

Implications of Distorted News for Nigerian Polity: Views from Akure, Ondo State**Adenike Omotayo Okeya, PhD**

Department of Communication and Media Studies, Ajayi Crowther University,
Oyo, Nigeria

*Corresponding Author: omotayookeya@gmail.com; +2348038851146,
+2347017110415

Abstract

This study was carried out to determine audience perception of distorted news and its implications on Nigeria polity. The methodology used was survey method, having questionnaire as the research instrument. Findings revealed that social media (Instagram, Whatsapp, etc.) have continued to serve as hotbeds for misinformation in the country as people believe what they read on all these social media more than what television and radio report. It was concluded that reporters should use the social media as lead and make references to it where appropriate. The study recommended that reporters should be active on social media and do more investigation when it comes to news as well as encourage media audience to follow them on social media.

Keywords: News, Social Media, Reporters, Media channels, Nigeria Polity

Introduction

News is an intrinsic part of any society. This is because people depend on news stories to know what is happening around them. News is therefore at the core of human existence, coexistence and interrelationship with institutions in the society (Nwabueze, 2014). News is a timely account of various events through the mass media. The mass media can be television, radio or print. News, according to Duyile (2005, p.18) “is an extra-ordinary event of the day or some things that are of interest to members of the public.” Ajayi (2006, p.34) further posits that “news is the factual account of an event rendered timely and of interest to the social, political, economic life of a considerable number of people.” News is about events ideas, people, issues and places. News cannot be served raw, it must be gathered by professionals, processed by these professionals before it can be disseminated and consumed. In other words, news is a consumable article.

Adanri (2005, p. 97) opines that “news can be described as the reporting of that which is strange or that which creates interest.” An event that just happened and has not been reported or heard is called news. Adanri further posits that an event does not merit to be called news if it is a daily occurrence. In the same vein, Nwabueze (2014, p. 221) describes news as “a timely account of an event through a mass medium by a journalist” stating that the event has to be reported by a journalist who understands the basic values for selecting among several events, which is news worthy. News is part of the society because the people rely

on news stories in the media to know and understand what is happening around them.

In the words of Stovall (2006, p.84), “news is one of the elements that hold the society together... the power of news that we get to know happenings around us.” Esimokha (2011, p. 34) describes “news as information of interest about recent, current or future events as reported by radio, TV, newspapers or magazine.” That is, news must be current, accurate and recent. It must have an element of proximity because people are more interested in stories about their nation, environment, religion, neighbours or friends and their local interest must be served. News generally is about what will interest the audience and that is why news media keep an eye on what is current and fresh, thereby, giving the public what happens around them. In a similar vein, a recent news media credibility assessment study conducted by the Centre for Media Studies (CMS) in New Delhi showed that though viewership of television news channels has gone up, “credibility of their hastily put-together news bulletins has not.” In other words, the frequency of watching news is increasing everyday as people are interested in what is happening around them every day. News is an intrinsic part of the society but a situation whereby news is distorted is gradually becoming the order of the day among various media channels has left a lot of people with no option than to doubt mass media contents even when they are important and correct information. Therefore, news must be objective, authentic, significant and timely if the news must be credible but distorted news also known as fake news is gradually becoming the norm of the day in Nigeria and is gradually infecting the citizens of Nigeria.

Fake news according to Ugowuanyi (2017) is false information that is deliberately circulated by those who have scant regard for the truth but hope to advance particular political causes while BBC (2017, March 12) says it could be false information that is circulated by journalist who do not realise that it is false. Fake news are news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false and could mislead readers or listeners. Research has indicated that there is growing evidence that fake news has the power to shape public opinion and even sway elections. Fake news is any information that is deliberately meant to be wholly or largely false or misleading. It is in the light of this that this study looked at audience perception of distorted news and its implications for Nigerian polity.

Statement of the Problem

Fake news all over the world is considered to be a problem that the global society is facing and will continue to face if it is not looked into because it is gradually becoming a modern issue hence the popularity. The rate at which modern technology is growing has also affected the churn of news coming out from different sources which are not named. Fake news has increasingly become a problem in Nigeria. Their source and platforms vary; many of course are created by politicians, ignorantly or deliberately by the media, interest groups, etc. An example was when President Muhammadu Buhari left the country for medical treatment in London in January 2017, news stories started circulating that he had

died. Moreover, when he returned some even alleged that it was a fake Buhari, an example is the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) leader who claimed:

The man you are looking at on the television is not Buhari, he is from Sudan. After extensive plastic surgery, they brought him back, the person was taught Buhari's mannerisms, and he came back deceiving all of you. I can stand and prove who I am but Buhari cannot do the same thing. He cannot deceive Nnamdi Kanu and IPOB.

