MISINFORMATION AWARENESS AMONG JOURNALISTS COVERING POLITICS IN NIGERIA:
Implications for Democratic Institutions in North-East Nigeria
MISINFORMATION AWARENESS AMONG JOURNALISTS COVERING POLITICS IN NIGERIA: Implications for Democratic Institutions in North-East Nigeria

HARUNA MOHAMMED
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The Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development [CJID] is a non-governmental organisation, founded in 2014, to promote a truly independent media landscape that advances fundamental human rights, good governance and accountability in West Africa through investigative journalism, open data and civic technology.

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This study examined Misinformation Awareness among Journalists Covering Politics in Nigeria and its Implications for Democratic Institutions in North-East Nigeria. The objectives of the study specifically was to; assess the disinformation awareness of journalists reporting the political beat in Northeast Nigeria; examine the ability of journalists covering politics in the Northeast to use OSINTs tools to fact check misinformation messages amplified by bots; find out the skills of journalists covering politics in the northeast to identify misinformation content and determine the implication of political misinformation on the institutions of the states making up the northeast sub-region. The study selected purposive sampling and surveyed 250 journalists in Adamawa, Bauchi and Gombe. The study found that the majority of working journalists in the northeast have a poor idea about the scourge of misinformation and commensurate OSINT and fact-checking skills to verify misleading content shared by politicians in the region. The study also found that despite the spread of viral and misleading information in northeast Nigeria by many political actors and other influencers, journalists practising in the northeast rarely come across misinformation because they have a weak understanding of the phenomenon. The study recommends that media organisations in Nigeria ought to make deliberate efforts to empower their reporters with verification and fact-checking skills and reporters must make a personal priority to improve their verification and fact-checking skills to be able to practice journalism as a calling.
Political actors transcending protocols of established and emerging democracies around the world deploy information disorder tools and strategies, especially around election time with the view to changing and influencing citizens' voting behaviour to favour their political ambitions. They mostly do this through manipulation of the media and its workers, especially in countries such as Nigeria. Journalists in the course of carrying out their civic obligations confer status on individuals while subtly spreading their persons and ideologies with tased effects on opinions and behaviour exhibited towards the propaganda subject. It is the focus of this study, therefore, to analyse the roles of bots on information disorder among journalists and politicians from North East Nigeria.

However, social media was also found to be veritable misinformation tools, with Facebook being at the front burner followed by the micro-blogging site: A Little Bird – Twitter (Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2012). It was established that among users of these platforms, there appeared to be sponsors of content designed to disseminate misinformation with explicit or implicit intentions around public opinion, manipulation of people in the online spaces at national, regional and international levels. For instance, Twitter played a crucial role in mobilising a pool of support for Cyril Ramaphosa and Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, the major candidates in the last concluded Leadership race of South Africa’s African National Congress. Bots amplified and retweeted tweets of the duo.

Undoubtedly, the evolution of the “internet and social media” afforded journalists and media organisations the opportunity to have a heavy presence and greatly altered the manner messages are encoded, circulated and distributed over distance with ease and speed which pave the way for the rapid spread of “fake news.” Information reception just as production has become cheap, especially in the “connected era” as more people are increasingly online for hours. Fake news travels widely and rapidly in social media spaces to increase traffic notably around “election time.” In the build-up to the US’ 2016 presidential race, research has shown that fake news online traffic stood at 41.8% while social media traffic for top news sites pegged at 10.1%.

In a comparative study of fake news circulation and legacy media’s “most popular stories” in the last three months of Clinton – Trump contest, Buzzfeed News suggests that the top 20 pseudo deceptive stories garnered “8,711,000 shares, reactions, and comments on Facebook” in contrast to “7,367,000 shares, reactions, and comments” in relation to 19 best-rated election stories from the finest mainstream media in the US gathered on Facebook.
Studies (Brkan, 2019; Woolley, 2018) show that technology has today given impetus to the adoption of tools and gadgets including bots, trolls, and cyborgs combined to promote chicanery “computer propaganda” with two sword edge effects on politicking and democracy. For instance, the use of bots was found to have played a vital role in amplyfying misinformation, notably during the 2016 US presidential elections and have, since then, become pragmatic tools for spreading fake news, the source of misinformation and “psychographic micro-targeting.”

SparkToro (Fishkin, 2018), a technology firm, discovered about 33 million pseudo followers out of the over 55 million followers of former US President Donald Trump. This evidence is suggestive of the fact the 33 million “fake followers” were technological creations implanted on the micro-blogging site to promote Trump's posts and ultimately dominate the American online community to rally support to the ideologies expressed by the former leader of the world's superpower.

Bots are responsible for more than half of the internet traffic in the same way they amplify posts and add to the scope of followership of political gladiators which give them space to will influence on citizens’ psyche in a pro-con like scenario and a competitive advantage over opponents in the race for an elective position or campaign to sway support for an ideology or leaning.

Empirical studies suggest a low perception of ability to identify mis/disinformation among journalists in Nigeria. This has exposed many media consumers to “dubious” misinformation campaigns without knowing, thereby mingling with malicious misinformation content every day. The rate at which misinformation content is being shared and given wide instant circulation by unsuspecting members of the society summarises the extent of ignorance among citizens.

In 2018, Sadiku relayed gruesome killings of about 86 persons in Plateau State of Nigeria, purportedly a reprisal attack on Beroms by some criminal groups. However, a few hours after a sustained misinformation campaign around the killing, many other souls were slain in the state.

The mass media has been a credible source of information for the people over the years. Conventional media—radio; television, newspapers and magazines--established themselves as drivers of public opinion which is believed to provide people with information that opens their minds and enables them to make rational and informed choices about issues. However, in recent years, this dogged hegemony has become vulnerable to infiltration of misinformation contents from the political class which in most cases is a deliberate and calculated attempt to drive home cheap political points over opponents or manipulate the thinking of the electorate.

Media professionals serve as vanguards or guardians of public interest. In their quest to accomplish this arduous task, media experts developed ethics to guide and guard
the operations of journalists and media content. Over the years, the fundamental responsibility of the media to gather and disseminate reliable information has been under attack—thanks to the influence of misinformation and the availability of technological gadgets at people's fingertips. The pace at which distorted information continues to spread over the fringes of the mainstream media and the internet raises questions over the depth, influence, and credibility of legacy media's reports all over the world.

However, because of the deleterious effects of fake news on African societies such as Nigeria and its gradual penetration into legacy media contents that command a lot of believability from the public but which is now under threat from misinformation, pleas for stakeholders to take responsibility for curtailing the spread of misinformation intensified. In 2018, Kalin Bontcheva ranked media professionals first in the order of stakeholders saddled with the task of stemming the tide of misinformation.

While both Nigeria and Ghana have documented legal frameworks to regulate media, these legal frameworks are far below ranking to be effective tools for managing social media spaces in these countries to tame the spread of misinformation.

The crux of this study is to examine misinformation awareness among journalists in the Northeastern part of Nigeria. The region was characterised by steady underdevelopment parameters long before the wake of the Boko Haram insurgency which is attributed to the prevailing political structures in various states making up the region.

Conversely, this study generally aims to analyse the extent of misinformation awareness among journalists covering politics in Northeast Nigeria. This study will analyse misinformation awareness skills of Journalists in the northeast and examine whether or not journalists in the region use OSINTs to fact-check claims made by politicians in the northeast.
Mass media have been the sole owners of the right to produce and distribute information in line with meeting their constitutional obligations. Hence, since the inception of media technologies, citizens heavily relied on the media for information about society which helped them make informed decisions and form opinions about issues which concern their lives. While carrying out its constitutional obligation, the mass media use reporters and correspondents stationed at various locations to scoop for news and information. However, in the process, the reporters interact with various kinds of people with different intentions and motives.

Critical news beats and newsmakers are respectively politics and politicians. They make most of the news content in developing countries partly because most of the media stations in those countries, especially broadcast media, are owned by the government. However, a cruel play of politics laden with propaganda aimed at voters and citizens manipulation saw the dissemination of unverified information from the level of the reporter or correspondent to the unsuspecting members of the public. The evolution of the “internet and social media,” on the other hand, greatly altered the manner messages are encoded, circulated and distributed over distance with ease which paves the way for the rapid spread of “fake news.” Information reception just as production has become cheap, especially in the “connected era” as more people are increasingly online for hours.

“Fake News,” the originator of misinformation, has been around in concept than in practice for centuries but has assumed more credence in 21st century’s American politics to become a contemporary challenge for institutions, particularly in polarized societies. Hence, the 21st-century world grapples to contend with misinformation in a similar way it does to hold off “human induced’ global warming that threatens the planet.

