

1 Influence of Fake News on Public Perception of Nigeria's Online 2 Newspapers

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6

7 **Abstract**

8 The online newspaper is increasingly taking the place of the hardcopy newspaper. As readers
9 switch to popular online newspapers, it behoves the internet-based medium to live up to, and
10 better play, the very important function to the society carried out by the hardcopy
11 newspapers. But the increasing cases of fake news in the blogosphere seem likely to detract
12 from the credibility which many place on popular online newspapers. When readers apply the
13 Uses and Gratifications as well as the Selectivity Factors theories, this will go a long way in
14 whittling down the influential role of the press in the society. Using the survey research
15 design, this researcher set out to explore the influence which the circulation of fake news has
16 on the perception members of the public have of Nigeria's online newspapers. Drawing the
17 sample size from Enugu metropolis, it was found that while the prevalence of fake news in
18 Nigeria is high, popular online newspapers do not play much role in the dissemination of fake
19 news. It was also discovered that most Nigerians see reports on popular online news platforms
20 as credible and that there is difference between information on online newspapers and those
21 circulated through social media.

22

23 **Index terms—**

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34 not play much role in the dissemination of fake news. It was also discovered that most Nigerians see reports on
35 popular online news platforms as credible and that there is difference between information on online newspapers
36 and those circulated through social media.

37 I.

38 **1 Background of Study**

39 he online platform, Sahara Reporters had dished out a story which was disputed by the Economic and Financial
40 Crimes Commission, EFCC, stating that "no official of the EFCC was authorized to speak with Sahara reporters
41 on the said story or on any issue affecting the investigation of the Paris Club refund". Also, the Senate President,
42 who was at the receiving end of the story, disclosed that the publisher of Sahara Reporters is in the habit of
43 creating fiction and quoting faceless sources. Yet, this is not a one-off development.

3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

44 Another major instance of fake news which dominated Nigeria's media space was the rumoured death of
45 President Muhammadu Buhari shortly after he began a health leave to the United Kingdom on January 19,
46 2017. So audacious were the masterminds that they cloned Metro newspaper of the UK or Huffington Post of
47 US announcing in the spoofs that President Buhari has died in London. While "Metro" reported the "death" of
48 the Nigerian president, "Huffington Post" alleged that he was caught "committing suicide". The same picture of
49 Buhari was used on both stories which had the same lines repeated in them. However these contradictions did
50 not stop the spoofs from sending the internet into an overdrive in Nigeria, as the rumoured death of Buhari was
51 lapped up by some blogs and the social media.

52 In the face of this, little wonder that Nigeria's Minister of Information and Culture, Mr. Lai Mohammed,
53 in February 2017 asserted that fake news poses more danger to the country than insurgency and militancy. He
54 catalogued some false reports the Information ministry has had to contend with thus:

55 Only recently, we have to refute the fake news that Nigeria today is the most difficult place for Christians to
56 live. There was also the fake report that the armed forces of Nigeria armed the Fulani herdsmen and instigate
57 them to carry out attacks. All these news are unfounded, fake and has the capacity to set one religion or group
58 against the other.

59 (Premium Times 2017, February 21)

60 Mohammed spoke the same month that the Chocolate City founder, Audu Maikori, was arrested by security
61 operatives for publishing a false report about the violence in the southern part of Kaduna state with the Kaduna
62 State governor, Mr. Nasir El-Rufai stating that "what he posted may have led to killings and we are trying to
63 link the date of the postings to attacks that happened the next day on Fulanis". (Pulse.ng 2017, ??arch 3) It is in
64 the light of these instances and many like it which show that the practice is assuming a life of its own in Nigeria
65 that this study sets out to find out how the incidence of fake news is detracting from the credibility Nigerians
66 accord popular online newspapers operating in the country. This is bearing in mind the submission by Ekwueme
67 (2008, p. 91) that:

68 Your readers want the facts you heard or observed from your various sources, and not figment of your own
69 imagination. Many people believe media messages to be gospel truth and, of course, some of the readers believe
70 either rightly or wrongly that anything that is not carried in the media is not authentic. Since they have that
71 trust in you, you don't betray it. If you betray it, you have betrayed yourself and the integrity of your medium.

72 2 II.

