

Boundless Interactivity In The Digital Era And The Transformation Of Newsgathering In Nigeria: Evaluating Social Media As Instrument Of Fake News Using Endsars Protests

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Abstract

The emergence and integration of new technologies and associated techniques in the communication industry have led to boundless interactivity across the globe as well as the manipulation of photos, videos, data, and messages in order to manipulate the audience's cognitive processes, cause outrage and shock, and present false or misleading claims as news. These news are being perversely shared on Facebook, Twitter, and other forms of social media platforms without question. With advantages like democratising communication processes, neutralising government monopoly and censorship of the media, wider and unlimited coverage, and low costs among others, the social media is now a dominant communication platform. Most countries with a closed-system brand news gathered through the platforms as fake news because of their anti-government policies/actions posture thereby making social media users engendered species. The controversial nature of the new concept has led to the emergence of six theoretical propositions for comprehending and isolating fake news. This paper evaluates these propositions using the End SARS 2020 protest in Nigeria with a view to find out which of the social media and government accounts of the protest is fake news; and whether social media is a veritable platform for newsgathering considering its vulnerability to technological manipulation. Logical inquiry, survey of literature, and ex post facto methods of data gathering, and trend analysis were adopted for purposes of inference. The results of analysis validate part of existing theoretical propositions; reveal government account of the End SARS protest as fake news; and social media as a relatively veritable source of newsgathering.

Keywords: New Technology, Social Media, Fake News, Newsgathering, End SARS, Nigeria

Introduction

Events and activities characterise human existence in all locations of the earth whether developed or undeveloped, and some of these events and activities are essential to others and corporate development and governance. Right from antiquity and depending on the level of

development, therefore, people desire them, hunt for them, and through different ways convey them appropriately to people that make use of them. In the traditional society, they are conveyed as messages by people who were either participants or eyewitnesses through interpersonal communication. As the society advances, organised bodies, or institutions recruit personnel to scout for information that will aid their operations and/or activities. In this context, it becomes germane to develop the ability to collect such useful information, analyse, retain, and circulate its valuable content because collecting useful information became a problem since events are everywhere happening in every second.

Thus, Tofler (1995, p. 224) noted, “Finding the right informative detail, accurately analysing it and delivering it at the right time to the right customer, results in much heavier problems than the actual collection”. Thus, some news reporters chose and transform some facts into significant ones while others identify the fact in the information itself as being qualitatively distinct and more important than others-newsworthiness (Eliade, 1990). On these mechanisms or approaches lay people and institutional acceptance or rejection of news as being fake or genuine in their bid to justify or castigate one’s actions, activities, or policies. In addition to poor or none coverage of important events, government employs the first approach to subdue activities and news critical of their policies and programmes. People’s understanding and rating of such, which alienate their activities and views considered developmental in nature, determine patronage and growth of the media industry, and people’s faith in government (Newsom & Carrell, 2004).

In different epochs of human development, different technical innovations were initiated to facilitate the coverage of gathering and disseminating the information in ways that safeguard government interests and policies. These include employment, training, and deployment of news reporters; and the modernisation of instruments and means of collecting and disseminating the information (Szabo, 2014). From land and water transportation wherein reporters hunt for and submit information, and printed copies of newspapers were transmitted to consumers; introduction of telegraphic transmission of information; and then to the invention of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) wherein radio and television communication, satellite system, and telephone became major sources of gathering and disseminating information.

The Satellite and Radio/TV reporters’ era of newsgathering, which lasted for over 50 years dating back to 1970s was characterised by the use of outside broadcast (OB) trucks to gather major news, disaster zones, sporting or music events, where content is partially produced and transmitted (Saunders, 2020). It gave birth to the phenomena of ‘breaking news’ and ‘news update’ in the media industry. Innovative as it is, the news generated via the outside broadcast (OB) trucks still needs to be transmitted back to the control room via satellite to allow for greater efficiency. Innovations in the field of satellite technology rendered outside broadcast (OB) trucks service irrelevant and ushered in the internet technology/system.

