MEDIA'S ROLE IN COMBATING MISINFORMATION AND FAKE NEWS

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Abstract
The stability and advancement of Nigeria are now seriously threatened by the proliferation of false information. The goal of this study is to examine the difficulties the media in Nigeria faces in battling fake news and to offer suggestions for how the media can effectively address this problem. The study's objectives are to identify the precise effects of fake news on the nation and to examine the challenges facing the media in this area. The study's findings also offer potential solutions for how to deal with these difficulties. By providing the public with accurate, impartial, and fact-based information, the media can play a crucial role in the fight against misinformation in Nigeria.

Keyword: Fake news, Media, Combating, Misinformation

INTRODUCTION

Information that is false or misleading but is presented as news is known as fake news. This can include entirely made-up tales as well as misrepresentative or exaggerated accounts of actual events. As it spreads, fake news has the power to undermine institutional trust, incite violence, and sway public opinion. Fake news, according to Alawode et al. (2018), is news that is obviously false and has the potential to mislead readers. Fake news, according to the authors, is information that has been proven to be false and was produced with the dishonest intent of misleading readers.

On the other hand, disinformation is described as deliberately false information that is spread with the aim of deceiving or manipulating. The government, political parties, and other organisations may disseminate false information, propaganda, and hoaxes in order to further their own objectives.

False information and fake news have existed since the invention of communication. It was initially spread through direct interactions between people. However, since the advent of mass media, the dissemination of false information has sharply increased. Nowadays, a lot

of people use it for their own selfish ends, which frequently results in conflict and other unpleasant feelings. The transition from traditional media to social media, where anyone with a phone and data connection may pose as a journalist without a formal education, has increased the prevalence of fake news.

Nowadays, it can be challenging to distinguish between reliable and false news. For all of the aforementioned reasons, this study chose to investigate the tactics employed by real journalists to combat fake information.

The objectives of this study are to examine the difficulties the media encounters in battling false and misleading information and to offer suggestions for how the media might best approach this problem. Nigeria, like many other nations, has observed a discernible rise in the dissemination of false information in recent years. This study looks at the many ways that fake news and false information are harming the nation to see how the media can help address the issue. This essay also seeks to identify the difficulties the media face in this regard and offer practical solutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fake news, according to McGonagale (2017), is information that has been created and disseminated with the intent to mislead and deceive others into believing lies or rejecting variable truths. Fake news was defined as articles that are obviously false and have the potential to mislead readers by Alawode, Olorede, and Azeez (2008). According to these authors, fake news is information that has been created with the dishonest intention of misleading readers and that can be independently verified to be false.

The definition of fake news given by Chapman (2017) includes "news that contains false or inaccurate information," "news with an agenda," "news that is stretched in one way or tailored to a certain audience," and "clickbait material created without regard for actual true content".

Seven categories of false information are listed by First Draft News' Claire Wardle:

1. Parody or satire, which has the potential to be misleading but has no malicious intent.

2. False connection (when the material isn't supported by the headlines, images, or captions)

3. False information ("false use of information to frame an issue or a person")

4. Inauthentic content ("when genuine content is shared with false contextual information")

5. Content impersonation (when real sources are misrepresented by fabricated ones)

6. Manipulative content (where real information or images are changed to make them appear false, as in a photo that has been "photoshopped")

7. Fabricated content (new stuff that is 100 percent fake and intended to mislead and cause harm)

The data shown above illustrates that fake news has a number of features, allowing us to understand how it endangers national peace and security and has negative effects on society. Therefore, any news that has been embellished or manipulated in an effort to sow discord, unrest, or anxiety qualifies as fake news.

Media academics have extensively researched the value of the mass media as a source of information during emergencies and significant national events. During times of crisis, during political campaigns, and during significant international or national events, fake

news frequently prospers. In order to uphold their commitments, the means of communication must satisfy the public's information needs by offering in-depth coverage and updates on topics.

Apuke and Omar (2020) investigated the factors that contributed to the dissemination of false information regarding the COVID-19 outbreak in Nigeria. The researchers discovered that altruism was the main predictor of the dissemination of false information on COVID-19. The study's additional results show that people used social media to inform those who might not be aware of certain health facts that might be detrimental to their health. Fake news was widely spread in Nigeria during the pandemic because these people didn't care to check the accuracy of the information before posting it online.

