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DISSECTING FAKE NEWS AND HALF- TRUTHS ON SOCIAL MEDIA IN NIGERIA

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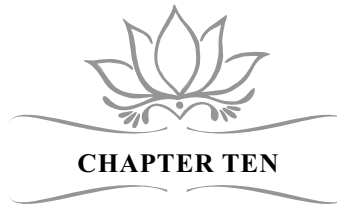
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CHAPTER TEN

DISSECTING FAKE NEWS AND HALF-TRUTHS ON SOCIAL MEDIA IN NIGERIA

Christian Chinedu ODOEMELAM & Queen Ekemeye ODOEMELAM

Introduction

Fake news has become a major issue in international debates in recent times. Studies show that fake news is not a new phenomenon. It has been in existence as far back as 1925 (Baum, Lazer and Mele, 2017; See Harpers' *Fake news and the public*, 1925) and gained popularity during the US presidential elections in 2016 (Silverman, 2016). The significant point about fake news today is the speed at which it is diffused among the people—a situation which has been occasioned by the internet and several social media platforms and smartphones. Research (Anyadike, Okeibunor and Odoemelum, 2013; Okoro, 2015) suggests that social media is more diffused among young people and thus, may be more susceptible to the negative effects associated with social media of which fake news is predominant.

Fake news has been associated with a lot of negative attributes, some of which include the potentials to create panic, fear and violence (Baum, Lazer & Mele, 2017). Given the negative outcomes of fake news, many countries of the world including Nigeria, have called for actions to curb it. Hence, the fight against fake news has become a global trend with many technology companies like Google, Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp involved in the global fight (Muhammed, 2018).

Fake news is any information that is deliberately meant to be wholly or largely false, or meant to mislead. As Gallagher and Magid (2017) observed, motivations for creating fake news include intention to cause harm, unrest. However when mild, it is usually used as a prank. Others do it for financial gains in order to direct traffic to their websites, support or oppose a cause, or a political candidate. However, most fake news is intended to deceive. According to BBC (2018) the lack of official information in some cases has created a vacuum which is almost readily filled by rumours. This only serves to perpetuate fake news and its effects. On the other hand, Nigeria's Minister of information, Lai Muhammed is of the view that media campaigns are necessary to sensitise all Nigerians to the dangers posed by fake news, to the peace and security, and indeed

the corporate existence of Nigeria, and the fact that each and every Nigerian has a role to play in curtailing the spread of fake news.

Many reasons have been adduced to why fake news must be addressed seriously. There are evidences that fake news has led to confusion, state of emergency, restiveness and apprehension. The increasing case of fake news in Nigeria is alarming (*Premium Times*, 2018). Given the propensity of fake news to foment trouble, there have been calls from many quarters in Nigeria to criminalise the act of spreading fake news. Part of that call was institutionalised when the Federal government of Nigeria, through the ministry of information, launched a campaign against fake news on July 11, 2018. As the ministry of information noted, though the federal government has been calling national attention to the issue of fake news, the timing of the launch was not unconnected to the role of fake news in aggravating the various crises in the country as well as the need to check the menace of fake news ahead of the 2019 elections.” (NAN, July 13, 2018).

However, curbing or eradicating fake news seems to be an impossible task, with the growing diffusion of the social media among the polity, especially among teenagers and young adults. This has led to an increase in calls for greater regulation of social media platforms (Anyadike, Okeibunor and Odoemelam, 2012). Research suggests that fake news is really a symptom of much larger problems, including the lack of media literacy (Lagger and Magid, n.d). Added to the above concern, is the lack of unanimity to what constitutes fake news and how fake news could be identified. This has also raised the question of whether fake news peddlers do it deliberately or they are ignorant news disseminators? It is difficult to answer this question out rightly. Perhaps a more positive way to begin this interrogation is to look at the concept of media literacy.

