



Effect of Fake News on the Spread of Covid-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

Okuneye Ademolu Patrick¹, Uchendu Chinelo Ebele², Lawal Umar Maradun³, Muhammad Ridwan⁴, Omotola Ogunbola⁵

¹Mass Communication Department, Chrisland University, Ajebo road, Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria

²Department of Mass Communication, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka Anambra State, Nigeria

³Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto

⁴Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

⁵Department of Mass Communication, Caleb University, Imota, Lagos

Abstract: *The spread of fake news during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, as in many other countries, had significant effects, exacerbating the challenges faced by public health authorities, governments, and citizens. In Nigerian context, social media is a means of keeping up with occurrences all over the globe and is used to shed light as regards the Nigerian situation, the ability to sieve authentic information from an avalanche of half-truths and false information available on social media networks is a challenge in Nigeria. In Nigeria, tackling this issue effectively during the pandemic was critical to improving public health outcomes and societal trust. The paper argues that social media has become an essential part of human life as it allows remote creation of contents for the purpose of entertainment and dissemination of information, making information sharing easier and faster in Nigeria and the world at large. The paper concludes that addressing fake news requires a combination of education, regulation, and collaboration between governments, civil society, and media organizations. Thus, the outbreak of Covid-19 in Nigeria spurred a digitalized reaction with citizen surfing about Covid-19 content to gather information about the virus. Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and Twitter, appeared to be among the prominent platforms consulted by Nigerians to create awareness on Covid-19 in the country.*

Keywords: *Covid-19, Effect, Fake News, Nigeria, Pandemic and Spread*

I. Introduction

Social media is primarily for sharing information in order to exchange ideas, opinions, and knowledge. Ahmed and Msughter (2022) noted that the spread of fake news has been identified as a global concern because unknowingly information shared helps progress the dastardly efforts of fraudsters. As seen in fake news that was peddled during the pandemic crises of 2020 on the news of the efficacies of Chloroquine to cure Covid-19 without recourse to experts and specialists in the field before taking any medication. Many Nigerian youths, and all ages alike, as observed by shared this information with so much enthusiasm. This was later discovered to have led to the abuse of Chloroquine where many were diagnosed to have abused the drug in a Lagos hospital (Aliough et al., 2023).

A similar situation was observed in Northern Nigeria the month World Health Organisation (WHO) declared Covid-19 pandemic; Kano State also confirmed its first positive Covid-19 case. Since then the state witnessed what was described as mysterious deaths, claiming hundreds of lives including the Emir of Rano and seven Professors from Bayero University, Kano (Kurfi et al., 2021). A lot of fabricated news stories sprung up afterward. A study by Sulaiman in Aondover et al., (2024) also established that Nigerian youths mostly

shared information about Covid-19 on social media using Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram during the pandemic disease in order to build relationships with the online communities, have fun and develop a political friendship of which some contents were true while some false after confirmation.

In Nigeria, a good number of citizens believe that the virus is a hoax created by the government to corruptly enrich few State officials. This belief is difficult to erase from the minds of many people, thus making almost impossible to adhere to personal hygiene instructions issued by both the WHO and the Nigeria Centre for Diseases Control (NCDC) (Aondover et al., 2022). However, little attention has been given to the role of social media vis-à-vis global pandemics. In the Nigerian context, social media is a means of keeping up with occurrences all over the globe and is used to shed light as regards the Nigerian situation. The penetration of social media is quite extensive in Nigeria particularly since the advent of cheap Android Smartphone telephony. What is worrisome is how to sieve authentic information from an avalanche of half-truths and false information available on social media networks.

In the past consumers relied on traditional form of media, such as radio and television, which involved relatively fewer and more established sources of news. Nowadays consumers are exposed to online sources of information (Internet), such as the social networking sites (SNS), this networking sites are known as social media. Social media as an offshoot of the Internet refers to the electronic network or networks that link(s) people and information through computers and other digital devices; thereby allowing for person-to-person communication and information retrieval (Hile et al., 2022). The Internet is a major tool that emerged for the purpose of information dissemination, it determines what information is made available to people as well as the impression people have on issues.

