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## Online fake news and journalism practice in Nigeria: Views from journalists and media scholars in Plateau State

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### Abstract

The study sought to evaluate fake news and journalism practice in Nigeria using the views of journalists and media scholars in Plateau State. Gatekeeping theory of the media was used as theoretical framework for arguments and discourse in the work. Through purposive sampling, 18 in-depth interviews were conducted among journalists in Jos and new media scholars in the department of Mass Communication, University of Jos. Results of the study revealed that the views of journalists and media scholars on fake news were unanimous. However, while journalists were of the opinion that fake news affects journalism negatively, media scholars had mixed reactions that fake news affects journalism positively. It was also revealed that there are no standard measures by media professionals or other regulatory bodies to counter fake news which implies very little gatekeeping especially in most online news sources. The study thus recommended, among other, that offenders should be sanctioned and all registered and licensed media organizations should step up their gatekeeping roles while registration should be extended to bloggers and other independent media entrepreneurs.

**Keywords:** fake news, online news, perception, journalism and gatekeeping

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### Public Interest Statement

This research provides a view of how journalists perceive fake news. The bulk of literature in this area has emphasised how the audience perceive fake news and how they have reacted to it. This study however, offers an opportunity for self-examination – a case of the lion hunting its kind. It would be a subject of interest to know how journalists perceive the stories they produce, especially those that are not true.

### Introduction

The purpose of journalism is not defined by technology, by journalists or the techniques they employ; rather, it is defined by something more basic – the functionality of news in the lives of people (Kovach & Rosentiel cited in American Press Institute, 2017). Kovach & Rosentiel further defined news as part of communication that keeps us informed of the changing events, issues and characters in the world outside. Though, it may be interesting for even entertainment, the foremost value of news is as a utility to empower the informed. Journalism does more than keep us informed as it enables us as citizens to have our voices heard in the chambers of power and allows us to monitor and moderate the sources of power that shapes our lives. But, in the past few decades thus the responsibility of journalists in a free society has been made more vital and more difficult by the revolution in communications technology.

The technology as stated by Pew Research Center (2005) has filled the world with a flood of undifferentiated information that is changing the audience for news and information from passive receivers to proactive consumers who decide what they want, when they want it and how they want it. With the advent of social media and the wider access of internet in and around the world, the news is no longer what it is. Adeniyi (2017) says unlike in the past where we all depended on the traditional media for informative, educative and entertaining content, it is not so now. This is because the World Wide Web is free and anyone can post or share anything including unverified, unauthenticated claims/news, in the name of driving traffic and attracting popularity to their websites/blog pages.

Fake news is no longer new but the rate at which it is being used in our technological era is now becoming new and spreading dangerously. According to the real story of fake news (2017), fake news in its purest form is completely made up, manipulated to resemble credible journalism and attract maximum attention and with it, advertising revenue. It was frequently used to describe a political story which is seen as damaging to an agency, entity or person. The growth of fake news is situated amid increasing public mistrust for communication that is typically strategic and directed toward achieving an agenda that is often subtly hidden from the message. However, it is by no means restricted to politics, and seems to have currency in terms of general news. Fake news uses a variety of methods to achieve its aim. The Editorial (2017) points out that some of the methods employed by fake news sites is to dress up a lie so it appears as the truth and to intertwine valid information with false information but in such a manner that it is not obvious. Propaganda for political or economic gains is nothing new, but what constitutes fake news is contested. As Finnish editor, Kari Huhta puts it; the arguments of fake news often become ridiculous. “It becomes a contest of people saying- ‘You’re fake news! ‘No, you’re fake news! No, your mother is fake news!’”

