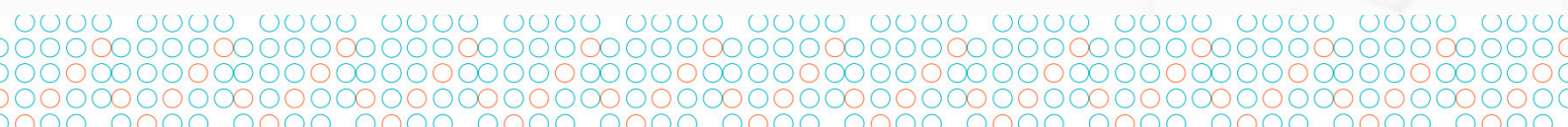**FACTCHECK AFRICA**

UNDERSTANDING

AND COUNTERING MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION IN NIGERIA:

Legal, Social, and Comparative Perspectives.

An Assessment of the Legal and Regulatory Framework: Strengthening Responses to Misinformation and Disinformation in Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Misinformation and disinformation have emerged as significant global challenges in the digital age, affecting societies, democratic processes, public health, and economies. Like many other nations, Nigeria grapples with the complex and pervasive impact of false narratives on its social fabric and information ecosystem. This research comprehensively analyses the prevalence and impact of misinformation and disinformation in Nigeria. It explores their influence on various aspects of society and the effectiveness of existing legal and regulatory frameworks in countering this phenomenon.

The study unveils the multifaceted nature of misinformation and disinformation, encompassing fabricated content, manipulated information, imposter content, and misleading context. Furthermore, it examines the role of technological advancements, social media platforms, cognitive biases, echo chambers, and algorithmic amplification in facilitating the spread of false narratives within the Nigerian context.

The research evaluates Nigeria's legal and regulatory framework, focusing on the Cybercrime Act (2015), the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Code, the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) Guidelines, and the Protection from Internet Falsehoods and Manipulation Bill. While these measures exhibit strengths in comprehensive coverage and collaborative efforts, they also reveal weaknesses and gaps, underscoring the need for targeted interventions to address the challenges of misinformation and disinformation more effectively.

The study examines experiences and strategies employed in other African, European, Asian, and global countries to tackle misinformation and disinformation. Insights from these experiences illuminate best practices and offer valuable recommendations for Nigeria's context, fostering knowledge exchange and international collaboration in the fight against false narratives.

The research advocates integrating media literacy programs, fact-checking initiatives, and public awareness campaigns to empower individuals with critical thinking skills and cultivate responsible information consumption. Additionally, it emphasises the importance of stakeholder collaborations, including partnerships between media organisations, government institutions, civil society, and technology platforms, in countering the spread of false information. By implementing evidence-based interventions and fostering collaborative efforts, Nigeria can build a more informed, resilient, and empowered society to navigate the challenges of misinformation and disinformation in the digital era.
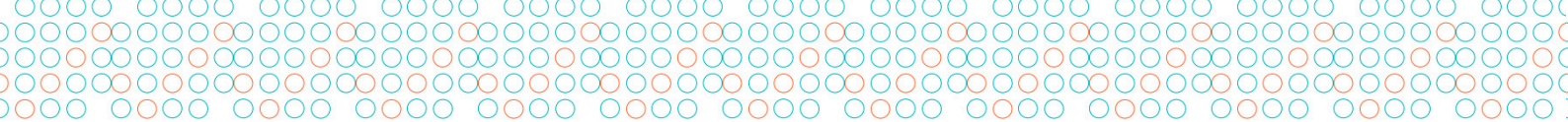
CHAPTER ONE

1.INTRODUCTION

1.1.Background to the Study

Knowledge and information are crucial in driving human development in the digital age. However, with the rapid proliferation of information channels, the issue of misinformation and disinformation has become increasingly prevalent. The spread of false and distorted news material is not a new phenomenon and has existed throughout media history, dating back to the invention of the printing press.

According to Tandoc Jr., Thomas, and Bishop (2021), fake news refers to "news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false" designed to manipulate people's perceptions of facts, events, and statements. It is about information presented as news known by its promoter to be false based on demonstrably incorrect facts or statements or events that verifiably did not happen. Fake news is fabricated information that mimics news media content in form but lacks the news media's editorial norms and processes for ensuring the accuracy and credibility of information (Boongasame, 2022).

