



FAKE NEWS AND NATIONAL SECURITY THREATS IN NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN SHAPING PUBLIC PERCEPTION AND POLICY RESPONSES

Alphonsus A. Adebisi*, Hannah O. Adejumo,

Margaret E. Aliyu, and Kehinde G. Adeosun

Communication and Language Programme, Institute of Communication and General Studies,
Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Nigeria.

*Corresponding Author's Email: adebiyiaa@funaab.edu.ng

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ABSTRACT: *The proliferation of fake news presents a critical threat to national security, with Nigeria being a prominent example. This study examines the relationship between fake news dissemination and national security threats, focusing on the media's role in shaping public perception and influencing policy responses. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research incorporates content analysis of Nigerian media, public opinion surveys, and interviews with policymakers and security experts. The findings illustrate how fake news intensifies conflicts, deepens social divisions, and hampers governmental security efforts. The study also highlights the role of traditional and social media in spreading misinformation, leading to diminished public trust in official communications. Case studies on election-related misinformation, ethnic tensions, and terrorist propaganda reveal how media narratives shape societal reactions and government strategies. In addition, the research evaluates current anti-fake news policies and suggests measures to mitigate its impact on national security. The study emphasizes the urgent need for coordinated efforts between media, government, and civil society to combat misinformation and enhance public resilience. These insights contribute to the broader discourse on media and national security, providing empirical evidence from Nigeria with implications for other nations facing similar challenges.*

KEYWORDS: Fake news, national security, media influence, public perception, Nigeria



INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of fake news has become a defining challenge in the digital age, with significant implications for governance, social stability, and national security. In Nigeria, a country already grappling with socio-political tensions, insurgencies, and ethnic divisions, the rise of misinformation presents an urgent threat. The media, both traditional and digital, play a pivotal role in disseminating information, but their platforms have also become fertile ground for the spread of falsehoods that exacerbate societal unrest. From politically charged fake news during elections to misinformation fuelling religious and ethnic conflicts, the stakes are higher than ever.

As national security in Nigeria becomes increasingly intertwined with the media's role in shaping public perception, fake news has emerged as a tool not just for misleading the public but also for manipulating security narratives and undermining government efforts to maintain order. The dissemination of false information has the potential to erode trust in official institutions, incite violence, and amplify divisions among communities. Terrorist groups, political actors, and even foreign entities exploit these vulnerabilities, complicating the task of ensuring public safety and national cohesion.

This study seeks to explore the complex dynamics between the Nigerian media, fake news, and national security. Through an empirical examination of media content, public perception, and policy responses, the research aims to uncover how fake news impacts national security in Nigeria. By focusing on key case studies and providing a comprehensive analysis of the media's role in this phenomenon, this study aims to contribute meaningful insights into how Nigeria—and other nations facing similar challenges—can combat the spread of misinformation and safeguard national security.

Statement of the Problem

The unchecked proliferation of fake news in Nigeria has advanced into a critical threat to national security, destabilising the nation's social fabric and eroding trust in institutions. Despite heightened awareness of the risks posed by misinformation, the Nigerian media—both traditional and digital, continues to facilitate the rapid dissemination of false narratives. These distortions are not benign; they have fuelled ethnic and religious divisions, incited violence, and amplified the activities of insurgent groups. Moreover, political actors have weaponised fake news to manipulate public perception, exacerbating instability and complicating national security efforts.

Existing policies aimed at curbing the spread of fake news have proven largely ineffective, allowing dangerous misinformation to persist unchecked. A deeper problem lies in the under-examined relationship between media influence, public perception, and security in Nigeria. Without a clear understanding of how fake news infiltrates public discourse and undermines security, government efforts to combat these threats remain fragmented and insufficient.

This study seeks to fill this critical gap by examining the direct impact of fake news on national security in Nigeria, with a focus on the media's pivotal role in shaping public opinion and influencing security policy. Through comprehensive empirical analysis, the study will uncover how misinformation escalates security risks and propose targeted strategies to mitigate its harmful effects, offering vital insights to policymakers and media practitioners alike.



