

# FAKE NEWS PROLIFERATION IN NIGERIA: CONSEQUENCES, MOTIVATIONS, AND PREVENTION THROUGH AWARENESS STRATEGIES

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Article History: Received on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2020, Revised on 03<sup>rd</sup> March 2020, Published on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2020

## Abstract

**Purpose:** This study aims to understand the effects of fake news spreading in Nigeria, the reasons for fake news sharing among social media users, and eventually propose preventive measures (i.e. awareness strategies) to combat the proliferation of fake news in Nigeria.

**Main results:** Some grave implications of fake news sharing were identified such as death, conflict escalation, political hostility, and societal panic. Meanwhile, people were motivated to share news mainly because of their civil obligation to inform others and provide advice or warning. These motivations, together with other contextual reasons such as media control, interpersonal trust and youth unemployment, had led to fake news proliferation in Nigeria.

**Methodology:** This study adopts a documentary research method to generate the information necessary to investigate fake news spread in Nigeria. A total of 265 articles were drawn from Google Scholar search and after a close examination, only 20 articles were included for analysis.

**Implications:** There is a need to increase fake news awareness, media and information literacy among Nigerians. Social media users should be constantly informed through adequate advertisements, workshops, conferences, and other forms of sensitization, about the consequences of fake news sharing, how to spot and differentiate fake news with made-up news and why it is imperative to be self-aware before forwarding any message.

**Originality/novelty:** This paper contributes to knowledge in two ways. First, it compiles past research on fake news in Nigeria and analysed contextual factors and consequences of fake news proliferation in this context. Second, it reinforces the need for fake news awareness as a means of reducing the spread of fake news among social media users in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** *Combating Fake News, Fake News Awareness, Fake News Proliferation, Fake News, News Sharing, Nigeria.*

## INTRODUCTION

The explosive growth of fake news, driven by the social media trend, demands investigation and intervention. While fake news is not a new phenomenon, it has received much attention at the present time because of the popularity of social media for interaction and for the diffusion of news and ideas. Social media is the “lifeblood of fake news” because it permits anyone to share a viral fake story to people at a low cost (Warner-Söderholm et al., 2018; Klein & Wueller, 2017). The “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 afford due to their technical affordances” (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Social media platform incentivizes the dissemination of problematic news content and permits its circulation in a novel perplexing manner (Quandt, 2019), and the rapidity with which news content moves within social media causes fake news to swiftly spread unverified, making it hard to correct (Lazer et al., 2017). Hence, the rise of fake news has become a global concern. Although the problem is universal, fake news spreading is often drawn by local issues and contextual situations. What motivates people to share news or fake news, for example, may come from cultural attributes that are not necessarily captured by motivation typology deduced from the vast majority of Western-centric research. The impacts of fake news spreading through society may be varied in many ways from other communities as well. Acknowledging the locality of this global problem, it is important to examine fake news proliferation at the micro-level. In this paper, we analyze past studies focusing on fake news in Nigeria to provide a microanalysis of the reasons or motivations for fake news sharing in Nigeria and consequences upon the populace. Our goal is to propose some strategies to help prevent fake news proliferation in this context.

Literally, the term fake news consists of two words ‘fake’ which implies something not genuine, but meant to be accepted as true, and ‘news’ which means information about current events. Therefore, it can be said that fake news is information or news that is not genuine but presented and expected to be conceived as being true. Scholars have conceptualized fake news in many different ways but with almost the same meanings. Duffy et al. (2019) define fake news as a situation when misinformation takes the form of a news story to approximate the legitimacy which society associates with real news. Many scholars focus on the intention behind fake news when defining the term. McGonagle (2017) defines fake news as information that has been deliberately fabricated and disseminated with the intention to deceive and mislead others into believing falsehoods or doubting verifiable facts. In this regard, it is disinformation that is presented as or is likely to be perceived as news. Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) view fake news as news articles that are intentionally and verifiably

