

HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS OF *FAKE NEWS* AND THE PHENOMENON OF SOCIAL MEDIA MISINFORMATION IN SOUTH AFRICA AND NIGERIA

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Abstract

Distribution of fake news is not a new phenomenon in the historical account of the media. In fact, misinformation has been in existence ever before the advent of social media. Its origin dates back to the time before the printing press. This implies that false stories have been in dissemination as long as human beings have lived in groups where power exists. It is based on the above testament that these researchers have attempted to do a critical study on the *historical antecedents of fake news and the phenomenon of social media misinformation in South Africa and Nigeria*. Data were gathered through *case study* in which various occurrences about dissemination of fake information on South Africans and Nigerians in social media were investigated within the real life context. The data were subjected to scrutiny in order to ascertain their veracity and validity before being synthesized, interpreted, described and summarized, using descriptive data analysis tool. It was discovered that cases of fake news are prevalent in African states and the perceived incredibility of popular online news sources is on the increase, and this may have negative impact on the democratic enterprise in contemporary African society. The conclusion is that with the ubiquitous of social media and users' anonymity the problems of free press are becoming more and more complex and even more dangerous.

Keywords: Fake news, Social media, African states, Historical antecedents, Democratic enterprise

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Introduction

Falsifications and distortions of news materials are not new occurrences in the chronological record of significant media events in fact they have been in existence ever before the advent of social media. The origins of fake news date back to the time before the printing press. This implies that false stories have been in dissemination as long as human beings have lived in clusters where power operates. Before printing was invented, news was passed orally and interpersonally from person-to-person through word-of-mouth (WOM). This was followed by inscriptions on hard-wood, stones, clays, papyrus and cotton-rag. We are made to

understand that the messages on these writing materials were exclusively reserved for the use of monarchs and leaders of religious groups as well as generals of military formations. Most of these messages had been properly documented thereafter for posterity in order to have historical knowledge about past rulers and state functionaries and for their leadership skills and if there are no means of verifying the authenticity of such documented messages it will be very difficult to ascertain whether they are true or fake in this contemporary period.

It is worthy of mention that the invention of the first movable type by Johannes Gutenberg in Germany put paid to the concurrent spread of literacy that made

it possible to disseminate information to a large heterogeneous, anonymous audience simultaneously and the literate persons around the world have had the easy access to manipulate such information while interpreting them aurally to the illiterates. Later printed/textual messages became available to all and sundry in different format such as books, newspapers, magazines and cartoons. As people became more and more enlightened through the emergence of printed matters it also became more and more difficult to mislead them by misrepresenting printed/textual messages, but some privileged writers still found easy ways to manipulate facts.

Atwater (1927) revealed that “in the sixth century AD a principal historian of Byzantium, Procopius of Caesarea (500-ca. 554 AD) used fake news to smear the Emperor Justinian”. The story goes that Procopius supported Justinian regime while it lasted, but after his demise he released a treatise called *Secret History*, which defamed the person of the emperor and his wife. Since the emperor was dead there was no room for rebuttal, questioning or investigation of this common misconception by Procopius. Then it was possible that Procopius had the leverage to defame Justinian with his wild and unverifiable fake news probably because the new emperor never favoured Justinian regime.

Cleugh (1965:9) has engaged in discourse about an Italian author and satirist, Pietro Aretino, who as a result of printing opportunities published a correspondence to blackmail former friends using the Roman style of *pasquinos*: anonymous lampooning, to a new level of parody that he eventually used to plant a seed of doubt in the minds of readers about people in power in Italy and to shape the complex political reality of the time. Darnton (2017) observed that “Aretino's *pasquinos* were followed by a French variety of fake news known as *canards*: unfounded rumours or stories one of which reported that a monster that was captured in Chile was being transported to France. A notable English writer Swift (1710) complained about political fake news in his essay that focused on the damage that rumours and false information can do whether ascribed to a particular author or anonymous. He declared that “falsehood flies, and truth comes limping after it, so that when men come to be undeceived, it will be too late”. His 1720 descriptions of fake news in politics are remarkably synonymous to those of writers in this 21st century.