Research Objectives

The research objectives for this study are:

1. **To analyse the impact of fake news on national security in Nigeria:** Investigate how misinformation has contributed to security threats, including its effects on social stability, conflict escalation, and public trust in government institutions.
2. **To examine the role of media in disseminating fake news and shaping public perception:** Evaluate how traditional and digital media platforms contribute to the spread of false information and how this influences public opinion and national security.
3. **To identify key case studies of fake news incidents and their security implications:** Provide a detailed analysis of specific instances where fake news has directly impacted national security, including the role of media in these events.
4. **To assess the effectiveness of current policies and strategies aimed at combating fake news:** Review and evaluate existing measures and interventions designed to address misinformation and determine their success in mitigating security risks.
5. **To propose actionable recommendations for improving media practices and policy responses:** Develop strategies to enhance media literacy, improve regulatory frameworks, and strengthen government responses to better manage the spread of fake news and its impact on national security.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are:

1. How does fake news impact national security in Nigeria?
2. What role do Nigerian media outlets, both traditional and digital, play in the dissemination of fake news?
3. What are the key case studies where fake news has directly influenced national security in Nigeria?
4. How effective are current policies and strategies; in combating the spread of fake news and addressing its impact on national security?
5. What recommendations can be made to improve media practices and policy responses to better address the challenges posed by fake news?

Research Hypothesis

Hypothesis One: Fake news significantly contributes to national security threats in Nigeria by increasing social unrest, ethnic tensions, and public distrust in government institutions.

Hypothesis Two: Nigerian traditional and digital media outlets play a substantial role in the propagation of fake news, thereby shaping public perceptions of national security and influencing public opinion.



Hypothesis Three: Specific cases of fake news have directly intensified national security challenges in Nigeria, with media coverage amplifying the effects of these incidents on public and governmental responses.

Hypothesis Four: Existing policies and strategies in Nigeria are insufficiently effective in countering the spread of fake news and mitigating its adverse impacts on national security, leaving significant gaps in security management.

Hypothesis Five: Implementing targeted interventions, including improved media literacy programs and enhanced policy frameworks, will lead to a measurable reduction in the influence of fake news and its negative effects on national security in Nigeria.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in several theoretical frameworks that examine the intersection between media, misinformation, and national security. One prominent theory is Goffman's Frame Analysis (1974), which explores how media narratives and social interactions construct public perceptions of reality. By framing news and information in particular ways, media organisations influence how audiences interpret events, including those related to national security. This framework is critical to understanding how fake news may shape perceptions of political instability in Nigeria.

Additionally, McCombs and Shaw's Agenda-Setting Theory (1972) emphasizes the role of media in shaping public opinion by highlighting certain issues over others. In the context of fake news, this theory explains how disinformation may disproportionately direct public attention toward politically charged or divisive topics, thus influencing national security concerns. This framework helps analyse the mechanisms through which fake news gains traction and potentially destabilises political structures.

The Information Manipulation Theory proposed by McCornack (1992) further provides a lens to understand the strategic use of information, particularly misinformation. This theory argues that communicators often manipulate information to achieve certain goals, which in this study translates to the dissemination of fake news aimed at destabilising national security. The manipulation of information and facts, especially on social media, creates a fertile ground for distrust and political instability.

Finally, Granovetter's Strength of Weak Ties theory (1973) offers insight into how information flows within social networks. In Nigeria, weak ties (i.e., casual acquaintances on social media) are instrumental in spreading misinformation rapidly. This theory helps explain the viral nature of fake news, especially during politically sensitive times like elections.

These theoretical foundations create a robust framework to analyse the dynamics of fake news dissemination and its implications for Nigeria's national security.

Literature Review

The growing body of literature on fake news, misinformation, and their societal impacts provides a solid foundation for this study. Ajayi (2021) offers a detailed analysis of how fake news spread during Nigerian elections, emphasizing the role of social media in magnifying



misinformation. This aligns with Allcott and Gentzkow (2017), who argue that social media platforms act as catalysts for the rapid spread of fake news, particularly during politically sensitive periods, such as the U.S. 2016 elections.

Bello (2020) provides insights into how misinformation destabilises political structures, particularly in fragile democracies like Nigeria. Bello's work highlights that the spread of fake news in Nigeria is not merely a social nuisance but a critical threat to national security. Bradshaw and Howard (2018) further underline the global organisation of disinformation campaigns, which are often politically motivated and systematically organised to undermine political stability in various nations.

In addition to the structural and organisational dimensions of fake news, Bertin and Meyer (2021) contribute a qualitative perspective on the media's role in fostering or mitigating misinformation. Their findings align with Cinelli et al. (2020, 2021), who explore the dynamics of misinformation in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrating the universal nature of the phenomenon and its adaptability across different crises and regions.

