

# New Media, Fake News and National Security in Nigeria

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## Abstract

News is an intrinsic part of any society as it educates and gives more information on things happening in the society but the new media has indirectly promoted fake news as different people now have access to the internet, thereby putting the security of the nation at risk since it has the power to shape public opinion. This study finds out the influence of fake news and new media on national security by focusing on residents of Oyo West Local Government. The methodology used was survey method having questionnaire as the research instrument, administering 300 of them to respondents that were purposively chosen among residents of Oyo West Local Government. Findings revealed that fake news is misleading as the people cannot decipher which news is real or fake as almost everyone now has access to internet. The study concludes that people should try to stay away from misleading news that can cause problems in Nigeria and recommends that the internet should be monitored and perpetrators of such news brought to book so as to serve as a lesson to others

**Keywords:** *News, Fake News, Internet, Security, New Media*

## Introduction

News is an intrinsic part of any society. It is a timely account of an event through a mass medium either television, radio or newspaper. Ajayi (2006: p34) posits that news is the actual account of an event rendered timely and of interest to the social, political, economic life of a considerable number of people while Nwabueze (2014: p221) describe news as a timely account of an event through a mass medium by a journalist. News can be said to be one of the elements that hold the society together as it tells us happenings around us on a daily basis. This means that news must be current, accurate and recent for it to be called news. In addition, news is about what will interest the audience and that is why news media keep an eye on current and fresh issues but despite the importance of news to the society, fake news has managed to get into the society and spreading fast as a result of technology and easy access to the internet by the people.

Fake news is increasing daily and is now a matter for concern as the populace believe it more without verifying the source, thereby compounding issues. Fake news according to Allcott and Gentzkow (2017: p.213) refers to news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false and could mislead readers. According to Sir Tim Berner Lee in an open letter published on March 12, 2017 to mark the www's 28<sup>th</sup> birthday, he noted that:

It is too easy for misinformation to spread on the web. He added that people choose what to show us based on algorithms which learn from our personal data that they are constantly harvesting. The net result is that these websites show us content that they think we will click on meaning that misinformation or fake news which is surprising, shocking or designed to appeal to our biases can spread like wildfire.

While Adaja and Talabi (2019) describe fake news as any account or report or story that is deliberately and intentionally and verifiable source intended to misinform and persuade people to take a particular course of action which ordinarily may not have been taken. It is false news that is deliberately circulated in order to make money out of online traffic or by people who have scant regard for the truth and this is where the new media, also known as the internet comes in, as it is used in most cases to circulate these intentions.

New media are ICT-based media which have enhanced the performance and widened the frontiers of the traditional old mass media and other communication channels (Nwabueze, 2014: p.163) while Adedina, Adeniyi and Bolaji (2008) avers that the new media which have extended the frontiers of mass communication have been associated with a revolution in information technology and the rise of the computer. Mugiira (2009) avers that the new media comprises the latest forms of digital mass communication such as textual blogs, video blogs, wikis and podcast which are competing with radio, television and newspaper. New media is known to have expand the horizon of communication thereby making information to reach its audience fast and the world a smaller place. It is a common adage that we are now in the technology/digital age. In the words of McQuail (2008, p.38) some features of the new media include their interactivity, their multiplicity of use and open-ended character and their ubiquity and delicateness while Oso (2007) describes the internet as the most ubiquitous of the new media.

The people made use of the internet during the ENDSARS protest in Nigeria. During this period, a lot of messages were posted on social media platforms by telling the people how the protest was going in each state and so on. In fact, the popular killing of protesters at the Lekki toll gate comes to mind here whereby it was reported that soldiers shot at protesters and as such many of the protesters died. According to various reportage on the issue, protesters were shown on the new media in the pool of their own blood while some were badly wounded. The government had to come out to refute the claim that it shot at innocent citizens and that people died. While this was going on, some of those alleged to have died came out to refute it while some said their pictures were stolen from their social media page but whether these were true or not, the fact remains that fake news distributed on the new media (internet) is able to cause chaos to our national security if the activities on social media are not monitored thereby causing more harm than good. This study looked at the effect of new media and fake news on the national security of Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Fake news is a global phenomenon. The new media has made fake news to be popular in the society as virtually everybody is on the social media either reading or trying to get information on issues happening around them, According to Ogbuoshi, Oyeleke and Folorunsho (2019) “with the advent of the new media, the scourge of fake news is becoming more prevalent that its negative impact is very evident. This shows that the negative sides of social media seem to be outweighing its benefits. In the words of Adavie (2018) recent developments around the world have proved that social media has assumed a destructive dimension and threatening the very humanity it came to improve. In Nigeria, the proliferation of fake news on social media has reached an unprecedented level thereby putting the country in a precarious situation. The ENDSARS killings was an example to this when it was circulated online that Nigerian soldiers shot at innocent citizens at the Lekki toll gate and even went ahead to show pictures of different people soaked in the pool of their own blood. The question then arises, do Nigerians know the implication of fake news on the national security of the country especially when making use of the new media? This study finds out the effect of new media and fake news on the national security of Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