Media literacy is the ability to think critically about the information we create and consume. It includes ability to distinguish facts from opinion and to understand how media can sometimes be used to persuade people. Media literacy is important because it is the basis for being informed as well as being a critical thinker in a world where technology and media are ubiquitous; helping to immunize people against undue persuasion and false information (Gallagher & Magid, n.d; Duggan, 2013). News demands some level of literacy for people to access, use, analyse and evaluate gainfully. Hence, researchers (Anyadike, 2018; Holton & Chyl, 2012) have expressed concern over the ability of online news consumers to make sense of what they consume in the midst of information overload. Findings show that performance or audience's quality of decision correlates positively with the amount of information he or she receives. The emergence of digital media and social network platforms has made the mass of people, media consumers as well as content providers (Anyadike, 2018). This also raises the question of media literacy as a prerequisite for making sense of the myriad of information available on various social media platforms, hence making media literacy a core part of the adaptability strategy for living in a media saturated world.

Media literacy also entails equipping one with the skill to analyse and evaluate messages for accuracy (Anyadike, 2018). It is also the ability to effectively comprehend and utilize any form of Mass Communication. In sum, it presupposes that media consumers need to possess the skill for better interpretation of media contexts. Baran (2004) enumerates attributes associated with media literacy:

1. The ability and willingness to make an effort to understand content, to pay attention, and filter noise.
2. An understanding of, and respect for, the power of media messages.

3. The ability to distinguish emotional from reasoned reactions, when responding to content and to act accordingly.
4. Development of heightened expectations of media content.
5. A knowledge of genre conventions and the ability to recognise when they are being mixed.
6. The ability to think critically above media messages, no matter how credible their sources are.
7. A knowledge of the internal language of various media and the ability to understand its effects, no matter how complex they are.

News demands some level of literacy for people to access, use, analyse and evaluate gainfully for the purpose of decision making. We argue in this paper that, making media literacy a core part of the adaptability strategy for living in the contemporary news and information saturated world, might mitigate the influence of fake news and half-truths on social media. Hence, due to the growing cases of fake news and the social challenges associated with fake news peddling, this paper examines the potentials of media literacy as part of the strategy to address the issue of eradicating fake news. Specifically, the study focuses on using media literacy as a check against the effect and influence of fake news.

Statement of Problem

The spread of fake news and rumours has been associated with restiveness, panic, ethnic and religious conflicts, with some resulting in the destruction of lives and property (Muhammed, 2018). Given this scenario, there has been a global response to address the spread of fake news. The Federal government of Nigeria in 2017, called on the global community, particularly the UN, to assist her fight fake news (News Agency of Nigeria (NAN, 2017). There has recently been a global industry action to control the spread of fake news. Google has set the pace in this aspect by committing over 300 million dollars to fight fake news (British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC, 2017). Facebook has taken out about 583 million fake accounts, Twitter 70 million, while WhatsApp has come out with the software to detect fake news. Despite these efforts, the spread of fake news goes on unabated. Perhaps there is more to be done. It is possible that these efforts had only treated the symptoms and not the causative factors.

A study by Pew (2016) showed that fake news influence and effect is associated with lack of media literacy, with those who are not media literate being among the defaulters and culprits. The study further averred that most media users are unable to differentiate between what is fake news and real news. Other aspects of media illiteracy are the inability to tell whether the photograph accompanying a piece of information was manipulated or real and whether a piece of information is an advertisement or objective news. Due to the lack of ability to know what constitutes fake news, some social media users have shared or posted fake news items without ascertaining their veracity; while others who knew, did it with the intention to mislead the populace. It is clear that the diffusion of social media technology and the corresponding social ills accruing from this phenomenon require an inquiry into how to address these challenges. However, despite the academic discussions on the eradication of fake news and half-truths, there is still a gap in ascertaining the potency of media literacy in fighting fake news and how media literacy moderates understanding and approach to fake news and half-truths.

Given this backdrop, this study examined media literacy among young adults who are active on social media and how this literacy or lack of it moderates their understanding and approach to fake news.