Social media has become an essential part of human life as it allows remote creation of contents for the purpose of entertainment and dissemination of information, making information sharing easier and faster in Nigeria and the world at large (Msughter et al., 2023). Nielsen (2017) sees social media as computer-mediated technology facilitating the growth and sharing of ideas, awareness, career interest, information and other ways of expression through social network and virtual communities. Similarly, Msughter (2020) observed that social media by their nature have the power of educating, informing, entertaining and inflaming the audience while creating a contagious and outreaching influence, which the conventional media find difficult to provide. Msughter and Phillips (2020) corroborate that social media information sharing denoted web-based tools that permit the interaction of people sharing information, opinion, knowledge and facts from different locations. This means that information sharing on social media deals with sharing of opinion, knowledge and facts about a particular event.

Murphy in Msughter et al., (2023) are of the view that social media as the collection of websites and web-based systems allow for mass interaction, conversation and sharing among members of a network. Hence diverse media outlets and communication networks play an important role in its operation. Social media has changed journalism practice as real-time audience engagement has given rise to crowd sourcing content, while the discipline of verification in journalism before publication of content and sources is minimized to reflect the impacts of fast-changing digital technologies, online behaviours, and newsgathering practices.

Similarly, this platform allows any individual to share content without ‘fact-checking or editorial judgment’ which in turn can bring about falsified news also known as fake news (Msughter et al., 2020). These fake stories or hoaxes are created to influence people's views, push a political agenda or cause confusion deliberately or misinform and deceive audiences; usually such stories are profitable business for online publishers.

Moreso, Msughter et al., (2022) admit that the Internet changes society and Kurfi et al., (2021) supported that the advent of social media came with opportunities for news outlets to engage more people thereby leading to an increased spread of information to a wider audience. Meanwhile the research conducted by Oginni and Motui in Namadi and Msughter (2020) analyzes the engagements of Africans with the social media. These scholars assert that the engagement of Africans with social media is relatively low and that authors did not fully explore the impacts of social media usage for civic engagements in individual countries or sub-regions of the African continent. Within this context, therefore, the pandemic has made Africans, specifically Nigerians to be more active on social media in order to keep up with the global sphere or challenge.

AlSayyad and Guvenc in Obada et al., (2024) add that owner lies in text, visuals conveyed by video recording of events as it unfolds. The international live streaming of events is capable of mobilizing a huge population of citizenry for positive or negative end. Additionally, it has played an important role in crippling dictatorial regimes and instigating uprisings such as the Arab spring, End SARS 2020, among others.

However, Obada et al., (2024) revealed that social media users evaluate the quality of information from the perspectives of physical characteristics of the information (length of post and quality of images or videos), style or tone of the writing, which can help determine the neutrality of the author, logical or illogical and so as to identify if the news story is authentic or fake. Thus, fake news has been defined as fabricated information that imitates news media content in form but not in organizational process or intent, which overlaps with other information disorders, such as misinformation, false or misleading information, and disinformation, which is false information that is deliberately disseminated to deceive people. The rise in fake news has drawn the attention of media scholars to the role of social media in the dissemination of fake news about current political and social affairs with tremendous speed.

However, the year 2020 ushered in the outbreak of coronavirus disease (Covid-19) in Nigeria and most part of the world, the virus formerly referred to as ‘2019 novel coronavirus’ or ‘2019-CoV’ emerged as a respiratory infection with significant concern for global public health hazards. Initially, it is transmitted from contact between animals and humans; however, the paradigm has shifted towards human-to-human transmission via droplets and contact with affected persons. Covid-19 is a global pandemic, which have affected most countries in different ways and different control mechanisms have been deployed to manage the situation. The nature of the virus makes it difficult to detect, hence, it is difficult to estimate the actual number of people infected. Its first case was confirmed in Nigeria on February 28, 2020. Since then, there has been observed increased in the exploitation of various social media platforms to share information about the disease.

