

Social Media Misinformation and the Transformation of Journalism in Lagos State

Mobolaji Grace Akintaro¹, Joseph Ifeoluwa Joy², Okuchemiya Success³

^{1,2}Department of Mass Communication, Caleb University, Imota, Lagos

³Department of Mass Communication School of Communications and Applied Arts, Federal Polytechnic Orogun, Delta State.

Email: okuchemiya.success@fepo.edu.ng

Abstract

Social media has transformed the production, circulation and consumption of news, while simultaneously creating new opportunities for the rapid dissemination of misinformation. In Nigeria, the growing dependence on platforms such as Facebook, X, TikTok and WhatsApp has altered traditional patterns of news gatekeeping and placed additional demands on professional journalism. This study examines the relationship between social media misinformation and the transformation of journalism in Nigeria through a secondary-data approach. The study relies on existing scholarly literature, published studies, professional reports and documented evidence on misinformation, fake news, social media use and journalistic practice. The review focuses particularly on the Nigerian and Lagos State media environments, where the rapid circulation of unverified information has created challenges relating to verification, credibility, professional ethics and public trust. Drawing on the Uses and Gratifications Theory, the paper argues that social media users actively select, consume and share information to satisfy informational, social and psychological needs, but such agency operates within an environment shaped by emotional appeals, peer influence, algorithmic amplification and the speed of digital communication. The reviewed literature indicates that misinformation can spread faster than corrections, exploit trust within social networks, and increase the pressure on journalists to balance immediacy with accuracy. It also shows that contemporary journalists increasingly perform expanded roles involving social media monitoring, fact-checking, source verification, contextualisation and correction of misleading information. The study concludes that social media misinformation has significantly altered journalistic routines and professional responsibilities rather than simply creating a new category of false information. Strengthening digital verification skills, ethical journalism, media literacy, collaborative fact-checking and newsroom verification protocols is therefore essential to sustaining journalistic credibility in Nigeria's evolving digital media environment.

Keywords

Social media;
Misinformation;
Journalism; Fact-checking
and Nigeria



I. Introduction

Social media is no longer a diurnal life anymore it is everywhere, as it influences how individuals receive and share information worldwide. The emergence of such sites has opened the gates so that anyone with access to the internet can be a news publisher, storyteller, cult-reaching person, etc. This does have a downside, particularly in regard to the ease and speed with which information has become available. However, there is also a

major issue, the one that is difficult to neglect fake news. False News, photo-shopped posts, clickbait headlines these effects go round presto on the internet, and they are not harmless. They influence the opinions, provoke violence, and undermine the faith in the traditional media (Pennycook and Rand, 2019; Lewandowsky et al., 2020). Nations all over the world are scrambling with the consequences. Consider the 2016 U.S. presidential election fake news that went viral on Facebook and Twitter, and individuals who are concerned about its impact on political discourses (Pennycook & Rand, 2019). WhatsApp has been a cannon of rumors and rumor-mongering in India, which led to mob violence (Tufekci, 2018).

The same thing is narrated in Africa but with its variations. The more individuals go online and the mobile phones become the norm, social media transforms into one of the significant forms of connectivity. However, it is also a simple avenue of fake news. In other countries such as Kenya and South Africa, fake news has been used to influence decisions (Lentz et al., 2019). In Cameroon, social networking rumors have added to ethnical conflict (Fishman, 2019), and the image indeed becomes even more complicated. By January 2023, there were more than 31 million social media users in Nigeria. When glancing over at Nigeria and things become even more disconnected, the nation is digitized in the digital era, Facebook, X, Tik Tok, Instagram, WhatsApp, you name it is how the news spreads nowadays (Ogunleye and Akinola, 2020). However, Nigeria is also vulnerable to that pace and distance. In the 2019 general choices, fake news regarding the outcomes and violence in Lagos came circulating around social media, creating verily fright and bewilderment (Vanguard, 2019).

The roots go deep. Social and political situation in Nigeria is perplexed with ethnical and religious schisms, political strains. Whenever decision-making time approaches, or in the case of heads such as COVID- 19, misinformation strikes. In 2019, fake news attacked choosers and attempted to influence the way people viewed campaigners (Adebayo, 2019). The pandemic caused a wave of fake information concerning the contagion and remedies that confused the health sweat among people (Oyeyemi, Gabarron, & Wynn, 2020). In fact the n't vulnerable were the EndSARS demurrers of 2020 that called out police brutality. It was social media that assisted in gathering support and disseminated misinformation and lies that attempted to discredit the movement or confusion to people (Akinreti, 2021). So, numerous Nigerians calculate on Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp for news, but not everyone has the tools to spot what's real. Media knowledge is each over the chart, so misinformation slips through fluently (Ezeah, Asogwa, & Edogor, 2023). To get a handle on all this, it is not enough to just list the problems. We need to really look into how fake news spreads, why people produce or partake it, what damage it does, and crucially wherein to push back.