According to Claire Wardle of First Draft News, there are seven types of fake news: satire or parody (no intent to cause harm but has the potential to fool), false connection (when headlines, visuals, or captions do not support the content), misleading content (misleading use of information to frame an issue or an individual), false context (when genuine content is shared with false contextual information), imposter content (when actual sources are impersonated with wrong, made-up sources). For these reasons, there is a growing consensus that these alternative phrases should be used instead of [fake news]. "Disinformation" and "misinformation" are the most frequently used terms.

While neither has a conventional nor commonly accepted definition, however, Ireton & Posetti (2018), in a handbook for journalism education and training published by Unesco, explained that disinformation is generally used to refer to deliberate (often orchestrated) attempts to confuse or manipulate people by delivering dishonest information to them. This is often combined with parallel and intersecting communications strategies and other tactics like hacking or compromising persons. Misinformation is generally used to refer to misleading information created or disseminated without manipulative or malicious intent. Both are problems for society, but disinformation is dangerous because it is frequently organised, well-resourced, and reinforced
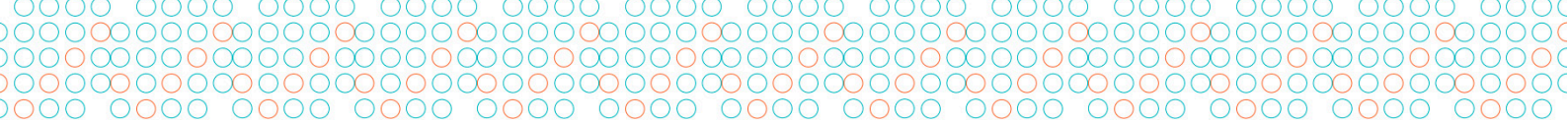
by automated technology. These two phrases, according to Molina, Sundar, Le, & Lee (2021), are more relevant and have advantages over "fake news" in that they clearly explain the scope of the information, the resulting harm, and the aim (or lack thereof).

The pervasive spread of misinformation and disinformation has become a significant concern globally, impacting societies, economies, and democratic processes. As a populous and diverse country, Nigeria is not immune to these challenges. The rapid growth of digital media platforms and the increasing accessibility of information have facilitated the dissemination of false or misleading information, leading to potential social unrest, public health risks, and economic implications. According to Gross (2018), fake news spreads quicker than actual news, and a recent study found that real individuals, not bots, are to blame. In today's interconnected world, the challenge lies in the unprecedented speed and reach at which misinformation can be disseminated. Social media platforms and digital communication have amplified the spread of false narratives, making it more challenging for individuals to discern between reliable and deceptive information. The consequences of misinformation and disinformation can be far-reaching, impacting public opinion, democratic processes, public health, and even the economy.

Misinformation and disinformation have become significant challenges in the digital age, impacting societies worldwide. With a 55.4 per cent penetration rate of the total population at the start of 2023, Nigeria's internet stood at 122.5 million internet users (Simon, 2023). The proliferation of false information through various channels, including social media platforms and traditional media, has raised concerns about its implications for societal stability, democratic processes, public health, and economic development.

Nigeria has witnessed a surge in misinformation and disinformation in recent years. The widespread use of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram, has facilitated the rapid dissemination of information, including false narratives. An estimated 32.9 million people in Nigeria actively use social media, which is 15.4% of the population. The dynamic nature of online platforms, coupled with the limited mechanisms to verify the accuracy of information, has created an environment conducive to the spread of misinformation. According to Ogbette, Idam, Kareem, and Ogbette (2019), the internet's ever-connected nature and the demand for speed above accuracy contribute to the growth of the false news phenomenon. Online content providers and distributors are in a zero-sum, winner-take-all competition for attention, so they will do anything to increase traffic. Unlike traditional print media, which generally have the luxury of time before publishing a breaking story the next day, online publications are forced to publish quickly due to the fast pace of the world in which they live. The internet offers two choices: go fast or go home.
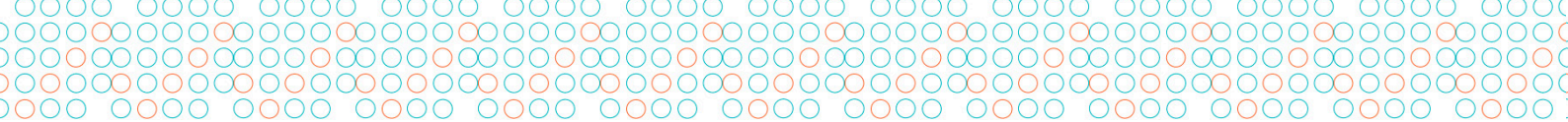
Because they are fighting for attention, many journalists are driven to post first and verify later, which is harming our planet (Adeleke, 2016).