II. Review of Literature

Theoretical Framework

This paper employed Source Credibility Theory and the theory was developed by Carl Hovland and Walter Weiss in 1951 remains relevant. 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., in Aondover et al., (2022) while referring to Onyejelem and Aondover (2024a) affirmed that news or information from ‘a high-credibility source’ usually results in behavioural 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 (fake news messages) that the source could not verify or in which the source is 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 support 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 on social media regarding Covid-19 pandemic, since information coming from these social media platforms are not verified to determine the authenticity or the credibility of the information. Thus, lack of source credibility on social media could create an avenue for fake news on the spread of Covid-19 in Kano State. The SMART Model of Leon, Esmeralda and Huss in Onyejelem and Aondover (2024a) 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., in Onyejelem and Aondover (2024b) the acronym SMART stand for, S- Source, M- Motive, A- Authority, R- Review, and T- Two Source Test. Beside 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 consumer’s 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 or news to properly screen information to ascertain its genuineness and authenticity before accepting, consuming or spreading such information like the case of fake news on Covid-19 pandemic in the state.

III. Results and Discussion

3.1 Social Media as an Information Outlet

In 1999, after his inauguration, former President Olusegun Obasanjo introduced a telecommunication policy which empowered the Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC) to reorganize, auction and issue fresh license to successful companies who could provide Nigerians an efficient and affordable telephone system. This was to eradicate the

problems of landlines which could only be afforded by the rich. Nigeria Telecommunication Plc, (NITEL), MTN Nigeria and Econet wireless were granted Digital Mobile (DM) license on 23 March 2001 with a 90 days deadline to start operation.

Obada et al., (2021) adds on the use of social media as information outlets to Nigerians during this pandemic. The announcement of the first Covid-19 victim was made through various social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and various websites. Since a good number of Nigerians have access to these platforms, it was easy to spread this information. Subsequently, Health Care Agencies such as the NCDC updated the masses on the number of cases tested that are positive, fatal or have recovered in Nigeria through social media platforms. This gave Nigerian citizens a better chance to be fully prepared for Covid-19; as opposed to the period of the Influenza pandemic in which there was limited news on the virus when it came to Nigeria, which prompted the faster spread of the disease to other parts of the country due to limited information passed out then on social media.

However, social media has also proved to be a means of spreading panic, fear and confusion by the people to the people despite having been warned by the NCDC not to indulge in social media abuse through spreading misinformation or fake news stories. This reflects how social media is permissible to all and sundry, hence unverified and fake news can be passed on without fear or favour.

3.2 The Evolution and Spread of Covid-19

According to Shereen et al., in Obada et al., (2021) the first known occurrence of the virus began in December 2019 in Wuhan, the capital of the Hubei province of China. It began as a form of pneumonic cases in the province. The cases were reported to the World Health Organisation (WHO) country office and it was discovered to be a new strain of the SARS-CoV virus of 2020. The name Covid-19 was given to the virus by the WHO on the 11th of February, 2020. It is an acronym which stands for Corona Virus Disease of 2019. The symptoms were common to that of the common cold. They include fever, cough, shortness of breath, loss of smell. However, the complications are of a greater degree than the symptoms as it could lead to pneumonia, viral sepsis, acute respiratory distress syndrome, kidney failure, etc, this complication is said to worsen based on the health status of the individual.

Although the virus is primarily spread amongst people during close contact with droplets from infected persons such as talking, holding, touching and hugging contaminated surfaces and people. Various studies have shown that the half-life of the virus outside the human body is temperature and humidity dependent; hence, different regions can have different rates of spread. However, it is suggested that the best preventive measure of control is to social distance our selves while wearing a face mask and constant washing of the hands with the use of sanitizer and cleaning of surfaces. The symptoms are irregular, so it is difficult to clearly identify an infected person without testing. Hence, Lauer in Msughter (2018) categories this Covid-19 symptoms into three silent carriers as follows:

1. Asymptomatic: people who carry the active virus in their body but never develop any symptoms.
2. Presymptomatic: people who have been infected and are incubating the virus but don't yet show symptoms.
3. Very mildly symptomatic: people who feel a little unwell from a Covid-19 infection but continue to come in close contact with others.

On a lighter note, advancement in technology has aided the containment of this disease; though the spread of this pandemic is still a challenge as countries of the world emerge to gather resources, both intellectual and financial, to combat it. In spite of this, there appears to be an increase in the spread globally with countries recording daily deaths and increases of up to a thousand and more. Reports do indicate that the country's most affected by this pandemic are located in Europe and North America (Obada et al., 2021).