The purpose of journalism is not defined by technology, by journalists or the techniques they employ; rather, it is defined by something more basic – the functionality of news in the lives of people (Kovach & Rosentiel cited in American Press Institute, 2017). Kovach & Rosentiel further defined news as part of communication that keeps us informed of the changing events, issues and characters in the world outside. Though, it may be interesting for even entertainment, the foremost value of news is as a utility to empower the informed. Journalism does more than keep us informed as it enables us as citizens to have our voices heard in the chambers of power and allows us to monitor and moderate the sources of power that shapes our lives. But, in the past few decades thus the responsibility of journalists in a free society has been made more vital and more difficult by the revolution in communications technology.

The technology as stated by Pew Research Center (2019) has filled the world with a flood of undifferentiated information that is changing the audience for news and information from passive receivers to proactive consumers who decide what they want, when they want it and how they want it. With the advent of social media and the wider access of internet in and around the world, the news is no longer what it is. Adeniyi (2017) says unlike in the past where we all depended on the traditional media for informative, educative and entertaining content, it is not so now. This is because the World Wide Web is free and anyone can post or share anything including unverified, unauthenticated claims/news, in the name of driving traffic and attracting popularity to their websites/blog pages. Fake news is no longer new but the rate at which it is being used in our technological era is now becoming new and spreading dangerously. According to the real story of fake news (2017), fake news in its purest form is completely made up, manipulated to resemble credible journalism and attract maximum attention and with it, advertising revenue.

It was frequently used to describe a political story which is seen as damaging to an agency, entity or person. The growth of fake news is situated amid increasing public mistrust for communication that is typically strategic and directed toward achieving an agenda that is often subtly hidden from the message. However, it is by no means restricted to politics, and seems to have currency in terms of general news. Fake news uses a variety of methods to achieve its aim. The Editorial (2017) points out that some of the methods employed by fake news sites is to dress up a lie so it appears as the truth and to intertwine valid information with false information but in such a manner that it is not obvious. Propaganda for political or economic gains is nothing new, but what constitutes fake news is contested. As Finnish editor, Kari Huhta puts it; the arguments of fake news often become ridiculous. "It becomes a contest of people saying- 'You're fake news! 'No, you're fake news! No, your mother is fake news!'"

The dangerous trend of disinformation and fake news championed by social media as a result of media freedom in information dissemination and which the traditional media are unfortunately feeding from is on the increase. Some online media houses, bloggers and citizen journalists do not bother about alteration or falsehood in the information, news and even pictures before disseminating. The news most times as explained by media experts are written and published with the 2021 of misleading in order to financially gain or to falsely grab attention.

Fake news stories are usually sensational in nature, disseminated via real and fake news media outlets that are often attributed to usually reliable or competent sources in order to carry out their misleading intentions and so are very likely to spread quickly and because the platforms containing the news already have a massive reader-base that looks at them for information, the stories will most likely be believed by people who read them. Adeyemi (2016) explains that these people will, in turn share the story on social media because who does not like to pride themselves on being one of the first to know; and the show, sadly goes on and on. Sometimes, even after the story has been debunked, the fake news still prevails.

Instances of such abound and very common too: In 2016, a British website, Metro UK (<https://metro-uk.com>) published and disseminated a story online headlined "Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari dies in London". In a separate development, The Guardian newspaper took to its site a bold headline "Breaking News: Buhari removes Magu as EFCC Boss". Here, the writer of the story was not indicated, the link used for publishing the story was removed and the report of Magu's removal was speculative. Very recently too, the world was greeted with a global health crisis in the form of Covid 19; while the

humongous level of fake news and disinformation on this pandemic leave much to be desired, several news platforms have sprung in an attempt to score some ‘audienceship’ in what can be described as ‘opportunism’.

While editors require news reporters to adhere to journalistic rigours, check facts and help to ensure reports are credible and reliable before publication, no such rigours are applied to irresponsible social media sites and independent blogs which are endangering the credibility, ethics and professionalism of journalism. It is of this essence that the views of Nigerian professional journalists and media scholars on the growing trend of online fake news was investigated to add up to the store of knowledge.

