

AUDIENCE PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA FAKE NEWS DURING NIGERIA'S 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN OSUN STATE

Akinola Moses Owolabi

Osun State Broadcasting Corporation, Osogbo, Osun State, Nigeria

Moyosore Alade (PhD)

Communication Department, Redeemer's University, Ede, Osun State, Nigeria

Abstract

The role of social media as an influencer in electoral processes was well pronounced in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election with political parties, candidates and their supporters deploying social media to their own advantages and the disadvantages of their opponents. One core area of its negative deployment was the churning out of fake news across political divides in order to influence voters' decision. The situation became so alarming that it attracted the attention of stakeholders in and lovers of Nigeria's democracy nationally and internationally. A number of studies has been done on fake news and its implications on various aspects of human endeavours in Nigeria and beyond. Many aspects of the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria have also come under the searchlight of researchers. However, the perception of fake news in the election by media audience in the country seems to have been off the radars of researchers. Hence, this study on audience perception of social media fake news during Nigeria's 2023 presidential election. Perception and technological determinism theories were adopted as the framework and survey as research method for the study. Findings showed a significant use of social media fake news meant to influence voters in the election as majority of the respondents were exposed to it and that even when they knew its damaging effects on Nigeria's democracy, the success of their candidates was more important to them than any other consideration. The study recommends the enactment and implementation of laws against social media fake news and proper education of the citizenry on the implications of fake news as a way out of the phenomenon in future presidential elections in Nigeria.

Key words: Social Media, News, Fake News, Elections, Presidential Elections

Introduction

Today, social media has developed into a powerful tool for political campaigning and social interaction (Adisa, 2023). It has persisted in claiming political relevance on a worldwide scale. As explained by Shittu (2019), when compared to traditional media like television, radio, or newspapers, social media has made political engagement simple and cost-effective. Omotolani (2021) noted that it offers more benefits than traditional techniques for planning political events, campaigns, and vote lobbying. Due to this, social media has become a new area of academic study, particularly in the social sciences. Political science is particularly interested in researching the effects of social media on election campaigns.

With time, the amount of false and misleading materials on social media have continue to be on the increase. This showed up during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria (Okoro & Kenneth, 2013). Majority of Nigerians were exposed to a variety of interactive platforms during the presidential elections where a variety of information is exchanged that could have a substantial impact on human behaviour, decision-making, and judgment (CES, 2019). Sadiku, Eze and Musa (2018) noted that false information can easily spread on social media. Afeera (2018) points out that social media users can share content without editorial review or truth checking from a third party. Disinformation and false news situations are growing more frequently worldwide. Freedom House (2023) stresses that online election manipulation and disinformation strategies, including those used in the United States of America and Nigeria specifically, were crucial in eighteen nations' general elections.

Majority of conversations across Nigeria towards the 2023 election conducted on February 25, focused mainly on politics. Sometimes, their arguments are filled with false assertions, fake news, faulty data, and inflated numbers. For instance, The Nation newspaper (2022) reported a case in which a speaker who spoke through a host's account on one of the social media sites noted that the INEC chairman, Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, was reportedly reading the results as written by APC candidate and President-elect, Bola Ahmed Tinubu. The anonymous social media user continued by noting that Professor Mahmood was seen on television rewriting the results that had been presented to him. Without providing any proof to support his claim that the results reported were staged, he asserted they were. Concern was raised across the country in response to the false reports regarding the Nigeria's electoral commission (Hermida & Young, 2023). There were accusations and counter accusations of widespread election fraud used as a weapon by presidential campaign teams to cast doubt on the outcome of the 2023 presidential election. A BBC investigation in January 2023 revealed how political actors secretly paid influencers up to 20 million naira (\$43,000) to spread false information regarding election fraud.

Obviously, the rise of fake news as it is experienced in Nigeria and other countries around the world is as a result of the Brexit vote and Trump's 2016 presidential campaign (Bennett & Livingston, 2018). Wasserman and Madrid-Morales (2019) maintain that in the field of African journalism studies, the use of social media platforms (such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, among others) as vehicles for disseminating political misinformation is rising. However, research into false news also indicates that it may also come from mainstream media (Benkler, Faris & Roberts, 2018; Carlson, 2018; Wahutu, 2019).

Agbese (2017) argues that fake news is the worst weapon in the hands of people who care less about the well-being of society and more about their own political and social goals. If fake news is indeed lousy journalism, it is also the worst tool for spreading propaganda. Majority of Nigerians, according to Tabia (2018), lack the exposure, education, and critical thinking skills needed to recognize fake news. Many also lack the knowledge essential to do fact-checking when confronted with contentious, sensational, or blatantly false articles on social media.