The above systems, which are pro-institutional or government information management policies were transformed in the 20th century globalisation era when the internet was introduced as a faster, cheaper, more encompassing, and people oriented system of information generation and dissemination. The character of the internet system, which ensures unrestricted or unhindered information circulation, public relations, advertising, extensive educational activities, and entertainments, initiated inclusive mass generation and circulation of information (Briggs & Burke, 2005). It is a social force, which enables people to copy-write, report, edit, engage in page making and filming, receive, and transmit information from and to any part of the world in matter of seconds. In this era, individuals, groups, institutions, and governments began to construct and circulate information to support the spread of certain ideas or to counter the spread of others (Floridi 2011). This changed people's attitude to and trust in the information or news being disseminated through televisions, music, radio stations, film, and print due to the dynamics of digital technology in their preference and delivery.

Whichever direction the pendulum swings to, stakeholders will always have vested interest in nature of information being conveyed to the public, and abhors public empowerment in the internet era, which enables people to gather and disseminate information without government censorship. Through this, individuals and oppositions expose and confront government atrocities, weaknesses, poor governance, and human right postures without limit. The efficacy of non-censored newsgathering and dissemination in driving populist values and democracy manifested itself during the 2011 Arab Spring uprising, and in the planning and execution of 2020 End SARS protest in Nigeria (Cottle, 2008, 2011; Per Skålen et al., 2015; Reid, 2016a).

Individuals from the comfort of their homes and locations used chat apps and other social networking tools inherent in android phones to gather and circulate information concerning events, government policies and actions, and people's criticisms and reactions (Didiugwu, Ezugwu, & Ekwe, 2015). The chat apps and networking sites became central nexus between public broadcast and private communication particularly fast-moving events, and offered range of functionalities that created online communities, public opinion, and public agenda (Belair-Gagnon, Agur & Frisch, 2019). Some of these sites are Facebook Messenger or Telegram, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, WeChat etc.

The universal nature of this social media usage introduced substantial changes to how journalists and news organizations produce news, and how they engage with audiences (O'Donovan, 2014; Belair-Gagnon & Anderson, 2015; Reid, 2016a, b). During the 2020 End SARS movement or demonstration in Nigeria, they served as inevitable sources of newsgathering particularly for foreign correspondents in media houses like CNN, BBC, Aljazeera etc., and Nigerians in diaspora, and the international community. The coverage of the End SARS was liberalised while the news generated contravened international human rights regime and indicted Nigerian government management of the demonstration with particular reference to the Lekki tollgate shooting and killing of unarmed demonstrators. Nigerian government and the military were quick to deny the news as false and fake news with

intent to misinform, dis-inform, engage in propaganda and cause hoaxes, yet they worked assiduously undercover to erase the tracks of what happened.

International and local inquiries were instituted to investigate the tollgate incident and verify either of the claims with the six theories of fake news in-view (see Kaminska, 2017; Posetti, 2018). In the light of the findings of the inquiries, this paper is set to:

- i. Examine the status of the news generated by the social media on End SARS protest using the six approaches for comprehending and isolating fake news.
- ii. Determine which of the information disseminated through the social media and government orthodox mass media is false and therefore fake.
- iii. Ascertain if the social media is a veritable source of news gathering in the 21st century.

Materials and Methods

This paper adopts logical inquiry, survey of literature and ex post facto methods of data gathering. These methods use extensive literature review was primarily as data gathering processes because of the wealth of debates and criticism available on the phenomenon of fake news, End SARS protest, and government management of the protest. The method uses library documents (both private and public) as secondary sources date. These documents exist in the form of books, journals, workshop and lecture papers, and government publications. Similar documents hoisted in the internet at different websites were explored where available and accessible.

The data generated from the review of literature was analysed using trend analysis. In this pattern of analysis, description, and comparison of events leading characterised as fake news, the nature and manifestation of End SARS protests, forms, and contents of media coverage of the protests, and their outcomes were explored using common sense. The process includes the determination of the inherent variables in the study, their empirical indices, and thereafter, an examination of the relationships and causative interactions among the indices of the variables within the context of study. Based on the findings thereof, inferences were drawn.