II. Review of Literature

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The paper adopted Uses and Gratifications Theory, developed by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in 1973, advocates that users actively intervene in their media use, making the choices that best suit the psychological and social requirements of their respective society. The use of media, therefore, is purposeful, in which the audiences seek out content, choose entertainment, personal identity, or community connection which fulfills those interests. In social media, consumers continuously search for information from many different sources, interact with content and share content that aligns with their passions or interests. The theory, against its own ends, emphasizes too much audience autonomy while understripping the strong moral impact of media itself.

Some scholars, including Rubin (2009), propose that audiences may not necessarily think rational or goal-oriented individuals, as emotional appeal, novelty and peer pressure are some of the more prominent motives for the behavior on social media. Vs. viral misinformation spread not only through intentional dissemination by users, but via algorithmic amplification and social contagion that also contradict the assumption of all being in the control of an audience. Meanwhile, advocates of the theory argue that media consumption, and reactions to misinformation, are in a fairly smooth manner. People often choose to consume news, or media that serves the reoccurring ideological agenda imposed by social media for the purpose of self-religiousness, to reach the desired social outcomes; but users also prefer to share and exchange information according to their beliefs — in essence, providing a direct link between audience behavior and the spread of misinformation. Social media users in Nigeria share some information including misinformation to fit their social needs, get approval from their peers or discuss political and personal opinions, for example, and, to an extent, have an exact relationship with the dissemination of the misinformation within the media by their actions.

This focuses on the importance of the Uses and Gratifications Theory for discovering why misinformation continues to propagate across social media and affecting journalism in Nigeria. The independent variable social media misinformation — interweaves with users’ desire for social attention and information in an instant. However, the dependent variable journalistic practice — operates in concert with audience demand, enabling people to take an interest in the media and the pressure for exposing false narratives and for maintaining credibility. But these users are actively deciding what is of interest to them and reporters

need to rely on content creation to hammer down the content. They also need to adopt engagement approaches, fact checking tactics, and corrective reporting that takes into account user motivations.

III. Research Methods

3.1 Fake News in the Digital Age

In the digital age, fake news takes on a new dimension by meaning more than rumors or propaganda. In the digital age, fake news means information that has been intentionally constructed or distorted, showcased as such, to mimic true news and spread the fake news around to deceive the audience. As opposed to conventional types of misinformation, fakenews takes advantage of the characteristics of digital media (social networks in particular) to be distributed within the shortest possible amount of time and acquire the credibility that it does not deserve. Tandoc, Lim, and Ling (2018) note that fake news thrives in the online environment since the latter has privileged speed, virality, and interaction over accuracy and fact-checking.

Consequently, fake news tends to run faster than the fact making it the driver of opinion in the society before a correction. Professional journalists and editors used to be the gatekeepers who filtered the information gained by the audience, which could be unreliable. This position has been reduced to a great extent. These barriers have been torn down by the digital age- any person who has access to the internet can now publish without being subject to editorial comments. According to McQuail (2018), such dismantling of institutional regulation has enabled the spread of fake news since the producers of such content are not subjected to professional norms and standards. Fake news is also described by its emotional appeal, rather than a focus on facts.

There is a tendency to make such stories create an anger, fear, excitement or outrage as an emotionally stimulating piece would be more likely to be shared. Bakir and McStay (2018) argue that fear and outrage are some of the emotions that contribute to online interactions, and people are less likely to question the accuracy of the information they come across. Here, the manufacturers of fake news amplify or create an event to cause a response and active relay. The digital journalism pressure makes the situation worse. The audience wants updates in real time, and journalists are pressured to the point of publishing fast and staying competitive. Nielsen and Graves (2019) note that this rush usually affects how the process of verification is conducted, resulting in a high probability of publishing false or deceptive stories. The other tactic that fake news producers use is to publish fabricated news when there is a breaking news event on as they know that the news reporters would have little time to check the facts. The visual manipulation is another powerful tool.

False news often includes altered photographs, deceptive videos or screen shots out of context in order to look real. According to Tandoc et al. (2018), high-quality images make fake news more believable, and viewers are not always able to see it. This form of visual misinformation is especially successful in the era when most individuals are merely looking at the headlines and pictures, while the country of Nigeria has become a major country of fake news, with the wide usage of social media and the varying degrees of digital literacy. Being the media and economic hub of the country, Lagos State receives a substantial amount of information that pass through the digital channels.