The dangerous trend of disinformation and fake news championed by social media as a result of media freedom in information dissemination and which the traditional media are unfortunately feeding from is on the increase. Some online media houses, bloggers and citizen journalists do not bother about alteration or falsehood in the information, news and even pictures before disseminating. The news most times as explained by media experts are written and published with the intention

of misleading in order to financially gain or to falsely grab attention. Fake news stories are usually sensational in nature, disseminated via real and fake news media outlets that are often attributed to usually reliable or competent sources in order to carry out their misleading intentions and so are very likely to spread quickly and because the platforms containing the news already have a massive reader-base that looks at them for information, the stories will most likely be believed by people who read them. Adeyemi (2016) explains that these people will, in turn share the story on social media because who does not like to pride themselves on being one of the first to know; and the show, sadly goes on and on. Sometimes, even after the story has been debunked, the fake news still prevails.

Instances of such abound and very common too: In 2016, a British website, *Metro UK* (<https://metro-uk.com>) published and disseminated a story online headlined “Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari dies in London”. In a separate development, *The Guardian* newspaper took to its site a bold headline “Breaking News: Buhari removes Magu as EFCC Boss”. Here, the writer of the story was not indicated, the link used for publishing the story was removed and the report of Magu’s removal was speculative. Very recently too, the world was greeted with a global health crisis in the form of Covid 19; while the humongous level of fake news and disinformation on this pandemic leave much to be desired, several news platforms have sprung in an attempt to score some ‘audienceship’ in what can be described as ‘opportunism’.

While editors require news reporters to adhere to journalistic rigours, check facts and help to ensure reports are credible and reliable before publication, no such rigours are applied to irresponsible social media sites and independent blogs which are endangering the credibility, ethics and professionalism of journalism. It is of this essence that the views of Nigerian professional journalists and media scholars on the growing trend of online fake news was investigated to add up to the store of knowledge.

### **Problem Statement**

In Nigeria, with the advent of the social media, online fake news, disinformation and propaganda have thrived and received new impetus. The Editorial (2017) points out that all these three techniques (online fake news, disinformation and propaganda) are used to alter, shape and manipulate perceptions, promote sectarian and political interests and attempt to entrench and exploit attitudes and further conflict and divisive politics.

The growing global tsunami of disinformation is replete with hybrid threats fostered by contrived hoaxes. Yet, the most insidious generators of fake news, is the lone perpetrator, sequestered by choice in a room or cafe with an iPhone or tablet and access to Wi-Fi, who feels the awesome power afforded by anonymity and driven by indignation or righteousness to redress perceived ills in any society. This irresponsible act, at the end of the day endangers the professionalism and integrity of journalism (Obaze, 2017). In recent time, fake news published about the death of President Buhari Muhammadu by a U.S online media platform, Metro.UK and the dismissal of the EFCC boss, Ibrahim Magu by a Nigerian Newspaper, *The Guardian* have brought different controversies, arguments amongst professional journalists, scholars, stakeholders and as well as the society at large.

This problem therefore necessitates this study: The perceptions of Nigerian journalists and media scholars. In other words, what are the views of Nigerian journalists and lecturers, University of Jos with particular reference to the journalists from Nigerian Union of Journalists, Plateau State Council and lecturers, Mass Communication Department, University of Jos in relations to fake news.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What are the views of journalists and media scholars on the nature of fake news?
2. What are the opinions of journalists and media scholars on how online fake news is affecting journalism practice in Nigeria?
3. What is being done to correct fake news?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The term “Gatekeeping theory” was coined by a social-psychologist Kurt Lewin in 1943. According to this theory, gatekeeping is considered to be the process through which a large number of news items are reviewed and examined and filtered to a very few that will be telecast by the news media. These news items pass through various gatekeepers such as reporters, sub editors and news editors before going on air or in print, so news story becomes a successful item after the decision making of its various gatekeepers. Such gatekeeping processes can be distinguished at three different stages of journalistic process: input, output and response (Bruns, 2005).

At the input stage, journalists themselves pre-select those news stories which they believe to be worthy of investigation and coverage. At the output stage, editors select from the total amount of material generated by journalists and reporters only those stories which they deem to be of greatest importance to their audiences which suits the available space within papers and bulletins and which fit the general news areas expected to be covered by the publication. At the response stage, finally, a small selection of audience responses is chosen for inclusion in the following day’s paper or for on-air broadcast-if a space for such audience responses is provided at all.