Hassan (2023) asserted that misinformation and disinformation pose significant challenges to Nigerian society and democratic processes. False information can fuel ethnic, religious, and political tensions, leading to social divisions, violence, and the erosion of trust in institutions. In elections, misinformation can undermine democratic processes, influence voter behaviour, and compromise the integrity of electoral outcomes. The impact of misinformation and disinformation extends beyond the digital realm. False information can affect public health outcomes. For example, spreading unverified medical advice and promoting harmful practices can impact healthcare decision-making. It can also create social divisions, reinforce stereotypes, and exacerbate community tensions.

Nigeria's existing legal and regulatory framework has attempted to address misinformation and disinformation. The Nigerian Constitution provides freedom of expression of opinion, unrestricted access to and distribution of ideas and information, and the right to own, establish, and run any media for such dissemination. Organisations like the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) have developed guidelines and regulations to govern online content and combat fake news. However, the effectiveness and adequacy of these measures in countering the spread of misinformation need to be assessed.

Exploring comparative perspectives is crucial to understanding Nigeria's misinformation and disinformation challenges. Comparative studies allow for identifying best practices, policies, and interventions implemented in other countries or regions that have proven effective in countering false information. Given the dynamic nature of misinformation and disinformation, there is a need to strengthen responses and interventions. This research aims to assess Nigeria's existing legal and regulatory framework, identify gaps and challenges, and propose strategies for enhancing the response to misinformation and disinformation. It seeks to provide recommendations for more effective measures, including improved regulations, media literacy programs, fact-checking initiatives, and public awareness campaigns.
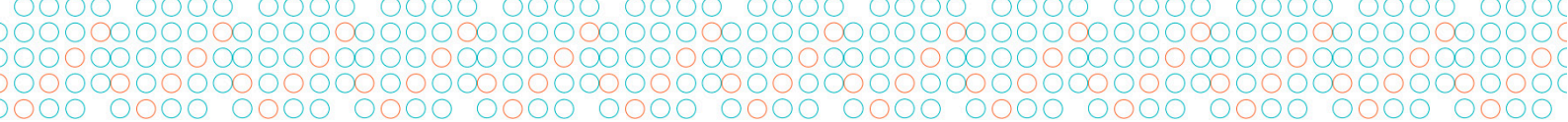
1.2 Statement of Problem

In the digital age, the widespread dissemination of misinformation and disinformation has emerged as a global challenge, affecting societies worldwide. Nigeria, as a country, is not immune to this issue, experiencing the impact of false narratives on various aspects of its society, democratic processes, public health, and economy. The problem at hand revolves around understanding the prevalence and reach of misinformation and disinformation in Nigeria, assessing the effectiveness of the existing legal and regulatory framework in countering false information, and exploring strategies to strengthen responses to combat this critical issue. This research aims to delve into the multifaceted dimensions of misinformation and disinformation in Nigeria and beyond, considering legal, social, and comparative perspectives to inform evidence-based interventions and policies that foster a more informed, resilient, and cohesive society.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The research aims to comprehensively understand the challenges posed by misinformation and disinformation in Nigeria and beyond, focusing on the legal, social, and comparative perspectives. The following objectives have been identified to fulfil the aims of the research:

- Identify the prevalence and reach of misinformation and disinformation in Nigeria and explore their impact on society, democratic processes, public health, and the economy.
- Compare the extent and impact of misinformation and disinformation in Nigeria to other countries, examining similarities, differences, and unique characteristics.
- Assess Nigeria's existing legal and regulatory framework to counter misinformation and disinformation.
- Identify cultural, social, and technological factors that may influence the spread of false information and evaluate their implications for Nigeria.
- Investigate the experiences and strategies of other countries in combating misinformation and disinformation, considering their effectiveness and relevance to Nigeria

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions are formulated to investigate the prevalence, impact, regulatory framework, and comparative analysis of misinformation and disinformation in Nigeria.

- What is the prevalence and reach of misinformation and disinformation in Nigeria, and how do they impact society, democratic processes, public health, and the economy?
- What cultural, social, and technological factors influence the spread of false information, and how do they impact Nigeria's challenges with misinformation and disinformation?
- What are the strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in Nigeria's existing legal and regulatory framework designed to counter misinformation and disinformation?
- How effective is Nigeria's current legal and regulatory framework in addressing the challenges posed by false information?

