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Chapter Nine



Fake News in Digital Media during the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria: Implications for Democracy

*Eric Msughter Aondover
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Abstract

The rise of digital platforms has changed the speed of information dissemination today. The disinformation, misinformation, and malinformation of narratives and rhetoric constructed about such texts and the negotiation of their meanings, as well as the response to them by vulnerable communities is worrisome. Considering the role fake news plays in the spread of hate speech and its consequence on the transformation agenda of the government, this study examined fake news in digital media during the 2023 general elections in

Nigeria. The study examined the prevalence of various kinds of fake news at the digital space in order to identify their functionality, which was anchored on the Information Fictions Theory. This study employed Textual Analysis (TA) with word frequency, collocation and concordance. Twelve fake news texts and pictures were analysed in the study. The study discovered that fake news was on the increase on social media in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The result of the study also shows that they were a lots of fake news circulations on political communication among candidates. Similarly, fake news has implications on democratic process in Nigeria as fake information may misinform the masses on the democratic ethos in the country. The study concludes that there is a need to manage or address the problem of fake news in Nigeria as such disinformation or misinformation may have negative consequences on the democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Keywords: Prevalence, Digital media, Fake news, General elections, and Proliferation.

Introduction

Digital peddling of fake news is influential to persuasive political participation, with veritable social media platforms. Social media, with their instantaneous and widespread usage, have been exploited by 'anonymous' political influencers who fabricate and inundate internet community with unverified and false information. In Nigeria, the social media have dramatically changed political discussions and political participations with their instantaneous and widespread campaign information and disinformation.

About 120 million Nigerians (61 per cent) have access to the Internet, according to the Social Media Poll Report (2023), and the percentage of users of each social networking site includes Facebook (86 per cent) and WhatsApp (84 per cent) as well as Instagram (19 per cent), Twitter (11 per cent), and Snap chat (2 per cent). Out of these, about 19 per cent and 8 per cent of Twitter and WhatsApp users, respectively, spend more than 10 hours per day on the social media platforms, making social media crucial tools in the hands of political influencers for informing the public about political events, engaging their users, and enticing them to participate in both online and offline political activities (Ahmad & Aondover, 2022).

Fake news is fast spreading on social networks and digital media. As social networking sites have grown, the prevalence of fake news has dramatically increased. According to statistics, 43 per cent of social media users get their news from Facebook, 500 million people use Instagram stories every day, and there are more than 1 billion monthly active users. As of the first quarter of 2023, Twitter had more than 330 million active users, 134 million daily active users, and 500 million tweets sent out each day. It follows that widespread use of social media, particularly for spreading false information and propaganda during political processes, has an impact on the reactions and behaviors of potential voters and endangers democratic processes (Kurfi et al., 2021).

According to a study by van Duyn and Collier (2019), fake news had a significant impact on the 2016 American pre- and post-election phases. This further inflamed the electoral process and put the country on the verge of eruption. During the election, fake news stories were spread more frequently than real ones, and more people were duped into believing them. During the election, social media sites like Facebook and Twitter were used extensively for the dissemination of a

greater volume of false information, misinformation, and misleading content (Bovet & Makse, 2019).

The ability to send texts in Nigeria signaled the beginning of popular fake news (Amobi, 2019). One of the first and most widely disseminated examples of fake news was arguably the Ebola-salt solution SMS messages that gently urged people to drink and bathe in salt water to avoid acquiring the deadly Ebola virus in 2014 (Nababa, 2016). As a result of too much salt water, two persons passed away and 20 were hospitalized (Okafor, 2018). Since the Ebola false information spread in 2014, around 120 million internet users have continued to receive such unsolicited false information on social networking platforms, with the 2023 general election serving as a notable high point. To damage the president's image, fabricated reports about his health and alleged corruption scandals were widely disseminated on various channels. Negative, varied responses brought on by the news, including negative political outcomes (Amobi, 2019).

The establishment of "CrossCheck Nigeria," a cooperative verification project aimed at examining the accuracy of reports and assisting the public in distinguishing false and misleading information, is the result of the steady growth, spread, and potentially harmful effects of fake news, particularly in contributing to increased ethno-political and religious tensions in Nigeria. Although CrossCheck Nigeria and Africa Check have convinced owners of social media websites and members of the mainstream media to check material before it is published or shared, yet false information is still spread. When a bogus post receives a large number of likes and re-tweets or shares, it becomes credible and spreads misinformation (Amobi, 2019).

