# The Effect of Fake News on Nigeria's Democracy within The Premise of Freedom of Expression

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## Abstract

*The study was conducted to measure the effect of fake news on Nigeria's democracy within the premise of freedom of expression. The study was anchored on four objectives to find out the rate of the spread of fake news among Nigerians on both social and conventional media; to examine the perception of media audience on fake news and abuse of freedom of expression; to find out the effect of fake news on Nigeria's democracy; to determine measures that can be adopted in combating fake news The study selected purposive sampling and surveyed 60 social media user from Borno and Yobe (i.e, 30 from each of the two states) and administered questionnaire. The study found that majority of the respondents contributes in the information sharing system of media cycle. The study found that despite the awareness of fake news among the respondents, there is limited alertness with regard to sensitivity of verifying information before sharing. The study also found that politics and crisis suffer more fake news than any other nature. The study found that fake news is still crucial because there are rounds of perceptions that influence its nature and thus its spread. We also found that the respondents have negative perception about the extent to which fake news can affect democracy and democratic system of governance. The study recommends that awareness should be created so as to enlighten people who use the social media to avoid spreading unverified information and that other social media platform should copy from Twitter in restricting number of text user can post and identification of a verified account.*

*Keywords: Democracy, freedom of expression, fake news, new media*

## INTRODUCTION

Freedom of expression is an important human right in a democratic dispensation which is essential for society to be autonomous. It was guaranteed in the Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948. It empowers the free exchange of ideas, opinions and information and also allows members of society to form their own opinion from happenings in public sphere. The common debate within and outside intellectual arenas have always been about its existence and the level at which citizens are allowed to exercise it in line with constitutional provision at hand. No doubt, the battle for freedom of expression has gained momentum in Nigeria and the world at large.

Like many nations, Nigeria practice democracy; joining other parts of the world in providing atmosphere for its citizenry to hold, form and express opinions to propel participation in good governance. At this juncture, it arguably important to state that significant improvements in freedom of expression and civil liberties were among the immediate gains of Nigeria's transition to civilian rule in 1999. Although, little has changed with respect to persistent corruption, violence and poverty, it is generally assumed that Nigerians are at least able to express themselves freely in the context of Nigeria's new political environment.

With the introduction of the Global System of Global Communications (GSM) in Nigeria at the turn of the millennium and specifically with the evolution of the

internet and social media which have impacted information sharing system greatly. Nigeria has been ranked as "partly free" in terms of freedom of expression on the Internet. Citizens create platforms such as websites and blogs to form and distribute information or opinions while others create social media account to voice up their opinions. All these happen without hindrance by constitution, harassment by authorities or restriction by the law.

The Nigeria's composition and configuration is very unique which is characterized by varieties of customs and costumes, norms and values, trades and traditions. It is one of the systems that have saturated differences in opinions, sentiments and religion. The above features make Nigeria prone to crises. Overtime, Nigeria's democracy had been threatened by unscrupulous citizens, leaders, community crises, religious crises, bad governance, disunity terrorism and most recently fake news. These have greatly influence the speed of building democratic institutions and infrastructural stability to the masses.

While the rest of the world worries about the impact of fake news on elections and referendums in developed nations, emerging democracies are facing the same threat. We now live in a digital world, surrounded by a deluge of information. The internet has made us more connected than ever, thus a threat anywhere is a threat everywhere. The new information age has created a virtual surrounding with loads of information, a large part of which is reliable with the more significant chunk unverifiable. Thus, discerning truth from hear-say has become an enormous task. Fake news has recently raised a lot of concerns because of its impact prevalent in contemporary democratic politics. Fake news spreads like wild-fire and difficult to contain or correct; more so its capacity to distort the eventual truth, makes it a threat in a democratic set-up.

The pluralistic nature of "the media" has further complicated the issue. There are so many sources with doubtful reliability; people are retreating into social media where like-mindedness thrives. This has increased the demand for accountability and has made users prone the vulnerability and the danger of misinformation. Studies show that when false information is introduced to these echo chambers, it is viewed as credible as long as it conforms to the existing narrative.

Nigeria has been defined by its differences, and now seems to have reached an inclining fact. The growth of fake news is on the increase daily as sources and platforms keep emerging, many of course are created by politicians, ignorantly or deliberately by the media, interest groups which have fuelled hate speech, sentiments, distrust and the abuse of freedom of expression thus, threatening the unity of the country.

In spite of the comprehensive list of legislation governing the telecommunications and internet sector, policies of the Federal Government of Nigeria, particularly the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) "Draft Lawful Interception of Communications Regulation" and the recent introduced Nigeria's Cybercrime Act, fake news still permeate diverse facets of the society like wild fire. The question to ask remains, why do we fall for fake news and how do we combat it?

**Statement of the Problem**
One of the fundamental tenets of democracy is freedom of expression and speech. It is the right of individuals to hold opinions and express it without hindrance. Considering the instrumentality of information dissemination, democratic dispensations hold media as an enormous tool in building its institutions. To this end, democracy thrives better on the wheel of freedom for all citizens to express their

views. However, it is fundamental to note that freedom of expression which democracy cheerfully gives is not as important as the concomitant obligation of a responsible expression by all.

As many virtual news sources with doubtful reliability keep surfacing, the spread of fake news which threatens quality journalism and media literacy is on the increase in Nigeria. The problem is not only unique to online environments, it is also present in the conventional media in spite of the concrete fact checking network prevalent. However there are lots of studies across the globe about fake news and democracy but do not specifically capture the aspect of fake news and its effect on Nigeria's democracy within the premise of freedom of expression therefore in order to fill the gap in knowledge, this survey will examine the effect of fake news on Nigeria's democracy. Specifically, the study will find answers to the following question; what is the effect of fake news on Nigeria's democracy within the premise of freedom of expression?

**Objectives of the Study**
The main objective of this study is to examine effect of fake news on Nigeria's democracy within the premise of Freedom of Expression. Specifically, the study is tied to the following objectives:

- To find out the rate of the spread of fake news among Nigerians on both social and conventional media.
- To examine the perception of media audience on fake news and abuse of freedom of expression.
- To find out the effect of fake news on Nigeria's democracy.
- To determine measures that can be adopted in combating fake news.

**Research Questions**
In order to achieve the aforementioned objectives, the research will answer the following questions:

1. What is rate of the spread of fake news among Nigerians on both social and conventional media?
2. Do media audience have perception on fake news and abuse of freedom of expression?
3. What are the perceptions?
4. What is the effect of fake news on Nigeria's democracy?