The above scenario was further exacerbated by the introduction and subsequent incorporation of bots into digital political, religious, economic and tribal propaganda to lure more people into a particular camp or brainwash their psyche into accepting a notion or ideology. Bots give a pseudo follower base to social media influencers and political figures than they actually do, thereby fueling their misleading social media posts’ undue circulation, dominance and popularity and raising more dust and concern and fear about misinformation.
Presently, ways to regulate social media spaces to counter misinformation feature prominently in political discourse at national, regional and international levels. Already social media technology giants like Facebook have initiated self-imposed mechanisms to halt the dissemination of misinformation through their platforms. More newsrooms have established fact-check desks an important constituent of their newsroom’s organisation so as to verify any suspicious content with news values before either publishing or airing it and, above all, to keep the audience off receiving misinformation content from the legacy media.

The septicity of the effects of mis/disinformation attracted the attention of researchers spurring a lot of studies on misinformation and fake news in advanced Western democracies clouded in politics of recent COVID-19 developments in the advanced world, with few studies existing on misinformation in emerging economies and democracies of Africa, Asia and Latin America (Duffy et al. 2019). However, even the few studies conducted in Africa, Asia and Latin America, dwell on the effects of misinformation, leaving out burning narratives in the contexts of these contents which ultimately ought to shape discourse about misinformation at the global level.

It is evident from an extensive literature review that despite the skewed nature of misinformation studies, none of the studies centred on misinformation awareness of journalists covering politics in Northeast Nigeria.
The general objective of this study is to assess the awareness of misinformation among journalists covering politics in Northeast Nigeria as well as its implications on institutions in the region. However, the specific objectives of the study are:

- To assess the disinformation awareness of journalists reporting the political beat in Northeast Nigeria;
- To examine the ability of journalists covering politics in the Northeast to use OSINTs tools to fact check misinformation messages amplified by bots;
- To find out the skills of journalists covering politics in the northeast to identify misinformation content;
- To determine the implication of political misinformation on the institutions of the states making up the northeast sub-region.

1.4 Research Questions

- What is the extent of misinformation awareness among journalists covering politics in the Northeast?
- To what extent do journalists covering politics in the Northeast use OSINTs to assess suspicious misinformation?
- What skills do journalists covering political beats in the Northeast have to spot misinformation from their sources?
- What is the implication of misinformation awareness among journalists covering politics in the northeast on the institutions in the region?
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is important because it attempts to set the pace for studies dwelling on misinformation. As stated earlier, most studies on misinformation in Nigeria and indeed other African countries are based on the general effects of misinformation but misinformation has a lot of dimensions cutting across politics, economy, culture, religion, health and the hegemony. Another grey area where this work is different from others is in its approach to attempt a specific examination of the misinformation awareness of journalists covering politics in the northeast, particularly that the researcher did not come across any misinformation study that focuses on a particular journalism speciality. Therefore, this research will add value and a distinct dimension to fake news and misinformation studies. This way, it is capable of providing a basis for further enquiries into this issue.

Scope Of The Study

The scope of this research is the misinformation awareness of reporters covering politics in Northeast Nigeria and how media, political gladiators belonging to different political platforms exploit political journalists and their media to amplify their views and ultimately win more followers to their sides; how journalists in those countries synthesise and distinguish bots-assisted social media account to filter information sourced from same for mass consumption and the way the generality of the north east's public sphere managed bots they created while expressing political views and preferences.

The significance of this study lies in its capacity to add to the body of information disorder literature—which arguably is still scanty and evolving. In the same vein, a new approach to information disorder studies will be established when the work is completed as other studies currently available in public spaces hitherto shied away from touching the grey area this study focuses on analyzing-- the misinformation awareness of reporters covering politics and reporting politically exposed persons in developing economies in Africa.
THE CONCEPT OF FAKE NEWS

The concept of ‘Fake news’ has an Egyptian origin when in the 13th century BC, Rameses the Great, knowingly disseminated fake information about the “Battle of Kadesh, claiming a ‘false’ victory for the Egyptians.” The coinage: fake news was formed largely to be used against the “news industry” as a mechanism to discredit reports that are critical of the actions or inactions of those in power (Wardle & Derakhsan, 2018). Hence, literature on the etymology of “fake news” recommended the use of misinformation and disinformation skills to checkmate the excess of the phrase, fake news.

Much has been written and said about “fake news” in the last five years. A lot of symposiums, lectures and studies were organised to search for clear conceptualization of “fake news,” a term with Egyptian origin. A critical review of some of the definitions of fake news offered by experts and intellectual giants suggests that the term “fake news” is sarcastically not enough to encapsulate the intricate concept of ‘mis- and dis-information. Fake news failed to capture, for example, the ‘diversity, form, dissemination and motivation’ of mis- and dis-information (Wardle, 2017).

In 2017, Tandoc et al after rigorously analysing 34 scholarly works on how they used the term fake news between 2003 and 2017, concluded that “fake news” was used to mean different things including news satire, news parody, advertisement, propaganda and fabrication. Recent developments indicate that nasty politicians use ‘fake news’ to make reference to critical legacy media reports, hence they are much likely to deploy all available means and tricks to clamp down on media houses, thus putting freedom of the press at risk. Again, fake news or ‘false news’ as Facebook labelled it, is inaccurate to describe the flood of pervasive information disseminated through different media contents, forms and formats.

Drawing from the forgone, fake news can be conceived as a claim-making report containing unsubstantiated information deliberately incorporated into the report to woo cheap followership, brainwash a target population, and/or put someone at an undue advantage in a race to course.

Information Disorder

Information disorder has been around for a long time though with less attention from researchers, governments, institutions and citizens until the electioneering campaigns for the US’ 2016 presidential election. Caroline Anipah has suggested that “information
Information disorder is grouped into three main interconnected groups. Firstly, disinformation which means false deliberately created information tailored to “harm a person”, “social groups,” “organisations” or “country.” Secondly, misinformation means false information designed without ulterior intention to cause injury to the receivers. Thirdly, mal-information – a truthful reality-based message encoded to harm an individual, group or nation. It is apparent from these definitions that discussions on information disorder revolve around the ingenuity of the message and the intention for either creating or disseminating the same message.

However, mis- and dis-information altogether have seven categories with different mechanisms of presentation and effects on the receiving end. The first is that false connection is at play when “headline, visual or caption” does not support message being relayed; second, false context meaning that a false situation is given real or true content; third, manipulated content talks about the use of accurate information to “manipulate” receivers; fourth, satire or parody in which there is no connected intention to cause harm but the content is laden with potency to “fool”; fifth, misleading content is to “frame an issue or individual” sixth, imposter content meaning impersonation of “genuine” information source; seventh, fabricated content is false in its entirety intended to “deceive” receivers.

Irrespective of the intent and class, “infodemic” as the World Health Organisation (WHO) labelled information disorder in the wake of the consolidated mischievous campaigns against COVID-19 as an “information pollution” with varying effects on a range of public discussion topics. This way, information disorder circulated on social media opened up for what is now termed “computational or automated propaganda” to serve keen political interests. Automated propaganda in the words of Woolley and Howard (2017:16) “describes the use of algorithms, automation, and human curation to purposefully manage and distribute misleading information over social media networks” However, Caroline Anipah has identified additional motivations for developing and sharing misinformation content: financial, social and psychological. Information disorder today travels at “supersonic speed” because of the availability of the internet and “social technologies” which greatly alter that the “information is produced and distributed.” Editing and publication technologies made it easier for
people to produce and publish media content today, just as information is “passed in real time between” and among peers. Information transmitted has been supercharged by an accelerated news cycle and mobile handsets. At the same time, fake media are designed to specifically pass misinformation across to users.

Misinformation spreads like wildfire. According to some economists at Stanford University and New York University, out of the ostensibly pseudo information that appeared in the three months before the election, pro-Trump fake stories were shared 30 million times on Facebook (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019) against 8 million that were shared in favour of Mrs Clinton. Other outlets that blow the whistle of information disorder are YouTube, WhatsApp, Twitter, Print and Debunk and professional media. Another study, Misinformation Review found that closed social media platforms like WhatsApp, are veritable tools for circulating misinformation about pandemics to score cheap political points to meet the overall interest of a few individuals as well as truncate government efforts towards addressing a phenomenon. This study was confined to analyzing misinformation distribution about COVID-19 around a major political event. Hence, the subject of misinformation here is the pandemic, not candidates contesting an elective position.

