COMMUNICATION, THE MASS MEDIA & GOOD GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all members of the

Association of Media and Communication Researchers of Nigeria (AMCRON)

Foreword

I am very delighted to write the Foreword to this book titled – COMMUNICATION, THE MASS MEDIA & GOOD GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA. From the title of the book, the content and unit pluralism in the treatment of each chapter, I am of the opinion that the book is not only **timely** and **topical**, but also **contemporary** from both its conceptual and structural frameworks.

The book is divided into three sections with twenty-four chapters. The writers are a mixture from the academia and the media industries. As treated in the book, the gap between the **classrooms** and the **newsrooms** has added the necessary value, colour and glamor to the entire book.

Section one, simply titled **Communication,** covers political communication from public policy to political instability in Africa. Equally important and interesting discourse in this section are the freedom of information, the social media typologies, twitter advocacy, political advertising, fake news and the damage it can do to sustainable democracy. The writers in this section forcefully call for caution while challenging the main stream media to wake up from their slumber by not allowing the so-called social media, to turn the media landscape into social disorder. The main stream media must suffocate the social media for attainment of sustainable democracy, the writers emphasise.

Section two of the book is on the unending military coup d'etats in Africa and the challenges of military intervention on democracy in Africa. The writers in this section call for media mitigation of political instability in Africa and many more.

Section three titled **Good Governance**, calls on the African media to continue to make African political leaders to see, and always provide appropriate dividends of democracy to their citizens. The concepts of political inclusiveness, the **ethos of "omoluabi"** in good governance, accountability and transparency in government and effective public participation in governance plus the **rule-of- law** and not the **law of the rule** are the perquisites for an enduring and sustainable democracy which Africa urgently needs for her vertical, horizontal and horizo-vertical pattern of democracy.

Indeed, this book, in my opinion is a compendium of well-researched and well-written chapters by well-endowed academicians and professionals. It is therefore my pleasure to appreciate the writers, the editors and indeed our Association, the Association of Media and Communication Researchers of Nigeria (AMCRON) for an excellent publication, the first in the series.

I recommend the book to all African political leaders, media researchers, educators, professionals, students and others who may wish to take on adventure into the Africa media landscape.

Happy Reading.

Professor Ralph A Akinfeleye, Ph.D, Fnipr, Fnge, Fcids
Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication,
Africa Rep and Council Member, World Journalism Education Congress,
Chair, BOT, (AMCRON).

September 9, 2024

Preface

This book is a product of the 3rd International Conference of the Association of Media and Communication Researchers of Nigeria (AMCRON) held at the Biodun Shobanjo Centre of Excellence in Multimedia Technology and Cinematography, Department of Mass Communication, University of Lagos, Akoka, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria in December 2023. The theme of the conference was **Communication, Mass Media & Governance in Africa: Trajectories, Expectations and Realities**.

The conference was predicated on recent happenings regarding governance in Africa which show that communication between the government and the governed is challenged. Although the level of the challenge varies across different nations on the continent, what is certain is that the tunes played across the spheres are discordant. For instance, analysts express fears about the long-term effect of the re-emergence of military coup d'etats in Africa with countries such as Burkina Faso, Chad, Gabon, Guinea, Mali, Niger, and Sudan recently falling victim to the aberration. Many African countries are under the siege of state terrorism and dictatorial leadership which have been entrenched through forced tenure elongation by sit-tight leaders. Analysts blame the situation on the cultural degradation across many African societies, which has pushed communal values and norms to the back. The question then arises, what role(s) have the mass media played in all these?

The mass media have often been accused of contributing to the discordant tunes among the players in governance. The nature of the mass media, the entrenched interests of media owners and the constantly evolving social media dynamics have meant that the conversation will keep changing.

If the conversation will keep changing, what are going to be the trajectories of the conversation? What are the expectations of the people? What are the realities on ground? These, and many other perspectives were what participants examined at the Conference. The sub-themes examined included: Communication, Mass Media and Coups d'etat in Africa; Communication, Mass Media and Political Instability in Africa; Communication, Mass Media and Unconstitutional Change of Government in Africa; Communication, Mass Media and State Terrorism in Africa; Social Media and the Dynamics of Governance in Africa; Communication, Social Media and the Freedom of Expression in Africa; Communication, Democracy and Freedom of the Press in Africa; and Communication, Mass Media and Cultural Devaluation in Africa.

The empirical and theoretical/conceptual papers that were presented and discussed at the conference were subjected to thorough peer review and revisions by the authors. The final products are what are contained in this book.

We thank all members of the Association and committed stakeholders who participated in the conference and thus contributed to the making of this book. We commend the book to all researchers, scholars, media professionals, policymakers, stakeholders, and the general public.

