



Nigeria EndSARS Protest: False Information Mitigation Hybrid Model

Oguchi Ajaegbu^{1*}, Chigozirim Ajaegbu², Rosemary Quilling³

¹ Veronica Adeleke School of Social Sciences, Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State 121103, Nigeria

² School of Computing and Engineering Sciences, Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State 121103, Nigeria

³ School of Management, Information Technology and Governance at University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban 4000, South Africa

Corresponding Author Email: ajaegbuo@babcock.edu.ng

<https://doi.org/10.18280/isi.270311>

ABSTRACT

Received: 24 April 2022

Accepted: 6 June 2022

Keywords:

fake news, false information, media, protest, social media

False Information can lead to chaos and destruction of lives and properties, as was the case during the EndSARS protests in October 2020. Young people took to social media to campaign for the scrapping of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) and for better governance in the country. Social media, especially Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram were used to garner the support of people to join the protests across the country. The use of social media platforms gave rise to a proliferation of unverified information in the social space. As events unfolded, some reports were confirmed as fake and some were quoted out of context. Different scholars have proffered solutions to mitigating the spread of false information but less attention has been paid to the combined role of the mainstream and social media. This study content analysed available reports of the EndSARS protests that were tagged fake and found out that rumour accounted for the most reported false information type. This implies that the mainstream media scale up their reporting to enable people get more authentic information. This study proposed a hybrid model factoring in the reporting role of the mainstream media as a potential strategy to mitigate false information in the media.

1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic brought about rapid adjustment not only to the personal lives of individuals but also to businesses, industries, and organizations. Most businesses and activities such as meetings, lectures, assessments and grading, and buying and selling moved online. The bid to sustain these activities led to the creation, and advancement of web applications and the use of social media in the dissemination of information. However, this also provided individuals with the opportunity to flood the web with fake news. These posts are either self-generated or shared from social media platforms. News such as the EndSARS movement in Nigeria [1], and the US election [2] are a few examples of headline news items for which numerous versions of “the facts” appeared on the Web.

The rise of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has brought about innovative practices in journalism [3], Innovations such as citizen journalism, news websites, and blogs have affected the way audiences consume news content. Social media is a powerful communication tool because it happens in real-time and allows for conversations. The problem, however, is that it has no intermediaries, like gatekeepers, to verify the information and thus can be a tool to spread both factual and false information [4]. In most cases, social media users cannot verify the authenticity of such information. Many users will go ahead and share the posts, irrespective of their factual correctness, spreading the information further. The credibility of information solely relies on the extent to which an individual believes the content is provided on the internet [5]. Many tech companies such as

Facebook and Twitter have previously taken measures to curtail fake news by finding ways to limit the level of intended revenue generation from the influx of individual traffic [6].

In traditional mass media, news content is perceived as credible and has a recognized level of acceptance and factuality due to gatekeeping processes that news reports go through. The standard approach is for the editor to review a report as it is generally assumed that journalists are competent, objective, and trustworthy [7]. The mainstream media, when compared to social media, is more trusted [7] but they are not infallible. Publication deadlines are sacrosanct in the media profession and hence journalists are in a struggle to meet the news demands of the day while ensuring the professionalism of their reports. During the EndSARS protests, there was a great need for factual information including where protests would occur and the time to converge; who is doing a particular thing that is of interest; and how to spur other young Nigerians to take part in the agitations offline and online. The protests were a major story for the traditional media as it spanned almost all states in the country and thus by all standards of what classifies as news, it was imperative to give adequate coverage. The need for media houses to be conscious of disseminating accurate information while also verifying any Web-based story as true before disseminating it to the masses becomes critical. The potential danger of a perfect fake news storm exists if false information is written by a reporter; the facts are not properly verified by the editor, and the voracious appetite for social media fuels rapid information dissemination, including the mainstream media using their online platforms to disseminate information in real time. It becomes imperative that media organizations have access to a mechanism to check

for potential fake news. Several authors [8-12] have proposed ways to detect and mitigate the spread of fake news both on mainstream media and social media. However, the proposed mitigation techniques appeared to be more user-centric. It is on this premise that this study having identified the gap of collaborative efforts between the mainstream media and social media platforms proposes a model for both to coexist in the mitigation of false information.

This study focuses on the spread of false information using the EndSARS events which occurred in Nigeria in October 2020 with the aim of developing a hybrid mitigation model that incorporates social media and mainstream media. The paper concludes that rumour was the highest false information type. The traditional media are encouraged to scale up their reporting to have more credible news in circulation to support viral spread of factual information. Fact-checking of news items is encouraged specifically those with social media content. The proposed model strongly emphasizes the need for collaboration among all involved parties and suggests mechanisms to enable access to factual information while calling out misinformation.

The structure of the paper includes a literature review that focuses on the forms of false information, the conventional mitigation processes of the mainstream media, social media, and fake news, as well as existing mechanisms of fake news mitigation. The methodology was a content analysis of tagged EndSARS reports which were culled from some news sites and social media platforms like *BBC*, *CNN*, and *Channels Television*, *Twitter*, and *Facebook*. In addition, the search process leads to a fact-checking site which was used to link to the selected news sites. The tagged EndSARS reports retrieved were analysed to discover the false information type and the frequency of occurrence.