Review of Extant Literature

ICT and Newsgathering

The need for secured, wider, cost-effective, and faster communication at inter-personal and societal levels led to the invention of different technologies. This started with the invention of wireless telegraph in 1897 by Guglielmo Marconi, which led to the emergence of the first telephone call around the world in 1935 (Akpomovie, 2010). Subsequently, mobile cellular phone was invented in 1983, which led to modernisations and inventions of communication gadgets, hardware, equipment, or facilities for the enhancement and easy exchange of ideas and information of various kinds among people and across distant localities boundlessly. These known as Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) (Nwodu, 2003) transformed and changed the face/dynamics of communication ostensibly in the 21st century. ICT covers

mobile phones, personal computers, the internet, email, imaging technology, digital broadcasts, and even cable television.

In addition to many other roles, ICT privatised and de-professionalised communication and facilitates information access and networking. These led to participatory and inclusive media activities, conventional and digital broadcasting, internet/web-based services, and social media and its domination of conventional media in information gathering and circulation (Deuze, 2008). Pavlik (2000, p.234) noted that it “is fundamentally reshaping the relationships between and among news organizations, journalists and their many publics, including audiences, competitors, news sources, sponsors and those who seek to regulate or control the press”. Exceptionally, it made individuals producers and consumers of uncensored news or information, and equally made professional journalists producers and consumers of information.

The Internet evolution has empowered the masses to be more participants in the generation and circulation of information on matters that concern their lives and activities, and in a manner that challenge the authority and activities of professional news providers. With mobile chat apps inherent in the internet system like Kakao Talk, WhatsApp, Telegram, Snapchat, WeChat, Facebook Messenger, etc., people gather news on live events and circulate same in different forms such videos, pictures, voice recording, video calls, etc. to different parts of the world in seconds (Belair-Gagnon, Agur & Frisch, 2017). Conventional media industries like CNN, BBC, Aljazeera, TVC, and AIT, make use of such information also.

The literature is dominant with anecdotal evidences that governments, news organizations, reporting teams, and other journalists particularly foreign ones equally use these sources for information gathering and surveillance purposes (Belair-Gagnon, Agur, & Frisch, 2016; Crete-Nishihata, 2015; Lee & Ho, 2014; Rai, 2014; Silverman, 2014; Hardy, 2013; Crandall et al., 2013). Many journalists are sourcing for news by subscribing to many NGOs’ contact lists and chat apps alerts, through anonymous tips, and individual eyewitness sources (Mabweazara, 2011). It has, therefore, ushered in a new set of practices in newsgathering for journalists particularly in crisis-ridden regions or locations across the world (Lorenzo-Dus & Bryan, 2011). It has enabled newsroom managers to work remotely (Väättäjä & Egglestone, 2012), and mobile news distribution (Westlund, 2013).

The dilemma in this era of democratised communication order is that what professional journalists consider important to cover or unimportant to eschew due to national security and elites’ interest, and what the individuals or public consider important or not, are always conflictual in nature (see Ettema & Glasser, 1998; Atton & Wickenden, 2005). It seems sacrosanct in the literature that the public tends to rely more on unofficial sources and information as obtain in the social media more than official sources and information due to trust (McBride & Rosenstiel, 2014; Lewis & Westlund, 2014; Dickinger, 2011; Reich, 2008). Dickinger (2011, p.387) linked this trust to the “perception of ability and integrity regarding the customers that generate content”. On this lie government apprehension about social media

and the genesis of fake news syndrome in the contemporary national and international political order.

Fake News

Egelhofer & Lecheler (2019, p.97) noted that fake news can be viewed from two perspectives as a genre “i.e. the deliberate creation of pseudo-journalistic disinformation”, and as a label “i.e. the instrumentalization of the term to delegitimize news media”. The literature reveals that some scholars have even tried to associate fake news with news one does not believe in (Nielsen & Graves, 2017). Nevertheless, there is no place for belief in Scientifics.