2.3 Bot and Misinformation

The bot is the abridged version of “robot” sometimes referred to as “internet bot.” It is a set of computed algorithms working both as an “online agent” and an automated communication ware individuals and organisations adapt to continuously interact with their community online. While bots mimic identified repeated human behaviour, they are ‘automated’ to carry out ‘programmed’ human tasks with speed faster than human speed. Bots perform automated functions entirely without human influence or assistance. Bots are used to carry out configured assignments over a network like instant messaging and interface platforms – Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Signal, are deployed to rebroadcast or reply to a message more rapidly than even human beings can.

Bots are responsible for more than half of the internet traffic in the same way they amplify posts and add to the scope of followership of political gladiators which give them space to will influence citizens’ psychic in a pro-con like scenario and a competitive advantage over opponents in the race for an elective position or campaign to sway support for an ideology or leaning. Hoaxy, an App that “Visualizes the spread of information on Twitter”, Twitter accounts of politically exposed individuals, such as Femi Fani Kayode and Reno Omokri, for example, have 60 and 48 bots like Twitter handle retweeting and amplifying their tweets.
Bots are broadly categorised into six. They are:

- **Spider Bots.** These are also known as ‘web crawlers.’ They are bots programmed to browse web pages and index contents for easy retrieval on search.

- **Scraper Bots.** These are bots automated to read a part of or complete online content to save specific information offline that may be reused. Scraper bots have a lot of implications on legal matters, particularly those relating to copyright law.

- **Spam Bots.** These are bots programmed to collect email addresses illegally which are used for malicious intents of the programmers of the bots.

- **Social Media Bots.** These are bots designed to send or respond to messages on social media. They are also used as accounts.

- **Downloads Bots.** These types of bots are automated to download software or applications for mobile phones.

- **Ticketing Bots.** These are bots configured to buy or sell tickets at public events.

However, ElectionWatch in its study on the intrusion of bots into campaigns of the African National Congress, ANC, leadership discovered the role of amplification of misinformation contents the two, Ramaphosa and Dlamini-Zuma, shared on social media the penultimate time of the election. Though ElectionWatch studied the role of bots in spreading disinformation on the Twitter accounts of the major candidates in the race for ANC’s slot, the study was limited to just one platform and micro-blog – Twitter.

In 2020, Ajay Sarangam suggested that 9 to 15 percent of the accounts on Twitter are bots created to amplify ideologies and promote a cause for a political bigwig.

Studies (Brkan, 2019; Woolley, 2018) show that technology has today given impetus to the adoption of tools and gadgets including bots, trolls, and cyborgs combined to promote chicanery “computer propaganda” with two sword edge effects on politicking and democracy itself. For instance, the use of bots was found to have played a vital role in amplifying misinformation, notably during 2016 US presidential elections and have, since then, become pragmatic tools for spreading fake news, the alma mater of misinformation, and “psychographic micro-targeting.”

SparkToro (Fishkin, 2018), a technology firm, discovered about 33 million pseudo followers out of the over 55 million followers of former US President Donald Trump. This evidence is suggestive of the fact the 33 million “fake followers” were technological
creations implanted on the micro-blogging site to promote Trump’s posts and ultimately dominate the American online community to rally support to the ideologies expressed by the former leader of the world’s superpower.

**Media Literacy Among Africans**

Media literacy, herein referred to media user’s ability to determine verified and unverified contents have been pinpointed as the most effective tool to curtail misinformation to safeguard democracy (Samuel et al., 2019) but according to Stringer (2018), Nigerians generally lack the awareness needed to spot and debunk misinformation. Respondents of a survey conducted in Northern Nigeria reported a lack of idea as to what it takes to identify misinformation content (Wilson and Umar, 2019). Nigeria’s high level of illiteracy in the northern part of the country further exposed Nigerians to be easy-going targets of manipulation for social media disseminators of fake news.

A study finds out that Nigerians are more likely to regurgitate misinformation unknowingly more easily than their US counterparts because of a general lack of skills at identifying and refuting misinformation. Simply put, the latter has better-advanced media literacy skills than the former.

**Social Media Misinformation Flow**

The coming of social media technologies increased skills among people on how to use social networking sites, just as mass penetration of mobile internet networks in West Africa gave impetus to the growing presence of civilian population on the sites draws the attention of policymakers in the member states of the regional bloc to checkmate the activities of their citizens’ behaviour in relation to information production and dissemination on digital spaces.

Social media penetration in two of the 15 member states of the ECOWAS, Nigeria and Ghana, in particular, armed people with tools to recklessly share unverified information (Warner-Soderholm et al., 2018) because such penetration has implications cutting across social, political and economic spheres of living of the populations of the two countries.

Hence, the affordability of social media allows its users to transmit fake stories to other users with speed and without any attendant cost (Klein and Wueller, 2017), making social media to become the lifeblood of fake news. Social media expedite the circulation of fake news, unabashedly turning the fake news epidemic into a global, regional and national subject of debate and topic of concern from the level of policymakers to the people for whom policies are made. Concern about the spread of fake news focuses on both the ubiquity of social media and the easy circulation of
information that social media platforms drive due to their technical affordances (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

While attention to the impacts of fake news is global, Obereri and Bahiya (2020) argued that the spread of misinformation on digital spaces has more to do with local events and cultural permutations with their effects changing from one place to another. The change, however, is anchored on socio-cultural differences among people, regions and places. Therefore, the motivations that catapult social media users to produce and share misinformation content and its attendant effects may not be adequately captured in studies dwelling on motivation typology. This is even more so in polarized and highly divisive countries like Nigeria and Ghana where social and cultural coexistence are played out along the lines of religion, regionalism, and political party affiliations.

**Drivers of Misinformation Flow**

**Political Drivers:** From the literature analysed thus far, it is evident that drivers for the production and broadcasting of misinformation on the internet are politically tied events like elections and party conventions.

**Pandemic Drivers:** However, another driver that features prominently from analysed literature is the unrestrained flow of avalanche of misinformation messages designed around pandemic such COVID and Ebola. This finding corroborates the circumstances surrounding the rebirth of fake news around the 2016 US presidential election and the neglect of the war tune attached to misinformation as Rameses the great demonstrated its effectiveness as a tool for warfare propaganda; frequent recurrence of misinformation and disinformation around COVID-19 pandemic. Salt-birth hype in Nigeria during the peak of the Ebola virus epidemic captures this point succinctly.

**Policy Drivers:** Proponents of a policy orchestrated production and dissemination of misinformation around the idea begging for the government to formulate a policy on. This is apparently done to woo support in favour of the policy and set an agenda on it for both policymakers and the generality of the populace. The spread of misinformation around the quasi directive of the Federal Government of Nigeria abolishing the award of Higher National Diploma, HND, by Nigerian polytechnics in 2016 is a classic example that buttresses this point.
The paucity of utmost lack of skills and techniques to filter misinformation out of legacy media contents by Nigerian media professionals played out in many instances in recent times. For instance, in 2019, a purported social media video showed the quasi wedding celebration of President Buhari and his Humanitarian Affairs Minister, Hajiya Sadiya Umar Farouk. The video claimed that the wedding solemnization was planned to be held at the National Mosque Abuja on Friday.

The speed at which the fake presidential wedding spread in Nigeria's social media sphere can only be compared with the speed of the light of thunder. It expectedly crept into the headlines of many legacy media in Nigeria beginning with The Herald, a local print medium and later, Nigeria's most visited online news platform, Nairaland picked up the story to spur the circulation of a ducked invitation card stating time and venue of the "ghostly planned" wedding.

In 2016, a story went viral on social media platforms and forced its way into the online contents of mainstream media in Nigeria claiming that the Federal Government has merged all Federal Polytechnics with Federal Universities in their immediate vicinity. By implication, heads of these polytechnics are to leave their offices. Because under the new arrangement, the formerly known polytechnics are now extensions of their mother universities. Vice-Chancellors of these universities are mandated, under the fake arrangement, to oversee the affairs of the new attachments added to them. The story went ahead to add that, no Higher National Diploma (HND). Only National Diplomas are to be run by these extensions. Students upon completion of their ND programmes will be enrolling into 200 levels in the mother universities.