Objectives of the Study

This paper was guided by the following objectives:

1. To ascertain young adults' understanding of media literacy ,
2. Analyse the influence of media literacy in the understanding of fake news and half-truths among young adults,
3. To examine whether young adults are aware that social media diffusion has led to the spread of fake news,
4. Ascertain whether young adults know the implications of fake news and half-truths.

Theoretical Framework

Two theories are adopted in discussing the phenomenon under study and they are: Social Constructivism Theory and the Disruptive Innovation (Technology) Theory. The perspectives that these theories espouse are germane to the issues in this study.

The Social Constructivism Theory

The social constructivism theory supports the notion of media literacy, from which this paper argues that media literacy could solve the social problems introduced by fake news and misinformation. Understanding fake news and half-truths as products of information society and how media literacy moderates the approach to information and news is part of arguments contained in the constructivists' world view. On the other hand, the disruptive innovation (technology) theory supports the argument that advances in communication technology has disrupted the media ecosystem such that the credibility of news and their sources are part of the challenges of the internet or technology age. The next few paragraphs discuss the main arguments of these theories.

The social construction theory is associated with Piaget 1962. The theory argues that learning is a social construction. According to the model, real learning can only occur when learners code, process and construct their unique understanding based on their previous experiences. In this way, learners can improve their cognitive ability continuously. Thus, knowledge is the social construction of individuals and others. Most adherents of the social construction viewpoint see news as a social construction. For instance, Tuchman (1978) suggests that news is a social resource whose construction limits the analytic understanding of temporary life. Scholars in this school see the audiences as very active and selective in their use and interpretation of media contents. It follows that, the more the users of media understand the workings and processes of the media (both traditional and social) within the environment and are able to construct their realities, the more they will understand the repercussions of fake news and half-truths.

Constructivists argue that, learners are not only active processors of information, they are also creating and constructing meaning - a pattern which we see play out among social media users who are not only active participants in the sharing and receiving of news, but are also involved in the news construction process (Tuchman, 1978). All human learning is constructed in a context where some types of mediations are used. In this regard, the mediation of the web 2.0 and other social media technologies in contemporary information construction and sharing, serves as a bridge connecting localities. Hence, the new concepts of social network sites that define present media ecosystems.

To Jonassen (1991) audiences and learners are seen as active constructors of meaning, since all media are constructions showing us different versions of reality. For instance, news events and

stories in newspapers are selected, edited in line with the editor's perception, designed and packaged as commodity for audience consumption. Besides, the beliefs, values and opinions of media producers and other variables such as age, gender, culture and socio-economic background influence their gate-keeping function. The theory opposes the idea that learning is passive. On the other hand, constructivism agrees that learning is initiative and positive. It tries to understand how people construct meaning out of what they consume so as to satisfy their objectives.

Developments in the society have necessitated greater emphasis on constructivism by scholars. Duffy and Jonassen (1992) argue that information age and technological capabilities have altered the conceptualisation of learning process as well as re-designing instrumental approaches. Since information is changing and rapidly too, Duffy and Jonassen (1992), also argue that education should centre on the understanding and use of information to solve real world problems, not storing contents. This understanding and use of information to solve the problems of the society serves one of the purposes of media literacy.

The Disruptive Innovation (Technology) Theory (Schumpeter 1942)

The disruptive innovation theory on the other hand, is associated with the works of several scholars (Schumpeter, 1942). However, Schumpeter's ideas of innovations were first honed by Karl Max. Innovation is a concept with multiple meanings. In the most pedestrian perspective, it means something new. In the innovation literature, however, it is often separated from an invention. While an invention is a new idea or a new theoretical model, an innovation is the implementation of this invention in a market or a social setting. An innovation can be based on existing technologies and off-the-shelf products. It implies that existing knowledge is implemented in new contexts and that this opens new possibilities. One of the major contributors of theoretical insights into innovation was Joseph Schumpeter, who was influenced by Karl Marx. Schumpeter was concerned about what caused long-term economic instability. He maintained that economic change, while promoting innovation and growth, generates “gales of creative destruction”.