In their 2019 study, Wasserman and Madris-Morales examine the effect of false information on the political elections of several African countries. Over 1,900 highly educated urban residents and members of the middle class from South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria were surveyed by the researchers. According to the survey, 90% of Nigerians, 93% of Kenyans, and 76% of South Africans said they frequently come across false information about their nation's politics. Study participants did not trust the material on these websites, according to researchers, because bogus news makes up the majority of the content on social media. Despite acknowledging and recommending the speed with which new media technologies can disseminate information, the study suggested that the government take steps to educate its citizens on how to control the way they use their social media devices.

Ngwainmbi (2018) discovered that while technological development in new media has many advantages, there are also drawbacks, one of which is the spread of false and unreliable information. This study aimed to comprehend how fake news affects society in the age of social media. The study by Ngwainmbi (2018) also examined the impact of fake news on international nation-building between developed and developing countries. His research indicates that while consumers' easy access to mobile devices increases the prevalence of sharing fake news in industrialized nations, people in less developed nations spread news information widely in part because they lack the resources to distinguish between true and false news. Despite the thrill it provides, the researcher asserts that social media users in both regions of the world may be less likely to try and spot false news reports. According to the study, disseminating false information on social media could have a substantial impact on nation-building, particularly when it comes to the socioeconomic development of nations.

Banerjee and Haque looked at how fake news travels in India and how politicians there use it to achieve their own self-serving goals in their 2018 study. Their analysis showed that politicians in India have used the guise of fake news to foment hate speech and false information all around the nation. As an illustration, a video of a sizable gathering of Pakistani supporters celebrating their team's victory in an Indian cricket match went viral in 2018. The statement said that Indian Muslims were forsaking their country by siding with their fierce rivals. The people in the movie are from Pakistan, where the actual filming took place.

Inaccurate information disseminated on social media is a negative part of our culture that undermines self-confidence and leaves individuals in the dark, claims Yaraghi's research (2019). Although the study claims that web-based businesses fail to verify facts before publishing content on their websites, a variety of automated and human systems for promoting, amending, and filtering published content have been developed by them in response to the growing prevalence of false information. Nowadays, a vast percentage of consumers instead obtain their knowledge through these procedures than from conventional sources.

FAKE NEWS AND DISINFORMATION'S IMPACT

Almost all social vices that plague Nigerian society are affected by fake news. Character assassination, racial and religious conflict, economic instability, mistrust of authorities, violence during elections, and other vices are among them.

How do these vices and the unrest in Nigeria get promoted by fake news?

Any genuinely democratic government must include elections as a fundamental element. It promotes political rivalry, guarantees political participation, and upholds the rule of law. However, violence and unrest have frequently marred Nigerian elections, resulting in numerous casualties and the destruction of numerous homes. It's sad that erroneous news reports contributed to some of the violence. In contrast to other types of information, news has a special place in democratic societies, according to McGonagle (2017). The public's opinion and the decision-making process are influenced by accurate knowledge of social and political issues, which is primarily acquired through the news. When news is "fake," election victories lose their appeal, democratic discourse is tainted, and the likelihood of populist rejection and uprising rises.

The majority of the anxieties and panics that surround the elections in Nigeria are generated and spread by people who disseminate false information and have no incentive to be honest. In an effort to sow discontent across the country, they fabricate information about political parties, political figures, and electoral bodies using social media. They even go so far as to fabricate and spread unverified election results, which leads to a great deal of unrest when the actual results diverge from those that have already been reported.

Not just in Nigeria, fake news has a negative impact on election processes worldwide. McGonagle (2017) cites the Brexit referendum and the 2016 US Presidential election as two examples of how fake news is frequently held responsible for skewing democratic public discourse and negatively influencing the outcomes of elections and referenda. Fake news has been shown to encourage hate speech, propaganda, and electoral violence.

The frail ethno-religious fabric of Nigeria is in danger, according to News Wires (2019). Produced lies portrayed as news are a menace. The creation of narratives that juxtapose the country's predominantly Muslim north and predominantly Christian south—a traditional fault line frequently referenced by proponents of re-organizing and even demolishing the current federal government—raises serious concerns.

