FAKE NEWS AND THE SAFETY OF INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM

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and

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of fake news on the safety of journalism, focusing on the experiences of independent journalists. The main objective of this study was to explore how fake news endangers journalists and to identify measures that can be taken to mitigate these risks. The theoretical framework employed included Agenda-Setting Theory and Framing Theory, which provided insights into the dynamics of media content and public perception. The study relied on library research, reviewing existing literature on the subject, with secondary data sources comprising journal articles, books, online resources, reports, and empirical studies. The discussions revealed that fake news poses multidimensional challenges to journalism in Nigeria, including the erosion of public trust, the spread of misinformation, and increased risks of violence and harassment against journalists. The study highlighted that social media proliferation, lack of fact-checking, and political and economic interests are key enablers of fake news. It was also found that fake news has severe implications for democracy, potentially undermining democratic processes and national security. In conclusion, the study emphasised the need for robust fact-checking initiatives, enhanced media literacy programmes, and the establishment of regulatory frameworks to curb the spread of fake news. Support for independent media was also recommended to ensure the continuation of fact-based journalism in a challenging media landscape.

Introduction

In recent years, the proliferation of fake news has emerged as a significant challenge to the practice of journalism, profoundly affecting both the credibility and safety of independent journalists. As the digital landscape evolves, the spread of false information has intensified, posing severe threats to the public's understanding of events and the well-being of those responsible for reporting the truth. Independent journalists, who frequently operate without the institutional protections available to those in larger media organisations, are particularly vulnerable to the dangers associated with fake news (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018).

The phenomenon of fake news is not entirely new; however, its impact has been magnified in the digital age, where information can be rapidly disseminated across multiple platforms with minimal verification. The term itself gained widespread attention during the 2016 United States presidential election, where it was used to describe a range of misleading or entirely fabricated stories that influenced public opinion (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). The consequences of fake news are far-reaching, undermining public trust in media institutions, fuelling misinformation, and creating an environment of uncertainty where discerning the

truth becomes increasingly difficult. For independent journalists, the rise of fake news represents both a professional hazard and a personal threat, as they are often targeted for their efforts to expose falsehoods or report on contentious issues (Tandoc, Lim, & Ling, 2018).

The relationship between fake news and the safety of journalists is complex and multifaceted. Journalists are increasingly at risk of physical harm, harassment, and legal repercussions as they navigate the treacherous terrain of misinformation. Their credibility and professional integrity are under constant scrutiny, as the line between factual reporting and fabricated content blurs in the eyes of the public (Posetti & Storm, 2018). This dynamic is particularly challenging for independent journalists, who may lack the resources and support systems available to their counterparts in established media outlets. Consequently, they are more susceptible to the dangers posed by fake news, both in terms of their physical safety and their ability to maintain the trust of their audience (Farkas & Schou, 2018).

The experience of independent journalists in the age of fake news underscores the urgent need for a comprehensive examination of the strategies and protections necessary to safeguard their work and well-being. This study aims to explore the impact of fake news on the safety of independent journalists, drawing on real-world experiences to highlight the challenges they face and the measures that can be taken to mitigate these risks. By examining the intersection of fake news and journalistic safety, this study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on media integrity and the vital role of independent journalism in upholding democratic values.

Statement of the Problem

The rise of fake news has significantly increased the risks faced by independent journalists, who, lacking the institutional backing of larger media organisations, are particularly vulnerable to threats such as harassment, legal challenges, and physical violence (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). This pervasive misinformation has eroded public trust in the media, complicating the efforts of independent journalists to maintain credibility and report the truth amidst a deluge of false information. Without adequate resources or support, these journalists are not only at greater risk of harm but also face the daunting task of rebuilding public trust in their work. This study aims to explore the impact of fake news on the safety and professional standing of independent journalists and to propose strategies for mitigating these risks.

Theoretic Framework

The Agenda-Setting Theory and Framing Theory provided a foundational understanding of the relationship between fake news and the safety of journalism. The Agenda-Setting Theory, introduced by McCombs and Shaw (1972), posits that media significantly influences the public agenda by highlighting certain issues while downplaying others. In the context of fake news, this theory suggests that the prominence of false information can shape public perception, leading to a distorted understanding of reality. Independent journalists, who often work to counteract such misinformation, may face increased scrutiny, harassment, or even violence as they challenge the prevailing narratives set by more prominent media outlets or social media platforms.