Explaining the importance of gate keeping in 2017, Emman Shehu, Director of Nigerian Institute of Journalism, in a workshop delivered to an audience of journalists noted that in the past, media organizations sifted through information to try to determine its validity and veracity. Being trusted for what they reported became an important part of journalists’ reputation. He further stated that the essence of gate keeping is to bring back the classical journalism ethos: When you are in doubt, do not publish.

This theory supports the study; that for news to be credible, it has to go through some form of editing and crosschecks to verify facts, accuracy, balance, objectivity, correct misleading headlines and to conform to the ethical values of journalism. But due to inadequate gate keeping mechanism, fake and misleading news are being published online and neither of these erosions are readily recognizable by consumers.

### **Literature Review**

Producing and distributing news is as old as human society. Altay (2015) explains that there was a time this was done by primitive methods such as smoke, signals and rock scribbling. Later on, people wrote them on parchment to hang them in big squares. With time, this evolved into using the printing press and paper. With the invention of radio, audio became the voice and with television, visuals accompanied the voice. Nzesylva, a blogger said that while most original reporting still comes from traditional journalists, technology makes it increasingly possible for the actions of citizens to influence a story’s total impact. Most broadly, the stories and issues that gain traction in social media differ sub sequentially from those that lead in the mainstream press. The ability to opine, report information and track daily news in the twenty first century has changed. The traditional journalists of years past are not the only reporters interested in covering news and offering their opinions about

events affecting their lives. Every day, people are now part of the equation.

Yushau (2013) corroborated by adding that globalization like a wave has swept the whole world in its tide, therefore no profession can afford to be left behind nor can any ignore the importance of the internet. Mobile technologies and social media have been changing the mass media landscape. Wilwayco (2014) also noted that beyond the traditional news sources, various platforms and models for information dissemination are evolving and opening new channels for online communication and publishing such as citizen journalism, blogs, and online communities. This new trend in journalism or online journalism is captured concisely by Networked Publics (2006, para.1), of the University of Southern California thus:

Online journalism refers to news content produced and or distributed via the internet, particularly material created by journalists who work for mainstream market driven news organizations. While blogs and other emerging forms of online news communication are widely acknowledged as significantly influencing mainstream news content both on and off line, they are considered here a distinct phenomenon and treated under the category of alternative media.

At one point, all media were “new” and then become old with time. But the newest media that is trending in the 21st century is the new media (internet) which is the fastest growing medium in history. Barton (2005) believed that the new media is without doubt one of the most significant innovations in the history of communication, at least as important as the invention of radio and television. Scott cited in Almaghlooth (2013) also noted that the new media holds the key to changing the way information is created and consumed, with an immediate, unlimited supply of easily accessible information on every topic under the sun.

The new media is not only operated by journalists for the dissemination of information as the emergence of the internet and its accompanying multimedia technologies are among the factors that have given rise to this whole new concept of citizen journalism. McNair (2009) agrees, adding that the advent of the internet means that the ability to produce information for mass distribution is no longer restricted to those in power, nor limited to those who own the means of media production: it is now in the hands of anyone who knows how to use the internet. Ordinary citizens are now involved in news and information gathering, processing and distribution. Citizen journalism is different from the preceding four models (traditional, civic, interactive and participatory) precisely because it eliminates the authority of the professional journalists. As Nips (2006) puts it, citizen journalism is the model of journalism that allows a wide range of participants to perform random acts of journalism. The concept of citizen journalism got a boost with the internet and global communication multimedia as it enables people to publish and distribute opinions and analysis as well as generate feedback on local and global issues and events relevant to them on a day -to-day basis which is becoming popular (Anaeto, 2008).

According to research, the rise of citizen journalism has also increased mass media organization’s need to get and sustain advertisers and have thus relegated public interests and their needs to the background. According to Lwahas and Akila (2016), citizen platforms have stepped in for professional journalists in their absence to capture and distribute news materials during major global events. Citizen journalists claim that their major goal is to publish information and stories for the sake of bringing about true change. Nevertheless, they write in an attempt to be heard and feel relevant as some citizen bloggers choose to remain completely anonymous. This protects the

individual's identity and allows them to publish contentious or controversial material without fear of association and or consequence-the luxury unavailable to a professional journalist as the source of the information is ultimately unknown and therefore unreliable.