73 3 Statement of the Problem

74 Motsaathebe (2011, p. 14) posits that "the news media is generally regarded as a credible provider of a realistic
75 view of what happens around the world. In composing news, journalists rely on various sources to verify or lend
76 credibility to the Information they put across". Kolawole (2017) writes, "Fake news -that art of concocting stories
77 from your bedroom because you have a smart phone with cheap data -is becoming the biggest thing in town. No,
78 it is not new. It was not invented in this generation of social media. We have been living with fake news most
79 of our lives. The SAP riots of 1989, for instance, were sparked off by fake news."

80 The assertions above point the how fake news affects not just the media but the society as well. With the
81 advent of the new media, the scourge of fake news is becoming more prevalent that its negative impact on popular
82 online newspapers is very evident. As Allcot & Gentzkow (2017, p.7) said, "The declining trust in mainstream
83 media could be both a cause and a consequence of fake news gaining more traction". If fake news can affect
84 traditional newspapers, then its impact on major online newspapers can only be imagined.

85 The literacy level in the country has not entirely made the difference between social media and popular online
86 newspaper a common knowledge to all. It is still believed in some quarters that there is no difference between a
87 major online news site and Facebook. To this extent, it is feared that whatever negative impression people have
88 of one is extended to the other.

89 Well-known online newspapers are too important to the fabrics of the society to be allowed to be smeared
90 altogether by what users post on social media channels. With the hardcopy newspaper believed to giving way for
91 online edition, well-known online newspapers should increasing be playing the role and gaining the acceptance
92 hitherto reserved for the hardcopy newspaper as Thiel (1998) pointed out "Consider the power of the traditional
93 newspaper. In the past, papers were responsible for bringing down a president and starting a war".

94 According to ??semah (2009, p.37), "The media, whether electronic or print often set agenda for the public to
95 follow; they monitor trends and events in our society and raised their agenda based on what they have monitored
96 ... Whatever issue the media raised becomes an issue of public concern".

97 "By electronically reproducing the news to cater to a much larger audience than its newspaper subscriber
98 base, online newspapers should be doing a great service to humankind. After all, they are bringing readers more
99 information than anyone has done in history at a time when the value of information as a commodity is greater
100 than ever" Thiel (1998).

101 Bearing this in mind and the need to sustain that pride of place earlier occupied by the print newspaper in
102 setting the agenda as well as among other roles holding government accountable to the people, the society stands
103 to lose out greatly if popular online newspapers, in the face of disappearing hardcopy edition, loses this influence

104 on account of fake news broadcast on social media channels which are lifted for publishing by some online news
105 sites.

106 Given that fake news is more likely to be wholly believed in view of their salacious and sensational nature
107 coupled with their feeding in to the sentiment of the public, government and news managers are distracted making
108 the true position prevail over fake news that have been passed off as real. This difficulty cannot be far removed
109 from bullet-like effect which fake news has on those who come in contact with it.

110 However, the existence of two variant versions of a news item may confuse the reading public and even make
111 them lose credibility in the news medium readily accessible to them. When this happens, the very essential
112 information role which makes the media the fourth estate of the realm are undermined.

113 Sanusi, Adelabu & Esiri (2015, p.11) wrote the fourth estate of the realm appellation of the media requires it
114 to monitor and report the conduct of the government, adding that as watchdogs, people rely on the media for
115 uncovering errors and wrongdoings by those elected into power. The media was also said to shape and reaffirm
116 attitude and behaviour of people in the society by showing what happens to people who act in a way that violates
117 societal expectations.

118 In view of the fact that "The most popular newspaper or newsmagazine is the one that has integrity: that
119 rare element of credibility" Ekwueme (*ibid*), those in power would not lose sleep over the watchdog activities of
120 an online newspaper without a reader base that can take what they read from such online news sites to the bank.

121 **4 III.**

122 **5 Objectives of Study**

123 This study aims to achieve the following as its objectives:

124 IV.

125 **6 Research Questions**

126 Based on the foregoing objectives of this study, the following research questions were drawn: 1. How prevalent are
127 cases of fake news in Nigeria? 2. Do popular online newspapers play any role in the dissemination of fake news?
128 3. How do Nigerians perceive news reports published on popular online newspapers? © 2017 Global Journals Inc.
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132 Influence of Fake News on Public Perception of Nigeria's Online Newspapers 1. To find out how frequent
133 cases of fake news are reported in the country. 2. To discover if popular online newspapers play a part in the
134 dissemination of fake news in Nigeria. 3. To unearth the perception Nigerians have of news reports published in
135 popular online newspapers. 4. To find out if any difference exists between reports published by popular online
136 newspapers and the ones broadcast via social media channels.