Framing Theory, as articulated by Goffman (1974), explores how media frames information to influence audience interpretation. In the case of fake news, misleading frames can lead to public mistrust in legitimate journalism. Independent journalists, striving to present accurate information, must navigate the risks associated with re-framing the narrative to counteract these misleading frames. The theory highlights the importance of understanding power dynamics in news presentation and how these dynamics can impact the safety and credibility of independent journalists as they work to correct misinformation.

Review of Related Literature

Fake news refers to the intentional creation and distribution of false or misleading information presented as legitimate news, often aimed at deceiving or manipulating public opinion. The rise of digital and social media platforms has amplified the spread of such content, which includes fabricated stories, misleading headlines, and manipulated images or videos. This phenomenon has significant implications for journalism, as it undermines the credibility of legitimate news sources and blurs the distinction between fact and fiction, making it increasingly challenging for the public to make informed decisions (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

The pervasive nature of fake news is particularly concerning in democratic societies, where a well-informed public is crucial for the functioning of the political system. Independent journalists, who rely heavily on their credibility, are especially vulnerable to the detrimental effects of fake news, as distinguishing their work from false information becomes more difficult (Tandoc, Lim, & Ling, 2018). Various strategies, such as fact-checking, media literacy education, and regulatory measures, have been proposed to combat the spread of fake news. However, these solutions face challenges, particularly when they require the cooperation of social media platforms and governments, which may have conflicting interests.

For independent journalists, addressing fake news is not only a professional duty but also a matter of personal safety, as their efforts to expose falsehoods can provoke backlash from those who benefit from misinformation (Pennycook & Rand, 2018).

Safety in journalism refers to the protection of journalists from physical harm, harassment, and legal threats as they perform their duties, a concern that has intensified with the rise of fake news. Traditionally, journalists faced risks primarily in conflict zones or under authoritarian regimes, but the digital age has introduced new threats, including online harassment, doxxing, and cyber-attacks. Independent journalists, lacking the institutional support of larger media organisations, are particularly vulnerable to these dangers, as they often work without the resources necessary to protect themselves from such risks (Posetti & Storm, 2018). The spread of fake news further exacerbates these threats, as journalists who expose misinformation may become targets of violence or harassment by those seeking to suppress the truth (UNESCO, 2019).

Efforts to enhance journalist safety have included the creation of press freedom organisations, the development of safety protocols, and the provision of digital security training. However, these measures frequently fall short for independent journalists, who may not have access to the same level of support as their peers in larger media outlets. The evolving concept of safety in journalism, therefore, demands a multifaceted approach that addresses both traditional and emerging threats, ensuring that all journalists, regardless of their affiliation, can work without fear of retribution (RSF, 2020).

Journalism plays a critical role in democratic societies by gathering, assessing, and presenting news and information to the public, thereby enabling informed decision-making. Guided by ethical standards that emphasise accuracy, fairness, and accountability, journalism acts as a watchdog, holding those in power accountable and providing a platform for public discourse. However, the rise of fake news has significantly challenged these standards, undermining the credibility of legitimate journalism and complicating journalists' roles. Independent journalists, in particular, face unique challenges in maintaining these standards amidst the widespread misinformation that pervades the media landscape (Schudson, 2018; Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018).

In response to the challenges posed by fake news, journalists have adopted new strategies, including fact-checking tools, collaboration with peers, and media literacy programmes aimed at educating the public about the dangers of misinformation. Independent journalists have been especially proactive in these efforts, leading initiatives to expose falsehoods and advocate for greater transparency in the media. Despite the obstacles,

journalism remains a vital component of democratic society, essential for maintaining public trust and ensuring accountability, even in an era increasingly dominated by fake news (Silverman, 2017; Tsegyu & Garba, 2024).

The intersection of fake news and the safety of journalism has been the subject of extensive debate and analysis in recent years. Scholars and practitioners alike have explored the various dimensions of this issue, with a particular focus on the impact of fake news on the credibility and safety of independent journalists. One of the key arguments in the literature is that the rise of fake news has significantly eroded public trust in the media, making it more difficult for journalists to carry out their work effectively. This erosion of trust is particularly damaging to independent journalists, who often rely on their credibility to attract and maintain an audience (Farkas & Schou, 2018).