1.5 Significance of the Study or Relevance of the Study

The study addresses a global challenge affecting societies worldwide: the pervasive impact of misinformation and disinformation on economies, democratic processes, and social well-being. Focusing on Nigeria, the research sheds light on the country's unique challenges while providing valuable insights for policymakers and regulatory bodies. The findings have practical implications, guiding evidence-based policy formulation and interventions to counter false information. Safeguarding democratic processes and public health is paramount, and the study's comparisons with other countries aid in developing strategies for transparent governance and improved health communication. The research empowers individuals with tools to navigate the digital information landscape effectively. Ultimately, the study contributes to societal well-being and cohesion by mitigating the negative impact of false narratives and fostering a more informed and resilient society
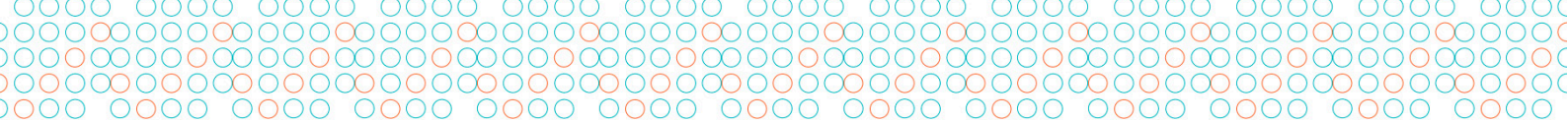
1.6.Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study explores the prevalence, impact, and regulatory framework of misinformation in Nigeria. The study focuses on Nigeria and draws lessons from other African countries and Europe to identify best practices and strategies, as well as the multifaceted aspects of misinformation and disinformation. The research encompasses legal and regulatory frameworks, media propaganda and misinformation, and a comparative analysis of misinformation across regions. By addressing these interconnected dimensions, the research seeks to enhance understanding, inform effective strategies, and contribute to header efforts in combating misinformation and promoting media literacy.

The study is limited due to financial constraints impacting its scope and execution. The financial constraints manifest in limited funding for data collection, research materials, and access to relevant databases. However, efforts were made to optimise available resources and ensure that the study provides valuable insights despite the financial limitations.

In addition to financial constraints, other limitations and constraints that affected the scope of the study include:

- Methodological Limitations: The study's findings and conclusions may be subject to certain methodological limitations, such as potential biases in data collection, limitations in sample selection, or reliance on self-reported data. These limitations are acknowledged, and efforts are made to mitigate them through rigorous research and appropriate methodologies.
- Legal and Ethical Constraints: The study adheres to legal and ethical guidelines, ensuring data privacy, confidentiality, and responsible research practices. Compliance with ethical considerations and regulatory requirements imposes certain limitations on data collection, analysis, and reporting.

Despite these constraints, the study made diligent efforts to maximise the available resources, employ rigorous research methods, and provide valuable insights into the understanding and countering of misinformation and disinformation in Nigeria while considering the financial limitations and constraints.

1.7 Definition of Terms

- **Comparative Perspectives:** It is about assessing and comparing different countries' approaches to combating misinformation and disinformation to find best practices for Nigeria.
- **Disinformation:** Disinformation is false or misleading information spread to deceive or manipulate. It is often disseminated for political, ideological, or malicious reasons, aiming to shape opinions, create confusion, or influence public perception.
- **Fact-Checking:** Fact-checking is the process of verifying information to determine its accuracy. Fact-checkers evaluate claims, statements, or news articles against reliable sources and evidence.
- **Legal and Regulatory Framework:** The legal and regulatory framework is the system of laws and policies that govern information dissemination and address misinformation and disinformation.
- **Media Literacy:** Media literacy is understanding and evaluating media content. It includes the skills to navigate and make informed judgments about information accuracy, credibility, and bias.
- **Misinformation:** Misinformation is false or inaccurate information that is spread unintentionally. It can be shared through social media, traditional media, or interpersonal communication.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Public awareness campaigns are targeted efforts to raise awareness and educate the general public about specific issues, in this case, misinformation and disinformation.
- **Social Perspectives:** Social perspectives refer to the examination of the societal factors and dynamics that influence the spread and impact of misinformation and disinformation.
- **Strengthening Responses:** Strengthening responses means improving measures, strategies, and interventions to combat misinformation and disinformation.
- **Stakeholders:** A range of organisations are working together to combat false information by sharing resources and coordinating efforts.
- **Stakeholder Collaborations:** Stakeholder collaborations refer to partnerships between different individuals, organisations, and entities involved in addressing misinformation and disinformation.v

