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## **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND THE SPREAD OF FAKE NEWS**

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

# FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND THE SPREAD OF FAKE NEWS

*Alex Tokunbo ADAJA & Felix Olajide TALABI*

### Introduction

Every human society, especially in the contemporary period, recognizes the importance of information in their daily activities, interactions, relationships and aspirations, such that the quest for information surpasses available vehicles of information dissemination even with digital media in that not every iota of information can be captured in the new media. Information is power, and it is key to the progress of human communities because it performs vital roles ranging from education, enlightenment, information, peace-building to cultural regeneration and rebirth. To underscore the imperative of information, many nations of the world, especially democratically organized nations constitutionally provided for press freedom and enacted Freedom of Information (FOI) Laws to give the citizenry unrestricted access to public information and records. The FOI laws afford every citizen, regardless of creed, colour or status, the right to request and obtain information that is of public interest from government officials, agencies and parastatals in order to be adequately informed, and to promote quality participation, good governance and accountability on the part of the government.

Thus, with the right of access to public information and documents given to every citizen, it is possible to ensure that fake news becomes an anathema in a country like Nigeria where democracy is just gradually gaining a foothold, and where all rights and freedoms are constitutionally guaranteed. To a considerable extent, Nigeria's Fourth Republic has increasingly observed most citizens' rights, privileges and freedoms as entrenched in the constitution as well as those prescribed by both national and international agencies and organisations.

However, the dimension of the fake news phenomenon has become a thing of serious concern to governments, organizations, agencies (local and international), scholars and well-meaning citizens. The pervasiveness of fake news and the attendant consequences have become a serious threat to democratic sustainability, especially in nascent democracies in the developing nations of the world like Nigeria. To sustain and preserve democracy and democratic institutions,

information consumers must be critical of information handed over to them before consuming or using such information. The study admits that, though the FOI Law conferred on all citizens the privilege to be both content creators and consumers; stakeholders and other information users must take proactive measures in evaluating information content before use in order to mitigate the adverse consequences of fake news in the quest for democratic sustainability.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

This study is anchored on two theories, Source Credibility Theory and the SMART Model. *Source Credibility Theory* developed by Carl Hovland and Walter Weiss in 1951 remains relevant (Anaeto, Onabajo and Osifeso, 2008). The theory emphasizes that one of the variables that communication source has control over is the choice of source. To achieve effective communication, the right source must be selected. Anaeto et al. (2008) while referring to Hovland and Weiss (1951) affirmed that news or information from 'a high-credibility source' usually results in behavioral change unlike news that people regard as being from 'a low-credibility source'. The theory presupposes that people tend to believe and act appropriately, if it could be established that a credible source produced the message. This underpins the power of the consumer to reject information (messages) that the source could not verify or in which the source is a suspect. The theory recognizes the fact that every citizen is born free and has the right to generate, acquire or disseminate information; it however sensitizes the attention of every information consumer to the fact that, the competence as well as the credibility of the source of the information must be considered before accepting, consuming and using or spreading such information. Source Credibility Theory supports the presumption that news consumers should evaluate the source of their information before accepting the ideas in the message consumed, or spreading same. Doing this will help overcome the challenge posed by fake news.

The SMART Model of Leon, Esmeralda and Huss (2017) corroborates the Source Credibility Theory extending the idea by introducing other factors critical for appraising information. The model posits that credibility, authenticity, objectivity and logical consistency test must be applied by news consumers to determine what to accept and consume. According to Leon et al. (2017), the acronym SMART stands for, S- Source, M- Motive, A- Authority, R- Review, and T- Two Source Test. Besides gauging the source identity as indicator of trustworthiness, their motive, authority, their consistency with other sources may reveal the quality of the information being offered. The major thrust of the model is anchored on the fact that fake news can be controlled through consumers' critical evaluation of messages or information (using these points highlighted with the acronym) before accepting to consume, use or spread such information. Any information that fails the test must be treated as fake news. Both the Source Credibility Theory and the SMART Model emphasized the vital position of information consumers in mitigating fake news phenomenon. Thus the onus lies on the receivers of information/news to properly screen every information to ascertain its genuineness and authenticity before accepting, consuming or spreading such information.