Disruptive innovation has proved to be a useful analytical tool for understanding how technological innovation has played an important role in shaping and reshaping the communications sphere. The term disruptive innovation as a scholarly concept has its roots in the academic work and theory, promulgated by the Harvard School Professor - Clayton Christensen, in his seminal work “The Innovators Dilemma” (Christensen, 1997). Christensen coined the term to describe a process through which a product or service takes root initially, in simple applications at the bottom of a market and then relentlessly moves up the market, eventually displacing established competitors. These disruptive innovations typically create business threats and opportunities, not nominally predictable from past historical experience and thus require incumbent participants to engage in strategic behaviour and organisational practices that represent a departure from past successful and familiar strategies.

Christensen (2012) notes that disruptive innovation allows a whole new population of consumers at the bottom of the market, access to products and services that were historically only accessible to consumers with a lot of money or skill. Christensen distinguishes between sustaining innovation and disruptive innovation. While disruptive innovation is the one that changes the basis of competition in an industry, for example mainframe computer and personal computers, sustaining innovation perpetuates the current dimensions of performance, for example, Intel developing faster chips and faster chip speed.

The concept of disruptive innovation shows how successful companies can be upended by new technologies that first appear as cheaper products with fewer features, but improve quickly and ultimately take over. This development is one that is common today and can be discerned in all facets of human development, especially since the emergence of technological innovation, digitization and its application to communications. From healthcare, education, banking, transportation, communications and media, commerce to social life; the disruptive impact of innovation can be felt. However common this concept might seem to be, there is no universally acceptable definition as to how distinct it is from non-disruptive (incremental) innovation. Scholars like Selhofer (2012) have however argued that any innovation is disruptive by its nature. The theories of constructivism and disruptive technological innovations as used in this study assist us in explaining how young adults understand media literacy and its influence in understanding fake news and half-truths. The disruptive innovation perspective assists us to interrogate the extent to which young adults are aware that social media diffusion has led to the spread of fake news in effect, creating disruptions in the news and information production processes. Since every innovation has the positive and negative side, the theory assists us to examine whether young adults know the implications of fake news and half-truths.

Methodology

To provide insights on the phenomenon under investigation, the study adopted the focus group discussion (FGD) technique, which is qualitative in nature. The use of qualitative techniques to complement the quantitative outcome data is due to the increasing importance of qualitative approaches in understanding social realities (Chilisa, 2012). Qualitative data are usually descriptive and they provide answers to certain behavioural nuances which may not be ascertained through quantitative methods.

A total of three focus group discussion (FGD) sessions were conducted among young adults in Okada. Young adults were operationalised as males and females within 18-25 years of age. Studies show that teenagers and young adults are more savvy and susceptible to social media (Anyadike, Okeibunor and Odoemelum, 2013; Okoro, Obayi and Odoemelum, 2015). Discussants were selected based on shared characteristics-the dominant which were age category, exposure to both social and mass media. Focus group participants were recruited by snowball sampling via word of mouth based on young adult criterion irrespective of gender. Odoemelum (2015) used this method to recruit a sample of 60 men in a focus group discussion study. Each FGD session was made up of 9-12 discussants. Three facilitators guided the discussions based on the paper's research questions as were represented in the items of the FGD schedule.

The study area consisted of discussants residing in different locations in Okada, Edo State. The cluster sampling technique was adopted in categorising participants into various locations. These consisted of those at the male hostels, female hostels, court road, and farm settlements. The population consisted of young adults of either male or female gender. A total of 33 discussants participated in the discussions.

The focused group participants were a total of 33 participants and were classified as young adults only, with each group consisting of 9-12 participants in each of the selected study areas. The size of each focus group is supported by Ayubu (2012) who suggested a smaller number of participants comprising a focus group session as against a larger group, due to the need for participants to adequately air their views within the limited time which may be difficult with a larger group. Studies (Okonkwo, 2018; Odoemelum, 2015; Griffith, 2011; Hussain, 2003;

Agdajanian, 2002) have used the focus group technique to generate corpus and reliable data.