**Significance and Justification of the Study**
Building a strong democracy depends on strict adherence to its tenets and propositions by leaders and the leads. Nigeria with a 19 year old democracy has gone far in this pursuit. In spite of the countless challenges encountered that have slowed the pace of genuine progress, outstanding developments in numerous spheres have been accrued. No doubt the media (fourth pillar of democracy) is instrumental in the facilitation of all-inclusive citizens' participation and societal development through sound reportage and spread of genuine information. However when laxity is found in the fact checking system of both new and conventional media, fakes new becomes the order of the day. Based on the leverage freedom of expression offers, the growing trend of fake news has caused serious chaos in diverse aspects of societal endeavours. The common assumption trending now is, if this chaos is not curtailed, its effects on Nigeria's baby democracy could be devastating. Since, all effort now tilts towards combating fake news for quality journalism and development, this study will examine the effect of fake news on Nigeria's democracy within the confines of freedom of expression. The outcome of this study will alert government, civil society organisations (CSOs) and all other pro-democratic groups on the need to enact strategies and mechanism for combating fake news in order to ensure quality journalism and a responsible expression by

all.

The result of the study will also provide a framework for media practitioners that will enable them exercise a good information sharing behaviour basically for the fact that the success of every democracy rest on the media. It will also provide an insight for them to understand the effect of fake news on the democracy of the country. Furthermore, the outcome of the study will make available ready materials for policymakers towards censoring falsehood in both new and conventional media industry so that citizens can express their opinions responsibly for the greater good of democracy.

**Scope of the Study**

The scope of this study is limited to Borno and Yobe states. The two states suffered the most destructive impact of insecurity (insurgency) in the North-east since 2009, hence, the likelihood of spreading, accepting and believing all kinds of news without fact checking to ensure source credibility is high and because of that, the spread of fake news thrives more especially on virtual platforms. Since, freedom of expression to a great extent gives the right to air opinions without restrictions, what happens then, if this privilege is abused? It is on this brink that the survey found it imperative to study fake news and its effects on Nigeria's democracy in the aforementioned states in order to underscore the rate at which it is spread, sample perceptions and examine the general effect of fake news on the nation's democracy from the viewpoint of freedom of expression and to proffer mechanisms of combating it. Since the features of democracy are to some extent analogous, the outcome of this research will be widespread to encompass the entire country and other countries that practice democracy across the globe.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Freedom of Expression and Democracy in Nigeria**

Freedom of expression is a precondition for democracy. It is instrumental and essential maintenance of diversity and plurality, which are key prerequisites of a democratic civilization and social order. The natural configuration of Nigeria is diverse in terms of ethnicity, religion, ideology, life style and what a view. Since contemporary democracy is governed by pluralism, the need to synergize multiple and conflicting patterns of life, ideas and ideologies is paramount therefore, freedom of expression is an important and effective mechanism of harnessing and maintaining orderliness and equal representation in a pluralistic society.

While freedom of expression remains essential in airing opinion, it is strongly believed to be an indispensable aspect of dialogue facilitation among individuals, and it creates a free public sphere in which everybody freely participate by expressing their opinions. In addition, other scholars opine that free expression of ideas on certain policies craft the platform for citizen participation in policymaking process and the enacting of laws thus, freedom of expression is a political backbone and an asset to the operation of a self-governing system of administration.

The right to express and also to be heard helps in the implementation of democratic philosophies of participation and equality before the law in a society. This critical or constitutive rationalisation of the freedom of expression is related to the moral responsibility of citizens. Citizenries as ethically upright agents must be unrestricted to obtain and express views. While freedom of expression is paramount and the backbone of democracy, exercising it being a fundamental human right is not as relevant as understanding that freedom of expression which democracy cheerfully gives goes hand-in-hand with the concomitant obligation of a responsible expression by all.

## Freedom of Expression, Social Media and Fake News

In contemporary media, landscape, journalists, communications experts and others see expression as a weapon. The Internet which provides open space for the exercise of the right to receive and impart information has redefine public discourse and information sharing process. The open nature of the internet, social media and the lack of total regulation and restrictions by authorities in Nigeria and the world at large defiles freedom of expression. However, in a number of cases, countries like China in order to prevent access to certain content, adopted measures such as blocking and filtering for the purpose of adequate regulation.

In Nigeria, before the advent of social media, people rely on the conventional media as their reliable and trusted news source. This is because, the conventional media provide the public with well researched news that were gate kept and scrutinised. Our democracy thrived on this model impressively. Unfortunately, the social media arrive with a freedom for public to develop and distribute information in their own quota. This is a new model that has been abused for several selfish and nonchalant reasons. It provides the public with anonymity and immunity to by cut the order. As a result, some unscrupulous elements with gruesome intentions use the social media to create fake news and distribute. Such news has created public chaos, communal clashes, political tension as well as economic threats which are very pillar in democratic dispensation. To this end, it can be deduced that fake news is a threat to Nigeria's growing democracy, not just as a country with high population but as a country with huge diversity and differences.

In order to combat fake news, scholars posit that glaring discrepancies should be enacted in respect of how freedom of expression is exercised physically (offline) and virtually (online). The potentially universal accessibility of the internet by everyone as a publisher; and its ability to support new, democratic public spaces for debate (the so-called virtual public square value of the Internet) where, social media handlers explore platforms for mobilization and incorporation of citizens in protest schemes regardless of distance and geographical barriers; a worrying trend, must be carefully checked..

## Misinformation, Disinformation and Mal-information

Central to the discourse of 'fake news' are three key concepts: misinformation, disinformation and mal-information. Information scientists have long debated the nature of information: what it is; where it comes from and the kinds of actions it affords humans. Information sharing behaviour is integral to humans, people value exchanging information even when it is true or false which are diffused via social networks, as misinformation and disinformation. Social media have made such diffusion easier and faster. According to (Bell 2015) [1] Misinformation and disinformation are deliberate and intentional lie.

Zhou et al. (2004) in Fallis (2009), [2] connotes that while disinformation may realistically be inaccurate, it must not necessarily be inaccurate as long as it is misleading and defines meaning deviating from facts. Fallis (2009) argued that disinformation can portray meanings which could be ambiguous in the milieu of a particular condition.

Buckland (1991) [3] added that, depending on the context, information is a thing, a process bounded by informativeness. According to him, misinformation and disinformation may also be things, processes, or knowledge, and therefore

informative, by implying or revealing information which sometime tends to be accidental or deliberate depending on how the receiver interpret it in relation to fact.

On the other hand, mal-information is seen to be information that is premised on realism, but adopted either deliberately or otherwise to perpetrate damage on a person, organisation or country. A typical example is the publication of a report which unveils sexual orientation of a person without public interest justification. It is however necessary to discern messages that are factual from those that are not, and those with little iota of truth) framed and published with the intension of demeaning rather than serve the public interest.

Misinformation, disinformation and mal-information are raw materials that form fake news, information sharing systems which are currently and mostly unregulated have altered with conventional information behaviour. Information published based on falsehood whether with little iota of facts can have devastating consequences on governments, people, businesses, information professionals, and user experience designers, as well as other groups. Misinformation is problematic largely because it can create confusion and mistrust among receivers, and can make information difficult to use.