The ‘genre’ perspective is scholarly and projected by academics to depict false information, while the ‘label’ perspective is political and projected by ruling elites to discredit genuine information that exposes their illegalities or is critical of their policies and actions. The ‘label’ perspective of the concept is political and a source of crisis and confusion across the world (Nelson & Taneja, 2018). In the perspective, the ruling elites weaponize the term fake news as an instrument for attacking a variety of news media and individuals that circulate uncensored information to the public, which exposes the evils of their regime or contradicts their political agenda (see Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018; Hanitzsch, Van Dalen, & Steindl, 2018; Nielsen & Graves, 2017). In this aspect, the public or citizens struggle to distinguish factual news from fake/false news as propaganda beclouds realities in the new media (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; UNESCO, 2018).

In all, some use the term to describe propagandistic messages being circulated by state-owned media (Khaldarova & Pantti, 2016); information being circulated by extreme radicals and social critics through the new media (Bakir & McStay, 2018); and false/fabricated information being circulated to capture the perceptions and opinion of the public (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). However, Egelhofer & Lecheler (2019) argues that there is a fundamental difference between what constitutes fake news and what the term is used for. Scientifically, therefore, the literature is dominant with the view that fake news stands for or represents all information or things that are ‘inaccurate’ (Lazer et al., 2017; Tambini, 2017; Packer, 2017).

Thus, Egelhofer & Lecheler (2019), Tandoc, Lim & Ling (2018), Lazer et al. (2018) submitted that there are three pillars for identifying fake news, which are when information is characteristically low in facticity, was created with the intention to deceive, and presented in a journalistic format. Wardle (2017) identified false connection, false context, manipulated content, misleading content etc. as the primary indices of ‘low in facticity’. Collaborating Wardle’s position, Bakir & McStay (2018, p. 157) mentioned ‘either wholly false or containing deliberately misleading elements incorporated within its content or context’. This means that fake news does not only mean information whose content is completely fabricated.

In addition, Horne & Adalı (2017) explained that “presented in a journalistic format” implies that such information must possess similar journalistic structural components such as a headline, a text body, and (however, not necessarily) a picture, video, and/or radio news

formats. This leads people to misattribute such news as genuine and credible, and is deceived (Mustafaraj & Metaxas, 2017; Vargo, Guo, & Amazeen, 2018). On this lie the third characteristics of fake news, which is intent to deceive.

Some websites are created purposely for deceptive works and propagation of fake news. Such websites do not strive for integrity and reputation, and are short-lived. Their names resemble established genuine news outlets and this enables them to deceive the public (Vargo et al., 2018; Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Scholars like Bakir & McStay(2017), Khaldarova & Pantti(2016),and Tambini(2017) observed that partisan, pro-governmental, and mainstream journalism that have rival ideologies and agenda to sale to the public engage in the same activities of spreading fake information or news with intent to deceive the people. Their programmes and activities are mostly propaganda and manipulation of facts to discredit the opponents.

Nevertheless, some scholars argue that in the amusement industry, media houses deliberately distort facts to create fun without any intention to deceive the public (Tandoc et al., 2018). Such activities are carried out with the premise that people know the facts, and therefore should be excluded in the categorisation of fake news (McNair, 2017; Bay, 2005; Borden &Taw, 2007). Some scholars equally noted that occasionally non-facts may be added by journalist not with the intent to deceive but out of mistake or misperceptions due to wrong source, time pressure, and poor professionalism. Such is not fake news but an expression of human frailty and imperfection (McNair, 2017). However, persistent mistakes of such nature can translate to intentional act and therefore, fake news. Thus, any inaccurate information can be applied for propagandistic and deceptive ambitions because the intent is to control the information flow and people's perception (Neudert, 2017; Jowett & O'Donnell, 2014).Scholars therefore concluded that the 'genre' perspective is the most objective for determining fake news (Khaldarova & Pantti, 2016; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; Waisbord, 2018; Lazer, Baum, Benkler, et al., 2018).

Zhou, Zafarani, Shu & Liu (2019) identified four perspectives or theories of detecting and explaining fake news as knowledge, style, propagation and credibility.