Within this context, this study employed Textual Analysis (TA) to study fake news in digital media during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria and its implications on democracy. TA involves applying a form of textual analysis to a series of printed, visual or audio texts. In textual analysis, researchers tend to highlight the common codes, terms, ideologies and individuals that dominate the media content. TA is a qualitative method for gathering, processing and interpreting text data. It is mainly used in academic research to analyze content related to the media and communication studies, popular culture, sociology and philosophy. In this case, the purpose of TA is to understand the cultural and ideological aspects that underlie a text and how they are connected with the particular context, in which the text has been produced. In short, TA consists of describing the characteristics of a text and making interpretations to answer specific questions.

Thus, information on the digital space provides platforms for the prevalence and proliferation of fake news. Today, various digital platforms like Facebook, X, Instagram, WhatsApp are social media platforms which serve as common platforms for the spread of fake news. Similarly, information on elections globally stands out as a period when there is prevalence and proliferation of fake news as parties of interest jostle for political positions. This fake news cut across several aspects of the electoral process, which obviously has its implication on democracy. Elections as a vital democratic process could be scuttled if fake news prevails without checks. Nigeria is not immune from all of these complexities of fake news. The prevalence and spread have compelled governments to work towards a legislation to regulate, particularly the social media to tackle fake news among other complexities (Wilson, 2019).

Like every elections, the 2023 general election in Nigeria noticeably witnessed outpouring of political messages from

the various stakeholders (Candidates, political parties, INEC, Voters, etc) on various aspects of the 2023 elections and noticeably witnessed the prevalence and proliferation of fake news, which would usually have their implication on the entire democratic system (Wilson et al., 2022). However, it is unclear what the nature of fake news, social media and politics was during the 2023 general elections, the implication on Nigeria's Democracy and how stakeholder in the general elections managed it. Thus, this study examines fake news in digital media during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria and its implications on democracy. Therefore, fake news during the elections came in various forms (written, spoken, or visual messages) and conveying meanings that this study would analyse to deconstructing texts and its underlying themes, messages, and symbols to understand the intentions, motivations, and perspectives of its creators.

Research Objectives

1. To interrogate fake news and social media in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.
2. To examine the implication of the fake news during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria on democracy.
3. To analyse fake news countermeasures or reactions during the 2023 general elections.

Literature Review

Donald Trump used the term "fake news" to describe stories that criticised his political positions and interests throughout his presidential campaign (Igwebuike & Chimuanya, 2021). The term "fake news" has been described in a variety of ways, with the majority of definitions focusing on the sources of its misinformation, disinformation, propaganda, and dissemination stimuli, including monetary and ideological inducements. It is described as "news articles that are

intentionally and demonstrably false, and could mislead readers"(Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 213). However, as mentioned by Lazer et al. (2018, p. 1094) fake news is defined as "fabricated information that mimics news media content but not in organizational process or intent." Wardle (2017) agrees to these definitions, when he submits that fake news is an instance of misinformation. These definitions foreground two major attributes of fake news; false information that pretends to be real news. This suggests that not all erroneous reports are fake news, only intentionally false information is. Igwebuike and Chimuanya (2021) noted that despite the fact that they are all connected by the common purpose to mislead, news propaganda, news parodies, and fake news are all distinct from one another. This makes it difficult to distinguish between them in today's world.

Social media has changed how and where bogus news is spread. They have increased the number of effective instruments for disinformation and manipulation, particularly interactive platforms that enable quick information republication. A large audience can now be reached by non-journalists who make news, even false information. False news spreads more quickly, and deeper in the digitalised media than it does in the traditional restricted outlets (Igwebuike & Chimuanya, 2021). The evolution of online information platforms has made social media the primary news source for an increasing number of people. More than 60 per cent of Nigeria's 120 million internet users get their news from social media (Olabamiji, 2014). People's propensity to follow those who hold the same beliefs as them and to believe information presented in groups or by someone in authority both contribute to the spread of false information. As a result, when information is received in a group context, people are less likely to fact-check statements whose truth is questionable. Globally, fake news on social media has

persisted as a misleading and deceptive instrument for persuasion that influences individuals, institutions, and particularly political actions (Silverman, 2016).

The emergence of social media has transformed political activity since these platforms have given online users the chance to engage in political discourse and offline participation (Ahmad et al., 2019). New media ideas such as netizen, cyber-democracy, e-governance, e-participation, etc are the results of digitalised political relations. A democratic postmodern public sphere where citizens may take part in informed, nonhierarchical discussions on topics affecting their social structures is possible as a result of Internet technology.

