regulation and restrictions by authorities in Nigeria and the world at large, according to Wilson and Umar (2019), defile freedom of expression.

Innes (2020) attest that with social media easy access, wide reach and the possibility of anonymity increasingly makes it easy to manipulate public opinion, defame companies, institutions and individuals or spread false information which can cause harm and reputation-damage. To many, it seems as if social media has eaten away our very foundation that democracy has built. In one of the Nigeria's Vanguard newspaper (2018), the Director of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Jamie Angus, raised alarm over the increasing rate of fake news and stated that "fake news has constituted a huge global challenge on us because people take advantage of the trust in it and perpetrators use it for financial gain because they benefit from the numbers of like and comments usually gotten on their page and timeline." Similarly, Article 19 (2016) added that unscrupulous businesses will publish deceitful report to attract advertising income.

Before the commencement of social media in Nigeria, people depend on traditional media as their authentic news source because, traditional media provide the public with well researched news that were gate kept and scrutinized (Lawlor, 2018). Our democracy once excels on this modus operandi. However, the social media arrive with a freedom for public to develop and distribute information in their own bit. This version has become a mockery and an abused of free expression, for several selfish and dubious reasons. It provides the public with anonymity and immunity to bypass the order. As a result, deviants with shocking intentions, use the social media to create and disseminate fake news that has caused public chaos, communal clashes, political tension as well as economic threats, feared to create a crack in the pillar of Nigeria's democracy.

Well documented videos reporting the death of President Muhammadu Buhari, who died in a UK hospital and being replaced by Jubril of Sudan, is an example of fake news which has made majority of Nigerians to lose credibility in the Buhari's administration. With this perception, most Nigeria looks for every means to destabilize the present administration because they feel they are being deceived and taken for a ride. In 2013 there was a story written by a Nigeria newspaper, the Daily Times, about governor Nasir el-Rufia who saw a tortoise in his office and collapsed, and was flown abroad in coma. However, the Governor and former mayor of the capital city of Nigeria, Abuja, said "I came into my office; saw something that looked like a small tortoise on my seat, supposedly some voodoo curse to scare me." He further said "I just removed it, settled down and started working" (BBC News, 2020). All these are among so many examples of fake news, capable of causing threat and chaos in the country.

We now live in a digital world, surrounded by junk information. The internet has made us more connected than ever, thus a threat anywhere is a threat everywhere. The contemporary information age has created a virtual environment with loads of information, a large part of which is reliable with the more significant chunk unverifiable, thus, discerning truth from hear-say has become an enormous task (Wilson and Umar, 2019). The aforementioned instances does not only explain the fact that fake news is a threat to Nigeria's growing democracy, but draw attention to a modern trend that can further wreak havoc on the value and sacred custom that sometimes unite the country as an entity.

2.3 Misinformation, Disinformation and Mal-information

Fake news encompasses three key concepts which are: misinformation, disinformation and mal-information. According to Staats, (2021), Misinformation, which is the least of the three concept, describes mistake that is unintentional, such as inaccurate photo caption, dates or when satire is taken seriously. Disinformation is fabricated or deliberate manipulated audio/visual content, intentionally designed to conspire rumor. Mal-information however, which has been found to be the most hurtful form of information, are deliberate publication of private information for personal or corporate rather than public interest, such as revenge porn, deliberate change of context, date or time of a genuine content. Bell (2015) added that it is seen to be information that is anchored on realism, but adopted either deliberately or otherwise to perpetrate damage on a person, organization or country. A typical example is the political sex scandal involving Bill Clinton, a former US president and 22 years old White house Monica Lewinsky that took place in 1998 (Milesjolly, 1997). It was a real life event that was used to mal the then sitting President of the United State.