The work of Friggeri, Gallus, and Yang (2014) on rumour cascades reveals how fake news spreads through social networks, particularly online. Their findings underscore the viral nature of misinformation, which supports Gerbner et al. (2002) cultivation theory, emphasizing the role of prolonged media exposure in shaping societal beliefs and perceptions.

Hsu et al. (2020) explore experimental approaches to combating fake news, offering practical insights into how interventions like fact-checking may mitigate the spread of misinformation. This theme is further developed by Pennycook and Rand (2020, 2021), who focus on using crowdsourced judgments to assess the credibility of news sources. Their findings provide a practical framework for addressing misinformation through collaborative efforts between media organisations and the public.

Lewandowsky, Ecker, and Cook (2017) explore the broader implications of the "post-truth" era, where objective facts are often overshadowed by emotional and political rhetoric. This is echoed by Lazer et al. (2018), who highlight the challenges of discerning fake news from real information, particularly in a highly polarized media environment. Their research provides a scientific basis for understanding the mechanisms that enable fake news to thrive.

The role of fact-checking organisations in combating misinformation has also been studied extensively. Mancini et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of these organisations in restoring public trust in media, while McCormack's (1992) Information Manipulation Theory helps explain how and why misinformation is strategically deployed.

O'Neill and Savigny's (2021) work on media literacy programs highlights their effectiveness in combating fake news, particularly in developing nations like Nigeria, where media literacy remains relatively low. Media literacy becomes a vital tool in fostering resilience to fake news, a sentiment echoed by Shin and Thorson (2017), who apply network analysis to study how misinformation spreads within specific social circles.

Finally, Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral (2018) emphasize the speed at which fake news spreads online compared to verified information, highlighting the unique challenges that social media platforms pose to national security. Tucker et al. (2018) provide a comprehensive review of the



political consequences of social media misinformation, arguing that fake news exacerbates political polarization and undermines democratic processes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study utilised a mixed-methods research design to comprehensively analyse the impact of fake news on national security in Nigeria. This approach combined both quantitative and qualitative methods, providing a robust examination of media influence, public perception, and policy effectiveness.

Data collection involved several methods. Content analysis was performed on Nigerian media outlets, including newspapers, television broadcasts, and digital platforms. This analysis identified and categorized instances of fake news related to national security, revealing key themes, frequency, and reach.

Surveys were administered to a representative sample of Nigerian citizens, revealing insights into public perception of fake news and its impact on national security views. The survey included questions about experiences with misinformation, trust in media, and perceived security risks.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including media practitioners, policymakers, and security experts. These interviews provided in-depth insights into the role of media in disseminating fake news, the effectiveness of current policies, and the challenges faced in combating misinformation.

Detailed case studies were analysed to explore specific incidents where fake news directly impacted national security. The case studies examined the events surrounding these incidents, the role of media, and the outcomes, highlighting how misinformation influenced security dynamics.

Data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Survey data were analysed using statistical methods, identifying patterns and correlations. Content analysis of media sources involved coding and categorizing information to understand the nature of misinformation. Interview data were analysed thematically, uncovering key insights related to media influence and policy effectiveness. Case studies were analysed qualitatively to understand the context and impact of specific incidents.

Ethical considerations were upheld throughout the study, including obtaining informed consent from participants and ensuring confidentiality. Data were securely stored, and findings were reported accurately, with careful consideration of any potential harm.

Despite challenges in accessing diverse media sources, potential biases in survey responses, and difficulties in isolating the impact of fake news from other factors, the study provided valuable insights. The findings offer a thorough understanding of the impact of fake news on national security in Nigeria, with implications for policymakers, media practitioners, and scholars seeking to address the challenges posed by misinformation.



Data Presentation

The data collection for this study employed a multi-method approach to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the impact of fake news on national security.

Quantitative data were gathered through a structured survey administered to a stratified random sample of 500 respondents across Nigeria. The survey was designed to capture a wide range of demographic variables, including age, gender, education level, and geographic location, to ensure representativeness. The instrument included questions measuring respondents' exposure to fake news, perceptions of its impact on national security, and overall trust in media sources. Statistical analyses, including descriptive statistics and inferential tests, were conducted to identify patterns and correlations within the data.

Qualitative data were obtained from semi-structured interviews with 30 key informants, comprising media professionals, security experts, and policy-makers. The interviews were conducted using a purposive sampling technique to ensure that participants with relevant expertise and experience were included. The interview protocol was designed to elicit detailed responses on the mechanisms through which fake news influences national security, the role of different media platforms in dissemination, and potential strategies for mitigation. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and insights.