Kperogi (2011) notes that despite characterization of citizen journalism as the "publish, do not filter" model of communication, (Ogundele, 2013) said citizen journalists in the past have been responsible for breaking and or reporting on exclusive worldwide news before any large organization. Take for instance events which generated much activities on social media; thousands of Nigerians opened Twitter during and after the subsidy protest (Occupy Nigeria) of 2012, the death of four UNIPORT students caused a nationwide outcry against jungle justice and the video of a police man caught extorting a motorist went viral online and has found its way into television and radio. These examples illustrate how useful citizen journalists are to all news organisations. They are in essence; powerful, spontaneous and omnipresent (Ogundele, 2013).

It must be noted that the mission of fake news content isn't typically for financial gain or at least not completely for profit but rather for luring visitors in through click baiting and then getting content consumers to virally spread the false information or hoax news. However, Daniels (2017), quoted Laurie Penny, an author and contributing editor who stated that Fake news is big business and "even those of us who create and consume news can forget that fake news is a commodity - a commodity with a business model behind it, subsidised by advertising".

Carson (2017) explains that fake news has now been co-opted by politicians and commentators to mean anything they disagree with making the term essentially meaningless and more of a stick to beat the mainstream press with than a phenomenon in itself. For instance, it was at Donald Trump's first press conference as President-elect of the United State of America when the term "fake news" broke out of media discussions and into the mainstream. "You are fake news!" he pointed at CNN's Jim Acosta while refusing to listen to his question. Also, Donald Trump on February, 16 2017 said that any negative polls are fake news. "Any, negative polls are fake news, just like CNN, ABC, NBC, polls in the election". For others, the term is dished out to media that broadcasts or disseminates negative stories.

Obaze (2017) observes that Nigeria is facing its share of fake news, but has not risen to the challenge with the seriousness it deserves. While broad awareness of the negative impact of fake news exists, the Federal Government is yet to fully contextualize the alarming challenges posed by false news and hate speeches. A recent legislative effort by the National Assembly to regulate the social media via the so-called "anti-media bill" fizzled soon enough. Presently, there is no consequence whatsoever, for the perpetrators of false news, with the added implication that media outfits seem reluctant to fact-check their reports, as they rush to be the first to put out a breaking news stories. In 2016 and 2017, especially in Nigeria, the media learned the hard way that journalism is in danger of being overwhelmed by rogue politics and a communication revolution that accelerates the spread of lies, misinformation and dubious claims.

According to many observers, two major stories - death of President Muhammadu Buhari and the sack of Ibrahim Magu signalled a moment of peril for the press and the media around the world were deeply alarmed. The free circulation of malicious lies, the ineffectiveness of fact checking, and the resilience of populist propaganda appear to challenge a fundamental cornerstone of ethical journalism. While citizen journalists can compete on timeliness through the laws of chance (being present when news breaks), it cannot replace the objectivity, reliability, and credibility a professional journalist would bring. In Nigeria, Ibbi (2016) explains that blogs spring up on a daily basis and most of them are involved in one form of unethical practice or the other. A great concern is the fact

that some of these bloggers and operators of social media platforms are ignorant of what constitute unethical practices with respect to crimes like plagiarism and defamation.

### Methodology

Research design for this study was in-depth interview. This is the most common data collection format in qualitative research. Interview explores the values, recollections, feelings, experiences, opinions and motivations of individuals on specific matters (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011). In-depth interview is paramount to this research as it is necessary to hear from the respondents about their deep thoughts and knowledge about the research area. In-depth interviews were conducted using 18 purposively sampled respondents, 12 of which were Practicing Journalists coded as PJ 1-12 while six (6) were Media Scholars coded as MS 1-6 respectively. These journalists are members of the Nigerian Union of Journalists, Plateau State Chapter where there is a membership population of 226 cutting across eleven (11) chapels. The media scholars, on the other hand, form part of a faculty strength of 26 lecturers from the rank of Assistant Lecturer to Professor in the Department of Mass Communication, University of Jos. Journalists were chosen based on their experiences of the two platforms of traditional and online media to avoid any biases while media scholars were chosen on the bases of their specialisation in the aspect of new media – this also was to ensure that respondents talk extensively given a familiar terrain of specialty.