Misinformation, disinformation and mal-information are the basic components in which fake news are formed. In addition, message sharing systems which are currently unregulated have demeaned the traditional pattern of information. Sensational stories that are published based on little reality can have immense detrimental consequences on governments, people and other reputable institute, leaving the majority to be at a fix of not knowing which source is more reliable than the other. Misinformation is one herculean challenge because it causes suspicion among people, makes information difficult to use and also increases people's doubt in the media.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

The study adopts Source Credibility Theory as the theoretical base for the research. Source credibility theory was presented by Hovland, Janis and Kelly in 1963. The theory explained that those that receive information are more likely to be persuaded when the source presents itself as credible (Umeogu, 2012). Also, Credibility Institute(2017)attests that the initial idea of credibility was first derived from Aristotle who submits that "speaker's trust worthiness must be built and established in speech and that what the speaker did or said before such a speech was not of importance". The theory is functional in diverse intellectual fields which include marketing, Political sciences, communication and law (Credibility Institute, 2017).

The main thrust of source credibility theory is to explain how communication's persuasiveness is affected by the perceived credibility of the source of the communication (McCroskey and Young, 2003). The credibility of

all communication, regardless of format, has been found to be heavily influenced by the perceived credibility of the source of that communication. The diagram below illustrates the theory (**Figure 1**):

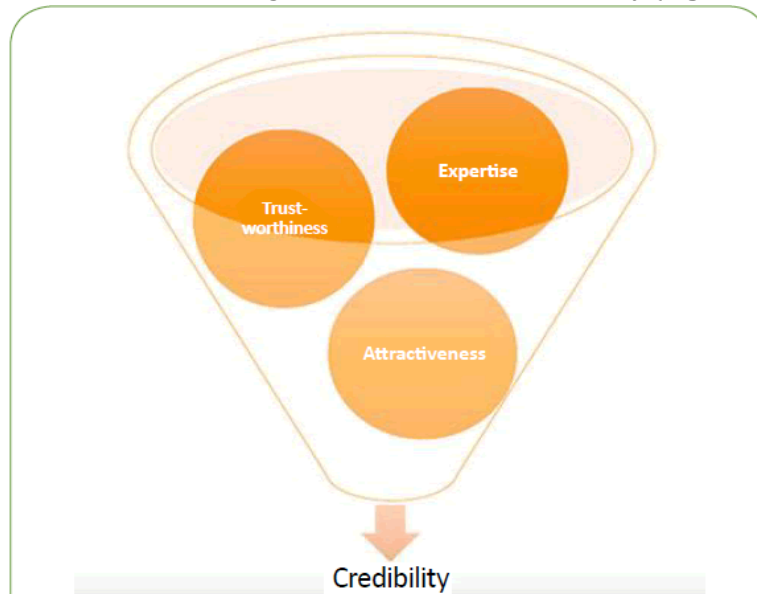


Figure 1: The Credibility (Source: Umeogu, 2012)

The theory basically establishes that there are two most commonly visible components which positively influence source credibility and they are: perceived expertise and trustworthiness of the source (Umeogu, 2012).

3.0 Research Method

The study used descriptive method and adopted the survey method of research. Reason is that it is most suitable for eliciting response from the population.

Population

The target population includes selected social media users in Delta and Edo state.

Sampling technique

The study used the purposive or judgmental sampling technique. Purposive sampling according to Adler, (2011) refers to a form of sampling procedure where some selected elements, based on the researcher's judgment on which elements will facilitate his or her investigation, is deliberately chosen for the study. The sample will be purposively selected from the social media users from Delta and Edo State. The purposive selection will enable the study to select people who have experienced and recognize the spread of fake news. The study selected sixty (60) social media users, thirty (30) from Delta and thirty (30) from Edo State.

Instrument for Data Collection

Questionnaire has been adopted as tool for data collection. Questionnaire is a survey instrument used to derive information from respondents in an organised way. Adefila (2008) notes that questionnaire is a distinctive form of correspondence developed to procure authoritative information from a number of persons through the medium of well-planned questions. The questionnaire will be designed in both close-ended and open ended format. The questionnaire will be divided into sections. The first segment will seek to elicit demographic data of the respondents; while the second segment will seek to obtain answers from the respondents; on the set objectives.

4.0 Result and Analysis

This part presents the results gotten from the survey that was carried out. Tables and charts were used to illustrate presentation. Each table is followed by analysis of the data it contained. The analysis is done using both quantitative and qualitative analysis. While the quantitative analysis uses percentages and numerical representations, the qualitative analysis is done to address the opened-ended questions designed in the questionnaire.