3.3 The Evolution of Covid-19 in Nigeria

The first case of the deadly disease Covid-19 was confirmed in an Infectious Disease Centre, Yaba, Lagos State, Nigeria on the 27th February, 2020, as an Italian citizen arrived at the Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Lagos on 24th February, 2020 on-board a Turkish airline from Milan, Italy. He visited his company's site in Ogun State the following day where he presented himself at his company's staff clinic. The physician-on-duty had a strong suspicion of the presence of the virus. This led him to refer the Italian citizen to Infectious Disease Hospital (IDH) and the Covid-19 status was confirmed (Kurfi et al., 2021).

This however led to the tracing of all persons he must have contacted from the flight as well as people who had close contact with him by Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC). Pate et al., (2020) add that after a period of two weeks, a cluster of cases was detected in Lagos and Abuja, this was noted to be the emergence of the nationwide spread of the virus. The Federal Government, through the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA), restricted International commercial flights into the country, effective from 23rd March, 2020. On the same day, Nigeria registered her first fatality; a 67-year-old male returnee from the United Kingdom who already had underlying medical issues that were been managed before his death. The death occurred in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Although, the initial performances of the various institutions and agencies of the Government showed the ill-preparedness to combat the virus but the subsequent responses have been phenomenal. This is evident in the containment of the ongoing pandemic spread in Nigeria that began February, 2020. Although, the spread potential is yet to be properly estimated, containment strategy has proven quite effective. A major contributor to the spread worldwide was increased travel, modern transport networks made it easy for travellers to transmit the virus, hence, the ban on inter-state travel was an appropriate containment measure.

The Federal Government responded with the authorization of the closure of all non-essential services (businesses and industries) and restricted movement of people in Lagos State, Ogun State and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Most State Governments restricted public gathering and there were restrictions on Inter-state movement. The Federal Government later authorized the gradual easing of lockdown in the previously restricted states on the 4th May, 2020.

3.4 The Spread and Containment of Covid-19 in Nigeria

The nationwide spread of the virus led to the Federal government of Nigeria making prompt measures to contain the virus. The available information on the virus and the welfare of her citizenry were guiding beacons in periodic restrictions to maximize containment. Educational and Religious institutions were the first bodies restricted before containment measures extended to non-essential services. The Federal Government with the aid of different ministries and governmental agencies put up a formidable response in the fight

against Covid-19 in Nigeria, strongly supported by the Presidential Task Force for the Control of the Covid-19 (PTF) and the Nigeria Centre for Disease and Control (NCDC).

Due to the nature of the symptoms, only people who have been tested can be easily identified as infected. The test results have shown a rising number of people confirmed to have Covid-19. Though, a significant number of people recover from the infection, the greater concern lies with those who are yet to be tested. The ease of transmission coupled the rate of interaction amongst the populace indicates that the confirmed cases are merely a small share of the actual numbers. This is demonstrated by the rate of newly confirmed cases by the day. According to the daily reports provided by NCDC, Lagos State with the highest population density in Nigeria has been recording the largest number of confirmed cases.

There was a total of 25 recorded cases in the country. Further examination of the confirmed cases revealed that 76 percent of Covid-19 cases had travel history outside the country, while 20 percent of confirmed cases had close contact with Covid-19 patients. The remaining 4 percent of confirmed cases were classified as no epidemiological connection and incomplete information. This implied that the majority of confirmed cases in Nigeria were returnees from epicentres, this prompted NCDC to issue a guideline that made it mandatory for returnees from high-risk countries to stay in isolation for a minimum of 14 days. The Federal government suspended all international flights into Lagos and Abuja, effective 23rd March 2020 (Pate et al., 2020).

Similarly, as of 21st March 2020, only three States of the federation plus the FCT Abuja had recorded cases of Covid-19 in the country; Lagos (19), Ogun (2), Ekiti (1) and Abuja (3).

By the end of the fifth week, there was at least one confirmed case of Covid-19 in all geographical zones of the country. This led to the restriction of interstate movement and total restriction of movement (lockdown) in Lagos, Ogun, and Abuja. In response to this development, the NCDC needed to increase the testing of suspected cases. Hence, the agency added a modular laboratory at the University College Hospital, Ibadan, Oyo State, to its existing laboratory collection across the country while reporting that additional six would be included in the coming weeks.

