

A Critical Digital Plan on How to Control Fake News in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The rate at which fake news thrive in the social media landscape around the world has attracted media scholars attention in different ways given the threat and dangers it poses to the peaceful development of every human society. In view of the above reason, this study is set to provide critical digital measure that can help the government of Nigeria in the control of fake news spread in its territory considering the heterogeneous nature of the country. The study is set to find out if there is any noticeable influence of fake news on the existence of the Nigerian state, the dominant noticeable dangers of fake news, and the various available digital measures that can control it and to provide a sound record keeping digital regulation to identify all individual social media users. The study is premised on the theory of reasoned action and planned behavior and the source credibility theory. The study adopts the online survey research method in studying 253 media scholars - all members of ACCE Whatsapp group. Findings revealed that fake news threatens the unity of Nigeria and that those who post, read, accept and share fake news online do that as a planned motif which can be religiously, politically or economically motivated. The study therefore recommends that social media users should at always be skeptical about what to read, accept and disseminate to the public and that An International Fact Checking Network (IFCN), should be used in regulating social media contents.

Keywords: Fake news; social media; digital measure; reasoned action theory; source credibility theory; Nigeria.

Introduction

The world today is on the verge with the internet space on the rampage. Every facet of the earth is preoccupied by the internet enabled gadgets which in one way or the other had changed the way the people get, use and disseminate information to one another (Stoval, 2006). With the advent and wide spread of the internet and its enabled devices around the world, virtually all individual users are producers of contents which are consumed by different people at different times and places. Given the nature and ability of the internet to encourage immediate feedback and response, information on the internet can quickly get to all the users and members of the internet space within the shortest possible time. In an era of the economic principle of pay per click/view, bloggers and social media owners alike, usually struggle to generate traffic that can increase their economic gains in the internet space. By this desperateness to generate traffic, many result to the injection of fake news items in the internet space to meet the economic goal of making high income through click detainment. And, the bloggers and social media moguls choose what to show their users based on algorithms which learn from their personal data that they are constantly harvesting. The net result is that these sites show the internet users the content they think they will click on which means that misinformation, or 'fake news', which is surprising, shocking, or designed to appeal to our biases can spread like wildfire. A case in point in the Nigerian state is the fake social media news that President Buhari had died in London. Unfortunately, all the beehives of social media outlets that spread these rumors failed to acknowledge the responsibility for such deceptive information to the public. The decline in the acceptance of responsibility among social media platforms was captured more clearly in a statement made by Zuckerberge (2016) when he stated that the social media (Facebook) exercises great control over the news its users see, but it declines to assume the editorial responsibility that traditional publishers do. Many a time, people get deceived into believing what is not real through the information secured from the internet media. This was captured more vividly in

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the words of Menczer (2016) who affirmed that each piece of misinformation contributes to the shaping of our opinions. Given the heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian state, any fake news item is viewed as a serious threat to the national unity of the country and this was why the Federal Government had since 2017 viewed with serious dismay any action of uncensored internet communication bearing in the mind the impending danger on the country (Vanguard news, 2017). This was captured more clearly in the words of Sobowale (2017) who argues that fake news is a threat to the peace and stability of any organization whether political, economic or social.

Lately, the subsequent spread of the fake news in social media that President Buhari is dead cast more light on the effect of such fake news broadcast in a heterogeneous society especially when the political tempo of the people is high (Ugwuanyi, 2017). However, fake news thrives in all part of the world including America, the case of the 2016 general election, (see Allcot and Gentzkow, 2017); South Africa, (Sobowale, 2017). So, it is not only in Nigeria but unfortunately, the Nigerian situation is very apt because of the nature of the country and their political landscape which promotes the idea of winner takes all and rancor blended with the excessive desire to constantly remain in power. It was against this backdrop that this study is set to ascertain the critical digital control that can be employed by the Nigerian government to checkmate the widespread and growth of fake news in the country.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Given the impending dangers of fake news spread on the sustenance of the unity of the country, the position of fake news in Nigeria, no doubt has attracted massive and serious government attention as can be seen in the reaction of the federal government in 2017. However, the use of the social media or at its best, the new media in the communication industry has been commended by earlier media scholars, (Ndolo, 2005, p. 6; Rodney, 2007, p. 148) but they did not look into the negative aspect of the use of the new/internet media and its implication to the unity of both social, political, religious and cultural organizations across the world. Moreover, little or no scholarly research had considered the means through which fake news spread in the country can be controlled. Considering the heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian state, spreading of fake news which has formed the main stay of the Nigerian social media space can be too inimical to its existence. Against this background, this study is set to ascertain the critical digital plan that can help the machinery of the country's administration in controlling fake news spread in the country to safeguard its existence.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

This study was conceived to set in motion a given platform for the control of fake news spreading among Nigerian social media landscape using views from media experts. In the light of the above purpose of the study, the measurable objectives that form the fulcrum of this study are:

1. To find out if there is any noticeable influence of fake news on the existence of the Nigerian state.
2. To ascertain the dominant noticeable dangers of fake news to the sustenance of the unity of the country.
3. To find out through media experts the various available digital measures through which fake news could be checkmated or controlled for the existence of the country.
4. To provide a sound record keeping digital regulation to identify all individual social media users in the country.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

For the purpose of maintaining focus on the study objectives, the following research questions were posed for the study.