Motivation for the study

Ray Walsh, a digital privacy analyst at ProPrivacy UK, stated that “it seems clear the social media platform’s algorithms are completely failing to differentiate between genuine posts and fake news, causing harm to users and serving as evidence that those algorithms simply are not up to the job of fact-checking when large scale breaking news event

occurs,” [13]. This highlights the challenges social media platforms are facing in ensuring fake news is appropriately identified and managed.

The motivation of this study emanated from the report of EndSARS events and the researchers also observed that to date, studies centering around having a collaborative effort of mainstream media and social media platforms towards the mitigation of false information have been given less attention. It becomes imperative to consider such in order to give protection towards what goes online, what should be believed and what should form the gatekeeping procedures. It is in this regard, that the EndSARS event was found appealing as a case study due to all the available reports for this case and the particular interest generated by the various claims of flagging of posts as fake.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of the literature includes a discussion of the types of misinformation and their impact as well as the conventional news verification process; fake news in social media and existing mitigation strategies. The issue of false information is categorized in different ways- fake news, misinformation, disinformation, rumour, among others. This study uses some of these terminologies interchangeably. The next section will be looking at a categorization of false information.

2.1 Characterization of false information

Meel and Vishwakarma [5] looked at how information is being manipulated to fulfill malicious aims in social media and the web thereby infiltrating users' perception of a person, an event or firm. A percentage of the literature studied focused on the detection of false content using machine learning. The authors provided a classification of false information content at different stages along with established technologies in order to manage the issue of information dissemination from origin, propagation, detection and containment stages.

Table 1. Characterization of false information [5]

Category	Definition	Impact
Rumor	Unverified piece of information which is not necessarily false; may turn out to be true also.	Uncertainty and confusion about facts
Fake News	False information spread under the guise of being authentic news usually spread through news outlets or internet with an intention to gain politically or financially, increase readership, biased public opinion	To damage an agency, entity, or person or gain financial/political profit
Misinformation	Circulating information that becomes false inadvertently as a consequence of an honest mistake, careless or cognitive bias	Less harmful but wrong interpretation of facts can lead to big damage
Disinformation	Deliberately deceptive information with a predefined intention	To promote a belief, idea, financial gain or tarnish an opponent’s image
Clickbait	The deliberate use of misleading headlines to encourage visitors to click on a particular webpage	To earn advertising revenue, to trigger phishing attacks
Hoax	The false story, especially by means of Joke, prank, humor or malicious deception, used to masquerade the truth	Falsehood is perceived as truth and reality
Satire/parody	Articles that primarily contains humor and irony, no harmful intention but has the potential to fool. The Onion and Satire wire are sources of satirical news and services	The motive is fun but sometimes exert adverse effects also
Opinion Spam	Fake or intentionally biased reviews or comments about products and services	Untruthful customer opinion
Propaganda	Unfairly prejudiced and deceptive information spread in targeted communities according to a predefined strategy to promote a particular viewpoint or political agenda	Political/financial profit
Conspiracy theories	An explanation of an event that invokes a conspiracy by sinister and powerful actors, often political in motivation-based entirely on prejudice or insufficient evidence.	Extremely harmful to people and society.

It is important to understand that a range of “false” information conditions are possible which vary along a continuum in terms of the severity of the problem and the impacts they are intended to, or may unknowingly, cause. Numerous categorisations are available but this discussion will focus on the taxonomy presented by Meel and Vishwakarma [5].

Literature studied suggests different terminologies for the concept of false information. Such categorizations range from fake news, disinformation, hoax, and misinformation and so on. Looking at the categorization in Table 1, the categorizations were described for proper identification. Rumour, fake news, misinformation, disinformation, click bait and hoax are a few of the types relevant to this study. However, they all point to falsehood in information dissemination.

2.2 News verification process

The mass media act as a bridge between the government and citizens in a country. They keep the citizenry informed of government programmes by making them accountable and the government is also made aware of how they are perceived by the citizens. This they need to do by disseminating timely information that is credible and factual. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions [14] provide pointers on how to spot fake news. They suggest the source or website and its mission should be scrutinised; the author should be checked to ensure they are real and credible and the date of the claimed event should be checked especially so old news stories are not reposted to suit current events. In addition, personal biases need to be made explicit to ensure they do not cloud the reviewer’s judgment; the entire story needs to be factually scrutinized not just the headlines; and supporting sources’ links must be fact-checked. If the claims are outlandish and appears a joke, then the site and author must be verified. It is also advised that experts like fact-checking sites should also be approached. Most news organisations also source information online and media organizations use different approaches to verify the facts in the reports. Big news organisations verify pictures and videos by contacting the owner directly to protect their editorial integrity [15].