Data was collected with the aid of a FGD discussion schedule and outline. These data were captured on tapes and note pads. The tapes were transcribed and produced in textual formats. The transcribed tapes were content analysed qualitatively around the issues surrounding media literacy, hate speech and free speech. In addition, focused group discussants were asked to describe what they thought were their understanding of hate speech and free speech. Focus group discussion outlines were adopted from qualitative evidences found in previous literature. The responses to the outlines in this study were transcribed and coded. Patterns of responses were identified based on themes found in previous literature and were placed according to the categories of their codes. Opinions and views which could not be categorized were placed under a new category named: emergent views.

Analysis was based on the phenomenological or theme identification technique which depended on groups within the units of analysis, other than the individual participant. To determine the outcomes in the focus group with regard to the research questions, the theme identification technique was used to categorize and code participants' responses based on their frequency or repetitions. Each identified theme represented a category into which other similar themes were aligned. Themes were coded based on prior categories found in previous studies (Umoiyoho and Inyang-Etoh 2012).

In theme identification, the researcher looked for particular patterns, themes, concerns or responses which are posed repeatedly by the focus-group respondents (Rubin and Rubin, 2004). For instance, when constructing tables to classify data or identify themes, particular understanding of media literacy is listed in the table if it is mentioned by a group; no matter how many times respondents in a particular group mentioned it. The number of groups, not the number of individuals, is used as the denominator.

Data Presentation and Discussion of Findings

The data gathered from the discussion groups are presented and the findings discussed in four sections based on the four objectives of the study. Each section is made up of a title and question items.

UNDERSTANDING OF MEDIA LITERACY

How media literate are the discussants?

(Participants in group A) We know about them. Like television, it helps us to know about reigning things like Big Brother Nigeria, FIFA world Cup. For Whatsapp you can make new friends, while Facebook, you can meet old friends and relations

(Participant in group B) Yes! The information is usually cross checked especially for punctuation marks, correct spelling, to make it clear and they will rearrange some statements.

(Participant in group C) In my opinion before a news get (sic) to the audience, it must be verified, by confirming the source of the news, and the editors double check before it can be sent for printing or broadcasting. Every organization has codes that guide their activities. If the news does not follow those procedures I don't think such information will be given out.

(Participant in group A) The information goes through different stages. It begins with gathering the information, after which the information will be processed. It is during this period that the

gatekeepers (editors) perform their roles. Actually media literacy is all about giving out information.

(Participant in group B) Before any information goes out to the public, it passes through a process. For instance, if one is having doubts about a particular piece of information on social media, you can cross check for accuracy by confirming from other media enterprise. If you cannot find the information on other media platforms, then know that the information is not genuine and factual.

Do discussants think about credibility when they hear or read information on media or when they share information from their mobile phones?

(Participant in group A) There is a difference between opinion and fact, debate, view etc. Most of what the media reports are opinions and not news. But yes, I do raise the question of credibility.

(Participant in group B) I do raise the issue of credibility whenever I hear any information especially on social media.

(Participant in group C) In the mainstream media, you will realize that they usually inform people that particular information is not confirmed, that is if the information has not yet been confirmed by the station or media outlet like BBC. Most times credibility has to do with the source and the reporter handling the issue.

(Participant in group B) Of course I do consider the credibility of information on social media. When I see some, I laugh. While for some like health and politics, I ask questions from people who are more knowledgeable on the subject matter, to ensure that the information is reliable and credible.

The issues discussed in this segment were: how media literate discussants were and whether discussants thought about credibility when they hear or read information on media or when they share information from their mobile phones. The first issue was meant to know how much the discussants knew about the media. For example the processes involved in news dissemination; the ability to differentiate between an advertisement and a real news item. The data points to the fact that the discussants are media literate. These variables could be seen in their description of news trajectory. Media literacy is very important in determining the level of our understanding of what constitutes news, rumour or outright fake news. According to the social construction theory, news is a social resource whose construction limits the analytic understanding of our life. Hence, constructivists see audiences as very active and selective in their use and interpretation of media contents.

