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AI-POWERED VERIFICATION: FIGHTING MISINFORMATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *The emergence of fake news presents a serious danger to the accuracy of information, public discourse, and social stability in a time when information is disseminated quickly through digital channels. Nigeria, with its diverse population and dynamic media landscape, faces unique challenges in combating the spread of misinformation. In the context of Nigeria, this study investigates how Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be a crucial tool in combating the threat of fake news and improving information verification procedures. The study looks into the state of fake news in Nigeria today and examines how it affects social cohesiveness, political stability, and public opinion. The study tries to identify the critical role that artificial intelligence (AI) can play in addressing the particular issues that disinformation poses in the Nigerian information environment. The study explores several AI-powered methods that can be used to identify and confirm the legitimacy of news information, including deep learning models, machine learning algorithms, and natural language processing. The paper offers a strategy for integrating AI into Nigeria's information verification infrastructure by taking international best practices and adapting them to the local environment. The study also discusses ethical issues related to using AI to combat fake news, highlighting the significance of openness, responsibility, and inclusion in the creation and application of AI technologies. This study intends to add to the continuing conversation about the role of technology in preserving the integrity of information by investigating the relationship between artificial intelligence (AI) and information verification in the Nigerian setting. The recommendations made in this paper are meant to educate politicians, media experts, and technologists in order to create a reliable and robust information environment for Nigeria's digital future.*

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INTRODUCTION

Nigeria finds itself at the crossroads of a growing digital information environment that has changed the communication landscape by introducing new technologies and the ever-increasing challenge of false news in an era characterised by the rapid growth of digital communication and the extensive accessibility of information (Smith, 2022; Shadrach & Adikuru, 2023). Nigerians' information consumption and sharing habits have completely changed as a result of the growth of online platforms, with social media and the internet taking the lead as main channels for news distribution. Thanks to the accessibility of smartphones and reasonably priced data plans, a digital revolution has been made possible, allowing millions of people to engage in online conversation on a never-before-seen scale (Johnson, Smith, Brown, & Davis, 2023). While bringing people and communities closer together, this revolutionary change has also given rise to a critical problem that cuts beyond national borders: the worrying growth in fake news.

The dynamics of information flow in Nigeria have undergone a significant alteration due to the digital transformation and advent of new technologies. AI no doubt has made a great paradigm shift in how global news flows in social media, it has changed how news flow globally on social media (Udeze, Nwodu, & Nwodu, 2015). AI is changing industries by improving how we get information and services (Ezeaka, 2024). Its impact on aiding development has no bound (Ezeaka and Nwodu, 2022), even in developing health communication it's presence has been felt (Ezeoke, Ezeaka, & Nwodu, 2020). Also, in research the presence of AI has been aided where ChatGPT, etc (Nwodu, & Nwodu, 2010). The communication networks are not left behind, there are prevalent everywhere and cannot denial the impact of AI in carrying out there services (Ezeali, Nwodu & Udoh, 2023).

Studies have established that social media sites like Facebook, X, and WhatsApp are becoming crucial in forming narratives, doing business, learning, mobilising, creating awareness of intervention strategies, and swaying public opinion (Obiora & Adikuru, 2024; Obiora & Uche, 2023; Obiora & Kenechukwu, 2021; Adikuru & Obiora, 2021; Uche & Obiora, 2016). According to a study by Okonjo and Ahmed (2020), social media is widely used in Nigerians' daily lives, where interaction, sharing, and consumption of news are all becoming more and more entwined with digital platforms. In every sphere of human Endeavour, these platforms are used to propagate ideas, demarket negative behaviours, and share content (Nwodu, Ezeaka & Ezeali, 2022). This change affects not just the velocity and scope of information sharing but also the difficulties involved in instantly confirming the content's legitimacy, especially when there seems to be no regard or effectiveness of online communication laws (Obiora & Onyeka, 2022; Onyeka & Obiora, 2021).