**Theoretical Framework**
The study adopted Source Credibility Theory, Elaboration Likelihood Theory and Theory of Rumour Transmission as theoretical foundation for the study.
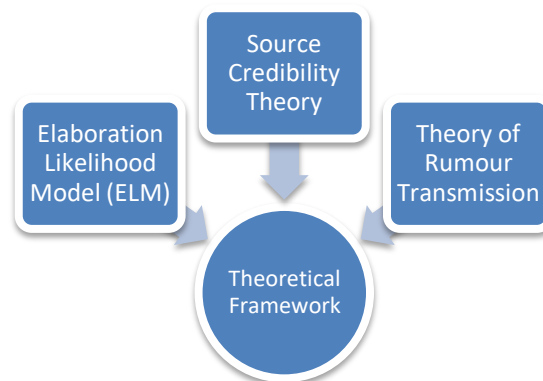


*Figure 1: Figurative theoretical framework.*

**Source Credibility Theory**
Source credibility theory was proposed in 1963 by Hovland, Janis and Kelly. The theory stated that information receivers are more likely to be persuaded when the source presents itself as credible [4]. According to credibility institute (2017) the initial idea of credibility was first derived from Aristotle who posits that "speaker's reliability must be built and established in speech and that what the speaker did or said before such a speech was not of importance". The theory is applicable in various intellectual fields to include law, Political sciences, communication and marketing (Credibility Institute, 2017). The central doctrinal kernel of source credibility was used to explain how communication's persuasiveness is affected by the perceived credibility of the source of the communication [5]. The credibility of all communication, regardless of format, has been found to be heavily influenced by the perceived credibility of the source of that communication. The diagram below illustrates theory:
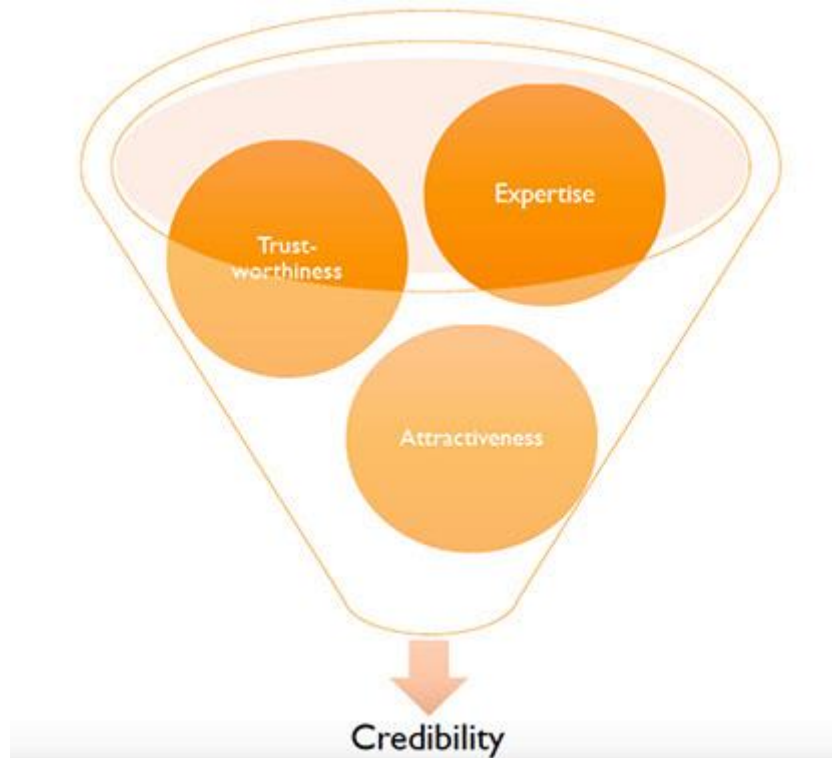
*Figure 2: The Credibility.*

The theorists confirmed that credible sources tend to create the desired impact on the audience. Basically, the theory posits that there are two most commonly visible elements which positively influence source credibility and they are: perceived expertise and trustworthiness of the source [4].

**Elaboration Likelihood Model**
Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) is a persuasion-based theory which propounds that recipients of a message will process the message through either a central route or a peripheral route. Petty & Cacioppo (1986) identified that under the central route, individuals think carefully about issue-relevant arguments and the quality of the message content while in the peripheral route, individuals engage in little scrutiny of message content, and focus on peripheral cues such as source credibility (Pornpitakpan 2004).

**Theory of Rumour Transmission**
The theory has in its early research on rumours, identified ambiguity and importance as the main drivers of rumour transmission [6]. In addition, Anthony (1973) added anxiety as another important driver. On these bases, Oh, Agrawal, and Rao, (2013) [7] introduced a model to explain rumour mongering on Twitter during a social crisis. Oh, Agrawal and Rao's effort was understood to focus on factors explaining why rumours are generated on Twitter (rumour transmission). In doing so, they particularly identify and explain cues in a Twitter message that signal it to be a rumour. These cues also reflect feelings and behaviours of rumour senders.

Oh, Agrawal, and Rao's model contained five antecedents. The five antecedents are explicated below:
- **Anxiety**: reflects the negative emotional state of a rumour sender.
- **Source ambiguity**: reflects whether a rumour sender understands the origin of a message and its trustworthiness. It is a relevant driver for messages brought into a network from outside

sources (e.g., agencies or news services).

- **Content ambiguity**: reflects the interpretability and clarity of the message itself.
- **Personal involvement**: represents the importance of a rumour to the sender. Finally, to measure social pressures from other members on a rumour sender
- **Directed message:** Oh et al., added directed message as a new variable arguing that directed messages were more likely to be rumours. A directed message on social media is a message sent to a specific Twitter, Facebook or whatsApp user.

**Justifications of the Theories**

The study used five antecedents of the theory of rumour transmission to explain its link with this study. Oh, Agrawal and Rao suggested that anxiety, source ambiguity and personal involvement significantly lead to rumour transmission, while effects of content ambiguity and directed message received no support. Firstly, the anxiety which reflect negative emotional intent of the sender means that some social media users send rumours to other with negative intent of causing chaos. Secondly, source ambiguity which reflects the doubt in the source of information being sent across. In this sense, many social media users send information wider without verifying the source. This connotes with the suggestion of the ELM on peripheral cues. Thirdly, Oh, Agrawal and Rao identified personal involvement as a driver in spreading rumour. For instance, in a crisis situation message on social media that is related to the crisis would be fast spread by especially the people who are involved regardless of its credibility.