The interviews were conducted by the researchers using assistants with audio recorders in environments conducive for the interviewees which usually was their offices and NUJ Press Centre as the case might be. Data acquired during the interview sessions were transcribed and analysed using themes. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. Researchers use thematic analysis as a means to gain insight and knowledge from data gathered. The analysis is relevant to this study because it has an easily interpretable and concise description of the emergent themes and patterns within a dataset, usually as the foundational phase of interpretation (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis has clearly six defined steps as specified by Braun and Clarke: familiarizing yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report.

### Data analysis and discussion of findings

From the interviews conducted to carry out this study, the research questions posed are answered below as well as discussion of findings. These analyses are sub-divided into themes for better understanding.

#### A unanimous view on the concept of fake news

Based on the data obtained, all interviewees were of the opinion that false news is inaccurate, not factual, fabricated, not truthful, fabricated, and misleading. Examples include: (PJ) 1 said *“fake news to my own understanding are stories or reports that are not correct and in most cases affects people in many ways which can be devastating”*. (PJ) 9 defined fake news *“as giving information that is not true*. The respondent went further to say that *“in Nigeria, the media industry cannot be accurate whether we like it or not as fake news has been in existence as old as human society”*. (PJ) 10 said *“fake news is news that the element of truth in it has been distorted and as well as news that is not based on fact but based on the perception of the individual who is purveying it”*. (MS) 1 said *“fake news as a concept is associated with online news that is fabricated and untruthful despite the motive or intention and has a way of going viral on journalistic blogs, social media, online forums and interpersonal mediated channels and communities like Whatsapp and Messenger”*. (MS)

3 said *“that fake news is news that defies basic ethics of news such as truth, objectivity, accuracy and often presented in a bad taste. It is often written to mislead or divert attention from a factual story”*.

This finding supports the words of Hunt (2016) when she said in its purest form, fake news is completely made up, manipulated to resemble credible journalism and attract maximum attention and with it, advertising revenue. Also, Claire Wardle of First Draft News; a Non-Government Organization launching programs against the proliferation of false information identifies seven types of fake news: Satire or Parody: No intention to cause harm but has potential to fool; False connect: When headlines, visuals or captions do not support the content; Misleading content: Misleading use of information to frame an issue or an individual; False content: When genuine content is shared with false contextual information; Imposter content: When genuine sources are impersonated with false, made up sources; Manipulated content: When genuine information or imaginary is manipulated to deceive; Fabricated content: News content is 100% false, designed to deceive and do harm.

### **Fake news cut across all forms of media**

Fake news is not peculiar to social media. It cuts across all forms of media either print or broadcast. The conventional media, on their part have willingly allowed themselves to be used as a conduit for the dissemination of fake news, disinformation and propaganda. (PJ) 8 tagged the recent happening in Benue state where the IGP made a pronouncement on live television that what is happening in Benue state is communal clash as an example of fake news rather he believes that it is the outsiders that are inflicting attacks on the people of Benue state.

The Guardian published an article on 8<sup>th</sup> December, 2016 claiming that fake visas had cost RwandAir over 8 billion naira on the Lagos-Dubai route. RwandAir quickly moved to dismiss the news, calling it is a “fabricated piece of fake news”. Guardian has since taken down the story. The mainstream cum conventional media is also complicit in the spread of fake news. The prevalence of sensational headlines and inability to provide adequate context in the reportage of dramatic events make them look no different from fake news websites. During the president’s controversial medical leave in the UK, at least two conventional news (Vanguard and The Punch) outlets in Nigeria on February 16 last year posted a sensational headline, “Buhari undergoes penis surgery”. Many Nigerians clicked to read the story, thinking that the president has genital complications only to find out that the story was about a nine-month old baby in Bida, Niger State.