137 4. Is there any difference between reports published on popular online newspapers and those broadcast through
138 social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Whats App, BBM etc?

139 V.

140 **7 Significance of Study**

141 From this research, online media practitioners would better understand the extent of damage which fake news is
142 doing to their trade. They would get to know why they should rely on credible sources of information rather than
143 embellishing what a user posted on the social media as story for their readers. This study would help readers
144 know the difference between the social media and online newspapers so that the intemperance of the one would
145 no longer mar the other. Society stands to benefit from this work as it is an effort to ensure that very useful roles
146 of the press to the society do not go with the declining popularity of the hardcopy newspapers which has turned
147 journalism more like an all-comers affair. In sum, this paper would restore the image of the pen profession as it
148 will afford other researchers a basis to build upon or a support for their work.

149 **8 VI.**

150 **9 Scope of Study**

151 This study will be focusing on bringing to light the impact which instances of fake news have on the perception
152 people in Enugu metropolis; that is the Enugu state capital, have of strictly online newspapers. It studies the fake
153 news particularly energised by some the social media and juxtaposes same with how Enugu residence perceive
154 online news sites. Given that there are hundreds of online newspapers operating in the country, the use of the
155 adjective 'popular' to qualify the online newspapers being studied is intentional. Popular online newspapers are
156 those ones that occupy top positions on the Alexa ranking of websites.

157 10 VII.

158 11 Conceptual Clarification

159 Influence: This refers to the strong ability to affect or manipulate something, in this case perception. Fake
160 news: Fake news means "false information deliberately circulated by those who have scant regard for the truth
161 but hope to advance particular (often extreme) political causes and make money out of online traffic. Or it
162 could be false information circulated by journalists who don't realise it's false" BBC (2017, ??arch 12). Social
163 media: Social media was defined by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p.61) as "a group of Internet-based applications
164 that builds on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange
165 of user-generated content." Perception: This refers to the way human beings uses any of their senses to think
166 about or come to terms with whatever they are exposed to. Pate & Dauda (2015, p. 218) wrote that, "People's
167 perception wield an enormous influence over their behaviour. If people perceive something in a certain way, even
168 if they are incorrect, in their minds, it is that way, and they often base their behaviour on that perception."
169 Online newspaper: According to Thiel (1998) "Online news is a commodity created through Web pages (which
170 are certainly more fleeting, both physically and mentally, than print news). Web pages, then, exist only at the
171 point of consumption". Ufuophu-Biri (2013, p.177) stated that online newspaper journalism is of two types.
172 They include: solely online newspaper which does not print hard copies, and the conventional newspaper which
173 combines traditional hard copy publishing with online publishing.

174 12 VIII.

175 13 Literature Review

176 The problem of fake news has become so pronounced that the inventor of the World Wide Web, WWW, Sir
177 Tim Berners-Lee, declared on the 28th anniversary of his invention that the impact of fake news is increasingly
178 concerning, adding that social media sites and search engines must be encouraged to continue efforts to tackle
179 the menace. In an open letter published on March 12, 2017 to mark the www's 28th birthday, Berners-Lee noted
180 that "It's too easy for misinformation to spread on the web". He added that people "choose what to show us
181 based on algorithms which learn from our personal data that they are constantly harvesting. The net result is
182 that these sites show us content they think we'll click on -meaning that misinformation, or 'fake news', which is
183 surprising, shocking, or designed to appeal to our biases can spread like wildfire".

184 To an extent, the biggest casualty of this misinformation that spreads on the web is the online newspaper.
185 Fake news is a global phenomenon. In July 2016, the now-defunct website wtoe5news.com, which described itself
186 "a fantasy news website" and that most of its articles are "satire or pure fantasy" reported that Pope Francis had
187 endorsed Donald Trump's presidential candidacy. The story was shared more than a million times on Facebook.
188 There was also the fabricated story from the now-defunct website denverguardian.com captioned: "FBI agent
189 suspected in Hillary email leaks found dead in apparent murdersuicide".