Misinformation and Media Believability

Today, peoples' belief in legacy media's content falls into a serious ‘crisis’ day by day as the command legacy media held for being the sole disseminators of ‘facts’ is under siege by the Trojan Horses of misinformation at a time when the ‘watchdog’ function of
the media is more pressing than ever before. Information circulated through interpersonal mediation channels tends to command more of people's trust and confidence than opinionated media content because contacts hold a great deal of belief in people they consider as ‘authority,’ (Schapals, 2017). This goes without saying that the age-long credibility and believability of legacy media is increasingly being partitioned between authorities and fact-based media outlets owing to the culmination of the effects of misinformation on news media and journalism.

Misinformation and National Security

Studies have corroborated how spreading misinformation in secular and multi-ethnic countries can fuel or even trigger violent confrontations; reappraisal among ethnic groups or religions. The flow of misinformation on social media proves to be devastating on the social, economic and political structure of nations. Hence, today, the government shares its role of ensuring the wellbeing of its citizens but Facebook and other technology companies.

Countries begin to adjust their security architectures in the wake of the flood of Challenges misinformation waged and are waging on the security and wellbeing of citizens with multiplier effects. What this translates to is a paradigm shift in media propaganda largely consolidated on legacy media to new media largely through misinformation and disinformation; countries count on their information capabilities as they did to assess individual military myths in terms of number and quality of armaments. However, as global concern and attention shifted to the recognized threat of misinformation posed to internal security less of the skills, competencies and techniques of uniform men at combating misinformation to safeguard national interest are known.

A rigorous analysis of the history of violence and conflicts in Nigeria in recent times shows that misinformation on social media fuels the embers of sectarian and ethnic conflict oftentimes with big human and material casualties. For instance, eleven people were killed in Northcentral Plateau State in Ghashish after a supposed video and pictures of a mutilated baby and some dismembered bodies went viral allegedly being a crime perpetrated on Berom. However, the pictures were recycled images of DR Congo’s conflict. They are six years old as at the time they were shared. In Ghana, on the other hand, misinformation was reported by an Afrobarometer survey in 2019 to be effective at promoting the violent reactions to campaigns opposition parties staged thereby promoting a hostile environment.

Security personnel in Ghana due to the poor appreciation of mechanisms to tackle misinformation grapple with an afterthought to contain fake security threat alarms which in most cases led to the loss of lives. In 2010, a fabricated text message flew into Ghanaians text message receiving devices alerting people of an impending earthquake forcing people to vacate their domiciles to safety zones. The pseudo alert came barely
months after a similar earthquake hit Haiti. The 2014 Ebola hoax in Nigeria in which at least two people were reportedly killed is a classic example of how fake alarms caused devastation and spot cracks on the security construction of not only under-developed and developing countries but also developed nations.

Spreading misinformation on social media portends danger in countries like Ghana and Nigeria because each time a faction felt threatened, it would nourish a retaliation idea, therefore, exacerbating the acrimony among people. The Plateau incident cited juxtaposes this claim. A Berom youth leader who granted an interview to reporters shortly after the wake up of the Gashish violence explained that on seeing the gory pictures circulated on social media, they felt irate and become desperate to kill any Muslim on sight.

Nigerians and Ghanaians are increasingly being online because of data affordability, penetration of mobile networks and influx of technological products searching for the latest information through socio-cultural groups and pages on Facebook and WhatsApp. Notably, most of these platforms are run by opinion leaders or social media influencers who are most sympathetic to a belief of ideology or group; hence their bias is often at play whenever they share product content for their teaming followers. The information these platforms produce and share are often not misinformation and disinformation too, leading to the chaos and breakdown of law and others in the society.

This requires the deployment of security personnel to areas where violence erupted as a result of misinformation within towns and cities and remote villages. However, deploying personnel to remote areas further depletes the capacity of the security operatives especially in countries like Ghana and Nigeria whose number of policemen is nothing to write home about despite the population explosion being witnessed in the country.

Having noticed and detected the frequency at which Nigerians distribute misinformation and its ‘propensity,’ to disrupt peace in Nigeria, the Nigerian Police Force set up a desk in Plateau State tasked to monitor trends of misinformation on social media capable of causing violence. This additional responsibility added to the policemen denies them time and energy that they would otherwise channel to make policing in Nigeria more effective and prudent. Similarly, the frequent flow of misinformation consumes “resources that are already overstretched” (Commonwealth Security Group, 2020).

'Multi Agency national security approach to tame the spread of misinformation is recommended for all nations in utter negligence of the fact that the capacity needed for a multi-agency collaboration against misinformation is not equal among nations of the world. It is evident that in Ghana and Nigeria, police are the sole security outfit-making moves to tame the spread of misinformation plus other policing functions
making their work too cumbersome and less efficient because misinformation contents that are supposed to have been pinned down from entering online public spheres in those are countries are allowed until their effects on peace and security becomes glaring.

Events where police in Nigeria activate stringent measures on security alarms but turn out to be fake crystallize their ineptitude at pinpointing misinformation content using open source intelligence which ultimately culminated in wasting the police resource working round the clock to ensure maximum protection to the lives and property of citizens. Tyopev Terna Matthias, a one time Police Public Relations Officer in Jos, told the BBC that once a man called the police in Plateau informing them that some men were on their way to attack his village. The police hurriedly sent trucks loaded with armoured police officers to the village. The team spent two days before it was able to distinguish that the purported report on which decision was based is misinformation. In the mid of the current trend of misinformation on Nigerian social media spaces, a mere unit in one of the commands of the force cannot be effective to quench the flow of misinformation in Nigeria considering the fact that about 24 million Nigerians are online and the number of the Nigerian police force is not up to that. Hence, security outfits act on false information that later turns out to be untrue.

*Villages in Plateau are under constant attack. So when we get this information, we take it seriously. Then we discover it's fake*

Because of the population size of Nigeria and the complexity of insecurity concerns, the nation's military was found to be engaged in active search for misinformation as part of its security role in the nation though not enough too to checkmate the avalanche of misinformation contents on the nation's social media spaces though nothing is heard of Ghana’s military effort at curbing the proliferation of misinformation in the country.

Based on the foregone, it is evident that misinformation has the potency to disrupt peace and sustained hatred in African countries through the capacity and strength of their security architecture is weak to make a significant impact in the drive to end dissemination of misinformation for the overall interest of peace and security in the continent and its subregion glaringly characterized by conflicts.
FACT-CHECKING AND VERIFICATION SKILLS AMONG MEDIA PROFESSIONALS

It behoves journalists and editors to realise that their chore as information mediators that set the agenda for the public is under grave threat. This submission implies that journalists need not only understand the flow of miss/disinformation in the public sphere – both online and offline – but also develop skills and techniques to first be able to detect polluted information made public through the use of computer technology; second to guard their journalistic contents against the incursion of fake news to retain the confidence and trust of the people patronizing legacy media service.

To digest the flow of misinformation, Wardle and Derakhshan (2018:43) argue that media professionals need to individually analyse “elements of information disorder’ especially agents of misinformation to be able to project the rate which each of the elements spread and begin to “address them” them squarely to safe their face in public eyes.

Media professionals need to properly get the nexus of dis/misinformation flow by understanding first, who these agents are as well as their motives for fabricating messages to seduce people to believe what is not genuine and make them cast doubt on the content of legacy media that they depended on for information since generations before the birth of chief conveyors of misinformation over the internet – the social or new media.

Secondly, the kinds of messages agents of misinformation published ought to be well understood at the level of the reporter to serve as a base to project the rates at which each travels and its likely effects on the minds of the people. However, scientific discussion on the nature and kind of misinformation messages distributed to the digital public centred on fabricated text news sites through visual misinformation content receives a trajectory of circulation and it is extremely difficult to identify and debunk.

Disinformation champions transcend circulating entirely fake information to misrepresent genuine content out the context and meanings it communicates; use the masthead of global and national reputed media outlets to masquerade misinformation content to deceive the audience that the media whose logo is used actually produced the content in question. For instance, in 2017, BBC discovered that someone had produced a video with its photoshopped logo. The video tended to capture the beliefs of BBC’s online audience prior to Kenya’s presidential election.
Cyber, Digital Communication Laws, Social Media Control in Selected African Countries

While Ghana is ranked the most media-friendly country in Africa, about 57 per cent of its population concurred that media and internet culture are poor which calls for action on the part of the policymakers to control social media spaces to guard the public against being in contact with information that's inappropriate to the society. This simply suggested that despite the criminalization of disseminating misinformation, the rate at which misinformation flourished in Ghana raised concern on the need to regulate. In 2020, Ghana's last election, 69 per cent of respondents in a study by GhanaFact, reported encountering misinformation that year.