1. Are there any noticeable influences of fake news on the existence of the Nigerian state?
2. What is the dominant noticeable danger of fake news to the sustenance of the unity of the country?
3. What are the available digital measures through which fake news could be checkmated for the existence of the state?
4. Can there be a sound record keeping digital regulation to identify all individual social media users in the country?

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Academically, this study will provide the world with an expert views on the means through which social media fake news spread in Nigeria can be put under check using critical digital control measures. Geographically, the study will also establish the African views of fake news and its influence on the Africans largest country, Nigeria. Considering the significance of this study to future research and academic growth, this study will provide literature for use by future researchers who may pick interest in this area of study. Moreover, this study will serve as a flash to media scholars on the need to look into the effects of fake dissemination in the social media on the unity and growth of nations across the world, owing to its power to shape and reshape the views of the public on issues of public concern. This study equally will serve as a panacea for the Nigerian government on the recognition and handling of fake news spread in the social media landscape.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

This study is limited to the above set research objectives and the selected media experts who are only members of the African Council for Communication Education in Nigeria. The study did not cover the means of controlling fake news spread in other African countries or any other country of the world. The disposition of the respondents to response to the questions in the research instrument is also covered in the limitation of the study as some of the members may not be well disposed or well knowledgeable in the means through which this ugly trend could be tackled. However, the personal biases of the respondents cannot be discovered before the distribution of the questionnaire.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study reviewed literature from both primary and secondary sources, which according to (Agbo and Ugwu 2011) provides a communication researcher the template for reviewing literature in research work. The essence of that is to ensure that it explored the previous works done in related areas of the current study and as well explore the relevant information concerning it from the views expressed in the research instrument. From the secondary sources, literature from already existing research works is examined with a view to establishing the relationships between them and the current study. The works examined include works from communication and related disciplines mostly articles and journal papers published across different disciplines that are related to mass communication and the society. Through this way, the researcher was able to establish the gap in knowledge which the current study is set to fill. The information obtained from the respondents and personal observation serve the purpose of the primary sources which enabled the researcher to draw conclusions from the findings of the study to proffer solution to the dangers of fake news spread in Nigeria.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ekeanyanwu (2012) described a theory as ‘the benchmark upon which new and novel ideas could be tested. Theories therefore provide an empirical support to novel ideas’. For a clear understanding of the implications of fake news spread in the country, there exists the need for the researcher to establish a marching theoretical background that will provide the readers with an understanding of the reason behind the spread of such media contents and credibility of such contents. In the words of Pearce (2013) cited in Okorom (2014), theory strengthens a study by providing a framework of concepts, definitions, assumptions and existing literature. Supporting the above observation, Odemelam, Okeibunor, and Okorom, (2015), affirmed that a theory allows a phenomenon not only to be described, but also to be generalized under a particular circumstance. Going by the scholarly position above, for a generalization of the research of this research outcome as it concerns fake news in Nigeria, a sound theoretical background is needed. Considering the available media theories that can provide a perfect background for this study, the source credibility and the theory of reasoned/planned action are considered most appropriate for the study.

THE SOURCE CREDIBILITY THEORY OF THE MEDIA

This theory was propounded by Hovland C, Janis, I and Kelly, H (Olumuji, Asemah and Edegoh, 2013) in 1951. The theory postulates that receivers of a particular media message are likely to accept, believe and be persuaded when the

source of information presents itself to be credible. In view of the above position of the proponents of this theory, the credibility of a media message is dependent on the audience reaction to the content. As captured in the words of Chu and Kamal (2008), the credibility of a source determines how the audience reacts to its contents. While citing Murphy and Auter, (2012), Nwabueze and Ikegbunam (2015) assert that the source credibility theory provides a template for explaining the ways through which the characters of communications influence the receivers into processing and utilizing the contents received. Here the consideration of the receiver's attitudinal change occasioned by the message received is dependent on the views of the receiver concerning the source. Subsequently, what controls believability is the ability of the receiver of media content to adjudge such content as credible. In view of the process required for a message to be considered credible, Anaeto and Anaeto (2008) as cited in Asemah, (2011) classified the theory into three models: the fact model-where the receivers credibility judgment of the message source is examined, the functional model- where they consider the degree of satisfaction the receiver derives from the message content and the constructionist model-where the utilization of the message by the receiver is considered as major factor in the sustenance of the society.

Relating this theory to the current study, the source credibility theory provides readers with an understanding of what the receivers of fake news feel about what they receive. What their views of the source that supplied them such media content are and what satisfaction they derive from the content. It cannot be out of place to state that the views held and utilization of media content is dependent mostly on the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction the receivers derive from the content. When particular media content fail to satisfy the aspiration of the public, it will be hard for such media content to translate into action among the audience. The theory provides the study with the views held among people who receive and act in line with fake news without investigating further to assert the credibility of such reports.