Unfortunately, Abuja, Lagos, and Ogun State experienced a poor compliance by citizens in ensuring a total lockdown due to doubt about the authenticity of the outbreak in the country. Similarly, due to the level of corruption by government officials in the country, promises of palliatives (cash transfer and relief materials distribution) was viewed by members of society as a major failure, considering that Nigeria is the centre of the world's multidimensional poverty. This led to an increase in the crime rate in certain parts of Lagos and Ogun States (Usman et al., 2022). The concept of social distancing was not strongly adhered to in other states of the Federation, some states did not prohibit religious gathering.

The increase in confirmed cases of Covid-19 in the North West region called for concern given that the virus was properly contained in the geopolitical zone until the index case was registered in the state of Kano. Kano's index case was alleged to have attended numerous parties and religious prayer grounds despite his manifestation of Covid-19 symptoms. This played a major role in the rate of spread across the state and the geopolitical zone as a whole (Usman et al., 2022). Kano State became a state of interest due to the number of deaths recorded; the State government released a report indicating that the deaths were not

related to Covid-19. However, there were allegations that autopsies were not carried out. The Kano State Government in its attempt to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the State resorted to the evacuation of Almajiris (children migrated in search of Islamic knowledge) from the eight local government areas that make up the metropolis back to their states of origin.

Furthermore, in pursuit of relief, the Federal Government requested a product that allegedly cures Covid-19 from Madagascar. The product has been accredited with the high recovery rate in Madagascar. Directives have been given to the National Institute for Pharmaceutical Research and Development (NIPRD) and the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), by the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, to ensure a thorough analysis and scrutiny before it is admitted into the country.

However, a 15-member team of Chinese medical personnel arrived in the country on April 8 “to share their experience with fighting Covid-19”. Upon arrival, the team were discovered to be present only to care for the China Civil Engineering construction corporation (CCECC). Their arrival sparked debate among various medical professionals about the need for foreign personnel; these became immaterial with regards to their activities since arrival. The medical personnel are presumed to have returned to China along with 286 Chinese nationals on May 30 (Chinedu, 2020). The NCDC database has ensured the efficient monitoring of the spread as shown in the figure below.

3.5 The Concept of Fake News

There have been many definition of the term ‘fake news’ and even ‘fake media’ to describe reporting with which the claimant does not agree. A Google Trends map shows that people began searching for the term extensively in the second half of 2016. Fake news is also referred to as “false news” or “misinformation”. Usman et al., (2022) described fake news as “news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false, and could mislead readers. Fake news is generated when information is adulterated or fabricated to create tension and fear. The consumers of fake news may take no measure to ascertain the accuracy of the news as far as suits partisan opinion or alignment. Hence, it takes a balanced and objective mind, to a great extent, to be able to ascertain whether the news is fake or not. However, it is quite difficult for most humans to be balanced in analysis and opinion.

Owens-Ibie and Aondover (2024) note the danger of fake news and state that fake news can continue to affect the attitudes of those exposed to long after it has been debunked and withdrawn from the media. Scholars like Spectra derided the concept of fake news and argued that if it is fake, then it is not news. Msughter et al., (2022) corroborates this and points out that the application of the term “fake” to news is inappropriate because news is a social construct, which already has a lot of economic, social and political biases, as well as medium constraints. However, one can only assess the world through instances of accurate accounts of events.

Pate et al., (2020) noted that there are three types of fake news which is evident in yellow journalism and sensationalism so as to increase profit; firstly, fabrication of news stories like falsification, fabrication and exaggeration, just the way people in Kano believed that the figures of Covid-19 in the state are overestimated by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) (Msughter, 2020). Similarly, hoaxes, which is a large-scale deception being deliberately masqueraded as news in social media or mainstream media, often may be picked up and mistakenly validated by supposedly credible news outlets causing harm to the victim. The last one is humorous fakes, which are playful pieces of information meant for humour.

The subtypes of humorous fake news include satire or news parody, which rely on irony and humour to imitate genuine or credible news sources and news game show, where unusual news pieces are read aloud for listeners to call in and guess, which is real or fake. The awareness of the playful intents by the readers often makes them not to take such humour seriously (Kurfi, et al., 2021). Thus, Msugther (2018) suggests that misperception often led to misinformation or conspiracy beliefs.