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September 2024

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COMMUNIQUE

WHAT HAS FAILED IN AFRICA IS NOT DEMOCRACY, BUT THE "OPERATORS" OF DEMOCRACY

(*Text of a Communique issued at the end of the 3rd International Conference and Annual General Meeting of the Association of Media and Communication Researchers of Nigeria (AMCRON) held at the Biodun Shobanjo Multimedia Centre of Excellence, Department of Mass Communication, University of Lagos, Akoka, Yaba, Lagos from Wednesday, 6th to Thursday, 7th December, 2023.*)

The 3rd International Conference and Annual General Meeting of the Association of Media and Communication Researchers of Nigeria (AMCRON) took place on the 6th and 7th December 2023 at the Biodun Shobanjo Multimedia Centre of Excellence, Department of Mass Communication, University of Lagos. Themed "Communication, Mass Media and Governance in Africa: Trajectories, Expectations and Realities," it was AMCRON's first hybrid conference, following the past two conference editions in 2021 and 2022, which were fully virtually.

The two-day conference featured six panels – three on each day – and 60 (sixty) presentations, 48 of which were in person while 12 were online/Zoom presentations. Attendees, numbering over 200, included academics, media professionals, representatives of regulatory agencies, representatives of professional bodies, members of the University of Lagos community, postgraduate and undergraduate students, and other stakeholders. Participants came from Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Malaysia, Germany, and the U.S.A.

Speaking at the opening, Dr Biodun Shobanjo, OON, the Conference Chairman and Head of Trokya Holdings, touched on the relevance of AMCRON and the need for the conference to highlight and identify solutions to political and media capture. On his part, Professor Ralph Akinfeleye, Chairman of AMCRON's Board of Trustees, extolled the surveillance function and the constitutional obligation of the Nigerian media to hold government accountable to the people. Additionally, Professor Eserinune McCarty Mojaye, President of AMCRON, called for increased funding and support for AMCRON and media research more broadly as a way of promoting the media's role in good governance. Professor Adepoju Tejumaiye, Chairman of the Local Organising Committee, commented on the vital link between media and governance, calling for greater support for the media in this endeavour.

Goodwill messages came from different quarters, including the Vice-Chancellor, University of Lagos, Professor Folasade Ogunsola (represented by Prof. Adepoju Tejumaiye); the Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Lagos, Professor Laja Odukoya; the Dean, School of Postgraduate Studies, University of Lagos, Prof. Abraham Osinubi; the Chairman of Nigerians in Diaspora Commission, Honourable Abike Dabiri-Erewa (represented by Mr. Dipo Odebowale); the Director-General of the National Broadcasting Commission, Barr. Charles Ebuebu (represented by Mr. Raphael Akpan); the Director-General of the News Agency of Nigeria, Mr. Ali Muhammad Ali (represented by Mr. Kayode Olaitan); the President of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations, Dr. Ike Neliaku, (represented by the Group Managing Director of CMC Connect, Mr. Yomi Badejo-Okunsanya); the Director-General of the Voice of Nigeria, Mr. Jibrin Baba Ndace (represented by Mrs. Mary Atolagbe); and Prof. Daniel Olawale Awodiya of Delaware State University, Dover, Delaware, U.S.A.

At the end of the Conference, participants made resolutions regarding politics and governance, the role of the media, and the relevance of social platforms and other news media technologies.

On **politics and governance**, the Conference resolved as follows:

- Political actors, particularly the electoral body and political parties, are yet to fully tap the potentialities of social media in strengthening democracy and providing good governance in the country and, by extension, the African continent.
- It is important to note that what has failed in Nigeria is not democracy, but the "operators" of democracy.
- Democracy is a good thing for Africa, and it is only sustainable if the "operators" do things rightly and stop the practice of adulterated democracy.

- A stable political environment is an indispensable ingredient of economic growth and development.
- Good governance as reflected in the areas of social, political, and economic advancement is a prerequisite for the attainment of a full-fledged democracy.
- There is a need to entrench the principle of majority rule, healthy intra and inter-party competition, free and fair election, separation of powers between the Executive, Legislature and Judiciary, strict adherence to due process and the rule of law, and effective participation of civil society groups (the media as well as civil rights organisations) as part of ensuring that all and sundry promote good governance and accountability in Nigeria.

On **the role of the media**, the Conference resolved as follows:

- The Nigerian media are responsible for making the government accountable for their actions and policies just as the citizens have the right to demand good governance and hold the government responsible for their shortcomings.
- The watchdog role of the media despite "the capture of the media" is still evident, as was noticeable during the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria.
- Media managers should bring an end to the commercialisation of the media, both broadcasting and print, particularly regarding advertising.
- The media should uphold the ethics of reporting political news and be wary of the undue influence of political advertising during elections.
- The Nigerian media and security agencies need to work in concert if the objectives of reducing security challenges in Nigeria are to be achieved.
- Media literacy is important in civic engagement and in fostering a discerning electorate; hence, there is a need to promote responsible journalism that educates people.
- There is a need to intensify efforts on media education and media literacy among the Nigerian populace.
- Free media and freedom of expression are two essential ingredients of democracy and good governance that the media and government should uphold.