THEORY OF REASONED ACTION/ THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOR

This theory states that people tend to behave in ways that allow them to obtain favorable outcomes and that meet the expectations of others who are important to them. (Glynn, 2004, in Agbanu, 2014), opines that the theory is based on the belief that humans are rational beings and as a result, calculate the cost and benefits of their actions and inactions. They take into account how other beings would perceive their actions.

Reasoned actions require people to think critically about posting fake news online for public consumption. It requires the posters/bloggers to think about the implication of what they wanted to do to the development of the Nigerian state before jumping into conclusions of engaging in posting such content. It depends upon what the actor wanted to achieve. For every action, there is a reason. The theory was transformed into TPB in 1991 by Ajzen to account for circumstances when people may have incomplete control over their own behaviors (Anol, 2012). The theory is a generalized theory of human behavior in social psychology that can be used to study a wide range of individual behaviors including posting of fake news by some people in the social media landscape.

The theory postulates that behaviors are based on one's intention regarding that action to be taken, which in turn is a function of the person's attitude toward the intended action. Drawing from the position above, any kind of news item a blogger wants to post for public consumption is viewed as reasoned and thought of and as well considered to be good and capable of providing the desired favor (economic, religious, political etc) considered expected by those who matter to him or her.

The import of this claim is that any blogger or social media owner who chooses to instill fear, terrorize or disintegrate the society by posting fake news content in the social media space is doing that as a well reasoned and thought action which he considers capable of drawing favor to him or her. It is not out of place to state that attitude is defined as the individual's overall positive or negative feelings about acting in a particular manner, which may be assessed as a summation of one's beliefs subject to a reasoned choice of action. What matters this time is whether those outcomes that are considered to have mattered in the intended action are justified or not.

Drawing from this logic, if a blogger resolves to be posting fake news to his viewers, it is necessary that he wants to achieve a motive from such an action. And this can be inimical to the state into which such an action is carried out (Ryan,

Xiaohan, Thalia, Christian, Hanqing, 2017).

Relating this theory to our current study, it is with different reasons that different peoples inject different fake news items in the social media landscape. So with this theory, it is certain that those who post fake news do that for reasons best known to them which are not uniform from group to group.

THE CONCEPT OF FAKE NEWS IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA

The concept of fake news is as old as the real news itself. According to Kai, Amy, Suhang, Jiliang and Huan (2017), fake news is a news article that is intentionally and verifiably false and could mislead readers (Ryan, et al, 2017) posted by social media handlers. Around the world, history had revealed that, the problem of fake news is not strange to society and has consistently interfered with the political process of democratic societies (Ryan, et al, 2017). With the advent of the internet, all barriers to the spreading of fake news items to the public have been removed and this makes the public vulnerable to believing what is not true. Unfortunately, fake news articles have a lasting impact on a person even after it has been discovered to be false (Polage, 2012). This is because, negative news and things thrive among the people more than good news in the media. A more sinister outcome is that conformity to erroneous recollections was even more pronounced in group settings, making the “echo chambers” and “filter bubbles” propagated by social media severe sources of misinformation (Edelson, et al., 2011) and for self-contained narratives to emerge (Bessi, et al., 2015).

THE EFFECT OF FAKE NEWS ON THE SOCIETY

Fake news, political and corporate propaganda, and shameless online abuse threaten the democratic network of every society and open up new frontlines for both free-speech defenders, policymakers, hate-speech promoters and media professionals alike (UNESCO courier, 2017). Fake news, or disinformation, is not a new phenomenon. But today, with the rise of digital media, it spreads easily and quickly. It is therefore the task of responsible journalists and trusted news organizations to douse the flames of this dangerous wildfire and call fake news out for what it really is (lies) usually occasioned by the use of irresponsible social media outlets. This development has forced many traditional media outlets to include stories that are trending on social media, even without necessarily having a clearly defined policy for verifying the content before it is broadcasted or published (Adornato & Lysak, 2017). This has also culminated in an uptick in newsreaders' exposure to fake news (Adornato, 2016) making the people to act or accept a view that is not in any way a reality. Someone may be surprised on how people accept to act and or believe in unconfirmed news. It is possible that people do not identify the real from the fake news contents.

However, Kai, Amy, Suhang, Jiliang and Huan (2017) have stated that there are two major factors which make consumers naturally vulnerable to fake news: one is the Naive Realism nature of consumers which maintains that consumers tend to believe that their perceptions of reality are the only accurate views. This is what makes them see others who disagree with their views as un-informed, irrational, or biased minds (Andrew, Ross, Reed, Turiel, and Brown. 1997); and two, confirmation bias nature of human beings which makes consumers prefer to receive information that confirms their existing views (Raymond, 1998) and predetermined attitudes. Fake news thrives among the people basically on the premise of these two factors to infiltrate wrong notion in the people's mind. Unfortunately, once this wrong impression is created, it becomes very difficult to erase out of the people's mind any more (Kai, et al, 2017). Apparently, the need for the control of fake news made some scholars to devise a means but the effort meets hard luck owing to the fact that sometimes, correcting fake news through the use of factual and true information casts more negative views on the social system especially among some logically thinking individuals. The above position gains ground from the assertion made in Kai, et al, (2017), where they affirmed that psychological studies have shown that correction of false information (e.g., fake news) by the presentation of true, factual information is not only unhelpful in the reducing the misperceptions already done, but sometimes may even increase the misperceptions, especially among ideological groups (Brendan and Jason, 2010). Now the question here is what media scholars think could be done to checkmate spread of fake news in Nigeria?