According to Ojebuyi (2020), misinformation has a high spread in Lagos as people tend to believe what their friends, family members or religious leaders or influencers post. Such a culture of sharing that is based on trust leads to the rapid malevolence of fake news

and negative assessment. WhatsApp is a leading fake news distributor in Nigeria. WhatsApp, in contrast to the public platforms, functions as a private group with the use of encrypted messages, so it is hard to trace the source or track the content. According to Apuke and Omar (2021), such a private and closed environment contributes to the dissemination of fake information as people perceive messages as personal and credible.

The spread of fake news related to health has become common online and more so during emergency times in the health sector. On social media unrealistic claims regarding diseases, remedies, and methods of prevention of illness spread quickly, with certain cases leading to actual harm. According to Apuke and Omar (2021), such type of digital misinformation reduces the trust of people to doctors and medical facilities. The journalists are compelled to use a lot of time and funds to disprove these fabricated reports and this leaves them with no option but to go back to their normal reporting duties. Fake news about business and the economy is on the rise as well. The news concerning the breakdown of firms, fluctuating currencies, or the introduction of new governmental policies can trigger panic and leave one uncertain about the state of the economy.

According to the researchers, in Lagos State, where the business activity is high, this misinformation can destabilize markets and reduce confidence in the population, Oso and Pate (2020) note that journalists in such states should always check the economic news they find online to avoid publication of false information that may be detrimental to investors and businesses. The fake news does not only mislead individuals with the simple facts but also makes the media lose its reliability. Once readers are presented with conflicting details about the same event on the internet, they are likely to lose confidence in professional journalism altogether. Carlson (2018) elaborates that constant exposure to fake news conditions the separation between legitimate reporting and fiction creating a situation where all news sources are called into doubt. This growing lack of trust has made the task of journalists in the Lagos State to establish their credibility even more difficult in a media landscape that is highly suspect of them at any given moment. Not only that, the digital era has turned fake news into a lucrative business. Most of the fake news creators receive financial benefits in terms of advertisement revenue, sponsored content, or political patronage.

Bakir and McStay (2018) argue that the amount of money that accompany online engagement encourages people to write sensational and deceptive stories. Ethical journalism therefore is at a disadvantage competing with high paying lies. The other reason supporting fake news is insufficient knowledge of media by cult. many social media druggies recommend sufficient chops to estimate sources, corroborate facts or fete manipulation. Wardle and Derakhshan (2018) point out that cult becomes vulnerable in deception due to poor media knowledge, particularly in cases in which fabricated news is congruent with existing beliefs. Lagos State has a small part of the population that has limited digital knowledge, which predisposes them to fake news. The fake news is also successful due to the fact that corrections and the fact checks rarely have an extended reach to go as far as the fake news.

Research indicates that individuals tend to flashback sensational false stories as compared to latterly corrections. Nielsen and Graves (2019) observe that once bogus news revenues roll, sweats to debunk it often has little effect. Intelligencers have to now use their time further correcting online news, covering social media trends, and refutation of false news. The professional habits of intelligencers have been significantly changed because of the frequency of fake news. Ojebuyi (2020) notes that this new burden exposes more stress and time to conduct investigative journalism. Pressures to strike the right balance of speed, delicacy, and credibility also threaten the existence of the intelligencers

in Lagos State as they encounter fake news over the internet. The ethical issue that arises is also to deal with fake news on the internet.

It is natural to understand why at times reporters are in a hurry to publish trending stories without researching the facts there is an urge to follow the popularity. But Oso and Pate (2020) note that journalists must not succumb to that temptation. Pursuing clicks at the expense of truth, particularly when fake news is ubiquitous, is undermining the essence of good journalism. Adhering to ethics is not merely a pleasant concept, but one that makes journalism be honest in our digital era.

It is not only that fake news has blurred the lines that the newsrooms have been struggling to overcome by taking the time and resources needed to counter viral misinformation and check their facts. It is a good change, but it also indicates how extensively the fake news has consumed the previous journalism methods. According to Graves (2018), fact-checking is no longer an active component of reporting but a self-defense mechanism. The mess of fake news in the digital age lies in the field of technology, culture, economics, and society. Its endurance indicates greater weakness on media systems, processing information by the audience and regulation of platforms. The pressure is an added burden to journalists in Lagos State, the media hub of Nigeria.

They must make a doubling of verification efforts and cling to ethics and seek to regain the trust of the populace. The modern environment of fake news succeeds due to the dilution of traditional gatekeeping, amplification of the incorrect stories with the help of algorithms, encouragement of clicks by emotions, and making publishing decisions based on the profit motives. Journalism has been affected on a deeper level and this is in the way news is generated and the credibility of the profession is questioned. In order to comprehend the implications of fake news to journalism in Lagos State, everyone will be expected to scrutinize how it influences and even skew the digital media landscape.