According to Afeera (2018), the border separating the online and offline worlds has become hazier due to social media's influence on everyday life. The amount and quality of communication around the world might be greatly enhanced by online activity. However, it also presents significant difficulties. Social media pays topical issues a lot of attention, whether they are social, national, or political ones. Fake news is now one of the most severe issues Nigerians are dealing with, along with other social media-related matters. The issue of fake news has broader ramifications for public safety, law and order, citizen security, and the democratic standing of many nations. In light of this, the purpose of this study was to investigate how the public perceived fake news on social media during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

It was the game of the survival of the fittest in the political rat race of adoption of the sharing of fake news on social media as campaign strategies by the political parties and their candidates as parts of political intrigues, maneuverings and schemings to edge out one another in the race to Nigeria's seat of power in 2023. Many of the supporters of the presidential candidates took the social media by storm by sending various write-ups, pictures and videos of false attributions and endorsements on Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram and Twitter among others for the purpose of disinformation and misinformation which negatively affected political communication in the run-up to the election. The blatant circulation of lies on social media was so much that it called to question the credibility of the election. BBC's report cited by Abdulkabeer (2023) indicates that politicians and their supporters were paying social media influencers handsomely to spread fake news about perpetration of electoral fraud by others apart from their candidates and parties. There were even instances of those Abdulkabeer refers to as public figures also getting involved in the act. This was corroborated by Factcheck Elections (2023) which took notice of fake news primarily designed to influence voters' decision throughout the federation during the poll. The issue got to ahead when the Coalition of Fact Checkers in Nigeria had to issue a joint statement imploring politicians, their backers and supporters to desist from circulating fake news. Surprisingly, the advice was not heeded. This prompted the leading members of INEC which include the national chairman, Professor Mohammed Yakub; the national commissioner on voter education and publicity, Festus Okoye; Lagos resident electoral commissioner, Mr. Olusegun Agbaje and a host of others warning constantly at various fora against the purveyors of fake news on social media.

Quite a sizeable study has been carried out on the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria. For instance, while Oyewola, Oladimeji, Sowore, Kachalla and Dada (2023) carry out an optimal sentiment analysis of the election with the adoption of "two-usage residual long short-term memory," Kohnert (2023) looks at the fallout of the election and its effects "on the sub-region" and Hassan and Obe (2023) assess "trust and turnout" as defining factors in the polls. Other aspects of the elections have also enjoyed research attentions. However, the perception of the roles of fake news in the voting exercise by media audience seems to have been off the radars of researchers. Hence, this study deals with assessment of audience perception of social media fake news during Nigeria's 2023 presidential elections, using residents of Osun State as a case study.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Find out the level of exposure to social media fake news during the 2023 presidential elections among the residents of Osun State.
2. Identify the implications of social media fake news on the 2023 presidential elections as perceived by residents of Osun State.
3. Determine Osun State residents' disposition to the use of legislation to curb the spread of fake news on social media in the interest of national stability.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of exposure to social media fake news during the 2023 presidential elections among the residents of Osun State?
2. What are the implications of social media fake news on the 2023 presidential elections as perceived by residents of Osun State?
3. What is the disposition of Osun State residents to the use of legislation to curb the spread of fake news on social media in the interest of national security?

Scope of the Study

This study is on audience perception of social media fake news during Nigeria's presidential elections, using residents of Osun State as a case study. However, it focused on six selected local governments chosen across the three senatorial districts of the state.

Literature review

Fake News as a Concept

Fake news on social media, according to Allcott and Gentzkow (2017), is the dissemination of untrue material on social media using journalistic formats. This suggests that the current tendency for fake news cannot be isolated from the growth of the social media ecosystem, which is defined by new communication technologies and the increasing significance of social media.

According to Moore & Tambini (2018), there have numerous recent studies addressing the issue of false news in relation to political campaigning. Ross and Rivers (2018) claim that in earlier media ecologies, the dissemination of dubious material as it is today in our digital media setting was referred to as "propaganda." Adopting another academic definition, (Baym & Jones, 2013) parody is a type of humor that is related to fake news (Baym & Jones, 2013). The misrepresentation of advertising and press releases as news media stories is one of two more operationalisations of fake news that one would want to consider (Nelson & Park, 2015). So also is fabricated stories produced by deliberately altered visual signals (Zubiaga & Ji, 2014).

It is imperative to keep in mind that "misinformation" and "disinformation" are two ideas that are occasionally used interchangeably with the term "fake news." However, the significance that scholars give to these concepts varies. Ross and Rivers (2018) define misinformation as the unintentional dissemination of erroneous information, while disinformation is the deliberate production and dissemination of material that is established to be fantastical. However, Guo and Vargo (2018) contend that misinformation is information that purposefully includes false assertions within its content or context.

According to Kershner, whose views are quoted in Tandoc, Wei Lim, and Ling (2018), fake news is an account that never happened. It is the result of someone's imagination for intentions that could or might not be malicious. Because news is intended to be real rather than based on imagination or opinion, someone noted that the term "fake news" is an oxymoron. Similar thinking is shared by Ojebode (2018), who defines "fake news" as any news item that either fails to accurately depict what actually occurred or recounts events that never occurred.

Social Media defined

Information and communication technologies, ICT, specialists, authors, and social media users have all given their own unique definitions of the term "social media." Social media is defined by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) as a collection of web-based programmes that expand on the conceptual and technical underpinnings of Web 2.0 and permit the production and exchange of user-generated contents. It encompasses web-based and mobile technologies that are employed to transform communication into interactive discourse among people, groups, and communities. Websites like Facebook, Flickr, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp and Youtube are common examples of social media platforms. Since these devices can be used to store and disseminate information, they are referred to as media. Unlike the traditional media outlets such as television and radio, most social media tools permit user interaction, as shown by retweeting on Twitter and commenting options on Facebook.