Another critical issue explored in the literature is the role of social media platforms in the spread of fake news. Social media has been identified as a major conduit for the dissemination of false information, with algorithms designed to prioritise engagement often amplifying sensationalist and misleading content. This has serious implications for the safety of journalists, as those who attempt to correct misinformation or report on contentious issues may become targets of online harassment or even physical violence. Independent journalists, who often lack the resources to protect themselves from such attacks, are particularly vulnerable to these risks (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019).

The literature also highlights the importance of media literacy in combating the spread of fake news and protecting the safety of journalists. Media literacy programmes aimed at educating the public about the dangers of fake news and the importance of critical thinking have been proposed as a solution to the problem of misinformation. These programmes are seen as essential for rebuilding public trust in the media and ensuring that journalists can continue to operate safely in an increasingly hostile environment. Independent journalists, who often engage directly with their audiences, are well-positioned to play a leading role in these efforts, using their platforms to promote media literacy and counteract the spread of fake news (Carlson, 2020; Tsegyu & Garba, 2024).

In addition to media literacy, the literature suggests that regulatory measures may be necessary to address the threat of fake news and protect the safety of journalists. Some scholars have argued that social media platforms should be held accountable for the spread of misinformation and that governments should implement stricter regulations to prevent the dissemination of fake news. However, these proposals are not without controversy, as they raise concerns about censorship and the potential for abuse by authoritarian regimes.

Independent journalists, who often operate in environments where press freedom is already under threat, may be particularly wary of such measures, as they could further limit their ability to report freely and safely (Napoli, 2018).

The literature also explores the psychological impact of fake news on journalists, particularly independent journalists who may lack the support systems available to their counterparts in larger media organisations. The constant exposure to misinformation, coupled with the risks associated with reporting on contentious issues, can take a significant toll on the mental health of journalists. This issue is further exacerbated by the increasing prevalence of online harassment and threats, which can create a climate of fear and intimidation for those working to expose the truth. Independent journalists, who often work alone or in small teams, may be particularly vulnerable to these pressures, highlighting the need for greater support and resources to protect their mental well-being (Holton, Coddington, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2018).

Thus, the literature underscores the urgent need for a multifaceted approach to addressing the challenges posed by fake news to the safety of journalism. This approach must include efforts to combat the spread of misinformation through media literacy and regulatory measures, as well as initiatives to protect the physical and mental well-being of journalists. Independent journalists, who play a critical role in exposing fake news and holding those in power accountable, must be at the forefront of these efforts, with the support of both the public and the broader journalistic community. By addressing the issue of fake news and its impact on the safety of journalism, we can work towards a media environment that is both credible and secure, ensuring that journalists can continue to fulfill their vital role in society.

Several studies and researchers have looked at fake news and its impact on contemporary society. In fact, since the advancement in technologies and their adoption including social media proliferation, there has been an increase in studies relating to fake news. A study conducted by Ciboh and Ugondo (2024) was specifically focused on gauging the attitudes and perceptions of journalists on the concepts of media, fake news and Nigeria's political stability. Relying on the survey with the adoption of a structured questionnaire to elicit data on the perceptions and attitudes of journalists in Nigeria, findings of the study revealed that fakes news is made manifest in scoops, political speeches, sensationalism, unverified reports, and false information. Furthermore, it showed in findings that fake news posed certain challenges to journalist as it affects credibility of news medium, journalists' reputation, and also disorganises society. It is instructive to note that a disorganised society also poses threat to journalists' safety as much as a lack of reputation.

Farkas (2023) also conducted a study with a focus on metajournalistsic discourse on fake news. The study relied on qualitative data from in-depth interviews of practitioners. Accordingly, findings of the study revealed that fake news represents an alien and new threat to journalism. Furthermore, study also showed that fake new posed as external danger from which journalists attempt to protect democracy. The menace is said to challenge the traditional journalistic models of business. The issues surrounding fake news and the threat to journalism are not hidden as they become glaring by the day primarily due to their proliferation in the era of the digital media (Inobemhe et al., 2020). This is not far from the findings of a study by Ordway (2017) where fake news was found to pose threat to institutions and persons in society.