IV. Result and Discussion

4.1 Misinformation and Its Characteristics

Misinformation generally refers to misleading or false information that flows without anyone making any effort of deceiving people. It does not resemble propaganda, which is planned to influence the opinion or manipulate a group. In the majority of cases, the misinformed people are sincerely thinking it is true. And that is what makes it so shady that it can influence what people think even though there is no ill intent to it. Misinformation goes viral online. Everybody can create or post content instantly and no one is to check whether something is correct before it goes out there. We have to learn about the misinformation paradigm in order to combat it and safeguard the quality of information we are exposed to (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2018).

Unintentionality: The greatest aspect of misinformation is the fact that it is accidental. Individuals transmit what they believe to be the truth without verifying. Wardle and Derakhshan (2018) indicate that this distinguishes misinformation and the deliberate propaganda. Consider a person who passed a health warning or a breaking news that they did without knowing it is wrong. This type of sharing would cause confusion, fear and poor choices even with good intentions.

Rapid Spread: The fake news spreads with amazing speed- particularly on the internet. Unlike other media, social media is obsessed with anything that creates a high sense of reaction whether it be shock, curiosity, or outrage. According to Bakir and McStay (2018), these posts go viral within no time. Extremes of misinformation tend to

enter the dialogue before anyone can verify the facts, and by the time the inaccuracies are revealed, the misinformation may well seem like the truth.

Persistence: Misinformation once created is always likely to persist even after individuals attempt to rectify it. According to Lewandowsky, Ecker, and Cook (2018), our memory recalls the initial thing that we hear more than corrections we receive subsequently. This is why misleading statements will continue impacting the masses and discussions, despite authoritative sources intervening to correct the situation. To illustrate, news concerning huge occasions may continue to emerge even after the formal narrative is released.

Emotional Hook: Misinformation is very emotional and it tends to make a person share it. Something you are scared of, angry, shocked or excited catches your eye and people cannot pass it without forwarding. Bakir and McStay (2018) demonstrate that emotionally charged fake news is transmitted more often and quicker than dull, factual information. To take the case for instance, wild claims of health hazard or social turmoil excited people and the cycle continues and these stories are left stuck in the minds of people.

Repetition and Reinforcement: The greater the exposure of the misinformation, the more they tend to believe. According to Lewandowsky and others (2018), this is what they refer to as the illusion of truth because after hearing or seeing something repeatedly, it becomes truth, even when it is not. The repetition of ideas on social media, in a group-chat, or even in normal conversation contributes to solidifying false concepts, and making them appear normal, thus explaining why misinformation is such a stubborn issue that is impossible to rectify. Second, gossiping and unverified information is equally the biggest issue. Friggeri, Adamic, Eckles, and Cheng (2018) emphasize that similar rumors gain momentum on account of their ability to fill introductory blank spaces which cult desire to fill.

In any case, an untruth about a business accident occurring in a high- viscosity Lagos neighborhood blights the medium quickly, and that causes the informers to reply fast, sometimes for the risk of multiplying inaccuracies. The fundamental condition for misinformation is validation bias. These Christians tend to take on information that is consistent with their current knowledge (Bakir & McStay, 2018). To address this fact, in Lagos, prejudiced or community- grounded groups can adopt nefarious posts that serve the purpose of their shoes, thus further embedded in social discussions misunderstanding. Visual and multimedia content reinforces misinformation.

As in Nigeria, these images have become highly associated with viral stories on government events or local politics, reaching much more audiences and growing engagement. Now journalists need to verify every multifaceted source, making their work significantly more difficult than previously. There is another large issue as well: source ambiguity (Vosoughi et al., 2018). It also complicates the tracing of stories when journalists in Lagos are often told to have no other ways.

Misinformation often fosters other misinformation into aggressive network structures that may look implicated. The authors Bakir and McStay present their research findings about how social and political and artistic environments of their study area affect the people who follow their work. The people in Lagos use different social practices and traditional beliefs to determine which claims they will accept or reject in their different communities. The news reporters need to follow the standard procedures for their work because different situations need different treatment methods. The process of creating incorrect information develops through active development. The issue of sharing information across different platforms constitutes a separate challenge.