THE REVIEW

Several studies have been conducted by media scholars and psychologists, sociologists and several other related professional on the implications and reasons for the spreading of fake news in both traditional and new media means of communication across the world and time. This shows that fake news have long been in existence and have equally struck scholars minds to seek for remedies. Some of the works done in the area are targeted on how it is being spread and the implication of its spread. Among these studies is that of Ryan Ho, Xiaohan Li, Thalia Marot-Achillas, Christian Mortlock, and Hanqing Zeng(2017) titled “the Truth behind Fake News” which basically looks at the trust of social media and perception of their contents by their audience. The study emanated from the height of uncertain political climate created across countries by fake news spread. It seeks to ascertain how young adults perceive and react to fake news and how this data might provide insight into policies that can tackle the problem of fake news. The authors’ findings suggest that education that keeps pace with developments in the information industry would be highly effective in tackling the problem of fake news. However, this study did not provide a digital measure for the control of the social media space in order to checkmate the spread of fake news among the people. Moreover, the above study was not conducted in the Nigerian state and therefore may not be adequate enough to provide a template for the control of fake news spread among social media landscape in Nigeria in order not to disintegrate the country through malicious publications.

In a similar study, Kai, et al, (2017) embarked on a study on fake news detection on social media from a data mining perspective. The study was based on the nature of fake news and what makes it thrives among the people. This study becomes relevant in the fact that fake news was intentionally written to mislead the readers and make them believe what is not true. With this development, it becomes imperative for there to be a research that can provide the public who is vulnerable to the consumption of fake news with the features to identify them. The study explored related research areas, open problems, and future research directions for fake news detection on social media. Once again, this study did not provide a digital control measure that can help any government control the heavy spread of fake news in its territory. With this, there is a gap in the existing literature because the present one failed to address the problem from the area of digital control of the ugly menace. The authors agreed that identifying key spreaders of fake news is crucial to mitigate its diffusion scope in social media. It is on the bases of this agreement that the current study becomes important to academics and societal protection from the dangers of fake news spread around the world with particular focus here in Nigeria.

Allcott and Gentzkow (2016) affirmed that fake news sites and articles raised important questions about who becomes the arbiter of truth in the social media landscape given the influence of fake news in the US presidential election of November 2016. The study looked at the impact of fake news basically from the individual disposition in the election which they believed influenced the voters the more in making voting decision on the election. However, they agreed that the spread of fake news that the Pope endorsed Trump may have some impact among those who are sharing the same faith with the pope. In view of this fact, the authors provided some reasons for which single a fake news item can beat several television advertising on a given issue of public concern. This study dealt with the influence of fake news in changing the decision of the consumers rather than provide a critical digital plan for its control in the society. With this development, the current study has a place in the academic development of the society and journalism as a profession.

While considering the influence of fake news on the public perception of Nigeria’s online newspapers, Ugwuanyi (2017) found that cases of the circulation of fake news are prevalent in Nigeria as it is across the world, but its circulation has not started to have a toll on the perceived credibility of popular online newspapers in the country, though it is a threat to them. With this conclusion on the influence of fake news, it is pertinent to strive to provide a digital control measure that can stop it from engaging the online newspapers sites in this impending danger as discovered in the above research.

It could be seen from the above scholarly articles from different media and social science scholars, there is a gap in the sense that none of the researchers have looked at what could be done to monitor the spread of fake news in the country using a any critical digital plan since the perpetrators operate online. This is because, the only effective way to checkmate the spread of fake news in social media is through the provision of effective digital monitoring network that will dictate who does what in the air space.

SUMMARY OF REVIEW

This study had examined two relevant theories providing the readers with a theoretical background for the understanding of the concept of fake news in social media. The theories were considered very apt for the study following their various propositions and support for such course of action among the public. The review looked at the fake news as a concept in media practice with special attention to the social media landscape as it infiltrates some elements of discord in any country's democracy. Placing the Nigerian state in at center of fake news spreading with its attending feature of heterogeneity, the study looked at the effect of fake news dissemination and the sustenance of state like Nigeria. The study finally looked at available and accessible literature in the area with special attention to their similarities and differences with a view to establishing the gap in literature that the current research is set to fill. Based in the available literature reviewed, the study has a place to stay in both protection of journalism and the Nigerian state from the dangers of fake news in the social media landscape.

METHODS OF STUDY

As the master plan that guides and directs the researcher in a mission to solving the identified research problems which inform the quest for this study Mbachu, (2005), this study adopted the survey research method in providing expert answers to the research questions posed above. The choice of the research design above was based on Ogbuoshi, (2006) who affirmed that the choice of research design is determined by the nature of the research. Given the nature of this study, the survey research design is very apt for its execution. Moreover, the survey research design helps the research to select a sample from the population of a study which meet a given criteria that can provide the required information that can supply answers to the research questions posed for the study.