However, despite the increasing flow of misinformation in Ghana in the last four years, especially in 2020 which is an election year and a pandemic year, authorities in that country arrested or pursued few social media users for spreading misinformation (Modern Ghana, 2020; Myjoyonline, 2020). “The attention of the Ghana Health service has been drawn to a false rumour that was circulated on social media about a surge in the number of COVID - 19 cases to 1064 on Monday night, 13th April 2020", a statement signed by ACP David Ekloo who is the Deputy Communications Director at the Ghana police service signalling Ghana's police plan to pursue Ghanaians suspected of spreading misinformation on social media platforms.

The foregone are evidence of horrible attempts to regulate and prosecute disseminators of misinformation in Ghana which lacks sustained effort to enforce relevant digital communication laws available in the country. Similarly, there was evidence to juxtapose whether or not the arrested persons were convicted of the offence of spreading misinformation to deter other Ghanaians.

Comparatively, Nigeria is ranked 120 on the global Press Freedom Index, despite the provision of the right to freedom of expression in the country's 1999 constitution; a situation indicating that the government can wax its media control axe willfully. Besides, at the moment, the much talked about social media bill in Nigeria is not yet a law. By implication, Nigeria does not have clearly codified laws that regulate social media and that can be used to check misinformation flow in the country's social media spaces.

What this translates to is the arbitrary interpretation of some sections of the constitution and cybercrime and cyber security law to regulate social media in Nigeria. On the other hand, it is glaring that misinformation is treacherous to the sustainability of the corporate existence of Nigeria and Nigerians and peace and security.

Recently, the Department of State Security Service, DSS arrested Kabriu Muhammad, an indigene of Kano for cooking the much-circulated fake video citing President Buhari's wedding with Sadiya Umar Farouk. The arrest was an afterthought to the
It is needless to say that both Nigeria and Ghana have different but similar legislation in place that regulate the operations and activities of legacy media – radio, television, newspaper and magazines, the two countries are not on the same page in terms of legislation to control their digital spaces. For instance, Ghana has two clearly stated laws that forbid misinformation sharing, the 1960 Criminal Offenses Act and the Electronic Communications Act 2008, whereas, in Nigeria, an attempt to regulate social media via legislation came up in 2019 when Senator Mohammed Sani Musa presented the Social Media Bill arguing that the bill seeks to protect the country from falling victim of cyber forces as did the US.

Distribution or sharing of misinformation is termed a criminal offence in Ghana which is punishable by five years’ imprisonment or a fine of 36,000 Ghana Cedi or a combination of both. Under the two laws prohibiting misinformation dissemination in Ghana, social media users are tasked to devise means of judging whether content is misleading or deceptive or unverified because being ignorant of the fact that the information one share is fake, isn’t a soft excuse for the punishment.

On the other end, the drafted Social Media Bill in Nigeria provides for three years imprisonment or a fine of $825 for individuals while a fine of $27,500 awaits a media organization found guilty of spreading misinformation when the bill becomes a law. The bill seeks to address misinformation from two different angles with the first being control of the social media accounts of Nigerians and the other being targeted at access to the internet with the police fully empowered by the provisions of the bill to arrest anyone suspected to be involved in sharing misinformation and close down a media house that disseminates unverified information.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theory selected for this study is technology determinism. The term: technological determinism was first coined by Thorstein Veblen, though the etymology of determinism idea was traced to Karl Marx. However, considering the context of this study, the most appropriate dimension of technological determinism is one offered by Marshal McLuhan in 1964. To McLuhan, the “media is the message” and people create technologies that in turn shape and influence people's behaviours and actions. This idea seems to link the power of the media to exert influence on the psyche of the people that some theorists labelled as “Media Determinism”.

Media determinism postulates that the invention of technologies, especially communication message producing and receiving technologies have turned the world into a “global village”. Today, the coming of social networking sites gave impetus to
bridge distance and promote global connectedness in a linked style, (Finnemann, 2002). The use of technology greatly altered the way people communicate, do business, school, behaviour, interact with families, pastimes and means of amusement, (Martin & Ericson, 2013).

This theory is premised on the basis that technology has the power to cause social change and that can be observed from peoples' way of life. Of particular interest here is technological influence on information consumption and the production behaviour of individuals. Today, technologies such as handsets, computers, social media, the internet and mobile network have become an indispensible part of people's lives that they cannot do without it. Here we argue that technology is the major instinctive factor motivating people to behave and act in a certain way.

Research Methodology

This study analysed misinformation awareness among journalists covering the political beat in Nigeria as well as its implications on the democratic institutions in the country. To scientifically achieve this goal, the researcher adopts a quantitative approach to survey the target population using a cross-sectional survey method where journalists working in the Northeastern part of Nigeria were sampled.

Journalists from three Northeastern states of Adamawa, Bauchi and Gombe were selected for this study. However, the selection of journalists from the three states as the population of this study is purposive. This is to enable the researcher to attain his goal. “In purposive sampling, specific elements which satisfy some predetermined criteria are selected. Although the criteria to be used are usually a matter of the researcher's judgment, he exercises this judgment in relation to what he thinks will constitute a representative sampling.”

The Northeast is one of the six geo-political zones making up the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It has six autonomous states that come together to make up for the region with an estimated population of 26 million according to UNDP, the northeast has one third of Nigeria's total land mass with more than 100 ethnic groups who are mostly peasant farmers. However, over the last decade, activities of Boko Haram insurgents mar the peaceful atmosphere for which the Northeast was known for over the years. Three states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa at the extreme eastern part of the region are the worst hit, though Taraba state is faced with a lot of religious, communal and tribal conflicts. Therefore, Adamawa, Bauchi and Gombe are the most peaceful states in the region, hence the selection of the two neighbouring states for this study.

There are private and government-owned radio and television stations in the region as it is the norm with the pattern of broadcast media ownership in Nigeria albeit print media are not operational in the region. The situation is not different between government and private ownership with the exception of online news platforms.
National and international media organisations stationed their correspondents in at least each of the states of the Northeast. This practice is more common with the Nigerian national dailies and the federal government’s owned television and radio stations.

Therefore, the Northeast is selected for this study because of its developmental backwardness and the recent activities of insurgents in the region. However, attempts to alter the paradigm of the absence of development in the region must be seen doing something in that direction albeit before they get to the political positions, they must deploy the necessary politicking tools, part of which include use of disinformation campaigns to gain more followership and support base.

Data was collected through a questionnaire that was administered to the respondents through the respondents-based administered method. The questionnaire was made up of multiple option responses with some framed on a Likert-like scale.
The population of this study includes all the journalists working in Northeast Nigeria. However, due to poor record-keeping in Nigeria, the actual number of journalists registered with the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) in the Northeast cannot be ascertained. The researcher obtained a list of registered journalists from three states from the Chairmen of the NUJ in the states. Hence, the researcher selected journalists working in three states of the region - Adamawa, Bauchi and Gombe for reasons of peace and accessibility. The breakdown of registered journalists in the three states is thus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Registered Journalists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adamawa</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bauchi</td>
<td>324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gombe</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>711</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Therefore, 711 journalists from the three states form the population of this study.

**Sample Size and Sampling Technique**

To determine the sample size from the total population, Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table of population and sample size was used to arrive at the appropriate sample size for this study, therefore a population of 711 has 248 as its appropriate sample size. Hence, the sample size of this study is 248. However, the researcher adds two to take care of errors and unreturned data gathering instruments making 250 to be the overall sample size.
The researcher adopts a purposive sampling technique in choosing the region used as a case study for this work because of the features of the region and the working conditions of reporters in Northeast Nigeria. However, a proportionate sampling technique was used to arrive at the samples to be selected from each council of NUJ in the three states.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Adamawa} &: \frac{250}{711} \times 240 = 84 \\
\text{Bauchi} &: \frac{250}{711} \times 324 = 114 \\
\text{Gombe} &: \frac{250}{711} \times 147 = 52 \\
\therefore 84 + 114 + 52 = 250
\end{align*}
\]

Method of Data Collection

The method of data collection for this research is a survey. However, the instrument for data collection is a questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered in a respondent-based method. This is because the respondents are literate. They can read and understand. The questionnaire was made up of multiple options questions and pro-con responses.

Method of Data Presentation and Analysis

The method of data analysis this research adopted is the quantitative method. Simple percentage and frequency tables were used to present and analyse quantitative data. The tables are important for clear presentation and they helped to satisfy the objectives of this research and to answer the research questions. To further simplify the statistical information the tables carry, a description of the elements of each table.