According to the source credibility theory, trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness of information is what attract and convince information receivers

to share certain information. The theory has elements of persuasion. This means that messages, news and other information has to acquire certain features to persuade media or social media users before sharing it. The theory was selected because it explains elements of reasons why fake news spread like wild fire. This is for the fact that social media users do not inquire the genuineness of information rather looks at its attractiveness and expertise in its syntax.

ELM is a useful theory for studying rumour mongering especially in a crises area because central and peripheral cues are both important in this context. But peripheral cues are more important in this study because there is typically a lack of verified information in crisis and people look to peripheral cues when facts are hard to verify. To this end, the high level of rumour mongering on social media arrive due to the adoption of peripheral cues in verifying sources of information before spreading the message content.

**METHODOLOGY**

The study used descriptive method and adopted survey as methodology. According to Adefila (2008) [8] survey research is also called descriptive research which focuses on populations or the universe. He added that in survey, data is collected from the population for intensive study and analysis. Survey is not done haphazardly, but follows an established process that can be followed, documented and replicated [9]. According to Fajonyomi & Fajonyomi (2003) [10] survey methodology is applied when the unit of analysis is individual, either alone or as members of a group. The unit of analysis here is individuals (social media users).

Survey research has several advantages or strengths compared to other research methods. Bhattacherjee, (2012) [11] noted that surveys are an excellent vehicle for

measuring a wide variety of unobservable data such as people's preference, traits, attitude or factual information. It also has an advantage of collecting data from a population that is too large to observe directly. Also, it allows respondents to provide their answers in their convenient time and places among other advantages. These advantages have also been identified by [8] [9] [12]. This study has target population. The population includes all social media users in Borno and Yobe states.

The study used the purposive or judgmental and accidental sampling technique. Purposive sampling (Adler and Clark, 2011:123) [13] refers to a form of sampling procedure that involves selecting elements based on the researcher's judgment about which elements will facilitate his or her investigation. The sample will be purposively selected from the social media users from Borno and Yobe state. The purposive and accidental selection will enable the study to select those who have experience and awareness of the spread of fake news. The study selected thirty (30) social media users. The study selected thirty (30) from Borno and thirty (30) from Yobe State.

Questionnaire has been adopted as tool for data collection. Questionnaire is a survey instrument used for obtaining information from respondents in a systematic way.

According to Adefila (2008), [8] it is a special form of correspondence developed to procure authoritative information from a number of persons through the medium of well-directed questions. The questionnaire will be designed in both close-ended and open-ended format. The questionnaire will be divided into segments. The first segment will seek to elicit demographic data of the respondents; on the other hand, the second segment will seek to elicit answers from the respondents on the set objectives. The questionnaire will be administered to 60 respondents (i.e, 30 in Maiduguri and 30 in Damaturu). Charts, tables and graphical representations will be used for data presentation and analysis.

**RESULT AND ANALYSIS**

This section presents the results obtained from the survey conducted by the study. The presentation will be made with the aid of tables and charts. Each table or chart is followed by analysis of the data it contained. The analysis is done using both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The quantitative analysis is one using percentages and numerical representations while the qualitative analysis is done to address the opened-ended questions designed in the questionnaire. This is because, they are designed to collect qualitative data from the respondents. The result thus

*Table 1: Do you know fake news?*

| S/N | Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Yes | 54 | 90% |
| 2 | No | 6 | 10% |
| **Total** | | 60 | 100.00% |

*Source: Field Survey, 2019.*

The Table 1 presents result from the study's quest to measure the awareness of the respondents about fake news. The result shows that 90% of the respondents are aware of what fake news is while only 10% do not have awareness of fake news. This shows that majority of the respondents are aware of fake news and thus establish ground for the suitability of the respondents to the study.
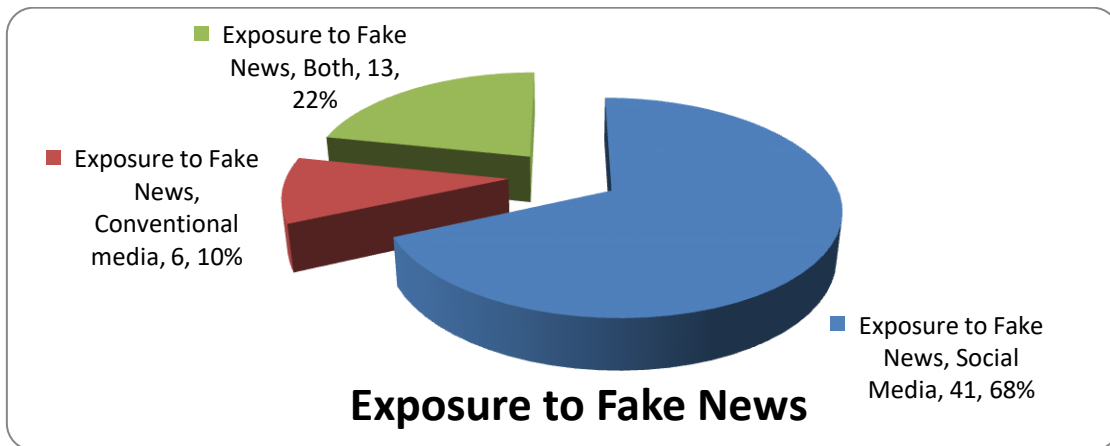
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**Figure 3:** *Where do you come in contact with fake news?*
*Source: Field Survey, 2019.*

Fig. 3 presents result regarding the exposure of the respondents to fake news on the media. The result indicated that 41(68%) of the respondents come in contact with fake news on social media pages. Only 6(10%) of the respondents chose that they come in contact with fake news on conventional media while 13(22%) of the respondent come in contact with fake news on both conventional and social media. The result suggests that social media is the major carrier of fake news while conventional media record least number of fake news.
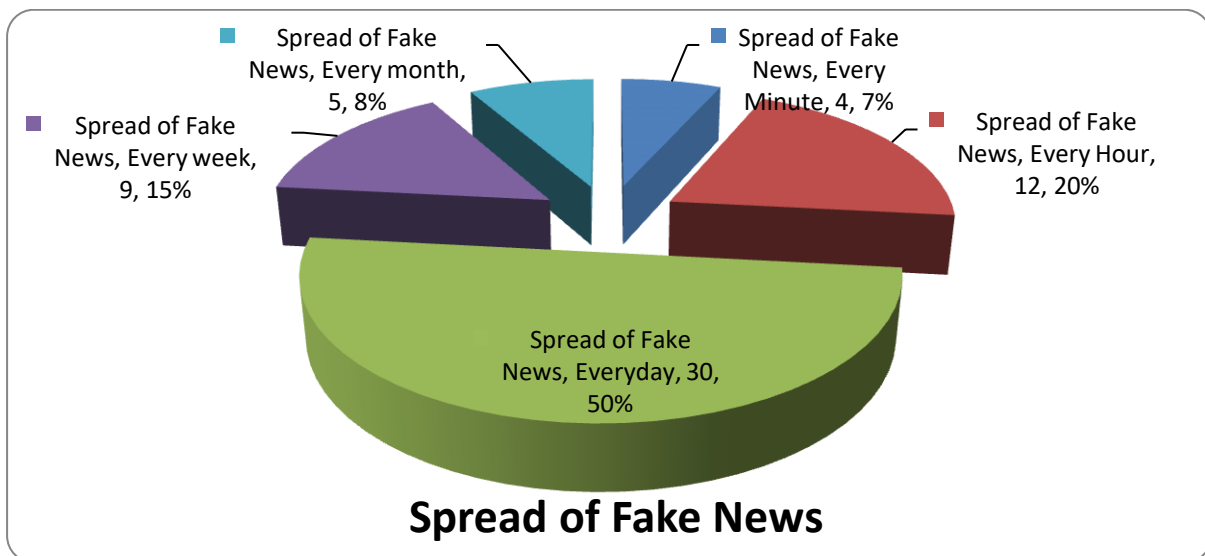