Table 1: Do you know what fake news is?

S/N	Response	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
1.	Yes	57	95
2.	No	3	5
	Total	60	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Table 1 presents result from the study’s search to estimate the awareness of the respondents about fake news. The result shows that 95% of the respondents are knowledgeable of what fake news is while only 5% do not have knowledge of fake news. This appears that majority of the respondents are aware of fake news and thus confirm ground for the appropriateness of the study.

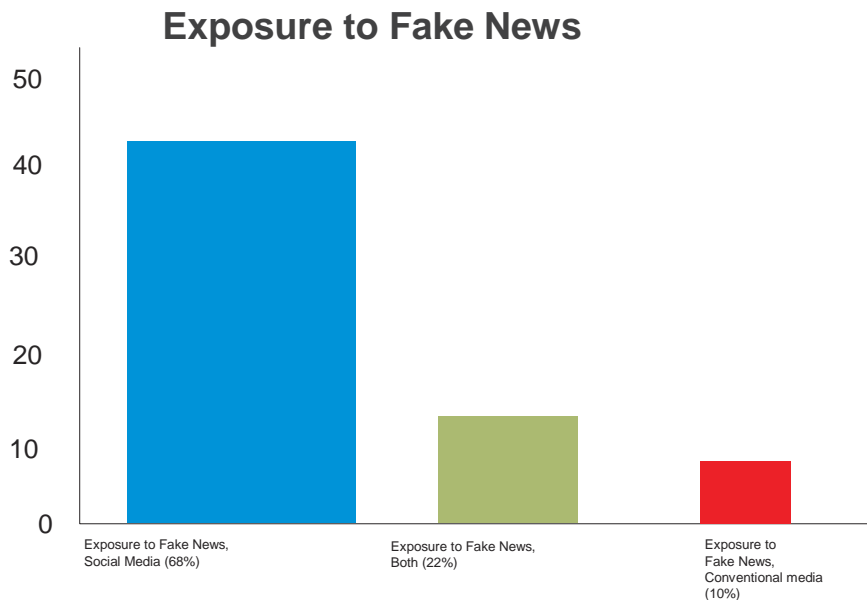


Figure 2 Where do you come in contact with fake news? (Source:Field Survey, 2021).

Figure 2:Where do you come in contact with fake news? Source: Field Survey, 2021.

The chart result above shows that 41(68%) of the respondents come in contact with fake news on social media pages. However, only 6(10%) of the respondents indicate that they come in contact with fake news on conventional media while 13(22%) of the respondent come in contact with fake news on both conventional and social media. The result suggests that social media is the major carrier of fake news while conventional media record least number of fake news.

Figure 3 presents result from the search to know the rate of the spread of fake news on social or conventional media. The result implies that 7% of the respondent who are conversant on social media experience fake news in every minute, 20% note that they see fake news every hour, 15% come in contact with fake news weekly on the media they suggest in the previous chart while only

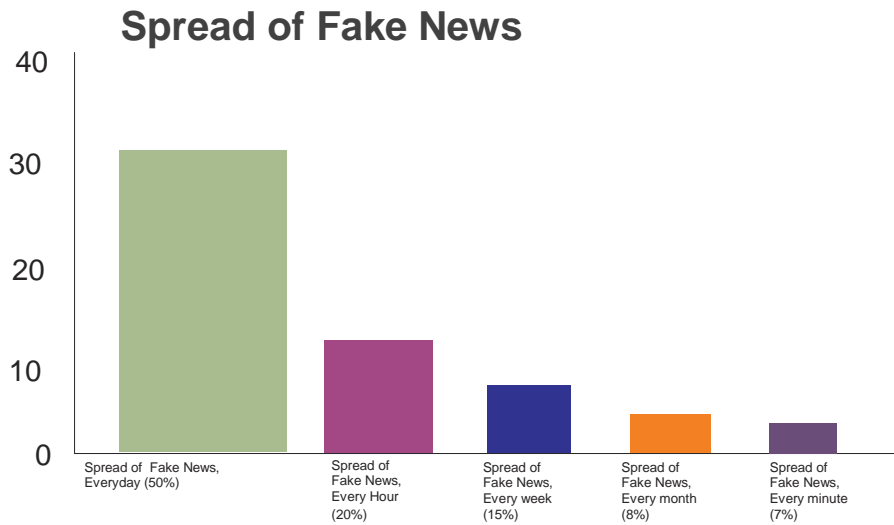


Figure 3: What is the frequency of spread of fake news on the media you choose in the previous question?
Source: Field Survey, 2021.