On **the relevance of social media and other new media technologies** in political engagement, social mobilization, and digital governance, the conference resolved as follows:

- The influence of social media on political participation, public discourse, and government responsiveness is undeniable, but challenges related to misinformation and digital divides negatively affect the prospects of equitable and transparent governance on the African continent.
- Social media has enhanced deliberative democracy in the digital age, and it has the potential for constructive deliberation in online forums.
- Organisations need to actively leverage digital platforms in their PR practices by being open to possibilities in the digital space, while being mindful of the risks of newer technologies such as AI.
- There is a need for a global multistakeholder protocol to regulate AI, one where African countries like Nigeria have a say in policy outcomes.
- The Nigerian populace should be encouraged to make appropriate use of social media platforms in creating and distributing genuine information.
- Online platforms are not credible media sources; hence, they should be designated as social platforms, not social media.

AMCRON thanked Dr. Biodun Shobanjo, OON, the University of Lagos, and all members of the Association for contributing greatly to the success of the 2023 Conference.

Prof. Ralph A. Akinfeleye
Chairman, Board of Trustees

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Exploring the dynamics of online fake political news, media literacy, and political engagement among university students in Kwara State

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Abstract

The information sphere in Africa and Nigeria, in particular, has evolved with the pervasive influence of social media. This has constantly brought to the fore, the pressing concern about fake news which unarguably is capable of undermining the political and democratic foundations of any nation. Experts and scholars have voiced apprehensions in recognizing these potential risks, emphasizing the urgent need for attention and intervention. This study delves into the interplay of online fake political news, media literacy, and political engagement among university students in Kwara State. This research focuses on university students who due to their dynamic energy and active engagement are expected to wield significant influence within the nation's population on issues of governance. We employed a quantitative research approach, surveying 400 respondents across selected universities in Kwara State, namely: the University of Ilorin, Al-Hikmah University, and Kwara State University. Key findings reveal a notable preference among respondents for online platforms as their primary source of political news; a substantial majority of participants exhibit a good level of media literacy, actively discerning and avoiding engagement with political processes tainted by fake news. Furthermore, our research establishes a relationship between exposure to online fake political news and political participation among university students. Our findings underscore the pivotal role of media literacy in shaping civic engagement and fostering a discerning electorate and highlight the need for a nuanced understanding of the use of digital and social media landscape to foster integration and political stability through the youths' active engagement in governance.

Keywords: social media, Fake political news, media literature, political engagement, university students

INTRODUCTION

In this 21st century, a significant portion of the population relies on online media, including the social media, as their primary source of information regarding public events and politics. This preference arises from the convenience and speed it offers (Chaffee & Kanihan, 1997; Petty &

Cacioppo, 1986). A recent data suggest that the usage of these online channels for news is expanding exponentially (Shearer, 2021). Sasu (2023) reported that as at 2022, the number of social media users in Nigeria reached approximately 33 million, with a penetration rate of about 16%.

Social media facilitate the creation and eventual consolidation of larger and more diverse, heterogeneous social networks (Brundidge, 2010; Diehl et al., 2016) that may share politically dissimilar news contents (Bakshy et al., 2012; Messing & Westwood, 2014). Literature suggests that the rise of fake news or distorted information has been intensified by technological advancements (for example, Allcot, 2018) As more people gain access to the internet, they become both disseminators of information and purveyors of disinformation

In the months leading up to and after the 2016 election in the US, the spread of politically charged digital deception is believed to have become a widespread phenomenon. For instance, Allcott and Gentzkow (2019) estimated that the average US adult could have read and remembered at least one fake news article.

Nigeria is not left out as the current information landscape has given rise to the problem of fake news, a dangerous phenomenon that can potentially undermine a nation's political and democratic structures if not addressed (Pate, Gambo & Ibrahim, 2019). Experts, government officials, and opinion leaders have expressed concerns about the challenges posed by fake news (Kolawole, 2017). According to Ireton and Posetti (2016), fake news revolves around the importance of accuracy, accountability, and transparency in public life, both nationally and internationally. Undoubtedly, fake news has had detrimental effects on Nigeria's political development and electoral processes, considering it is the most populous black nation on the planet (Sanusi, Adelabu & Esiri, 2015). Ogbuoshi, Oyeleke, and Folorunsho (2019) state that the spread of fake news has become a widely discussed topic in Nigeria's social, economic, and political spheres, leading concerned citizens and prominent figures to call for legislative measures.

The negative effect of fake news on the society has received varied attention from scholars from different fields, including the political communication. For example, Allcot, Hunt and Gentzkow (2017) aver that the rise of fake news has had significant implications, particularly in influencing people's attitudes and beliefs, including within political discussions. Kolawole (2017) emphasize

that the dissemination of fake news through online platforms for political purposes perpetuates a culture of intolerance, electoral violence, and political apathy among Nigeria's political class. He further suggests that this type of violence can manifest in various ways, such as killings, looting, property damage, verbal attacks, death threats, bombings, disruption of political rallies, voter apathy, destruction of campaign materials, inter-party conflicts, violent protests, hooliganism, and abductions. According to Sanusi (2015), these manifestations and impediments not only pose a threat to democratization but also endanger the country's political stability, peace, and unity. Ogbuoshi (2019) further argue that exposure to false information can have detrimental effects, including a decline in trust in mainstream media, fostering feelings of inadequacy, alienation, and cynicism towards political candidates. This may also lead to the creation of false memories regarding fabricated policies or events.