An American writer Edgar (1844) wrote a *hoax* newspaper article to trick or deceive people by claiming that a balloonist had crossed the Atlantic in a hot air balloon in only three days. Arevalo (2017) rebutted

this fake news by saying that “Edgar's attention to details and the plausible of the idea caused many to believe the account until reporters failed to find the balloon or the balloonist”. However, the story was said to have been retracted by Edgar four days after publication. However, Edgar became popular with a credit that he wrote at least six stories that turned out to be fake news.

Brad Schwartz (2015) alluded that one Father Ronald Arbuthnott Knox did a fake news broadcast called “Broadcasting the Barricades” in January 1926 on BBC radio. On November 3, 1948, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* editors were said to be so certain of the outcome of the American presidential election that took place a day before the particular date mentioned above and they subsequently cast the sensational headline: “**Dewey Defeats Truman**” (Jones, 2017). This headline turned out to be a fake title that had to be retracted and reprinted with correct news later. This incidence has been quoted as one of the reasons why journalists of reputable news outlet are always mandated to verify their news source before production and distribution till date.

In actuality, fake news was what is being used to promote and sell tabloid sheets and broadsheets immediately after the invention of the first movable type by Johannes Gutenberg. Soll (2016:11) has confirmed this statement by saying that: “as far back as early 19th century unethical sensationalism in news stories always sold well”. This was a period identified by some characteristic media features in which modern newspapers started soliciting scoop beats by exposing something of discreditable and promoting fake stories as well as merchandizing news items to increase circulation and profits. It is worthy of knowing that with the advent of social media headline forms that are called *click bait* have been used to entice people to click to read more on the internet.

Going back to the earliest time, Soll (2016:12) peeped through the example of *New York Sun* stories that were based on “Great Moon Hoax” of 1835. The **Great Moon Hoax** is an allusion to a lithographic print of the hoax's Amphitheatre that was printed in a series of six articles by *The Sun* newspaper from August 25, 1835. The story behind the print was about the supposed discoveries of life and civilization on the moon. These discoveries of existence in the moon were falsely attributed to one of the best-known astronauts of that time, Sir John Herschel. According to Maliszewski (2015:26) “the story was advertised on August 21 1835 as an upcoming feature by *The Edinburg Courant* newspaper”. Maliszewski concluded

that “the first in a series of six stories was published four days later on August 24” (26).

There have been unusual series of false news in human history. The first in this series was the one used by Nazi propaganda machine under the leadership of Adolph Hitler to arouse anti-Semitic favour in Germany. Second in the series is that false news had performed a great function in bringing about the public enlightenment through the great thinker like Voltaire who spoke out against religious domination, when the Catholic Church falsely pronounced the 1755 Lisbon earthquake to distract the populace. The third in the series is associated with the emotional idealization of racism in the United States of America that led to the publication of false stories in the broadsheets about African Americans' alleged deficiencies and crimes in 1800s.

In the 1890s, there was also an occurrence in the United States of America in which rival newspaper publishers such as Joseph Pulitzer and William Hearst competed for readership of their newspapers through reportage of rumours as if they were true. In fact, the coinage of the phrase *yellow journalism* for unethical practice in journalism held its ground at the period. An account of the publishers' incredulous media practice has it that their activities in sensationalizing news played a leading role in drawing the United States of America into the Spanish-American war of 1898. After the end of this ruthless war the American public cried out and demanded for more accurate and objective news sources, which subsequently led to the emergence of a recess in a wall that gave birth to *New York Times* at the turn of the 20th century during which *yellow journalism* became less fascinating until the coming of web-based news series that returned the era of false news in full force.

The historical narratives of the origin of fake news are not lost on Africa where fake news and alternative facts are prevalent, considering the way most African leaders are trying to destroy the private media ownership “as truth regimes remain both loose and contested” (Ogola, 2017). Most of these leaders are autocrats who believe in the philosophy of **absolutism**, in which recognition of the truth is believed to be a prerogative of only a few cabals who exercise leadership power in **top-down** approach.