**Figure 4:** *What is the frequency of the spread of fake news on the media you choose in the previous question?*
*Source: Field Survey, 2019.*

Fig. 4 presents result from the quest to find out the frequency of the spread of fake news on either social or conventional media. The result shows that 7% of the respondent who are active on social media come in contact with fake news in every minute, 20% suggest that they see fake news every hour, 15% come in contact with fake news week on the media they suggest in the previous chart while only 8% suggested that they see fake news in every month. This can be attributed to the fact that the social media which provides free access to users propels the frequency of spread of fake news more than any other media of communication.

*Table 2: Do you share information?*

| S/N | Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Yes | 57 | 95% |
| 2 | No | 3 | 5% |
| | Total | 60 | 100.00% |

*Source: Field Survey, 2019.*

The Table 2 presents data on share ability of information among the respondents. This was done to access how much do the respondents who come in contact with fake news do share such news. The result shows that 95% of the respondents share information while only 5% do not share information. This means that majority of the respondents contribute in the information sharing system of media cycle. It also suggests that respondents play role in either fuelling or controlling the spread of fake news on the media they use

*Table 3: Do you verify information before sharing?*

| S/N | Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Yes | 22 | 36.7% |
| 2 | No | 38 | 63.3% |
| | Total | 60 | 100.00% |

*Source: Field Survey, 2019.*

In the above result (Table 3), the study quest to find out if the respondents verify the authenticity and source of information before sharing. The result shows that 36.7% of the respondents do verify the authenticity of information before sharing, while 63.3% of the respondents do not verify information before sharing. This means that despite the awareness of fake news among the respondents, there is limited alertness with regard to sensitivity of verifying information before sharing. This further establish that majority of users on social media do not find time to verify information before sharing.

*Do you know that sharing suspicious information without verifying could lead to spread of fake news?*

The study also sought to know if the respondents know that sharing information without adequate verification could led to fast spread of fake news. The result indicated that 27(45%) of the respondents suggested that they know such cause and effect while 33(55%) declared that there, they are not aware of such instances. This means that lack of awareness on what spread of unverified information may cause is a major factor in the spread of fake news on social media platforms. This study puts that the users on social media are not aware of the dangers of their actions on such platforms.
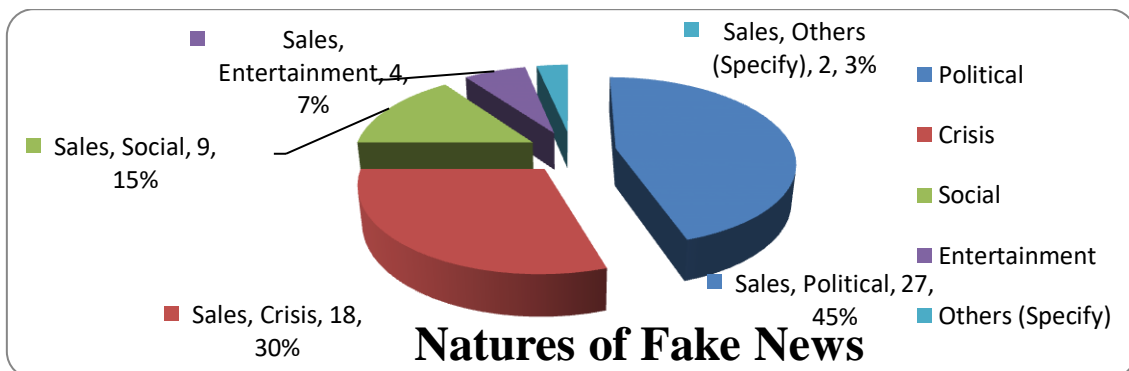


*Figure 5: What is the nature of fake news you come across on the media you expose to?*
*Source: Field Survey, 2019.*

Fig. 5 presents result from the quest of the study to find out the natures and frequency of each type of fake news being circulated on the social media. The respondents suggest that 45% of the fake news they see on media are political in nature, 30% of the fake news they are crisis related, 15% of the fake news are related to social aspect of life, 7% of the fake news they see on the social media are related to entertainment. There are 3% who suggest that there is also fake news

in the aspect of sport, economic and cultural. This means that politics and crisis suffer more fake news than any other nature. This is why social media become very congested with so much unverified information and fake news during political or elections period. Not just political period but also when crisis spurs in various angles. Fake news becomes subject of discourse because they fuel either of the political tension or crisis margin.
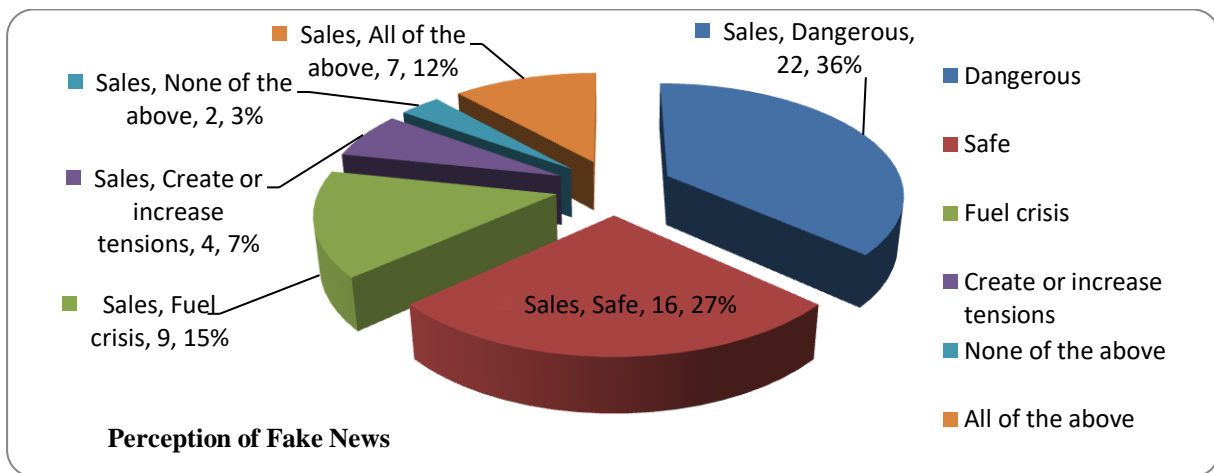


