Users' Perception of Fake News Prolifer and Threats to National Security in South-South, Nigeria

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Abstract
This study investigated usersô perception of fake news proliferation on new media platforms and threats to national security in South-South, Nigeria. The study became necessary following the assumptions that fake news poses a major threat to national security in any nation. The survey design was employed. The population was estimated at nine million new media users in three States in South-South, Nigeria (Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers). The sample was 343, though only 340 with background knowledge of all the variables actively participated in the study. Multi-stage sampling technique was employed in selecting the sample systematically from the three States. Data generated were analysed, presented and tested using frequency tables, statistical charts, simple percentage, mean scores and ordinal regression analysis. The computation was done using SPSS software. The findings in the study confirmed the assumption that there is the proliferation of fake news on new media as virtually all the users of new media who participated in this study strongly agreed that they receive fake news on a daily basis especially political news stories. Fake news proliferation on new media was found to be responsible for some of the demonstrations in some areas in South-South Nigeria. It was also empirically established that younger new media users, aged 18-25 years were more likely to share fake news to others more than other age categories. Male users of new media were also found to share the news more than their female counterparts. Therefore, the researcher concluded that whether fake news proliferation on new media platforms remains a threat to national security in Nigeria would largely depend on new media usersô acceptability of such stories. It was recommended that new media users should endeavour to embrace fact-checking software so as to be able to differentiate between fake and real news stories.

Keywords: Africa, Crisis, Misinformation, New Media Users, Social Media Platforms

Introduction

News sharing is a significant means by which the public can keep abreast with happenings around them and beyond their immediate environment. More so, a paradigm shift has been noticed in news sharing process with the emergence of new media. News sharing has transcended beyond the usual 9.00pm broadcast on national

television. It is now about the website people visit, the post they read on social media and WhatsApp, the tweets seen on twitter, videos watched on Blogs etc. These pieces of information here and there on new media make up the news in this new media age. New media can be described as modern information communication technologies used for quick gathering, processing, storage, dissemination, of news stories/information and which allows for instantaneous feedback. New media have transformed the landscape of news sharing. With new media, participatory journalism, creation of online community, instantaneous feedback, easy and fast news delivery, wider access to news stories is made possible and easier (Olise, 2019). Most technologies described as "new media" are digital, often having characteristics of being manipulated, networkable, dense, compressible and interactive. Some examples may be the Internet, websites, computer multimedia, computer games, CD-ROMS and DVDs (Asemah & Edegoh, 2013). In spite of these emerging benefits and potentials accruing from the use of new media for news sharing, new media has somewhat encouraged the proliferation of fake news. In fact, the advent of new media has accelerated the spread of fake news. This is because anyone with the required exquisite device and Internet connection can adequately be involved in the production and distribution of any type of news that may look very believable even when it is just fake news (Siapera, 2018).

For example, one of the headlines on *Vanguard* newspaper of April 3, 2020 reads thus: ñCOVID-19: Warri Video Clips, Fakeï Delta Govt.ò The newspaper reported that the Delta State government was reacting to video clips that went viral on social media platforms. The said video clips portrayed two military personnel threatening to deal with the residents of Warri metropolis in Delta State who defy the sit-at-home-order of the State government due to the Coronavirus pandemic. The military personnel were also enraged because they claimed that two of their colleagues in the military were killed and they are out to revenge their deaths. There was heightened tension until the Delta State government through the then Commissioner of Information, Mr. Charles Aniagwu, released a Press statement calling on Deltans to disregard the video clips because they were all fake. He also assured Deltans that no military personnel were killed anywhere in the State and that the video clips were fake.