From a more pragmatic perspective, Sweetser and Lariscy (2018) characterise social media as a read-write Web, in which online users go beyond merely consuming material on the Web to actively contributing to it. One aspect of social media that is mentioned in most definitions is that it relies on user-generated engagement. The ability to engage in user-to-user communication sets social media apart from traditional media, which is characterised by a top-down approach to news distribution (Clark and Aufderheide, 2019).

Shittu (2019) explains social media as a word frequently used to describe new types of media that feature interactive engagement. Ajayi (2015) cited in Shittu (2019) maintained that Social media are essentially Internet-based platforms for people to share and discuss information. Laworld (2021) says it is a group of websites that relies on user interaction and user-generated content. These websites include social networking platforms like LinkedIn, Facebook, or My Space, social bookmarking platforms like Del.icio.us, social news platforms like Digg or Simpy, and other platforms that emphasise user engagement. Meanwhile, according to Capilanou (2019), social media refers to a variety of activities that combine technology, social contact, and the creation of words and images. Social

media is a group of internet resources and technologies that people and organisations can use to meet their information and communication needs more quickly (Axel, 2022).

From these definitions, it could be deduced that the ability for users to choose is another feature of social media that sets it apart from traditional media. Through social media, people have the freedom to access the content they are interested in learning about. Unlike the traditional media, it builds a network of people with similar interests and tastes.

Historicity of fake news during elections in Nigeria and other climes

The circulation of fake news during electioneering in Nigeria did not start with the 2023 presidential election. According to Okon-Ekong and Obioha (2019), in 2007 there were reports that the PDP presidential candidate, Umar Musa Yaradua, had died few days before the election prompting the then president and leader of PDP Olusegun Obasanjo to put a call through to him at a political rally at Ado Ekiti and asked the sickly candidate whether he was indeed alive or dead. Yaradua replied that he was alive to the joy of his party members and supporters, disappointment of those wishing him dead and consternation of apolitical observers. Ojebode (2018) recounts another incident in 2018 in which hackers set up a phony Twitter account in Alhaji Atiku Abubakar's name and thanked a fictitious Nigerian gay community for their support as soon as the candidate collected his party's nomination form for the 2019 presidential election. Two national newspapers reportedly accepted the information and reported it prominently. One of the newspapers used a banner headline that reads “2019: LGBT movement supports Atiku” (Pulse, 2018). Also, the immediate past president who was the APC’s presidential candidate in 2019 presidential poll, Muhammadu Buhari, was widely reported online ahead of that year’s presidential election to have died and even replaced by a lookalike named Jubril allegedly from Sudan. A BBC report in 2018 quoting AFP Fact Check says the “posts promoting the rumours have been viewed more than 500,000 times.”

However, it must be pointed out that fake new phenomenon is not peculiar to Nigeria’s political landscape. Citing Chrysalis Wright who is a member of the United Nations’ Coordination Committee, Lee (2020) explains that towards the 2016 presidential election in the United States of America “foreign entities” from Russia infiltrated American social media space with all sorts of damaging fake news. While corroborating this, Wendling (2018) adds that over one hundred fake news platforms all registered and operating in Veles, Macedonia, latched on to the spreading of fake news on the 2016 American election for economic reasons of having huge traffic via Facebook for advertisement purposes rather than core political reasons. In the 2020 U.S. presidential poll having the incumbent president, Joe Biden and his predecessor, Donald Trump, as the leading candidates, peddling of rumours online created the atmosphere for political unrest.

In Brazil, France 24 details cases of social media misinformation and disinformation during electioneering period. The Brazilian case is a classical study in political fake news phenomenon in the country's 2018 and 2022 presidential elections. The 2018 presidential contests between Jair Bolsonaro and Luiz Inacio Lala da Silva was nearly marred by fake news. Since 2018, Jair Bolsonaro who contested the presidential election that year and in 2022 had adopted social media platforms as the preferred mode of reaching out to his supporters and electorate while branding the conventional media as corrupt. In 2022, his supporters resorted to the use of WhatsApp groups where they spread widely written, pictorial and visual materials which were most times far from the truth. According to the international media outfit, circulation of fake news in 2022 prompted an attempted coup.

There were instances of the spreading of fake news in Philippine before, during and after the conduct of presidential elections. The same can be said of Indonesia where the phenomenon first came to the fore at the time Joko Widodo was running for the office of the country's president in 2014. Monzur and Scott (2014) states that viral social media posts alleged Widodo of being "a Chinese Christian and Communist." This was an attempt to stigmatise him religiously in the core Islamic nation. Other advanced and evolving democracies across the globe have also witnessed at one point or the other as well as in varying degrees and dimensions the peddling of social media fake news for political purposes.

Monzur and Scott (2016) remarks that the impact of social media platforms on electioneering globally is unquantifiable. However, the founder of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, did not believe that the social media platform had the capacity to influence the 2014 American mid-term election in any way. As pointed out by Monzur and Scott, the issue had once attracted the attention of one-time American president, Barak Obama and former German Chancellor, Angela Merkel who both criticized Facebook and other online media for circulating fake news.