false and could mislead readers. [Visentin et al. \(2019\)](#) regard “fake news as fabricated stories that are intentionally false, realistically portrayed, and potentially verifiable”. These definitions suggest that fake news is false information that is created with dishonest intention to mislead readers. [Tandoc et al. \(2018\)](#) provide a wider range of fake news category namely news satire, news parody, fabrication, manipulation, advertising, and propaganda. Relating those mentioned categories to fake news, the authors argued that there is a piece of fake news in the form of satire often found in comedy programs, fake news using parody for humorous purposes based on fictitious, fairly implausible news material, fake news as fabricated news, with no factual basis and disguised as real news in order to disinform audiences, fake news in forms of manipulated images and videos intended to create false narratives, fake news in the shape of advertising, but disguised as genuine reports and fake news as propaganda aimed at manipulating audiences’ political orientations and attitudes ([Tandoc et al., 2018](#)). The definitions of fake news, thus far, suggest that the core deducible elements of fake news are falsity of news content and the intent to deceive or mislead.

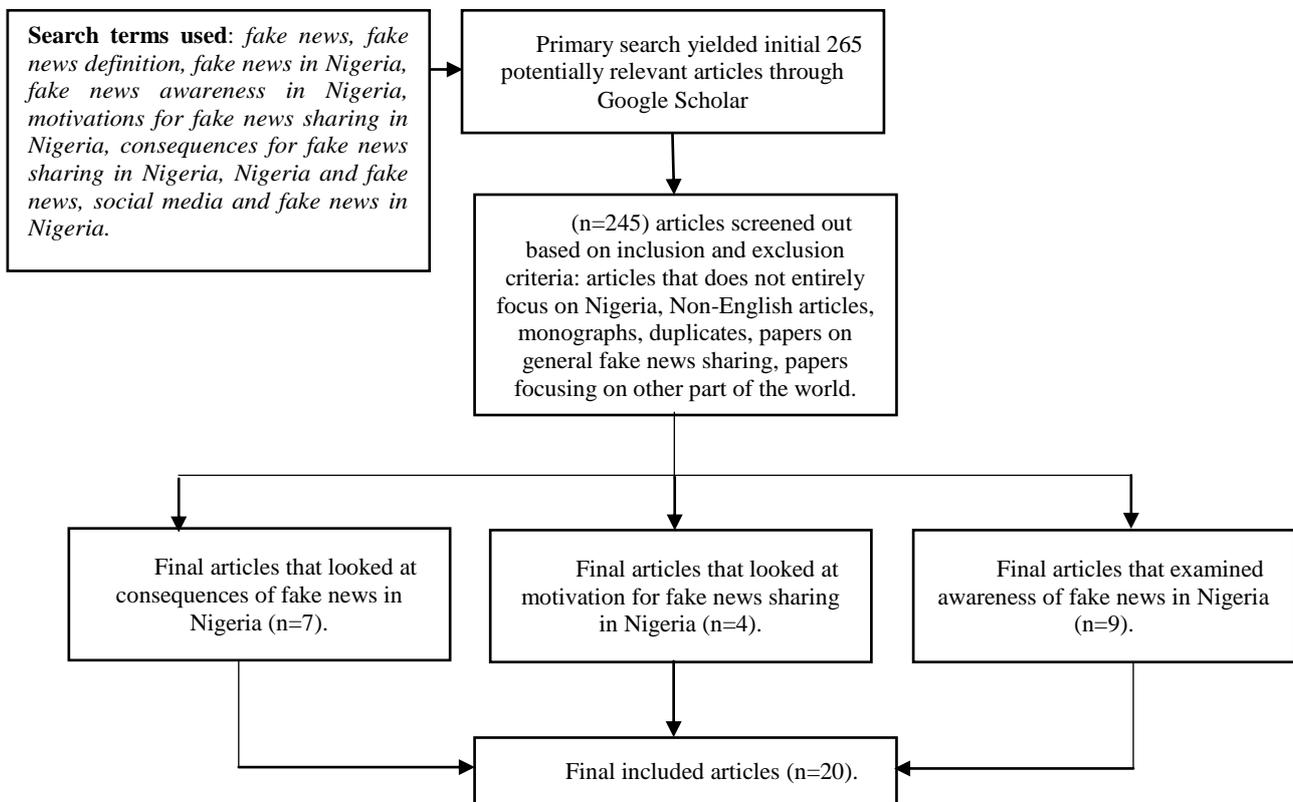
Fake news has gained research attention as it has a huge impact on democracy ([Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017](#)). In fact, past studies found many adverse effects of fake news. It was found that fake news further polarizes already divided societies ([Vargo et al., 2018](#)). For instance, in Nigeria, [Sadiku \(2018\)](#) reported that in June 2018, the gruesome murder of over 86 people in 11 communities in Barkin Ladi, Rirom and Jos South Local Government areas of Plateau state was spread on social media as a retaliation carried out by the Miyetti Allah group. However, a new report revealed that the killings had nothing to do with the Miyetti Allah group. By then, the spread of fake news stories associated with the killings caused further deaths in the Plateau state of Nigeria. Similar research conducted in the US found that in 2016 there was a reported US “Pizza Gate conspiracy theory” were leaked party Emails of Democratic National Party was disseminated online during the US Presidential campaign, leading to speculations that the leaked emails contained an oblique reference to pedophilia and human trafficking, focusing on the family of a pizza restaurant in the Washington DC area, without a substantial proof ([Barthel et al., 2016](#)). This misinformation caused harassments, threats as well as inciting citizens to commit a shooting at a Pizza parlor ([Barthel et al., 2016](#)). Consistent with this finding, research reported that fake news was spread during the US 2016 elections, suggesting that Pope Francis endorsed the Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump. This fooled millions of readers around the world as well