8% state that they see fake news in every month. This can be pointed to the reality that the social media which gives free access to users facilitates the spread of fake news more than any other media of communication.

Table 2: Do you share information?

S/N	Response	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
1.	Yes	54	90
2.	No	6	10
	Total	60	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 2 illustrates the share ability of information among respondents. This was done to know how much of fake news do respondents usually share, unknowingly. The result shows that 90% of the respondents share information while only 10% do not share information. This means that majority of the respondents contribute in the information sharing system of media cycle. It also implies that respondents play role in either increasing or curtailing the spread of fake news on social media.

Table 3: Do you verify information before sharing?

S/N	Response	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
1.	Yes	18	30
2.	No	42	70
	Total	60	100

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Table 3 tries to find out if respondents check the genuineness and source of information before sharing. The result shows that 30% of the respondents do check for the genuineness of information before sharing, while 70% of the respondents do not have time to verify information before sharing. This shows that despite the realization of fake news among respondents, majority of cybercitizens do not find time to verify information before sharing.

Natures of Fake News

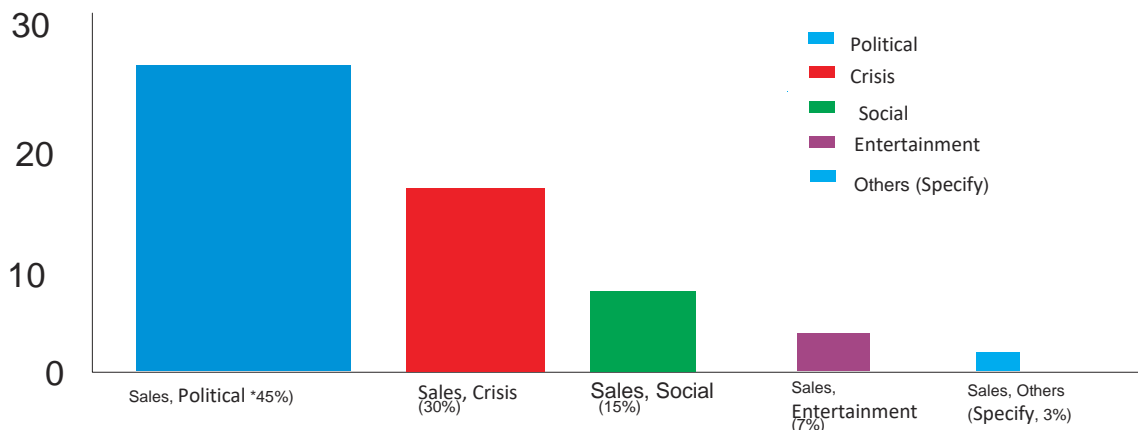


Figure 4 What is the nature of fake news you come across on the media you expose to? Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Figure 4:What is the nature of fake news you come across on the media you expose to? (Source: Field Survey, 2021)

The Figure 4 above presents result from the search of the study to find out the natures and rate of each type of fake news being disseminated on social media. The respondents note that 45% of the fake news they see on media are political in nature, 30% are crisis related, 15% are related to social aspect of life, while 7% fake news they see on the social media are related to entertainment. There are however, 3% who suggest the presence of fake news in the aspect of sport, economic and cultural level. This explains that politics and crisis receives more fake news than any other sector in Nigeria.