Series of steps have been contemplated or taken by governments the world over to curb incidences of social media fake news especially during electioneering period. Angela Merkel once considered a policy in Germany that would compel social media platforms to make known the ranking of their online news. The government of Indonesia had at a point in time closed down social media networks seeing as promoting fake news. In Nigeria, the national assembly in 2019 attempted a legislation that would have criminalised the peddling of falsehood on internet. Going by a media report by Kafeero (2021), Uganda "shut down all social media two days" to its January 14, 2021 presidential election. Another report on the research conducted by the Privacy Protection Company, Surfshack, showed that fifteen African nations have outlawed pre-election usage of social media while twenty-seven have "blocked or heavily restricted social media access over five years" (Fisayo-Bambi and AFP, 2021).

Social Media and Nigeria's 2023 General Elections

Social media has played a crucial role in sustaining Nigeria's democracy. They have specifically been of immense values in the electoral process by serving as key information sources, offering essentially free and sometimes trustworthy information that has led to a more balanced education and opinion formation among the voting

population. The connection between the politician and the social media should therefore be contextualised from the perspective of the politician who wants to win an election, whether by hook or by crook.

Examining the use of social media during the 2023 presidential election reveals a glaring disregard for not only the fundamental rule of journalistic practice by all parties involved, including politicians, media outlets, and their owners, but also a tangible attack on the conduct associated with societal solidarity and harmony. For instance, blatant lies were spread by groups as well as politicians mainly to win major political points. No candidate or party contesting the election was spared in the social media political mudslinging. However, the incumbent Nigeria leader, president Bola Tinubu, seemed to have had more cases of fake news surrounding him than any other towards the 2023 presidential election. At a stage so many fake news flew across social media about his parenthood, place of birth, education, work experience, corrupt nature and above all his health status. He was even rumoured to have been dead. As reported by Adewole (2018) in the Punch Newspaper, Tinubu had to resort to the social media to clear the fog over his health and whether he was dead or alive via a twee

Many have said I have died; others claim I have withdrawn from the Presidential campaign. Well ...Nope. This is the reality: I am healthy and ready to serve Nigerians from Day one.

-The Punch, 2nd October, 2022.

Among materials published or aired on social media pre, during and post 2023 Nigeria's presidential election found to be fake after Fact Checks by TheCable, one of Fact Checks organisations in Nigeria, are listed below:

- A. Preparatory to the election, the social media was agog with reports that Chadians armed with permanent voters' cards had been arrested at one of the country's borders in twelve busses. The post was initially shared by Charles Oputa on his verified Instagram handle. Fact check by TheCable showed that it was false.
- B. Nigeria's ex-military leader and two terms democratically elected president, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was quoted few days to the election on social media to have said that only rigging would deny the Labour Party's presidential candidate from winning the poll. The statement could not have been true because no credible media outfits published or aired it.
- C. There was an audio which went viral online allegedly about a conversation between the PDP's presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar, his running mate, Emmanuel Okowa and the director-general of their campaign organization, Aminu Tambuwal, on how they intend to rig the presidential election. The audio was eventually found to be far from real.
- D. Another fake news that trended online was that the chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, Professor Mahmood Yakub, visited the Lagos residence of the APC's candidate, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, on the day of the election. The origin of the allegation was simultaneously traced to a PDP top brash in Lagos, Chief Olabode George and the Labour Party's vice-presidential candidate, Datti Baba Ahmed. The allegation was discovered to be frivolous.

- E. It was widely circulated on the social media that the former president, Olusegun Obasanjo, appeared at the Abuja collation centre of INEC with the original result sheet of the 2023 presidential election. This was later found to be false.
- F. There was another audio conversation between Obasanjo, Donald Duke and Charles Oputa urging youths in the country to embark on protest against the poll's result declaring Tinubu as winner. The audio was found to have been a doctored one.
- G. Shortly after the declaration of Bola Ahmed Tinubu as winner of the 2023 Nigeria's presidential election, a statement said to have emanated from the European Union calling the credibility of the poll to question was widely circulated online. However, EU's spokesperson in Nigeria, Agnes Doka, declared the news as fake.
- H. Another video that went viral showed people being instructed on how to vote for a specific party. Strong regional and religious connotations were present in both sets of videos, which were widely disseminated on Twitter and WhatsApp groups. Vanguard (2023) noted that one of those who uploaded the video of people being instructed on how to thumb print was a well-known politician in Nigeria. It appears that the movie depicts voter education initiatives carried out by the opposition Labour Party in some regions of Nigeria (Shittu & Shittu, 2023). However, it has been noted that the ballots depicted in at least one of these popular videos were fake. They were plainly labeled "specimen" and look very different from the typical ballots used by the electoral commission (The Nation, 2023).

There were countless other instances of fake news churned out on various social media platforms most especially as far as the results of the presidential election were concerned as individuals, groups, social media Influencers and politicians having thousands of followers disseminated fraudulent and inaccurate results which expectedly called the credibility of the election to question.

Empirical Review

Fake news and misinformation in Nigeria were investigated by Sadiku, Eze, and Musa (2018). They clarified that false information is purposefully spread as fake news, which is a form of propaganda. Journals, periodicals, mainstream media, and social media are the primary channels for disseminating this erroneous information. The study, which used a quantitative approach and a survey research methodology, was conducted among educated individuals in Agbor Community of Delta State. The study discovered that false news items can be spread by social media, email, or chat message, among others. Even though it is not a recent phenomenon, spreading misleading information has become profitable in today's world. Therefore, it came to the conclusion that there is a growing risk to civilisations all over the world from the quick spread of online misinformation.