CHAPTER TWO

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The literature reviewed in this study is discussed under the following sub-headings:

- Misinformation and Disinformation: Definitions, Characteristics, and Types
- Prevalence and Impact of Misinformation and Disinformation
- Factors Contributing to the Spread of Misinformation and Disinformation in Nigeria
- Legal and Regulatory Approaches to Addressing Misinformation and Disinformation
- Comparative Perspectives on Countering Misinformation and Disinformation
- Media Literacy and Fact-Checking Initiatives
- Public Awareness Campaigns and Stakeholder Collaborations
- Challenges and Limitations in Addressing Misinformation and Disinformation

2.1 Misinformation and Disinformation: Definitions, Characteristics, and Types

Misinformation and disinformation are pervasive challenges in our digital age, posing significant risks to individuals, societies, and democratic processes. Understanding the concepts, definitions, and key characteristics of these phenomena is crucial for addressing and countering their harmful effects.

Misinformation refers to false or inaccurate information that is inadvertently spread or disseminated. It can result from errors, misunderstandings, or a lack of verification of facts. Misinformation may be shared through various communication channels, including social media, traditional media, or interpersonal communication (Pennycook & Rand, 2019). It is essential to recognise that misinformation is not necessarily spread with malicious intent but can still have detrimental consequences.

Disinformation, on the other hand, involves the deliberate creation and dissemination of false or misleading information with the intent to deceive or manipulate the audience. It is often driven by political, ideological, or malicious motivations and aims to shape opinions, create confusion, or influence public perception (Lewandowsky, Ecker, & Cook, 2017). Disinformation campaigns can be highly organised, targeting specific individuals or groups and exploiting vulnerabilities in information ecosystems.

### 2.1.1 Characteristics of Misinformation and Disinformation

Both misinformation and disinformation encompass various types of false information. Fabricated news refers to entirely made-up stories presented as factual information, often designed to attract attention or generate ad revenue. Rumours are unverified or unconfirmed pieces of information that quickly spread through social networks, often in times of crisis or uncertainty. Conspiracy theories involve explanations of events or phenomena based on unfounded claims of secret plots or covert actions. Propaganda refers to deliberately biased or misleading information disseminated to influence public opinion or promote a particular agenda (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018). Recognising the characteristics of misinformation and disinformation is crucial for developing effective strategies to combat their spread. These characteristics include rapid dissemination, emotional appeal, exploitation of cognitive biases, use of persuasive language, and manipulation of visuals and multimedia elements (Vosoughi et al., 2018). Misinformation and disinformation often thrive in environments where information ecosystems are fragmented, trust in traditional media is eroded, and echo chambers reinforce existing beliefs.

2.1.2 Types of Misinformation and Disinformation:

According to Aïmeur, Amri, & Brassard (2023), there are many different ways to classify fake news. Based on the examined perspective (i.e., aim or substance), fake news
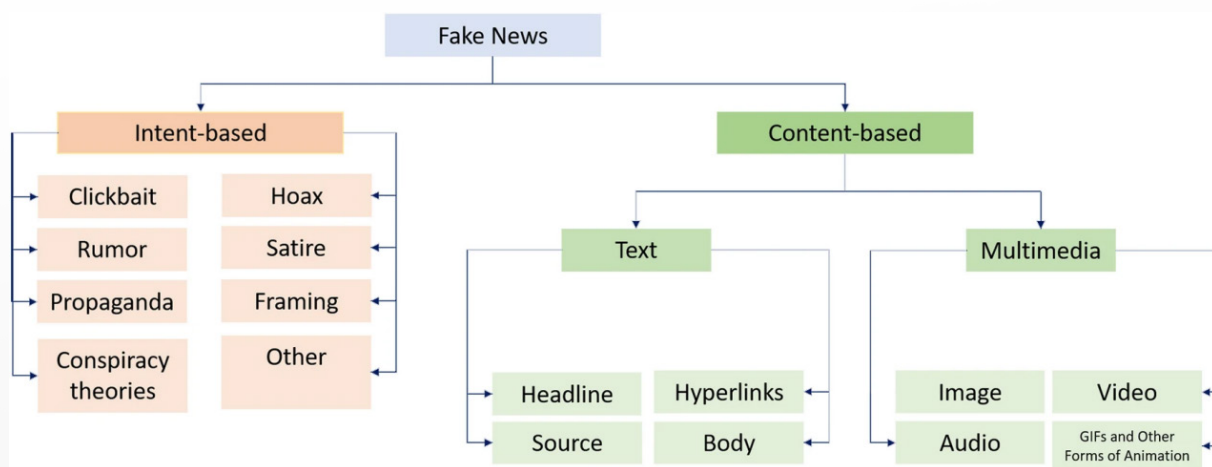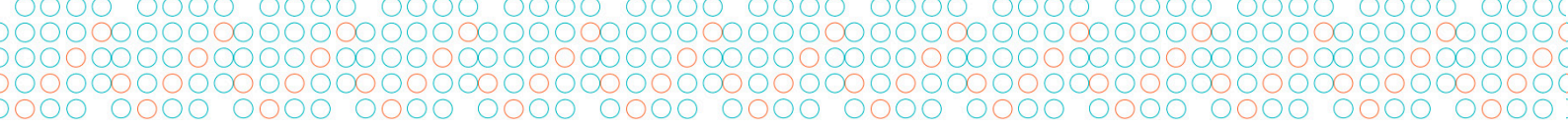
was divided into two primary types, as illustrated in Fig. 1.