The official corrections do not fully restore the original state of affairs (Lewandowsky et al., 2018). Journalists in Lagos face a constant battle against false stories on social media, where repetition, emotion, and confirmation bias keep misinformation alive. Public trust restoration needs continuous record correction work performed across multiple platforms. Misinformation becomes more shareable when people encounter unexpected and new information. People do not just read or watch They engage with content through commenting sharing and remixing which enables them to show their reactions This behavior leads to the ongoing existence and dissemination of false information according to Bakir. People become interested in content that contains unexpected and shocking and uncommon elements, according to Vosoughi and his colleagues who conducted research in 2018.

The public spreads exaggerated reports about crime and accidents and political events in Lagos because these stories create unexpected moments which make it harder for journalists to choose between reporting facts and sensational news. Misinformation becomes stronger when people share incorrect information. 'In many cases, misinformation will often truncate the complex of events into a simple and catchy story while excluding the broader context. By taking advantage of local beliefs, values, or fears, false information can thrive and be widely accepted.

4.2 Social Media and Information Dissemination

Localized social media networks in Lagos can shift the gossip into a story in short time which is why investigative intelligence services need real time data tracking and verification system. The importance of social media has decreased during this period. The themes which show trend-on-the-fly characteristics will determine which themes become popular in society according to their main significance for public relations (Kaplan (Kaplan, 2014). For example, having the news reports posted evokes feelings, and they find a lot of drama in its tone(Bakir, 2006) The system permits users to generate deceptive content which presents as authentic through its ability to create realistic sounding material and show modified visual content. The assessment needs to include immediate response as an additional factor. The use of social mediaAs an alternative to assessing errors (Kaplan b'When it comes to detecting mistakes in general, this will be the best way for citizens to continue to debate things on the basis of what they read (Hermida, 2019).

The structure of social networks is huge. Information speeds up rapidly through well-connected groups such as communities or political networks (Vosoughi et al. , 2018).When in Lagos government officials, local communities you name it, even when it comes to urban traffic, public safety or health emergencies, the social media trends are visible to everybody's eyes and these trends are especially difficult to deal with if the trends of the day have implications for Nigerian affairs as well. Journalists can't spare a thought: They are supposed to be interested in what is happening online, but also to be mindful of what's going on behind their backs. In addition, it's not fair to let an image a scream or a shout out and a viral post doesn't exactly look true, it's just as much to ignore. There is a time when we tend to look outside for things that aren't easy to do on Facebook. One big factor is that with access to the internet, local activism and community influencers are often at the center of conversation, in part, the journalist's job. There is a lot of hype in the discussions, which is welcome, but can be pretty much unbalanced and one has to make careful judgments about fact from fiction. And the issue of sheer volume.

Facebook continues its momentum. Even during adolescence, reporters in Lagos work through thousands of posts, tweets, messages. The case for Nigeria's journalism is all the more alarming because so many times the truth is spreading around, journalistically

delivering it has to take a toll, so journalists are not just telling people what's at the top, they're fact-checking and teachers and protecting their public trust (Hermida, 2019).

4.3 Concept of Mental Health

Journalism, which takes its inspiration from the ethics, routines, and professional values that shaped the style of journalism, is what helps it stay relevant. Etheloi was part of my compass that read from my own words, such as honesty, good judgment and personal integrity that both the judge of truth and the watcher must pay attention in all sorts of areas. But embracing these principles have become a harder task since now. Digital media continues to expand, social media become dominant, and quickly info is circulated without interference from traditional verification. Newspapers working in Nigeria in this environment are faced with a media milieu of high-pressure competition and noise. Media convergence has made Television, radio, print and online news outlets even fierce competitors and social media added an extra layer of noise. This is an urgency that permits journalists to keep out too late and at times even if only a few details are examined.

The impact is that misinformation can cross your mind (Oso & Pate, 2020). It has been established that any kind of viral content could be a source of controversy concerning candidates, and journalists were often scolded for reporting information that were published just minutes before the post was made. Whenever a source in the Lagos context of the social media has a fast circulation, it is always used by journalists, even if its source is from the newsrooms (Bakir & McStay, 2018).

Once in their chat window, even false accounts of violence or accidents elicit a rage from the public, which, in the course of time, is spread through the ostensible information. At the same time, ethical responsibility must remain at the forefront. Journalists are bound to refrain from spreading false stories, as well as being able to still be critical of a particular issue, when the facts may not be there for clarity. However, social media pressure can distort these standards. Journalists are sometimes forced to retract and correct their initial accounts in Lagos (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2018). This brings to mind the persistent struggle between speed, public interest and ethically correct information. Digital literacy is now necessary. Journalism is no longer the source of traditional media, but instead the subject of journalism; journalists must have skills to test social media content, delve into the origins of viral postings, and spot authentic information versus fake information. In Lagos for example, journalists reporting on news of break-up rely on reverse image searches, metadata analysis, and fact checking platforms to control the spread of social media misinformation. An increasing amount of audience engagement has also shifted journalism in practice.