Abdulrauf (2016) asserts that youths in Nigeria and Malaysia now know more about politics and are more likely to participate in politics as a result of having access to political material on Facebook and Twitter. Many political parties utilize their Facebook accounts to engage voters and conduct surveys of their supporters (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2014). Political parties disparage political opponents through unverified news and propaganda distributed through social media in addition to conducting virtual political campaigns to solicit support. Instantaneous platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter were used to spread both positive and negative speculative political statements. Such news frequently affects political stability and democratic outcomes in many countries, as well as the results of elections (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

Fake news is made up of information intended to support lies in order to further political goals. Studies on fake news in Nigeria include a wide range of topics, including the difficulties in preventing the transmission of false material and misinformation during elections on social media and the practical use of Facebook as propaganda to mislead voters

(Olajimbiti, 2019). While Olajimbiti (2019) lists four political deceptive forms on Facebook, including identity equivocation, exaggeration of performance, falsification of corruption cases, and concealment of offenses, Assay (2019) calls for a stronger national campaign against fake news to stop falsehood and half-truths.

Fake News and Democracy

With the advent of the new media, the scourge of fake news is becoming more prevalent than its negative impact on popular online (there is an omission here) is very evident. Also, political communication in Nigeria has been transformed by the advent of the digital age, creating both new opportunities and challenges (Odubote, 2014). In Nigeria, social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have become increasingly popular. These platforms provide politicians and voters with a dynamic setting for political debate, information sharing, and support-building. Nigeria had over 100 million internet users as of 2021, with a sizable proportion of them participating in social media activities, according to a report by the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) (NCC, 2021). Election campaigns and public involvement have been significantly impacted by the growing usage of social media platforms for political communication.

The 2015, 2019 and 2023 general elections in Nigeria provide examples of how digital communication has impacted elections. Social media significantly impacted voter turnout and mobilization during these elections (Oso & Olayiwola, 2020). These elections saw a rise in online political participation as candidates used social media to reach a wider audience as well as citizen journalism and online activism. Citizens are now able to actively engage in political communication through digital platforms. Social media is a platform that citizen journalists and internet activists utilize to

spread awareness, distribute news, and express their thoughts. Political activity in Nigeria has been impacted by digital communication, as evidenced by movements like the #EndSARS protests in 2020, when social media platforms acted as a catalyst for advocacy and mobilization (Sotunde, 2021).

Citizens now have the chance to voice their political opinions, take part in public dialogue, and hold elected authorities responsible in these digital forums. Citizens may stay up to date on political happenings in real time because of the rapid dissemination of political information and news updates made possible by the digital age. Sharing of news stories, videos, and live broadcasts is made easier by social media platforms, resulting in a more vibrant and open information ecosystem. Research from Pew Research Center, which discovered that a sizable part of Nigerian social media users rely on these platforms for news consumption, supports the importance of digital communication on political activity in that country (Pew Research Center, 2021). To identify voter preferences and adjust their messaging, political campaigns use data analytics as a unique strategy.

Fake News and its Implication for Democracy

Nigeria, since independence is yet to discover her right path as a nation. When the military took over following a coup on 15 January, 1966, they mentioned that they had seized power as a result of the illicit activities of politicians and that they were in position to redirect the course of the country. After 16 years of military interregnum, Nigeria is still in search for a new political order (Emoghene & Okolie, 2020). The realisation of this objective has been far from being achieved because of the dominance of the same factors the military claimed to have addressed including those they brought with them. Some of these problems worthy of note are wanton corruption,

ethnicism, tribalism, religions and politics, regionalism, hate, etc. these are but some factors which have affected the survival of democratic rule and national development in Nigeria.

While federalism is meant to address most of these issues through a framework where each region or state is allowed to control its resources and develop at its own pace, the Nigerian federalism operates the opposite and does not recognise the identities, interest and needs of the people especially the minorities. This has created a precipice upon which leaders come into power with the aim of raping the treasury. They are as well backed and supported by people who are no better. Today, politics in Nigeria is a 'do or die' affair. They do not care 'if the baboon and gorilla are soaked in blood'(Emoghene & Okolie, 2020).