Data Analysis

This chapter presents data gathered through a questionnaire designed as an instrument for data collection. The data is presented using descriptive statistical instruments—simple frequency and percentage tables. The objectives of the study informed the choice of this method of data presentation. The tables give a factual analysis of data gathered according to research aims. An analysis of each table is given to further explain them. This allows for a thorough discussion of findings for more clarity and understanding of the elements each table contains.
Table 1: Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>68.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>250</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*2021 Field Survey*

**Gender Distribution of Respondents**

Table 1 above shows that 171 respondents which represent 68.4 percent are males; 26 percent are females. However, 5.2 percent of the data gathering instrument shared to the respondents attracts no response. This is an indication that more men are into journalism in Northeast Nigeria than women.

Table 2: Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-25yrs</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-35yrs</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45yrs</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55yrs</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56yrs and above</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>250</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*2021 Field Survey*

**Age Brackets of respondents**

From table 2, it can be seen that 36 percent of the respondents are between the ages of 26 and 35 years old; 28 percent between the ages of 36 and 45 years old; 14 percent falls between 46 and 55 years old; 19 percent are between 18 and 25 years old and 2 percent between 56 years and above. This implies that the majority of working journalists in Northeastern Nigeria are young, agile and abled bodied men.
Table 3: Qualification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSCE</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCE/Diploma</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HND/Degree</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>43.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2021 Field Survey

Respondents’ Level of Education

Data in table 3 shows that 43 percent of the respondents have a degree; diploma and NCE 35 percent; SSCE 10 percent; master’s degree six percent and 2 percent PhD. Journalists in Northeast Nigeria have an appreciable educational background that qualifies them to practice.

Table 4: Media Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEDIA</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>70.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online medium</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2021 Field Survey

Media Institution Types

Among the total respondents, 70 percent are journalists working for radio stations; 7 percent work for newspapers; 6 percent work for online news platforms and 15 percent are employees of television stations. Going by this finding, radio is still very appealing to the people of Northeast Nigeria because of the gap between urban and
rural centres in the region. Most settlements in the northeast as it is all over Nigeria, are rural-based, a reality that condemned them to rely more on radio as sources of information about happenings in their neighbourhoods.

Table 5: Specialization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>38.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>250</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2021 Field Survey

Respondents’ Area of Specialisation

From the respondents sampled, 4 percent report climate; agriculture 12 percent; transportation 5 percent; security 10 percent; energy 4 percent; economy 10 percent; health 13 percent; politics 38 percent; and zero responses 2 percent. This shows that most reporters in the northeast cover politics despite the fact that the region has been under serious activities of insurgents and terrorists in the last decade.
Table 6: Geographical Penetration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>250</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2021 Field Survey

Area of Coverage

Table 6 indicates that the geographical distance covered by the media houses of reporters working in the Northeast with 35 percent covering a state; 6 percent local communities; 7 percent local government; 8 percent regional; 24 percent national; 16 percent international and 1 percent having no clearly defined area of coverage. This goes to suggest that most media stations in the Northeast are owned, managed and controlled by state governments.

Table 7: Extent of Mis/Dis Information Knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Average</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciable</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very appreciable</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very excellent</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>250</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2021 Field Survey

Misinformation Awareness among Journalists Covering Politics in Nigeria: Implications for Democratic Institutions in North-East Nigeria.
Journalists’ Level of Misinformation Awareness

The table above shows that 6 percent of journalists in northeast have very excellent knowledge about misinformation, excellent 7 percent, very appreciable 11 percent; appreciable 27 percent; very average 12 percent; average 31 percent and no response 2 percent. This is an indication that working journalists in the northeast have a poor idea about the scourge of misinformation, fact-checking and verification skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>46.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offline</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WhatsApp</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal level</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>250</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2021 Field Survey

Sources of Misinformation

Misinformation spread through interpersonal relations 2 percent; via WhatsApp 3 percent; through Facebook 38 percent; offline 8 percent; online 46 percent; 1 percent no response. This means that Facebook is the main originator of misinformation campaigns in Northeast Nigeria and online contents which might be in the form of pseudo online news platforms or personal blogs.
Table 9: Frequency: of Misinformation Encounter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>35.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very rarely</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very often</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>250</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2021 Field Survey

The extent of Misinformation Encounter

Journalists who seldom come in contact with misinformation are 8 percent; 11 percent very often; 26 percent often; 12 percent very rarely; 35 percent rarely and 6 percent no response. Going by this, journalists practising in the northeast rarely come across misinformation because they have a weak understanding of the phenomenon.

Table 10: Misinformation Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>51.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecurity</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>250</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2021 Field Survey
Misinformation Themes

Political misinformation themes feature prominently with 51 percent; education 10 percent; 21 insecurity; health 5 percent; election 6 percent; religion 3 percent and 1 percent no response. This means that political themes are the major most recurring theme of misinformation campaigns in the Northeast.

Table 11: Producers of Misinformation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politicians</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>66.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political parties</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious leaders</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurgents</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health management bodies</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>250</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2021 Field Survey

Encoders of Misinformation

Table 11 above shows that politicians that are key producers of misinformation content constitute 66 percent; 3 percent health management bodies; 9 percent insurgents; 3 percent religious leaders; political parties 13 percent and 4 percent attracting no response. This shows that politicians produce a great deal of mis/disinformation to attract more support and acceptance among the voters.
Table 12 Drivers of Misinformation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election times</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>46.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pandemic times</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War times</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious festivities</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious ideology</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>250</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2021 Field Survey

**Misinformation Drivers**

Table 12 shows that elections drive more misinformation flow with 46 percent; pandemic 25 percent; war 10 percent; festivities 10 percent; religious ideologies 8 percent and no response 1 percent. By these findings, it is clear that misinformation flow is being spurred by-election and their related activities.

Table 13: Sourcing News from Social Media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>55.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>34.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>250</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2021 Field Survey

**Social Media as Source of News**

55 percent of journalists say they use social media to scout for news ideas and events, 34 percent say they don’t use social media to source news; 5 percent say they were not certain whether or not they use social media to scout for news and 11 percent gave no response at all. This suggests that despite available evidence that social media
platforms are the cheapest forums where one can find misinformation, more journalists rely on such platforms to get news items that they use on legacy media that people attach a certain level of believability to.

**Table 14: Social Media Sourced Stories Turned Fake**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>39.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>35.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot recall</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>250</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*2021 Field Survey*

**Stories Sourced from Social Media Turned Fake**

The table shows that 39 percent of news stories sourced from social media turned out to be fake; not fake 35 percent; 11 percent of surveyed journalists say they cannot recall whether stories they lifted from social media turned out to be fake or not with 8 percent of them saying they are not sure. This means that there is a thin margin between stories sourced from social media that turned to be purely misinformation content designed to brainwash its receivers.

**Table 15: Journalists’ view of misinformation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information designed to stun situations referred to in the stories</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information created to inspire emotions such as hate or fear with little evidence</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Names of organizations, cities and persons that you didn't know before will appear in a news content</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information contains claims without providing source</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information is referenced to ‘experts’ who lack valid credentials</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Journalists Understanding of Misinformation

Table 15 above shows that 6 percent of journalists say that misinformation is that information broadcast at normal news time; 2 percent misquotation; referral to incompetent persons 4 percent; claims without sources 17 percent; unknown names 8 percent; information designed to stir up emotions 30 percent; information that stuns realities 12 percent and no response 12 percent. This is an indication that the popular perception of misinformation is that it is encoded to attract the emotion of people to the event being described in the report.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many times the post is shared</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many times have people commented on the post</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The account where information is spread</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If a post contains a picture or not</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checking the website from which the post originated</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not care about checking and just ignore it</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will read it carefully</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16: Misinformation Watch out List
Table 16 shows that 2 percent of the respondents say they don’t know what to do when they come across misinformation; none 10 percent; read carefully 11 percent; ignore it 2 percent; checking the originating website 18 percent; check whether it has a picture; where information is spread 19 percent; how many comments 6 percent; numbers of share and no response 6 percent. This means that the first thing most political reporters do when they come across a piece of information suspected to be fake is to check the originating website.