### **Freedom of Information (FOI): A Conceptual Clarification**

As a precursor to freedom of information, freedom of expression conferred on every citizen the right to receive and impart information. Many Human Rights Declarations and International Charters conferred on every citizen the freedom to actively seek information as well as the freedom to share or disseminate information. Other rights, such as Freedom of Association, Freedom of Expression and Freedom of the Press are related to Freedom of Information. For example, Freedom of the Press strictly describes the right of media workers (Journalists) to gather, process and publish information without prior restraint. The 1999 Federal Republic of

Nigeria Constitution in Section 39 (i & ii) states that “Every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions, and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference. . . every person shall be entitled to own, establish and operate any medium for the dissemination of information, ideas and opinions”. The provision gives a 'dual right' to every citizen, that is, the right to hold or harbour any opinion or view; and the right to express such opinion or view using his/her choice of medium/media, regardless of its genuineness or otherwise. It is notable, that Freedom of the Press limits the right to a group of people, that is, media workers (Osinbajo and Fogam, 1991). They are legally granted the right to access, process and disseminate information considered to be in the public interest. In distinguishing between freedom of the press and freedom of information, Alabi (2007, p.66) states; “press freedom is the right or freedom of the press to publish without prior restraint, while freedom of information is the right of journalists and other Nigerians to have unhindered access to public records and documents”. Freedom of Information Law confers on every citizen young or old, male or female, the right to actively seek information considered to be in the interest of the public from government officials and agencies. As encapsulated in the Nigeria Federal Government Gazette of December 8, 1999, and expressly captured in the Freedom of Information Act 2011, Freedom of Information Act is described as

*An act to make public records and information more freely available, provide for public access to public records and information, protect public records and information to the extent consistent with the public interest and the protection of personal privacy, protect serving public officers from adverse consequences of disclosing certain kinds of official information without authorization and establish procedures for the achievement of those purposes and; for related matters.*

It is gratifying to state that the Nigerian Freedom of Information Law as captured in the Freedom of Information Act 2011 is all encompassing. The law explicitly captured every area that could lead to further controversy. Among the specific provisions of the FOI law are stated below:

- i. It guarantees citizens' access to both public records and information.
- ii. It makes public interest paramount in the quest for public information.
- iii. It protects public officers from adverse consequences for disclosing official information.
- iv. It provides procedures to be followed by applicants.
- v. It states enforcement procedures as well as the punishment for every erring official.

It is imperative to point out that, freedom of information contains two essential types of right of access. According to Bittner (1989:356), freedom of information guarantees public access to: (i) Meetings of government bodies, and (ii) Documents that are classified or are part of public official's files and reflect possible corrupt activities in government. In line with the submission of Bittner (1989), the Nigerian Freedom of Information Act 2011 explicitly captured information that may be requested for by the citizenry to include "documents and information stored in whatever form including written, electronic, visual image, sound, audio recording, etc." (Freedom of Information Act, 2011).

Highlighting the components of the Nigeria Freedom of Information Law, before Presidential assent in 2011, Alabi (2007; 69) submitted that, the FOI Law has brought about:

- (i) Declassification of public information as being secret
- (ii) Free access to public information

- (iii) Right of Disclosure of public information by public servants without consequences, and
- (iv) Enforceable right of access to public information in the Court of Law.

It is instructive to point out that, in addition to other rights and freedoms, such as freedom of expression, freedom of association, being enjoyed by the citizenry; the Freedom of Information Law “specifies and negotiates the process of accessing information that is in the hand of government which can be subject to state security” (Tsebee, 2012, p.108). Reiterating the imperatives of Freedom of Information Law; the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (2002) Declaration, as cited by Alabi: (2007, p.67), states that “public bodies hold information not for themselves but as custodians of the public good, and everyone has the right to access this information”. Thus, on account of the Nigeria Freedom of Information Act, every Nigerian has the legal backing to request for information as well as confirm the veracity of any information before consuming and spreading such information. The provision forecloses the lacuna that hitherto encouraged misinformation, disinformation, fake news, rumour or speculation. Thus, misinformation or fake news can only arise when mischief is intended.