A study by West (2017) also revealed that practising journalists have been accused of spreading fake news. It also alluded that some legitimate journalists have been arrested or even subjected to scrutiny by officials of a country. The researcher revealed that a case of arrest of a journalist can be seen in Egypt where the Al-Jazeera producer was charged for incitement against the institution through the broadcast of fake news with the intention of spreading chaos. It also revealed that fake news has led to the decline in public trust for traditional journalist, and this implies that the menace constitute a serious challenge as well as posed as threat to journalism practice across the world.

Another study by Ognyanova, Lazer, Robertson and Wilson (2020) was on how exposure to fake news and misinformation leads to a reduced trust in the media and government. It relied on a wider opinion poll involving 3000 respondents split into two separate surveys conducted in 2018 around October, November and December of same year. Though the respondents were asked to install a browser extension so as to track their prevailing online behaviour, only 227 representing 8% of them positively responded. Findings of the study demonstrated that a decline in mainstream media trust can be linked to people's exposure to fake news. Whereas, the foregoing was the case in respect of media trust, a contrasting result was seen in the case of political trust. Results from the study revealed that exposure to fake news led to an increase in political trust especially in respect of justice system and congress in the United States.

Furthermore, Arikenbi, Ekhueorohan, Eguono and Ekwemalor (2023) conducted a study into the implication post-truth and fake news has on the canons of journalism within the Nigerian media space. It relied on secondary data already collected in other studies. Findings of the study revealed that proliferation of fake news in the Nigeria's media space has had a great impact on the credibility of journalism. According to the study, the foundational

principles of journalism are greatly challenged by the blurring of opinions and facts coupled with the spread of falsehood in the country. Additionally, the study revealed that news media credibility is shaped by public perceptions and this has a number of implications for the norms of journalism profession.

Similarly, a study on perceptions of journalists and media scholars on journalism and fake news circulating in the Nigerian online space was conducted Habib and Akila (2021) and through carefully drawn samples conducted In-depth interviews. Accordingly, the researchers revealed that fake news can spread through words of mouth (WoM), and that the spread finds strength in bias human nature. It has dire consequences on journalism practice as it can lead to loss of credibility, the study showed. Furthermore, findings of the study showed that online platforms and the festering spread of fake news enabled by the growing adoption of technology makes a space for proliferation of fake journalists making it difficult for members of the public to separate a professional from an amateur that works for an online medium.

The gaps from these studies reviewed are multidimensional. First, their focus was more on the spread of fake news and credibility of the media. Second, there was no much focus on first-hand experience from a practicing journalist who has had a unique sore experience from the fake news menace. Finally, there is also the gap occasioned by the lack of detailed literature on the fake menace and its implications to the safety of journalism n this part of the world. Therefore, this current study sought to dissect the fake news problem vis á vis its implications on the practice in Nigeria – taking on a unique approach that considers the experience of an independent journalist in the country.

Methodology

The library research was relied upon to advance a discourse on fake news and journalism safety from the perspective of an investigative journalist. This involved the review of existing literature on the subject matter. The secondary data sources include articles in journals and book chapters, books, online resources, related documents in form of reports, and empirical studies of private and government agencies.

Discussion

According to Inobemhe et al. (2020), fake news has been enabled by new media technologies. This does not just pose as challenge to the professional journalist but also the society at large. In Nigeria the fake news menace has created a lot of concerns not just for conventional media but also the society and citizens within it (Oso et al., 2024). On account of the proliferation of fake news, journalism in Nigeria is said to be facing numerous challenges among which is the fake news dilemma which not only threatens trustworthiness of the media

but also its credibility. These issues are multidimensional and sometimes exacerbated by the speed in which the new spread.

A major dimension to this challenge is the causes of the spread of fake news in Nigeria. A major reason cause is social media proliferation and their wide adoption by citizens. Social media platforms are numerous with overabundance of information and this has enabled quick spread of false information. Aside their multiplicity of use, numerous user base and accessibility, social media also reward people for engagements and posts made. This Madrid (2023) claimed is made based on the structure of the sites where engagements and posts are rewarded. This drives the spread of fake news as users strive to post to attract comments and get engagement towards rewards.

The challenge is further compounded by the lack of fact-checking. This is a multidimensional challenge as it creates challenge for both professional journalists, amateur and the individual users of information-dissemination channels such as social media in modern times. Some newsrooms lack adequate fact-checking and verification processes. Findings from a research conducted by (Porter & Wood, 2021) showed that fact-checking reduced people's belief in fake news. The implication of the foregoing is that without fact-checking, people are likely to belief misinformation they encounter across platforms. Westlund et al. (2024) alluded to the foregoing that though misinformation is a challenge, but fact-checking is one way to solve the problem in society.