190 Referring to fake news, Allcot & Gentzkow (2017, p.6) wrote:

191 One historical example is the 'Great Moon Hoax' of 1835, in which the New York Sun published a series of
192 articles about the discovery of life on the moon. A more recent example is the 2006 'Flemish
193 Volume XVII Issue V Version 17 (A)

194 Secession Hoax,' in which a Belgian public television station reported that the Flemish parliament had declared
195 independence from Belgium, a report that a large number of viewers misunderstood as true. Supermarket tabloids
196 such as the National Enquirer and the Weekly World News have long trafficked in a mix of partially true and
197 outright false stories.

198 In Nigeria, there have been instances of fake news, some of which had been identified in the background of
199 study. There are however other examples of false stories gaining attention in the Nigerian public space. According
200 to Kolawole (2017), "Heard the latest? The Central Bank of Nigeria has been selling the elusive dollar to some
201 end users at 61 kobo/US\$1, while the rest of us are busy buying the stuff at over N500/\$1 in the parallel market...
202 Now, I don't need to do any research to know that what you just read is an excellent piece of fake news."

203 On the third anniversary of the establishment of The Cable, founder of the online medium, Simon Kolawole
204 admitted that the biggest mistake made by the online newspaper was a false report in May 2015 that the Nobel
205 laureate, Professor Wole Soyinka made hate remarks against the Igbo in the United States. Kolawole said, "We
206 discovered that it was the interpretation of the reporter at the event and not the actual words of Professor
207 Soyinka. The embarrassment was universal for us, and sadly there were those who stopped trusting our stories
208 after the episode." (The Cable 2017, April 29) This indicates that there is a relationship between the publishing
209 of fake news by an online newspaper and readers' attitude towards that medium afterwards. Meanwhile, it is
210 believed that fake news in Nigeria also comes from government quarters as Kperogi (2017) revealed,

211 The Buhari government is an absolute propagandocracy, that is, a government conducted by intentionally
212 false and manipulative information... the president also has a clandestine hate and propaganda factory called
213 the Buhari Media Center (BMC), which has nearly 40 paid propagandists whose mandate is to smear, demonize,
214 and troll government critics with thousands of fake, foul social media handles. They also flood the comment
215 sections of news websites with false handles and calculatedly duplicitous information, in addition to producing

216 propagandistic social media memes (often with southern Nigerian-sounding names) that appear to come from
217 everyday Buhari fans. The 40 odd propagandists-in-residence at the BMC are paid N250,000 per month.

218 With the products of these propagandists and other creators of fake news making it to the open space, one
219 can only imagine the impact this would have on the perception which the reading public has towards popular
220 online newspapers.

221 **14 IX.**

222 **15 Empirical Review**

223 Sanusi, Adelabu & Esiri (2015, p.16) in their study entitled: 'Changing roles in the Nigerian media industry: A
224 study of multimedia journalism' concluded that "the emergence of internet and its associated applications have
225 redefined the practice of journalism. No longer are the traditional journalists the sole purveyor of information, it
226 now have to work with the audience as they jointly scan the environment for information of interest." This may
227 be the reason why fake news has crept into the media.

228 Credibility accorded the online newspaper is therefore threatened as Thiel (1998) wrote that "A recent study
229 conducted by Georgetown graduate student Josephine Ferrigno found that while 80 percent of 60 random
230 newspaper readers surveyed found The New York Times to be credible, slightly less than half found The New
231 York Times Online (which contains the same articles as the newspaper) to be credible."

232 The long history of fake news notwithstanding, there are several reasons to think that fake news is of growing
233 importance. First, barriers to entry in the media industry have dropped precipitously, both because it is now
234 easy to set up websites and because it is easy to monetize web content through advertising platforms.

235 Because reputational concerns discourage mass media outlets from knowingly reporting false stories, higher
236 entry barriers limit false reporting. Second, as we discuss below, social media are well-suited for fake news
237 dissemination, and social media use has risen sharply: in 2016, active Facebook users per month reached 1.8
238 billion and Twitter's approached 400 million. Third, as shown in figure ??A, Gallup polls reveal a continuing
239 decline of "trust and confidence" in the mass media "when it comes to reporting the news fully, accurately, and
240 fairly.

241 In the course of scouring through relevant literatures, it was very difficult coming across publications related
242 to the topic of study. This research will therefore present the situation in Nigeria as regards how the reading
243 public now perceive the online newspaper courtesy of fake news incidence which is more pronounced in the social
244 media but is believed to also have dominance in the online newspaper.