- i. Theory of Knowledge: In the theory of knowledge, there “is a ‘comparison’ between the relational knowledge extracted from the to-be-verified news articles and that of knowledge-bases representing facts/ground truth” (Zhou, Zafarani, Shu & Liu, 2019, p.2; see also Pujara & Singh, 2018).
- ii. Theory of Style: This theory focuses on capturing and quantifying the differences in writing styles between fake and true news. One can easily extract news style from the text, images, and/or videos within to-be-verified content (Wang, Ma, Jin, et al., 2018; Zhou, Zafarani, Shu & Liu, 2019).
- iii. Theory of Propagation: This theory uses information provided in news dissemination as yardstick for determining if it is fake or not.
- iv. Theory of Credibility: The credibility-based theory assesses the credibility of news headlines by using click-bait detection, the publishers (i.e. source websites), comments

generated by the information from the public (i.e. using opinion spam detection), and users of the information (Shu, Sliva, Suhang, Tang & Liu, 2017; Jindal & Liu, 2008).

In spite of variation in the set of tools and focus of each theory, the literature is dominant with an integrated or a unified framework for studying, identifying, and analysing fake theory (see Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Jindal & Liu, 2008; Pujara & Singh, 2018; Shu, Bernard & Liu, 2018). According to Zhou, Zafarani, Shu & Liu (2019) explanations, this framework consists of examining each pieces of information in the light of:

- a. Journalistic or multiple news-related formats: This refers to the conventional formal news presentation format of headline, body text, and publisher.
- b. Social-related character of the information: This refers to the feedback, propagation paths and spreaders types of information. Every information must align with or conform to either the form of text, multimedia, network, etc., corresponding to various applicable techniques and usable resources.
- c. Photo Manipulation: Photos are easy to manipulate in the pursuit of one's goal and the same time, manipulated photos are the simplest to detect and expose. The manipulation can occur by using special editing software such as Adobe Photoshop, and by using real photos taken in a different environment to explain another event. Google Images reverse search, TinEye reverse search tool, Baidu, Yandex and metadata searching tools are veritable instruments for detecting such photo manipulations. They expose the date and time of the original photos, their geo-location, the model of the camera used and its settings, and their copyright information. The tools are contained in Img Ops app.
- d. Manipulation of Videos: Videos are manipulated like photos in media presentations but detecting them is more tedious and time-consuming than photos. The method here is to watch the video and look for discrepancies such as inaccurate gluing, distorted proportions, strange moments, shadows, reflections, weather, the environment/infrastructures in the background, and the sharpness of different elements. In addition, special apps like InVid reverse search tool, Youtube, and Data Viewer can be used to detect fake videos.
- e. Manipulation of News: This takes place in the form of publishing a true piece of news under a false title, taking quotations out of context, presenting one's opinion as an existing fact, presenting a fact in a distorted form, neglecting important details that completely change the context of the news, and presenting completely framed-up information as fact. One can be detect and expose these fake news through basic searches using search apps like Google.

- f. **Manipulations with Data:** This refers to the manipulation of sociological survey data using inappropriate or weak methodologies such as peripheral study, publishing report, or information that is not based on a systematic study nor critical analysis of available data before publishing such. Other forms of data manipulation, which prevails in contemporary communication era, are the misinterpretation of data or results of investigation, and invalid comparisons.

Theoretical Nexus

This paper adopts the combined theories of Knowledge and Credibility as the preferred framework for the study. The theory of knowledge compares the knowledge extracted from social media information on Nigeria’s End SARS protest with the knowledge derived from the facts/ground truth concerning the protest. The theory of credibility complements this by providing the mechanism for such comparison. The Credibility theory assesses the news headlines propagated by the social media, the publishers of the headlines, public comments concerning the social media information, and the end users of the information. Through this process, the paper assessed the objectivity, authenticity, or falsehood that characterise the social media coverage of the protest. It enables this paper to actualise the objectives of the study.