### **Understanding the Concept 'Fake News'**

To put fake news in a proper perspective, it is necessary to first operationalize the concept, 'news'. News could be defined as a comprehensive account or report of an event or occurrence. And, according to Tuchman (1978, p.1), “news aims to tell us what we want to know, need to know and should know”. For any report to qualify as news, it must be comprehensive; it must contain all necessary facts and details. These facts and details must be accurate. Whosoever reports an event or occurrence, according to Ufuophu Biri, “should not toy with facts. He should report them accurately and unbiasedly” (2006, p.12). Thus, anything contrary to the definition above is 'fake news'. Fake news subsists when facts and figures in a particular account or story are intentionally distorted. According to Gans news is considered distorted when

*it favoured one or another ideology, or was unfair to one or another set of public officials. . .it was overtly superficial, too concerned with personalities at the expense of issues, or overtly given to dramatic action and exaggeration; because it was too preoccupied with official sources and with media events rather than with actualities, or because it reported too much social disorder or other bad news. (1980, p.304),*

Fake news, according to Allcott and Gentzkow refers to “...news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false, and could mislead readers” (2017, p.213). Thus, for any news to be referred to as fake news, it must be intentionally and deliberately distorted. Fake news can be described as any account or report or story that is deliberately and intentionally fabricated with no traceable and verifiable source, intended to misinform, mislead and persuade people to take a particular course of action which ordinarily may not have been taken. Fake news are usually presented as facts, and readers are made to believe that the stories are true. It is important to note that, fake news are not just errors, mistakes or omissions in stories or news but errors or omissions deliberately or intentionally inputted. In mainstream media, errors of fact, omissions, mistakes, do occur. In most cases, retractions are made, and readers are notified of the errors, and such organizations normally express or publish their regret.

### **Historical Trends and Dimensions of Fake News**

Fake news as a phenomenon has become a thing of great concern to individuals, groups, organizations, societies and governments alike because of its phenomenal increase,

pervasiveness and vulnerability of democratic institutions and processes to it. Reflecting on the trends and dimensions of fake news in the recent time, Nelson (2017) posited that fake news has become a powerful and sinister force in the news media environment. However, it is important to note that fake news is not a new phenomenon. Although, it may be difficult to say precisely when and where it started; it is somewhat reasonable, to regard fake news as having been a phenomenon for long and it shall continue to be with us. According to Shu, Silva, Wang, Tang, & Liu (2017) fake news has been in existence for a long time, nearly the same time as news began to circulate widely after the invention of the printing press in 1439. Thus, it can be said that fake news pre-dated the invention of the printing press.

The Holy Bible makes it clear that the instruction God gave to the first man on earth, Adam, was distorted by the serpent while relaying the message to Adam's wife, Eve. God had instructed Adam not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the midst of the garden; and that the day he eats from it; he shall surely die. Genesis 3:4-5 states that, “. . .and the serpent said unto the woman, ye shall not surely die, for God doth know that in the day ye eat therefore, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil”. That falsehood was deliberate and intentional. The serpent deliberately distorted the instruction (information) to accomplish the aim of severing the cordial relationship between God and man. Falsehood, misinformation, fake news can thus be traced to the period of the creation. The difference between the 'old fake news' and the “new fake news' is that, the contemporary fake news is pervasive; it is everywhere. And, this is because the 'new fake news' is technology-driven. According to Ireton and Posetti,

*... the 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen the weaponisation of information on an unprecedented scale. Powerful new technology makes the manipulation and fabrication of content simple, and social networks dramatically amplify falsehoods peddled by states, populist politicians, and dishonest corporate entities, as they are shared by uncritical publics. (2018, p.15)*

The advent of the social media Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, has provided a veritable template for the speedy spread of fake news. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have become the instruments of spreading fake news. Fake news has been in circulation even pre-social media era, but it occurred at what can be regarded as micro-level of information transfer. Most of the fake news then were fabricated as a means of social control. They were fabricated to create fear in the minds of children and youths to mitigate some anti-social behaviours. There is also the 'April fool' phenomenon which happens on April 1<sup>st</sup> of every year. Fabricated stories are usually disseminated via different vehicles including the mass media. According to Allcott and Gentzkow (2017, p.214), “fake news and its cousins are not new, one historical example is the 'Great Moon Hoax' of 1835 in which the *New York Sun* published a series of articles about the discovery of life on the moon”.

The post-social media period has experienced an unprecedented surge in the quantity, speed and spread of fake news. Many sites have emerged which were specifically established to fabricate and disseminate fake news and misleading articles. Examples of such sites are; *denverguardian.com*, *wtoe5news.com*, *endingthefed.com*, and so on. It is important to note that fake news purveyors get engaged in it for a lot of reasons. Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) identified two reasons. First, is the pecuniary motivation; news fakers go into the business to make money. When fake news goes viral on social media, it draws significant attention thereby attracting advertisers. Second, there are ideological motivations. News fakers do so to propagate a

particular ideology or promote their candidates. According to Allcott and Gentzkow (2017, p.217), the Romanian man who owned *endingthefed.com* was quoted to have claimed that, “he started the site mainly to help Donald Trump's Campaign”.