As the universe of the study (Asika, 2010; Nwodu, 2017), this study population is all African Council for Communication Education (ACCE) members who participate in the ACCE Whatsapp group chat. The reason for the premising of this study on the (ACCE) members is that they are conversant with fake news spread through the social media. Again, as media experts, they understand the concept of ethics and are capable of suggesting some digital means of controlling fake news dissemination considering the threat it poses to national unity of the Nigerian state.

The researcher used the purposive sampling technique to select only the members who are on the group chat room because of their ability to share and gain information in the same platform. It is a public discourse among the members online whose expert opinions were sampled and analyzed.

The study used both the questionnaire and the interview guide to elicit information from the target population of the study. Both the questionnaire and the interview guide were administered through the Whatsapp group platform to all members who logged in at wish to respond to the research questions as demanded by the researcher.

Using the test retest mode of reliability, the instrument was found valid at the correlation coefficient of 0.77 percent.

Meanwhile, the research instrument was distributed to the 253 members of the ACCE Whatsapp group comprising of members of the organization through the Whatsapp messenger online. At the time of collation, 223 members filled and submitted their questionnaire through the website created for the collection of the questionnaire. This means that the data interpretation was based on the 223 research questionnaire returned for the study.

DATA PRESENTATION

All quantitative data generated from the study was presented in pie-charts and percentages while the qualitative data obtained in the study was presented in interpretative and narrative analysis.

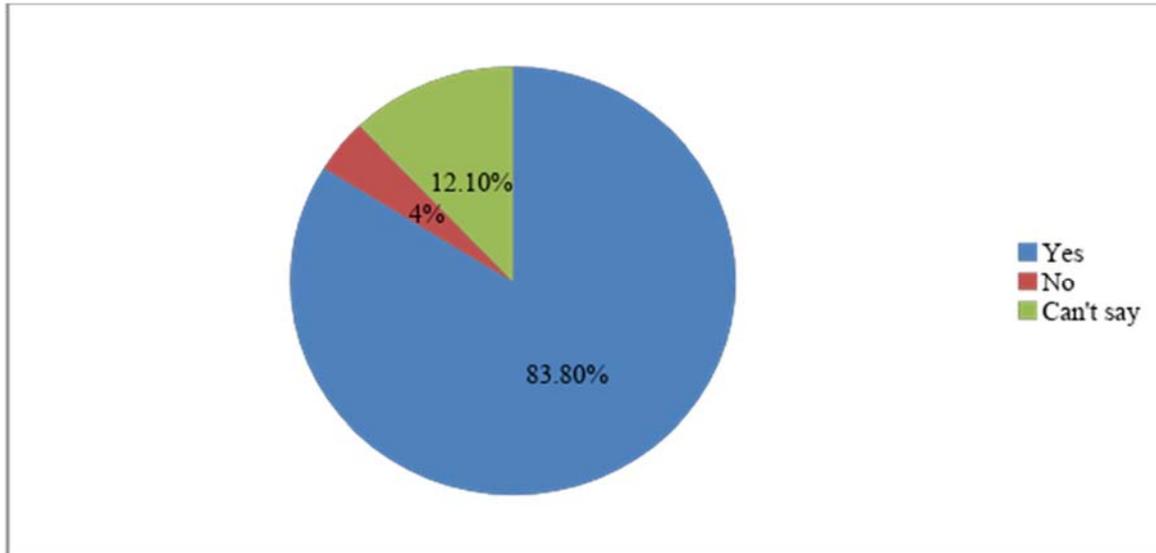


Figure one showing the respondents' response on whether there are any noticeable influences of fake news on the existence of the Nigerian state?

Source: Researcher's online survey, 2018

From the figure above, 4% of the entire population representing 9 respondents said that fake news in the social media have no noticeable influence on the country Nigeria whereas 12.10 percent accounting for 27 respondents of the population who chose the Can't say response category while an overwhelming percent of the population 83.8 percent accounting for 187 respondents of the population are of the opinion that fake news spread in the country exerts noticeable influences on the country's unity and progress. The impact of the above data is that fake news items have significance influence on the country Nigeria. The import of the data above is that fake news dissemination in the social media landscape is a dangerous action that has dangerous effects on the state of the nation of Nigeria as a country. The effect and danger posed is mostly felt in the area of the heterogeneous nature of Nigeria as everything tilts towards disintegration of the country.