*Figure 6:* *What is your perception of fake news?*
*Source: Field Survey, 2019.*

The result contained in Fig. 6 shows the perception of the respondents regarding fake news. 36% of the respondents perceive fake news as dangerous, 27% of the respondents perceive fake news as safe which has no danger, 15% of the respondents perceive and believed that fake news fuels crisis, 7% of the respondents perceive fake news as

something that create or increase tension, 3% perceive fake news as normal and it does none of the above while 12% of the respondents perceive fake news as critical and its best explained by all of the above. This means that fake news is still crucial because there are rounds of perceptions that influence its nature and thus its spread.

*Table 4: Do you think spreading fake news is an abuse of freedom of expression?*

| S/N | Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Yes | 22 | 36.7% |
| 2 | No | 27 | 45% |
| 3 | Undecided | 11 | 18.3% |
| **Total** | | 60 | 100.00% |

*Source: Field Survey, 2019.*

The Table 4 presents result regarding the perception of the respondents on spreading fake news as abuse of freedom of expression. The study intends to measure

how the respondents perceive the above hypothesis. The result shows that 36.7% of the respondent perceive spread of fake news as abuse of freedom of expression,

45% of the respondents perceive spread of fake news not as abuse of freedom of expression while 18.3% of the respondents remain undecided. The result indicated that

the reason why fake news is still spread is because the social media users do not believe spreading such information is an abuse of freedom they enjoy on such platforms.
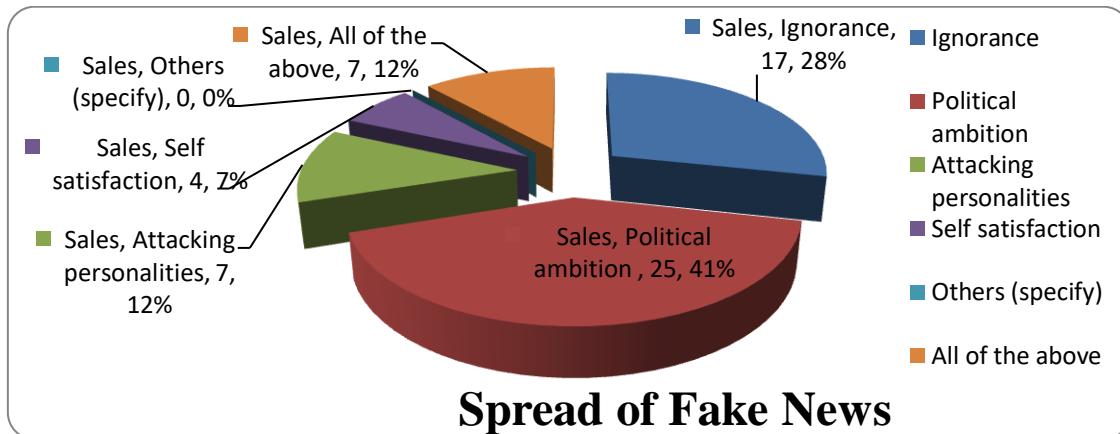


**Figure 7:** *Why do you think people spread fake news?*
*Source: Field Survey, 2019.*

Fig. 7 presents result from the quest of the study to find out the perception of the respondents on why social media users spread fake news. The result shows that 28% of the respondent suggest that ignorance of fake news and what it may cause is the major reason people share fake news, 41% of the respondents attributed the spread of fake news to political ambition of some people, 12% of the respondents perceive that people spread fake news to attack personalities of others, 7% of the respondent perceive the reason for the spread of fake news to self-satisfaction while, 12% of the respondents attributed it to all of the above perceptions.

*Do you think fake news have effect on democratic system of government?*
The study sought to know if the respondents know that the spread of fake news has effect on democratic system of government. The result indicated that 27(45%) of the respondents suggested that spreading fake news has effect on smooth operation of democracy while 33(55%) declared that spread of fake news has no effect on democratic system of government. This means that there is gross misunderstanding or underestimation of what fake news can cause in a society that

practice democracy. This is also another reason why spread of fake news is on increase.

*Why?*
In this section, the study collected qualitative data from opened-ended question. The study quests to find out that why the respondents hold above perception regarding the effect of fake news on democratic system of government. The following are some of the response collected.
The responses are categorised into two. The first category are those that support the fact that fake news affect democracy while the second category are those that think it does not affect democracy. There are responses that were filtered to have not taken side.
Some of the responses in the first category include:
*"Because it affects the way decisions are made."*
*"Every country needs communication which is accurate and not unreliable information like fake news which has so much potential to strike tensions and fights. Every country that practice*

democracy will love to enjoy peace and vibrant communication system"

"fake news raises tension in the polity"

"it (fake news) lead to rise in tension among the populace and sometimes create unnecessary crisis among different cultures and religious beliefs."

"Fake news is evil"

"Fake news affects the trust in the communication system of a country. For instance when authorities disseminate information people tend to think the information is fake too"

Some of the responses from the second category include;

"Fake news does not have any impact on government"

"to think it (fake news) affect democratic system of government is too myopic and lack of understanding of how government operate"

"Fake is safe because is a fun thing we do on social media"

"There is no relationship between government and fake news"

"Government in our country (Nigeria) bothers a lot on fake news which does not affect them in anyway, I think fake news start on social media and end there, there is no effect on the entire government operation"

Some of the responses in the last category include:

"No idea"

"I don't have anything to say about that"

"relationship between Fake and government? Undecided"

"Nothing to say"

"I have no idea"



**Effects of Fake News on Democracy**

- It cripples the freedom of expression of others
- It create unnecessary tensions in the polity
- It propels disinformation and misinformation which can create public chaos
- It leads to so much censorship over the media
- Others specify

Sales, Others specify, 0, 0%

Sales, All of the above, 7, 12%

Sales, It cripples the freedom of expression of others, 17, 28%

Sales, It leads to so much censorship over the media, 4, 7%

Sales, It propels disinformation and misinformation which can create public chaos, 7, 12%