Of course, this was fake news too. Greg (2017, p.33) notes that fake news is firmly in the public's attention once more, occupying a lot of media space to the presumed unstoppable power and the consequences of this much slated threat to the very fabric of society and the democratic system.... A lot of the blame has been directed at social media and the mainstream media for spreading fake news on an unprecedented level and on a global scale. The question then arises, what is the implication of fake news on Nigerian polity and development? This study looked at audience perception of distorted news and its implications on the Nigerian polity.

Objectives of the Study

The study sought to:

1. Find out the audience perception of distorted news in Nigeria
2. Find out the role that social media play in the circulation of distorted news in Nigeria
3. Ascertain the implication of distorted news on the Nigerian polity
4. Determine the factors that predispose the audience to distorted news

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two theories: Perception theory and Uses and Gratification theory. The first theory according to Berelson and Steiner (1964), cited in Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifeso (2008) state that perception is the complex process by which people select, organise and interpret sensory stimulation into a meaningful and coherent picture of the world. This means that audiences pay attention to messages which leads to then understanding the content which ultimately leads to changes in attitudes and belief. The way people interpret news whether fake or real depends on how knowledgeable they are when it comes to that particular issue. The second theory, uses and gratifications theory assumes that people use the media to their advantage more often than the media use them and it further states that it is concerned with what people do with the mass media instead of what the mass media do to the people. The theory has to do with those making use of the media to tell the people about things that are not true in order to win their sentiments. In essences, politicians make use of the media to tell stories that are not true to the general public in order to win their sentiments. The audience perception of distorted news might have been informed by the various

political parties that are fighting for attention for next election but despite all these, there are lots of implications on the Nigerian polity.

Conceptual Review and Review of Related Literature

News has been defined by many scholars in many ways to have different meanings to suit the different purposes for its definition. According to Duyile (2005, p.18) “news is an extra-ordinary event of the day or some things that are of interest to members of the public.” A lot of things happen on daily basis that are of interest to the public and if it is not extra-ordinary, it cannot be of public interest and that is why, it is called news. Moemeka, (1991), cited in Duyile (2005, p. 21) defines news as an accurate, unbiased account of the significant facts of a timely happening that is of interest to the readers of a newspaper or to the listener of a radio station or the viewer of a television station. Defleur & Dennis (1994), cited in Duyile (2005, p.21) further define news as a report that presents a contemporary view of reality with regard to a specific issue, event or process. News must be current and there must be a fresh knowledge about an event or subject that is gathered, processed and disseminated via a medium to a significant number of interested people. There is a popular definition of news of common knowledge among communication scholars that is associated with John B. Bogart who was the News Editor of *the Sun* in New York in 1980 and he defined news thus “when a dog bites a man that is no news, (because it happens so often) but if a man bites dog that is news (because it is unusual and extra ordinary).

News is generally shaped by a consensus about what will interest the audience and by constraints from outside and inside the organisation. It is the result of daily hard work within the news organisation that brings out events that will interest the people. Akinfeleye (1987), cited in Ojebuyi (2008, p.4) defines news as “an account of unusual events which more or less compel reporting ... an account of what the public know and what they ought to know, and the commercial proposition(advertisement).” News, to a greater or lesser degree must reflect some elements of the real world or fact. That is, we can assume that a major factor in news content is the noteworthy events that just happened. Willis (1967), cited in Ufuopho (2006) in Ojebuyi (2008, p.4) further defines news as what is happening now in the locality, in the state, in the nation and throughout interpret the significance of events as does the analysis, the editorial or the documentary. It states the fact as they are. Librizzi cited by Mencher (1989) in Ojebuyi (2008, p.4) says that the expected, a switch from what we consider the usual, the average, the ordinary, but when the events is so unexpected when its deviates so far from the possible then we have the bizarre.

Distorted news also known as fake news means false information that is deliberately circulated by those who have scant regard for the truth, but hope to advance political causes or it could be false information circulated by journalists who do not realise it is false (BBC, 2017, March 12). According to Gallinger & Magid (2017), fake news is any information that is deliberately meant to be wholly or largely false or misleading. The researchers noted that the motivations

for creating fake news include financial gain: by getting people to click on sites so they're exposed to advertising or to persuade others to take an action, purchase a product, or support or oppose a cause or political candidate. Some people perpetuate fake news just for the sake of deceiving people or as a prank. The constitutional rights foundation in 2017 stated that fake news are fabricated news stories that are presented without any credible evidence and for the apparent purpose to misinform or to persuade through misinformation. Research has also indicated that fake news includes hoaxes and conspiracy theories that are based on provable claims. Fake news is a news article that is intentionally and veritably false.