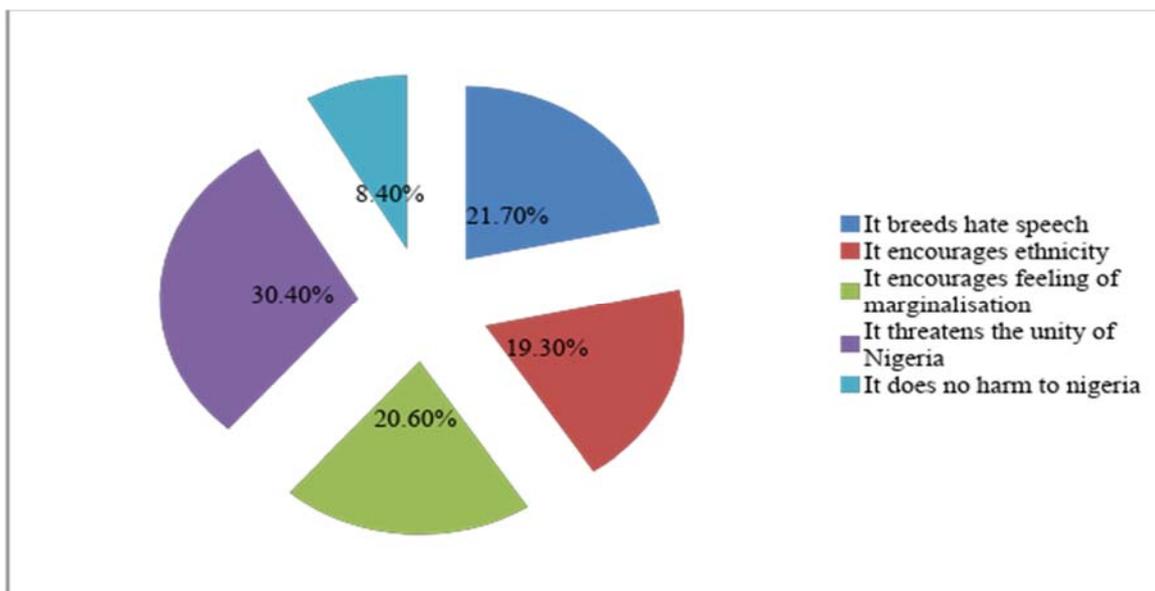


Figure 2 demonstrating the dominant noticeable danger of fake news to the sustenance of the unity of the Nigerian state?

Source: Researcher's online survey, 2018

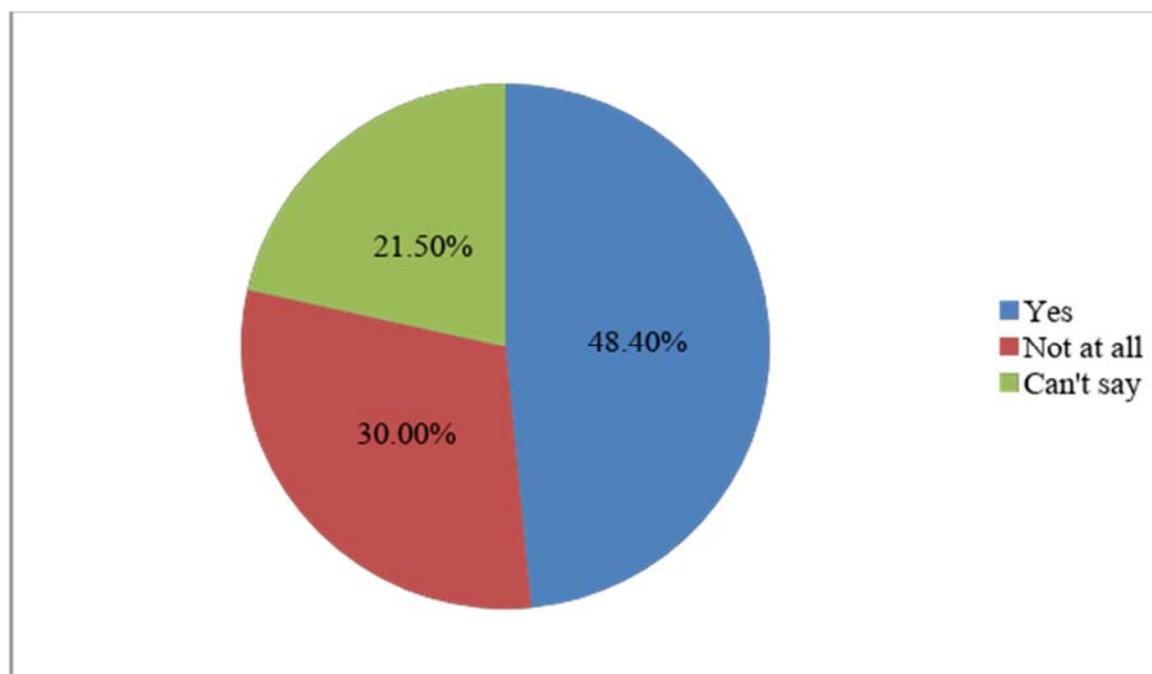
Considering the dominant noticeable danger of fake news to the Nigerian state, figure 2 revealed that fake news spread poses different kinds of danger of different magnitude to the Nigerian state. Based on the data presented, 68 respondents accounting for 30.4% of the population admitted that fake news spread threatens the unity of the Nigerian state followed by 48 respondents representing 21.6%, of the population of the study who admitted that it breeds hate speech among the citizens. 45 respondents representing 20.6% of the respondents see fake news as encouraging the feelings of being marginalized among the people where 43 respondents representing 19.3% whose views about fake news is that it encourages ethnicity. Meanwhile, 19 respondents accounting for 8.4% of the sample believed that fake news does no harm to the existence of the country. From the data presented, it has been clear that the major area that fake news spread in Nigeria is felt is in the unity of the country given the heterogeneous nature of its composition.