Various false claims are being shared on social media in an effort to divide Nigeria's ethnic groups by sowing the seeds of worry, mistrust, and unrest. In a recent statement, Alhaji Gidado Siddiki, the head of the Miyetti Allah Group, is quoted as saying that the south east

"will boil any moment from now because of their stubbornness" because they "have claimed to be stubborn, and had refused to give them their lands in peace, it will be taken by force, and the entire south east will be raided and taken over by the herdsmen" (Siddiki, 2019). When headlines or captions didn't match in the news, Claire Wardle referred to it as a "false connection."

False information is used by politicians, especially during electioneering. Propaganda and false information are disseminated by political actors and their supporters in an effort to harm and defame their opponents. If this "unholy project" were to proceed, it would agitate the populace against its rulers and might spark widespread unrest. Nigeria's experience in 2012, the year the federal government of Nigeria announced the end of petrol subsidies and an increase in the price of petroleum products, serves as an illustration of this. By asserting that there was no such thing as a gasoline subsidy and that the PDP-led administration was using it as a cover to steal from the national coffers, the opposition party mobilized Nigerians against the then-Government.

After the opposition All Progressive Party (APC) won the election, the President Buhari-led administration shocked Nigerians by announcing an increase in the price of petroleum products. This is due to false information and propaganda. The current president is often accused of wanting to "Islamize and Fulanize" the country in order to impose Sharia law and make Fulanis the predominant ethnic group. The public may begin to doubt the President as a result of these reports because they make it simpler for dishonest politicians to spread lies.

Jungle Justice: Security has been established to ensure the safety and security of citizen lives and property. "Jungle justice" is a term used to describe a type of public extrajudicial killing in which an accused criminal is publicly beaten, humiliated, or killed by a mob. Fake news and hoax SMS have been blamed for the murders of 12 people who were slain in India and Nigeria after being falsely accused of kidnapping children. The UN reporter on freedom of thought and expression, the ACHPR, and the OSCE have all acknowledged the potential harm of fake news. A recent BBC analysis found that the herdsmen and farmer issue in Nigeria has gotten worse as a result of fake news.

According to some analysts, the rise of fake news could be a precursor to the next world war. The UN focused on the dangers of the habitual transmission of purposefully false or distorted news, while the World Economic Forum warned that inaccurate information might spark "digital wildfires" in our connected society.

Detecting Fake News

Numerous newsworthy stories have dominated, including the 2023 elections, the Ruga law, the hate speech bill, the corona virus, the revolution now protest, the end SARS protest, and many others. All of these true stories created a lot of buzz, just like their made-up counterparts do. But how can one recognize fake news?

1. The publisher's credibility: Does the website uphold academic standards? What is that website address? What is the publication's point of view? The author of the text? All of these questions can be used to evaluate the accuracy of the news.

2. Pay attention to quality and timeliness: Do you notice any mistakes? If so, put down the book right away. Reliable sources use high standards for grammar and proofreading. Is the story original or rehashed? Check to see if an old tale is being misinterpreted.
3. Check the references and sources: How did you find the article? What does the narrative aim to convey? Are other websites able to access the data? If not, something is off. The foundation of trustworthy journalism is fact-finding.
4. Constantly research the facts online. There are numerous trustworthy ones available, such as factCheck.org, IFCN, Politifact, and Snopes.com. Do your own research and develop confidence in your ability to tell truth from falsehood.
5. Examine the material to see whether it is sponsored; sponsorship means that someone or something is paying for the right to show the content.
6. Try to read past the headlines because sometimes the news story's details differ from the story's headline.

CONFLICTS MEDIA FACE IN COMBINATING MISDELIVERY

Nigerian media face a number of obstacles when attempting to counter misinformation, some of which are listed below.

1. Limited resources: In Nigeria, many media organizations lack the tools needed to research and fact-check content. Their capacity to confirm information and stop the spread of false information is thus constrained.
2. Government censorship: There is a lengthy history of the government stifling the media, which hinders their ability to look into and report on controversial topics. As a result, journalists have started to self-censor, which further reduces their capacity to battle false information.
3. Poor media literacy: Due to a lack of media literacy knowledge, many Nigerians find it difficult to discriminate between real and fake news. This ignorance facilitates the propagation of misleading information.
4. Limited trust in the media: Sensationalism, bias, and lack of credibility are just a few of the reasons why the public lacks faith in the media. This makes it easier for misleading information to spread.