### **Developments that Influenced the Growth of Fake News**

Based on current developments and happenings around the world, especially, media plurality, anonymity, multiplicity of media platforms, digital media and increasing media accessibility and literacy, it is reasonable to expect that this incarnation of fake news is formidable. The campaign against fake news can only sensitize the citizenry to the prevalence, manifestations and consequences of fake news; it may not eradicate it. Many factors have worked together to create, sustain and promote the creation, dissemination and consumption of fake news.

First, it must be acknowledged that we are now living through what is popularly referred to as 'information society'. According to McQuail (2005), “Information society is a term used to describe (the) contemporary society in which the central driving force or source of productive power is information of all kinds” (p.558). The period that followed the Industrial Revolution known as the Post-industrial Era, witnessed the rise in the service sector of the economy as against agriculture and manufacturing. The information society, according to Berger (2013) “describes a society that increasingly relies on information flows” (p.49). The period was characterized by a significant increase in the production, flow and consumption of information of all kinds. The content creation platforms offered by the new communication and information technologies compelled people to create, share and consume information of all kinds, whether genuine or fake. And, for the platforms to be actively engaged, information must be created and shared.

Second, the emergence of the social media, powered by information and communication technologies, has provided a veritable platform for the expression of views without prejudice. Kareem and Akoja (2017, p.39) while citing Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as “a computer-mediated tool that allows people to create, share or exchange information, ideas and pictures/videos in virtual networks”. The opportunities offered by social media encouraged individuals to create contents as well as share information, pictures, videos, opinions, without any form of censorship or editing by anyone or institution. According to Audu, Adeyeye, Onoja, and Ogwo (2012), “with social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, Myspace and YouTube, the public can afford to post comments, pictures, videos, texts and other happenings in society directly to these sites. Thus, giving room for a large number of people to access such information almost immediately as they occur” (pp.71-72)

Third, the structure and configuration of mainstream media make it elitist, and beyond the reach of a good number of the citizenry. Folarin (2002), while evaluating the structure and operations of the mainstream media suggested that “. . . the existing bureaucracy as well as commercial and professional hegemony in media systems be broken down, so as to guarantee easier media access for all potential users and consumers”. (p.33). It is important to point out that, access to the media, especially mainstream media, is mainly open to the rich and powerful individuals in the society. Where access to the mainstream media becomes the exclusive preserve of the powerful people in government and in business, and with their tendency to preserve or wrestle for power, the tendency for fake news and misinformation to thrive becomes very high. Thus, it is instructive to posit that the lack of access by potential users of the mainstream media compelled them to develop interest in the alternative media, that is, social media.

Again, those who are media literate and have access to mainstream media still encounter the bottlenecks of gatekeeping, editing, libel-check, lack of immediacy, before disseminating such information. For example, certain news items or stories may be edited, modified or even cut-off out rightly. Gatekeeping, according to McQuail (2005) refers to the processes in which news organizations “. . .have to decide what events to admit through the gates of the media on grounds of their news worthiness and other criteria” (p.556). In the process of re-writing, editing and fine-tuning the story, the content and facts of the story may have been tampered with. Thus, the output may not be a true reflection of the occurrence. People turn to social media to circumvent these processes, and present the story 'raw'.

It can be argued that whatever is currently happening in the media space has its origin in the First Amendment. The Declaration of Human Rights, as well as constitutional provisions, confer on every citizen the right to own ideas, and the right to freely share such ideas. The current information and communication revolution has not left anyone behind except those who cannot afford the required technology. Those who have the financial and technical wherewithal to utilize the technological devices can upload, distribute or share any information, picture or video at will, even without authenticating such information. Thus, the orientation, mindset and motivation of the content creator, to a large extent, determine what is uploaded.

This ease of access to the social media and the increasing lack of trust in the mainstream media contributes to the prevalence and growing influence of fake news. Some of the essential features of the new (social) media “seem to be their interconnectedness, their accessibility to individual users as senders and/or receivers” (McQuail, 2005, p.38). Similarly, in a welcome speech delivered at the 5<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the Association of Communication Scholars and Professionals of Nigeria (ACSPN) on September 14, 2018 at Asaba, Delta State, Professor Lai Oso submitted that, "public trust in the media has waned over time due to ethical and professional inadequacies. There is a general belief that the media are failing in serving the public interest, and the requirements for democracy"

### **Fake News and the Nigerian Democratic Environment**

Although, the Nigerian democratic experience is in its Fourth Republic; it could be conveniently referred to as 'nascent' in that none of the previous republics lived beyond five years or so, or successfully transmitted power to the next government. In spite of the fact that the current democratic experience has subsisted for almost 19 years, it is still at its infant stage when compared with advanced democracies of the western world.