Content analysis was employed to examine 100 news articles and social media posts identified as containing misinformation about national security. The selection of content was based on keyword searches and trend analysis of misinformation related to key national security issues such as terrorism, political instability, and ethnic conflicts. The content was categorized and coded to assess the frequency, type, and sources of misinformation, as well as its thematic focus. This analysis aimed to elucidate the patterns of misinformation spread and the platforms most frequently used for its dissemination.

DISCUSSION OF DATA

The findings from the data analysis reveal significant insights into the relationship between exposure to fake news and public perceptions of national security, providing a comprehensive understanding of the impact of misinformation on national stability.

The quantitative analysis, based on the survey of 500 respondents, demonstrates a clear and statistically significant correlation between higher exposure to fake news and increased concerns about national security. Specifically, the results show that individuals who reported frequent exposure to fake news were considerably more likely to perceive national security as being under severe threat. This finding is consistent with existing literature that highlights the psychological and emotional effects of misinformation on public perception, especially in politically and socially volatile environments. A strong positive correlation coefficient ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$) between fake news exposure and national security concerns indicates that the more frequently individuals encounter misinformation, the more they perceive threats to the nation's stability.



Moreover, regression analysis revealed that exposure to fake news accounts for a significant proportion of the variance in perceptions of national security threats, with a beta coefficient of 0.53 ($p < 0.05$). This result suggests that even after controlling for other factors such as demographic variables and media consumption habits, exposure to misinformation remains a potent predictor of heightened security concerns. The implications of this finding are profound, as they suggest that fake news is not merely a passive phenomenon but actively shapes public attitudes toward national security, potentially exacerbating societal tensions and undermining trust in government institutions.

The qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews provide further depth to these findings. Key informants, including media professionals and security experts, expressed concerns about the strategic use of fake news to influence public opinion and destabilise the country. Many interviewees pointed to the increasing sophistication of misinformation campaigns, which often leverage social media platforms to spread content that plays on existing ethnic, religious, and political divisions. This aligns with the content analysis findings, which revealed that much of the misinformation identified focused on divisive issues such as terrorism, ethnic conflict, and political corruption—issues that are already sources of tension within Nigeria. The qualitative thematic analysis identified three primary themes: the erosion of public trust in traditional media, the weaponisation of fake news for political gain, and the role of social media in amplifying misinformation.

The content analysis further underscores the dominance of social media as a platform for the dissemination of fake news, with over 75% of the analysed misinformation originating from platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. This supports the hypothesis that social media, due to its viral nature and algorithm-driven amplification, serves as the primary conduit for the rapid spread of false information. The findings also highlight the role of anonymous accounts and bots in the propagation of fake news, making it difficult to trace the sources of misinformation and hold them accountable.

Notably, the data suggest that individuals with lower levels of media literacy were particularly susceptible to misinformation, which in turn heightened their perceptions of national security risks. This was further supported by the findings from the media literacy variable, which showed a negative correlation ($r = -0.44$, $p < 0.01$) between media literacy and the perception of national security threats. Respondents who demonstrated higher levels of media literacy were less likely to report heightened concerns about national security, indicating that the ability to critically evaluate information plays a crucial role in mitigating the effects of fake news.

Overall, the data highlight the complex and multifaceted relationship between fake news and national security. The statistical evidence supports the notion that misinformation is a significant contributor to heightened national security concerns, while the qualitative insights shed light on the mechanisms through which fake news influences public perception. The study's findings underscore the urgent need for interventions aimed at curbing the spread of fake news, particularly on social media platforms, and enhancing media literacy among the general populace to foster resilience against misinformation. Additionally, policy implications suggest that government agencies and media organisations must collaborate to develop more robust fact-checking systems and public awareness campaigns to counter the negative impacts of misinformation on national security.



Testing of Hypotheses

The study's hypotheses were rigorously tested using a combination of statistical techniques, including correlation, regression analysis, and content analysis, with results that strongly support the research assumptions.

Hypothesis One: Exposure to fake news negatively affects public perception of national security.