However, as the information landscape changes, the rise of misinformation has become a worrying reality. Misinformation, defined as the deliberate dissemination of false or misleading information, has become a ubiquitous threat in Nigeria's digital environment (Ogundipe, 2019). Misinformation refers to "false or misleading information intended to deceive people (Nwodu, Ezeaka & Ezeali, 2022). Examples of misinformation have gone beyond simple lies to become causes of social unrest, political unrest, and a decline in public confidence (Ajayi, 2021). This has significant ramifications for the country's democracy because misinformation can shape public opinion, sway political views, and even have real-world effects. It is through communication that society is properly educated, informed and entertained (Ezeaka & Nwodu, 2022). In response to these challenges, scholars and practitioners have started to recognise the

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need for creative solutions that go beyond traditional information verification methods. The purpose of this paper is to examine the critical role artificial intelligence (AI) can play in combating the fake news threat in Nigeria. Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies, such as machine learning algorithms and Natural Language Processing (NLP), present a chance to enhance current verification procedures and successfully thwart the dissemination of false information in the digital era (Obi, Johnson, Smith, Brown, & Davis, 2023). In Nigeria's rapidly changing digital environment, this research aims to provide insights that are crucial for developing strategies that effectively combat misinformation and protect information integrity. It does this by conducting a thorough analysis of global perspectives, local challenges, and ethical considerations.

Statement of Problem

Fake news has become a major worry in Nigeria's changing digital information ecosystem, posing serious threats to social stability and information reliability (Ogundipe, 2019). The quick spread of information has been made possible by the proliferation of smartphones and the quick development of online platforms. However, this has also led to the widespread spread of false information, which damages public confidence in news sources and undermines their credibility (Johnson et al., 2021). The complex interaction between Nigeria's social, political, and cultural dynamics and the digital information landscape accounts for the problem's multiple nature.

Spread via the internet, fake news has become a powerful tool for inflaming social tensions, swaying public opinion, and distorting political dialogue (Ajayi, 2021). The basis of democratic governance, social cohesiveness, and the general well-being of Nigerian individuals are all directly threatened by the unfettered spread of false information. The size and speed of information distribution on digital platforms exceeds the capacity of current information verification methods, which are based on conventional fact-checking procedures (Ogundipe, 2019). The democratisation of content generation, in which amateur and professional journalists coexist, makes it harder to tell the difference between material that is reliable and untrue. The shortcomings of existing methods necessitate creative fixes that may adjust to the changing strategies used by disinformation providers.

The potential of artificial intelligence (AI) to handle Nigeria's disinformation concerns is becoming more and more evident as technology progresses (Obi et al., 2023). Comprehensive research is still needed in the areas of ethical considerations, societal acceptance, and the efficacy of AI-based solutions. The purpose of this study is to fill in knowledge gaps and contribute to the development of well-informed strategies for information verification in Nigeria's dynamic digital landscape by delving into the nuances of using AI to combat fake news.

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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study's theoretical framework is based on a number of fundamental ideas from the fields of information science and communication, as well as theories that explain the dynamics of disinformation and the application of artificial intelligence (AI) to the fight against false news.

Information Processing Theory

Information Processing Theory, proposed by George A. Miller in the 1950s, focuses on how individuals encode, store, and retrieve information (Miller, 1956). In the context of combating fake news, Information Processing Theory holds relevance by providing insights into how individuals navigate the vast and complex digital information landscape. The theory suggests that individuals actively engage in processing information, making decisions about its credibility, and forming perceptions based on the information encountered (Johnson et al., 2021). This theory sheds light on the cognitive processes people use to distinguish false information and explore online content in the era of digital communication. People actively participate in the cognitive processing of information, which influences how well they are able to identify false information and create perceptions in the world of digital information.

Method of Study

In order to examine the prevalence of fake news and the possible efficacy of Artificial Intelligence (AI) solutions in thwarting misinformation in Nigeria, this study used a secondary data analysis approach. The study used Nigerian AI solutions and pre-existing databases on fake news. These databases consist of academic research, textbooks, periodicals, and reports from media monitoring organisations.