3.6 Understanding News and Fake News

Asemah in Msugther (2018) sees news as the account of a timely and unusual event in the society. This definition seems limiting as observed by Msugther et al., (2020) that the current digital environment characterised by proliferating social media have changed the traditional notion of news to an account of an unusual event. Hence, Msugther and Phillips (2020) see news as the main form in which current information about public events is carried by media of all kinds. Although, it is obvious through the definitions given here that one of the distinctive features of news is currency, the latter definition captures the fact that news is information conveyed on different kinds of media. It suffices to presume that news is information about events that are currently happening or that have happened recently.

Though, Msugther et al., (2020) adds that fake news spread “faster, farther, deeper and more broadly than truth”. Because information disorder covers satire and parody, click-bait headlines, and the misleading use of captions, visuals or statistics, as well as the genuine content that is shared out of context, imposter content (when a journalist’s name or a newsroom logo is used by people with no connections to them), and manipulated and fabricated content. From all this, it emerges that this crisis is much more complex than the term ‘fake news’ suggests.

However, solutions to these types of information polluting our social media streams and stopping them from flowing into traditional media outputs, has to do with content creators, motivation behind the creation, the type of content being produced and the recipients of such contents on social media and the motivation behind the recipients to repost, there are many aspects to this issue, and many of the debates are not grasping this complexity.

3.7 Influence of Social Media Regarding Covid-19

Media coverage and public opinion can have a significant effect on both the public and private sectors in deciding with regards to suspending programs like airline programs, compared to the actual need for public health. Mass media have long been regarded as critical sources of public perceptions of risk. Through the media, people are acknowledged as a chance that offers the risk warnings and interprets the risk issues regarding the pandemic. The information regarding risk is presented in a manner that influences people’s perception of risk, especially sensational media reporting of a pandemic crisis (Hile et al., 2022).

In particular, it is believed that anxiety and anger mediate the effect of media exposure on the perception of personal-level danger and therefore increase beneficial preventive behaviours. The outbreak of Covid-19 is a negative occurrence, resulting in an unpredictably high number of illnesses and mortalities, eliciting negative self-relevant emotions from the public. People usually express their concerns about the pandemic outbreak through social media. In some instances, however, the mass media are unable to capture the epidemic on time, and thus fail to become the prime indicator. Since mass media news reports fall behind real-time corona virus trends, it does not play a useful pre-warning role in communicating and sensitising about public health. However, as the virus is new and there is not enough research

on it, misinformation may have been transmitted by the mass media leading to adverse psychological effects among people such as anxiety, rage or sadness (Aondover et al., 2022).

IV. Conclusion

The effect of fake news on the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria is a significant topic. Fake news exacerbated the pandemic's challenges, influencing public behavior, health outcomes, and the efficiency of government response. Misinformation about the nonexistence of the virus caused some individuals to ignore government-imposed lockdowns, social distancing, and mask mandates. The paper argues that fake news often amplified fear and panic, such as claims of massive deaths or false reports of an outbreak in specific communities and stigmatization of those infected with COVID-19 or those who recovered led to discrimination, reducing the likelihood of individuals seeking medical help. The paper concludes that addressing fake news requires a combination of education, regulation, and collaboration between governments, civil society, and media organizations. In Nigeria, tackling this issue effectively during the pandemic was critical to improving public health outcomes and societal trust.