as caused chaos and panic among Americans ([Tandoc et al., 2018](#)). Likewise, in 2016, a piece of fake news suggesting that Israel threatened Pakistan with nuclear weapons surfaced online causing a lot of confusion ([Goldman, 2016](#)). In another incident, a Facebook picture posted by a refugee in Germany was used in several fake news stories blaming refugees for terrorist attacks, despite the individual having no ties to the events ([Torres et al., 2018](#)). These findings demonstrate the universal effect of fake news on society at large. Despite the rise of fake news in the world, research focusing on its effects on developing countries is scarce. [Duffy et al. \(2019\)](#) stated that most research examining fake news has emerged from the US and UK contexts and they recommended scholars to look beyond. In this paper, we purposely select Nigeria, a developing country that is less well studied ([Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2019](#)) to provide an alternative view of understanding this global problem. Due to marginalization, anger, confusion and economic challenges, “there is a tendency that political actors [in Nigeria] can take advantage of these lapses either to misinform, disinform and promote apathy” ([Pate et al., 2019](#)). In addition, studies on fake news in Nigeria are still limited. A few studies that appear in the literature focus on the consequences of fake news rather than solutions to the problem ([Pate et al., 2019](#); [Pate & Ibrahim, 2019](#)). As such, this paper contributes to knowledge in two ways. First, it compiles past research on fake news in Nigeria and analyzes contextual factors and consequences of fake news proliferation in this context. Second, it reinforces the need for fake news awareness as a means of reducing the spread of fake news among social media users in Nigeria. Therefore, this current work looks at fake news spread in Nigeria and its outcome, identifies the motivations for fake news sharing among Nigerians and further proposes fake news awareness as a strategy for prevention.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a documentary research method to generate the information necessary to investigate fake news spread in Nigeria and its outcome, motivations for fake news sharing among Nigerians and fake news awareness among Nigerians. It has been shown that “the use of documentary research method requires careful and systematic study and analysis of documented sources based on written texts, visuals, and pictorial data which may be based on secondary data” ([Agbo et al., 2018](#)). Documentary research entails sourcing materials from documented facts or evidence, through a careful synthesis of data from available and accessible documents. It requires a descriptive, interpretative and historical approach to find out both latent and manifest contents of data, which perhaps has not received attention, but are necessary for understanding a phenomenon ([Chohan, 2019](#); [McCulloch, 2013](#)).