Similarly, *Daily Trust* newspaper of November 3, 2020, reported how the then Inspector General of Police (IGP), Mohammed Adamu, narrated how a purported fake video recorded in Delta State triggered the two-week #EndSARS protests in many States across Nigeria. The said fake video was uploaded with a false tag that the now disbanded Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) operatives had just shot a man dead in Ughelli, Delta State, Nigeria, which sparked off serious tension despite the story being false. The truth was that a suspect, Ambrose Joshua jumped out of a moving patrol vehicle and sustained injuries on his head and body. While the patrol team were busy attending to the situation, one Malcolm Nicholas, who was at the scene of the event recorded the incident and uploaded same on social media with a false tag that that SARS operatives on patrol have just shot a man dead. Although Malcolm Nicholas was later tracked and arrested according to the Police AIG, but the havoc the fake news he

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were to:

1. Find out the extent to which new media users receive fake news which they regard as threat to national security in South-South, Nigeria.
2. Determine how new media users react to fake news that are considered as threats to national security in South-South, Nigeria.
3. Ascertain new media usersô perception of the ways fake news proliferation on new media affect national security in South- South, Nigeria.

Research Hypothesis

Ho1: Fake news proliferation on new media is not directly related to perceived threats to national security in south-south Nigeria.

Conceptual and Literature Review

Fake news is a type of hoax or deliberate spread of misinformation with the intent to mislead in order to gain financially or politically (Thompson River University, 2019). Similarly, Sullivan (2019) defines fake news as the deliberate creation and sharing of false or manipulated online information intended to deceive and mislead audiences. It can, therefore, be said that fake news is any news that misinforms or misleads or deceives people. National security on the other hand, is the ability of a country to provide defence for its citizens, environment and economy. National security is the requirement to maintain the survival of the state through the use of economic power, diplomacy, power projection and political power.

The emergence of new media has brought about new ways of publishing news without recourse to professionalism. The rate at which information is spread over new media has tremendously increased with news now spreading internationally within seconds online. With unlimited pictures, images, views, and hours of footage published online, the likelihood of fake news proliferating even increases. New media users are overwhelmed by the level of information explosion. Thus, in a bid to control the proliferation of fake news on new media platforms, the federal government of Nigeria launched a national campaign on the spread of fake news (Emameh, Nelson & Oguntola, 2018). There have also been a number of fact checking techniques put in place to curb the proliferation of fake news. Yet the rate at which fake news increases on new media is alarming and is posing serious national security challenges in Nigeria.

Unarguably, fake news proliferation on new media affects national security in a number of ways. Some of these ways are:

Creates Tension: Pate, Gambo & Ibrahim (2019) observe that Nigeria as a country is embroiled in tension. They came to this conclusion following series of security threats the nation faces such as "multiple conflicts, systemic and widespread corruption, debilitating poverty, weak institutions, threats of secession as well as perceived marginalisation, anger, hatred and economic challenges" (Pate *et al* 2019, p.21).

Intensifies Religious and Ethnic Crises: Ethnic and religious conflicts have been pinpointed to be the major causes of security issues in Nigeria (Obarisiagbon & Akintoye, 2019). Most frequent and religious clashes between the Muslims and Christians in Nigeria are making mockery of the entire security. Fake news proliferation on new media further worsens the situations. There are certain news that when published create chaos, religious and inter-ethnic crisis thereby posing serious threat to national security. Sometime in January, 2020, for instance, a popular newspaper in Nigeria- *ThisDay* newspaper, published a news story that the US Embassy in Nigeria denied Bishop Oyedepo of Winners' chapel visa and that the Bishop displayed acts of outburst. The news was apparently fake news as the US Embassy in a publication debunked such news. Erezi (2020) of the *Guardian* newspaper reported that the US embassy in a tweet urged members of the public to help debunk the fake news involving the general overseer of the Living Faith Church. In a Nigeria where religious leaders are considered celebrities, Nwaubani, (2020) argues that this type of fake news could spark chaos.

Promotes feelings of Insecurity and Chaos: Insecurity was defined by Udeh & Okoroafor (2013) as a feeling of trepidation and unsafe. It is a state of being unable to protect lives and property. Chaos, on the other hand is any state of disorder, any confused or amorphous mixture or conglomeration. Indeed, fake news proliferation on new media has brought about feeling of insecurity and chaos. Commenting on this, Chukwere & Onyebukwa (2018) observed that new media like Facebook are used by terrorist groups to spread their propaganda thereby creating a feeling of insecurity and chaos among new media users.