Taking a critical look at the fake news dilemma in Nigeria specifically, the cause of its spread, another perspective to see is that of political and economic interests. This is the case because fake news more often serves economic and political agendas. An example is the use of social-enabled fake news as a tool for propaganda for the sole aim of spreading panic and confusion among the people. If such objective is achieved, then the deliberate circulation has served a purpose. According to Kwode and Selekane (2023), fake news used as propaganda is often targeted at political opponents either to divert the attention of the public from government policy or destroy the character of the political opponent. This is the case whether the opponents are perceived or real enemies in the political domain.

Low media literacy is another enabler of fake news and its rapid spread in modern times. In fact, limited understanding of how to critically evaluate information posed as a serious challenge to the society as fake news spread dangerously. According to Inobemhe and Asemah (2024), lack of media literacy can lead to spread of disinformation in our society and with adequate media literacy, the menace can also be combated. Relatedly, a USC-led study found that among several others, lack of critical reasoning was dominant as motivation for

sharing fake news (Madrid, 2023). The implication is that once people do not give a piece of information they see online or hear offline a good thought before sharing, chances are that they will contribute to the spread of falsehood.

Fake news has several negative consequences including the eroding trust – where public trust in the media is undermined by the spread of fake news in society. A study conducted by Idiongo (2024) revealed that fake news comes with the consequence of erosion of trust in the media. In fact, it is not just the media that suffer the impact but democratic institutions that stand the danger of loss of trust from members of the public (Ognyanova et al., 2020). In addition, spreading misinformation is seen as an effect of fake news as false information can lead to confusion, misinformed decisions, and harm to the people and actors involved. Furthermore, polarisation is another issue relating to the effect of fake news in modern society as it reinforces existing biases as much as it exacerbates social divisions.

The threat of fake news to democracy cannot be overemphasised. This is because it can undermine democratic processes through its influence on elections and by extension threaten national security of a country. The democratic process can be negatively impact by knowledge resistance and misconceptions (Broda & Strömback, 2024) both stemming from the spread of fake news in our contemporary society. According to Sanchez and Middlemass (2022), democracy is serious trouble on account of misinformation because the fake news menace continues to lead to a gradual erosion of public's trust in democracy.

How Fake News Endangers Journalists' Safety in a World of Information Manipulation

The focus here is the impact of fake news on the safety of journalists in a world where information manipulation is rife. In fact, there are several ways in which fake news endangers journalists' safety. Some of them are discussed hereunder:

i. **Violence and attacks:** This is a major impact of fake news on journalists. Fake news can create a scenario where people are incited to take on violent acts against journalists putting them at risk of physical harm. Several scenarios of attacks against journalists on account of fake news abound in Nigeria. However, a recent case was that of a Pakistani journalist that suffered arrest over fake news that led to riots in the UK (Latif, 2024).

ii. **Harassment and threats:** It is possible that journalists are harassed and threatened offline and online on account of fake news circulated in their name knowingly or unknowingly.

iii. **Loss of credibility:** There is a credibility side to the fake news menace in relations to the safety of journalists. Fake news can erode the credibility of media outlets and their journalists. This creates a situation where it increasingly gets difficult for them to carry out assigned duties in safe and effective ways.

iv. **Chilling/shocking effect:** Fake news spread and its consequences can also have eerie effect on journalisms, and by extension deter reporters/journalists from pursuing important investigative leads or stories.

v. **Misidentification:** On account of fake news and its spread, journalists can be misidentified as propagandists or biased reports and this can put them up for attack or harassment.

vi. **Targeted disinformation:** The fake new menace is deep-rooted that it can be used to spread targeted information about media practitioners, consequently damaging their reputation and putting them at risk.

vii. **Self-censorship:** Censorship can result from the fear of fake news and its consequences as journalists may take a stance where they avoid reporting on certain stories, subject matter, or topics.

viii. **Increased surveillance:** Journalists can attract attention of concerned authorities to the point that they see increase surveillance which may make it harder for them to provide protection to their sources and maintain source confidentiality.

ix. **Psychological impact:** Once there are ceaseless cases of online harassment resulting from the proliferation of fake news across virtual spaces, the journalist can suffer psychological pressure that negative impacts their mental health and general well-being.

x. **Polarisation and division:** A hostile environment for journalists is often created due to the polarisation effect of fake news and division. Consequently, journalists are perceived as opposing a particular group of ideology.