Ladd and Lenz (2008) aptly explains that when people are exposed to false information, it can lead to a variety of negative effects, including a decline in trust in the mainstream media, the development of feelings of inadequacy, alienation, and cynicism toward political candidates, the formation of false memories of made-up policy-relevant events, and the anchoring of people's perceptions of foreign subjects, the mainstream media often lack proper gatekeeping before information are disseminated.

On its effect on the electorates, Wardle and Derahhshan (2020) also observed that young people tend to develop apathy towards any form of fake or distorted information shared online. Kolawole (2017) adds that this apathy is not a recent phenomenon as various global political surveys have shown similar trends among young people. Young people's disinterest in traditional politics, including the electoral process, seems to be persistent despite calls at various level to encourage participation of the younger generation on governance of their nation (Umeaku & Babatunde, 2021). Supporting these claims, Shearer and Huberman (2021) argue that young people of between age 18 and 24 are significantly less likely to vote than any other age group, especially when there is hostility and apathy preceding such election. Hence, it becomes imperative to examine the potential role of young people’s exposure to online political fake news in their political engagement. The study of this nature is important as not much attention has been given to the issue of fake news in the context of youths’ participation in politics.

University Students who are more of the youth are considered a vital part of the population of any country. This is because of the vibrancy and the energy the youths use in carrying out tasks actively, which also reflect in their involvement in the political affairs of society like voting and also envisaging political offices. This is particularly concerning in Kwara State, like every other state in Nigeria, where university students are a significant demographic and active users of social media platforms. It is therefore important to answer questions whether the university students lose interest in politics, avoid decision on political matters, whenever fake political news dominates the political space and whether media literacy can potentially mitigate the impact of fake news on political engagement of the people. Specifically, this study sets out to achieve the following research objectives:

1. To establish the level of exposure to online political news.

2. To establish the level of media literacy among the university students

3. To find out the perceived effect of online fake political news on students' political participation

4. To establish the relationship between exposure to political fake news and political participation among university students in Kwara state

Political participation

The notion of political participation is at the center of the concept of the democracy. This implies that true democracy thrives where people are actively engaged and involved in decision making. The concept has received varied conceptualizations to reflect its place in democracy and governance of a nation. Political participation refers to the active involvement of individuals in the political process and activities that shape the governance of a society (Falade, 2014). It encompasses a wide range of actions through which people can express their opinions, influence political decisions, and contribute to the functioning of a democratic system (Abdullahi, 2018). Political participation is a fundamental aspect of democratic societies, as it helps ensure that citizens have a voice in the decisions that affect their lives. Political participation often come in form of voting, political activism, participation in political rallies and campaigning during

elections, community involvement, participating in public forum and governance, social media activism which involves the raising awareness, information sharing and engaging in public discussion forum via the social media. By actively participating in these activities, people are able to form and express their opinions about the world and how it is governed, as well as attempt to influence and shape decisions that affect their lives (Mustapha & Mustapha, 2017; Stefanone, Vollmer & Covert, 2019). Zubaiga (2010) points out that it is a voluntary activity in which anyone can participate either directly or indirectly.

Only in the last five years have Nigerian youth actively engaged in and demonstrated their relevance in governance. The momentum increased in 2019 with the groundbreaking legislation that lowered the age requirements for presidential and gubernatorial candidates. The age limit for presidential candidacy was reduced from 40 to 35, and for governorship positions, it went from 35 to 30. Advocates for youth involvement in governance have gained significant support, resulting in increased youth participation in governance from 2015 to the latest election in 2023.

The impact of youth participation in politics and governance is evident, with political activists and experts expressing optimism about heightened political awareness, increased support, and greater responsibilities entrusted to the younger generation. This positive trend is expected to make a meaningful difference in people's lives (Abdullahi, 2018). Despite the continuous criticism of Nigerian political leaders for poor governance and ongoing political challenges (Norris, 2017, among others), the growing distrust in the media, including social media, may also contribute to the perceived lack of interest in governance (Umeaku & Babatunde, 2021). Ursin (2000) aptly notes that trust in the news media is crucial for its effective functioning and shapes the audience's perception of the political system. One of the reasons for lack of trust in the media is the presence of fake information or misinformation that vacillates profusely in the media, particularly the social media platforms.

Fake political news on social media

People who rely on the social media environment for information often encounter both verified accurate information as well as fabricated information (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Lazer et al., 2018). Fake news has received various conceptualization, one of such referred to it as fabricated, false news that could mislead consumers by mimicking news media content (Allcott &

Gentzkow, 2017). Extant literature has presented a pessimistic view on the potential impact of fake news on society (Balmas, 2014; Rapp & Salovich, 2018). Because fake news spreads deeper and faster than authentic news (Vosoughi et al., 2018), the areas of health and medicine have seen such negative impact because prior knowledge is usually required to determine the authenticity of the content (Ha et al., 2021). Also, other areas such as politics is also affected by the prevalence of fake news and misinformation. Propagators or users of this strategy believe in the theory that when people assume fake news to be authentic, it matters may change their attitude and influence their behaviour, which includes attitudes towards politics and politicking (Chadwick et al., 2018; Luo et al., 2020).