### **Fake news can be disseminated through words of mouth (WoM)**

(PJ) 9 gave an instance of someone telling something that does not exist as fake news. (PJ) 7 gave an instance of fake news based on the Plateau state crisis where journalists do not get to the scene of the events and at the end of the day report the imagined number of casualties or perpetrators which has great implications on the general public.

Word of mouth or viva voce, is the passing of information from person to person by oral communication which could be as simple as telling someone the time of day. Story telling is a common form of word-of-mouth communication where one person tells others a story about a real event or something made up. Burkhardt (2017) said fake news has always been spread by word of mouth. Early human populations were sparse. The spread of news was limited. Over time, populations grew and become sedentary. This made it easier to spread news. As populations became literate, the means to spread news diversified. This shows that fake news has been in existence even before the advent of social media or the broadcast media platforms.



### **Bias human nature is responsible for fake news**

This was seen in the response of (PJ) 1, *“that people want to make names for them. They want to be the first person to say something even if it is not true”*. (PJ) 2 said *“that people trying to break the news, people trying to trend and get attention and all that”*. (PJ) 5 said *“that some people want to get attention, some wants chaos, then some for selfish interest”*. (MS) 2 said that *“the wider factor would be people who may be or may not be journalists but who have an agenda to pursue, an agenda that does not generally agree to the truth or facts but their need to pursue their agenda overrides the truth for information”*. (MS) 4 said *“Fake news has to do with human beings and their nature. We have different categories of human beings and they do things the way it comes to them. So just you have people who engage in crimes, they are not doing it for any other reasons rather than to be criminal in nature”*. It was revealed that Nigerian journalists and media scholar agreed among other things that the bias human nature is majorly responsible for fake news. This finding corroborates the work of (Obaze, 2017) who stated that the desire to shape opinion by legerdemain as well as revenge is responsible for fake news.

The gatekeeping Theory according to Kurt Lewis on which this study is based operates on the principle among others, that news should pass or go through several gates before reaching the public so that professional standards of balance, truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance can be achieved. The present research finding supports the above theory as majority of practicing journalists and media scholars were of the opinion that the bias human nature is responsible for fake news. This implies that there is the need for a gatekeeper to control the flow of information and the content therein.

### **Loss of credibility in journalism practice**

From the response in respondent (PJ) 2 *“people tend not to believe real and accurate reports these days because you have lots and lots of fake news out there and people tend to rely more on the social media for information and not a lot of people really read newspapers, listen to radio or watch television but spend most of their time online”*. (PJ) 6 said *“people have loosed credibility on news on traditional media. People no longer have respect for the journalists who are practicing the mainstream journalism. People no longer have respect for them as they see us as propagators of fake news because the public cannot differentiate between a traditional media house and an online platform that is opened by an individual”*. (MS) 3 *“it undermines the integrity and credibility of journalism practice in Nigeria”*. (MS) 5 *“it has affected journalism by casting doubt and suspicion on any news at all that questions anything that comes”*.

It can be deduced that some practicing journalists and media scholars believe that fake news has led to the loss of credibility in journalism practice. The result therefore, corroborate the words of the chairman of Channels Media Group, John Momoh on the 12<sup>th</sup>, January 2018 when he said *“those of us who still believe in the civic value of good journalism has been left in a quandary as politicians are having a field day, taking cue from the U.S. President Trump and lasting journalists for false reportage and balance”*. It further strengthens the position of the managing Editor of Premium Times, Idris Akinbanjo cited in Omeje (2017) said that many Nigerians still prefer to source from online platforms that have credibility issues instead of the mainstream media. However, Obijiafor (2016) disagreed by stating that mainstream media have lost esteem because they lack professionalism and because they no longer serve as a platform that enables minorities, less privileged people and the voiceless in the society to express their views freely. When the media abandon their social responsibility in the society, other channels of communication particularly, those outlets that serve the needs of citizens rise to fill that gap.