Afeera (2018) also conducted a study on fake news, disinformation and political process in Nigeria. Fake news and misinformation, he noted, have emerged as one of the most significant issues facing Nigerians as a people and Nigeria as a nation. A larger range of issues, including law and order, citizen safety and security, and the nation's democratic credentials, are being affected by the fake news phenomena. He came to the conclusion that the most pressing issue is how to effectively combat fake news.

More so, Tandoc, Wei and Ling (2018) wrote on defining fake news. They noted that recent changes in Nigerian media landscape generate fresh worries about the susceptibility of democratic nations to fake news. The study discovered that the speed at which information spreads through the media in modern society, particularly through social media platforms, seriously helps fake news to travail as a type of misinformation.

Theoretical Framework

For this study, perception theory and technological determinism theories were deemed adequate and pertinent.

Perception Theory

Ikpegbu, Ndinojuo, Gbeneka, Diegbegha, and Onyekasor (2017) point out that it is difficult to identify a single person as the creator of perception theory because other individuals, including Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1944) and Allport and Postman (1945), contributed to its development. Folarin (2002) claims that research into perception actually resulted in the identification of the selection process. Each of us has a tendency to perceive mass communication signals and then decipher them in the light of our current attitudes, wants, and recollections.

According to the theory of perception, viewers of mass media actively interpret and incorporate media messages into their daily lives. As opposed to the image of a passive audience that had been propagated by ideas like the "magic bullet," "hypodermic needle," and "stimulus-response theories," perception theory presents a more active, engaged audience. The theory's antecedents are studies in areas including selective exposure, attention, perception, and retention. People seek for information that serves their own interests, affirms their views, and bolsters their ego while avoiding that which is incongruent with their inclination and undermines their perception of themselves, according to the theory of selective exposure (Folarin, 2002).

Selective attention proposes that people will only pay attention to messages that are also consistent with their beliefs, selectively perceive messages from the media, and selectively retain messages that are supportive of their self-image rather than messages that will lead to an imbalance in their self-image (Folarin, 2002).

This theory is in line with this study as some Nigerians are inclined to swallow any news on social media the same way they receive it while others may turn away from social media news if it does not align with what they already know about the topics or situations being covered.

Technological Determinism Theory

The study is also based on the interpretations of technological determinism, which claimed that when transition from one technological age to another occurs (Tribal- Literate- Print- Electronic), media technology has an impact on how each member of a society thinks, feels, and behaves as well as how society functions as a whole. This means that the messages we receive through the existing technology that is accessible are responsible for how we learn, feel, and think. We could only listen to the radio and hone our hearing skills. While watching television, on the other hand, we use both of our senses. Then, people transfer those developed senses into everyday lives and want to use them again. The medium is then our message. Humans do not have much free will at all. Whatever society

as a whole is using to communicate, they too will use to communicate. So that they may send and receive communications like everyone else, they will adapt to the media they are utilising.

According to Thorstein Veblen, an American sociologist who lived from 1857 to 1929, technology influences how a contemporary society develops its social structure and cultural values. The German philosopher and economist Karl Marx is credited with developing technological determinism in a significant way (Adio, 2019). Marx's theoretical framework is based on the notion that the development of productive technology and subsequent technological change have the greatest impact on how social relations are organised, and that social interactions and cultural norms ultimately revolve around the technological and economic foundation of a society. The idea that technology is a major social force that governs behaviour has been characterised as technological determinism (Blumberg, 2001). Technology is viewed as the fundamental condition underpinning the pattern of social organisation, and technological determinists believe that specific technological developments, communication technologies, or media, or more broadly, technology in general, are the main antecedent causes of change in society (Chandler, 2015).

Methodology

In this study, survey research was used as the research method, and a quantitative research design was adopted. Quantitative research focuses on collecting numerical data and using it to understand a specific event or generalise it across groups of individuals. Nwodu (2006) explains that survey is a research technique that focuses on representatives. This approach is required since it tends to deal with a sizable population, necessitates systematic data collecting, and addresses attitudes toward decision-making.

Population

Population, according to Oloyede and Adejare (2012), is a group of things from which we want to draw conclusions. To Sadiku, Eze and Musa (2018), a research population is typically a sizable group of people or things that serve as the principal subject of a scientific inquiry. The population of this study are the residents of Ifedayo, Osogbo, Ede South, Ola-Oluwa, Atakumosa West and Ife Central Local Governments. The population figures of the areas, according to City Population (2022), are shown in the table below:

Table 1: showing the population of the selected local governments

Local government	Population
Ifedayo	48,700
Osogbo	201,900
Ede South	98,000
Ola-Oluwa	99,000
Atakumosa West	88,700
Ife Central	217,100
Total	753,400

Source: City Population (2022)

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A sample is a subset of the population that was chosen at random and that possesses the traits of the complete population. The findings and interpretations drawn from the sampled data are applied to the entire population (Singleton & Straits, 2009). A sample or subset of the population was employed to represent the full population because it is never practical to collect data from the entire population of interest. Because of this, a sample is required taking into account the constraints of time frame, the resources at hand, and the population being studied.