In this context, various actors within political systems have strategically employed deceptive narratives for political advantages, exemplified by instances such as Donald Trump's presidential campaigns (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Guo & Vargo, 2020) and similar practices observed during electoral campaigns in Nigeria. The 2023 electoral period in Nigeria, in particular, witnessed a surge in the dissemination of false information across social media platforms. Contentious materials, especially concerning religion and ethnicity, proliferated on social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and WhatsApp. Although social media provides a real-time avenue for Nigerians to exchange information, political strategists are exploiting this medium in preparation for the polls. Idayat Hassan, the director of the Abuja-based think tank, the Centre for Democracy and Development [CDD], remarked that misinformation and disinformation are pervasive in this election, with political actors actively promoting this trend to achieve their objectives (Al Jazeera, February 2023). Notably, certain posts targeted Peter Obi, the presidential candidate of the Labour Party, accusing him of remunerating church groups for their endorsement and associating him with the separatist group, Independent People of Biafra (IPOB). Another allegation surfaced against Rabiu Kwankwaso, the presidential candidate of the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP), questioning the legitimacy of his claimed academic and honorary doctorate degree. The circulation of false claims and viral videos depicting inaccurate portrayals of the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) processes also contributed to the pre-election misinformation witnessed.

Fact checkers collaborated with journalists from various media organisations, applying relevant softwares and tools to verify the veracity and subsequently debunking claims in the information

being disseminated during the period. Such team of fact checkers, no doubt made meaningful impact as politicians became cautious of what they say, after being aware of the negative impact of being called out for misleading statement (Egwu, 2023). The activities of these groups created a vibrant community, wanting to verify content, thereby improving on the information ecosystem invariably contributing to a more informed electorate.

The increased reliance on social media for information has led to concerns that fake news can manipulate public opinion and delegitimize opposing voices. Hassan (2023) observes that this effect can be on the climate of opinion in both online and offline media consumers, given that the dissemination of fake information online creeps into offline spaces through the traditional media. Experts observe that when one is unsure of which information is true or not in times when they are exposed to high volume of information, people can be desensitized and try to avoid making decisions. There is evidence that social media fake news, and political discussion are all positive predictors of individual political attitude change. For example, Thorson (2016), avers that fake news holds the potential to continue to shape people's attitudes, even when misinformation has been debunked. Gil de-Zuniga, Gonzalez and Goyanes (2022) reveal that online and social media news lead individuals to be exposed to fake news, which, in turn, predict higher levels of political discussion, ultimately facilitating political persuasion in the social media realm.

Media and Information Literacy

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA, 2011) conceptualized Media and Information Literacy (MIL) as encompassing the knowledge, attitudes, and a set of skills required to determine the necessity of information, identify where and how to access it, critically evaluate information to make informed judgments, organize it effectively, and apply it ethically. Also, UNESCO suggests that Media and Information Literacy (MIL) offers solutions to questions such as how to judiciously contribute content in both online and offline contexts, understanding the rights of consumers and creators of information in both realms, and how to use media and information and communication technologies (ICTs) to advance equality, intercultural and interreligious dialogue, peace, freedom of expression, and access to information (UNESCO, n,d).

Research in media studies and information literacy has evolved over the years, given also the expansion and evolvement witnessed in media and information platforms (Adjin-Tettey, 2022). Adjin-Tettey (2022), explained that early scholarships in the domain emphasized the analyses of text and visual communication (citing Lipschultz & Hilt, 2005), ability to read, write and speak (citing Ruben, 1997) and further developed into studying the relationship between reading, writing, and speaking and the development of visual and computer literacy skills (citing Potter,2001). Today, with media and information literacy has gone beyond these, to address the complex interaction between literacy and new media forms include digital media platforms.

By the above conception, MIL refers to the ability to access, evaluate, and create information in various forms of media. It involves critical thinking skills and an understanding of the role and impact of media on society. Here individuals are empowered to distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources, communicate effectively in a media-rich world and make sense of images and videos for their authenticity. This literacy is crucial for making informed opinions, decisions and fostering a responsible and informed citizenry. According to the UNESCO (n.d), the quality of information that consumers and users engage with basically defines their beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes.

False information and misinformation typically do not manifest overtly; they frequently present themselves as authentic. Their primary purpose is intentional deception, aiming to misinform readers or advance a specific agenda. Additionally, given the widespread use of digital technologies and the democratization of media ownership and content creation, the ability of users to discern between false and credible information becomes crucial in a vibrant democratic society. There is evidence that MIL trained individuals or people with high MIL are more likely to determine authenticity or otherwise of information and less likely to share inaccurate stories (Adjin-Tettey, 2022).

Theoretical foundation of the study

For this study two theories will be applicable which are Technological Determinism theory and media literacy theory. The theory of Technological Determinism posits that advancements in media technology play a pivotal role in shaping the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of individuals within a society. It also influences the overall functioning of the society as it

transitions from one technological era to another (e.g., Tribal-Literate-Print-Electronic). Marshall McLuhan is a notable theorist associated with this concept. According to him, one cannot analyze the "content" of media independently of the technological framework that underlies the media itself (McLuhan, 1962). Coined by Thorstein Veblen, the term 'technological determinism' asserts that the nature of a society is defined by its prevailing technology. To Tandoc, Lim and Ling, (2020), technological determinism suggests shapes society and human behavior, and that technological advancements drive social change.