If it means fighting dirty, to get there, it simply extolls Niccolo Machiavelli's words where he wrote in his famous book, *The Prince*, "the end justifies the means." On the impact of fake news, the Minister of Information and Culture, Mr. Lai Mohammed, said "the global epidemic of fake news is already having far reaching repercussions across the world. A study by Ogbette et al., (2019) at Ohio State University in the United States concluded that Russian interference and the fake news it promoted probably played a significant role in depressing Hilary Clinton's support on Election Day during the 2016 presidential elections in the United States. Among the Fake News circulated ahead of the election were: *Clinton is in poor health due to a serious disease; Pope Francis endorsed candidate Trump; Clinton approved weapons sales to Islamic Jihadists, etc.* In India, about a dozen people have been killed just because of fake news or hoax messages (Aondover, 2023). The victims were lynched after they were falsely accused of child abduction based on fake messages circulated

via the social media platform, WhatsApp, etc.

Here in Nigeria, the situation is no better as social media is used to instigate animosity through fake news. Arewa Republic posted on Facebook as quoted here, “Peter-Obi-sponsored Igbo Militia (IPOB) just killed a popular Islamic scholar, Sheikh Ibrahim Iyiorji in his house in Isu, Onicha LGA of Ebonyi State. His only crime is because he is a Muslim...” It may seem that Arewa Republic is against the candidature of Peter Obi where on July 24, 2022 they also posted, “Breaking!!! Peter-Obi-sponsored Igbo Militia (IPOB) just killed 28 Hausa business men in Lokpanta Cattle Market in Abia State...” All these are attempts maybe to discredit the presidential candidate of the Labour Party.

Similarly, many Nigerians believe that the global Covid-19 pandemic was a hoax. Some were equally made to believe that Nigeria is being led by Jibril Al-Sudani from Sudan and that the real president, Buhari is actually dead since 2018. Also, four students of the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, dubbed the “Alu Four”, in October 2012 were lynched after they were falsely accused of stealing and cultism. The Rwandan massacre of 1994 perfectly captures the horrors fake news can imprint on a people of a nation. Bearing in mind that over 76 million adult Nigerians are illiterates (Amobi, 2019), it gives concern about the authenticity, genuineness, and integrity of the news people get, especially in the social media space. This growing but sad trend needs to be addressed by stakeholders, government and Nigerians as a whole as fake news, propaganda, and smear campaigns have taken over the media space in Nigeria. The image of the country has also not fared well as a result of fake news. There is a lot of assumption and presumptions about Nigerians and Nigeria. Fake news has fractured the country and driven away investors. This has led to a drop in revenues, reduced patronage of some companies

and organisations, and business closure on some occasions. It has largely been responsible for communal, ethnic and religious crises.

During the 2023 general elections, more of disinformation occupied Nigeria's media space, spreading falsehood capable of setting ethnic groups, religions, individuals' rivals and institutions against themselves. For instance, in 2019, the Federal government of Nigeria initiated a plan to regulate social media, the outcry by the public ensured that the bill which was sent to the National Assembly was suspended, as it was considered an attempt to gag the media and to deny free speech as a fundamental human right. Interestingly, journalists have come up with an initiative called CrossCheck Nigeria (Arnold, 2018) and is one of several fact-checking organisations dedicated to exposing fake news and preserving the reputation and credibility of well researched and honest journalism. Another is FactCheck Nigeria. CrossCheck says its method is simple: to identify claims and posts that are fake, investigate them, and publish the real version (Hanmakyugh et al., 2022).

Fake News Countermeasure or Reactions

The emergence of social media has broadened the battlefield. The prevalence of fake news on political, national issues, and social interactions in Nigeria, especially on social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and YouTube is alarming. This is because apart from undermining the ethics of journalism profession, it is contributing to disaffection among tribes, political actors, and religious affiliations within the Nigerian social environment. The prevalence of such negative media activity absolutely limits Nigerians from making informed choices. Knowing the negative effects of fake news and free speech, even when Section 39 (1) of Nigeria 1999 Constitution as amended provides that “every person shall be

entitled to freedom of expression...” however Section 45 provides that nothing in Section 39 shall invalidate any law that is reasonably justifiable in a democratic society in the interest of public order, public morality and for the purpose of protecting the rights and freedom of other persons (Aondover et al., 2022a).

The 2015 Cybercrime Act made it a felony liable to imprisonment of three years or fine of N7 million (approximately \$17,000), or both, for knowingly publishing fake news to cause a breach of peace. The Nigerian Broadcasting Code prohibits false advertising, impersonation and hate speech and it is also a crime, in the country's criminal and penal codes, to impersonate a government official or another person. An addendum to the 2010 Electoral Act (as amended) also prohibits the use of intemperate, abusive and slanderous languages during campaigns, and anybody found culpable is liable to a maximum payment of N1 million and 12months imprisonment, or N2 million in the instance of a political party. Although social media is not explicitly included, therefore covered, by this election specific regulation, it could be (Hassan, 2022).