Leads to Violence: Spreading of fabricated news stories can lead to violence. The proliferation of fake news can threaten the peace and unity of Nigeria with unprecedented violence. Fake news can cause mistrust, division and trigger violence in a multicultural country like Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Theory of Rumour Transmission

This theory was propounded by H. Taylor Buckner in 1965. The theory helped provide understanding on how fake news spreads on new media. According to Buckner (1965) whether a rumour is truthful or untruthful is unimportant in studying rumour transmission. The essential features of a rumour are that it is unconfirmed at the time of transmission, and that it is passed from one person to another. Based on Buckner's theory of rumour transmission, new media users fall under one of the three orientations or situations which Buckner referred to as 'sets." They are critical set, an uncritical set, or a transmission set. If a new media user takes a critical set, he/she is capable of using "critical ability" to separate the true from the false in the fake news, perhaps using fact-checking techniques. If an uncritical set is adopted, the new media user is unable to use

"critical ability" to test the truth of the fake news. In the transmission set - usually found in laboratory experiments - the individual's "critical ability" is considered to be irrelevant. Hence, according to the theory, whether fake news becomes more or less inaccurate as it spreads is dependent on the individual sets as well as the situations surrounding the spread of the fake news on new media.

Game Theory

Game theory was propounded by John von Neumann & Oskar Morgenstern in 1944. This theory helped to provide new platforms for understanding national security especially in an era of fake news proliferation on new media. Game theory is a theory

10th house/building in the administrative headquarters of each of the selected States. Out of the 343 copies of questionnaire administered, only 340 were properly filled and found usable for this study. Data generated were presented, analysed and tested using frequency tables, statistical charts, simple percentage, mean scores and ordinal regression analysis. The computation was done using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 software.

Results

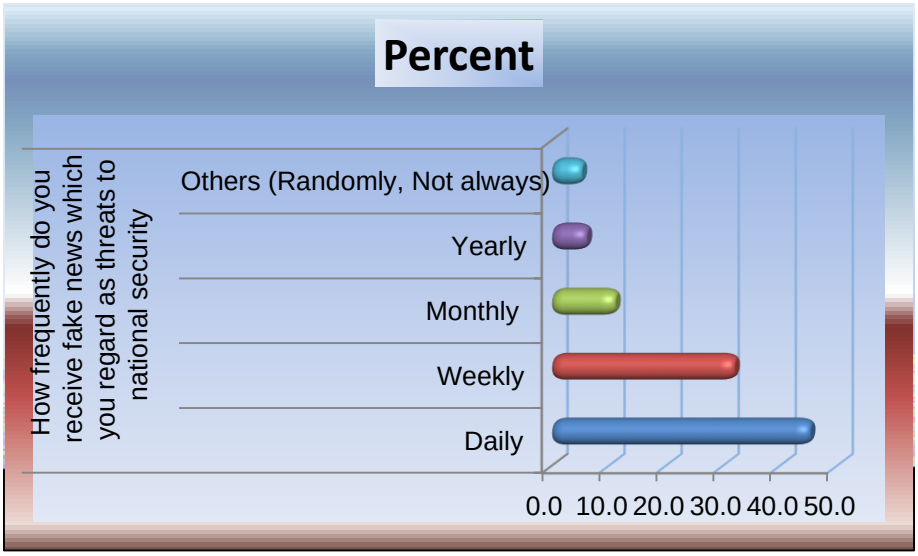


Figure 1: Frequency to which New Media Users receive Fake News regarded as Threat to National Security in South-South, Nigeria (n=340)

Fake news keeps spreading exponentially. However, what is the frequency at which new media users are aware that they receive news that is fake? Figure 1 showed 45.3% of respondents said that they receive fake news daily. Also, 32.1% of them claimed to receive fake news weekly, 11.2% were said to get fake news monthly, 6.2% received fake news regarded as threat to national security, while 5.3% of the respondents chose the ówhatsô options which were specified as randomly and not always.