When examining the issue of fake political news and political participation in the digital age, the relevance of the theory of technological determinism lies in understanding how technological advancements shape the dissemination, reception and impact of misinformation in the contemporary age. According to Woolley & Howard (2017), the theory highlights the transformative influence of digital technologies on society, including the dissemination and consumption of information. The rise of social media platforms and digital communication tools has significantly changed how political news is produced, shared, and consumed. Hence, this speed of online communication contribute to swift spread of misinformation. Talway, Dhu, Kaur, Zafar and Alrasheedy (2019) assert that digital technologies have facilitated the rapid and widespread dissemination of information, including fake political news. The constant exposure to sensationalized or misleading content on digital media may influence public perceptions, beliefs, and political attitudes. According to Gil de Zuniga, Weeks and Ardevol-Abreu (2017), the technologies we use do not only shape our modes of communication but also influence public discourse.

Media literacy theory is built on the foundation of principles of how humans think. It is a framework that seeks to promote critical thinking and active engagement with media messages (Talway et al, 2019). It encompasses a set of skills, knowledge, and attitudes that enable individuals to navigate, analyze, and evaluate media content effectively (Livingstone, 2009). The theory recognizes that media plays a significant role in shaping public opinion, influencing behavior, and constructing meaning in society (Tandoc, 2019), by understanding the underlying principles and techniques employed in media production, consumers can become more informed, discerning, and active participants in the media landscape (Tandoc, Lim & Ling, 2017). At its core, media literacy theory emphasizes the importance of developing a critical stance towards

media messages. It encourages individuals to question and challenge the information presented to them rather than passively accepting it (Buckingham,2005). This involves examining the purpose, perspective, and potential biases embedded within media content (Renee, 2005) By doing so, individuals can become more aware of the power dynamics and vested interests that may influence the information they consume (Glenski & Weninger, 2017). Summarily, scholars has used the theory to explain how people might absorb the flood of information in media-saturated society and how they often construct faulty meanings from those messages.

The theory has equally been criticized on several grounds. Buckingham (2003) argue that media literacy theory places an excessive burden on individuals to critically analyze every media message they encounter. Zhang and Ghorban (2020) suggest that media literacy theory may overlook the practical limitations and time constraints faced by individuals. Another criticism is that media literacy initiatives have not demonstrated significant and sustained impact in terms of changing people's media consumption habits or improving critical thinking skills. Stefanone, et al (2010) argues that media literacy education alone may not be enough to counteract the powerful influences of media and its potential to shape attitudes and behaviors. They emphasize the need for broader structural and regulatory changes to address media-related issues effectively. However, the relevance of the theory in this study lies in the fact that it is important to gauge individuals' ability to critically engage with information, fostering a more discerning and informed public in the face of misinformation and manipulation.

Methodology

The study focused on undergraduates in Kwara State universities. Six universities exist in Kwara State but for this study, four universities were purposively selected. They include the University of llorin, Kwara State University and Al-Hikmah University owned by Federal, state and private, respectively. The total of 398 samples, determined using the Taro Yamane's formular was selected out of a population of about 80000 students, across the three universities. Data were collected, using the structured questionnaire, for a period of one month and analyzed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) software.

Findings

Results were presented in simple frequency and percentage tabulation. Tables below shows the result obtained from 381 samples which were correctly filled and returned.

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variables	Options	Frequency	Percentage
	Male	177	46.5
Gender	Female	204	53.5
	Total	**381**	**100%**
	Below years	26	6.8
	18 – 24 years	262	68.8
Age Range	25 – 29 years	89	23.4
	30 years and above	4	1.0
	Total	**381**	**100%**
	100 level	65	17.1
Level	200 level	100	26.2

	300 level	117	30.7
	400 level	84	22.0
	Others	15	3.9
	Total	**381**	**100%**

Table above indicates that majority of the respondents that participated in the study were females. The table also showed that roughly 70 % of the respondents were between the ages of 18 – 24 years which reflects the average age group of most university students. On the basis academic level, majority of the respondent 117 (30.7%) in 300 level were more which is appropriate given the nature of the study.

Exposure to online political news

One of the objectives of this study is to find out how respondents get information and update about political news and their exposure to online political news.

Table 2: Respondents preferred medium of political News

Variables	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Radio	24	6.3
Television	29	7.6
Online	302	79.3
Print	19	5.0
From family/friends	7	1.8

Total	**381**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2023

As shown in table above, 6.3% of the respondents get information through radio, 7.6% through television, 79.3% online, 5.0% through prints and 1.8% from families. Therefore, majority of the respondents get information and update about political news online. This finding made it clear that most students in Kwara state university make use of online medium to get political information.

Table 3: How frequent participants access the internet for political news update

Variables	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Daily	152	39.9
Bi-weekly	96	25.2
Weekly	103	27.0
Bi-monthly	13	3.4
Monthly	17	4.5
Total	**381**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2023

In the above table, majority of the respondents access the internet for political news update daily.