Therefore, a search for relevant studies in Google Scholar was conducted, using the following terms: *fake news, fake news definition, fake news in Nigeria, fake news awareness in Nigeria, motivations for fake news sharing in Nigeria, consequences for fake news sharing in Nigeria, Nigeria and fake news, social media and fake news in Nigeria*. There was no restriction on the article publication dates. Initial search results yielded 265 references which seem to be of a general nature. However, after a closer look at the retrieved materials through scanning the abstracts, findings, and conclusions, 20 met the inclusion criteria based on the basic objectives of this research and were included in the final data set. Of the 20 papers that made up the final dataset, 7 (35%) focused on *fake news in Nigeria and its consequences*, 4 (20%) focused on the *motivations for fake news sharing among Nigerians* and 9 (45%) focused on

*fake news awareness among Nigerians*. It should be noted that there were some publications that covered two themes. However, articles on fake news outside Nigeria context, non-English publications, duplicates, encyclopedia articles and editorials were generally excluded. Figure 1 demonstrates the article's search and screening techniques.



**Figure 1:** Articles Search and Screening Flow Chart

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The retrieved publications ( $n=20$ ) that met the final data set were read thoroughly, synthesized and grouped according to the following themes: fake news in Nigeria and its consequences, motivations for fake news sharing in Nigeria, and awareness of fake news in Nigeria.

### Fake News in Nigeria And Its Consequences

Past studies focusing on fake news and its consequences in Nigeria have identified death, conflict escalation, political hostility and societal panic as some of the adverse effect of fake news proliferation (Edwin & Yalmi, 2019; Samuel et al., 2019; Ojebode, 2018; Carter, 2014; Ugwuanyi, 2017; Okoro et al., 2018). Based on seven articles that we analyzed, six major fake news epidemics with serious adverse consequences across Nigeria were identified. The cases were documented below:

- **Plotted stories caused an increase in polio cases**

Past research has shown that in 2017, the Nigerian Army had just begun a free medical service of administering polio vaccination as part of its military operations in south-eastern Nigeria. Then rumors began to circulate that the army was going to schools to inject pupils with the monkeypox virus. The rumors caused a massive panic that led to the closure of some schools. Students hurriedly left their schools and worried parents came to pick up their wards (Okoro et al., 2018). Thus, the free medical service interrupted by the fake news circulation intensified the cases of polio in the country rather than reducing and curtailing it. The rationale for the spread of such fake news could be to diminish the efforts of the government in tackling health issues in the country as well as disrupt the peace and unity that Nigeria has been trying to attain.

- **Ebola ‘cure’ kills two**

Research findings (Carter, 2014), showed that during the 2014 Ebola outbreak, a fake text message claiming people could avoid catching the disease by bathing in and drinking large quantities of saltwater went viral on social media even though there was no medical basis for it. The message reads:

*“Please ensure that you and your family and all your neighbors’ bathe with hot water and salt before daybreak today because of Ebola virus which is spreading through the air”*

Friends and families shared on different WhatsApp and Facebook groups that people should with immediate effect bath with salt water to prevent further spread of the disease. Though the motives behind sharing this unverified news could be attributed to altruism, which most Nigerians tend to possess. Yet, the consequences were deleterious because in Nigeria there is a high prevalence of hypertension and the excessive consumption of saltwater killed two people and left several hospitalized (Carter, 2014). This indicates that Nigerians hardly verify the authenticity of a message before sharing which may cause panic, death, and injury through the motive behind such sharing was believed to preserve lives.