Table 17 Misinformation Associated Actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not care about the information you are spreading</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disseminate information that you do not know is false</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want to spread malicious information about someone on social media</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>250</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table above shows that 4 percent of the respondents say they don’t know what to do when they come in contact with misinformation; 21 percent none of the above; want to share 9 percent; disseminate the information you don’t know genuinely is 30 percent; carefree towards the information one is sharing 4 percent. This indicates that people distribute information that they don’t verify.
### Table 18: Perception of OSINT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly disagree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>42.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly agree</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>250</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2021 Field Survey

**OSINT Understanding**

Table 18 shows that 6 percent of respondents very strongly agree that they know how to apply OSINT to daily journalism work; strongly agree 1 percent; agree 42 percent; very strongly disagree 4 percent; strongly disagree 9 percent; disagree 26 percent; no response 6 percent. Therefore, this means that most journalists in the northeast agree with their ability to use OSINT.

### Table 19: Use of OSINT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly disagree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>48.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly agree</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>250</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2021 Field Survey
OSINT Use

Table 19 shows that 4 percent very strongly agree that they can use OSINT, 10 percent strongly agree; 48 percent agree; 2 percent very strongly disagree; disagree 21 percent did not respond. This is an indication that a sizeable number of journalists in the northeast can use OSINTs.

Table 20: Use of OSINT to Authenticate Photograph

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly disagree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly agree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>250</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2021 Field Survey

Photograph Verification

Table 20 above shows that 6 percent of the respondents have no response to the question, disagree 16 percent; strongly disagree 6 percent; very strongly disagree 2 percent; somewhat agree 24 percent; agree 34 percent; strongly agree 6 percent; very strongly agree 2 percent. This means that political reporters in the northeast can make use of OSINT to establish the authenticity of a photograph.
Table 21: Use of OSINT to Determine Photograph Location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly disagree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>42.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly agree</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>250</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2021 Field Survey

Determining Photograph’s Location

Table 21 above shows that 5 percent of the respondents have no response to the question, disagree 23 percent; strongly disagree 9 percent; very strongly disagree 6 percent; agree 42 percent; strongly agree 9 percent; very strongly agree 2 percent. This means that political reporters in the northeast can make use of OSINT tools to spot the location where a particular photograph was taken.

Table 22: Use of OSINT to Determine Time of photograph or Video

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>55.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly agree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>250</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2021 Field Survey
Knowing Time of Photograph or Video Record

Table 22 above shows that 10 percent of the respondents have no response to the question, disagree 15 percent; strongly disagree 4 percent; very strongly disagree 4 percent; agree 55 percent; strongly agree 10 percent; very strongly agree 2 percent. This means that political reporters in the northeast can make use of OSINT to determine when a photograph or video was taken.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly disagree</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>48.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly agree</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>250</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2021 Field Survey

Fact-checking Individuals

Table 23 above shows that 8 percent of the respondents have no response to the question, disagree 17 percent; strongly disagree 6 percent; very strongly disagree 5 percent; agree 48 percent; strongly agree 10 percent; very strongly agree 4 percent. This means that working journalists in the Northeast have the ability to use technological tools to fact-check individuals.
Table 24: Understanding of Network Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly disagree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>46.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly agree</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2021 Field Survey

Network Analysis Understanding

Table 24 shows that 7 percent of the respondents say they very strongly agree with their understanding of network analysis, strongly agree 9 percent; agree 46 percent; very strongly disagree 2 percent; strongly disagree 6 percent; disagree 19 percent and 8 percent no response. Therefore, reporters in the Northeast have a fair understanding of network analysis tools.

Table 25: Monitoring hashtag

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly disagree</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly agree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2021 Field Survey

Misinformation Awareness among Journalists Covering Politics in Nigeria: Implications for Democratic Institutions in North-East Nigeria.
Ability To Monitor Hashtag

Table 25 above shows that of the total respondents, 7 percent did not give any response to the question; 38 percent disagree; 1 percent strongly disagree; 5 percent very strongly disagree; 35 percent agree; 10 percent strongly agree; 1 percent agree very strongly. This is an indication that journalists in Northeast Nigeria lack the skills needed to effectively monitor hashtags.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly agree</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly disagree</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>250</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Network Visualisation

Table 26 indicates that 6 percent of the respondents disagree very strongly; 13 percent strongly disagree; 20 somewhat agree; 9 percent very strongly agree; 3 percent strongly agree; 36 agree and 10 percent no response. This means that political reporters have the skills to visualise networks.
Table 27: Google Dork

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone who spends all their time on Google</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A combination of several search operators that can be used to conduct precise searches via any search engine</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A database of information leaked on the internet</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A means of searching the internet using characters such as “Michael Jackson” or site:facebook.com</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of the above</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>250</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2021 Field Survey

**Google Dork Use**

Of the sampled journalists, 9 percent reported having no idea as to how to use Google Dork; all of the above 12 percent; means of surfing the net 9 percent; leaked information database 19 percent; multi-searching tools compatible with many search engines 18 percent; a person that spends a lot of time online 17 percent and no response 13 percent. This finding suggests that working journalists in the Northeast have weak knowledge of what Google Dork entails and does.
### Use of OSINT

Table 27 above shows that 13 percent of the surveyed journalists use Google Earth; Tweet Deck 15 percent; who posted what 10 percent; Facebook Identifiers 6 percent; Twitter Advanced Search .8 percent; secure browser 3 percent; advanced search operators 2 percent; wikimapia 8 percent; Followerwonk 5 percent; InVid 1 percent; map.snapchat.com 6 percent; searchmy.bio 2 percent and no response 8 percent. This means that most political journalists in Northeast Nigeria use Tweetdeck frequently because most politicians use it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TweetDeck</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>map.snapchat.com</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who Posted What</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Followerwonk</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searchmy.bio</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>InVID</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google Earth</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wikimapia</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced search operators</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure browser</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverse image search</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter Advanced Search</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook Identifiers to conduct searches</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>250</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2021 Field Survey
Table 28: Investigating a Company

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google Earth / Google Maps</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCCRP Aleph</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official Government registries</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of the above</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>250</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2021 Field Survey

Tools For Investigating A Company

Table 28 above show that 19 percent of the respondents say that they don’t know how to use OSINT tools to investigate a company; 10 percent use official government registries; 2 percent use social media platforms; 4 percent use OCCRP Aleph; 32 percent use Google Earth; 17 percent use LinkedIn; 6 percent gave no response. This means that Google Earth is the most common OSINT tool journalists in the Northeast use to investigate a company.

Table29: Bots

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They have a string of numbers after their name</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By conducting a reverse image search on their profile picture</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling mistakes or grammatical errors in their biography</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 29 shows that 8 percent of political reporters in Northeast Nigeria use Botometer to determine whether or not a social media account is a bot; when the account follows a lot of other accounts 8 percent; looking for a blue tick close the name of the account 8 percent; exclusive high number of tweets 34 percent; spelling and grammatical error 3 percent; conducting reverse image search 20 percent; a string number after name 4 percent and no response 10 percent. This shows that journalists in Nigeria’s northeast spot bots on social media when they sense that an account does a lot of exclusive tweets.

### Table 30: Analysis Tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flight tracking tools such as flightaware.com or flightradar/24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCCRP Aleph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maritime tracking tools such as marinetrack.com or vesselfinder.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good tracking tools such as panjiva or CMA CGM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOAXY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BotoMeter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CrowdTangle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The excessively high number of tweets | 87 | 34.8 |
Looking for a blue tick next to their account name | 22 | 8.8 |
Using Botometer | 21 | 8.4 |
When the account follows a lot of other accounts but does not have many | 21 | 8.4 |

**Total** | **250** | **100.0**
Use of OSINT

Table 30 above shows that most reporters covering political beat in the Northeast don’t use OSINT with 30 percent reporting any use of the tools; 11 percent use CrowdTangle; 5 percent uses Botometer; 5 percent use Hoaxy; 5 percent use Panjiva; 2 percent use maritime tracking tools; 14 percent uses OCCRP; 8 percent use flight tracking tools; 15 percent gave no response. This means that political reporters in Nigeria don’t use OSINT tools to support their journalistic work despite reporting the beat that is mostly associated with the production and dissemination of misinformation.
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

It is evident from the data analysed and literature reviewed that political reporters in Nigeria grapple to decipher what forms the nucleus of misinformation from among the avalanche of information that they come across on a daily basis. Table15 suggests that Nigerian political journalists are more likely to display emotions towards misinformation content. Colleen (2020) corroborates that pure misinformation content is very likely to ‘spark anger, fear and disgust.’ The fact that Nigerian journalists attached a lot of emotion to misinformation arguably might not be unconnected to the multiculturalism and diversity of the inhabitants of the country. Nigerians are engrossed with issues of religion, tribe, region, political affiliation and race. Therefore, any information that touches Christianity for instance, has a very high tendency of sparking reaction from Nigerian Christians and vice versa.

