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CMS 204 SPECIALIZED REPORTING: SOCIAL MEDIA AND PROLIFERATION OF FAKE NEWS, DODGY HEALTH ADVICE AND FAKE CURES OF COVID-19

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Social media is a collective term for websites and applications which focus on communication, community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. Different types of social media are normally dedicated to forums, micro blogging, social networking, social bookmarking, social duration, and wikis are among the. Many individuals will use social media to stay in touch and interact with friends and family, while others use it to communicate with different communities. Many businesses will use social media as a way to market and promote their products. Social media has become larger and more accessible thanks to access to mobile applications, with some examples of social media including Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

Fake news is the term used to refer to fabricated news. Fake news is an invention, a lie created out of nothing that takes the appearance of real news with the aim of deceiving people. This is what is important to remember: the information is false, but it seems true. That's logical, if it is too obvious that it is a lie, it won't have any impact. Fake news is a little like a false rumor, but on a large scale.

Fear inevitably leads to panic, speculation, and the spread of fake news. Though, modern technology means even while the isolation is ongoing we don't have to be lonely as it serve as a means to ease boredom for ourselves in essence social media and other online channels means our friends and loved ones are just a click away. Of course, it has its downsides too. Rumors and outright lies can spread around the world faster than ever before and this can feed the fear, anxiety and mental stress that many people are experiencing. As the pandemic began to unfold across the globe, bad, dangerous, or just plain stupid information's came with it.

One of the earliest false rumors was that drinking alcohol provided a level of protection against the disease. It was even said that deaths were caused by people consuming industrial alcohol to try and disinfect themselves. With this in mind, it's reassuring that some of the biggest internet and social media companies are making an effort to live up to their responsibilities, as gatekeepers of what information can be sent over their network.

The COVID-19 pandemic has come to dominate the social media in the past few weeks, both domestically and abroad. The increased attention on the pandemic has come the viral the spread of COVID-19 fake news online. Many of the stories appear tantalizing as they are patently false.

Talking about reality, it was not the US government that created the virus. And it wasn't the Chinese government either. And no 5G has nothing to do with the pandemic. Misinformation is something that we might expect for any major event that captures people's imagination, but in the case of COVID-19, the spread of fake news offers unique challenges and dangers to the public.

The global COVID-19 pandemic is happening at a time when sorting facts from friction is increasingly difficult. In Nigeria, fake news has accompanied the virus spread, provoking fear and

exploiting vulnerabilities. Many Nigerians till date have simply refused to believe the disease existence rather they feel it is a political game.

Health information, dodgy health advice and also fake cures is nothing new to Nigeria. At the height of Ebola epidemic in 2014, false news circulated around the country through the social media. This included advice allegedly from the Atta of Igala, that bathing in and ingesting salt water could stop one from getting the disease. This false information circulated first on social media and led to lots of deaths.

This same pattern has already re-emerged during the COVID-19 outbreak. According to Lagos health officials, three people have been hospitalized after *over dosing* on chloroquine, this followed rumors publicly endorsed by US President Donald Trump, that the drug could treat the virus. The treat of fake news is greater in 2020 than in 2014, false information is more sophisticated than ever and its potential spread much wider. In the year 2015, Nigeria has 76 million internet subscribers but today, it has increased massively to 122million subscribers.

This shows that the already over-burdened Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) does not just have to combat COVID-19 but also fake news also known as “Infodemic”. A review by the Centre for Democracy and Development since the virus reached Nigeria suggests that purveyors of fake news have sought to incite panic and panic buying, proffer fake cures, undermine medical advice, promote hate speech particularly individuals of Chinese origin, and promote polarization along political lines.

Social media activists, influences and self-styled warriors are using their social media platforms and fringe websites to proliferate misinformation, propagate conspiracy theories and promote the denial of COVID-19. Sometimes their motivation is just to grow their online followers.



For instance, the controversial blogger Kemi Olunloyo tweeted that President Muhammadu Buhari is sick with a persistent cough and that make shift ICU had been set up to give adequate treatment to him. Within hours, the tweet had been liked 3 thousand times and retweeted more than 2 thousand times.

In other instances, sensationalist comments from supposed “health experts” have spread widely. On 23 March, for example, an audio clip emerged on Whatsapp of an alleged World Health Organization (WHO) official predicting that at least 45 million Nigerians would die in pandemic. The audio provoked so much attention that the NCDC issued a rebuttal. Other so-called experts have proffered cures such as constant sex, taking of hot water, placing of onions around the corners of the house, sitting in the sun, or have claimed that African blood is immune to the corona virus. None of this has any medical basis.

There are also political ideologues who have been trying to exploit the pandemic to influence public opinion along partisan lines. Supporters of the opposition People’s Democratic Party (PDP) have sought to create a narrative that it handled the Ebola crisis far better than the current government is dealing with COVID-19. The recent confirmation that Abba Kyari, the president’s chief of staff, has tested positive has given the opposition new ammunition, though this has been complemented with unsubstantiated rumors that ventilators have been moved from the isolation centre in the Abuja to Aso Rock for Kyari’s personal use.

For their part, supporters of the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) have sought to politicize the crisis by focusing more on the irresponsible action of individuals linked to the opposition. Confirmation that the son of Atiku Abubakar, the PDP’s 2019 presidential candidate, had contracted the virus was followed by fake photos and videos of the son dancing in clubs, ignoring government isolation advise.

In conclusion, the platforms used to share COVID-19 fake news vary across geopolitical zones and demographics in Nigeria. Facebook and Whatsapp continue to be the most popular messaging platforms, whilst Twitter, Instagram and traditional media play complimentary roles. There is cross-posting across all platforms. Whatsapp, in particular, is a common conduit as it allows for the circulation of different types of media such as audio, video, text and links. For audio in languages like Hausa, listeners do not necessarily have to be literate to understand.

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