There is the assumption that people get fake news from fake news sites, it however becomes worrisome when the mainstream media disseminates disinformation and fake news. Thus, Tsifti et al. [12] in their study looked at the role of mainstream media in the dissemination of fake news vis-a-vis the reasons for such coverage and its influence on the masses. It is asserted that the mainstream media also propagate fake news because of journalists’ role perceptions, traditional news values, the psychology of news decisions, and the infrastructure for covering what’s happening in the online world [12]. Journalists’ role perceptions lie in their need to report the truth and expose misinformation and fake news. More usually needs news to appear to be catchy and meet traditional news values especially in terms of targeting negativity and elite people. Furthermore, the psychology of news decisions is shaped by social validation especially as regards interaction with other journalists. Jamil and Appiah-Adjei [16] studied journalism in the era of mobile technology with a major objective to analyse the actions of mobile journalism. They considered how it is altering the news production process and promotion of fake news in Pakistan and Ghana. They employed qualitative document review and thematic analysis of interviews.

The reserve of news dissemination is no longer exclusively in the hands of the traditional media as anyone with internet access can share information online [7]. Audiences are no longer passive but have become active in the news dissemination process and are now taking up the role of disseminating information as events happen around them. In an experimental study, Swasy et al. [7] discovered that although online news sources have become popular, traditional news sources are still perceived as more credible than citizen journalists. The major difference with news covered by traditional news reporters and citizen journalists is the absence of gatekeeping [7]. While reports from citizen journalists could be the basis for a report in the traditional media, some media houses like CNN have a section on their website for such reports and they state that they are not edited or fact-checked so users are aware [7].

The advent of ICT gave rise to individuals becoming more active in the news dissemination process. Some of these individuals barely understand the ethics of news reporting and as such are prone to disseminating false information. The mainstream media with understanding of the ethics of the profession are also guilty of broadcasting false information for various reasons. Users are enjoined to look out for pointers of false information, in the same vein media organizations are also advised to check their facts to protect their editorial integrity.

2.3 Fake news and social media

Mavridis [9] asserts that social media is a fertile environment for the spread of fake news. Fake news can be driven and also be mitigated by information technology [9]. In a mixed-method study to assess fake news sharing behavior, [11] discovered that the need to be timely in sharing news is an underlying factor in the dissemination of fake news. The idea of fake news gained popularity during the US presidential election in 2016 [9, 17]). The term was used extensively by former president Donald Trump [18]. While the term can be understood as information that is untrue, it is also used by people to downplay the opinions of others when at variance with their own. Fake news reports are news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false and could mislead readers [10]. The motivations for fake news are “political, subversive, financial and for entertainment” [17].

The issue of fake news is a global concern because information affects decision-making at all levels including business policies, government decisions, and individuals’ personal lives. When such information is false, it could be destructive and lead to the collapse of the basic structure of normal activities. Mavridis [9] posits that there are two motivations for fake news: pecuniary and ideological. For pecuniary purposes, content is produced to gain advertising revenue, and when misleading content is shared it results in more clicks which translates into more money. Mavridis [9] explains that some people produce misleading information for ideological purposes e.g. to promote a different political viewpoint and distribute propaganda to discredit others. During the US 2016 election, 27% of the voters visited fake news sites the final week of elections which is claimed to have had an impact on their established mindset before the election [8]. Guess et al. [19] studied the prevalence and predictors of fake news dissemination on Facebook tied to the US presidential election of 2016. They employed an online survey to examine the characteristics of individuals associated with

sharing false articles during the U.S. presidential campaign. It was discovered that older Americans share information from fake news domains more than younger Americans.

The issue of fake news and disinformation could do a lot of harm. When information is not managed properly, it could lead to chaos. This was the case for the EndSARS protest. In a meeting of experts, Galal et al. [20] reported that there are three ways by which information disorder could affect protests: “One, it may trigger protests. Many have embarked on protests only to discover that they had been fooled by fake news. Two, information disorder may fuel protests. When protests begin, lies and fabrications, and exaggerations are sometimes used to sustain them. Three, importantly, information disorder has been used to discourage protests and split protesters – even turn them one against the other.” This can have major impacts when there are gaps in mainstream media reporting and the veracity of reports cannot be determined. In the case of the EndSARS protests, this led to the loss of lives and property [4, 20].

Media organizations understand the need to be timely in disseminating news as news is a perishable commodity hence making them prone to peddling fake news. Fake news which could be for pecuniary purposes or to win an ideological battle, not only misleads people but it could also lead to chaos and the collapse of businesses.

2.4 Mechanisms for curbing fake news

There are numerous mechanisms which are posited for counter-acting fake news. They are presented to provide context.

Organizations like Google, Facebook, and the BBC have introduced measures to tackle fake news. These include improving users’ digital media literacy and developing their critical skills to evaluate the factuality of information [9]. Thus Mavridis [9] examined how an online Greek community, the Ellinika Hoaxes Facebook group verifies and curbs the spread of fake news on social media. Using online questionnaires, the author discovered that the group has techniques to verify fake news like searching the web to find additional materials relevant to a news story. To curb the spread of fake news, some members of the group comment under the post that it is fake, while others report the post. Monther and Ali [6] looked at methods of identifying and filtering sites from fake news in order to help users avoid getting involved with such fake news links. The authors proposed a web tool that will help to identify and revoke such fake news links. The study suggests that while individuals and social media platforms have a role to play in curbing the spread of fake news, an independent body is needed to strengthen the process. On the other hand, Galal et al. [21] proposed a community-based approach that consists of a three-phased framework- facts discovery, facts searching and, community recommendation- to mitigate fake news.