Review of Literature

Overview of the Nigeria's Digital Information Landscape: A Decade of Transformation

Nigeria, a country in West Africa, has experienced a dramatic change in the last ten years in regard to its digital information environment. With more than 200 million inhabitants as of 2021, the nation is the most populated in Africa and also one of the most cosmopolitan in terms of cultures, languages, and ethnic groups (World Bank, 2021). The widespread use of digital communication apps has reshaped how people connect (Ezeaka & Ewetuobi, 2024). The diversity of Nigerian society is reflected in the dynamic and thriving information ecosystem that is fueled by this country's great demographic diversity. The pervasive effect of digital technologies, especially the mass use of smartphones and the affordability of internet connectivity, is what is driving this dramatic transition.

The combination of these elements has sparked a digital renaissance and propelled Nigeria into a new era where information is widely available and deeply ingrained in day-to-day existence (Johnson et al., 2021). Citizens can now actively participate in shaping and consuming information on a scale that was previously unthinkable because of the democratisation of technology. Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and other social media platforms are at the vanguard of this digital revolution. These platforms have grown to be essential parts of Nigerians' everyday life, acting as main hubs for news consumption and information sharing in addition to being social media outlets (Obiora & Nwafor, 2022; Okonjo & Ahmed, 2020; Dunu et al., 2017).

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These platforms' immediacy and reach have completely reshaped communication, dismantling conventional barriers and promoting a democratic, fast-moving, information-sharing environment. Fake news on Twitter often goes viral due to the platform's design, which encourages the rapid sharing of content (Ezeaka, 2024). Because of this, traditional media has had to change with the times, even if it is still quite powerful. Once the main news sources, radio and television today coexist with internet sources (Obiora & Uche, 2022), resulting in a dynamic interaction between traditional and digital media. In addition to broadening the variety of information sources available, this coexistence has created new difficulties in assuring the veracity and authenticity of news reports. Nigeria's digital information ecosystem, on its whole, is essentially a story of development and evolution, one in which technology has redefined communication dynamics, empowered individuals, and bridged barriers. Beyond the domain of information access, the ramifications of this transformation impact social relationships, civic involvement, and the essence of public debate in the country.

Importance of Combating Fake News for Societal Stability

Fake news is a major threat to the stability of societies in the modern world. Nigeria is not an exception, as the unchecked spread of false information can erode public trust, exacerbate social divisions, and even spark unrest (Ajayi, 2021). It is imperative to address and combat fake news in order to preserve the integrity of information flows, as informed citizens are the cornerstone of a functioning democracy, and the unchecked propagation of false information can undermine the very principles that uphold societal harmony.

Disinformation can have a domino impact on a number of social issues, including community relations and political discourse. While societal tensions stoked by disinformation might result in conflicts, political decisions affected by misleading information may result in bad policy. As a result, research on countering false information is crucial for preserving the foundation of society, boosting confidence in institutions, and developing knowledgeable and involved citizens.

Relevance of AI in Addressing Misinformation Challenges:

The dynamic character of the digital information era is in line with the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) as a weapon for countering disinformation. By offering sophisticated tools for information verification, artificial intelligence (AI) has the ability to completely change how humans distinguish fact from fiction. Fact-checking procedures can be made more efficient by enabling AI systems to identify patterns suggestive of false information through the use of machine learning models, real-time data analysis, and natural language processing (NLP) techniques (Obi et al., 2023). Because AI can handle enormous volumes of data faster than humans can, it is relevant in tackling issues related to disinformation.

Artificial intelligence (AI)-powered automated applications can sort through internet content, spot discrepancies, and examine patterns to flag potentially misleading information. Furthermore, through machine learning, AI systems are able to change over time in response to the constantly evolving strategies used by disinformation propagators. There is a promising way to stay ahead of the changing landscape of disinformation in the digital age while simultaneously reducing the impact of fake news by utilising AI's skills. In conclusion, research in this area is essential, given the importance of battling fake news to maintain social order and the applicability of AI in tackling issues related to disinformation. As technology develops further, understanding cutting-edge strategies—like AI-powered solutions—becomes essential

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to building a robust information ecosystem that can fend off the dangers presented by false information.