245 **16 X.**

246 **17 Theoretical Framework**

247 In line with what has been set out to be studied, the Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Selectivity Factor
248 Theories form the fulcrum for this work. Both theories are intertwined as Okunna (1999, p.171) that "the decision
249 to practice selective exposure depends primarily on the uses which members of the mass media audience want to
250 make of media messages and the benefits which they hope to derive from using the media".

251 The uses and gratification theory is about that social and psychological origin of needs, which generate
252 expectations of the mass media or other source, which leads to differential patterns of media exposure (or
253 engagement in other activities), resulting in need gratification and other consequences, mostly unintended ones,
254 Katz (1974) in ??jobor (2002, p.20).

255 Wogu (2008, p.120) stated that the uses and gratification theory "deals with what the audiences use the media
256 to do, and what gratifications/gains/ satisfaction they derive from using the media". Quoting Kunczik ??1988,
257 ??1976), he stated that the theory believes that: an individual has some needs related to communication; he/she
258 selects the media that appear to satisfy those needs; he/she selectively consumes the content; an effect may or
259 may not occur.

260 Granted that this theory recognises that there are various media for the audience to choose from, it is then
261 very likely that the public would opt for those mediums which are less likely to present fake news as one of their
262 gratifications to the users. On this basis, online newspapers when lumped with the social media as purveyors
263 of false information would lose the confidence and readership of enlightened users who expose themselves to
264 the media not to be fed with fake news. This simply means that if the public have the perception that online
265 newspapers carry fake news, they would rather use the broadcast media or hardcopy newspapers as their exposure
266 to the media is not to be gratified with fake news. In that circumstance, online newspapers lose the influence of
267 the press.

268 The selectivity factor theories, on the other hand, include: selective exposure, selective perception, selective
269 attention and selective retention. People expose themselves to things that conform to their preconceived norms,
270 biases and values. But it does not stop at exposing themselves to information as a person can still decide to pay
271 full, partial or no attention to a medium that he or she has been selectively exposed to. In decoding the message
272 after paying attention, previous experiences and current disposition like needs, moods and memories stand in
273 the way. Hence these factors can affect the perception of what is paid attention to. This perception ultimately

21 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

274 determines the readers' retention of whatever messages gotten from a particular medium as people remember
275 those aspects of an issue which aligns with their beliefs. ??ogu (2008, p.120).

276 Relating the above postulations to this study, those who believe that popular online newspapers publish fake
277 news would rather expose themselves to more credible media. Even when they visit a popular news site, they
278 may just stop at looking at the headlines without clicking to read any of the stories. But if they reluctantly click
279 on the story, the preconceived idea that the medium publishes false information would undermine whatever aim
280 the writer of the story intends it to achieve in the mind of the reader. The foregoing would all team up to make
281 the reader not to remember what he or she read minutes after leaving the story or the website.

282 Therefore through the selectivity theories, it become clear how readers' suspicious of the source of fake news
283 can make popular online newspapers irrelevant to the media audience, who of course, wouldn't count being fed
284 false information as one of the gratifications he or she expects from the media.

285 18 XI.

286 19 Methodology

287 Given the topic of this study, the survey research design was picked as tool for carrying out this work. Residents
288 of Enugu metropolis constituted the population of this study. Enugu is a city which to an extent is cosmopolitan.
289 As the capital of Enugu state, a handful of federal establishments wherein people from other parts of the country
290 work, owing to the federal character principle.

291 The National Population Commission (NPC), in its 2006 population estimates, puts the population of Enugu
292 at 722,664. Considering that this was derived from a census exercise that held over a decade ago, there is the
293 need to have a population figure that is up to date. Therefore, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
294 estimate of 3.2 per cent annual growth rate for Nigeria was used in arriving at the population of the Enugu
295 capital over an 11-year period.

296 Using the formula, $N1 = N0 (1 + K n)$ where $N1$ = Current population at a given growth rate; $N0$ = Census
297 figure as at 2006; K = Growth rate and n = Numbers of years after last census, the current population of Enugu
298 state was derived as 975,596.

299 Having got the population of study, the Sample Size Calculator as developed by the National Statistical Service
300 of Australia (www.nss.gov.au/nss/home.nsf/ pages/sample+size+calculator) was deployed with a confidence level
301 of 95% and confidence interval of 0.05. This yielded 384 as the sample size.