- **President Muhammadu death in 2017 and his marriage saga in 2019**

Ugwuanyi (2017) reported that a major instance of fake news that dominated Nigeria's social media space was the rumored death of President Muhammadu Buhari shortly after he began a health leave to the United Kingdom on January 19, 2017 (See Figure 2). Many Nigerians shared and reshared on social media that the President was dead and cloned or replaced by a Sudanese called “Jubril,” causing an uproar and confusion among many people. This fake news made many to lose faith in the Nigerian government. Likewise, Edwin and Yalmi (2019) study found that in October 2019, there was widespread information circulated on social media suggesting that the President is taking another wife. To substantiate this rumor, invitation cards were also circulated. After a few days, the President debunked the issue stating that he had no plans of taking another wife. Incidence like this demonstrates how viral fake news could be disseminated among the Nigerian populace without much verification. Such fake news spread is continuously destabilizing the system, political stability, inciting people to violence and weakening the people’s confidence in the present government. Creators of fake news could have committed this act to discredit the government for political reasons. No doubt, Nigerian political rivalry is intensifying in recent years and this could contribute to widespread rumour mongering that could undermine any sitting government.



**Figure 2: Fake News of President Muhammadu’s Death**  
 Source:(Edwin & Yalmi, 2019).

- **Fake Facebook post intensifies the regional and religious crisis**

A study has shown that in central Nigeria’s Plateau State, false information on Facebook is said to have caused an inter-ethnic crisis (Ojebode, 2018). For instance, a graphic image of a mutilated baby, killed in Congo Brazzaville in 2012, was shared with the claim that the act was perpetrated by the Fulanis against the Beroms in Jos, in 2018. The media reported that Berom youths took to the streets and systematically sought out Fulani men for reprisal attacks, with the authorities believing the Facebook post contributed to the attacks. The same image has been used to stoke deadly crises in other regions of Africa (Ojebode, 2018). This type of false information has intensified the regional and religious crisis in Nigeria further dividing the peace and unity among Nigerians. A similar study (Okoro et al., 2018) found that fake news spread causes a negative impression on the religious and ethnic balance in Nigeria. In this view, recent fake news was spread suggesting that Nigeria is the most difficult place for Christians to live (Okoro et al., 2018). The intention of these fake news spread could be attributed to politics which is consequently disrupting the nation’s peace and harmony. In other words, it could be inferred that the ultimate mission of fake news sharing related to religion and regional crisis is to incite fear, anxiety and disunity among ethnic groups.

- **Fake photos and news exacerbate tensions between the herdsmen and farmers conflict**

Past research has reported that fake photos circulated online by Nigerians are intensifying the conflicts that exist between the herdsmen and farmers (Edwin & Yalmi, 2019). For instance, a gruesome photo of a woman lying in a pool of blood was massively circulated on Twitter with the claim that she was a victim of the violence. This fake Tweet caused inflammatory comments and further chaos resulting in the death of many Nigerians. It was later

revealed that the image was of a traffic accident in the Dominican Republic ([Edwin & Yalmi, 2019](#)). In the same vein, [Siddiki \(2019\)](#) found that a certain story about the Fulanis disguising to attack people in some parts of Osun State trended on various WhatsApp platforms. The statement reads;

*“Alert! Alert!! Alert!!!: good day, please pass this message to everyone in Osogbo and its environs. ... from 7 pm every day, their gate should be well locked. The Fulanis now dress in Yoruba outfits with dangerous weapons in their hands (with the) plans to come in and kill. If there is a knock on the gate from 7 pm adult should attend to the person. Please don’t open and don’t talk. Let the person talk first. Tell your children also. Sent as received”*

In another incident, it was reported that the Military is involved in arming and supporting the operations and attack of the herdsmen ([Okoro et al., 2018](#)). These types of fake news could have a profound effect on the politics, society, economy and democracy of the country. Undoubtedly, these fake news stories circulated through social media with the aim of inciting fear, disunity, suspicion and anxiety across ethnic groups have done more harm than good.