Taro Yamane model is used to determine the sample size and it is shown as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

n = Sample

N = Population size under study

1 = Unit in value (always constant)

e = Estimated standard error margin of 0.05

$$\begin{aligned} n &= \frac{753,400}{1 + 753,400(0.05)^2} \\ &= \frac{753,400}{1 + 753,400(0.0025)} \\ &= \frac{753,400}{1 + 1883.5} \\ &= \frac{753,400}{1884.5} \end{aligned}$$

n = 399.7 approximately 400.

Therefore, n = 400

In order to gather data that can be utilised to draw conclusions about a much greater number of cases, Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) defined sampling as the act of choosing a small number of cases. This implies that sampling refers to the selecting procedure, whereas sample refers to the number of respondents who will be chosen to reflect the overall population of the study. The multi-stage sampling technique was used in this study. As explained by Shittu (2022), multistage sampling involves breaking down the population into lesser and lesser groups in order to create a sample over the course of multiple steps. The researcher maintained that in order to produce a sample that is less expensive and time-consuming to collect data from, sampling can benefit from hierarchical classifications (e.g., from state to city to neighborhood).

In this study, the researcher firstly employed stratified sampling technique in dividing Osun State to the existing senatorial districts. However, using purposive sampling approach in the second stage, six local governments were selected for the study with two coming from each of the senatorial districts. The six chosen council areas took into cognisance the thirty local governments which are distributed ten per senatorial district and one each per the administrative zones. From Osun Central Senatorial District, Ifedayo Local Government was picked from Ikirun zone and Osogbo Local Government from Osogbo zone; Ede South Local Government from Ede zone and Ola-Oluwa Local Government from Iwo zone were chosen from Osun West Senatorial District while Atakunmosa West Local Government from Ilesa zone and Ife Central Local Government from Ife zone were selected from Osun East

Senatorial District. The selection also took cognisance of the dichotomy between rural and urban council areas. While Ifedayo, Ola-Oluwa and Atakunmosa West represented rural council areas, Osogbo, Ede and Ife central stood for urban council areas. This is to ensure adequate and balanced representation of the perception of the audience from the two divides.

Instrumentation/Reliability/Data Gathering/Method of Data Analysis

According to Oyewole and Olorede (2014), the type of instrument utilised for a research project relies on the nature of facts and information to be collected as well as the research methodology used. Questionnaires were the instrument employed in this study's data collection. To Roopa and Rani (2014), questionnaire is merely a set of printed or mimeographed questions that a respondent fills out for the purpose of providing his opinion. Since the purpose of this study was to collect quantitative data, the use of a questionnaire is justifiable since it allows for the collection of quantitative data in a regular manner, leading to results that are internally consistent and coherent for analysis (Roopa & Rani, 2014). The administered questionnaire had two sections: Section A dealt with the demographic information of respondents, and Section B had questions intended to address the study's research issues. In an effort to guarantee that all copies of the questionnaires were correctly filled out and returned, the researcher delivered the instrument personally and face-to-face. Additionally, SPSS (version 23) was employed to process the quantitative data collected through the use of a questionnaire for presentation, interpretation, and discussion.

Data Presentation and Analysis

In carrying out the study, 400 residents of Ifedayo, Osogbo, Ede South, Ola-Oluwa, Atakunmosa West and Ife Central Local Governments were selected as respondents. Four hundred (400) copies of questionnaires were distributed but three hundred and eighty-four (384) were retrieved representing 96%. The data are presented below:

Table 2: Demographic data of respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Male	219	57%	57%
Female	165	43%	100.0%
Total	384	100.0%	
Age			
18-25 years	96	25%	25%
26-35 years	92	23.9%	48.9%
36-45 years	106	27.6%	76.5%
46 years and above	89	23.5%	100.0%
Total	384	100.0%	
Educational Qualification			
O'Level	46	11.9%	11.9%
ND/NCE	111	28.9%	40.8%
HND/B.Sc/B.A/B.L	144	37.5%	78.3%
M.Sc/M.A/M.Ed	54	14%	92.3%
Ph.D	11	2.8%	95.1%
Other	18	4.9%	100.0%

Total 384 100.0%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 2 presents the demographic information (gender, age, and educational qualification) of respondents in the study. It revealed that 219 respondents representing 57% were male while 165 respondents representing 43% were female. This shows that there were more male among the respondents than their female counterpart. Also, 96 respondents representing 25% were between the ages of 18-25 years, 92 respondents representing 23.9% were between the ages of 26-35 years, 106 respondents representing 27.6% were between the ages of 36-45 years while 89 respondents representing 23.5% were 46 years and above. This finding implies that most of the respondents were adults. More so, the data shown in the table also revealed that 46 respondents representing 11.9% were o'level holders, 111 respondents representing 28.9% were ND/NCE holders, 144 respondents representing 37.5% were HND/B.Sc/B.A/B.L holders, 54 respondents representing 14% were M.Sc/M.A/M.Ed just as 11 2.8% were Ph.D holders while 18 M.Sc/M.A/M.Ed 4.9% were holders of other degree.

Table 3: Respondents' level of exposure to fake news on social media during 2023 presidential election

Response	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid High	179	46.5%	46.5%
Moderate	171	44.5%	91%
Low	34	9%	100.0
Total	384	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2023

As shown in table 3 above, most of the respondents were exposed to fake news on social media during the 2023 presidential elections as 179 respondents representing 46.5% said they were highly aware of it, 171 respondents representing 44.5% said they were moderately aware of fake news and 34% representing 9% submitted that they lowly exposed to fake news on social media during the 2023 presidential elections.