After gaining independence in the 1960s African political leaders invested heavily on state owned media, most especially the traditional broadcast media to husband political power and silence political dissidents. They always have an erroneous belief that the traditional media should be used to service the

government in power. They find truth being disseminated by the socially responsible media to be offensive. They cannot tolerate the truth and they are always bitter and vindictive after it is being told. Then, with its emergence in the virtual space, social media have been heavily used to distribute lies rather than truth. This distribution of lies via social media can be eternalized with the Yorùbá saying: *Eni o gba kadara, a gba kadara* meaning “He who refuses to accept the truth will forcefully accept lies”.

It is a matter of fact that most of these leaders use their power to regulate the broadcast media with the claims that they control and allocate broadcast frequencies on behalf of their citizens and that if frequencies are not controlled and allocated by central authority there will be confusion in the atmosphere. It is also a general belief that governments in the world over earn revenues from the allocation of broadcast frequencies. However, it has been very difficult for them to regulate the print media, but because they exist in the real world with physical structure there are professional regulatory bodies and self-regulatory mechanisms in place for print journalists to exercise their ethical power on free, but responsible press.

The operations of social media have become trite in that it defied regulations in any way this is because it exists in a virtual space and as African political leaders have not found the final pieces of the puzzle some of them have resulted to enacting draconian laws to muzzle the traditional press as an alternative measure. In Nigeria, for example, there was this most controversial media law passed in the year 1964 shortly after Nigerian independence to curtail the spread of rumour and false information. It was called *Newspapers Amendment Act of 1964*. Section 4(1) of the act generated controversy because it stated that: *Any person, who authorizes for publication, publishes, reproduces or circulates for sale in a newspaper any statement, rumour or report knowing or having reason to believe that such statement, rumour or report is false shall be guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine of two hundred pounds or to imprisonment for a term of one year.*

President Muhamadu Buhari of Nigeria also declared in his 1st October 2019 independence day speech that: “where the purported constitutional rights of people to freedom of expression infringes on the rights of other citizen or threatens to undermine national security his government will take firm and decisive action most especially against people spreading fake information”. In Egypt, “government has taken a measure under a new law and using fake

news label to shut down social media accounts with more than 5,000.00 followers without having to obtain a court order” (Magdy, 2018) “the pattern of new law in Kenya is also the latest fashion in other East African countries to punish the spreading of false information with an imposition of a lengthy jail term on offenders” (Olewe, 2018). In Ghana “fake news is a growing problem and media regulatory bodies and the government have no clear-cut strategy to deal with the problem” concluded Ahiabenu and Ofosu-Peasah (2018).

Following the summation of Ahiabenu and Ofosu-Peasah, it can be assumed that the full toll of the fake news disaster is yet to be abated in African states. For example, in the African elections monitored by *Quartz Africa* Magazine, a journalist named Latif Dahir (2018) reported that “automated bots are increasingly muddying election cycles in Africa, disrupting conversations, distorting facts, and bringing into focus the changing dynamics of politics in the continent”. Citing an example, he declared that “the influence of the bots was most prevalent in a country like Kenya where election was fought across social media platforms, with both the ruling party and the opposition using various tools to pitch their policies, provide spin, and shape their images”. In this aforementioned election, fake news that was peddled through social media became the mainstay of campaigns. Then political parties used Facebook Live and Periscope to engage voters and automated accounts were by far the leading influencer during voting exercises. This identification of political bots is indicative of the growing force of automated elections in Africa; these are imitating trends that are already taking place globally.