As such, we are now relying on multitasking as part of this changing daily journalistic practice. Lagos intelligencers now write, edit and post online on social media in synchronized fashion. This merge boosts productivity but may slow down the process of fact-checking and vulnerability to leak news emerging online from malicious data. And professional dubitation is one thing that matters very much. Moreover, intelligencers must question the authenticity of sources especially on social media where fake accounts and bots can elevate false claims (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018). And in Lagos, it could appear on viral videos on accidents, political corruption, or social awkwardness, making even more intelligencers wait for details that can be verified by multiple trustworthy sources. There is still little in-apprehension and there is no risk that trail surveillance on the internet can be overlooked.

The way in which the Lagos newspaper is distributed nowadays is mongrel with the social media surveillance brigades working in parallel with editors who ensure authenticity in an ongoing fashion. This works to spread false information, though one that requires

fresh funds and training (Bakir & McStay, 2018). In practice intelligencers can likely show their own sources, styles, and verification processes to cult (McQuail, 2018). As journalists in Lagos are inquiring about political disinformation they typically mention sanctioned statements or police reporting to counter social media hoax, thus strengthening followership trust and revealing false stories. Fact checking business are crucial in journalistic practice. Nigerian news associations including those in Lagos team up with independent fact checking associations to counter claims spread on the internet (Shu et al., 2020).

During COVID- 19 epidemic, viral misinformation regarding treatment styles required intelligencers to cross-reference sanctioned health agency updates prior to the dissemination, undermining the significance of systematic verification protocols. When it comes to speed and melodrama, one of the greatest is the fight of “instant update” being anticipated by the cult to ensure the current is real and false. Cult expect real-time updates, but the content on social media can make the world falsely. Lagos intelligencers frequently encounter quandaries between reporting breaking news incontinently and delay for verification (Hermida, 2019). One example of this is viral reports of erecting defeat

Contextualization of news has gained significance. intelligencers must give environment to help the misapprehension of social media content (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2018). For illustration, rumors about demurrers in Lagos may be exaggerated on social media; intelligencers contextualize these events by including sanctioned statements, literal background, and vindicated viewer accounts to present accurate information. Professional integrity requires intelligencers to repel sensationalism. The appeal of high engagement on social media can incentivize inflated captions or deficient reporting (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2019).

Intelligencers in Lagos who stand by professional ethics will not amplify the misinformation on social media actually when it attracts a lot of attention and instead focus on delicacy rather than virality. Never-ending training is the key to the modern intelligencer. Digital verification, ethical reporting and social media monitoring workshops prepare the Lagos intelligencers to address the tricky information geography (Bakir and McStay, 2018).

To provide an example, the training on how to relate deepfakes or manipulated images is important so that the intelligencers are able to know what is real and what is misinformation. The use of social media and journalism in crisis reporting is depicted in Lagos. In cases of civic extremities that are comparable to business gridlocks, fires, or cataracts, social media has often become the source of rapid-fire reports, some of which are accurate and others false, and intelligencers have to offer these reports responsibly and with the welfare of the community in mind (Vosoughi et al., 2018). Cooperative journalism has emerged as a reaction to the demands of misinformation. The Lagos newsrooms collate with the communal associations, tech businesses, and independent fact-checkers to support and share of the information that is correct (Shu et al., 2020).

To illustrate, health head reporting often entails hookups with Lagos State Ministry of Health to combat fake news on treatment style. Responsibility to the population is still a pillar. Lagos intelligencers are becoming less liable to crimes that are enhanced with social media. The corrections and interpretations are placed online to ensure credibility and trust (McQuail, 2018). This obligation strengthens the ethical standards and fights the reputational effects of misinformation. Adaption to digital culture must be done. Modern-day journalism demands incorporating multimedia and interactive capabilities as well as real- time analytics to attract cultural (Hermida, 2019). Intellectually, the practice of journalism in Lagos requires constantly covering social media, fact-checking, refuting fake

news, and educating cult to distinguish realistic information. This continued predicament guarantees that professional journalism will be a reliable source of information in the environment of social media misinformation.