Conversely, Anyadike (2018) suggests that understanding media is associated with understanding how and why people engage with news. It also tries to understand how people construct meaning out of what they consume so as to satisfy their objectives. It is concerned with how individuals are influenced by their own news consumption. Literature suggests that media literacy has positive effects on media knowledge, criticism, perceived realism, influence, behaviour, beliefs, attitudes, and self-efficacy (Jeong, Cho and Hwang, 2012; Hobb and Frog, 2003). Jeong et al (2012) suggest that media literacy is a key intervention strategy to protect against media effect.

INFLUENCE OF MEDIA LITERACY IN THE UNDERSTANDING OF FAKE NEWS AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

Do discussants believe all news on social media?

(Participant in group A) *We do not believe everything we hear or see or read.*

(Participant in group B): *No.! Some of the information is blasphemous, some is not real, and some is meant to extort money. Political parties can also use it against each other. They use it very well during campaigns and some of the things they say are not true.*

(Participant in group C) *It is not possible to believe all news on social media.*

(Participant in group C) *It boils down to what we have been saying. We can just believe what we see on social.*

(Participant in group B) *To me, social media is the least reliable source of information.*

(Participant in group A) *I can't just believe everything I see on social media. It is impossible to do so.*

(Participant in group C) *I feel some of these writers on social media are attention seekers. They can just come up with anything just to seek attention for themselves.*

Are discussants not bothered with unverified information on social media?

(Participant A) *No. Not bothered at all.*

(Participant B) *Not bothered at all (collective response).*

(Participant C) *No. Like when they said the new VC of our school wants to stop summer, we almost died oooo. Then we later found out that it was not true. Then the case of the mass slaughter at the Lagos Ore road which was also later confirmed to be false. They even brought out a picture of one massacre that took place some years back, added another write-up and voice note as well, that it was happening meanwhile it was fake news.*

(Participant A) *Social media has no control; people can come out and post anything like in terms of spelling, language and the likes. It is usually garbage in and garbage out. Although one can get real information from the social media but that does not remove the fact that it lacks credibility.*

(Participant B) *Yes! Sincerely, I am bothered about information on social media. We are fortunate to be educated to know the dangers of social media but some persons who are not so educated may not know that some information on social media is not true. It is truly a thing to bother about.*

(Participant C) *I am bothered because most of the fake news we hear today all emanated from the social media. Also, a lot of unverified news is being spread through social media. Some people take the information they get on social media very seriously which should create concern. Although they are also credible news but the fake supersedes the credible ones.*

(Participant)- *The word fake news came as a result of social media.*

How do discussants differentiate between fake news and credible news?

(Participant A) Well, you will realize that most of the information on social media is like love stories. But sincerely it is difficult to differentiate between fake news and credible news because they are all news.

(Participant) Well to me, I feel it is easy to differentiate between fake news and credible news. Fake news usually does not have credible sources. You will realize that the writer just writes everything from his or her imagination. Meanwhile one of the basic requirements of a news article is a credible source, which most fake news does not contain. I often ensure that there are attributed sources in the information. Once the sources of the information are not attributed, I know immediately that something is wrong somewhere.

(Participant B) Other ways to differentiate between fake news and credible news is through the text. When you check some of this fake news, you will see a lot of typographical errors in the person's write-up.

(Participant A) It depends on the source. That is if it is coming from a???

(Participant) It is hard to differentiate between fake news and accurate news.

How does knowledge of how media operate help in handling fake news?

(Participant A) Knowledge is power, if you are not knowledgeable about something it will be difficult to protect yourself from the dangers associated with such a thing. And so when you are enlightened and informed about fake news, you can protect yourself against it.

(Participant B) Knowledge is very important when it comes to handling or approaching fake news on social media. My knowledge of how the media operates has gone a long way in helping me determine what is false and what is true.

(Participant C) In order to know what is right and what is wrong, you need to be knowledgeable about that thing. Same applies to fake news. The knowledge of media operations is one of the steps by which we can tackle fake news.