Most researchers classify fake news based on intent (Collins et al., 2020; Bondielli & Marcelloni, 2019; Zannettou et al., 2019; Kumar et al., 2016; Wardle, 2017; Shu et al., 2017; Kumar & Shah, 2018). However, other researchers (Parikh & Atrey 2018; Fraga-Lamas & Fernández-Caramés 2020; Masciari et al. 2020) focus on the content to categorise types of fake news by distinguishing the different formats and content types of data in the news (e.g., text and/or multimedia).

Another classification was proposed by Zhang and Ghorbani (2020). It is based on a combination of content and intent to categorise fake news. They distinguish physical news content and non-physical news content from fake news. Physical content consists of the carriers and format of the news, and non-physical content consists of the opinions, emotions, attitudes, and sentiments that the news creators want to express.

2.1.2.1 Content-based fake news category

According to researchers in this category (Parikh and Atrey 2018; Fraga-Lamas and Fernández-Caramés 2020; Masciari et al. 2020; Elhadad et al. 2019; Yang et al. 2019), forms of fake news may include false text such as hyperlinks or embedded content; multimedia such as false videos (Demuyakor & Opata, 2022); images (Masciari et al. 2020); and so on. Moreover, we can also find multimodal content (Shu et al. 2020), that is, fake news articles and posts composed of multiple types of data combined, for example, a fabricated image along with text related to the image (Shu et al. 2020). In this category of fake news forms, we can mention, as examples, deep fake videos, which are artificial intelligence-based machine-generated fake content that is hard for unsophisticated social network users to identify.

The effects of these forms of fake news content vary depending on the credibility assessment, as well as sharing intentions, which influence the spread of fake news on social media. For instance, people with little knowledge about the issue compared to those who are strongly concerned about the key issue of fake news tend to be easier to convince that the misleading or fake news is real, especially when shared via a video modality as compared to the text or audio modality (Demuyakor & Opata 2022).

2.1.2.2 Intent-based Fake News Category

According to researchers, clickbait, hoaxes, rumours, satire, propaganda, framing, conspiracy theories, and other forms of false news are the most frequently mentioned and debated ones. The categories of intent-based fake news that are most frequently cited are as follows:
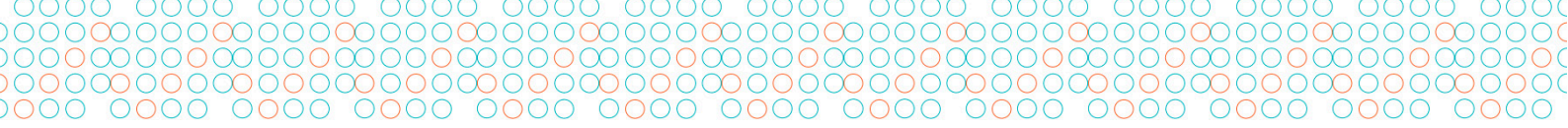
2.1.2.2.1 Clickbait

The term "clickbait" refers to deceptive headlines and thumbnails of online material (Zannettou et al. 2019), which frequently relate to made-up tales with alluring headlines meant to entice readers to click on a link (Collins et al. 2020). Because a person can tell if the headline and/or thumbnail were deceptive if they read the entire article, this kind of fake news is regarded as the least harmful kind of incorrect information (Zannettou et al. 2019). The aim of deploying clickbait, however, is to drive more visitors to a website (Zannettou et al. 2019)