Okoro et al. [10] proposed a hybrid method for fake news detection by looking at the limitations of the human-based and machine-based approaches. Their model was to determine the likelihood of a news item being fake i.e. not to categorically say the news is fake. The authors used the Facebook 10-point measure to detect fake news as a guide for their model. Of the 10-points some are better handled by humans, or machines, or humans and machines. They concluded that there is a need for a balanced approach to fake news detection. While studies on fake news look at the impact on politics, Domenico et al. [22]

focused on how social media misinformation impacts marketing and consumers. Through a review of literature, they identified that the dissemination process, features of the channel, and outcomes, among others explain the fake news phenomenon. Shu et al. [23] conducted a survey with the aim of facilitating further research in the direction of fake news. Their study adopted a comprehensive review on the detection of fake news on social media which includes fake news characterization based on psychological and social theories, existing algorithms from data mining perception, etc. They found out that fake news is designed to mislead readers which make it difficult to detect and as such, there is a need for auxiliary information like users’ social engagements to determine fake news.

Thorsten et al. [24] established that the debate over fake news has led to both civic and governmental measures to prevent online misinformation/disinformation. This has led to global, multiple fact checking organizations aimed at authenticating official news sources and social media claims. Hacıyakupoglu et al. [17] looked at global initiatives geared towards countering fake news. They explained legislative measures being taken by different countries to counter fake news. In particular, these address news that undermines national security. The impact of such legislation could not be gauged as the approach is in its early stages. The authors proposed a multi-pronged framework and suggest using legislation will be challenging because of the ambiguity of what fake news is and the speed and reach of information dissemination. The proposed framework comprises pre-emptive measures like having an issue-focused approach and having collaboration; immediate measures like fact-checking and flagging fake news; long-term measures like inculcating media literacy into the curriculum and encouraging social norms focused on more responsible information sharing.

Another research approach is to limit the scope of the focus of the fake news research to a specific field or event(s). Waszak et al. [25] narrowed their social media fake news study to the medical field. The authors opined that analyzing social media for the most-shared news could assist in the identification of leading fake medical information mis-educating society.

Fake news has become a global concern calling for different authors to proffer solutions on how to mitigate the spread. Critical skills such as digital literacy has been advocated as a solution to identifying false information. Groups are enjoined to limit the spread of fake news by verifying information before sharing. A combination of human and machine-based approaches is also suggested to give balance to the detection process.

2.5 Journalists as communities of practice

Journalists in a bid to garner more audiences jostle for exclusive news, sometimes it could be authentic, and sometimes it might be unverified to meet the needs of an ever active audience. With the advent of information technology, the audiences are also becoming more involved in the news dissemination process and this raises concerns on the authenticity of certain information. This brings to the fore the challenge related to credibility that the traditional media are experiencing, hence, the need for journalists to come together to stem the tide of the spread of misinformation. The principles of journalism embody truth and accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, independence, and accountability among others.

As cited by García-Avilés [26], “journalism is a cooperative endeavor guided by a sense of moral purpose” (p.261).

García-Avilés [26] asserts that “the standards of any professional community embody the common identity of its members, based on shared interests and loyalties.” García-Avilés [26] posits that the practice of every professional community has its own standards of excellence and practitioners are required to work towards achieving the internal goods in the profession. Hence, this study is anchored on the Community of practice as a theoretical framework.

“Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” [27]. García-Avilés [26] points out that one feature that must be present in any practice is the need for learning on the job.

Community of practice applied to the media profession goes beyond codes of conduct or laws but involves shared experiences, genuine interactions and cooperative learning [27]. Adapting an example from ref. [28], journalists and media professionals irrespective of trying to out-do one another can form a tight-knit group where they agree on meeting informally to share their challenges. As they discuss and share experiences, they find new ways to tackle issues inherent in the profession. By doing this, they are a community of practice working together to develop new and refined ways to succeed in their profession. The issue of fake news is such that affects the profession and puts media professionals in a bad light. By adopting this collective learning experience, experienced and aspiring media practitioners can engage in knowledge sharing, discussing developments, and mapping out solutions.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted content analysis method to analyse posts flagged as fake both on social media (Twitter, Facebook and Instagram) and some mainstream media (Channels, CNN, and BBC), during the EndSARS protest in Nigeria. Posts tagged as fake either by individuals or organizations from October 9th to October 27th, 2020 were sourced using the hashtag EndSARS. Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook were the major social media platforms used to draw attention to the situation globally, with Twitter recording the highest frequency of reports [29]. However, empirical evidence shows that Twitter and Facebook had more reports on the protests. The news sites of two international news media (BBC and CNN) and one Nigerian media (Channels), were also selected for the study. Channels television was selected because of its authoritative news analyses and based on the assumption that the station is non-partisan. An initial search for reports on the EndSARS also showed that CNN and BBC gave some coverage to the protests.

Searching these platforms hardly yielded any report using the hashtag. While there is no documented reason for this, it is assumed that most posts were pulled down as the EndSARS issue was a controversial one that almost exposed the government of Nigeria to the international community.