302 The quota sampling and the purposive sampling techniques were used for this study. On this basis, the
303 instrument for data collection was shared in four locations in Enugu. They include: Ogui layout/Edinburgh,
304 Institute of Management and Technology, IMT, premises, University of Nigeria Enugu Campus, UNEC, and
305 the Abakpa Nike axis of Enugu. Each of these four locations got one-quarter of the instruments, making it 96
306 apiece. Specific questions were asked in the instrument to elicit response from the research subject
307 regarding a particular research question.

308 Two persons were engaged as research assistants to distribute the questionnaires in the selected locations. The
309 research assistants were told not to give the questionnaire to anybody who says he or she has never visited a
310 popular online news site.

311 The measuring instrument used in this study evaluates what it is meant to measure and would consistently
312 yield the same answer baring the vicissitude of human response to issues. The reliability of the instrument is
313 assured because it contains structured questions that amply address the research problem and covers the scope
314 of study.

315 Quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis were used to present and analyze data gathered from
316 the study. Aside tables of frequencies and percentages, sentences were also used to buttress whatever data is
317 contained in the tables.

318 20 XII.

319 21 Presentation of Findings

320 Before going into the presentation of findings, proper, it needs to be pointed out that of all the 384 questionnaires
321 distributed in deference to the sample size, three were unaccounted for. It was also discovered that five others
322 were not properly filled which invalidates the five. Less this number (8), the researcher was left with 376
323 questionnaires from which to get findings. The 376 responses are presented below in tables of frequencies and
324 percentages. Respondents who said that the rate at which they read or hear people denying statements credited
325 to them or people saying that an event reported by an online newspaper did not happen is very frequent made up
326 41 per cent, those who placed the rate at frequent constituted 16 per cent while 43 per cent of the respondents
327 stated that they have never had an instance where the story they read from an online newspaper was debunked.
328 Respondents who answered 'yes' to the follow up question: 'Do you get to see such fake news you read in your
329 preferred medium published in other media?' made up 49 per cent while those whose response was 'No' constituted
330 51 per cent. Respondents who believe that information published in popular online newspapers is very different
331 from those broadcast using social media are 17 per cent. Those who think they are just different are 55 per cent
332 while respondents who do not see any difference between information published on online newspapers from those

333 circulating on social media are 24 per cent. Meanwhile 4 per cent of the respondents said the information in
334 social media and the online newspaper is not very different.

335 **22 Discussion of Findings**

336 The findings above reflect the thinking of Enugu residents over prevalence rate of instances fake news in Nigeria.
337 They also depicts whether popular online newspapers actually play any role in the dissemination of fake news.
338 Nigerians perception of news reports published on online newspapers is also highlighted in this findings even
339 as the outcome of this research went on to show whether any difference exists in reports published on online
340 newspapers from those broadcast through social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram,
341 WhatsApp, BBM etc? RQ1: How prevalent are cases of fake news in Nigeria?

342 Going by the finding that 57 per cent of the respondents (very frequent 41%, frequent 16%) attest to the
343 witnessing instances where the reports they read online were debunked as untrue, it is safe to say that the
344 prevalence rate of fake news in Nigeria is high enough to be the most popular among respondents as found in
345 Table 1. This is more so as only 43 per cent of respondents say there had never been a time when reports
346 they read on online newspapers were debunked. Since, these categories of respondents never got to read these
347 fake stories, the Uses and Gratifications theory as well as the Selectivity Factors theories must have made them
348 avoid news outlets that have qualms running such fake information on their websites. RQ2: Do popular online
349 newspapers play any role in the dissemination of fake news?

350 Considering that more respondents (51 per cent) do not get to see the fake news they read in their preferred
351 medium published in other media, it then goes to show that online newspapers do not play much role in the
352 dissemination of fake news but given that as high as 49 per cent voted that what they read in online newspapers
353 ended up making it to other media, the online newspapers therefore plays a role in the spread of fake news.
354 The online newspaper's slight complicity in the spread of fake can be situated within the complaint by Sir Tim
355 Berners-Lee of the www fame.