A celebrated Uganda entertainer Anne Kansiime woke up from a siesta one day in April 2019 to find more than 150 missed calls on her phone, she knew something was wrong immediately. She soon found out that during her brief *shuteye* siesta, fake news had spread that she had drowned together with her boyfriend in Canada. In the five-minute footage posted on her You Tube page, “the self-styled 'Queen Ninja' was also keen to offer a dollop of advice to her social media followers in the hope that they do not fall into the jaws of such misleading hoaxes” (Kizza, 2019). Her advice to her followers: “please follow the right pages. I recently got a blue tick on Instagram; meaning the account is verified. I have a blue tick You Tube page, so no excuses”. This false death story is one of thousands or even millions other similar hoaxes that have found their way into the public space all over the world. The

closing in of fake news is real with short-term implications of the new global social policies.

Review of Related Works

Thesis Statements on the Issue of Fake News Dissemination in African States

Beside the above historical narratives, several scholars of notes have made valuable contributions through their thesis statements to the issue of fake news dissemination within the context of contemporary African democratic dispensation. Such scholars include: Agbata (2018), Ahiabenu and Ofosu-Peasah (2018), Boylan (2018), Nye (2018), Wasserman and Madrid-Morales (2018), Bizimungu (2019), Borchardt (2019), Mbabazi (2019), Mubere (2019), Obi (2019), Schetze (2019), Wilson and Umar (2019).

Agbata (2018) opined that “although technology is awesome, it has also brought about some of the biggest challenges that African democracy is constantly confronted with, one of which is fake news, which has become a menace across the world”. He exemplified a BBC six-part report that shares multiple examples of how fake news on political campaigns fueled through social media brought about the death and maiming of some Nigerians, these are horrid situations that have been replicated times without number in some other parts of the world to signify that the world is now at a crossroads.

Ahiabenu and Ofosu-Peasah (2018) reiterated that “new digital tools and the spin-off innovative offerings and opportunities they provide have unleashed ground-breaking forms of gathering and publishing news including increased speed of news dissemination and ability to reach a wider audience”. However, the scholar duo exhibited the fear that “the growing challenges that come with the proliferation of fake news via these new digital tools portend great danger for African governments and African democracy if they are not properly managed”.

Boylan (2018) described how social media users in Uganda are in pitched battle with longtime President Yoweri Museveni, who is trying to curb the spread of fake news and online '*olugambo*'-**gossip**-by taxing users for the right to log into social media platforms and free speech proponents are saying that Mr Museveni's real intent is to muzzle critical independent media reporting”.

Nye (2018) emphasized that “the free services offered by social media are based on a profit model in which users' information and attention are actually the products, which are sold to advertisers and that emotions such as outrage stimulate engagement, and

news that is outrageous but false has been shown to engage more viewers than accurate news". He rounded-up this discourse by saying that "imposing limits on free speech, protected by the First Amendment of the US Constitution, raises difficult practical problems".

Wasserman and Madrid-Morales (2018) did a comparative study of exposure to fake news in African continent and the Americas. According to them, "the rise of false information has complex cultural and social reasons...until now, though, the phenomenon has been studied mostly as it happens in the US, with relatively little attention to the situation in African countries". They queried the reason why "little attention is paid to Africa despite the fact that disinformation on the continent of Africa has often taken the form of extreme speech inciting violence or has been used to spread racism, misogynous and xenophobic messages on mobile phone platforms".

Bizimungu (2019) averred that "Facebook has been accused of being a platform that allows users to propagate hate speech and other negative views, rumours and false news and that in countries like Nigeria, Kenya and the United States of America it has been used to influence people's democratic decisions". Borchardt (2019) opined that "fake news have proliferated in recent years". He also claimed that "trust in new media was established and otherwise has plummeted...news journalism is not an expendable luxury, it is a critical public good, enabling citizens to make informed decisions, while helping to hold those in power accountable, it serves that function only if it is a quality product and people know that"

Mbabazi (2019) confirmed that "the influence of the media is part and parcel of contemporary politics, but the upsurge of social media platforms has given rise to, among other aspects, circulation of false narratives, staining the media industry with yet a confusing image and this bears consequences...fake news also known as junk news is a type of propaganda that has caused great upheavals in the political arena and is unfortunately impacting the mode in which political affairs play out within masses in African nations". Mubere (2019) wrote that "social media was awash with stories of higher death tolls and gruesome accounts of violence during the traumatized riots and xenophobic attacks in South Africa". He said further that "in this impasse misleading and untrue stories were being shared on several social media platforms".