However, one search led to a study done by the Fact-Checking group, *Dubawa*. On *Dubawa*, there were links to EndSARS reports tagged fake. The links were followed to lead to the actual platform where the posts were made. Also, the BBC fact-checked some tweets and ascertained they were false. In all, a total of 15 posts were recorded and Table 2 indicates the number of such items sourced from the various platforms.

Table 2. Number of identified posts tagged fake

Platform	Number of posts
Twitter	8
Facebook	5
Online news sites	1
CNN (International, USA)/Twitter	1
TOTAL	15

These items were then classified in accordance with the categories of false information as proposed by Meel and Vishwakarma [5].

The study did not consider verification of these posts i.e. whether they are true or false, because the proposed model is applicable during real time events. The model could thus could not have been used to track and verify the relevant interactions of the already concluded ENDSARS protest posts. The study rather focused on determining if agreement existed between conventional and social media platforms of the veracity of the events being reported. This study argues strongly that due to the high esteem to which the mainstream media is held in the eyes of the public, there is a need for them to maintain a high level of credibility and authenticity in their reports. In order to achieve this, it is suggested that they should; firstly, be in direct control of a mechanism to verify any post before releasing it to their audience; and secondly, there should also be a platform to connect media houses and to grant them the opportunity to reach out to the media community to confirm particular news in a specific country, before publicising in their country. This study proposes a theoretical model that should be able to achieve these aims.

4. ENDSARS FALSE INFORMATION CLASSIFICATION

Table 3 shows recorded misinformation gathered from both social media platforms and the mainstream media houses available within the duration of this study and their assigned categories.

It is evident that some flagged news reports during the EndSARS period can be classified as false news.

The frequency table (Table 4) shows that there were five (5) different categories of misinformation. Rumours accounted for the majority of instances (5), while disinformation and fake news occurred four times. Misinformation and hoax had one report each. Some classifications were related to those by Rutgers University Libraries [30]: For instance while some reports were classified as fake news; they were either reported out of context or had a false connection. In addition, a report classified as disinformation was also reported out of context.

Table 3. Category of false information recorded from the media

EndSARS Posts Tagged as Fake News	Category of False Information	Explanation
“She lost her brother to SARS” (Twitter post checked by BBC)	Disinformation	A female protestor said her three brothers were killed by SARS and it was regarded as false. During the protests, many people spoke about how they, or their family members, have been victims of SARS brutality. Some could have been true or even fabricated to spur more people to join the protests.
Carrying the Nigerian flag to prevent the military from shooting citizens (Twitter post checked by BBC)	Rumour	It was suggested that the military can do no harm to protestors holding the Nigerian national flag. Whether this was true or not, it was believable on the basis that the flag will be respected as a sign of allegiance.
Alleged statement by the presidential spokesperson that the protest was child’s play. (Twitter post checked by BBC)	Fake news (False context)	There was a risk of information “mix-ups” and people being quoted out of context, e.g. a video showing the presidential spokesperson calling the protest child’s play. The video was produced two months before the EndSARS protest but was edited to suit the moment and fuel an uproar.
Destruction and looting of Osun State Mall (Twitter post checked by BBC)	Disinformation (False context)	The video showing the destruction and looting at the Osun state mall was used out of context. A Twitter account of the ruling party, All Progressives Congress UK chapter, stated that the looting involved EndSARS protesters. However, online users debunked the allegation, saying that the video was staged by unknown persons.
Report of Catholic Bishops marching in support of EndSARS Protest (Twitter post checked by BBC)	Fake news (False connection)	There was a tweet accompanied by an image that Catholic Bishops in Nigeria joined the protests. Though the picture was real, it was not related to the EndSARS protests. It was a protest against the kidnappings and killings in the country.
EndSARS Protesters on a no-fly list (Twitter)	Disinformation/ Rumour	One of the organizers of the protest was stopped at the airport for undisclosed reasons. This led to the tweets that the federal government had generated a no-fly list. The Ministry of Interior however disproved this report.
Nigerian army soldiers fire gunshots to disperse protesters (Twitter CNN)	Rumour	There was a report on a shooting at Lekki. The Nigerian army insists that no shooting occurred whereas evidence from reports showed dead bodies and injured people. There were assertions that the Police were also involved in the shooting. While this report was labeled false, it had elements of truth with subsequent footage that were released by CNN.
Police reject nine bodies from the Nigerian Army (Online news sites)	Rumour	In another report, the Nigerian Police rejects nine bodies from the Nigerian Army. This was also labeled false. Though a rumour, there are elements of truth in the report as some bodies were missing from the scene and eyewitnesses said the Army took bodies away.
EndSARS protesters destroying highway in Nigeria (Facebook)	Disinformation (Deceptive image)	A post claimed EndSARS protestors destroyed federal and state roads. The image was missing context. The image was not of EndSARS protestors but of South African residents protesting lack of basic amenities. Roads were blocked in Nigeria during the protests but the roads were not vandalized.
“Animals” (military) killed a number of people in a toll gate (Facebook through <i>Dubawa</i>)	False connection	The photo showed men in Nigerian military outfits. This image was a false connection as it is an old photo of men impersonating Nigerian soldiers in Lagos and Abuja.
BBC apologises for a report on Lekki massacre (Facebook, implicating the BBC)	Misinformation	A post on a pro-government page suggested the BBC was apologizing that their information was false and misleading on the Lekki massacre report. This is misinformation. This was purposefully linked to the October 20, 2020 massacre to suggest the killings never happened.
Buhari body double claims resurface with #EndSARS protests (Facebook)	Rumour	There is an online rumour that resurfaced during the EndSARS protests, that the Nigerian President, Buhari, is long dead and an impostor was occupying his office at Aso Rock.
VIRAL VIDEO SUGGESTING TINUBU WAS CHASED OUT OF FRANCE (FACEBOOK THROUGH <i>DUBAWA</i>)	Hoax	There was a hoax that the national leader of the ruling party, All Progressives Congress (APC), Bola Tinubu was chased out of France where he went to seek refuge towards the climax of the protests. The video did not show Tinubu and was shot in the UK. An earlier rumour implied Tinubu had fled Nigeria anticipating the uproar after the Lekki killings. The furor around this report was due to the political power he wields in the state. It was alleged he had a hand in the massacre and this unverified information led to massive destruction in the state.
Nollywood actress killed at Lekki toll gate (Twitter through <i>Dubawa</i>)	Fake news	A rumour made the rounds on social media that popular Nollywood actress, Eniola Badmus was shot during the toll gate massacre. To counter this, the actress tweeted that she was not even at the scene of the incident that day.
Former president, Obasanjo running away from Nigeria (Twitter through <i>Dubawa</i>)	Fake news (False context)	A tweet suggested the former president of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo was leaving the country to escape the rage of the EndSARS protest. While the video showed the former president, it dated from 2019. The poster deleted the post when she found out it was an old video.