Understanding of these risks is not merely to instill fear on the journalists but to create an environment for knowledge where critical decisions can be taken to protect practitioners. Interestingly, the knowledge of these risks also create and understanding where journalists are better protection towards the promotion of a safe and free press even in the face of the proliferation of social media platforms and rapid spread of fake news.

How Factual Report can be Weaponised against a Reporter: Experience of a Journalist in Nigeria

In Nigeria, there are several cases where journalists' reports are taken out of context to suit a specific purpose – sometimes the purpose that suits the desired intention of the actors involved in the act. This is an excerpt from a reporter's story about how a truthful and factual story was taken out of context and weaponised by purveyors of fake news. It details the harmful impact such could have on the morale of the practitioners.

Oluatobi Enitan is a freelance journalist based in Abuja.

My name is Oluwatobi Enitan I am an Independent journalist based in Abuja. I have worked with the International Center for Investigative Reporting, ICIR Nigeria, Inter Press Service based in Rome Italy as a freelancer. Presently I work as a freelancer for TV Platinum, a News and Media outlet based in Abuja, Nigeria.

Asides this, I have a YouTube Channel named Oluwatobi Enitan this allows me to work on stories that calls for positive change and reactions for a better Nigeria. My content spans across three major programmes areas – *Unbiased with Enitan*, *Surviving Nigeria*, and *All that Happened in Nigeria*. These programmes provide me the opportunity to give a bird eye view about issues which directly affect the country by providing my subscribers and followers a knowledgeable angle ignored in the mainstream media.

On June 17, 2024, <u>I uploaded a 12 minutes 45 seconds long video</u>, with the tittle "this is what lawmakers allegedly earn in Nigeria" on my Tiktok and YouTube pages. Within 24 hours of posting the video a whirlwind of controversy was stirred. Honorable Leke Abejide representing Yagba Federal Constituency had accused Adeola Fayehun of instigating the public against lawmakers over their salaries and allowances.

The original content read:

"One Adeola Fayehun who alleged on social media and Instagram (sic) that a member of this House collect basic salary of 2.5 million naira per month, furniture allowance 7.5 million Naira per month, newspaper allowance 1.2 million naira per month, wardrobe allowance 631,000 naira per month, recess allowance 248,000 Naira per month, accommodation allowance 4.9 million Naira per month utility allowance 828,000 Naira per month, personal assistant allowance 621,000 Naira per month and so. and very interesting for you to know that this Adeola Fayehun does not reside in Nigeria; she's in UK and this is the same person December time when one of our colleagues maybe by mistake said trailers of rice were given to members of national assembly the same lady was spreading it everywhere that you should ask your representatives where is your trailers of rice so if this House does not take a stand on this and take it as a case against her I Elder Leke Joseph Abejide will take it up with her, because in my own constituency this is what is now spreading around that I take this amount. I was on Channels Television at a time and I put up my salary to the whole world for them to see. What is there that we are hiding? We are not hiding anything in this hallowed chamber. I want to bet it with you, there are some members that cannot survive more than 5 days with their salaries even before the end of the month, the request from your constituents has already taken over everything and somebody who does not reside in Nigeria will be instigating the general public against us and then we will be quiet this is the privilege that has

been breached against me and I Believe by extension to all members of this house thank you so much Mr. Speaker and honorable colleagues."

The video with my name and social media handles "Oluwatobi Enitan" made it easily identifiable as my original content, but what I was not prepared for was the trouble my re-edited content bore to me.

A content creator with the name "Merit O'clock" on Tiktok re-edited and republished the video to suit specific agenda leading to a flurry of accusations and counter accusations with many labeling me as the source of the disinformation.

The re-edited video reads

"I, a member of this House collect basic salary of 2.5 million Naira per Month, furniture allowance 7.5 million naira per month, newspaper allowance 1.2 million Naira per month, wardrobe allowance 631,000 Naira per month, recess allowance 248,000 Naira per month, accommodation allowance 4.9 million Naira per month utility allowance 828,000 Naira per month, personal assistant allowance 621,000 Naira per month."