It is pertinent to note that for any democratic experience to succeed, information is vital. The (mass) media as the vehicle of information dissemination have been assigned some indispensable roles. According to Golding (1990, p.84): “. . .democracy is like a political supermarket, in which consumer-voters wander from one counter to another counter, assessing the relative attractions and prices of the policies on offer before taking their well-informed selection to the electoral check-out”. The modern democratic experiment is based on citizens' participation. Democratic sustainability is anchored on quality participation of the citizenry induced by the quantity and quality of information available to them.

According to Carpini (2004, p.414), “. . .modern representative democracies presume an information environment in which citizens are able to learn about pressing issues of the day, follow the actions of elected and government officials, and communicate their views to these officials”. For democracy to thrive, it must be founded on the "principles of fundamental human



rights which include association, worship, movement, right to life and right to protection of life and property from wanton attack and destruction, the freedom to hold and express an opinion, no matter how incongruent with others' opinions or how unreasonable it may seem” (Sobowale, 2013, p.13). It is instructive to note that the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria permits every citizen to hold any opinion; actively seek information, and disseminate or share information or opinion without any hindrance.

However, in spite of these constitutional guarantees, the available vehicles (mainstream media) for so many reasons, [did not] and could not have provided enough avenues for everybody to express their views freely, especially 'incongruent' or 'unreasonable' views (Sobowale, 2013). Because of the limitations of the mainstream media, people have taken to the use of social media to express their views and opinions on issues of importance. Social media are internet-based platforms through which individuals who are connected can share information, texts, pictures, videos. Social media, now christened “Fifth Estate”, provide a veritable avenue for those who may not have or have access to the mainstream media to instantaneously share their opinions with millions of people who are connected simultaneously. Such views, whether reasonable or otherwise, can only be disseminated through the social media because according to Allcott and Gentzkow (2017, p.214), “reputational concerns discourage mass media (mainstream media) outlets from knowingly reporting false stories”.

However, Sobowale (2013, pp.21-22) warned that;

*The entrance of Citizen's Journalism into the mass communication arena should not be regarded as a solution to the problem of communication versus information. . . While the veracity and importance of social communication infrastructure cannot be denied; it creates a cacophony of disconnects and precipitates crises that are capable of leaving a country in greater chaos than non-communication may even ignite. The Arab Spring is an example of what can easily result.*

Although, fake news phenomenon has become a world-wide concern, especially because of its role in the 2016 US Presidential election, it is, nevertheless, to be seen as an aberration in the Nigerian democratic environment. Nigerian democracy is still at its infancy, it is still evolving, and trying to take shape. Political players and other stakeholders are yet to master the intricacies involved in democratic governance. Also, the composition of the nation, its heterogeneous and polarized nature have connived to make the democratic experiment fragile to the extent that there is mutual suspicion and lack of trust among the different ethnic groups that make-up the polity as well as the rulers and the ruled (Sobowale, 2013). Thus, a deliberate (or otherwise) infusion of fake news into the polity may spell doom for the evolving democracy.

Fake news should be abhorred and shunned by all, whether in the mainstream or social media. Nigerian media worked tirelessly to enthrone democracy in 1999 after a lengthy period of military dictatorship, and they cannot turn round to destroy what they laboured for by promoting fake news. Both media workers and journalists should seize the opportunities offered by FOI Law to verify news items before accepting, consuming and spreading such. According to Olukotun (2000, p.100), “Guerilla publishing meant that journalists could not research their stories or take a second look at them, today the situation is different, and there is no excuse for sloppiness, hype or unverified stories”.

Fake news stories co-exist with the mainstream media stories, and can precipitate mainstream media investigation, it must, however, be stated that fake news stories tend to be written by people who are not professionals, thereby infusing personal opinion, falsehood, misinformation; the concept of social responsibility of the media is likely largely compromised. Fake news, if encouraged in Nigeria's nascent democracy, can heat up the polity, aggravate political polarization, ethnic disunity and religious intolerance. It can result to negative feelings or views as well as hate speeches. And, since it is not always easy to fact-check news stories, people may hold the impression that the stories are true because fake news are usually presented as facts with the intention of making readers to believe that the stories are true (Gans, 1980).