Obi (2019) made the point that "while the digital media helped 'disrupt' Nigerian political campaigns in 2019 Nigerian national elections, it also aided the rise of the dreaded fake news...every election in Nigeria has

witnessed few bouts of fake news where a party would circulate an old picture of money in an envelope or strapped on packs of food as the case may be and accuse the opposition of attempting to buy votes". Schetze (2019) hammered that "the rapid spread of fake news can influence millions of people, impacting elections and financial markets". He cited example that the impact of fake news on the 2016 US presidential election has found that fake news stories about Hilary Clinton was very strongly linked to the defection of voters who supported Barak Obama in previous elections"

Wilson and Umar (2019) measured the effect of fake news on Nigeria's democracy within the premise of freedom of expression. They anchored their theses on four objectives to find out the rate of the spread of fake news among Nigerians on both social and conventional media. They discovered that politics and crisis suffer more fake news than any other nature and that fake news is still crucial because there are rounds of perceptions that influence its nature and thus its spread.

Theoretical Postulations

The arguments for our discourse on fake news and disinformation will be structured on three linguistic theories of speech. In essence, **Speech Act Theory**, **Theory of Truth** and **Theory of Reference** have been adopted as frameworks to construct the illustrative base for the *Historical Antecedents of Fake News and the Phenomenon of Social Media Misinformation in South Africa and Nigeria*. One of the proponents of the **speech act theory** Austin (1962) has theorized that *utterances*: oral or written statements can be used to accomplish a considerable task in speech communication. He sees utterances as oral or written testaments that create actions in humans' speech performance while passing messages across to a large, heterogeneous, anonymous audience simultaneously in different parts of the world. This act of performance is what he conceptualizes as **performatives**

In other to appropriate the concept: *performatives* within the context of speech communication, the *speech act theorists* "took their ample time to group speech into myriads of family units that contain similar types of Performatives" (Bach, 1975). These are (1) Commissives, Directives, Assertives, Expressives and Declarative. In Commissives, the theoretical idea is assumed to promise and commit the speaker to a course of action in which he or she gives offer, makes a vow, takes a pledge and gives guarantee. In Directives, the speech

act theorists' postulations hang on getting the recipients of speaker's message to do something through request that boils down on the fact that the speaker gives command, gives order, gives suggestion, gives permission and asks questions. In Assertives, the theoreticians' intention is to display the speaker's belief in the propositional content of his/her utterances that assert, describe, state, predict, speculate, report and announce. In Expressives, their point of view is to articulate the speaker's psychological state in which human beings have used speech to compliment, to apologize, to welcome, to thank, to greet and to acknowledge. In Declaratives, their point is to state what is done by an appropriately authorized speaker to fire-"You are sacked", to appoint -"You are in charge", to sentence-"You are jailed for so, so days"

This illustrative analysis given by **speech act theorists** should be taken with caution because the illustration is a central insight of *Conversation Analysis*, which states that "the action that the participants in a conversation will interpret the speaker's utterance to be will depend not just on the utterance's of linguistic form, but also on its location in the sequence, on the context, and on the identity of the speaker, among others".