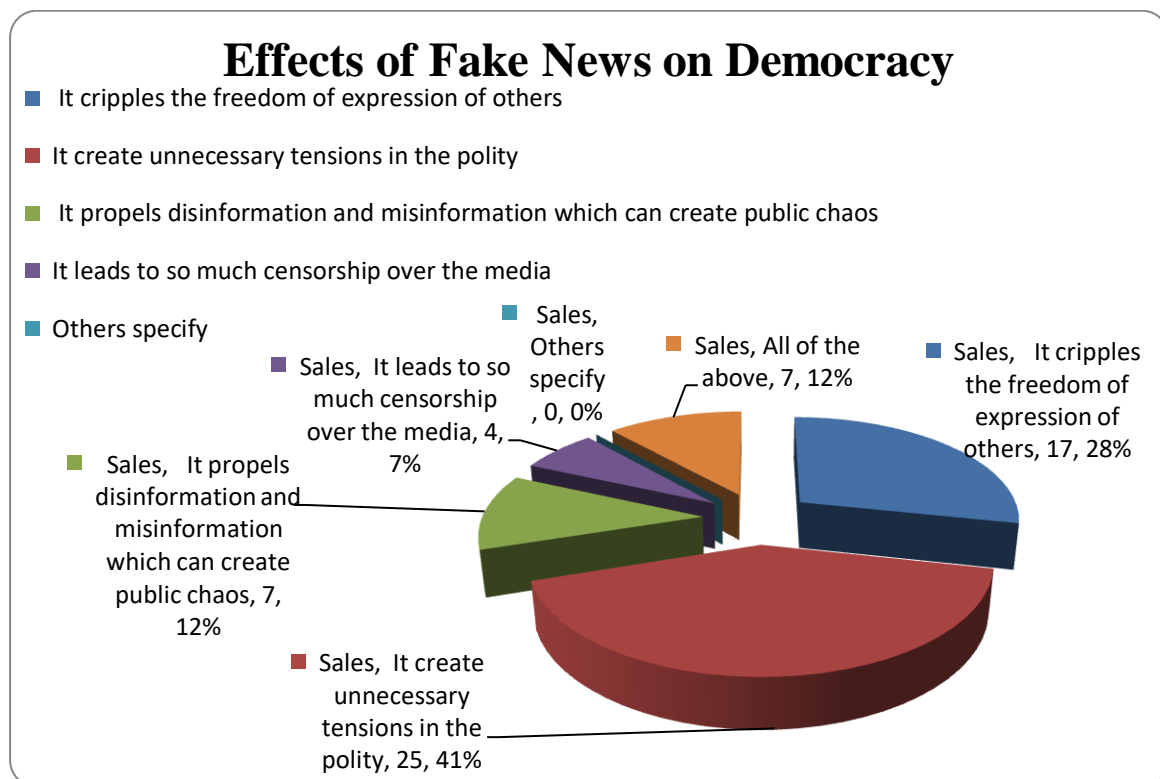Sales, It create unnecessary tensions in the polity, 25, 41%

***Figure 8:*** *To what extent does fake news affect democracy?*
*Source: Field Survey, 2019.*

Fig. 8 presents result from the quest of the study to find out what the respondent think is the extent to which fake news affect democracy. The result shows that 28% of the respondents believe fake news cripples freedom of expression of others, 41% of the respondents believe fake news create unnecessary tension in the polity, 12% of the respondents believe fake news propels disinformation and misinformation which

can create public chaos, 7% of the respondents suggest fake news lead to so much censorship over the media while 12% suggest all of the above.

**Table 5:** *Do you think democracy will thrive well in the era of fake news?*

| S/N | Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Yes | 22 | 36.7% |
| 2 | No | 27 | 45% |
| 3 | Undecided | 11 | 18.3% |
| **Total** | | 60 | 100.00% |

*Source: Field Survey, 2019.*

The Table 5 presents result from the quest of the study to find out if democracy can thrive well in the era of fake news. The result shows 36.7% of the respondents agreed that democracy will thrive well in the era of fake news, 45% of the respondents disagreed that democracy can thrive well in the era of fake news. There are 18.3% of the respondents who remain undecided. This means that majority of the respondents recognises the threat of fake news to democracy and thus suggest that democracy cannot thrive well if fake news continue to spread without control.
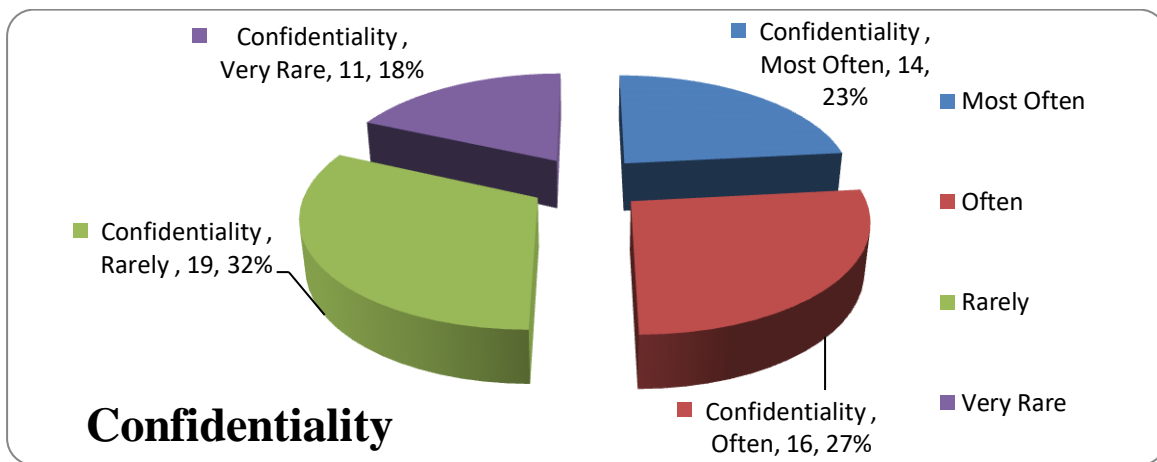


**Figure 9:** *How often do you keep your sources confidential?*
*Source: Field Survey, 2019.*

Fig. 9 presents result from the quest of the study to find out, how often the respondents keep their sources of information in confidence. The result shows that 23% of the respondents keep their sources of information confidential most often, 27% of the respondents often keep sources confidential, 32% rarely keep their sources of information in confidence while18% of the respondents very rare. This means that 50% of the respondents frequently hide their sources of information while 50% rarely keep sources in confidence.