This hypothesis was tested through Pearson correlation and regression analysis. The correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant positive correlation ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$) between exposure to fake news and heightened concerns about national security. This indicates that individuals with higher levels of exposure to fake news are more likely to perceive national security threats as imminent or severe. The regression analysis further confirmed these findings, showing that exposure to fake news is a significant predictor of national security concerns ($\beta = 0.53$, $p < 0.05$). The adjusted R^2 value of 0.34 indicates that fake news exposure explains 34% of the variance in public perceptions of national security threats. This is a substantial proportion, highlighting the pervasive impact of misinformation on public sentiment.

The findings demonstrate that fake news is not only a disruptive force in the media landscape but also actively shapes public opinion by fostering fear and insecurity. Individuals who frequently encounter misinformation about terrorism, political instability, or ethnic conflict are more likely to develop a heightened sense of vulnerability, which could exacerbate tensions in an already volatile socio-political environment. These results affirm that fake news is a critical factor in shaping negative public perceptions of national security, reinforcing the hypothesis.

Hypothesis Two: The spread of fake news is more prevalent on social media platforms compared to traditional media.

To test this hypothesis, the study employed content analysis of 100 selected misinformation items, comparing their sources and modes of dissemination. The analysis revealed that 75% of the fake news identified originated from social media platforms, with Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp being the dominant channels. In contrast, only 15% of misinformation was found to have been disseminated via traditional media outlets such as television, newspapers, or radio. This significant disparity supports the hypothesis that social media is the primary conduit for the spread of fake news.

Furthermore, statistical analysis demonstrated that social media platforms facilitate the rapid viral spread of misinformation due to their algorithmic amplification, which often prioritizes sensational or emotionally charged content. The regression analysis showed that individuals who primarily consume news through social media were significantly more likely to be exposed to fake news ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$). These findings are consistent with existing research on the viral nature of misinformation on digital platforms, where content can quickly gain traction, spread across networks, and reach a wide audience without undergoing verification processes typically associated with traditional media.

The content analysis also revealed the role of automated bots and anonymous accounts in the propagation of fake news on social media. These accounts, which often disseminate misinformation at high volumes, make it difficult to trace the original sources of fake news,



complicating efforts to counteract its spread. The dominance of social media as the primary platform for misinformation dissemination, as demonstrated by these findings, confirms the second hypothesis.

Hypothesis Three: Media literacy programs mitigate the impact of fake news on public perceptions of national security.

This hypothesis was tested using both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data derived from survey responses measured respondents' levels of media literacy; including their ability to critically evaluate news sources and discern between credible and fake news.

The Pearson correlation analysis showed a significant negative correlation between media literacy and national security concerns ($r = -0.44$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that individuals with higher media literacy were less likely to perceive significant threats to national security due to fake news. This suggests that media literacy acts as a protective factor in filtering misinformation and mitigating its impact on the public.

A regression analysis was conducted to provide additional confirmation, with media literacy as the independent variable and perceptions of national security as the dependent variable. The results indicated that media literacy is a significant predictor of reduced concern regarding national security threats linked to fake news, with a beta coefficient of -0.35 ($p < 0.05$). The adjusted R^2 of 0.21 implies that media literacy accounts for 21% of the variance in perceptions of national security threats, underscoring its importance in mitigating the influence of misinformation.

Qualitative data from interviews reinforced this finding. Media professionals and policymakers emphasized the critical role of media literacy in helping individuals differentiate between fact and fiction. Respondents highlighted successful media literacy campaigns that had been implemented in schools and through public awareness programs, which have led to greater scepticism toward misinformation and a more informed citizenry. Thus, the hypothesis that media literacy programs can mitigate the negative effects of fake news on national security perceptions is strongly supported by both quantitative and qualitative evidence.

Hypothesis Four: The trustworthiness of traditional media is inversely related to the perceived impact of fake news on national security.

To test this hypothesis, the study examined the relationship between respondents' trust in traditional media outlets (television, radio, newspapers) and their perceptions of the impact of fake news on national security. Survey questions assessed the level of trust respondents had in these traditional media sources; as well as their perceived vulnerability to fake news.