What are the available digital measures through which fake news could be checkmated for the existence of the state?

This question was handled using the qualitative research approach where the individual views of the respondents were examined based on their positions and views on what could be done to checkmate the existence of fake news in the country. From the discourse, majority of the respondents admitted that fake news can be minimized in Nigeria through establishing a very high technology that can provide the identity and location of all social media users in the country with a view to providing the total account of users' posts on daily basis. Those who oppose to this view state that such a measure will be too much for the country given her technological development. Among the available measures suggested by the respondents on how to tackle fake news spread in the country are: the use of human news editors by social media owners, the use of warning from Universal Resource Locator (URL), looking at the economics of fake news spreading among social media owners, being skeptical about what we read, accept and share to our friends among others.

In all, majority opinion suggests that the use URL and application of one's skepticism in the sharing and receiving social media information is best way to minimize the dangers of fake news dissemination in the country.

Can there be a sound record keeping digital regulation to identify all individual social media users in the country?



Source: Researcher's online survey, 2018

the above figure demonstrated that of the 223 respondents under study, 21.5% accounting for a total of 48 respondents were sitting on the fence by choosing the "Can't say response category" whereas 30.0% representing a total number of 67 respondents, are of the opinion that there cannot be any sound digital control measure that can identify online users

in the country in order to control the spread of fake news. Meanwhile a meaningful percent of the population 48.4% accounting for 108 respondents accepted that there can be sound record keeping digital regulation that can help identify all individual social media users in the country. Based on the logic of argument presented in the group discourse, those who assert that fake news could be controlled stood on the fact that all individual social media users have a code card which is powered by one telecommunication network or the other. According to this group, through the sim card registration, the user of any social media account can be identified and traced to the root using committed monitoring team/staff who will be assigned to monitor it. Those who argued against that premised their argument on corruption which they maintained will penetrate the system and be a way through which those saddled with the responsibility of finding and dealing with the miscreants will make illegal money from them and allow fake news to thrive among the social media airways.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

On whether fake news dissemination exerts noticeable influence on the Nigerian state, an overwhelming number of the respondents admitted that it does by choosing the “Yes” response category (see figure one above).

Considering the second research objective tackled using the qualitative research approach, it was found that majority of the respondents agree that fake news dissemination is a serious threat to the unity of the country. It was equally found that there are some respondents who assert the fake news dissemination does no harm to the country, rather the personal disposition of the citizens does. Though a very negligible figure, these set of people in the course of the discourse made some good points in stating that the country is what it was today because of the personal disposition of the citizens. According to them, the citizens believe what they want to believe as a result of their predetermined attitude. This finding agrees with the position held in theory of reasoned action and planned behavior which maintains that every action taken by an individual is as a result of the desire and original intention to so hold in a particular matter (Amy, 2007); Agbanu, (2014).

Their argument culminates in the fact that although the fake news has been disseminated, once we realize that it is fake, what we need to do is to retrace our steps and accept the truth, not to continue with the misleading information on the ground that it has been fed. Meanwhile, this finding disagrees with the earlier position held in Kai, et al, (2017), where they affirmed fake news once disseminated is always very hard to correct. The view of this few opposition ideas is that rigidity in sticking to what fake news has broadcasted is a matter of interest of those who stick to such information. The survival of fake news is purely dependent on our lack of skepticism. This view was better explained in the word of Nicholas (2016) where he stated that as users, people need to take more responsibility for the content they read and share.

On the means through which fake news can be tackled, different measures were outlined and reasons were given by various view proponents (see, research question three above). The respondents who suggested these means of controlling fake news spread in the social media landscape gave different reasons why their views can save the situation and set the country free from crashing in the hands of fake news from social media. Accepting the responsibility for what one reads and shares will foster the check for credibility of the source of the information being accepted and shared with friends online. It becomes necessary to assert the credibility of the source before accepting and sharing the information obtained from it.

The use of human element proponents argued that if human beings are employed and paid to regulate whatever content that enters their social media platform, they will put in all that they have in order to keep what they wanted. This will form their own means of making money on their own. This group of experts believes in the views of Dooling, (2016) who stated that the social media algorithms cannot dictate what is false and true but the use of human editors who are going to be responsible for what is produced can. The proponents of the URL utilization in the control of fake news are of the view that it has the power of stopping people from accepting as true and acting in line with any content suspected by the URL as coming from an unidentified source. This view agrees with the idea held by (O’Niel, 2016) who argued that a simple warning that labels any content from a suspicious URL or source as untrustworthy could be the first line of education for those who want to help stop the spread of fake news, and in so doing regulates its spread.

Those who are concerned about the economy behind fake news are of the views that with the principle of pay per

view, the social media owners are more interested in the traffic that they can generate and not in the dangers their posts can cause to the state where they operate (see Caplan, 2016).