In November 2019, the Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulation Bill was first introduced in Nigeria's House of Representatives to tackle the problem of false information. It failed to become law because it posed a severe threat to the democratic right to freedom of speech of Nigerians. The draft contained draconian provisions empowering the government to unilaterally shutdown social media, and even the internet, for posts deemed to pose risks to public safety and national security, which were loosely defined. Also, it required a low burden of proof in the determination of contraventions of its provisions and vested implementation powers in the already overburdened Nigeria Police (Aondover et al., 2022b).

The Minister of Information, Lai Mohammed stated that big technology companies like Google, Facebook and Twitter have started to address the problem. Google is reported to have dedicated 300million US dollars over the next three years towards efforts to fight the spread of false information. Facebook, according to Bloomberg, took down 583 million fake accounts in the first three months of 2018. According to Reuters, Twitter suspended over 70 million accounts in May and June this year alone, and the pace of suspension has been sustained. Apart from the big technological organizations, the European Commission, in January 2018, set up a high-level group of experts to advice on policy initiatives to counter fake news and disinformation spread online (Elebeke, 2018). However, Brian Hughes of City University of New York and Idayat Hassan of Centre for Democracy and Development are both skeptical that the engagement of the big tech companies will be to their own benefits of controlling what newsfeeds are allowed while the relationship between them and countries remain one of unequal.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the theory of Informative Fictions (TIF). The theory was established by Drew Margolin in 2021. The theory argues that although being untrue in terms of the objective reality, false narratives can offer insightful “character information” that illustrates people's and groups' theories of mind. It will specifically demonstrate how, when forecasting the behaviour of objects which do not plan ahead or seek to manipulate others and social agents who do different information inputs and prediction systems are used. The hypothesis has several ramifications for how scholars comprehend and create countermeasures to false information, including fake news.

According to TIF, people collect and share two important but different types of information: character information, which describes the intentions and viewpoints of “agents,” or entities people believe are capable of making decisions, and property information, which describes the circumstances, conditions, and mechanisms pertaining to “objects,” or entities people believe lack agency. According to TIF, several communication forms help each type of information be communicated more successfully. Propositions and arguments are better for communicating property information, but stories are better for communicating character information. Due to this distinction, people are able to tell stories that convey accurate character information more skillfully by using erroneous property disinformation (such as describing made-up events). Because of this, people who value character information may create or accept stories that make exaggerated claims (Margolin, 2021).

Two underlying assumptions of TIF are unsupported by the theory itself. First, there is the functional aspect of communication, where people attempt to obtain the kind of data that would help them make better judgments. It is assumed that people have a sufficiently functioning propensity to obtain and disseminate information they deem valuable, but not that they are flawless maximizers. The theory also makes the assumption that people look for knowledge pertinent to their own decisions and share information they think would assist others in making wise decisions. This communication might be altruistic, like counselling a friend, or self-interested, like providing knowledge to influence political decisions that affect the individual (Kümpel et al., 2015).

TIF posits that the process of message production inevitably generates a rivalry between property and character information. Using the following justification, this study shows that this competition is both logical and practical. For

instance, character information is communicated differently from property information in order for it to be functionally effective; secondly, character information is gathered and processed differently from property information; while as a result of these distinctions, inaccurate property claims can be exploited to improve the communication of accurate character portrayals. To reiterate, predictive accuracy is compromised by incorrect claims for property inferences. This is due to the fact that logical deduction inference makes the assumption that all of the world's true qualities are consistent with one another (Rosenbaum, 2017).

TIF's main thesis is that stories built around exaggerated claims can still have usefulness since they can elicit and convey precise character information. How might one test this argument? Numerous predictions made by TIF align with current theories of disinformation. First, current ideas highlight how preexisting beliefs and worldviews influence people's willingness to accept false information (Lewandowsky et al., 2012). According to the principles of simulation theory and Fisher's concept of narrative fidelity, people will reject narratives or simulations that they are unable to reconcile with their own worldview. Second, in line with studies of misinformation, TIF predicts that messages containing disinformation will be accepted if they evoke strong, vivid, and stimulating imaginations. According to research on the idea of rumors (Allport & Postman, 1947), rumors are accepted when there is a significant amount of worry and/or a lack of trust in authority. This conclusion is consistent with TIF, which contends that when formal institutions fail, these circumstances generate a need for character information to reevaluate leadership or to focus on interpersonal interactions.