Theory of truth was developed by a Polish logician, Alfred Tarski in the 1930s. The theory is a theory in the philosophy of language that holds that "truth is a property of sentences" (Tarski, 1944). Tarski developed the theory in the 1930s to give an **inductive definition of truth-inference** of a generalized conclusion from particular instances. Tarski (1944) categorizes *Inductive Definition of Truth* into five broad groups: (1) negation $\neg A$ is true if and if A is not true (2) conjunction $A \wedge B$ is true if and if A is true and B is true (3) disjunction $A \vee B$ is true if and only if A is true, or both A and B are true (4) universal statement " $A \times A(x)$ " is true if and only if every object x satisfies " $A(x)$ " and (5) existential statement " $E \times A(x)$ " is true if and only there is an object x which satisfies " $A(x)$ ". The above analogy explains how the truth conditions of *complex* sentences can be reduced to the truth conditions of their constituents. Tarski (1944) called the 'simplest' constituents as atomic sentences, which explain a number of protons in the nucleus of a sentence and he said that a contemporary semantic definition of truth would define truth for atomic sentences as follows:

An atomic sentence $F(x_1, \dots, x_n)$ is true
if the corresponding value of
variables
bear the relation expressed by the

predicate F

Kirkham (1992) in his proposition on the theory of truth differs a bit from Tarski earlier inductive definition of truth when he clarified that "to formulate any of the linguistic theories, such as it is applied in the truth theory, it is necessary to distinguish the language that one is talking about, that is, the *object language*, from the language that one is using, that is, *meta language*". The word **Meta** means more than: beyond or change

The **theory of reference** is a theory that pairs the expressions of a language with true-values. It does not pair expression with their meaning, but it pairs expressions with the contribution those expressions make to the determination of the truth-values of sentences in which they occur. The construction of a theory of reference is best illustrated with the example of proper names for proper occasion.

- (A) Muhamadu Buhari is the 5th executive president of Nigeria
- (B) Jubril from Sudan is the 5th executive president of Nigeria

The (A) is true reference point, and (B) is false reference point.

The difference in **truth-value** is traceable to the difference between the expressions 'Muhamadu Buhari' and 'Jubril from Sudan'. It is a fact that 'Muhamadu Buhari' stands for the man who is in fact the 5th president of Nigeria, whereas 'Jubril from Sudan' stands for a man who is not. This indicates that the reference of a proper name, its contribution to the determination of truth conditions of sentences in which it occurs, is the object for which the true name stands.

Methodology

Data were collected through **case study**. In this method various occurrences of fake news dissemination in social media across African states were investigated within the real life context. These researchers tried to construct and deconstruct explanations about myriads of disinformation incidents by gathering materials on where, which, when, what, how and why of their causes. They compared a series of data points to some theoretical false news trending that were predicted before this research. As several African states have been experiencing false news dissemination via social media, the data generated on the issue were used to make predictions about possible changes in information

seeking patterns of Africans and more so an observational investigation was carried out among internet users in the cities of Ibadan and Lagos to see whether these predictions can support the facts and figures that have been collected through documents, archival records and the Internet. Careful weighing of evidences and validity of information sourced on the past and present cases of false information disseminated in some African states were done, and there was a textual explication of the weighed evidences. The type of case study used is *case history* that focuses on historical similarities of fake news occurrences in two African states: Nigeria and South Africa. All these data were subjected to scrutiny in order to ascertain their veracity and validity. After verifying and validating the genuineness of these materials, they were then synthesized, interpreted, described and summarized, using descriptive data analysis tool.

Findings

It has been established that cases of fake news are prevalent in African states and the perceived incredibility of popular online news sources is on the increase and this may have professional implications for the days of toil and sweat that have been spent by traditional mass media. There is also a probability that the incidence of fake news distribution via online platforms may have negative impact on the democratic enterprise in contemporary African society. Results of our findings on this probable negative impact will be situated within the context of fake news observed in South Africa and Nigeria.

The crisis of xenophobic violence against foreigners particularly other African nationals in South Africa became a big story in digital media technologies. As ever, there was a lot of disinformation trending on social media platforms; there were numerous video and photo footages that were passing false information, proven to indicate high level of violence against foreigners in South Africa. The question to ask is: do these visuals and footages actually reflect what is really happening in South Africa? The answer to this question is probably NO. For example, there was a disturbing footage that went viral on watts hap news coverage that was showing people, which were trapped in a multiple storied building on fire, jumping down off to escape. The bloggers misrepresented these web site activities/experiences as Nigerians that were jumping down from the building on account of xenophobic attack in South Africa.