The edited video that sparked this controversy was maliciously cut to include only the portions listing the purported salaries and allowances, which were then taken out of context to generate public outrage. The re-edited version omitted crucial details and was crafted to mislead viewers intentionally. As a result, several of my colleagues reached out to me, expressing their concerns. Upon reviewing the original video, they realised that the disinformation stemmed from a mischief-maker who had altered the content.

Given the gravity of the situation, and considering the advice of a Lawmaker and journalists I had no choice but to issue a public disclaimer one week after posting the original video. The disclaimer reads:

"Disclaimer Regarding Misleading Video Clip on Lawmaker Salaries"

My attention has been drawn to an edited clip from a video circulating online concerning the salaries of lawmakers. This clip has been maliciously edited by mischief makers with the intent of inciting the public against lawmakers. I, Oluwatobi Enitan, am issuing this statement to bring clarity to the matter and to present the original video to the general public.

The original video was created with the sole purpose of informing and educating the public about the factual details of lawmaker salaries. However, the version being circulated has been altered to misrepresent the content and context, leading to misunderstandings and potential public unrest.

I want to categorically state that I am not involved in the creation or distribution of the misleading edited clip. Furthermore, I am not associated with the actions of those who have spread this misinformation. Specifically, merit o'clock on Tiktok, is the individual who edited the video for selfish reason to gain traffic on his page. The video has 429k views over 12k shares and 33k views. He is responsible for circulating the edited clip. He should be held accountable for this act of deception any individual who wishes to take legal action should hold him accountable.

Ugotok on Tiktok has since deleted the video from his Tiktok account while "tmyposts" on Instagram are still circulating the misinformation. In addition, Merit Oclock has over 18 thousand followers on TikTok, and in one of his pictures, he is shown wearing soldiers uniform. Upon seeing this, I contacted the Director of Army Public Relations, Major General Onyema Nwachukwu, who expressed doubts about him being a soldier of the Nigerian Army based on the cap badge he was wearing. I have forwarded this to the Nigerian Army to determine if he is their soldier. I urge the public to refer to the original video for accurate information and to disregard the edited clip intended to mislead and provoke. Let us maintain our commitment to truth and responsible sharing of information.''

While in my attempt to clear my name @atlantic7949 believes @atlantic7949 – 2 months ago (edited).

He should be held accountable? Nigerians are very swift to backstabbing and betraying themselves. True or not, why can't they declare their salaries to rest the case? Y'all still scared for these criminal politicians? And y'all said you want a better country? Y'all scared. Keep dreaming

One would expect that lawmakers would publicly declare their salaries to counter these allegations, but this transparency never materialised. This lack of openness further empowers mischief-makers to thrive and perpetuate disinformation. In light of this, it is crucial that journalists receive protection against the damage that disinformation, like that spread by Merit O'clock using my content can inflict on our reputations. Ensuring the integrity of our work is essential in maintaining public trust and upholding the truth, Enitan concluded on the bases of her experience.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, fake news has become a hot topic of discourse in academic and media circles not just for the negative impact but also for the multidimensional negative consequences for journalism practice and information management. In greater dimensions, it

creates series of problems for journalists and media organisations in the 21st century information world. The issues are numerous and are further execrated by the channels of information dissemination such as social media's Facebook, Instagram, X and more with their capacity to spread, retain and archive information leading to overabundance. Once used for the wrong reasons, fake news whether emanating from the traditional media or online platforms creates serious safety issues for journalists in Nigeria and elsewhere in the world.

Owing to the discourse above and the conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. There is a need for fact-checking initiatives where independent fact-checking organisations and media outlets can be encouraged to help verify authenticity of information. This can also further strengthened and supported with a kind of collaboration where media outlets synergise to promote accuracy and accountability.

2. More than ever before, there should be concerted efforts at packaging and in repackaging existing media literacy programmes. This becomes imperative because of the need to educate the public on how to critically evaluate information especially the piece of information to which they are exposed on various online platforms including social media.

3. As much as it gets technical to regulate, it has become pertinent that regulatory framework be put in place to establish and enforce regulations to curb the spread of fake news in our country media space- both digital and traditional.

4. Support must now be provided for independent media as this will ensure independent, fact-based journalism. The appropriate agency of government must lead efforts at providing this support.

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