Table 4: Respondents preferred social network for getting political news?

Variables	**Frequency**	**Percentage**

Facebook	21	5.5
Twitter	112	29.4
Google	45	11.8
Opera	103	27.0
News sites	81	21.3
Others	19	5.0
Total	**381**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2023

As shown in table above, 5.5% of the respondents utilize Facebook, 29.4% utilize Twitter, 11.8% utilize Google, 27.0% utilize Opera, 21.3% utilize News sites and 5.0% utilize other social networks not captured in this study. Therefore, majority of the respondents utilize Twitter in getting political news, from the data derived it is clear that students in universities in Kwara state mostly use twitter to get political information than other platforms.

Table4: Respondents' exposure to online fake political news.

N	Variables	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	SD
1	I have come across political information/News that I later discovered not to be true	148 (0.8%)	159 (7.3%)	43 (11.3%)	28 (41.7%)	3 (38.8%)	4.10	0.926

2	I find it difficult to separate credible online political news from fake ones	73 (19.2%)	84 (22.0%)	139 (36.5%)	57 (15.0%)	28 (7.3%)	3.31	1.157
3	I have shared a political news that was a made-up story	58 (15.2%)	67 (17.6%)	97 (25.5%)	97 (25.5%)	62 (16.3%)	2.90	1.298
	Total	**24.4%**	**27.1%**	**24.4%**	**15.9%**	**8.1%**	**3.44**	**1.097**

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 4 reveals that participants have come across political information/News that they later discovered not to be true (M=4.10; SD=0.926). However, majority of the respondents were indecisive on the item statement I' find it difficult to separate credible online political news from fake ones" (M=3.31; SD=1.157). Larger percentage of the respondents chose disagree and strongly disagree as compared to agree and strongly agree for the item statement. "I have shared a political news that was a made-up story" (M=2.90; SD=1.298),

Level of Media Literacy

The objective of this study is to find out how the respondents navigate and interpret the vast information through online media platforms.

N	Variables	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	SD
1	I am deliberate in the	159	146	67	0	9	4.17	.882

	selection of online media platforms assess for political news	(41.7%)	(38.3%)	(17.6%)	(0%)	(2.4%)		
2	I can detect fake political news shared online	88 (23.1%)	116 (30.4%)	101 (26.5%)	52 (13.6%)	24 (6.3%)	3.50	1.169
3	I know of search engine that can be used to detect the veracity of any news shared online	68 (17.8%	148 (38.8%)	116 (30.4%)	42 (11.0%)	7 (1.8%)	3.60	.965
4	I understand the content of online political news	105 (27.6%)	198 (52.0%)	54 (14.2%)	9 (2.4%)	15 (3.9%)	3.97	.931
	Total	**27.5%**	**39.8%**	**22.1%**	**0.6%**	**0.3%**	**3.81**	**0.98**

The table above shows that participants strongly agree that they are deliberate in the selection of online media platforms they assess for political news (M=4.17; SD=0.88) . Majority of the respondents agreed that they can detect fake political news shared online (M=3.50; SD=0.16). They also agreed that they know of search engine that can be used to detect the veracity of any news shared online (M=3.60; SD=0.96). Respondents also reported that they have ability to understand the content of online political news (M=3.97; SD=0.93). Hence it can be deduced from the table that the level of media literacy of the participant is high (M=3.81; SD=0.98).

Level of political participation

This objective of the study is to find out level of political participation among students in universities in Kwara state.

N	Variables	O	S	HE	N	Mean	SD
1	Are you interested in online political News to gain political knowledge	189 (49.6%)	104 (27.3%)	50 (11.3%)	28 (13.1%)	2.94	0.895
2	Does your exposure to fake political news online shaped your political beliefs	160 (42.0%)	53 (13.9%)	105 (27.6%)	63 (16.5%)	2.53	0.927
3	Do you intend to contest for any political seat in future	66 (17.3%)	105 (27.6%)	113 (29.7%)	97 (25.5%)	2.39	1.047
4	Do you stay away from political process due to misinformation	200 (52.5%)	43 (11.3%)	73 (19.2%)	65 (17.1%)	2.58	0.901
5	Does your trust in online political information keep declining, and makes you less likely to participate in	58 (16.5%)	221 (10.2%)	39 (58.0%)	63 (15.2%)	2.72	0.916

political processes.

Total	**17.0%**	**46.3%**	**32.5%**	**16.5%**	**3.29**	**1.17**

Table above reveals that majority of the respondents are sometimes interested in online political News to gain political knowledge (M=2.94; SD=0.895), exposure to fake political news online shaped their political beliefs (M=2.53; SD=0.927); majority of them hardly ever intend to contest for any political seat in future (M=2.39; SD=1.047). Also, a significant number of the respondents often stay away from political process due to misinformation (M=2.58; SD=0.901). They also perceive a decline in trust in online political information, making them less likely to participate in political processes (M=2.72; SD=0.916). Hence it can be deduced from the table that the level of political participation among students in Kwara state is low (M=3.29; SD=1.17).