There was a public furor across Nigeria in the

aftermath of this blogging. This tells how fake news and provocative information can create chaos, civil strife, war and even death. The bloggers' success has given the lie to the Nigerian nation, but Journalists from Nigeria's print and broadcast media have failed to match expectations because they could not debunk the falsehood in the aforementioned blogging; as none of them seized the initiative to correct the lies. It was British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) that came to the rescue by giving a detailed narrative of this event as one that occurred in the city of Surat, Western India in May 2019.

There was also a film footage that went viral showing a man being burnt alive in a South African city. The bloggers shared the video on watts hap claiming it to be horrid depiction of the xenophobic violence against Nigerians in South Africa, but experts in **reality checking** have actually confirmed that the video clip was showing a neutral man, not a Nigerian, who was burnt to death in January 2019 after being accused of robbing a woman's handbag in Johannesburg, South Africa.

A video clip showing the South African Deputy Police Minister speaking about the illegal presence of some foreign nationals in South Africa was shared widely to falsely indicate his supports for the xenophobic attack in 2019, but actually it was a video clip from 2017. What complicated the issuance of this video clip further is that, the image being shared was not faked or doctored, but its accompanying news content was sort of being distorted to make it to look like it showing what is just happening in South Africa. The summation is that the impact of social media public outcry over the Deputy Police Minister's racial comments in this footage was far reaching and it was falsehood.

The reported 2019 xenophobic violence in South Africa was felt in a huge way in Nigeria. The resultant increase in misinformation about the attacks stoked anger in Nigerians who organized peaceful and violent protests across the country. In order to show alibi of anger and violence, a popular Nigerian blogger, Linda Ikeji, shared on watts hap footage of a burnt MTN office claiming that it has been lit up in Lagos, but it was a picture of fire occurrence from another state in Nigerian in the year 2015. This blogger's footage proved to be another round of lies and falsity of a report on web site.

A video of a woman manhandled by a rabid crowd in a Nigerian city having been found guilty of kidnapping a human being was shared on the blog few years ago. In 2019, this same video was reposted by

some bloggers who linked the woman's crime to the former governor of Imo state, Rochas Okorocha. In truth, the character of the accused and actual meaning of the footage as well as the quality of the textual messages below it are incomparable. The texts read thus:

This woman was recognized in Owerri as Rocha's girlfriend. As she was packing her exotic car assumed to have been procured with Imo State money, she was given the beating of her life. People are indeed angry. Has the silent revolution begun?

In fact, there is a credibility gap between what the blogger was saying and what the readers saw happening in the video. In angry rebuttal, the members of Nigerian society who have seen the video clip some years back claimed that Rochas Okorocha was being unfairly scrutinized and humiliated through this fake blogging activity.

Yusuf (2018) granted *Sahara Reporters* an interview. In the interview he reported how members of a *watts hap* group were arrested by the Police Command under his control in Kano state Nigeria for circulating fake news about a married woman who they allegedly accused of child trafficking. He claimed that "the woman lodged a complaint with the Police under his command that her photo was being shared maliciously by bloggers with the intent to malign and incite public anger against her person". It was reported that the woman's photographs and the false news about her had gone viral and in order to protect her from mob attack the Police moved into action by tracking down three suspects and arresting them for circulating the fake and offensive information. After thorough investigations they were released on bail while further investigation is ongoing. This step that was taken by the Police to provide security cover for the innocent woman is a pointer to bloggers that they are highly susceptible to arrest for disseminating fake news that could negatively affect the nation's security or jeopardize individual's personal freedom. The study of this particular case is an urge to social media users to desist from sharing and forwarding fake messages that are actionable in the court of law.