Table 1: Extent New Media Users receive Fake News which they regard as Threat to National Security (n=340)

Varaibles	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
Religious News Stories	3.17	**1.093**	**Moderate extent**
News of Health matters	3.70	**,953**	**Large extent**
Entertainment News	3.60	**1.216**	**Large extent**
News on Education	3.50	**1.098**	**Large extent**
Political News	4.23	**.837**	**Very Large extent**
Social News	3.79	**.927**	**Large extent**

Cultural News	3.37	**1.009**	**Moderate extent**
Financial News	3.30	**1.144**	**Moderate extent**

In a closed ended item in the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate the extent they receive specific types of fake news. Data analysed revealed that political fake news are received to a very large extent ($\bar{x}$= 4.23) more than any other type of fake news. Apparently, religious fake news were the least received fake news by new media users as the item had a mean score of 3.17. It could be implied that new media users receive more of political news stories to any other type be it real or fake.

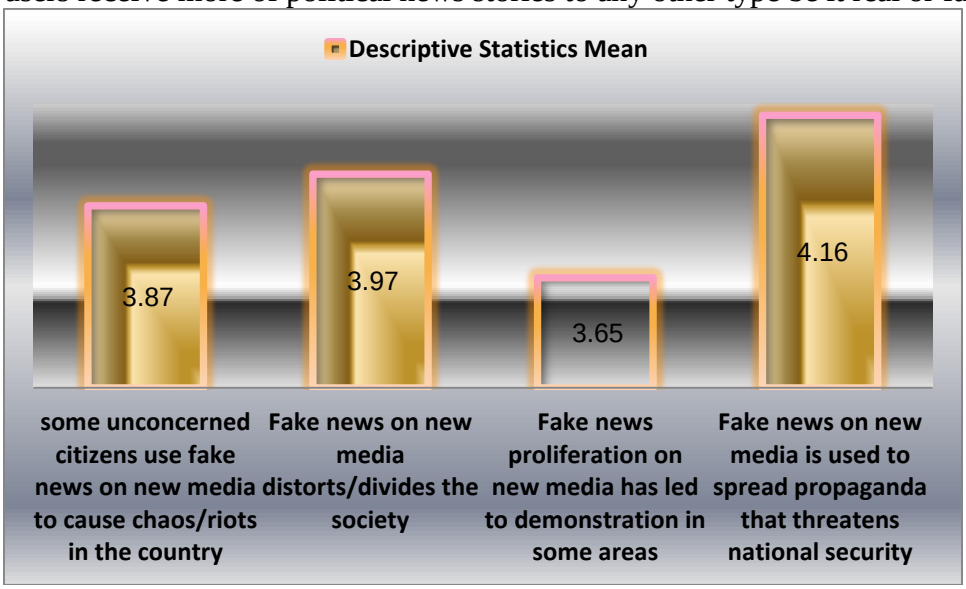


Figure 2: Mean Scores on Ways Fake News Proliferation on New Media affect National Security (n=340).

Figure 2 showed that some unconcerned citizens use fake news on new media to cause chaos/riots in the country ($\bar{x}$=3.87). Data further shows that fake news on new media distorts/divides the society ($\bar{x}$=3.97); fake news proliferation on new media has led to demonstration in some areas ($\bar{x}$=3.65); and fake news on new media is used to spread propaganda that threatens national security ($\bar{x}$= 4.16). Apparently, fake news on new media has some undesirable effect on national security.