On the fourth research question which sought to ascertain if there can be any sound control measure that can be applied to tackle fake news dissemination in Nigeria, the researcher found from figure four and the corresponding interview guide that there are measures through which fake news dissemination can be controlled in Nigeria. Though, very expensive and hard to achieve, a determined government can upgrade its technology to achieve a desired objective in keeping with the peaceful existence of the state. As shown by majority opinion, with an effective and determined media check online, the identity of all social media account operators can be obtained and their locations verified. Through this, users posting fake news will know that they are under check. With this, a good number of such posts will stop rising by the day. This finding is in tandem with the solution provided by Mike, (2017) who asserts that International Fact Checking Network (IFCN) should be put in place to take care of the posts from different social media users. The fact checkers should come from media organizations and social media owners who are now going to be placed on responsibility just like the mainstream media organizations. All defaulters are liable on conviction for the punishment that is designed for them.

CONCLUSION

From the research findings above, the researchers hereby conclude that the dissemination of fake news is a bad act that sets the responsibility of true journalism to question. Based on scholarly propositions of early researchers, fake news dissemination is viewed in this research as a bad wind that blows no society any good. It was also concluded that acceptance and dissemination of fake news by consumers and posters is a planned action that is sustained by a motif which may either be political, religious, social, cultural or economic. The study also supports the belief that people tend to accept as true any media message that appeals to their original attitude and personal disposition. Considering its influence to the state of the nation Nigeria, this study concludes that fake news threatens the unity of the Nigeria and poses severe challenge to its existence bearing in mind the heterogeneous nature of the country.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings and conclusion, the researcher recommended that:

1. Social media users should accept responsibilities for they read, accept as true and share to the public by being very critical of the contents they read and share among friends.
2. All social media organizations, bloggers and social media owners should as a matter of necessity examine their financial policy and regulate how they control the airspace for the sake of making more money through generating conflicts online.
3. An International Fact Checking Network (IFCN) should be put in place to take care of the posts from different social media users. By compulsion, all social media organizations and bloggers must have this network to help them monitor their users and their posts at all time as sanctions will apply to them as obtained in mainstream media.
4. Seminars and workshops should be organized from time to time to educate the people on how to dictate fake news and the implication of fake news to the Nigerian state. This will help the people to know that what they are doing can ruin the state they live in.
5. The government should apply a digital identification code for all social media account owners in the state. This network will help to identify the designation and location of any social media user.
6. URL should be upgraded to be able to resist clicks to a piece of information form an unidentified and un-trusted source by the people.
7. Human editors should be employed by social media owners to help fact check the contents of their posts at all time. This will screen off any uncensored and attributed reports from the social media space

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" خطة للتحكم بظاهرة الأخبار الزائفة على شبكة الإنترنت في نيجيريا "

شيليا نابوئي، يسرى جرار *

ملخص

يلتفت خبراء الإعلام إلى المعدل الذي تنتشر به الأخبار الزائفة في المشهد الإعلامي الاجتماعي حول العالم، وذلك بتأثير التهديدات والمخاطر التي تعكسها هذه الأخبار على التنمية السلمية للمجتمعات البشرية. وفي ضوء ما سبق، أعدت هذه الدراسة لقياس رقمي دقيق، ينبغي أن يساعد حكومة نيجيريا في السيطرة على انتشار الأخبار الزائفة، مع الأخذ بعين الاعتبار النسيج غير المتجانس للبلد. وتتطلع الدراسة إلى كشف ما إذا كان هناك أي تأثير ملحوظ للأخبار الزائفة على وجود دولة نيجيريا، والأخطار الملموسة للأخبار الزائفة، والعديد من الإجراءات الرقمية المتاحة التي تسمح بالتحكم بالظاهرة، وتوفير سجل يحتفظ بالأخبار الرقمية فيما يخص جميع مستخدمي وسائل الإعلام الاجتماعية الفردية. وقد استندت الدراسة إلى نظرية الفعل المنطقي والسلوك المخطط، ونظرية صدقية المصدر. واعتمدت الدراسة أسلوب البحث عبر الإنترنت في دراسة 253 من المختصين في الإعلام - جميعهم أعضاء في مجموعة ACCE على تطبيق Whatsapp وكشفت النتائج أن الأخبار المزيفة تهدد وحدة نيجيريا، وأن أولئك الذين ينشرون أخبارًا مزيفة على الإنترنت أو يقرؤونها، أو يشاركونها، أو يفعلون ذلك بشكل مقصود، يمكن أن يكون ذا دوافع دينية أو سياسية أو اقتصادية. لذا أوصت الدراسة بأن يشكّ مستخدمو وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في ما يقرؤونه ويقبلونه وينشرونه، وبأنه ينبغي أن تتوافر شبكة دولية لفحص الحقائق (IFCN) ولتنظيم محتوى الوسائط الاجتماعية.

الكلمات الدالة: أخبار وهمية. وسائل الإعلام الاجتماعية. مقياس رقمي. نظرية الفعل المنطقية. نظرية صدقية المصدر. نيجيريا.