Table 4. Frequency of the classifications

Classification	Frequency
Disinformation	4
Rumour	5
Fake news	4
Misinformation	1
Hoax	1
TOTAL	15

5. FALSE INFORMATION HYBRID MITIGATION MODEL

Observing the online space and following reports by the mainstream media, it appears the EndSARS protest was peaceful and this endeared more people to the cause. However, the spread of disinformation resulted in the escalation of the protests including violent activities [31]. Adepetun [4] in light of the adverse effect of spreading fake news reported that properties belonging to notable political figures in Lagos were destroyed. This according to Jamiu [20] stresses the need for proper conflict reporting from the mainstream media. This means that when the media fulfills its responsibility of properly reporting the news, it could mitigate the spread of fake news and its attendant effects. Also, Cunliffe-Jones [32] suggested a four-pronged approach to countering fake news thus: “identifying and reducing the circulation of harmful information; ensuring adequate information is more widely acceptable; ensuring a more accurate understanding of topics it covers; and fostering fact-checking skills among the public” (p.596). The first two points by Cunliffe-Jones [32] are in agreement with the purpose of this study. Hence, the need for a model that would aid in the control of misinformation (see Figure 1):

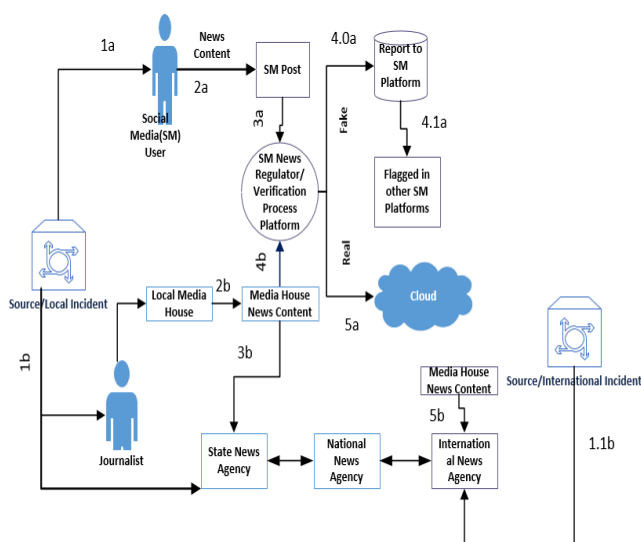


Figure 1. False Information hybrid mitigation model

The above model is proposed to mitigate the level of fake news on social media platforms and to monitor the news content carried by media houses to avoid airing fake news to the public. The proposed model suggests that any “first-in” News Content (2a, SM post) from a social media user should be verified (3a) using primarily the news content gathered by the local journalist of a mainstream media (4b) and in situations where more technicality is required, some earlier

proposed algorithms in literature could be used to support such scenario. The process of control is explained with the function(s) of the model components as follows:

The Social Media (SM) News Regulator/verification process platform (3a) is where all social media posts (News content) coming from a social media user, based on a local incident (1a), are received for verification, by comparing it with the News content from the mainstream media (4b). The process is such that any SM news post (“first-in”, 2a) is matched with the content received from the mainstream media (4b), before deciding whether or not it should be **flagged** as fake to other social media platforms (4.0a and 4.1a) or projected further to the public. News content evaluated as real is made available to the public as seen in label 5a. Also, the news content from a local media house (2b) is also verified further from the State News Agency before it is being used to verify every first-in News Content from the Social Media. It is assumed that this monitoring should be implemented using a port filtering algorithm (which is not within the scope of this study) in order to differentiate News contents from any other social media content. The verification time-stamp should be assigned as rapidly as possible after a post becomes public to minimize the possibility of delay and latency.