References

- Ahmed, M. O., & Msughte, A. E. (2022). Assessment of the spread of fake news of Covid-19 amongst social media users in Kano State, Nigeria. *Computers in Human Behavior Reports*, 6, 100189.
- Aliough, T. D., Ovey, I. J., & Aondover, E. M. (2023). Examining perceptions of Kwande residents on traditional songs aired on Ashiwaves radio station for curbing the COVID-19 pandemic in Benue State. *Environment and Public Health Research*, 1(1), 1448-1448.
- Aondover, E. M., Ebele, U. C., Onyejelem, T. E., & Akin-Odukoya, O. O. (2024). Propagation of False Information on Covid-19 among Nigerians on Social Media. *LingLit Journal Scientific Journal for Linguistics and Literature*, 5(3), 158-172.
- Aondover, E. M., Oyeleye, S. A., & Aondover, P. P. (2022). Analysis of Iconographic Effect of Visual Communication Genre on Covid-19 in Nigeria. *Journal of Gynaecology and women's health*, 23(3), 1-10.
- Hile, M. M., Msughte, A. E., & Babale, A. M. (2022). A Public Health Communication: Towards Effective Use of Social Marketing for Public Health Campaigns in Nigeria. *Ann Community Med Prim Health Care*, 5(1), 1002.
- Kurfi, M. Y., Msughte, M. E., & Mohamed, I. (2021). Digital images on social media and proliferation of fake news on covid-19 in Kano, Nigeria. *Galactica Media: Journal of Media Studies*, 3(1), 103-124.
- Msughte, A. E. (2020). Internet meme as a campaign tool to the fight against Covid-19 in Nigeria. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science: A Arts & Humanities–Psychology*, 20(6), 27-39.
- Msughte, A. E., & Phillips, D. (2020). Media framing of COVID-19 pandemic: A study of daily trust and vanguard newspapers in Nigeria. *International Journal of Health, Safety and Environment (IJHSE)*, 6(5), 588-596.
- Msughte, A. E., Kuchi, M. G., & Abba, A. A. (2023). Critical Discourse Analysis of Traditional Medicine Outdoor Advertising and Public Health Issues in Northern Nigeria. *Indigenous Language for Social Change Communication in the Global South*, 39.
- Msughte, A. E., Perpetua, A. O., & Itiafa, A. L. (2023). Artificial Intelligence and the Media: Revisiting Digital Dichotomy Theory. In *Information Systems Management*. IntechOpen.

- Msughter, A. E., Yar'Adua, S. M., & Maradun, L. U. (2020). Influence of Cultural Practices on Maternal Morbidity and Complications in Katsina-Ala Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Health, Safety and Environment*, 6(9), 670-681.
- Msughter, A.E., Yar'Adua, S.M., & Ogechi, A.P. (2022). Information seeking behavior on Covid-19 vaccine among residents of Fagge Local Government Area of Kano, Nigeria. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6 (9), 2526-2541.
- Namadi, H. M., & Aondover, E. M. (2020). Survey of reproductive health information seeking behavior among pregnant women in some selected hospitals in Kano Metropolis. *Biomed J Sci & Tech Res/BJSTR. DOI*, 10, 1984-1987.
- Obada, A. A., Airaoje, O. K., Okuneye, A. P., Collins-Dike, J., & Msughter, A. E. (2024). Media Role on the Burden of Non-Communicable Diseases in Nigeria. *Clin Case Rep Int*. 2024; 8, 1652.
- Obada, A. A., Msughter, A. E., Namadi, H. M., & Nongubee, T. (2021). Hyper prevalence of malnutrition in Nigerian context. *Biomedical Journal of Scientific & Technical Research* , 39 (1), 30916-30925.
- Obada, AA, Abba, AA, & Msughter, AE (2021). Pregnancy Induced Hypertension in Kabo Local Government Area of Kano State, Nigeria. *Biomedical Journal of Scientific & Technical Research* , 39 (4), 31458-31466.
- Onyejelem, T. E., & Aondover, E. M. (2024a). Digital Generative Multimedia Tool Theory (DGMTT): A Theoretical Postulation. *Journalism*, 14(3), 189-204.
- Onyejelem, T. E., & Aondover, E. M. (2024b). Digital Generative Multimedia Tool Theory (DGMTT): A Theoretical Postulation in the Era of Artificial Intelligence. *Adv Mach Lear Art Inte*, 5(2), 01-09.
- Owens-Ibie, N., & Aondover, E. M. (2024). Hate postings on social media and peace imperatives in Nigeria. *Legal challenges and political strategies in the post-truth era*.
- Pate, UA, Yar'Adua, SM, & Msughter, AE (2020). Public awareness, knowledge and perception of Covid-19 in Tarauni LGA and Kano metropolitan area of Kano State, Nigeria. *Media & Communication Currents*, 4 (2), 52-69.
- Usman, B., Eric Msughter, A., & Olaitan Ridwanullah, A. (2022). Social media literacy: fake news consumption and perception of COVID-19 in Nigeria. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 9(1), 2138011.