### **Proliferation of fake journalists**

Respondent (PJ) 1 said *"it has affected journalism practice in Nigeria because of that we have fake journalists just like we have fake news. If you look at fake news, they come from fake journalists"*. Also, Respondent (PJ) 7 noted that *"like any venture, there are quacks. It also affects journalism. In most profession, you tend to have quacks. One, they tend to affect the perception of news or journalism as been filled with fake or quacks and you do not get to be trusted"*.

The above statements imply that some persons claim to be journalist whereas they are no members of Nigerian Union of Journalists. Fake journalists corrupt journalism practice as they are turned to tools in the hands of some people for their own interest. The activities of certain bloggers on the internet are not checked. The public cannot differentiate between a professional and trained journalist in a traditional media house and an amateur journalist in an online platform that is opened by an individual. The interviewees agreed that the journalists who disseminate fake news do not have journalistic background. They just jump into journalism and want to make name for themselves. Fake journalists most times succeed in their quest to sow the seeds of chaos and confusion. People sit in their homes and publish fake news on the internet. The former Abuja Bureau Chief of the Tide Newspaper, Alloys Nweke, during the January 2008 Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) submit in Port-Harcourt frowned at the numerous untrained people bestriding the streets with pen and paper claiming to be journalists. Nweke speech revealed that the number of fake journalists in Nigeria society is higher than the real practitioners.

### **Lazy journalism**

Respondent (PJ) 4 said *"it has made several journalists lazy because they cannot go out and research to get the best for their media media/medium as the case may be"*. This statement explained the view of Lara Owoeye-Wise, an investigative journalist and a former presenter with AIT said the most worrisome development is that some journalists pick up stories from the social media and use it without verification, thereby damaging the reputation of the mainstream media organisations. Kaleem Butt, a journalist and friction writer explained that there have been many incidents in Pakistan, where journalist's only source of information is social media. It is passed on and gets published or broadcast in the mainstream media. Many times, journalists share videos and photographs from social media to their papers and channels that are not of the standard and are not made up to the requirement of journalism. Distorted languages, abuses and allegations are commonly seen in various social media platforms and the journalists may send the same information without censoring abuses or allegations.

### **Fake news has not affected journalism practice**

However, (MS) 4 believed that *people are now becoming aware of fake news, thereby making them to rely on the traditional media for cross checking of any information they get elsewhere* and (MS) 1 said *"in respect to news credibility, the business and practice of traditional journalism has no way been affected by fake news. On the contrary, traditional journalism counters fake news"*. This implies that fake news makes people to cross check the information they receive. They go to the traditional media either the print, television, radio or their online to verify because they believe these platforms are credible and whatever they find on those platforms is true. The above statement was strengthened by Beckett, 2017 as he sees fake news as one of the most important information issues of our time. *"In my sector of journalism, fake news is the best thing that has happened for decades. It gives mainstream quality journalism the opportunity to show that it has the value based on expertise, ethics, engagement and experience. Beckett also stated that fake news has led to the renewed interest in developing media or news 'literacy'.* According to

New York, the global rise in “fake news” allegations appears to have impelled journalists to improve their reporting so that half (52%) of them now believe traditional media to be most trusted source of news. “Contrary to sentiment that fake news is actually eroding journalism in these legacy media channels, a lot of (traditional media) stories have better reporting, better fact-checking, and better citing of sources,” said Jennifer Risi, Ogilvy’s Worldwide Chief Communications Officer. Risi also explained that fake news phenomenon has put a spotlight on news more traditionally, and it has made journalists and editors challenge their reporters and put more parameters in place to ensure the news is accurate.

### **No standard measures**

In redressing fake news in journalism practice, majority of the respondents were of the opinion that no standard or particular measures put in place by media professionals and other bodies to counter fake news. (MS) 1 said *“there has not been any major conference by key industry players and professionals to deal with the issue. All attention has been diverted to hate speech”*, (MS) 5 *“I do not think there is any measure available because Nigeria’s cyberspace is a free zone as people are trying to get use to the cyberspace in the first place. The media owners are not doing anything”*.