The Media House News Content (2b) is a platform that allows Local Media Houses within a state, to provide their news content for verification with the state news agency (3b). The role of **News Agencies** is to gather first-hand news in such a way that other news organizations can subscribe to them for more News content. In this model, News agencies are interlinked with each other within “states-to-national, national-to-international, and vice versa interactions. This will ensure a certain level of authenticity as the agencies would depend on each other at different levels for News content. Hence, limiting the level of dependency on social media posts while Journalists of Local Media Houses ensure the first-hand gathering of News Content from the source. This model also indicates the interactions and responsibilities shared with international news agencies that provide access to international incidents (1.1b).

It is important to note that the aim of the model is not to act as a standalone model but could also work with already existing technical matching algorithms (if need be) like the one proposed by Hamdi et al. [8] in order to verify the authenticity of content involving pictures and videos from social media post. This highlights the need for digital literacy among media professionals. Also, the secondary News verification process can commence with the editors as gatekeepers and this would ordinarily involve checking of some facts like communicating with some authorities linked to a report and liaising with other professionals in that field before the primary verification as proposed in the model. This is important as fake news cannot be totally eliminated but can be mitigated because purveyors of such distorted information make them look appealing.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The initiation and spread of false information is a question of intent; its impact also is not quantifiable. The few days of the EndSARS protest came with its own challenges, especially in terms of identifying valid information as well as avoiding rumours, disinformation, and conspiracy theories. As with the EndSARS protests, there was a lot of information labelled as false information both on social media and the mainstream

media. This gave rise to the destruction of lives, properties, and disruption of businesses, especially at the peak of the protests which culminated with the shooting at the Lekki toll gate, Lagos. This study analysed available reports on the EndSARS protests that were tagged false and classified them following [5] classification of false information. Based on the classification, rumor was recorded as the most prevalent form of false information. The implication of this is that during the EndSARS protests, a lot of rumour was peddled probably to garner more support or to discourage participation in the protests. While different studies have suggested different measures to curb the spread of fake news, this study among others also proposes the need for digital literacy among media professionals in handling information. The traditional media must be grounded in the use of technology for the sake of peripheral verification before more in-depth verification. The traditional media also need to make efforts to scale up their reporting and spread of factual news to reduce over reliance on citizen journalists and bloggers. With the traditional media doing more reporting, people can be encouraged to first turn to them for reports on issues first instead of seeking other less authoritative channels. Traditional media and social media especially citizens' journalists must learn to co-exist productively as false information cannot be eliminated but can be mitigated.

It was challenging to gain access to the required reports probably because some had been taken down and due to the clamp down of Twitter by the Nigerian government, which was a major channel of communication during the protests. This study thus recommends that the government should encourage the creation of a data repository for researchers to have access to materials to proffer solutions should similar events like the EndSARS protests occur.

Chiefly, this study proposed a hybrid model to mitigate the spread of false information across the mainstream media and social media. As a real time model, it suggests that governments seek ways to assist the mainstream media to coexist with social media in the dissemination of information to reduce the spread of false information.

REFERENCES

- [1] Mwai, P. (2020). Nigeria SARS protest: The misinformation circulating online. BBC News. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-54628292>.
- [2] Edson, C.T., Ryan, J.T., Lauren, B. (2021). What is (fake) news? Analyzing news values (and more) in fake stories. *Media and Communication Journal*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v9i1.3331>
- [3] West, D.M. (2017). How to combat fake news and disinformation. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/research/how-to-combat-fake-news-and-disinformation/>.
- [4] Adepetun, A. (2020). Social media and carnage that trailed #EndSARS protest. *The Guardian*. <https://guardian.ng/features/social-media-and-carnage-that-trailed-endsars-protest/>.
- [5] Meel, P., Vishwakarma, D.K. (2019). Fake news, rumor, information pollution in social media and web: A contemporary survey of state-of-the-arts, challenges and opportunities. *Expert Systems with Application: An International Journal*, 153(1): 112986. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eswa.2019.112986>
- [6] Monther, A., Ali, A. (2018). Detecting fake news in social media networks. *Procedia Computer Science*, 141: 215-222. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2018.10.171>
- [7] Swasy, A., Tandoc, E., Bhandari, M., Davis, R. (2015). Traditional reporting more credible than citizen news. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 36(2): 225-236. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739532915587298>
- [8] Hamdi, T., Slimi, H., Bounhas, I., Slimani, Y. (2020). A hybrid approach for fake news detection in twitter based on user features and graph embedding. *Distributed Computing and Internet Technology*. 16th International Conference, ICDCIT 2020 Bhubaneswar, India, pp. 266-280. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-36987-3_17
- [9] Mavridis, G. (2018). Fake news and Social Media: How Greek users identify and curb misinformation online. A Master's Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Culture and Society, Malmö University. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1483157/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.
- [10] Okoro, E.M., Abara, B.A., Umagba, A.O., Ajonye, A.A., Isa, Z.S. (2018). A hybrid approach to fake news detection on social media. *Nigerian Journal of Technology (NIJOTECH)*, 37(2): 454-462. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/njt.v37i2.22>
- [11] Talwar, S., Dhir, A., Singh, D., Virk, G.S., Salo, J. (2020). Sharing of fake news on social media: Application of the honeycomb framework and the third-person effect hypothesis. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 57: 10219. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102197>
- [12] Tsfati, Y., Boomgaarden, H.G., Strömbäck, J., Vliegenthart, R., Damstra, A., Lindgren, E. (2020). Causes and consequences of mainstream media dissemination of fake news: literature review and synthesis. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 44(2): 157-173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2020.1759443>
- [13] Uwagbale, E.E. (2020). Facebook and Instagram made missteps on Nigeria's EndSARS protest while Twitter boosted it. *Quartz, Speak Up*. <https://qz.com/africa/1922372/facebook-hurt-nigerias-endsars-protest-while-twitter-boosted-it/>.
- [14] IFLA. (2021). How to Spot Fake News. <https://www.ifla.org/publications/node/11174>.
- [15] Schifferes, S., Newman, N.N., Thurman, Corney, D., Goker, A.S., Martin, C. (2014). Identifying and verifying news through social media: Developing a user-centred tool for professional journalists. *Digital Journalism*, 2(3): 406-418. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2014.892747>
- [16] Jamil, S., Appiah-Adjei, G. (2019). Journalism in the era of mobile technology: The changing pattern of news production and the thriving culture of fake news in Pakistan and Ghana. *World of Media Journal of Russian Media and Journalism Studies*, 1(3):42-64. <http://dx.doi.org/10.30547/worldofmedia.3.2019.2>
- [17] Hacıyakupoglu, G., Yang, H., Suguna, V.S., Leong, D., Faizal, M. (2018). Countering fake news: A survey of recent global initiatives. A Policy Report. S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University. https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/PR180307_Countering-Fake-News.pdf.
- [18] McCarthy, J. (2018). Journalists believe the public trusts