V. Conclusion

The proliferation of social media has fundamentally transformed the production, circulation and consumption of news in Lagos State, while simultaneously creating favourable conditions for the rapid spread of fake news and misinformation. The discussion demonstrates that misinformation is sustained by speed, emotional appeal, repetition, confirmation bias, source ambiguity and the participatory nature of social media platforms. Through the lens of Uses and Gratifications Theory, users are not merely passive recipients of information but actively select, interpret and share content according to their informational, social and emotional needs. This behaviour, combined with weakened traditional gatekeeping and the commercial and political incentives surrounding online content, has placed considerable pressure on professional journalism and contributed to challenges of credibility, verification and public trust.

The study therefore underscores the need for journalism in Lagos State to adapt without compromising its fundamental professional and ethical responsibilities. Journalists and news organisations must strengthen digital verification, fact-checking, contextual reporting, continuous professional training and collaboration with credible fact-checking organisations and public institutions. Equally important is the development of stronger media and digital literacy among social media users so that audiences can critically evaluate information before accepting or sharing it. Ultimately, addressing misinformation requires a shared responsibility involving journalists, media organisations, technology platforms, regulators and audiences. Sustaining credible journalism in the digital environment will depend on the ability of these stakeholders to balance the demand for speed and engagement with the enduring principles of accuracy, accountability, verification and public interest.

References

- Adeyemi, O. (2016). The dynamics of fake news dissemination on social media platforms. *Journal of Media Studies*, 8(2), 112–125.
- Akinreti, T. (2021). Social media and the #EndSARS movement: Mobilization and misinformation. *African Journal of Communication Research*, 13(3), 78–94.
- American Press Institute. (2017). The elements of journalism: What newspeople should know and the public should expect. American Press Institute.
- Bakir, V., & McStay, A. (2018). Fake news and the economy of emotions: Problems, causes, solutions. *Digital Journalism*, 6(2), 154–175.
- Ezeah, G., Asogwa, P., & Edogor, R. (2023). Media literacy and fake news detection in Nigeria. *Journal of Mass Communication Studies*, 14(2), 90–107.
- Fishman, J. (2019). Social media and ethnic tensions in Cameroon. *African Media Studies*, 7(1), 15–28.
- Hermida, A. (2019). Social media and the news: The circulation of information in a digital age. *Journalism Studies*, 20(1), 21–34.
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2019). Social media: Back to the roots and back to the future. *Journal of Systems and Information Technology*, 21(3), 10–26.

- Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2014). *The elements of journalism: What newspeople should know and the public should expect* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Three Rivers Press.
- Lentz, R., Sigal, L., & Mukasa, M. (2019). Fake news and elections in Kenya and South Africa: The role of social media. *African Journal of Political Communication*, 6(2), 56–70.
- Lewandowsky, S., Ecker, U. K. H., & Cook, J. (2020). Beyond misinformation: Understanding and coping with the “post-truth” era. *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition*, 9(4), 353–369.
- McQuail, D. (2018). *McQuail’s mass communication theory* (7th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Ogunleye, O., & Akinola, T. (2020). Social media and news dissemination in Nigeria: Opportunities and challenges. *Nigerian Journal of Communication Studies*, 12(1), 40–55.
- Ojebuyi, B. (2020). Social media misinformation and journalism in Nigeria. *African Media Studies Journal*, 8(1), 23–40.
- Oso, L., & Pate, U. (2020). Digital journalism in Nigeria: Challenges and opportunities. *Media and Communication Studies*, 12(2), 45–58.
- Oyeyemi, S., Gabarron, E., & Wynn, R. (2020). COVID-19 misinformation: Health literacy and public health implications in Nigeria. *Health Information Science and Systems*, 8(1), 1–7.
- Pennycook, G., & Rand, D. (2019). Fighting misinformation on social media using crowdsourced judgments of news source quality. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 116(7), 2521–2526.
- Pew Research Center. (2019). Social media fact sheet. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/social-media/>
- Rubin, A. M. (2009). Uses-and-gratifications perspective on media effects. In J. Bryant & M. B. Oliver (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (pp. 165–184). Routledge.
- Shu, K., Wang, S., & Liu, H. (2020). Understanding user profiles on social media for misinformation detection. *ACM Transactions on Information Systems*, 38(3), 1–25.
- Tufekci, Z. (2018). How social media triggers mob violence: WhatsApp and rumors in India. *Journal of Social Media Studies*, 4(3), 12–25.
- Vanguard. (2019, February 25). Fake news causes panic in Lagos during 2019 general elections. Vanguard Newspaper. <https://www.vanguardngr.com>
- Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., & Aral, S. (2018). The spread of true and false news online. *Science*, 359(6380), 1146–1151.
- Wardle, C., & Derakhshan, H. (2018). *Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policymaking*. Council of Europe.