2.1.2.2.2 Hoax

A hoax is a false or wrong news story that is purposefully made and presented as being true to confuse the general public or audiences (Collins et al. 2020). According to Zanettou et al. (2019), this category of stories is also referred to as factoids or half-truths. Popular hoax instances include reports of the fake deaths of famous personalities and celebrities (Collins et al., 2020; Zanettou et al., 2019). Recently, COVID-19 hoaxes have made the rounds on social media.
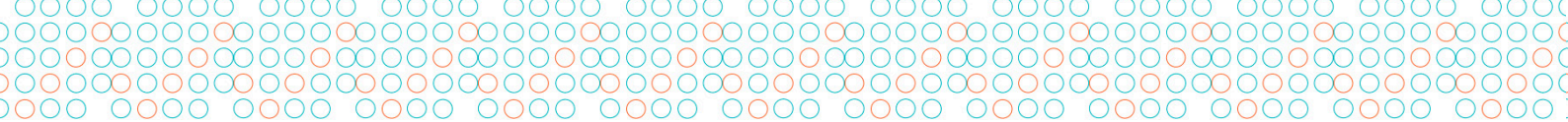
2.1.2.2.3 Rumour

The term "rumour" refers to unconfirmed or confusing allegations that are spread without sufficient evidence to back them up (Sharma et al. 2019). Social media is extensively used to spread this type of information. They might end up being true; therefore, they are not always wrong (Zubiaga et al., 2018). According to Zubiaga et al. (2018), rumours come from unreliable sources but could be genuine, false, or unresolved.

2.1.2.2.4.Satire

Satire is defined as stories with a high level of sarcasm and humour (Zannettou et al. 2019). The intention is to expose bad behaviour, not mislead. It presents stories as news, but they may be factually wrong. This is done by fabricating a narrative or exaggerating the truth. Although there is no desire to hurt anyone, satire can mislead or trick people, and many authors (Wardle, 2017) do include it as a form of fake news.

Additionally, Golbeck et al. (2018) note that many fake news websites use a spectrum from fake to satirical news. Some sites use satirical disclaimers to avoid being sued for false information. Unlike journalists who aim to inform the public, the authors or hosts of satirical fake news present themselves as comedians or entertainers (Collins et al. 2020). Comedians often humorously present news, which makes it more acceptable to audiences.

2.1.2.2.5 Propaganda

Propaganda is false news spread by political organizations to hurt their opponents. (Zannettou et al., 2019). During both World Wars (Collins et al. 2020) and the Cold War (Zannettou et al. 2019), propaganda was heavily deployed. It is a consequential type of misleading information since it has the potential to alter the course of human history (for example, by altering the outcome of an election) (Zannettou et al. 2019). The states are the primary propagandists. Politicians and media organisations have recently employed propaganda to advocate a certain position or point of view (Collins et al., 2020).

Astroturfing is a type of online propaganda that is designed to make it appear as though a particular viewpoint is held by a large number of people when, in fact, it is only being promoted by a small group or organisation. It is a covert manipulation of public opinion (Peng et al. 2017). Astroturfing can affect a variety of fields of interest, with political astroturfing, business astroturfing, and astroturfing in e-commerce or online services being the most common (Mahbub et al., 2019). Manual fact-based detection approaches, such as the use of expert-based fact-checkers, can be used to disprove propaganda types of fake news (Collins et al. 2020).

2.1.2.2.6 Framing

Framing is the use of some aspect of reality to highlight information while concealing the truth (Collins et al. 2020) to deceive and mislead readers. People will understand particular notions based on how they are coined and invented. Collins et al. (2020) presented an example of framing: "Suppose a leader X says, "I will neutralise my opponent," simply meaning he will beat his opponent in a given election." Such a statement will be framed as "Leader X threatens to kill Y," and this framed statement completely misrepresents the original meaning.