TIF is communication-centered theory for forecasting the acceptance and propagation of false information is presented

in this work. According to the hypothesis, the dissemination of incorrect property claims, or disinformation, results from the prioritization of character portrayals over other types of information. While the theory of informative fictions is consistent with many other theories and does not claim to explain all occurrences or preferences for misinformation, it does offer a further set of particular empirical predictions. Therefore, Information Fiction Theory is a framework that examines the construction and dissemination of information that intentionally blurs the line between fact and fiction. In the context of fake news in digital media, this theory can be instrumental in understanding how misinformation is crafted, propagated, and received by the public. When considering the 2023 general election in Nigeria, this theory offers insights into the potential impact of fake news on democracy.

Method and Materials

This study adopts Textual Analysis (TA), which is a research method that involves understanding language, symbols or pictures present in texts to gain information regarding how people make sense of it and communicate. Visual, written or spoken messages provide clues to ways through which communication may be understood (Aondover, 2022). Often the messages are understood as influenced by and reflective of larger social structures (Amobi, 2019). Within this context, the units of analysis for the TA were pictures and the texts that were in circulation on social media in the 2023 general election in Nigeria. 12 fake news texts and pictures were analysed in the study based on the stated objectives. FactCheckHub and social media platforms like Facebook, X, Instagram were used to select these pictures and texts. Purposive sampling was adopted to select these pictures and texts on the 2023 elections.

The study purposively selected the 12 pictures and texts because the most prominent, popular or most controversial drew large public reactions during the elections. The study used collocations, which are usually bigrams (a pair of words) and trigrams (a combination of three words). Also, concordance was used to identify instances in which a word or a series of words appear, to understand its exact meaning in addressing the objectives of the study. Qualitative approach of textual analysis was applied in the study. The study analyse fake news on social media in the 2023 general elections, the implication of hate speech on democracy and fake news countermeasures or reactions during the 2023 general elections.

Results and Discussion

Fake news and social media in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria

Plate 1: Viral False Alarm by INEC Chairman on Social Media



Source: (FactCheckHub, 2023).

The image above was widely circulated on social media as a tweet emanating from Dino Melaye. But, when the tweet was verified by FactCheckHub, one of the social platforms dedicated to correcting misinformation on social media using Google Lens and Google Reverse, the image could not be traced to any particular news blog or website or other sources.

Plate 2: Viral Misinformation on Atiku's Victory in Osun State in the 2023 General Election

Politics Today

BREAKING: Atiku defeat Tinubu to win all 20 LGAs in Osun

By **Jake Clifford** - February 26, 2023

0

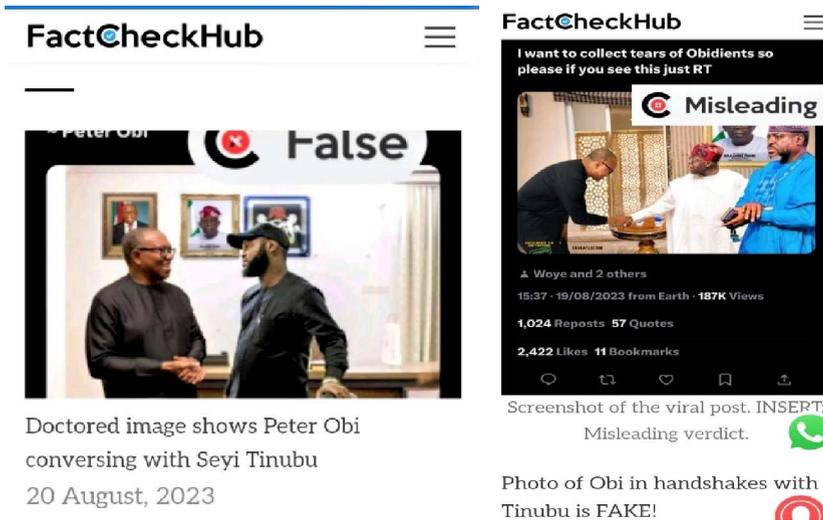


Source: (Tweet, 2023 & FactCheckHub, 2023).