According to Allcott & Gentzkow (2017), fake news can be defined as “news stories that have no factual basis but are presented as facts” (p. 5). According to research, fake news has existed for a long time, nearly the same time as news began to circulate widely after the printing press was invented in 1437. Fake news refers to news articles that are intentionally false and used to mislead readers. It includes false information and is often created with dishonest intention to mislead readers or listeners. Various literatures directly treat deceptive news as fake news and they include serious fabrications, hoaxes and satires.

The various discussions on perception have made it to become more imperative as a basis for investigation because it involves sensory stimulation and the experiences that go with it. Scholars in the field of communication are of the opinion that fake news now includes the elements of deception and misinformation. Albright (2017) sees the need for journalists to seek facts and to engage audiences with accurate information. In addition, the information must be accurate, in order to help in the development of the country, but in a situation, whereby the news coming out from either the broadcast stations or the newspaper houses ‘trends’ and shape the narrative with deceptive statements, then there is a problem. The observation by Albright concerning audiences increasingly seeking opinionated news rather than objective news was in part substantiated in a study on youth news behaviours and attitudes by Marchi (2012). The more fake news persists, the more perception of the audience on the development of the country. It is either the perception of the audience is right or wrong. When it is wrong, it is likely to affect the Nigerian economy and development because the international community will not take the country serious again and might likely stop doing business with the country.

Methodology

The survey research method was used. The questionnaire was used as an instrument of data collection. The area of study was Akure North Local Government with a population of 131,587 as retrieved from the internet. The sample size was 200. The sampling technique used was the purposive sampling technique. The researcher purposively chose the population of study because it was considered the one that gives the more reliable information concerning the subject matter.

Data Presentation and Discussion of Findings

Table 1: Respondents' Perception of distorted news in Nigeria

Responses	Frequency	%
Most of the times, the news are always correct	150	75
Most of the times, the news are not always correct	30	15
I can't say	20	10
Total	200	100

The data show that majority of the respondents like distorted news because it is believed that most times, the news is always correct.

Table 2: Respondents' View on distorted news in Nigeria

Responses	Frequency	%
Agree	60	30
Strongly Agree	60	30
Disagree	30	15
Strongly disagree	20	10
Undecided	30	15
Total	200	100

Table 2 shows respondents views on distorted news in Nigeria. The data show that majority of the respondents agree that there are distorted news in Nigeria.

Table 3: Respondents' Response on the role that social media play in the circulation of distorted news

Responses	Frequency	%
I like social media because it gives me up to date information on happenings around me	120	60
It entertains me	50	25
It educates me	30	15
Total	200	100

Table 3 shows respondents' responses on the role that social media play in the circulation of distorted news. The data show that majority of the respondents like social media because it gives up to date information.

Table 4: Frequency of Usage of Social Media

Responses	Frequency	%
Daily	150	75
Weekly	45	22.5
Seldom	5	2.5
Total	200	100

Table 4 shows respondents frequency of usage of social media. The data show that majority of the respondents use social media daily.

Table 5: Purpose of Usage of Social Media

Purpose	Frequency	%
News	20	10
Entertainment	90	45
To keep myself busy	90	45
Total	200	100

Table 5 shows respondents purpose of usage of social media. The data show that majority of the respondents use social media for entertainment purposes and to keep busy.

Table 6: Respondents View on News on Social Media and TV/Radio News

Responses	Frequency	%
Social media (twitter, instagram, whatsapp etc.) gives credible news	120	60
Television gives credible news	50	25
Radio gives credible news	30	15
Total	200	100

Table 6 shows respondents' view on news on social media and TV/radio. The data show that majority of the respondents believe that social media gives credible news.

Table 7: Distorted News Implication on Nigerian Polity

Responses	Frequency	%
Yes	150	75
No	50	25
I don't know	-	-
Total	200	100

Table 7 shows the implication of distorted news on Nigerian polity. The data show that majority of the respondents believe that distorted news has implications on the Nigerian polity.

Table 8: The Extent of Implication of Distorted News on Nigerian Polity

Responses	Frequency	%
Great Extent	100	50
Large Extent	60	30
Little Extent	10	5
No Extent	10	5

Undecided	20	10
Total	200	100

Table 8 shows the extent to which distorted news have implications on the Nigerian polity. The data show that majority of the respondents believe that there is a great implication of distorted news on the Nigerian polity.

Table 9: Factors that Predispose the Audience to Distorted News

Factors	Frequency	%
Distorted news spreads fast than normal news	95	47.5
I like the various comments from different people	80	40
Gets people's attention fast	10	5
Makes me to read news more	15	7.5
Total	200	100

Table 9 shows the factors that predispose the audience to distorted news on social media. The data show that majority of the respondents believe that distorted news spreads fast than normal news.