This correlates the words of Olajide, 2011 when he said that in the era of the internet journalism, there are no regulatory bodies delegated to regulate the contents of online print and electronic by the way of convergence. Nigeria is facing its share of false news, but has not risen to the challenge with the seriousness it deserves. While broad awareness of the negative impact of false news exists, the Federal Government is yet to fully contextualize the alarming challenges posed by false news and hate speeches. Presently, there is no consequence whatsoever, for the perpetrators of false news, with the added implication that media outfits seem reluctant to fact-check their reports as they rush to be the first to put out a breaking news stories (Obaze, 2017).

Meanwhile, the closest Nigerian Law for check mating false news is the Cyber Crime Act that does not have necessarily focus on false news or defamation. Still, many argue that there is no need for new laws for combating false news since Nigeria’s constitution makes provision for punishment of slander and defamation. Invariably, there is need for effective gatekeeping at all levels – organisational, regulatory and self – where the determinants of news content brainstorm and manufacture news.

### **There are measures such as workshops, seminars and conferences**

(PJ) 4 *“NUJ, Newspapers Proprietors of Nigeria, Nigeria Press Council came out last year, to suggest a way out of the whole thing that people should be punished”* and (PJ) 8 *“there have been workshops and awareness on fake news. There have been sanitizations of their members by NUJ concerning fake news from the national to state level to report based on the ethics of the profession”* are under this category. Examples include: putting across the suggestion at the end of a workshop on “fake news and the Demand of Evolving Journalism in the Post-Truth Era” organised by the Association of Communication Professionals and scholars of Nigeria in Abuja on March 30, 2017. The conference was aimed at creating fact-checking platform to detect and expose fake news. Also, on the 28<sup>th</sup> July, 2017 there was two-day training in New Media in Lagos organised by the African Media Network in conjunction with the Nigerian Press Council to advocate professionalism in new media.

### Conclusion

Since the advent of the new media, journalism in Nigeria is seriously facing a dilemma of fake news which is affecting its practice and the performance of the professionals practicing it as unprofessional or untrained journalists have continued to manipulate or fabricate news for their selfish or personal interest. Journalism does more than keep us informed as it enables us as citizens to have our voices heard in the chambers of power and allows us to monitor and moderate the sources of power that shapes our lives thus, this study after thorough research, came to the conclusion that journalism needs to be given a second look with the view of improving its present professionalism and credibility. The researchers conclude that fake news does not only affect the practice of journalism but also affects the individual, government and its bodies, and the society as a whole. Also, fake news is a global threat but Nigeria must find its own solution to the menace.

### Recommendations

Arising from the research findings, the researchers wish to make the following recommendations:

1. **Gatekeeping:** Although the new media has encouraged free flow of information, this information should be gagged to discourage rumours capable of causing mayhem. There should be comprehensive gatekeeping on any information or news before it will be disseminated.
2. **Ethics:** Truth and objectivity should be the watch word for every media organization in order to retain readership and earn trust from their audiences. Journalists must uphold the ethical principles that encourage truth, accurate, fair and balance reporting.
3. **Training of journalists:** There should be training and retraining of journalists in every media organizations. There should be conferences, awareness, seminars and campaigns on/against fake news.
4. **Sanctions:** Media outfits and non-practicing journalists that circulate fake news should be sanctioned so as to serve as deterrents to other offenders. Proper sanctioning will serve as check and balance to regulate the dissemination of fake news.

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### **Authorship and Level of Contribution**

All two authors contributed meaningfully to the study. The first author was responsible for the writing process, the analysis and the interpretation of the work while the second author contributed to the conceptualization of the work through providing the idea and ensuring all sections of the work align with the theme for research. As a senior colleague, he assumed a supervisory role throughout the activity by ensuring thorough revision and scrutiny of the article before sending it out for publishing. The two authors have gone through the work together and have approved it for publication; therefore, we bear all responsibility for its content. We have also ensured that no aspect of the work becomes a subject for litigation.

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