The media in Nigeria has several and substantial obstacles in the fight against false information. However, by addressing these issues, the media can contribute more effectively to the public's education and the fight against false information.

MEDIA'S PART IN CURING MISTAKEN INFORMATION

The media plays a critical role in battling misinformation in Nigeria because fake news and disinformation have proliferated like wildfire in recent years, provoking conflict, escalating tensions, and undermining social cohesion. The media may be instrumental in Nigeria's fight against misinformation by providing the public with accurate, unbiased, and fact-based information.

One of the media's primary responsibilities in Nigeria is gate keeping, or the process of verifying information before publishing or disseminating it to the general public. Journalists and news organizations should rely on trustworthy sources, fact-check

information, and avoid sensationalizing stories in order to ensure that their reports are factual and objective. To combat false information, media outlets in Nigeria can employ a variety of strategies and tools, including;

1. Social media mentoring: media organizations can keep an eye on social media sites to spot inaccurate or misleading information, fact-check it, and enlighten their viewers with the truth.
2. Fact-checking websites can be developed by media organizations to deliver accurate information and refute erroneous information.
3. Building capacity and training: Media organizations can educate their reporters and editors on how to spot and successfully counteract false information.
4. Partnership with tech companies: media organisation can partner with tech companies to develop tools that identify and flag fake news and disinformation. Because of the enhanced public knowledge brought on by numerous media interactions, people are better equipped to recognize and reject incorrect information.
5. Helping individuals who are developing counterarguments against fake news, especially when it jeopardizes the public's remaining faith in some organizations (like INEC).

The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), a Nigerian organisation, suggests actively supporting the traditional media in order to boost their credibility and shrink the area where fake news is most prevalent. However, media outlets also struggle to combat false information because of a lack of funding, low public trust, and intimidation by the government or other parties. In order to overcome these challenges, media organizations can band together, network, and work together to share resources, competencies, and knowledge. The media should receive support from the government, civil society, and other interested parties in their fight against false information.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
Some theories that explain the concepts in this work were reviewed in the researcher's effort to adequately reflect the issues involved in this study. The Uses and Gratification theory is one of these theories.
The hypothesis is connected to Michael Gurevitch, Jay Blumter, and Elihu Katz's publications from 1974. This idea holds that by selecting and presenting news items that achieve this, the media can influence how people view the world. The notion contends that people have some influence over the perceptions that the media hold of them. The assumption is that viewers actively engage in media interpretation and integration into their own life. The media may set the agenda when it comes to fake news and disinformation by highlighting the presence and risk of misinformation as well as by exposing inaccurate information.

Siebert, Peterson, and Schrann introduced the social responsibility hypothesis in 1956. According to this idea, the media has a responsibility to serve the public interest by offering truthful and unbiased information, fostering free speech, and acting as a watchdog over the government and other institutions. Media organizations have a societal responsibility to

fight misinformation in the context of false news and disinformation by putting an emphasis on accuracy and integrity in the communication of information.

The agenda-setting idea was first presented in 1972 by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw. This idea places a strong emphasis on the media's ability to form agendas and influence how people view the world. The notion emphasizes the obligation of the media to protect the public's interests and dispel false information. It also emphasizes how critical it is to provide the people with accurate and impartial information.

CONCLUSION

The role of the media in the battle against false information cannot be overstated. Effective tactics have been developed to halt the spread of fake news, restore public trust in the media, and alert people to the dangers of misinformation and fake news.

More must be done to address the serious threat that the spread of false information continues to pose to Nigeria's stability and prosperity. As a result, the media should continue to contribute to the fight against false information by coming up with new strategies, collaborating with relevant parties, and utilizing technology to reach a wider audience. The public, the press, the government, civil servants, and everyone else involved must work together to combat false and misleading information because it is a never-ending process. The media should continue to play a proactive role in promoting accuracy and sincerity in reporting and urging the public to independently confirm all information before accepting it at face value. By doing this, we can all contribute to the development of a society that is better educated, more accountable, and less susceptible to the risks posed by false information.

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