(Participants) Yes, we know how media operates and it has helped us in identifying which news is fake or credible,

The concern of this segment of the discussion included whether discussants believe all news on social media, and whether discussants are not bothered with unverified information on social media. The discussion also addressed how discussants differentiate between fake news and credible news, how the knowledge of media operations help discussants in handling fake news. First, it was apparent that discussants do not believe everything they read, hear or see on social media. Perhaps it might be the case that the discussants' level of media literacy moderated their experience. This is more so, since audience level of education is associated with their uses of and gratification from media items including news. Unverified information on social media is a factor to be concerned with, but the discussants are not bothered about it because their prior knowledge of fake news on social media serves as a gate-keeper. The gate-keeping theory by

Kurt Lewin (1947) suggests that there are factors that serve as criteria in the news selection process. Again, it is obvious that detecting fake news is not so easy. This agrees with Metzger et al., (2010), the fact that misinformation is mixed with other content and that many stories get little attention from people means that traditional measure of quality cannot distinguish misinformation from truth. This requires some level of media literacy.

SOCIAL MEDIADIFFUSION AND THE SPREAD OFFAKE NEWS

The spread of fake news is made easier by the diffusion of social media, especially through smartphones. In this segment of the discussion, the discussants were allowed to express their views as to their awareness of the phenomenon. Discussants were expected to share their experiences on any news on social media that has turned out to be fake news.

Is there any information on social media you once believed, that turned out to be false?

(Participants in group A) Yes, for example, during the Ebola outbreak people were asked to bathe with salt and hot water which resulted to death.

(Participant in group B) Yes. There was a time they said that government will be monitoring social media and that they should share the information across the country which was not true. Also there was a time when information was spread across that people should not sleep with their phone on their bed by 12am a light will flash across Nigeria that might cause radiation and this was later confirmed to be false.

(Participant C) Yes. I have. There was a case of massacre along Lagos Ore road that people were being killed and in the message there was a picture, a voice note as well as a text accompanying the message. I was touched when I saw this information only to discover that this information was false

(Participant D)- There was also the case of the invasion of the former DSS Boss' house and office where millions of naira was discovered. This information was accompanied by a motion picture in the video format. Eventually this turned out to be untrue.

Are discussants aware that fake news has become predominant in the era of social media?

(Participant in group A) Yes it is true. Fake news has rapidly spread especially in this era of social media.

(Participant in group B) Yes. It is worse because it is now easier to pass information. Anybody from anywhere can decide to pass any information which sometimes is not true and they cut across the young and old. Group chats are created every day which aids the passing of such information.

(Participant in group C)- To me it is not strong. It is always prominent during election period. It is predominant (sic) in specific period of time, like during crisis, festive period. But in normal situation I don't think fake news is predominant

(Participant) Well if you ask me, fake news has become predominant in the era of social media. In the sense that if you go back through history when social media was not prominent or spread across the globe, the issue of fake news was not there. But in this era of social media, fake news

has become the order of the day. To the extent (sic) that the mainstream media are now falling victims of fake news propagation.

(Participant)- Even in television and newspapers we have fake news but there is no immediate feedback to counter such fake news. Government can give fake news. Like if they spent 50 million on a project, they can come up and say they spent 100 million on the project.

(Participant) Even though there was fake news then, it was not rampant compared to now that there is social media. What is fake news? It is reporting something that is false, that has the capacity to cause misinformation. Any information that is not verifiable is fake news.

The discussions on social media diffusion and the spread of fake news, bothered on two issues: the experience of having heard a news item on social media that turned out to be false and the knowledge that the spread of social media had created the preponderance of fake news. The trend of discussion among the different discussion groups suggests an understanding that social media is implicated in the spread of fake news-suggesting a disruption of the social order. This holds true with regard to the theory of disruptive innovation in which the social media play very critical role. The disruptive innovation perspective is a useful analytical tool for understanding how technological innovation has played an important role in shaping and reshaping the communications sphere. For instance, Christensen (2012) notes that an innovation that is disruptive allows a whole new population of consumers at the bottom of the market access to products and services that were historically only accessible to consumers with a lot of money or skill. This is axiomatic in analysing the mainstream media which was once the exclusive reserve of a select few, and the social media which has democratised information and communication.