Table 4: Social media platforms through which respondents were exposed to fake news during 2023 presidential election

Response	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Facebook	79	20.5%	17.9%
Twitter	110	28.6%	49.1%
Instagram	57	14.8%	63.9%
Tik Tok	41	10.6%	74.5%
WhatsApp	47	12.2%	86.7%
YouTube	29	7.5%	94%
Others	21	5.8%	100.0
Total	384	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 4 shows the social media platforms through which the respondents were exposed to fake news during the 2023 presidential election. As such, highest number of the respondents (28.6%) was exposed to fake news during the 2023 presidential election through the twitter. This is followed by those that were exposed to it through facebook with 20.5.9%. 14.8% of the respondents said they were exposed to fake news during the 2023 presidential election through instagram, 12.2% said through WhatsApp, 10.6% of the respondents said through Tik Tok, 7.5% said through YouTube while 5.8% said through other channels. This implies that twitter is the main platform through which fake news were disseminated during the election.

Table 5: Nature of Social Media fake news respondents were exposed to during 2023 Presidential Election

Response	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Political contents with half truths	119	30.9%	30.9%
Exaggeration of facts and figures	44	11.4%	42.3%
Misleading Information	68	17.7%	60%
Misleading headline	54	14%	74%
Doctored Photograph and videos	99	26%	100.0%
Total	384	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 5 presents the nature of social media fake news that the respondents were exposed to during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. It revealed that 119 respondents representing 30.9% were exposed to political contents with half truths, 44 respondents representing 11.4% said they were exposed to exaggeration of facts and figures, 68 respondents representing 17.7% said they were exposed to misleading information, 54 respondents representing 14% said they were exposed to misleading information while 99 respondents representing 26% said they were exposed to doctored photograph and videos. This shows that there were several kinds of social media fake news that the respondents often come across during the 2023 presidential election.

Table 6: Implications of social media fake news on the 2023 presidential elections as perceived by residents of Osun State?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Breakdown of law and order	59	15.3%	15.3%
Misled the public	141	36.7%	52%
Enhanced political participation	33	8.5%	60.5%
Promoted political apathy	59	15.3%	75.8%
Instigated social actions	81	21%	96.8%
Led to civil unrest	11	3.2%	100.0
Total	384	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 6 sought to provide response to research question 2 of the study which borders on implications of social media fake news on the 2023 presidential elections as perceived by residents of Osun State. In the table, it was found that 59 respondents (15.3%) opined that the implication of social media fake news on the 2023 presidential elections is breakdown of law and order, 141 respondents (36.7%) said it misled the public, 33 respondents (8.5%) said it enhanced political participation, 59 respondents (15.3%) said it promoted political apathy, 81 respondents

were of the opinion that it instigated social actions while 11 respondents (3.2%) said it led to civil unrest. This finding shows that the respondents were of the opinion that the spreading of fake news on social media had implications on the 2023 presidential election.

Table 7: Respondents perception on the use of legislation to curb the spread of social media fake news during elections

Response	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid It is a good idea	133	34.6%	34.6%
I will lead to abuse of power	104	27%	61.6%
It will increase interest in politics	43	11.1%	72.7%
It will enable ruling parties to propagate their ideologies alone	88	22.9%	95.6%
It will increase political apathy	16	4.4%	100.0
Total	384	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 7 deals with the use of legislation to curb the spread of social media fake news during elections in Nigeria. It was discovered that 133 respondents representing 34.6% said the use of legislation to curb the spread of social media fake news during elections in Nigeria is a good idea, 104 respondents representing 27% said it will lead to abuse of power, 43 respondents representing 11.1% said it will increase interest in politics while 16 respondents representing 4.4% said it will increase political apathy. Also, 88 respondents representing 22.9% said it will enable ruling parties to propagate their ideologies alone. This implies that majority of the respondents thought that using legislations to curb the spread of social media fake news during elections in Nigeria will posed adverse effect on the nation’s democratic practice as a substantial amount of the respondents said it will enable ruling parties to propagate their ideologies alone while some others said it lead to abuse of power.

Table 8: Respondents disposition on other means in which the spread of fake news on social media can be eradicated

Response	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Promote media literacy	129	17.9%	17.9%
Eradicate citizen journalism in Nigeria	91	23.6%	41.5%
Regulation of social media	33	8.5%	50%
Place restrictions on erring bloggers	119	30.9%	80.9%
Establish laws			
Total	384	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2023

In ascertaining the disposition of Osun State residents on other means in which social media fake news could be curbed in the interest of national security, table 8 shows that 129 respondents representing 17.9% said media literacy should be promoted, 91 respondents representing 23.6% said citizen journalism should be eradicated in Nigeria, 33 respondents representing 8.5% said social media should be regulated, while 119 respondents representing 30.9%

were of the opinion that the means in which spread of social media fake news could be curbed during elections in Nigeria is by placing restrictions on erring bloggers and as well establish laws that will regulate them.