Spread of Fake News

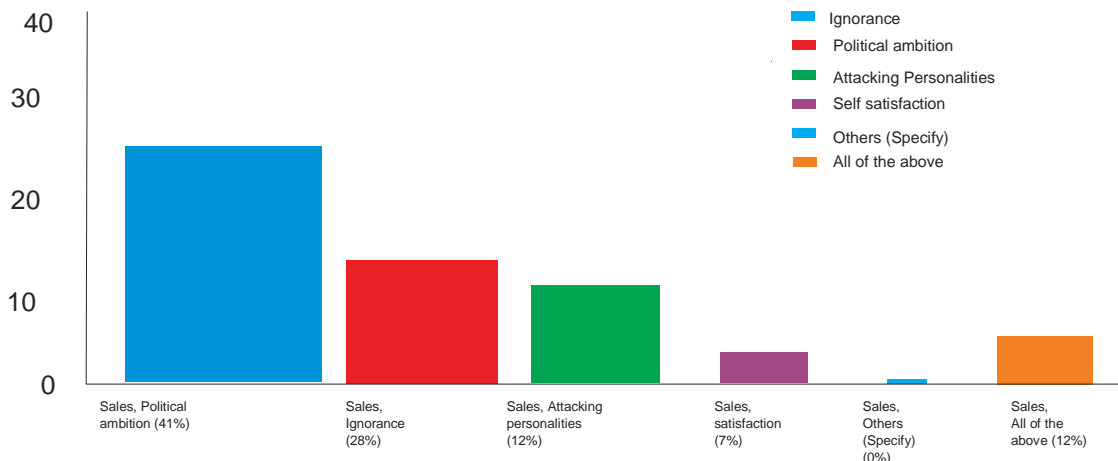


Figure 5 Why do you think people spread fake news? Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Figure 5: Why do you think people spread fake news? Source: Field Survey, 2021.

The chart above shows the perception of the respondents on why social media users spread fake news. The result indicates that 28% of respondents ignorantly spread fake without knowing the effect. 41% of the respondents points the spread of fake news to political ambition of some people, 12% of the respondents perceive that people spread fake news to attack personalities of others, 7% of the respondent states the spread of fake news to self-satisfaction while 12% attributed it to all of the above.

Do you think fake news have any effect on Nigeria’s democracy?

The study search to find if the spread of fake news has effect on a democratic government gave rise to the table below.

Table 4: Do you think spreading fake news will affect democracy?

S/N	Response	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
1.	Yes	22	37
2.	No	30	50
3	Undecided	8	13
Total		60	100

Source: Field survey 2021

To provide answer for the above question, 22(37%) of the respondents suggest that spreading fake news has effect on the smooth performance of democracy while 30 (50%) indicate that the spread of fake news has no effect on democracy. This means that people underestimate what fake news can cause in a democratic nation.

Other reason why the spread of fake news is on the increase.

Why?

Under this category, qualitative data were collected from opened-ended question. The study search to find why respondents hold the above perception regarding the effect of fake news on a democratic government. The following are some of the responses that were gathered.

The responses are grouped into two. The first group are those that indicate that fake news affect democracy while the second category are those that think it does not affect democracy. There are however, responses that were indifferent on the subject.

Some of the responses in the first category (supporting that it affect democracy), gave the following responses which are thus:

- "It affects the way decisions are made."
- "Every country needs information that is authentic and reliable so that tension and crises can be eliminated."
- "Fake news raises fear and instability in the polity"
- "It create unnecessary crisis among different cultures and religious beliefs."
- "Fake news is evil and causes distractions"
- "Fake news discredits government before her populace. For instance, because people no longer believe in the current Nigeria's minister of information and culture, Lia Mohammed, most people take advantage of his short coming and spread many fake news from his desk so that when information is passed from his ministry, people discredit it and think every information from him is fake"
-

Responses from the second group (that fake news does not affect democracy) are as follows;

- "Fake news does not have any effect on government"
- "It is out of context to imagine that fake news will affect democracy because it is not new. I feel so because government themselves and politicians use it as a tool, under the guise of propaganda, to project their political ambition."
- "Fake news is part of social media because it is fun doing it"
- "There is no relationship between government and fake news"
- "I think fake news starts and end in social media, it have no effect on government operation in the country (Nigeria). Government should stop bothering and misappropriating money on issues that concern information on social media, it's a normal thing."