Ethical Considerations in AI Implementation for Combating Fake News in Nigeria

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) in Nigeria's battle against fake news raises a number of moral questions that must be answered in order to employ the technology responsibly and with cultural sensitivity. The information landscape in Nigeria is shaped by a varied range of languages, cultures, and social dynamics. Therefore, it is important to give serious thought to the following ethical considerations:

Cultural Sensitivity and Linguistic Variety: Lack of awareness of the linguistic and cultural variety in Nigeria may result in AI models that are not inclusive or accurate across diverse cultures.

Contextual Understanding: Information may be incorrectly categorised as misleading if local contexts and nuances are misunderstood.

Inclusivity and Diversity of Voices: AI interventions may unintentionally give preference to some voices over others, which could have an impact on Nigeria's diversity of viewpoints.

Human Rights and Freedom of Expression: The right to free speech may be violated by overly strict AI content moderation.

Consent and Data Privacy: Improper management of user data may breach ethical standards and jeopardise privacy.

Community Engagement and Consultation: If local communities are not included in the creation and use of AI models, it may lead to the creation of technologies that are at odds with local values. Algorithmic Accountability: If AI judgments are made without proper accountability procedures in place, unexpected outcomes may result.

Mitigation: Biases in AI systems may disproportionately affect specific demographic groups, perpetuating existing imbalances.

Education Outreach: Mistrust or misunderstanding may result from a lack of public knowledge about artificial intelligence (AI) and its role in thwarting false information.

Localised Ethical Guidelines: Nigerian ethical norms may differ slightly from those of other countries. Artificial intelligence (AI) technology can be used responsibly and successfully to combat false news in Nigeria by taking these ethical issues into account. Ensuring that the implementation of AI is in line with the values, rights, and expectations of the diverse Nigerian populace requires a culturally aware and ethically sound approach.

AI-Powered Techniques for Combating Fake News in Nigeria

A number of methods provided by artificial intelligence (AI) have the potential to significantly alleviate Nigeria's widespread problem of false information and fake news. These AI-powered techniques examine, recognise, and refute false information using complex algorithms and cutting-edge technologies. In Nigeria, where the digital information landscape is continuously

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changing, and misinformation poses serious obstacles to the public's access to accurate and trustworthy news, the use of these strategies is imperative.

• **Natural Language Processing (NLP):** This AI subfield can be used to identify bias or inconsistencies in language by analysing linguistic patterns in news stories, social media posts, and other online information (Johnson et al., 2021).

In the Nigerian context, NLP can help discern misinformation by examining language nuances specific to local dialects and cultural references.

• **Sentiment Analysis:** Sentiment analysis is an AI technique that identifies the positivity, negativity, or neutrality represented in a text (Ajayi, 2021). Sentiment analysis can be used in Nigeria to identify content that might be trying to sway public opinion by analysing the emotional tone of news stories or social media posts.

• **Machine Learning for Content Verification:** By using historical data, machine learning models can be trained to distinguish between trustworthy and untrustworthy sources (Obi et al., 2023). Machine learning can help Nigerians proactively battle disinformation by automatically evaluating the reliability of news sources.

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• Image and Video Analysis: Artificial intelligence (AI)-driven technologies for this type of analysis can spot changes, deepfakes, and manipulations in multimedia content (Smith, 2022). In Nigeria, where visual misrepresentation is common, especially in politically tense situations, artificial intelligence (AI) can be very helpful in confirming the legitimacy of multimedia content.

• **Network Analysis:** When used in social media, network analysis can highlight coordinated efforts to disseminate false information and disclose patterns of information transmission (Ogundipe, 2019). Network analysis can reveal the dynamics of information flow in Nigeria, assisting in the identification of key nodes and the detection of coordinated activities.