Secondly, Nigerian political reporters pay specific attention to the source of the information to filter whether or not the source is genuine and partisan as well as opinionated free sources. However, some sites on the internet are purposefully designed to disseminate misinformation about persons, issues, ideas, race and or religion. They are powerful vendors of undeserved acceptance or rejection. For instance, Russia was credited for creating pseudo-news sites that spread misinformation about Mrs Clinton during the build-up to the 2016 US presidential election which gave Republican’s Trump an edge over Mrs Clinton in the voting opinion polls conducted in the last three months to the election date, (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017).

Again, exacerbated by poor misinformation knowledge, Nigerian political reporters give in to the temptation of wanting to share unverified information. Table17 shows that one of the first actions political reporters in Nigeria initiated on getting in contact with a particular disinformation message was to rebroadcast it through either their legacy media channels or on their personal social media handles. This, they ostensibly do, to sustain their public image of being information purveyors trusted to be disseminating factual and authentic information to guide the decision of members of the public. However, this gap has created a leeway for misinformation to encroach into the highly revered and accepted contents of legacy media in Nigeria particularly radio—the popular medium in Nigeria’s rural communities.

Poor perception of Open Source Intelligence Tools which could be used to track misinformation contents online among journalists covering political beat in Nigeria ensures steady incursion of disinformation into their work thereby misguiding
unsuspecting citizens. The rise in the trend of misinformation in the last five years or so saw the need for more fact-checks to counter misinformation spread. Demand for fact-checks has never been more pressing than during the emergence of the recent Coronavirus monster. The pandemic brought a lot of ‘infodemic’ around it, a development that paved the way for fact-checking organisations to spring up.

However, Nigerian journalists reporting politics depict utter preference for Twitter, to enable them to follow topical issues at the same time. This attitude of political journalists in Nigeria does not come with surprises because Twitter, as a social media platform, is pro elite, hence, it is the common platform to find political heavyweight individuals. Of course, this habit might be helpful to the day-to-day chores of the reporters, but their ineptitude at spotting and squashing misinformation posed a serious concern as accounts of prominent Twitter users were found to be containing bots that amplify their posts and bias.

Similarly, the fact that prolific Twitter accounts in the recent past came under serious hacking, the most recent being that of Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi. Mr Modi’s Twitter account with over 70 million followers, came under hackers attack for the second time in as much as twelve calendar months.

However, table28 depicts that political reporters in Nigeria oftentimes use Google Earth while investigating a company. This is a snag given that Google Earth is a tool designed to offer a pictorial representation of the surface of the earth in a satellite-like manner. This implies that it might not be effective at investigating a company. This, however, overall indicates that political reporters in Nigeria lack the flair for investigating companies probably because corrupt politicians clandestinely invest stolen monies in both onshore and offshore firms to hide their crimes. Recently, Pandora Papers divulged how corrupt Nigerian politicians and public servants starched away billions of Dollars and Naira in secrete foreign investments. However, unlocking grand scandals that corrupt Nigerian politicians are known for demands mastery of different OSINT tools, not just one out of the many that are in public space. Generally, the weak mis/disinformation skills of political reporters posed great danger to the proper functioning and operations of the institutions combined to make the system work for all. And, with the kind of misinformation skills of Nigerian political reporters, a gap or vacuum is being created to exploit the uninformed poor citizens of Nigeria who are in most cases at the mercy of heavyweight politicians.
The issue under study is “Misinformation Awareness among Journalists Covering Politics in Nigeria: Implications on Democratic Institutions.” The study surveyed political reporters working in three states in Northeast Nigeria with the aim of underpinning misinformation awareness of political reporters in Nigeria, its implications on state and non-state institutions as well as the ability of political reporters to use Open Source Intelligence, OSINT to support their work in line with contemporary demands of the job. The whole work is structured in chapters. Each chapter has subheadings under which major issues are raised and argued in the light of available evidence supported with empirical data.

Chapter one, which is the introductory part of this study contains a general introduction of the problem of study, problem statement, objectives of the study, research question, significance of the study and scope of the study.

Chapter two contains a literature review and theoretical framework. Relevant and related literature to this study were examined and discussed in order to appreciate the state of research or studies in the field of climate change coverage among newspapers. Discussions were done under subheadings such as the concept of fake news, information disorder, bots and misinformation, misinformation skills among Africans, misinformation flow on social media, misinformation flow drivers, traces of misinformation in Nigerian online sphere and media, misinformation and media believability, misinformation and national security, misinformation skills among media professionals, cyber digital communication laws and social media control on Africa and theoretical framework.

Chapter three of this work captures the methodology on which this study was carried out. It also begins with an opening introduction, research design, population of the study, sampling technique and sampling size, instrument for data collection and method of data presentation and analysis.

Chapter four presents data gathered through a survey. Data was presented through a descriptive statistical instrument, frequency distribution table. The chapter, like previous chapters, is arranged in subheadings and a discussion of the findings of the study is given.

Chapter five is the concluding part of this study and it includes a summary, conclusions and recommendations.
Limitation

This study was limited by time constraints that would have allowed a thorough study. However, the findings and conclusions drawn from generated data will go a long way to beam light toward a better understanding of misinformation in the Nigerian context.

Conclusion

The main thrust of this study is “Misinformation Awareness among Journalists Covering Politics in Nigeria: Implications on Democratic Institutions.” The study surveyed political reporters working in three states in Northeast Nigeria with the aim of underpinning misinformation awareness of political reporters in Nigeria, its implications on state and non-state institutions, the ability of political reporters to use Open Source Intelligence, OSINT, their misinformation skills and the implication of misinformation on democratic institutions in Nigeria. The study surveyed political journalists in the Northeastern part of Nigeria with 250 questionnaires administered to reporters in Adamawa, Bauchi and Gombe States respectively.

Data from this study shows that political reporters in Nigeria have very limited awareness about misinformation, something that makes them ready to use tools for manipulation of the minds of citizens in the country. Most of the political reporters surveyed in this study reported ‘checking sources’ of suspected disinformation content as their basic skill for determining whether or not the information in question is misinformation or not. There are other skills and techniques expert proffered for checking misinformation.

Similarly, Nigerian political reporters don’t have the required technical know-how and capacity to use or manipulate Open Source Intelligence Tools to better their works and guard their audience against the manipulation of exposed political individuals for undue advantage. This is the possible reason that Nigerian journalists have a carefree attitude to ask their sources probing questions even when they are pretty sure that the information being divulged to them is fabricated and half true. Hence, anybody can say anything and get away with it.

The combined weak misinformation awareness level among political reporters in Nigeria posed serious danger to the effectiveness of democratic institutions in the country that traditionally ought to work well to make the nation work. This makes it difficult or even impossible for Nigerians to hold their leaders to account because the required sound information needed to effect that is not always readily available to them. No thanks to the verification and fact-checking skills of reporters in Nigerian legacy media spaces.
Drawing from data analysed and findings of this study, certain problems were identified, hence the need to make suggestions on ways forward. The following are the recommendations of this study:

- That media organizations in Nigeria ought to make deliberate efforts to empower their reporters with verification and fact-checking skills to be able to adequately fact-check their newsmakers to keep the trust the public entrust in the media;

- That reporters must make a personal priority to improve their verification and fact-checking skills to be able to practice journalism as a calling and a profession especially in the present century;

- That journalism practice must be seen as a service to humanity to help improve the society, not just as a means to make a living as it is mostly seen in Nigeria;

- That both media organisations and their staff must develop the zeal for fact-checking at an organisational and personal level to guard the democratic institutions that warrant journalism to be practised.

- That newsrooms must deliberately learn to develop alternative and resilient financial models to help them build the capacities of their journalists rather than relying on traditional means of generating revenues.
REFERENCES


REFERENCES


Haruna Mohammed Salisu is an experienced, diligent reporter and free-lance journalist with a strong enthusiasm for Online and Multimedia Journalism; podcasting, and development communication. A grant recipient of Institute of War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR), and Open Society Initiative for West Africa, OSIWA.

A fellow at the Africa Resilience Network, Haruna has over seven years of experience in news writing and reporting. Haruna has key competencies in manipulating word-press for web-based content and multi-media publishing. His recent work includes mentoring young reporters on investigative reporting and accountability journalism, where his mentees at HumAngle and CrossRiverWatch produced impactful reporting.

Haruna has many articles and investigative stories to his credit across many newspapers in Nigeria and beyond. Haruna is the publisher of WikkiTimes.

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