Discussion of findings

This study is on audience perception of social media fake news during Nigeria's presidential elections, using residents of Osun State as a case study to determine the level of exposure to social media fake news during the 2023 presidential election. As revealed in table 3 of the study, most of the respondents (46.5%) were highly exposed to social media fake news during the 2023 presidential election as a little below (44.5%) were moderately exposed to fake news on social media during the 2023 presidential elections. This finding is in line with the submission of Sadiku, Eze and Musa (2018) which revealed that most social media users were exposed to social media fake news to a high extent. Further examination of the level of exposure of the respondents to social media fake news during the 2023 presidential election shows the social media platforms through which the respondents were exposed to it. In finding out this, an average number of the respondents (28.6%) were exposed to fake news during the 2023 presidential election through twitter. This again backed the finding of Afeera (2018) which noted that twitter is the main platform through which fake news is always disseminated especially about politics during elections in Nigeria. Uzuegbunam (2017) adds that in the age of social media, fake news has become both a thing news media and society celebrate and perpetuate. However, 20.5% of the respondents were exposed to social media fake news during election through facebook, 14.8% of the respondents were exposed to fake news during the 2023 presidential election through instagram, 12.2% were exposed through WhatsApp, 10.6% of the respondents said through Tik Tok, 7.5% said through YouTube while 6% said through other channels. With this finding we can deduce that twitter is the main platform through which fake news were disseminated during the election. This may be as a result of its high level of usage amongst youths. Furthermore, to ascertain the nature of social media fake news that the respondents were exposed to during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria, it was found that 30.9% of the respondents were exposed to political contents with half truths, 11.4% were exposed to exaggeration of facts and figures, 17.7% were exposed to misleading information, 14% were exposed to misleading information while 26% were exposed to doctored photograph and videos. This again shows that there are several kinds of social media fake news that the respondents often come across during the 2023 presidential election. This finding is in line with that of Uzuegbunam (2017) which revealed that exaggeration of facts and figures, misleading information and doctored photographs and videos were the common social media fake news that the respondents often come across.

On the second research question which sought to identify the implications of social media fake news on the 2023 presidential elections as perceived by residents of Osun State, it was found that 36.7% of the respondents opined that it misled the public. More so, 15.3% of the respondents opined that the implication of social media fake news on the 2023 presidential elections is breakdown of law and order, as 15.3% others said it promoted political apathy. 8.5% said it enhanced political participation, 21% respondents were of the opinion that it instigated social actions

while 3.2% said it led to civil unrest. This finding shows that the respondents were of the opinion that the spreading of fake news on social media has implications on the 2023 presidential election. Tandoc, Wei and Ling (2018) which describe fake news as a form of misinformation in today's media ecosystem, especially across social media platforms, which individuals rely upon heavily on to shape their beliefs, which are in turn extremely difficult to correct or change.

On the respondents' perception on the use of legislation to curb the spread of social media fake news during elections in Nigeria, it was discovered that 34.6% of the respondents said the use of legislation to curb the spread of social media fake news during elections in Nigeria is a good idea, 27% said it will lead to abuse of power, 11.1% said it will increase interest in politics while 4.4% said it will increase political apathy. Also, 22.9% said it will enable ruling parties to propagate their ideologies alone. This implies that majority of the respondents thought that using legislations to curb the spread of social media fake news during elections in Nigeria will posed adverse effects on the nation's democratic practice as a sizeable number of the respondents said it will enable ruling parties to propagate their ideologies alone while some others said it lead to abuse of power.

In ascertaining the disposition of Osun State residents on other means through which social media fake news could be curbed in the interest of national security, 17.9% said media literacy should be promoted, 23.6% said citizen journalism should be eradicated in Nigeria, 8.5% said social media should be regulated, while 30.9% were of the opinion that the means in which the spread of social media fake news could be curbed during elections in Nigeria is by placing restrictions on erring bloggers as well as enacting laws that will regulate them.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Leaning on the findings of this study, it can be deduced that the significant use of social media fake news in influencing the choice of candidates among electorates during the 2023 general elections was noticed. This could be caused by three main factors: the propensity of Nigerian election stakeholders to adopt the global trends in the use of social media as a tool for political mobilisation; the propensity of Nigerian politicians and political parties to take advantage of the opportunities provided by social media to reach and engage their constituents and voters through manufactured and false information; and finally, the propensity to use the social media tools to enhance the chances of achieving their political ambition without taking into cognisance the effects that it will have on the sustenance of democratic culture in the society.

This study has really demonstrated that social media platforms are a universal means for electorate to obtain political information, and that they have provided them with an interactive forum where they may connect either directly or indirectly with political actors in a nation. From the responses, it is pertinent to note that social media fake news is widely used during the 2023 election season. In the meantime, the respondents pointed out that social media fake news has various implications for the 2023 presidential election. Even though the majority of respondents was aware of the damaging effects fake news has on Nigeria's democracy and overall stability, winning the support of

the populace is a serious challenge when trying to use legislation to stop the spread of false information on social media. In line with the findings and conclusion of this study, the following are hereby recommended:

1. In order for more Nigerians to always be suspicious about any news item they come across on social media, civil society and human rights organisations should work to raise awareness of the prevalence of false news on social media.
2. Nigerians should establish trustworthy methods for verifying social media news in order to recognise fake news when they see it. People can always verify social media news from the mainstream media.
3. To gain the trust of the populace on important topics like the problem of fake news on social media, the Nigerian government should lead with transparency and sincerity.
4. Politicians should ensure that the media are well used to promote their image in a positive mode rather than using it to tarnish the image of other persons.

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