356 **23 RQ3: How do Nigerians perceive news reports published on 357 popular online newspapers?**

358 Despite the prevalent of fake news, this study has shown that online newspapers and their reports are still seen
359 as credible as more Nigerians do not presume online newspaper reports as false even before they are debunked.
360 This means that Nigerians wholly believe what they read in online newspaper which they 'Use' to 'Gratify' their
361 hunger for credible information. The finding for this research question is justified by the postulation of Allcott
362 & Gentzkow (2017) thus: "reputational concerns discourage mass media outlets from knowingly reporting false
363 stories". RQ4: Is there any difference in reports published on popular online newspapers from those broadcast
364 through social media platforms?

365 The finding presented in Table 4 provides a twofold answer to this research question. Adding up the percentages
366 of respondents who voted 'different' and 'very different' to the comparison between information circulated on
367 social media and those published by online newspapers shows that this view is popular by 72 per cent. Little
368 wonder that Nigerians wholly believe what they read in the online newspapers as the "social media are well-suited
369 for fake news dissemination". This finding also aligns with the Selectivity Factor theories in that people would
370 rather selectively expose themselves to, perceive, pay attention to, and remember information published by online
371 newspapers than the ones circulated on the social media.

372 XIV.

373 **24 Conclusion**

374 Cases of the circulation of fake news are prevalent in the country as it is across the world, but the circulation of
375 false information have not started to have a toll on the perceived credibility of popular online newspapers. Those
376 who because of fake news are cautiously optimistic about the credibility of popular online newspapers were found
377 to be slightly higher than those who have allowed incidence of fake news make them suspect reports on popular
378 online newspapers as not credible. This means that fake news still poses a threat to the perception Nigerians
379 have of reputable online newspapers. As the Uses and Gratification and the Selectivity theories go, those who
380 have the notion that popular online newspapers are purveyors of fake news may switch to other mediums of mass
381 communication or take information passed by online newspapers with a pinch of salt. When this becomes the
382 case, the influence of popular online newspapers with regards to the role of the press to the society is whittled
383 down and hampered, essentially because of the scourge of fake news.

384 **25 Recommendations**

385 Drawing from the knowledge and finding garnered in the course of this study, the under-listed ideas can be
386 proffered as recommendations through which fake news and its impact on the public perception of online
387 newspapers in Nigeria can be tackled: Influence of Fake News on Public Perception of Nigeria's Online Newspapers
388 b) Online newspapers should ensure they employ only qualified and well-trained journalists who can validate and
389 can defend whatever story that has their by-line. c) Granted that running a newspaper requires a huge capital

25 RECOMMENDATIONS

390 outlay which makes publishers are reporters susceptible to moneybags looking for where to plant stories that would
391 further their interest, online newspaper practitioners should rather rely on international donor agencies which
392 support independent media organisations which funds to enable them better hold the government accountable to
393 the people. d) Online newspapers must not base their reports on rumours spread on the social media. Whenever
394 they want to report what was post on the social media by newsmakers, they should ensure that the posting is
395 actually on the verified social media account of the prominent personality in question. e) The government, the
396 Nigeria Union of Journalists and other associations in the media industry should find a means of streamlining the
397 process of setting up online newspapers so as to avert the springing up mushroom news sites which publish false
398 stories that dent the perception of the online newspaper. f) When a story published by an online newspaper is
399 found to be false, such stories should promptly be pulled down with the same online site publishing a corrigendum
and an apology signed by its editor to the readers. ^{1 2}

1

popular online newspapers?

Rebuttal of reports	Frequency	Percentage
Very frequent	154	41%
Frequent	60	16%
Never	162	43%
Total	376	100

Figure 1: Table 1 :

2

Fake news

later in other
medium

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	184	49%
No	192	51%
Total	376	100%

Figure 2: Table 2 :

400

¹Year 2017 © 2017 Global Journals Inc. (US)Influence of Fake News on Public Perception of Nigeria's Online Newspapers

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3

	Frequenc	Percentag
Presumption of online reports as false		
Yes	141	37%
No	220	59%
Not sure	15	4%
Total	376	100%
Those who presume reports on online newspapers to be false even before they are disputed are 37 per cent while respondents who do not have such presumption are 59 per cent. Those who are not sure about having or not having such presumption constitute 4 per cent.		
Difference between online newspaper, social media reports		
Very different	64	17%
Different	207	55%
Not different	89	24%
Not very different	16	4%
Total	376	100%

Figure 3: Table 3 :

4

published on popular online newspapers and those broadcast through Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, BBM

Figure 4: Table 4 :

25 RECOMMENDATIONS

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