#### • Claims of under-age voting in elections and other misleading stories

According to [Edwin and Yalmi \(2019\)](#), after the 2015 presidential elections, false reports emerged that the Independent National Electoral Commission had determined that under-age youth in northern Nigeria had voted in the elections. The claim caused a serious uproar among the public and opposition parties. However, the Vanguard newspaper reported that the electoral commission, which oversaw the elections, produced factual evidence that debunked the claims. Similarly, a research reported that in the 2019 elections, false messages circulating on WhatsApp that President Trump was supporting the opposition candidate Atiku Abubakar (See Figure 3), caused a lot of tension among the electorates and further divided the northern and southern parts of the country ([Samuel et al., 2019](#)). A similar study conducted by [McGonagle \(2017\)](#) revealed that elections in Nigeria are characterized by violence leading to the loss of lives and properties and this is instigated by circulated news that was never real. This suggests that most of the panic and anxieties in the Nigerian elections were caused by fake news sharers. False information regarding political parties, actors and electoral bodies as well as fake election results are concocted and massively spread fueling widespread violence when original results contrast the already made up circulated one. The ill intention of fake news sharing during elections is to disrupt the electoral process, character assassination and cause panic among electorates.



**Figure 3: Fake News on Trump-Supporting Atiku**

**Source:** ([Samuel et al., 2019](#)).

In Nigeria, the advent of social media and the users’ ability to generate their own content has increased the presence and reach of misinformation. False claims can spread in less than a minute, taking on the garb of truth and making the need for swift verification more pressing. Therefore, fake news in Nigeria leads to disunity and uneasy coexistence, undermines democracy, exacerbate distrust, violence and division. It also weakens the confidence of the populace towards the mass media as well as the Nigerian system. Why then do Nigerians share fake news? The next section provides answers to this question.

#### **The motivation for Fake News Sharing Among Nigerians**

Few studies have paid attention to the motivation for fake news sharing among Nigerians ([Wasserman et al., 2019](#); [Pate et al., 2019](#); [Tandoc et al., 2018](#); [Chakrabarti et al., 2018](#)). Based on these studies, the motivations for fake news sharing among Nigerians could be categorized into themes; individual motivation, contextual or cultural motives and trusts in the network.

*Individual Motivation:* [Chakrabarti et al. \(2018\)](#) found that the desire to be “in the know,” motivates fake news sharing, suggesting that sharing “fake news” is a form of social currency. This means that Nigerians see news sharing

as “a sense of civic obligation,” even if the information might later be proven to be false as in the event of the Ebola prevention tip message stated earlier, “the hurt done by not informing others outweighs that of informing them”. The authors also found that sharing news is seen as contributing to social cohesion –users doing so are motivated by the emotional impact the news is seen to have, the relevance it might have for the receiver and the sender’s intention to ‘provide advice or warning.’ It was also found that information is democratic, therefore, it should be shared not minding if it is well authenticated or not ([Chakrabarti et al., 2018](#)). Undoubtedly, these motivations are unique to Nigerian people who are often described as those with much altruistic attitude. Nigerians often have this characteristic of helping one another which is evident when sharing information, not minding if it is true or not as far as it contains precautionary measures on certain issues. They also believe that access to information is unequal, prompting the desire to democratize information through widespread sharing.

*Contextual and Cultural Motivation:* Media control, lack of trust in the news media, unemployment, gossip, rumor, and satire have been identified as some of the contextual and cultural reasons that drive fake news sharing among Nigerians. For example, [Wasserman and Madrid-Morales \(2019\)](#) found a link between a lack of trust in the news media and the sharing of false news. Thus, a significant relationship exists between higher levels of perceived exposure to disinformation and lower levels of media trust. Similarly, [Pate et al. \(2019\)](#) found that the general distrust of elites and politicians, absence or late arrival of official information on issues and the low capacity of the conventional media to gather, process and verify immediate and distant information in real-time contributes to the spread of fake news in Nigeria. The same authors also found that government stringent control and the severe commercialization in the broadcast media which excludes alternative ideas and opposition has forced many to respond via social media thereby spreading fake news ([Pate et al., 2019](#)). Other contextual factors that could contribute to Nigeria’s susceptibility to fake news are the lack of job opportunities for youths. According to [Chakrabarti et al. \(2018\)](#), it was revealed that many who access smartphones and social media in Nigeria are young and often jobless, giving them a lot of idle time online. They get a lot of false information and share it quickly amongst themselves, sometimes without even reading it. This, combined with the ever-present discord between Nigeria’s ethnic groups, can spell trouble where fake news is concerned. Furthermore, past research has also attributed *cultural influences* such as the long-standing importance of informal sources of information such as gossip, rumor and satire play a role in the likelihood of media users to share news found on social media which sometimes lead to the spread of fake news ([Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2019](#)).