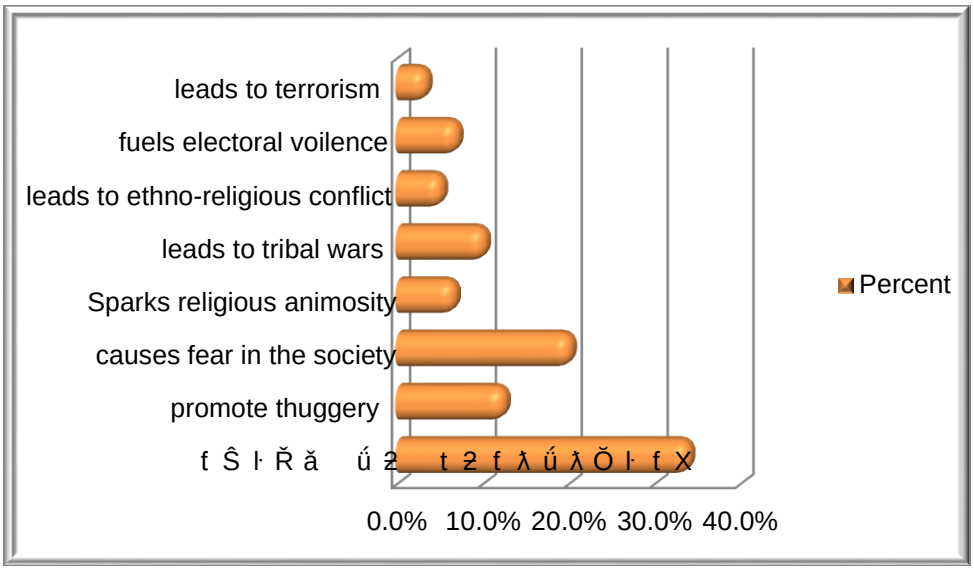


Figure 3: Responses on how Fake News Proliferation on New Media affects National Security

In an opened ended item, respondents were asked to state how fake news proliferation on new media affects national security in their area. Responses were coded and displayed in figure 3. A cumulative majority of respondents stated that fake news proliferation on new media affects national security as it leads to Political unrest/propaganda (34.1%). Very few respondents believed that fake news lead to terrorism.

Testing of Research Hypothesis

Table 2: Fake news Proliferation on New Media is not directly related to Threats to National Security in South-South Nigeria

Test of Parallel Lines[a]

Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Null Hypothesis	449.834			
General	264.55	185.284	9	.000

An ordinal regression analysis was used to test the null hypothesis that fake news proliferation on new media is not directly related to threats to national security in South-South Nigeria. The model- fitting information showed a fit of the final model over the null model [$x^2(4) = 14.054$, p ' 0.001]. The predictor variable (fake new proliferation on new media) in the ordinal logistics regression analysis was found to contribute to the model. The ordered log odds [(449.834) =.322, SE=.125, Wald=6.665, p ' 0.10)]. The estimated odd ratio favoured a positive relationship of nearly 340 folds, 95% confidence level (.078, .566) for every one unit increase of threats to national security. The test of parallel line in table 4 indicates significance [$x^2(9) = 185.284$,

p ’ 0.000]. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected, meaning that fake news proliferation on new media is directly related to threats to national security in south-south Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

Fake news keeps spreading exponentially. The extent to which new media users receive fake news which they regard as threat to national security in South-South Nigeria was determined in this study. Findings revealed that most new media users receive fake news on a daily basis (45.2%). However, the extent they receive news varied based on the type of fake news. The study found that political fake news are received to a very large extent more than any other type of fake news such as fake news on health matters, entertainment fake news, fake news on education and social fake news. This finding corroborates that of Wasserman & Madrid-Morales (2019). They found media audience had high levels of perceived exposure to fake news. Even though their study placed emphasis on disinformation on social media, a significant relationship was further deduced between this higher levels of exposure to fake news and lower levels of media trust. The extent new media users are exposed to fake news on new media tend to affect the trust they have on the media and may even affect the way they react to fake news on new media. Moreover, these facts further re-enforces the tenets of theory of rumour transmission, which holds that rumours spread in form of fake news which results in misinformation and disinformation.

Nevertheless, psychologists have found that people react differently based on individual differences. Reactions to fake news that are considered threats to national security are actually normal. However, these reactions may vary based on peoplesô demographics. Indeed, associations were found between new media usersô reactions to fake news considered threats to national security and their demographics such as age, gender and educational qualification. Thus, a cross tabulation was done between various reactions to fake news and their age, gender and educational qualification. Basically, most new media users were found to ascertain the source of the news they receive especially when considered a threat to national security. This shows that new media users are more conscious of rate at which fake news proliferates on new media and trying to be more cautious. However, Lile (2020) argues that there are many individuals that would read fake news and take it as truth. Whichever the case, the female gender new media users with PhD were found to be more likely to ascertain the source of the news more than others did. Furthermore, it was found that some new media users shared fake news considered as threats. This finding agree with Barthel, Mitchell & Holcomb (2016) survey whereby 23% of their respondents admitted to sharing fake news while 14% shared the fake news even when they knew it was fake. In this present study it was further revealed that younger new media users aged 18-25 years were more likely to share the news to others more than other ages. Males tend to share the news more than their female counterparts while new media users with lower educational qualification tend more to share the news more than those with higher educational qualifications.