- 1) What is the extent of the effect of fake news on national security in Nigeria?
- 2) To what extent have the respondents been influenced with fake news on new media?
- 3) What are the factors that often lead to fake news on new media?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Like any other academic endeavor, this work is pegged on the Agenda setting theory. The theory was propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw in 1972/73. Their theory argues that people get their news from limited sources because people do not pay attention to an outlet thus they rest on the mass media. According to Anaeto et al (2008), the agenda setting theory proposes that the facts which people know about public issues tend to be those which the mass media presents to them. It is assumed that the media sets the agenda for our general discussion whether directly or indirectly. The messages on social media have a way of getting into our brain thereby making us to focus on things received online. These days, most people rely on the social media(internet) for news than to sit in front of the television or listening to radio. The generation we are in is relying more on the social media and this is one of the reasons why fake news thrives.

### **Literature Review**

#### **New Media: A Conceptual Clarification**

The world is changing fast and much of that change is driven by technology. The new media are ICT based media which have enhanced the performance and widen the frontiers of the traditional “old” mass media and other communication channels (Nwabueze, 2014) while Adedina, Adeniyi and Bolaji (2008) explains that the concept of the new media refers to the media and communication activities made possible by the digital revolution and distinguished from the traditional mass media. The ICTs is known to have expanded the frontiers of communication channels referred to as the new media. The main features that distinguish the new media from the old media according to research is their interactivity, their multiplicity of use and open ended character and their ubiquity and delicateness.

Mugira (2009) in Nwabueze (2014) avers that the new media comprises the latest forms of digital mass communication such as textual blogs, video blogs, wikis, and podcast which are competing with radio, television and newspaper.

### **Fake News: A Conceptual Clarification**

Fake news has become a thing of great concern to the society as it causes a lot of damage to the people involved. Also its phenomenal increase, pervasiveness and vulnerability is also a great concern anytime, anyday because of the damaging effect as it is usually presented as facts, thereby making people to believe such stories. Nelson (2017) posited that fake news has become a powerful and sinister force in the news media environment while Adaja and Talabi (2019) describe fake news as any account or report or story that is deliberately and intentionally fabricated with no traceable and verifiable source, intended to misinform, mislead and persuade people to take a particular course of action which ordinarily may not have been taken. Fake news is not new phenomenon as it is difficult to say precisely when and where it started. Fake news subsist when facts and figures in a particular account or story are intentionally distorted.

Distorted news also known as fake news means false information that is deliberately circulated by those who have scant regard for the truth but hope to advance political causes or it could be false information circulated by journalists who do not realize it's false" BBC (2017, March 12). According to Gallinger and Magid (2017) Fake news is any information that is deliberately meant to be wholly or largely false or misleading. The researchers noted that the motivations for creating fake news include financial gain: by getting people to click on sites so they're exposed to advertising or to persuade others to take an action, purchase a product, or support or oppose a cause or political candidate. Some people perpetuate fake news just for the sake of deceiving people or as a prank. The constitutional rights foundation in 2017 stated that fake news is a fabricated news stories that are presented without any credible evidence and for the apparent purpose to misinform or to persuade through misinformation. Research has also indicated that fake news includes hoaxes and conspiracy theories that are based on provable claims. Fake news is a news article that is intentionally and veritably false.