Through fake news; opinions, views, voters' choices at elections are swayed. People, citizens or voters are intentionally persuaded through false information to accept and believe fabricated stories. According to Allcott and Gentzkow (2017, p.223), while explaining the result of their study of the influence of fake news on the 2016 US Presidential election said; “we record 41 pro-Clinton (or anti-Trump) and 115 pro-Trump (anti-Clinton) articles. . . Thus there are about three times more fake pro-Trump articles than pro-Clinton articles”. Corroborating this, one of the Facebook fake news writers, Paul Horner, said, “I think Donald Trump is in the White House because of me”.(Dewey, 2016)

### **Combating the Challenges of Fake News**

It is instructive to note that fake news phenomenon is not new. According to Shu et al., (2017), fake news is not a new phenomenon. It has existed for a long time, almost the same time that printing press was invented. Corroborating this position, Palma (2017, par. 3), says, "My point is that fake news is nothing new. *Weekly World News* started in 1979, the popular news satire organization, *The Onion* was founded in 1988, and many other tabloids and websites had the similar idea of writing silly news stories for our amusement". However, in the contemporary time, fake news has become a big business. It is very unlikely that fake news phenomenon will fizzle out in the foreseeable future. According to Sydell (2016) in the interview with Jestin Coler, the founder and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of *Disinfomedia* - a company that operates many fake news sites, such as *DenverGuardian*, *NationalReporter.net*, report Coler as saying;

*...This is probably going to be my last run in fake news biz, but I can promise you that it's not going to go away. It's even going to grow bigger and it's going to be harder to identify as it kind of evolves through these steps.*

As indicated above, fake news may be difficult to eradicate, however, some conscious steps could be taken to mitigate the impact of fake news on the society. First, conscious and conscientious efforts must be taken by governments, agencies, organizations, and other stakeholders to promote media literacy across the globe. Media literacy refers to the competence of the citizenry to access, use and evaluate media contents. It means, citizens' ability to critically evaluate information before consuming or creating it. People must be able to distinguish fact from false information or personal opinion. The citizenry must be given the opportunity to acquire media education in order to avoid consuming all media contents without evaluation. According to Sydell (2016), when Jestin Coler was asked about what can be done to curb fake news, he replied; “Some of this has to fall on the readers themselves. The consumers of content have to be better at identifying this stuff. We have a whole nation of media-illiterate people. Really, there needs to be something done”.

Second, news consumers, especially on social media, must be encouraged to always fact-check information before consuming such. A fake news writer, Paul Horner, was quoted to have said, “Nobody fact-checks anything anymore”. (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2017). People should consciously fact-check news/information, particularly, from the social media. There exist a good number of fact-checking sites such as *snopes.com*, *factchecking.org* and so on. Mainstream media consumers should also be encouraged to always double-check information that appear to be strange by contacting other sources for confirmation.

Third, to curtail the negative consequences of fake news in the society, the Constitutional Rights Foundation (2017) has evolved a model for testing and evaluating news, posts, tweets, etc. to confirm their genuineness before consumption. The model named, SMART, stands for:

- S - Source (Who the source is)
- M - Motive (Why the source said so)
- A - Authority (How credible is the source)
- R - Review (Examine the story carefully)
- T - Two-Source test (Talk to a second party)

Media content consumers are expected to key into this model to prevent being scammed and misled by news fakers. The model will help in screening and ascertaining the credibility and reliability of any information, especially stories shared on social media. Fourth, since everyone can post or tweet virtually anything for user's consumption, it has become imperative for people to always seek opinions or views of second parties or alternative sources to balance the story. Through this, falsehood or fake news can easily be detected.

Lastly, managers of the Internet, such as Google, Facebook, Twitter, etc. should identify fake news sites with the aim of delisting them. Fake news sites and writers should be banned, and probably prosecuted for deliberately misinforming and misleading the people. News faking is a dis-service to humanity, and it has the potential of creating confusion and disequilibrium in the society

### **Conclusion**

It is instructive to note that fake news is not disappearing anytime soon because of the circumstances that tends to promote the phenomenon in contemporary society. All the agitations and campaigns against fake news may not yield the much expected results in the foreseeable future. However, it must be pointed out that every person, organization, agency or government should not lose sight of the dangers inherent in festering fake news especially through accepting, consuming and spreading unverified information or news stories. Every citizen must critically consider every information content and take steps to verify and confirm such before consuming and spreading such.

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