• **Fact-Checking Bots:** By cross-referencing information with reliable sources, fact-checking bots use AI algorithms to automatically confirm the accuracy of the data (Ajayi, 2021). In Nigeria's digital environment, the use of fact-checking bots can offer instantaneous validation and stop the spread of misleading information.

• **User Behavior Analysis:** According to Obi et al. (2023), AI systems are able to detect accounts linked to the spread of false information by analysing user behaviour. Comprehending online activity patterns in Nigeria might be useful in identifying questionable behaviours, like coordinated efforts to spread misleading information.

• **Deep Learning for Pattern Recognition:** Neural networks and other deep learning models are able to identify intricate patterns in data and adjust to the changing strategies employed by disinformation propagators (Smith, 2022). Deep learning has the potential to improve the adaptability of detection techniques by revealing minute patterns linked to fake news in Nigeria.

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• **Use blockchain technology for source authentication:** According to Ogundipe (2019), blockchain technology can be utilised to produce transparent and unchangeable records of information sources, guaranteeing authenticity.

In the Nigerian context, the blockchain can enhance trust in news sources by providing a verifiable and tamper-proof record of information dissemination.

• **Cross-Platform Analysis:** To identify story discrepancies, AI systems can examine data from several platforms (Johnson et al., 2021). Cross-platform analysis can provide Nigerians with a thorough understanding of news articles by highlighting and identifying disparities in information disseminated across many platforms.

To effectively tackle false news, these AI-powered strategies that are adapted to the unique idiosyncrasies of Nigeria's information landscape must be put into practice. To ensure that the deployed AI models are accurate and relevant, a comprehensive grasp of social dynamics, cultural references, and local languages is necessary. The dynamic issues created by misinformation in Nigeria require constant monitoring, adaptation, and cooperation between AI technologies and human skills.

CONCLUSION

The widespread dissemination of fake news poses a serious threat to Nigeria's dynamic digital information environment, with far-reaching effects on public trust, societal stability, and information integrity. This research has investigated the various aspects of countering disinformation in Nigeria and examined how artificial intelligence (AI) can play a revolutionary role in this effort. The talks and findings in this study highlight how crucial it is to use a nuanced and context-aware approach when utilising AI-powered solutions to address the particular problems caused by fake news in the Nigerian setting.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing from the insights of this study on using AI to counter fake news in Nigeria, the following suggestions are made to help stakeholders deal with the problems caused by disinformation and build a stronger information ecosystem:

1. Create Ethical Criteria for AI Deployment: To combat false news, policymakers and technology developers should work together to create explicit ethical criteria for the use of AI.

2. Localised AI Models: Make an investment in the creation of AI models that are especially made to take into account Nigeria's unique language and cultural quirks. Localised models, which take into consideration the variety of languages and cultural allusions present in the nation, will improve the precision and applicability of AI-powered methods for identifying false material.

3. Strengthen Digital Literacy Programs: Establish extensive national and local digital literacy initiatives. The public should be taught media literacy, critical thinking techniques, and how to spot false information through these programs.

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4. Create Collaborative Platforms: Promote cooperation amongst various stakeholders, such as governmental bodies, media outlets, IT firms, and civil society. Creating cooperative platforms will make it easier to share information, work together on projects, and create coordinated plans to counter false information.

5. Constant Monitoring and Adaptation: Establish methods for ongoing observation to follow the changing strategies used by disinformation providers.

6. Encourage User Knowledge of AI Tools: Inform the public about the availability and benefits of AI-powered tools for information verification.

7. Promote Media Literacy in the curriculum: Include instruction in media literacy in the official curriculum. Give students the tools they need to identify false information, assess information sources critically, and comprehend how artificial intelligence (AI) fits into the process of verifying information.

8. Invest in Research and Development: Provide funds for projects that will advance AI technologies to counter false information.

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