Some of the responses in the last group (people that are indifferent about the subject) include:

- "No idea"
- "I don't have anything to say about that"
- "Connection between Fake news and government? Undecided"
- "Nothing to say"
- "I have no idea"

To what extent does fake news affect democracy?

The **Figure 6** presents result from the search in which fake news affect democracy. The result shows that 28% of the respondents believe that fake news incapacitate others people's right of expression, 41% of the respondents believe fake news create unnecessary tension in the polity, 12% of the respondents think fake news promote disinformation and misinformation which can cause public disarray, 7% of the respondents believe fake news lead to so much restriction over the media while 12% agree to all of the above (**Table5**)

Effects of Fake News on Democracy

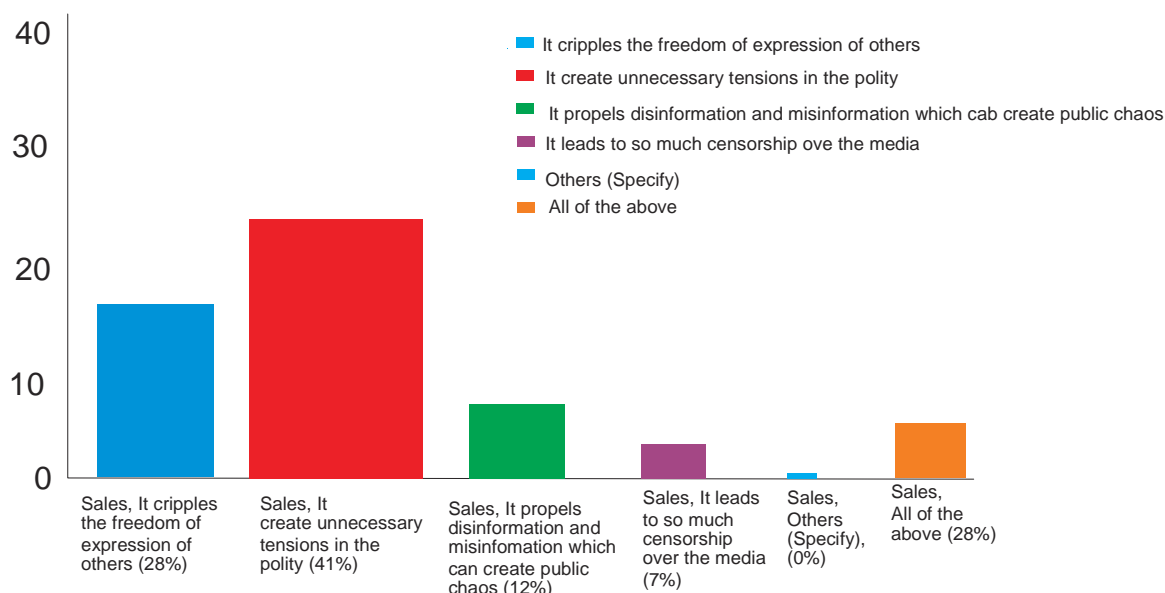


Figure 6 To what extent does fake news affect democracy? Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Table 5: Do you think democracy will thrive well in the era of fake news?

S/N	Response	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
1.	Yes	20	33.3%
2.	No	29	48.3%
3	Undecided	11	18.30%
Total		60	100.00%

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Table 5 The result shows 33.3% of the respondents agreed that democracy will thrive well in the era of fake news, 48.3% of the respondents disagreed that democracy can thrive well in the era of fake news. There are 18.3% of the respondents who remain undecided. This means that majority of the respondents recognizes the threat of fake news to democracy and thus suggest that democracy cannot thrive well if fake news continue to spread without control.

Identify methods that can be used to curtail the spread of fake news without restricting freedom of expression?

An opened-ended question which sought to gather suggestions towards combating the spread of fake news without impinging on the freedom of expression was used in this section. The responses that were made are as follows:

- Government should put an end to the hoarding of public information
- “There should be social media control”
- “Nigeria Press Council and National Broadcasting Commission should come in as guide that will professional censor defaulters without tampering ones freedom of expression”

- “The conventional media should be used by government to create awareness of the detriments associated with fake news as well as punishment for people who create and share unverified news.”
- “The provider of social media should draft out ways of identifying and avoid the post of unverified information”
- “Other social media should adopt the strategy of twitter that has limited number of text that can be post.”
- Anybody, found to create or facilitate the spread of fake news, especially of the kind that can cause harm, should be prosecuted so as to serve as deterrent to others.”
- “Government should improve on its communication techniques in other to impede on the spread of fake news”
- “There should be strict guideline on how social media handle should be registered and operated.”