The above picture in Figure 1.1 is a fake news report traced to a twitter user, Jake Clifford that was published at ejesgist.ng. As

indicated in the image, it was wrongly reported that the PDP presidential candidate, Atiku defeated his APC counterpart, Tinubu to win all 20 LGAs in Osun State. However, findings by FactCheckHub revealed that out of the 30 LGAs in the State, Atiku won 20 LGAs while Tinubu won the remaining 20 LGAs. The information @ ejesgist.ng was therefore fake.

Plate 3: Doctored Viral Image Showing Peter Obi with Tinubu and Peter Obi and Tinubu's Son



Source: (FactCheckHub, 2023 & Social Media, 2023).

On August 19th, 2023, an X user, Imran U. Wakili posted an image showing President Tinubu in a handshake with Peter Obi, the presidential candidate of Labour Party in Nigeria. But when the image was subjected to check by Fact Check Hub using Google Reverse Image search, it revealed that the original image had President Tinubu exchanging pleasantries with Aliko Dangote at the Defence Headquarters on April, 26, 2023. In the image which was later manipulated by X account, @ Luca-Brasi-5.0, a strong supporter of Tinubu and a social media political fake news creator specialist on August, 19th,

2023, the image of Dangote was removed and replaced with that of Peter Obi. The same holds true for the other image on the right. Within this context, van Duyn and Collier (2019) study also revealed that fake news had a significant impact on the 2016 American pre- and post-election phases just like in any other elections elsewhere.

Plate 4: Political Communications among Candidates



False claim circulates that Atiku is retiring from politics, congratulates Tinubu



False claim circulates that Alex Otti is the first elected Labour Party governor in Nigeria

Source: (FactCheckHub, 2023 & Social Media, 2023).

The preceding pictures show conversation between the APC President Tinubu and the Presidential candidate of PDP Atiku, which is a false claim that was circulated on social media that Atiku is retiring from politics, congratulates Tinubu. Similarly, false claim was also circulated that Alex Otti is the first elected Labour Party governor in Nigeria. Fact Check Hub using Google Reverse Image search revealed that the images are fake. IseOlorunkanmi et al., (2023) corroborate that political communication has undergone a paradigm shift with the emergence of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, posing new opportunities and problems for political actors and voters alike.

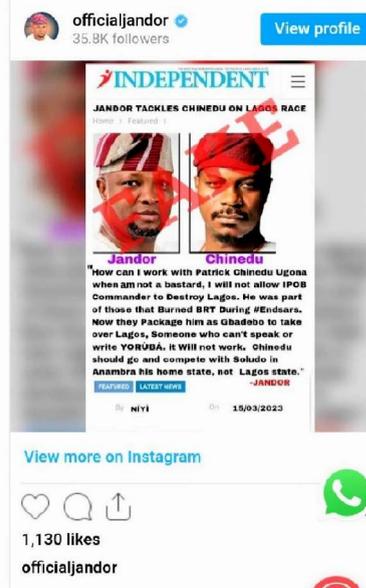
Fake news and its implication on democracy in Nigeria

Plate 5: False Claims of Beef between the LP and PDP Lagos State Gubernatorial Candidates



FILE PHOTO: L - R: Adediran and Rhodes-Vivour. II CREDITS: Vanguard newspaper.

Lagos guber poll: False claim circulates that Adediran used derogatory words for Rhodes-Vivour



Source: (FactCheckHub, 2023 & Social Media, 2023).

As indicated in the image above (left one), it was widely reported that Rhodes Vivour, the Labour Party's (LP) gubernatorial candidate insulted Jandor Adediran, his PDP counterpart. However, as revealed in the other image (right), Jandor had in his official twitter handle disassociated himself from such false claims. But for his timely response, such volatile statement is capable of undermining the fragile peace in Lagos State and can negatively impact our democracy. Therefore, fake news poses a significant threat to democracy in Nigeria, impacting political stability, social cohesion, and public trust. Fake news can distort the electoral process by spreading false or misleading information about candidates, political parties, or voting procedures. This can influence

voters' decisions and undermine the legitimacy of elections.

Plate 6: Viral Image Showing Former President and a World Class Lawyer



Source: (FactCheckHub, 2023 & Social Media, 2023).