The Pearson correlation analysis indicated a significant negative correlation ($r = -0.47$, $p < 0.01$) between trust in traditional media and perceived national security threats posed by fake news. This suggests that individuals who have greater trust in traditional media are less likely to perceive fake news as a significant threat to national security. These results align with the argument that traditional media often perceived as more reliable and accountable, serves as a counterbalance to the rapid spread of misinformation on social media platforms. Regression analysis confirmed these findings. Trust in traditional media was a significant negative predictor of concern about fake news impacting national security ($\beta = -0.41$, $p < 0.05$). The adjusted R^2 of 0.26 suggests that trust in traditional media explains 26% of the variance in



perceptions of fake news as a threat to national security. Qualitative data from interviews corroborated this, with participants noting that traditional media's editorial standards and fact-checking processes contributed to their credibility. In contrast, the lack of gatekeeping on social media was frequently cited as a reason for the greater prevalence of fake news on those platforms. Therefore, this hypothesis is supported: individuals who trust traditional media are less likely to view fake news as a serious threat to national security.

Hypothesis Five: The dissemination of fake news is strategically used to exacerbate ethnic and political tensions, thereby increasing perceptions of national security threats.

This hypothesis was tested through a combination of content analysis and qualitative data from interviews with media experts and security analysts. The content analysis focused on 100 instances of misinformation related to national security issues, particularly those concerning ethnic and political tensions.

Results of the content analysis showed that over 60% of the fake news items analysed were explicitly framed around ethnic or political divisions. Common themes included exaggerated reports of ethnic violence, false claims about political corruption, and fabricated stories about threats from specific ethnic or religious groups. These themes were disproportionately shared during politically sensitive periods, such as elections or during periods of civil unrest, suggesting a strategic element to the dissemination of this type of misinformation. Qualitative data from interviews strongly supported this hypothesis. Several interviewees noted that political actors often used misinformation as a tool to manipulate public sentiment, particularly by inflaming ethnic and political divisions. Security experts highlighted how fake news that taps into existing societal fault lines tends to exacerbate tensions, leading to heightened public fear and perceptions of insecurity. This finding is consistent with existing theories of social conflict, which suggest that misinformation targeting group identities can amplify social cleavages and increase the perception of imminent threats. Quantitative analysis further supported this hypothesis. A regression analysis using the frequency of exposure to ethnically or politically charged fake news as the independent variable and perceived national security threats as the dependent variable showed a significant positive relationship ($\beta = 0.58, p < 0.01$). This result indicates that exposure to fake news with ethnic or political themes is a strong predictor of heightened national security concerns. The adjusted R^2 of 0.32 suggests that 32% of the variance in national security perceptions can be explained by exposure to ethnically and politically charged fake news. Thus, Hypothesis Five is strongly supported by both content analysis and qualitative interviews, confirming that the dissemination of fake news is strategically employed to exacerbate ethnic and political tensions, thereby increasing public perceptions of national security threats.



CONCLUSION

This study has delved deeply into the complex and multifaceted relationship between the proliferation of fake news and national security perceptions, with a specific focus on the Nigerian media landscape. Findings affirm the significant role misinformation plays in shaping public attitudes toward national stability and security. As the data suggests, fake news is not merely an incidental by-product of the digital information age, but rather, a deliberate and strategic tool used to exploit societal divisions and manipulate public perceptions, particularly in politically sensitive environments.

The study demonstrated a clear and statistically significant relationship between exposure to fake news and heightened national security concerns. Individuals frequently exposed to misinformation are more likely to perceive the country as being under threat, contributing to an atmosphere of fear, uncertainty, and instability. The study's content analysis further revealed that social media platforms, due to their viral nature and lack of stringent gatekeeping, serve as the primary channels for the dissemination of fake news, outpacing traditional media in terms of reach and influence. This underscores the urgent need for regulation and intervention in the digital media space to curb the unchecked spread of misinformation.

Moreover, the research findings highlight the mitigating role of media literacy in reducing the impact of fake news. The negative correlation between media literacy and security concerns suggests that educating the public on how to critically evaluate information sources is essential in fostering resilience against misinformation. As the study's results show, individuals with higher levels of media literacy are significantly less likely to be swayed by fake news, emphasizing the need for comprehensive media literacy programs at both the institutional and grassroots levels.

Importantly, the study's examination of the strategic use of fake news to exacerbate ethnic and political tensions reveals the broader implications of misinformation for national security. Fake news targeting ethnic and political divisions not only amplifies societal tensions but also destabilises trust in government and traditional media institutions. In Nigeria, a country with a history of ethnic and religious conflicts, the weaponisation of misinformation presents a significant threat to national cohesion, as it deepens existing societal rifts and promotes distrust among different groups.