*Identify methods that can be used to curtail the spread of fake news without restricting freedom of expression?*

In this section, the study asked an opened-ended question which sought to gather recommendation towards curtailing the spread of fake news without restricting the freedom of expression. There were little suggestions in this respect. The study collected only 10 responses as follows:

*"There should be social media censorship"*
*"Awareness should be created so as to enlighten people who use the social media to avoid spreading unverified information"*
*"Social media should propose ways of*

*reducing post of unverified information"*
*"I want other social media to copy from twitter in restricting number of text you can post and identification of a verified account"*
*"Authorities should propose laws that will frighten against spreading fake information without clamping on people's right to express their views"*
*"through censorship of the social media"*
*"there should be control on how to register and operate social media handle"*
*"everybody deserve freedom but nobody has freedom to harm others, anybody that spread information that harm others should be prosecuted so that it will serve as lesson to others"*
*"Nigeria Press Council and National Broadcasting Commission should come in as instruments of control and there will be professional censorship without tampering the freedom of expression"*
*"government should vamp up it communication machineries to counter the spread of fake news"*

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Fake news has been a topic of discourse in Nigeria over the years. The discourse has been taking shapes but it is now hotter than it has ever been. This is not unconnected with the fact that it has become more glaring and fast spreading as it is being propelled by social media and even the conventional media. It is also propelled by the elections period as well as numbers of crises in the rounds and corners of the country. It is on these bases that this study was proposed. The study was conducted to address some few research questions. The following are the findings of the study discussed based on the research questions of the study.

### What is rate of the spread of fake news among Nigerians on both social and conventional media?

In order to find out the rate at which fake news spread, the study sought to find out the awareness of the respondents about the concept of fake news. The study found that the majority of the respondents are aware of fake news and thus establish ground for the suitability of the respondents to the study. The study further quest into the media that spread fake news faster and found that social media is the major carrier of fake news while conventional media record least number of fake news. This was obtained from the number of respondents who suggest that they come in contact with fake news mostly on social media than the conventional media.

While measuring the frequency of the spread of fake news, the study found that 7% of the respondent who are active on social media come in contact with fake news in every minute, 20% suggest that they see fake news every hour, 15% come in contact with fake news week on the media they suggest in the previous chart while only 8% suggested that they see fake news in every month. This can be attributed to the fact that the social media which provides free access to users propels the frequency of spread of fake news more than any other media of communication. In connection with this finding, study also found that majority of the respondents contributes in the information sharing system of media cycle. This is because majority of the respondents engage in sharing information their social media platforms. It also suggests that respondents play role in either fuelling or controlling the spread of fake news on the media they use.

The study found that that despite the awareness of fake news among the respondents, there is limited alertness with regard to sensitivity of verifying information before sharing. This further establish that majority of users on social media do not find time to verify information before sharing. It was found that lack of awareness on what spread of unverified information may cause is a major factor in the spread of fake news on social media platforms. This study puts that the users on social media are not

aware of the dangers of their actions on such platforms.

The study also found that politics and crisis suffer more fake news than any other nature. This is why social media become very congested with so much unverified information and fake news during political or elections period. Not just political period but also when crisis spurs in various angles. Fake news becomes subject of discourse because they fuel either of the political tension or crisis margin.

**Do media audience have perception on fake news and abuse of freedom of expression?**

The study found that the respondents who are selected media audience have perceptions towards fake news and its relationship with abuse of freedom of expression. The result contained in Fig. 6 shows the perception of the respondents regarding fake news. 36% of the respondents perceive fake news as dangerous, 27% of the respondents perceive fake news as safe which has no danger, 15% of the respondents perceive and believed that fake news fuels crisis, 7% of the respondents perceive fake news as something that create or increase tension, 3% perceive fake news as normal and it does none of the above while 12% of the respondents perceive fake news as critical and its best explained by all of the above. This means that fake news is still crucial because there are rounds of perceptions that influence its nature and thus its spread.

The study measures how the respondents perceive the fake news as abuse of freedom of expression. It was found that 36.7% of the respondent perceive spread of fake news as abuse of freedom of expression, 45% of the respondents perceive spread of fake news not as abuse of freedom of expression while 18.3% of

the respondents remain undecided. The result indicated that the reason why fake news is still spread is because the social media users do not believe spreading such information is an abuse of freedom they enjoy on such platforms.

**What are the perceptions?**

On the perception of the respondents on why social media users spread fake news, the study found that 28% of the respondent suggest that ignorance of fake news and what it may cause is the major reason people share fake news, 41% of the respondents attributed the spread of fake news to political ambition of some people, 12% of the respondents perceive that people spread fake news to attack personalities of others, 7% of the respondent perceive the reason for the spread of fake news to self-satisfaction, while 12% of the respondents attributed it to all of the above perceptions.

In the finding of the study, 36% of the respondents perceive fake news as dangerous, 27% of the respondents perceive fake news as safe which has no danger, 15% of the respondents perceive and believed that fake news fuels crisis, 7% of the respondents perceive fake news as something that create or increase tension, 3% perceive fake news as normal and it does none of the above while 12% of the respondents perceive fake news as critical and its best explained by all of the above. This means that fake news is still crucial because there are rounds of perceptions that influence its nature and thus its spread.

**What is the effect of fake news on Nigeria's democracy?**

The study found that the respondents know that the spread of fake news has effect on democratic system of government. The result indicated that 27(45%) of the respondents suggested that spreading fake news has effect on smooth operation of democracy while 33(55%) declared that spread of fake news has no effect on democratic system of

government. Based on this, it was found that there is gross misunderstanding or underestimation of what fake news can cause in a society that practice democracy. This is also another reason why spread of fake news is on increase.

In this direction, the study collected qualitative data and its analysis shows that the category of respondents who supported the fact that spread of fake news has effect on democracy suggest that it affects decision making, democracy thrive well with peace and reliable and vibrant communication system, heating politics, create and fuel crisis, tamper with the trust of the people have in the media. The study found that the respondents who disagree suggested that fake news does not have any impact on government. Some of them thought fake news is a fun thing on social media that does not go beyond that while others disregards any relationship it may have with government.

The study measures the extent to which fake news affect democracy. It was found that that 28% of the respondents believe fake news cripples freedom of expression of others, 41% of the respondents believe fake news create unnecessary tension in the polity, 12% of the respondents believe fake news propels disinformation and misinformation which can create public chaos, 7% of the respondents suggest fake news lead to so much censorship over the media while 12% suggest all of the above. The study also found that the respondents have negative perception about the extent to which fake news can affect democracy and democratic system of governance. In a similar direction, the study also found that majority of the respondents recognises the threat of fake news to democracy and thus suggest that democracy cannot thrive well if fake news continue to spread without control.

## CONCLUSION
## Recommendations
- Awareness should be created so as to enlighten people who use the social media to avoid spreading unverified information.
- Social media should propose ways of reducing post of unverified information.
- Other social media platforms should copy from Twitter in restricting number of text user can post and identification of a verified account.
- Authorities should propose laws that will frighten against spreading fake information without clamping on people's right to express their views.
- There should be control on how to register and operate social media handles.
- There should be adequate prosecution for anybody that spread information that harm others so that it will serve as lesson to others.
- Nigeria Press Council and National Broadcasting Commission should come in as instruments of control and there will be professional censorship without tampering the freedom of expression.
- Government should vamp up it communication machineries to counter the spread of fake news.

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