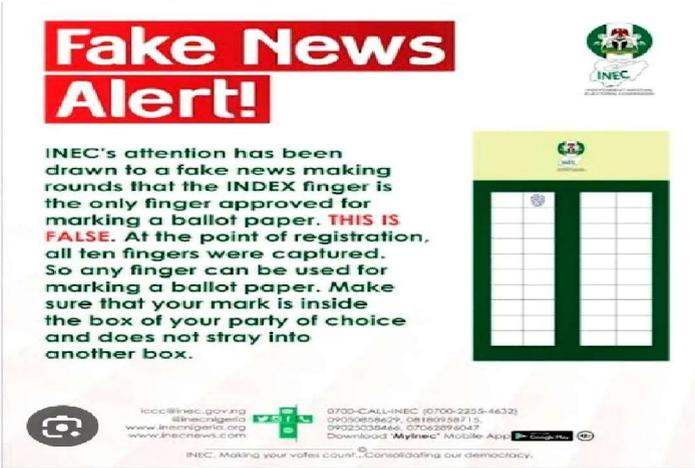
Figure 2.1 shows a viral image showing former President Obasanjo in a tweet which was widely circulated on social media, that the former President, Obasanjo had brought a world class lawyer, the special adviser to President Putin to represent the Presidential candidate of LP, Peter Obi in the election tribunal. In this context, fake news often exploits existing societal divisions, deepening political and social polarization. In Nigeria, where ethnic and religious tensions are sensitive, this can exacerbate conflicts and lead to violence. False information about voting times, locations, or

requirements can lead to confusion and discourage people from voting, impacting electoral participation.

Therefore, TIF posits that the process of message production inevitably generates a rivalry between property and character information. Using the following justification, this study shows that this competition is both logical and practical. For instance, character information is communicated differently from property information in order for it to be functionally effective; secondly, character information is gathered and processed differently from property information; while as a result of these distinctions, inaccurate property claims can be exploited to improve the communication of accurate character portrayals.

Fake news Countermeasure during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria

Plate 7: INEC Correction of Misinformation on Right Fingers for Voting



Fake News Alert!

INEC's attention has been drawn to a fake news making rounds that the INDEX finger is the only finger approved for marking a ballot paper. **THIS IS FALSE.** At the point of registration, all ten fingers were captured. So any finger can be used for marking a ballot paper. Make sure that your mark is inside the box of your party of choice and does not stray into another box.

0700-CALL-INEC (0700-2255-4632)
09030858629, 08180928713
09023038466, 07062096042
Download MyInec Mobile App

INEC. Making your votes count...Consolidating our democracy.

Visit

**INEC Corrects
Misinformation On...**

Source: (INEC, 2023 & FactCheckHub, 2023).

In Figure 3 above, a tweet shared by Dubawa misinformed the public about the right finger to be used for printing the ballot papers during the just concluded election. As contained in the counter-letter issued by INEC to correct the misinformation, the tweet had wrongly informed the public that the INDEX finger was the only approved finger by INEC during the voting process. In a bid to manage the fake information, INEC issued a letter to re-educate the public that any of the 10 fingers can be used to mark the ballot papers during the voting process. The information which was published on INEC website was circulated by some anti-fake news platforms including FactCheckHub, 2023. Silverman (2016) corroborates that globally, fake news on social media has persisted as a misleading and deceptive instrument for persuasion that influences individuals, institutions, and particularly political actions.

Plate 8: INEC Reactions to Misinformation on Final List of Candidates for the 2023 General Elections



Source: (INEC, 2023 & FactCheckHub, 2023).

Just as contained in the previous case (Fig. 4), INEC had published a letter to warn the general public of a fake viral publication on the social media that claimed that the electoral empire had released the final list of candidates for the 2023 general elections.

Plate 9: European Union Reactions to Misinformation on the Move to Nullify Tinubu's Victory

EU did not author viral statement seeking nullification of Tinubu's victory



AUTHOR:

Claire Mom 

Source: (FactCheckHub, 2023).

As indicated in Figure 3.2, the European Union had issued the above disclaimer letter to warn Nigerians of a widely circulated information that claimed that it authored a statement that called for the nullification of Tinubu's victory. The above letter was equally widely circulated on various social media

platforms which was also fake news. As observed by Bovet and Makse (2019), during election, social media sites like Facebook and Twitter were used extensively for the dissemination of a greater volume of false information, misinformation, and misleading content. Within the theoretical context, social media also set agenda by giving prominence to misinformation, disinformation and malinformation.

Conclusion

This study examines fake news in digital media during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The study discovered that fake news was on the increase on social media in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The result of the study also shows that they were lots of fake news in circulation on political communication among candidates. Similarly, fake news has implication on democratic process in Nigeria as fake information may misinform the masses on the democratic ethos in the country. Thus, there is a need to manage or address the problem of fake news in Nigeria as such disinformation or misinformation may have negative consequences on the democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

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