Findings and Discussion

Approaches for Detecting Fake News and Social Media News on End SARS

Table a: Approaches for detecting Fake news and Social Media on End SARS

s/n	Detecting fake news Approaches		Social media & End SARS
1	Presented in a journalistic format or Multiple news-related formats to deceive	Format of headline	Professionally styled headlines such as “Nigerian flag covered in blood”, “Pray for Nigeria”, “Enough is Enough”, etc. flooded the internet media outlets without intent to deceive
		Body text	Constructed like professional journalists’ products in orthodox media outlets
		Publishers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Information was relayed directly to conventional media newsrooms through twitter, YouTube, and other chat apps. ➤ Secondly, Fire Chat made it possible for protesters to be accessed through surveillance by major international media industries like BBC and CNN. ➤ Finally, Voxer, Viber, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp were used to coordinate, organize,

			and progressively publish the End SARS protest.
		Reporters	Reporters consisting of youths and trained journalists with both using applicable ICT techniques and usable resources to transmit End SARS information live to cable networks, online media, and orthodox media houses.
2	Social-related character of the information	Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The chat apps provided for and accommodated one-to-one, some-to-some, and many-to-many conversations within and outside the national frontiers of Nigeria during the protest. ➤ Their functionalities equally provided for and allowed connections to Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter etc. ➤ They accommodated a role between media broadcast and private communication, which enable individuals to report background Information live from different locations ➤ Social media democratised the End SARS movement, allowing users with varying numbers of followers to pitch, improve or reject ideas, solicit donations or start food banks to feed protesters
		Propagation paths i.e. in the form of text, multimedia, network, etc.	<p>The news were propagated through genuine national and international news outlets such as Reuters, TVC, AIT, BBC, CNN, Aljazeera, Google etc. using their various twitter handles.</p> <p>Websites created purposely for deceptive works and propagation of fake news were not part of the propagation paths.</p>

		Spreaders types of information	Information was not presented or propagated for amusement purposes and did not assume that people know the facts. Rather, information or news were propagated as facts with proof.
3	Photo Manipulation	Manipulation of the real photos of events and activities of the protests	Not applicable
		Using real photos taken in a different environment and event to propagate the End SARS protest	No, most of the information propagated were life coverage of the protest. Not even the Nigerian government, the police, the military, or any of the pro-government activists have presented any contradictory photos that show they were taken at a different event and environment.
4	Manipulation of Videos	Manipulation of the real videos of events and activities of the protests	Not applicable
		Using real videos taken in a different environment and event to propagate the End SARS protest	No applicable. Most of the information propagated through videos were life coverage of the protest. Not even the Nigerian government, the police, the military, or any of the pro-government activists have presented any contradictory video that shows the End SARS videos being propagated were fake and taken in a different event and environment.
5	Manipulation of the End SARS News	Publishing a true piece of End SARS news under a false title	Not applicable
		Taking government, police, and military officials' quotations out of context	Not applicable
		Presenting reporter's opinion as an existing fact	No evidence of this
		Presenting facts about the protest in a distorted form	Not applicable

		Neglecting important details that completely change the context of the news	No evidence of this
		Presenting completely framed-up information as fact	Not applicable
6	Manipulations with Data	Manipulation of sociological survey data	Not applicable
		The use of inappropriate or weak methodologies such as peripheral study to gather news and publish reports	Reporters were participants and participant observers, who generated direct live information. Thus, the method was neither inappropriate nor weak
		None use of systematic study or critical analysis of available data before publishing	Not applicable
		Misinterpretation of data or results of investigation, and invalid comparisons	Not applicable

Sources: Literature review, 2021

According to table ‘a’ above, the assessment of the status of social media coverage of the End SARS protest in 2020 particularly the Lekki Tollgate experience using the six approaches for detecting fake news reveals that the news disseminated were not fake news. The social media adopted multiple-journalistic format without the intent to nor actually deceiving the public – nationally and internationally. The events of the protests were transmitted live without deliberate distortions or manipulation of events to deceive the world. This finding contradicts the near dominant position in the literature, which holds that social media is a channel for fake news propagation (see Zhou, Zafarani, Shu & Liu, 2019; Bakir & Mc Stay, 2018; Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Silverman, 2016).