According to Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) fake news can be defined as "news stories that have no factual basis but are presented as facts" (p. 5). According to research, fake news has existed for a long time, nearly the same time as news began to circulate widely after the printing press was invented in 1437. Fake news is news articles that are intentionally false and used to mislead readers. It includes false information and is often created with dishonest intention to mislead readers or listeners. Various literatures directly treat deceptive news as fake news and they include serious fabrications, hoaxes and satires. Researchers have noted that fake news has existed for a long time, almost the same time that printing press was invented while scholars corroborated this by stating also that fake news is nothing new as it has been with us for some time and may be difficult to eradicate.

### **Fake News and National Security in Nigeria**

Fake news has become a global social scourge ravaging and threatening to snuff credibility out of the web 2.0 architecture (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017; Mustafaraj & Metaxes, 2017; Silverman 2016). Fake news portends grave danger for a growing society. In 2014, the social media aide to incumbent Nigerian President at the time, Reno Omokri was exposed for allegedly using fake social media handle to disseminate fake political news about his boss's opponent (Judah, 2014). Fake news uses social, religious, political and ethnic tension existing in the country to disrupt peace and derail the country. According to Odebode and Fabiyi (2018) fake news is a time bomb that can destroy the very foundation of the fragile unity being enjoyed in the country. Both fake news and disinformation are major concerns around the globe but the virulent nature of dissemination via social media has attracted even more global outcry and of particular concern are the implications on promised balance of democracy (Gaughan, 2016; Silverman, 2016). With misinformation circulating freely and going viral on social media, it is very likely that people who get their news from the social media are daily exposed to doses of hoaxes, rumours, misinformation, falsehood, conspiracy theories and misleading news (Menczer, 2016; Silverman & Singer-vine, 2016). Thereby leading to non-

security in the country as fake news can cause people to believe rumours that are not true posing as the truth. For the country to be secured, fake news must be worked on as it is becoming alarming in the country.

Nigeria has on a daily basis experienced an upsurge of activities that threatens and endanger its national security. In recent times, the Nigerian nation suddenly metamorphosed into an abode of insecurity (Daniel & Kwopnan, 2018). William (2008,p. 6) says security is an essential concept that is commonly associated with the alleviation of threat to cherished values especially the survival of individuals, groups or objects in the near future while Babangida (2011) view national security as the physical protection and defense of our citizens and our territorial integrity and also the promotion of the economic wellbeing and prosperity of Nigerians in a safe and secure environment that promotes the attainment of our national interest and those of our foreign partners. Orji (2012) on the other hand posits that pivotal to the survival of any society is its law and order which are predicated on national security. This includes fake news which should be looked into, so that it won't cause chaos in the country as news must be true and not false or damaging to anybody in the country.

### **New Media as drivers of Fake News: Danger for National Security**

The emergence of the new media has affected the quality and rapidity of communication positively in a lot of ways. According to McQuail (2007) new media is a disparate form of communication technologies that share certain features apart from being new, made possible by digitalization and being widely available for personal use as communication devices. The new media has become an inherent part of modern society. The presence of the new media has posed a challenge to the country as it is now being used to distribute fake news and misinformation all over the country.

There has been tremendous increase in the number of internet users since 1995, the so called year of internet. Affordable, personal computers, at-rate unlimited access and the high speed internet connection combined with a strong economy in the late 1990's and early 2000's powered the internet to phenomenal growth in the United States (Rajemdran & Thesinghraj, 2014). The time spent online has more than doubled between 1998 and 2006 (Willinat, 2009). Researchers have noted that people now spend a lot of time on the social networking websites thereby making people to be more sensitive to information posted on social media and this is where the issue of fake news comes in. in most cases, the new media is used to spread fake news since we are in the modern era where you are expected to be on social media of any kind. Most of the time, the news on social media are not censored at all and also it cannot be linked to a particular source or organization, most especially now that we are in the freelancer age where everybody now has access to the internet and also claim to be a journalist, thereby portending danger for the national security of the country if it is not curbed.

### **Methodology**

This study is descriptive in nature and the tool employed for data collection was the questionnaire. A total of 300 copies of questionnaire were administered in all to respondents in Oyo West Local Government. Respondents were between the ages of 18years and above. Questionnaires were completed and returned, giving a response rate of 75% approximately. The respondents were selected purposely to ensure the inclusion of all age groups. The data was analyzed using SPSS version 21.