5.0 Discussion of Findings

This study made some findings that are based on the earlier stated research questions.

i. Awareness of fake news

The study found that 57 (95%) who formed majority of the respondents are aware of fake news and thus establish ground for the appropriateness of the study. The study further search into the media that spread fake news faster and found that social media 41(68%) is the major carrier of fake news while conventional media record least number of fake news 6(10%). This was obtained from the number of respondents who suggest that they come in contact with fake news mostly on social media than the conventional media.

ii. Frequency of spreading fake news

While measuring the frequency in which fake news is been spread, the study found that 7% of the respondent who are active on social media, come in contact with fake news in every minute, 20% suggest that they see fake news every hour, 15% come in contact with fake news weekly while only 8% suggested that they see fake news in every month. This can be attributed to the fact that the social media which provides free access to users, promote the frequency of spreading fake news more than any other media of communication. In connection with this finding, the study found that though there is an awareness of fake news among the respondents, there is little or no sensitivity of verifying information before sharing. This substantiate the fact that majority of social media users, do not authenticate information before sharing it. It was found that lack of awareness on what the spread of unverified information may cause, propel the increase of misinformation and user are not aware of the danger it causes.

Furthermore, the study also found that politics and crisis suffer more fake news than any other issue, making social media to be congested with so much unverified information, mostly during elections period. Also, when crisis comes up in other angels such as issues on celebrities, fake news is used to compound the whole issue which sometimes led to crises between the fans of such celebrities and their ‘haters.’

iii. What is the effect of fake news on Nigeria’s democracy?

The result indicated that 22(37%) of respondents suggest that spreading fake news can affect a democratic government while 30(50%) declared that spreading of fake news have no effect on a country’s democracy. It can therefore be deduced, based on the above data that people tend to underestimate what fake news can cause in a democratic society and this could add to the increase of it.

In addition, the study collected qualitative data and its investigation shows that the group of respondents who attest that the spread of fake news affect democracy suggest that it also influence the following: decision making, democracy thrive well with peace and reliable and vibrant communication system, heating politics, create and fuel crisis, tamper with the trust that the people have in the media. However, the study establishes that respondents who disagree attest that fake news does not have any impact on government. Some of them think fake news is a fun thing on social media that does not go beyond the internet while others disregard any relationship it may have with government. Furthermore, the study estimates the degreeto which fake news affect democracy. It was found that 28% of the respondents believe fake news cripples freedom of expression of others, 41% of the respondents believe fake news causes unnecessary tension in the polity,

12% of the respondents believe fake news drive disinformation and misinformation which can cause public disarray, 7% of the respondents suggest fake news lead to so much censorship over the media while 12% suggest all of the above. Similarly, the research also found that a larger number of respondents recognizes the threat of fake news to democracy and submit that democracy cannot thrive well if fake news is not checkmated.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

From the above findings, one can therefore establish that fake news does not only cause fear and chaos, but can also wreak havoc in a democratic society, especially in a country like Nigeria where there are diverse cultural and religious believe. There is an urgent need for the three tiers of government to tenaciously work with the media in creating awareness of what fake news is capable of causing in a society and to discourage the spread of it. To eliminate the spread of it, modalities such as source verification, which include the search to find out if a story has already been disproved or not, is advised. This can however, be done using the following medium which include: Google, Snopes.com, FactCheck.org, Lead Stories, truth or Friction, Washington Post Fact Checker, to mention but a few. Also, for images, tools like Tin Eye, REVEye and SurfSafe can be useful; these tools will reveal where and when an image or video was recoded in other to avoid misinformation which can lead to fake news. There is need to always discipline those bloggers or media outlets that disseminate fake news no matter the circumstance. By so doing, others who have similar intention, for whatsoever reason, will be discouraged.

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