THE IMPLICATIONS OFFAKE NEWS

Evidences abound, suggesting that fake news impacts negatively on the society. In this segment of the discussion, participants are given the opportunity to analyse the effects with personal experiences and evidences.

Can you share your experiences of the possible negative effects of fake news on persons and the society?

(Participant in group A) Depression, panic, phobia, sometimes death.

(Participant in group B) It can lead to premature death. Like the case of Ebola when people were asked to bathe with salt. It led to many deaths. It can create fear and panic.

(Participant in group C) Fake news can create hatred in the mind of one group against another which in turn can lead to conflict.

(Participant in group D) Fake news has more negative effects than any other effect you can think of. It breeds disagreement and misinformation which can have health implications, economic implications as well as social implication.

(Participant): Hmmm! people really like fake news ooooo... the topic sometimes is very interesting. For example if somebody should post information now that there will be no school today because of Eclipse of the Sun and Moon, everybody will be happy. When parents come to take their children home due to passing of the information that the Oba of Benin is searching for seven heads to bury the former Oba. Such information usually comes with all seriousness and at

the end of the day you will discover that it was not true.

The finding with regard to knowing the implications or consequences of fake news is striking. The discussants are quite aware of the consequences. For instance, the experience of a member of one of the discussion groups in Ebola stands out. It clearly shows that young people know the personal harm that fake news causes. The reason for some who engage in it is not clear in the literature. According to Lazer et al (2017) majority of people who engage in propagating fake news deliberately do it for selfish and unethical gains. However, Gallagher and Magid (2017) are of the view that not everything that is inaccurate is necessarily a deliberate lie. Gallagher and Magid warn that without intent to deceive, falsehood should not be considered fake news. This suggests that the intention to cause harm may be lacking in such instances and that ignorance is implicated instead. Perhaps this understanding underlines the need for policy to emphasise media literacy across all levels.

Conclusions

This paper has examined how the explosion of social media have defined the present media ecosystem across the world, where in many countries, Facebook Twitter, Instagram and Whatsapp have become major sources of information creation and sharing. In Nigeria, the experience is that there are over 26 million active Facebook users, with Whatsapp increasingly becoming one of the most popular means of interpersonal information sharing platform. Added to this, is the rapid growth of smartphones that has resulted in the quick and easy spread of rumour on social media. It was also pointed out that fake news is mostly predominant in times of increased political activities. An example is the 2019 General elections in Nigeria, with fake news defining several aspects of the election process. To say that the Nigerian body language should spell zero tolerance for fake news in the light of its consequences might be stating the obvious.

However, eradicating fake news might continue to pose an impossible task as social media use continues to diffuse among the polity, especially among teenagers and young adults. Media literacy seems to be a more innovative approach to the fight. *Fake news is really a symptom of much larger problems, including the lack of media literacy.* While industry effort at combating fake news has been quite commendable, there are other critical issues that ought to be incorporated in the overall fight. Our study has shown the importance of media literacy in the fight against fake news. For now, the ball seems to find itself again in the court of the mainstream media and communication educators. But their efforts may not be significant without a determined will of policy to match words with action, by creating an atmosphere where there is media education.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn from the discussions:

1. A sustained effort to create user education in terms of media literacy has become very desirable to match the effects of the disruptive innovations in social media fake news. This education will form a baseline policy approach to the understanding of the media, news and information among social media users, especially among young adults.
2. One of the ways to improve literacy of the media is to ensure that the mainstream media introduces intense media literacy as part of their broadcast programming and social responsibility.
3. Given that fake news peddlers are more active in times of political activities, the voter education unit of Nigeria's Independent Electoral Commission should regularly embark on intensive media literacy campaigns.

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