- traditional media 22% less than in 2016. <https://www.thedrum.com/news/2018/06/18/journalists-believe-the-public-trusts-traditional-media-22-less-2016>.
- [19] Guess, A., Nagler, J., Tucker, J. (2019). Less than you think: Prevalence and Predictor of fake news dissemination on Facebook. *Science Advances*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aau4586>
- [20] Jamiu, F. (2020). Why ‘Fake News’ dominates #EndSARS protest in Nigeria – experts. <https://dubawa.org/why-fake-news-dominates-endsars-protest-in-nigeria-experts/>.
- [21] Galal, S., Nagy, N., El-Sharkawi, M.E. (2021). CNMF: A community-based fake news mitigation framework. *Information*, 12: 376. <https://doi.org/10.3390/info12090376>
- [22] Domenico, G.D., Sit, J., Ishizaka, A., Nunan, D. (2021). Fake news, social media and marketing: A systematic review. *Journal of Business Research*, 124(C): 329-341. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.11.037>
- [23] Shu, K., Sliva, A., Wang, S., Tang, J., Liu, H. (2017). Fake news detection on social media: A data mining perspective. *ACM SIGKDD Explorations Newsletter* 19(1). <https://doi.org/10.1145/3137597.3137600>
- [24] Thorsten, Q., Lena, F., Svenja, B., Tim, S. (2019). Fake News. *The International Encyclopedia of Journalism Studies*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118841570.iejs0128>
- [25] Waszak, P.M., Kasprzycka-Waszak, W., Kubanek, A. (2018). The spread of medical fake news in social media - The pilot quantitative study. *Health Policy and Technology*, 7(2): 115-118. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hlpt.2018.03.002>
- [26] García-Avilés, J.A. (2014). Online newsrooms as communities of practice: exploring digital journalists’ applied ethics. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics: Exploring Questions of Media Morality*, 29(4): 258-272. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08900523.2014.946600>
- [27] Wenger-Trayner, E., Wenger-Trayner, B. (2015). Communities of practice a brief introduction. <https://wenger-trayner.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/07-Brief-introduction-to-communities-of-practice.pdf>.
- [28] Kahan, S. (2004). Etienne Wenger on Communities of Practice: Engagement, Identity & Innovation. *The Journal of Association Leadership*. Retrieved from https://www.shareweb.ch/site/Learning-and-Networking/sdc_km_tools/Documents/Etienne-Wenger-on-Communities-of-Practice-2005.pdf.
- [29] Jamiu, F. (2020). Analysis of Claims on #EndSARS Protest in Nigeria: Images most manipulated content, Twitter as major platform. <https://dubawa.org/analysis-of-claims-on-endsars-protest-in-nigeria-images-most-manipulated-content-twitter-as-major-platform/>.
- [30] Rutgers University Libraries. (2021). Evaluating news resources: Steps and tools for evaluating the news. https://libguides.rutgers.edu/fake_news.
- [31] Dangogo, S.K. (2020). Still On Fake News and EndSARS Protest. *Leadership Newspaper*. <https://leadership.ng/still-on-fake-news-and-endsars-protest/>.
- [32] Cunliffe-Jones, P. (2020). From church and mosque to WhatsApp—Africa check’s holistic approach to countering ‘fake news’. *The Political Quarterly*, 91(3): 596-599. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12899>