Furthermore, although the theory of rumour transmission stipulates fake news (rumours) are mainly characterised by their lack of evidence, it was also found new media users usually verify the authenticity of fake news although it varied based on

their demographics. Older new media users, males and individuals with higher educational qualification were more likely to verify the authenticity of fake news received. Ignoring of fake news was commonly associated with older new media users while younger individuals were more likely to make comments on fake news on new media than the older new media users. Males were more likely to ignore fake news while females were more likely to make comments about the news. It was further revealed that people with PhD were less likely to make comments on news considered as threats. Strangely, the new media users with PhD were more likely to instigate people to react. This means that even though they are less likely to make comments on the supposed fake news on new media, they tend to instigate people to react either positively or negatively. However, the direction of instigation was not empirically determined in this study. Older respondents were also found to be more likely to instigate people to react to the fake news. In addition, older new media users with PhD (0%) and males (32.3%) were less likely to report to appropriate security authorities about the fake news. Some of these reactions were somewhat consistent with Washington (2020) study. Washington used a Google chrome extension to watch 25 participants on their social media especially Facebook and Twitter feeds. Various reactions to fake news received were found including ignoring it, ascertaining the credibility and taking it with a pinch of salt.

Despite some of these positive reactions to fake news among new media users, the study found that some unconcerned citizens use fake news on new media to cause chaos/riots in the country and distorts/divides the society. Fake news proliferation on new media was perceived to lead to demonstration in some areas in South-South Nigeria and fake news on new media is used to spread propaganda that threatens national security. It also affects national security as it leads to Political unrest/propaganda, promotes thuggery, causes fear in the society, sparks religious animosity, leads to tribal wars, leads to ethno-religious conflict, fuels electoral violence and leads to terrorism. These undesirable activities have been predicted by the game theory. Thus, the game theory analyses possible behaviours of people engaged in certain games like spreading of fake news stories to rationally determine strategies. Considering all these social vices fake news is capable of erupting, fake news on new media is definitely a cause for concern. More so, from an ordinal logistics regression analysis test, it was further confirmed that fake news proliferation on new media is directly related to threats to national security in South-South Nigeria.

Conclusion

This study has been able to establish that despite some of the positive reactions new media users exhibit in the face of fake news like ascertaining the source of news, fake news proliferation on new media is a threat to national security in South-South Nigeria in a number of ways including causing chaos in the society, distorting/dividing the society and causing political unrest/propaganda. Apparently, fake news proliferation is a wild fire capable of erupting varying social vices. However, just as the theory of rumour transmission, whether fake news becomes more or less a threat to national security as it spreads is dependent on the individual sets as well as the situations surrounding the spread of the fake news on new media.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of this study:

1. Fact-checking techniques tools must be embraced especially in an era of fake news proliferation. New media users can check the publication date to ascertain if the date of publishing support the date/ period of the events. Checking for signs of an original source as well as supporting sources. New media users are encouraged to use fact-checking sources before sharing any news they are not sure of. There are a number of fact-checking tools like Snoopes, AFP fact check, Africa Check, DomainBigData, FactCheck.org, OpenSecrets.org.
2. All new media users should report to appropriate security authorities about any fake news they consider threats to national security. This would help ameliorate some of the social vices fake news could erupt that threaten national security. This is necessary when one considers the fact that it was empirically established that fake news proliferation on new media is directly related to threats to national security in South-South Nigeria.
3. Total eradication of political fake news may be difficult considering the political state of Nigeria. However, new media users are advised to continue to verify all sources of news, especially political news before deciding to share; delete or join in the conversation.

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