Aisha Buhari, the wife of Nigerian president had cautioned Nigerians on the dangers of spreading fake news. She injected a word of caution in her talk while debunking trending fake news that she abandoned her children in Aso Rock to escape the wrath of the Northern cabals. Her talk was a rebuttal of some common misconception about her medical trip to the United Kingdom. She reminded bloggers that a similar fake story was disseminated when her husband,

General Muhamadu Buhari, fell sick and they were showing fake Ambulances, Hospitals and Dead body to suggest that he was dead. Rumours that General Muhamadu Buhari had been cloned and replaced with a *body-double* called 'Jubril' from Sudan were widely shared online: This is still a rumour, because the body-double narrative has not been confirmed or authenticated in Nigerian political communication. Buhari (2018) in *BBC News Africa* claimed that "AFP Fact Check investigation revealed that the rumours appeared on Facebook, Twitter and You Tube and the posts promoting the rumours were viewed more than 500,000 times".

There was a claim in a *BBC News* report that "the aide to former President Good luck Jonathan was among the high profile individuals who promoted the rumours". The *BBC News* report also accused Nnamdi Kanu of *IPOB Group* (Indigenous People of Biafra) of fuelling the rumour by sharing two images of Buhari, one reversed, to allege that Buhari who is right-handed was using his left hand in order to prove that General Buhari is a **body-double**.

However, the ongoing unfounded disinformation by *IPOD* group connecting the body-double narrative to the Chinese Engineering Construction Company (CECC) and Chinese Medical Team for COVID-19 isolation centers' construction is currently based on pending truth. In the meantime, all actions on this rumour milling are hanging on Tarski *Liar Paradox* of (LP) (S) is true if and only if (S) is false. In the above postulation by Tarski, the sentence=(S) employed asserts its own falsity, that is, a situation called a self-referential use of semantic concept: falsehood. What is really needed to add a truth-value to this rumoring and free Nigerian society of confusion is to apply "classical logic relating to *law of bivalence*" and adopt "the twenty-century strategy of many-valued logic, logic with truth-value gaps or Para-consistent logic" (Tarski, 1944).

Conclusion

The conclusion is that fake news has always been in existence, since time immemorial. The only difference today is that the platforms for its distribution have increased tremendously as a result of the democratization of information technology. The above assertion has been supported by the view of Mbabazi (2019) who concluded that "democracy does not always bring responsibility, and responsible media should always be at alert to serve as watchdogs for irresponsible democracies". He further inferred that: "one of the dangers of democratizing media

technologies is to put IT in the hands of ignoramus and malicious gossipers". He also concluded that, with the ubiquitous of social media and users' anonymity, the problems of free press are becoming more and more complex and more dangerous. The implication is that if nothing is done about the prevalence of fake news distribution on social media, the existing democratic governances will struggle to muzzle the press with obnoxious laws and its aftermath may consume the journalism practice and democratic culture in Africa.

The aftermath of fake news can also be drawn based on the evidences from the first three case studies, which indicated that social media reportage of xenophobic crisis in South Africa is awash with graphic photos and video footages that appeared to stoke tensions and uncertainty in Nigeria. From the footages most Nigerians found it a little bit hard to tell what is real and what is not real. There was a great deal of confusion about how the bloggers uploaded their videos, photos and news content in a way that readers and viewers could not easily wrap up their minds around what had happened. More so, the audience cannot discard the fact that fear and hatred of strangers and widely attacks on them are not a new occurrence in South Africa.

Records have shown that attacks on foreigners have been on since the year 1994, but the xenophobic attacks hit the peak in 2008, 2015 and again in 2019. What makes the 2019 attacks different from the previous years is the proliferation of social media and their ability to disseminate information very quickly and the trending of fake news is moving upward. From the above cases drawn from South Africa and the Nigerian experiences it is evident that fake news/rumours are prevalent in African states and that the perceived incredibility of popular online news sources is on the increase, and that undefined powers of social media users/bloggers may have negative impact on the democratic enterprise in contemporary African society if care is not taken. The recommendation is that message receivers on social media should not believe everything that they come across on the blogs just on the face value, they should learn to ask questions before believing the messages and before sharing it with friends.

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