*Trust in Network Motivation:* A recent study has shown that WhatsApp is the leading social media platform for sharing fake news in Nigeria because it is the most trusted communication for family and friends. Hence, people tend to trust information shared by family members and friends more than strangers ([Wasserman et al., 2019](#)). This suggests that they are more likely to share misinformation about entertainment, political news, job adverts, religious matters, ethnic issues, crime and those that have elements of patriotism and emotions ([Wasserman et al., 2019](#)). In Nigeria, sharing ‘fake news’ is a sign of trust between the sender and recipient: ‘What is shared –and reciprocated –is more than just news or information; it is also a marker of trust, fellow-feeling and mutuality’ ([Tandocet et al., 2018](#)).

### **Awareness of Fake News in Nigeria**

In this current study, awareness of fake news includes users’ knowledge about the features of fake news and skills in identifying them. We argue that critical information evaluation skills can help combat the effects of fake news. Thus, the lack of aptitude among the audience to verify news shared on social media could lead them to consume potentially false information ([Okoro & Emmanuel, 2018](#)). From the reviewed documented studies that focused on fake news in Nigeria, we observed that most of these studies do not wholly focus on awareness of fake news among Nigerians ([Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2019](#); [Samuel et al., 2019](#); [Okoro & Emmanuel, 2018](#)). These studies failed to propose a comprehensive awareness strategy to curtail the spread of fake news despite their increasing harmful effects upon the country. For instance, a survey conducted in the Northern part of Nigeria found that despite the respondents remarking to have heard about fake news, they still have low levels of awareness and alertness towards verifying information before sharing ([Wilson & Umar, 2019](#)). Another study revealed that the Nigerian literacy rate is only 56.6 percent, suggesting that many Nigerians are vulnerable to manipulations, slanted narratives or fake news propagated in some online media outlets ([Okoro & Emmanuel, 2018](#)). Consequently, [Stringer \(2018\)](#) suggests a concrete measure in terms of enhancing information and media literacy which is lacking in Nigeria. Though media or news literacy has been one of the most promising solutions recommended by many experts around the world ([Bali & Desai, 2019](#)), research shows that “most Nigerians do not constantly confirm the source of information before believing and sharing which most times turn out to be fake” ([Samuel et al., 2019](#)). The same study recommends that “increased standards of education and media literacy will enable people to realize what is trustworthy and what is fake”. [Wilson and Umar \(2019\)](#) investigation on the rate of fake news spread among Nigerians on social media found limited knowledge of fake news awareness among Nigerians. The participants reported that they lack the understanding of what fake news can cause in a democratic society. Consistent with these findings, related studies also affirmed the low level of fake news awareness and literacy skills among Nigerians ([Abang & Okon 2018](#); [Okoro & Emmanuel, 2018](#)). Therefore, the need to recommend fake news awareness strategies in Nigeria becomes imperative.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Our analysis of past research shows that fake news sharing in Nigeria has caused death, conflict escalation, political hostility and societal panic. As such, individual, contextual and cultural motivations, as well as trust in-network, contribute to the spread of fake news among Nigerians. Despite the adverse effect of fake news sharing, fake news awareness is still lacking in the Nigerian context. Awareness campaigns have not adequately informed users about the consequences of fake news and why it is important to be self-aware before forwarding any message. It is important to note that there has been a wide range of solutions developed, to overcome the proliferation of fake news. Often the focus has been on algorithms and machine-based approaches to help humans distinguish between fake and real news ([Khan & Idris, 2019](#)). However, it has been noted that this strategy has proven to be abortive ([Khan & Idris, 2019](#)). Generally, past research has revealed that one of the most significant factors leading to a broader consumption of fake news among users is their limited ability to differentiate facts from opinions ([Tandoc et al., 2018](#)). Studies suggest that social media users must make personal judgments regarding the information that they come across online and decide whether to share such information with others or not. Therefore, adequate knowledge, awareness and ability to easily spot fake news could help such users to reduce the tendency of sharing fake news ([Leeder, 2019](#); [Torres et al., 2018](#)). Since individuals play a crucial role in dealing with misinformation, without the incidence of individuals generating false content and sharing it, social media, which houses fake news may not survive ([Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2019](#)). As such, the role of the fake news awareness campaign can never be overemphasized. Hence, we propose some managerial implications as follows:

*Firstly*, there is a need to increase media literacy for the public, particularly young people to enable them to be critical in accessing and responding to media messages. There should also be adequate adverts, workshops, jingles on TV and Radio, as well as other sensitization strategies such as posters and flyers (See Figure 4) on print and social media as a part of the strategy to enhance the public's awareness to fight back circulation of fake news.

*Secondly*, Nigerian social media users should be encouraged to check the integrity of the information they receive before sharing it with others. This can be achieved through considering the source of information, reading beyond the headlines, checking the authors, in-depth investigation of news articles by checking the dates, examining evidence to confirm sufficient facts and figures, confirming fake images, searching other sources and asking professionals when in doubt. Undeniably, the first line of defense on fake news is a discerning and well-informed public that is able to detect fake news when it is presented to them.

*Thirdly*, there should be a focus on the awareness and dangers posed by fake news. Specifically, awareness of the responsible creation and dissemination of information. There must be efforts to educate the public to be responsible when creating and disseminating information. This suggests that the media, government and other information professionals should create adequate awareness and enhance the skills of the populace in identifying fake news. These efforts should also be extended to the masses in rural communities via civil society groups in Nigeria. Civil society groups in Nigeria should take it upon themselves to spread digital literacy and awareness of the risks posed by false news to the grassroots. They should also be advocates for community-centric norms and guidelines when dealing with fake news.

*Fourthly*, media and digital literacy should be part of the regular school curriculum in Nigeria. Students and lecturers of higher education institutions should be advised by librarians who are the traditional information providers. They have a significant role to play in curbing fake news by creating adequate awareness among tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Libraries have a long history of reinforcing the information literacy skills of their patrons. That said, one can easily view the fake news phenomena is just the most recent iteration. Furthermore, teachers and lecturers should teach media literacy and information processing skills across primary, secondary and tertiary institutions in Nigeria to improve student's critical thinking skills so as to combat fake news. This would improve their ability to evaluate and separate fake news from real news.

## LIMITATIONS AND STUDY FORWARD

This study is only an exploratory study documenting the motivations for fake news sharing and the consequences of its proliferation in a Nigerian context. Although this study explains patterns and regularities deduced from this social epidemic, it is limited by its ability to empirically explain the causes and effects of fake news proliferation. In other words, no empirical evidence can be drawn from this study. Another limitation to be noted is that we could not conclude that fake news awareness and the ability to spot fake news is the only solution to control the menace it poses. We assume that it is one of the best solutions, so far, to reduce the tendency of the spread of fake news from a Nigerian perspective. Future researchers are recommended to test empirically the role of awareness in reducing fake news spread to better understand its effectiveness in preventing the problem. [Talwar et al. \(2019\)](#) pointed out that "there is a gap as far as studies related to sharing fake news by social media users are concerned" as little is known about factors affecting fake news sharing and dissemination in social media. This is because prior literature lacks a theoretical framework or model that empirically broadens our understanding of fake news sharing behaviour on social media, either intentionally or unintentionally. This research gap could be another object for investigation in future research.



Figure 4: Stipulated Guide on Spotting Fake News

Source: (Cambio, 2017).

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