Online fake political news and political participation

This objective here is to establish the relationship between online fake political news and political participation among university students in Kwara state.

Table: Relationship between online fake political news and students' political participation

	No	Mean	Std. Deviation	Pearson Correlation	Sig.(2-tailed)
Political participation	381	2.16	.46	.049	.343

Exposure to fake news	1.63	.52

@p≤0.05

The Pearson correlation coefficient result shows the link between political fake news and students' political participation. The table above shows the number of cases, the correlation coefficient, and the significant values. The correlation value of 0.049, indicates that the relationship between exposure to fake news and political participation is weak or negligible since the value is less than 0.5; hence close to zero (0). Simply put, as exposure to fake political news increases, there is a slight tendency for political participation to increase. In addition, the result also revealed that the level of student political participation is insignificantly related to exposure to online fake political news, since the p-value is greater than the level of significance (alpha = 0.05). In other words, the weak positive correlation might be due to random chance, and the study does not provide sufficient evidence to conclude that the relationship is not coincidental.

However, the presence of high media literacy among the participants may have influenced the weak correlation. With a high level of media literacy, individuals are better equipped to critically evaluate and filter information. In this context, a weak correlation might indicate that media-literate individuals are less influenced by exposure to fake political news in their political participation.

Discussion of Findings

The data analysed in this study was obtained from 400 undergraduates in three selected universities in Kwara state from 3rd to 10th of July 2023. The entire results offer a wide range of insights and conclusions.

The major research question was to establish the relationship between exposure to political fake news and political participation among university students in Kwara state. Data from the survey led to the conclusion that majority of the respondents are interested in and rely on online political news to gain political knowledge. Similarly, Dahlberg and Siapera (2007) in their research found that with the rise of online media, the political media system has become more complicated.

However, their exposure to fake political news online often shaped their political beliefs. In fact, a significant number of the respondents 'hardly ever' intend to contest for any political seat in future. This result support that of Astin (2019), who observed that the nature of the poor democracy in the country has made the students become uninterested in the political scene of the country. Also supporting Parry's (1992) submission that students have developed political apathy toward everything related to the country's politics.

Another insight this study provides is in the aspect of the respondents' level of media literacy where by 42% respondents strongly agree to be deliberate in the selection of online media platforms they assess for political news. Another 50% agree to understand the content of online political news. A significant number of the respondents also reported to have knowledge of search engines for detecting the veracity of any news shared online. These generally implies that the students are media literate in the detection of fake political news they read online.

The study showed that the negative impact of online fake political news on political engagement as reported by the students. participation in politics where by 36.5% respondents are neutral that they have shared a political news that was a made up story, also 41.7 respondents agree to come across political information/News that they later discovered not to be true, which implies that most of the students come across fake political news online, while 36.5% respondents are neutral to find it difficult to separate credible online political news from fake ones. this is familiar with a study conducted by

Conclusion

This research is another examination of the interplay of online fake political news and political engagement in a democratic society like Nigeria. It provides evidence of the potential role of media literacy in generating and driving the appropriate political consciousness. The study has

shown that the student are exposed to fake political news in their quest for information to gain political knowledge through online sources. The students reported the possibilities of these misleading information impacting on their political beliefs and plans for future political engagement. This is even as they demonstrated a good level of media literacy. This clearly indicates the students' potential ability to apply non-technical reasoning to decipher the authenticity of news and information whenever they are prompted to do so, implying that they are likely to become cautious about interpreting and sharing information that seem fake. They do not only actively discern and but also avoid engagement with political processes tainted by fake news. Even as this understanding is valuable and imperative to democracy, it points to the negative consequence of decision avoidance, negative political beliefs and attitude, leading to poor engagement in politics and governance among the young people.

However, based on the findings on the relationship between exposure to online political fake news and political participation, this study exercises caution in drawing causal conclusions between exposure to fake political news and political participation. The weak correlation and non-significant p-value suggest that the observed relationship may not be robust and may not imply causation. While, we infer that exposure to fake political news may have limited practical significance in predicting or influencing political participation, especially among a media-literate population, it is essential to consider other potential factors that may influence political participation. High media literacy could be acting as a mitigating factor, and other variables such as political interest, trust in institutions, or socio-economic factors may play significant roles.

Based on the foregoing that the study recommends that:

Future research should explore additional factors that may contribute to political participation. It could also investigate the specific mechanisms through which media literacy interacts with exposure to fake news and political engagement.

Since the renewed interest in political processes is now being adversely affected by the preponderance of fake information out there, it is important that there should be a sustained effort to train and educate the students on ways to filter information and seek information from credible sources. Interest in political process can be developed when people are constantly exposed to credible information.

Major stakeholders can work with the media to ensure proper gatekeeping process which also includes prompt detection and debunking of misleading and fake information before they are spread.

There should be proper sensitization of political actors and party agents on the proper use of digital and social media in propagating political information. This should be followed by stringent deterrent measures for any content producer found wanting in developing and sharing fake stories.

Youths should be encouraged and made to drive the appropriate political narratives through online discussion forum where opinions are voiced. These are positive engagements that benefit governance in any democratic society.

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