### **Presentation of Data**

**RQ1:** What is the extent of the effect of fake news on national security in Nigeria?

Table 1a: Respondents Position on whether there is an effect of fake news on the National Security in Nigeria

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Strongly Agree	125	<b>42</b>
Agree	75	<b>25</b>
Undecided	15	<b>5</b>
Disagree	50	<b>17</b>
Strongly Disagree	34	<b>11</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1a shows respondents response on the extent of effect of fake news on national security in Nigeria. 125(42%) respondents strongly agree that there is fake news in Nigeria and it has a great effect while 34(11%) strongly disagree. The data shows that majority of the respondents strongly agree that fake news has a great effect on national security in Nigeria

**Table 1b: Respondents Position on whether there is fake News in Nigeria**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Yes	265	88
No	15	<b>5</b>
I don't Know	20	<b>7</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1b shows respondents response on whether there is fake news in Nigeria. 265(88%) respondents said there was fake news in the country while 15(5%) were of the opinion that there was none while 20(7%) were not decided. The data shows that there is fake news in Nigeria from the position of the respondents.

**RQ2:** To what extent have the respondents been influenced with fake news on new media?

Table 2a: Respondents Influence of Fake News on New Media

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Large Extent	125	42
Great Extent	75	25
Little Extent	70	23
No Extent	30	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 shows respondents position on the influence of fake news on new media. 125(42%) respondents say fake news have influenced them through the new media while 30(10%) says there have not been influenced. The data shows that respondents have been influenced with fake news on new media to a great extent.

**RQ3:** What are the factors that often lead to fake news on new media?

Table 3a: Factors that lead to fake news

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Propaganda	105	35
Hate Speech	120	40
Social Media	35	12
Lack of trust in the mainstream media	25	8
Structure and configuration of mainstream media	15	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3 shows respondents' response on the factors that lead to fake news. 120(40%) respondents are of the opinion that hate speech is one of the factors that lead to fake news while 15(5%) respondents say the structure and configuration of the mainstream media lead to fake news. The data shows that hate speech and propaganda are one of the important factors that often lead to fake news on new media.

### **Discussion of findings**

The data shows that fake news has a major effect on the national security of Nigeria as majority of the respondents strongly agreed while respondents also agreed that there is fake news in Nigeria. the result of the findings agrees with Mohammed (2017) who noted that the goal of spreading disinformation and fake news to include destabilizing the system, inciting people to violence and weakening the people's confidence in their government while Osinbajo (2019) noted that peddling of fake news posed great danger for the society, in addition to causing

physical harm. He further stressed the need to carry out investigations, cross check facts and do more interrogations before publications.

The data further shows that respondents have been influenced with fake news on new media to a great extent. This explains what Schackmuth (2018) says that social media is a mobilizing force for fake news especially thanks to some of the features that give it an advantage over other media while Schwarz (2018) avers that social media has become the driver of fake news in this century much as traditional media did in earlier centuries. Scholars have also noted that certain features of social media make it difficult for readers or viewers to know whether it is fake or true, noting that these features include its anonymity, the speed of dissemination even before the story can be verified, the near permanent feature of online information amongst others. Another research by Syed (2017) supports these views as he identifies the features of social media that drives news irrespective of the truth or otherwise across boundaries and platforms to include lack of strong information filters which allows all manner of information and news to flow across the internet.

The data further shows that the factors that often lead to fake news on new media are propaganda, hate speech, lack of trust in the mainstream media, with hate speech having the highest percentage. These findings agree with United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination where they noted that all over the world, hate speech represent a form of threat to damage the lives of individuals and increase the sense of fear in entire communities while Adibe (2015) in Nwokoro (2019) states that hate speech is any speech that is used to demean persons based on their identifiers such as race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and predispose them to acts of violence. Adibe (2015) further submits that hate speech occurs in various forms ranging from speech, gesture, conduct, writing or display which could incite people to violence noting further that it is a gateway to discrimination, harassment and violence as well as a precursor to serious criminal acts.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

This paper examined New media, fake news and national security in Nigeria. fake news has a major effect on the national security of the country and also it was established that fake news thrives more on new media to a great extent while noting that hate speech has the highest percentage when it comes to the factors that often lead to fake news on new media. The internet is the most ubiquitous of the new media thereby making fake news to thrive more on new media. The study recommends that government should try to put a stop to fake news in order to make sure that the country is safe as it could cause chaos if not properly checked and controlled.

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