Discussion of Findings

In response to research question one on the audience perception of distorted news in Nigeria, the data clearly demonstrate that an overwhelming majority of the respondents like distorted news because it is believed that most of the time, the news stories are correct while on the other hand, some respondents believed that distorted news are not always correct. This result indicates that the people believe distorted news more maybe because it spreads fast. This corroborates what Ugwuanyi (2017) says when he noted that the increasing cases of fake news in the blogosphere seem likely to detract from the credibility which many place on other media houses. The data from the study also showed that majority of the respondents agree that there is distorted news in Nigeria.

In response to research question two on the role that social media play in the circulation of distorted news in Nigeria. Majority of the respondents like social media because it gives up to date information on happenings around while others like it because it entertains and educates. The data from the study also showed that majority of respondents make use of the social media daily indicating that they use it for news purposes while some use it for entertainment purposes. This corroborates what the UNESCO courier (2017) said when they noted that journalism is going through a global crises, meaning that all pervasive reach of the internet and social media have meant that rumours and false information are rife but these very spaces can be used to create better journalism. The data from the study also showed that majority of the respondents believe that social media gives credible news than television and radio. In response to research question three on the implication of distorted news on Nigeria polity, majority of the respondents believe that distorted news have a lot of implications on Nigerian polity to a great extent. This corroborates what constitutional rights foundation

(2017) said when they noted that the SMART test which include source, motive, authority, review and two source test should be used to judge the credibility of a story in order not to affect the Nigerian polity. In response to research question four, on the factors that predispose the audience to distorted news on social media, the data show that majority of the respondents believe that distorted news spreads fast than news on television and radio while noting that they like the various comments coming from different people.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Social media have continued to serve as hotbeds for misinformation in the country as people believe what they read on all these social media channels than what television and radio report. The result from the study equally demonstrates that an overwhelming majority of the respondents like distorted news because it is believed that most of the time, the news are correct. In addition, Majority of the respondents like social media because it gives up to date information on happenings around, while others like it because it entertains and educates. Furthermore, majority of the respondents believes that distorted news have a lot of implications on Nigerian polity to a great extent. Evidence from the study clearly illustrates that majority of the respondents believe that distorted news spreads fast than news on television and radio while noting that they like the various comments coming from different people. It was, therefore, recommended that reporters should be active on social media and do more investigation when it comes to news as well as encourage media audience to follow them on social media.

References

- Adanri, B. (2005). *Fundamentals, ethics and effects of television*. Akure: Linda Bee Publishing.
- Ajayi, T. (2006). *Hints on radio and television production*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Hope Publishers.
- Akinfeleye, R. (2004). Broadcasting and societal values: Which way Nigeria?' *Non Air Waves*, 1 (6), 30–34.
- Allcott, H. & Gentzkow, M. (2017). Social media and fake news in the 2016 election. *Journal of Economic Perspective*, 31(2), 211-236.
- Albright, J (2017). Welcome to the era of fake news. *Media and Communication*, 5(2), 87-89.
- Anaeto, S. Onabanjo, O. & Osifeso .J. (2008). *Models and theories of communication*. Maryland: Africa Renaissance Books Incorporated.
- Duyile, A. (2005). *Broadcast news reporting and programming*. Akure: Endurance Prints and Publishers.
- Duyile, D. (2005). *Writing for the Media: A manual for African journalist*. Lagos: Gong Communications

- Duyile, D. (2011). *Ethics of journalism in Africa: Observations and analyses on continental and global media ethics* (2nd ed.). Lagos: Gong Communications.
- Esimokha, G. (2011). *Basic news writing and reporting*, Lagos: Great Achievers Communications.
- Greg, S. (2017). Fake news: As the problem or a symptom of a deeper problem? Institute for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Uppsala University, Sweden.
- Gallinger, J. D & Magid, L. (2017). Media literacy and fake news. Connect safely in association with Yale Centre for Emotional Intelligence. Retrieved from <https://www.connectsafely.org/fake-news-tips-from-Connectsafely>
- Leon, E. & Damon, H. (2017). Understanding fake news, civics on call. Constitutional Right Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.crf-usa.org>.
- McQuail, D. (2005). *Mass communication theory* (5th ed.). London: Sage Publications.
- Nwabueze, C. (2014). *Introduction to mass communication: Media ecology in the global village*. Owerri: Top Shelve Publishers.
- Ugowuanyi, S. U (2017). Influence of fake news on public perception of Nigeria's online newspapers. *Global Journal of Human Social Sciences*, 17(5), 1-11.
- UNESCO Courier. (2017). The media: Operation decontamination, July-September, 2017