Comparing Social Media and orthodox Mass Media report on End SARS

Table b: Genuineness of Social Media and orthodox Mass Media report on End SARS

s/n	Indices of Fake news	Social media	Orthodox Mass Media	Remarks
1	Manipulation of the real photos of events and activities of the protests	Not applicable. The real photos, graphics and graphic images of the casualties and	CCTV cameras were reportedly removed and electricity cut to obscure and avoid recording the details of	Orthodox Mass Media report subjected to manipulation of the activities of protesters

		the ruins left at the Lekki tollgate flooded the internet	events at the Lekki Tool gate	
2	Manipulation of activities of the protests to present distorted information and consequent false opinion	Not applicable. Presented details of security forces use of tear gas, water cannons and live ammunition against #EndSARS protesters; and armed thugs attacks on protesters, media outlets, and destruction of police stations and buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Nigerian press refused to cover the issue initially when major events were on-going ➤ Later, presented details of armed thugs attacks on protesters, media outlets, and destruction of police stations and buildings without presenting the security forces use of live ammunition against #EndSARS protesters 	Orthodox Mass Media presented distorted information on the protests with intent to deceive
3	Using real photos taken in a different environment and event to propagate the End SARS protest	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable
4	Manipulation of the real videos of events and activities of the protests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No, real video of Nigerian police officers and military personnel manhandling demonstrators were circulating on Twitter, Facebook, etc. ➤ October 20, 2020 security forces opened fire on unarmed demonstrators in Lekki, and was 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ CCTV cameras were reportedly removed and electricity cut to obscure and avoid recording the details of events at the Lekki Tool gate ➤ At least 12 journalists were attacked during the #EndSARS protests by security forces and unidentified perpetrators ➤ The National Broadcasting 	Government and the orthodox media carried out acts that undermined the propagation of genuine video information of the protests. Further, deliberate official efforts were made to cover up facts about the protests, and therefore, enhanced fake news during End SARS protests.

		livestreamed on Instagram	Commission (NBC) sanctioned three independent broadcasters on 26th October 2020 with fines ranging from N2,000,000 to N3,000,000 for propagating 'footages' of the End SARS activities	
5	Using real videos taken in a different environment and event to propagate the End SARS protest	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable
6	Publishing a true piece of End SARS news under a false title	Not applicable	Addressing the country on Friday October 20, 2020, President Buhari made no mention of military shooting but announced 51 civilian deaths and 37 injuries, with the death of 11 policemen and 7 soldiers due to "hooliganism"	Government and the orthodox media used false heading such as "hooliganism" to present true data i.e. numbers of deaths during the protests
7	Taking government, police, and military officials' quotations out of context	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable
8	Presenting reporter's opinion as an existing fact	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable
9	Presenting facts about the protest in a distorted form	Not applicable	Presented conflicting account and casualties figure on the Lekki Tollgate protest	Government and orthodox media presented distorted account of the protest

10	Neglecting important details that completely change the context of the news	Details of police brutality, dynamics and progress of the protests, organizers, supporters and volunteers activities such as donations, disbursements, and accounts of disbursed funds were published in Instagram, Twitter, etc. through frequent updates	Government and orthodox media deliberately omitted essential parts of youths and security forces clash during the protests due to international human rights issues	Government and orthodox media faltered
11	Presenting completely framed-up information as fact	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable
12	False information and the manipulation of survey data	Social media reported that the military and police opened fire on unarmed protesters killing and injuring scores of civilians	Authorities and the Nigerian army initially denied they were present at the site, and later admitted that they were present. The military denied the shooting and killing but later accepted that it took place but denied their involvement in the shooting and killing of unarmed protesters at Lekki Tollgate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Footage showing heavily armed operatives in army camouflage reveals that the Nigerian Army was present during the Lekki shootings ➤ Amnesty International recorded 56 deaths and over 123 injuries on October 20 ➤ President Buhari later admitted 51 deaths and 37 injured civilians with 11 policemen and 7 soldiers' deaths
13	The use of inappropriate or weak methodologies such as peripheral study to gather	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable

	news and publish reports			
14	None use of systematic study or critical analysis of available data before publishing	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable
15	Misinterpretation of data or results of investigation, and invalid comparisons	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable

Sources: Literature review, 2021; Shayera (2020);Obia (2020); Olasoji (2020)

The result of a comparative analysis of the credibility and fake news status of the social media and orthodox mass media during the End SARS protest in table ‘b’ above reveals that out of fifteen variables considered, eight (8) were not applicable to the study. However, the Nigerian government with its orthodox mass media were culpable in the remaining seven (7) variables while the social media was not. The orthodox media committed acts that rendered the status of its news or information concerning the activities of the End SARS as fake news. It failed to cover the protest initially, manipulated the events/activities of protest and presented distorted information, published certain facts under misleading and false heading, CCTV camera and lights were turned off to shield the footage of events at the Lekki Tollgate, and denied military use of life bullets to kill unarmed civilians but later acknowledge such when evidences became viral. Therefore, orthodox media presented false news during the End SARS while the social media did not. This finding collaborates earlier findings made by scholars to the effect that orthodox media is a potential propagator of fake news with intent to deceive due to political reasons (see Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Khaldarova & Pantti, 2016 among others).

Social Media as a veritable source of news gathering in the 21st century

From the findings made in tables ‘a’ & ‘b’, it is innocuous to note that social media is an attractive medium for genuine news gathering and reporting in the 21st century. It has gained popularity as a media tool that governments cannot censor and limit easily in spite of its anti-government character. Even professional journalists and traditional/orthodox media industries particularly foreign reporters rely on it for gathering and disseminating information. The open chat room nature of most of its tools makes it a useful means of newsgathering and propagation in this era of media inclusivity, citizens’ journalism, and information democratisation (Wright & Hinson, 2009).

Characteristically, its cost-effective, fast in its global reach, ensures wide coverage even in the rural areas, and amenable to minimal technicalities. During unrests and protests involving large number of people or a whole population, it enables journalists to find and connect with sources, events, and sourcing multimedia content quickly and accurately too (Noam, 2016). For

instance, “WeChat has a GPS-based friend-finder for meeting people nearby so journalists on the platform can contact nearby persons at a breaking news event to interview as sources”.

During the protest, Nigerian youths used their tech-savvy influence to draw international attention to the brutality on protesters, which prompted international reactions and response after the video of Lekki shooting went viral. In the first place, it was the circulation of a where members of the SARS unit were killing an unarmed young man in Edo on Twitter that prompted Nigerian youths call for the dissolution of the notorious police unit and effect police reform, with the hashtag, #EndSARS, #Endpolicebrutality, and many others (Dan-Awoh, 2020). Government would not have allowed its media houses to circulate such video. Therefore, social media has demonstrated reliability, effectiveness and efficiency in the emergency management of crucial information that is vital for public safety before, during, and after an incident (Lindsay, 2011). In addition, it allows individuals, response organizations, and victims to interact and communicate in ways not amenable to traditional or orthodox media. Thus, it is an essential tool for news gathering in the 21st century.

Conclusion

The emergence of internet based media vis-à-vis social media revolutionized and democratised communication in the 21st century. It’s fast, accessible, cost effective, and uncensored or unlimited activities led to successful civil challenge of dictatorial regimes across the world, people’s criticism of government policies, and effective opposition mobilisation. It was a veritable instrument for mobilising, organising, and managing 2020 youth protests in Nigeria against police brutality and its SARS unit rascality. As trending across the world, the federal government and its supporters were quick to stigmatised social media dissemination of activities during the protests as fake news.

However, using the indices of the six theoretical propositions or approaches to detecting fake news, this study observed that the information gathered and propagated during the End SARS protests does not qualify for fake news. Rather, it was the information disseminated by the government through the orthodox/traditional media that meets the fake news criteria. Thus, social media is a veritable tool for newsgathering and dissemination in the 21st century irrespective of its weaknesses.

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