The research also underscores the declining trust in traditional media and its implications for the media ecosystem. As fake news flourishes on social media, the role of traditional media as a credible source of information becomes increasingly vital. However, the decline in trust in traditional outlets makes the public more vulnerable to misinformation on unregulated platforms, highlighting the need for traditional media to bolster their credibility through transparency, fact-checking, and responsible journalism.

Lastly, this study has provided substantial evidence that fake news poses a tangible and significant threat to national security in Nigeria. The proliferation of misinformation, particularly on social media, fuels public fear, exacerbates ethnic and political tensions, and undermines the legitimacy of government institutions. However, the findings also offer a pathway forward: media literacy initiatives, stronger regulatory frameworks for digital platforms, and efforts to restore public trust in traditional media can serve as critical interventions to mitigate the negative impacts of fake news. Addressing these challenges is not only vital for safeguarding national security but also for promoting social cohesion and



democratic resilience in Nigeria. The findings of this study offer valuable insights for policymakers, media professionals, and security experts, highlighting the urgent need for coordinated efforts to combat the growing threat of misinformation in the digital age.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings and conclusions of this study, several strategic recommendations are proposed to address the pervasive issue of fake news and its adverse impact on national security in Nigeria. These recommendations focus on strengthening media literacy, enhancing regulatory frameworks, improving traditional media credibility, and fostering a more informed and resilient public.

First, there is an urgent need for comprehensive **media literacy programs** that equip the public with the tools to critically assess the authenticity and credibility of the information they encounter. As demonstrated in this study, individuals with higher media literacy levels are less susceptible to the influence of fake news. Government agencies, educational institutions, and civil society organisations should collaborate to develop and implement media literacy curricula at all levels of education, from primary schools to universities. Additionally, community-based media literacy workshops should be conducted to reach wider demographics, including rural and less formally educated populations. Such programs should emphasize critical thinking skills, the identification of credible news sources, and the dangers of misinformation.

Second, **stronger regulatory frameworks** are essential to curb the rapid spread of misinformation, particularly on social media platforms. The Nigerian government, in partnership with digital platform providers, should establish clear guidelines and enforceable policies that address the dissemination of fake news. While respecting freedom of speech, regulations should mandate social media platforms to enhance their content moderation processes, develop algorithms that flag or suppress false information, and cooperate with fact-checking organisations. Additionally, penalties for individuals or groups found guilty of intentionally spreading harmful fake news should be strengthened to serve as a deterrent against such activities. This regulatory approach should be complemented by public awareness campaigns that educate citizens on the legal consequences of creating or sharing false information.

Third, **restoring public trust in traditional media** is crucial in countering the dominance of misinformation on digital platforms. Traditional media outlets, including television, radio, and newspapers, must improve their transparency, accountability, and professionalism to regain their status as credible sources of information. This can be achieved by adopting stronger editorial standards, investing in investigative journalism, and prominently featuring fact-checking segments in news broadcasts. Moreover, partnerships between traditional media and independent fact-checking organisations should be established to ensure that news content is thoroughly verified before publication. By elevating their credibility, traditional media can serve as a reliable counterpoint to the often unreliable information circulating on social media.

Fourth, **collaborative efforts between the government, media organisations, and civil society** are vital in building a national defence against fake news. A multi-stakeholder approach, involving security agencies, journalists, digital platforms, and the public, should be



adopted to develop a national strategy for combating misinformation. This strategy could include the creation of a centralised platform for reporting and debunking fake news, which would enable real-time fact-checking and dissemination of verified information to the public. Government agencies, particularly those responsible for national security, should establish specialised units that monitor fake news trends and their potential impact on public perceptions and national stability.

Fifth, the government should take proactive measures to **address the root causes of societal divisions** that make fake news effective in Nigeria. The study's findings demonstrate that fake news often exploits ethnic, political, and religious tensions, deepening societal divides and inflaming public anxieties. To counteract this, the government must engage in policies that promote social cohesion, inclusive governance, and dialogue between different ethnic and religious groups. National unity campaigns, supported by both government and media organisations, can help bridge these divides and reduce the effectiveness of fake news in fostering conflict.

Finally, **ongoing research and monitoring** of the evolution of fake news are essential. As digital technologies and misinformation tactics evolve, so too must the strategies to counter them. Universities think tanks, and research institutions should be encouraged to continue studying the impact of fake news on national security, with a focus on identifying new trends and developing innovative solutions. Such research should also examine the psychological and sociocultural factors that contribute to the spread of fake news, providing policymakers with deeper insights into how misinformation operates and how it can be effectively combated.

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