2.1.2.2.7 Conspiracy Theories

The assumption that an event is the product of hidden conspiracies devised by strong conspirators is referred to as a conspiracy theory. People's adoption and belief in conspiracy theories are connected with psychological, political, and societal aspects (Douglas et al., 2019). Conspiracy theories are common in modern democracies (Sutton and Douglas, 2020), and they have serious repercussions. For example, conspiracy theories have recently and during the COVID-19 pandemic been examined from a public health standpoint (Allington et al. 2020; Freeman et al. 2020).
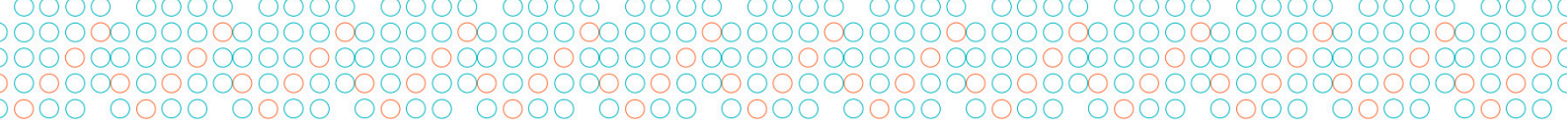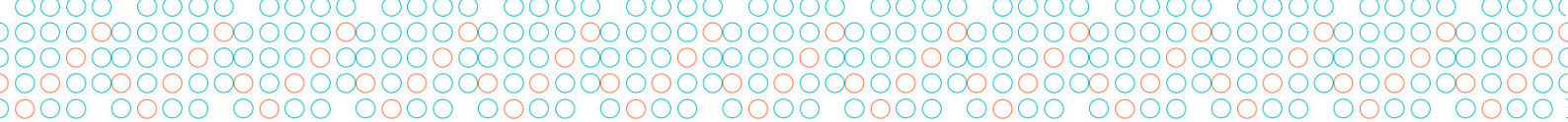
2.2.Prevalence and Impact of Misinformation and Disinformation

Misinformation and disinformation circulate widely across online platforms, news outlets, and social media channels. False narratives often target sensitive issues such as politics, health, religion, and social affairs, attracting attention and engagement from unsuspecting individuals. Research has shown that misinformation and disinformation can spread rapidly and reach a vast audience due to the ease of sharing information on social media platforms (Vosoughi et al., 2018). The cost of producing, distributing, and obtaining information has been significantly reduced via the Internet. Social media further reduces barriers because it is now less expensive to interact with people who are physically far away. Traditional gatekeepers no longer govern the media ecosystem, making disseminating false material alongside legitimate content easier.

The prevalence and impact of misinformation and disinformation are substantial and widespread, affecting individuals, societies, and democratic processes. Numerous studies have examined the scale and reach of false information, shedding light on the detrimental effects it can have. Altay, Berriche, and Acerbi (2023) state that concerns regarding false information are growing on a global scale. According to Mitchell et al. (2019), disinformation is now more of a concern for Americans than sexism, racism, terrorism, or climate change. The majority of American electorates (60%) believe "made-up news" significantly influenced the 2020 election (Auxier, 2020). Online bullying and fraud are less of a concern for internet users than fake news, according to a 2020 World Risk Poll.

According to Apuke & Omar (2020), six main false news outbreaks with severe negative effects in Nigeria were found based on the analysis of seven articles: Plotted stories resulted in a spike in polio cases (2017), two deaths from the Ebola "cure" in 2014, President Muhammadu's passing in 2017, and his marital drama in 2019, among other events. Fake Facebook posts exacerbate the regional and religious crises (2012, 2018); The herders and farmers conflict is exacerbated by fake images and news (2019); and election fraud allegations and other false information (2015 presidential election). Many scientific and journalistic articles claim that online misinformation is the cause of many contemporary socio-political issues but ignore other more significant factors such as the erosion of trust in institutions (Benkler et al., 2018; Bennett & Livingston, 2020) and in the media (Newman et al., 2020).

The mere fact that disinformation is more accessible and measured now does not mean that it is more prevalent. Given the current emphasis on social media, little is known about misinformation in widely utilised information sources like television or radio, despite the possibility that traditional media play a significant role in its propagation.
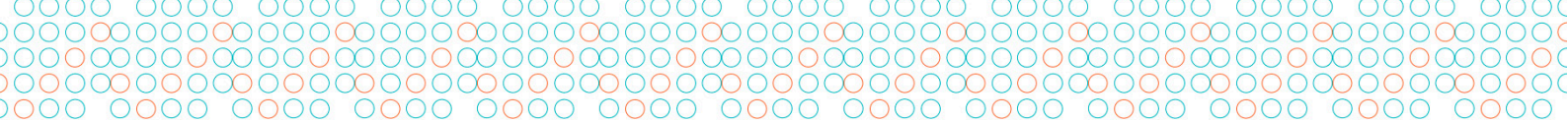
Today's widespread access to digital traces makes it easier to examine current significant issues like disinformation, which can give the impression that misinformation was less common in the past (Altay, Berriche, & Acerbi, 2023). However, there was never a time when everyone solely shared and believed truthful information (Nyhan, 2020). Before social media, conspiracy theories were widely disseminated (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). False rumours and other forms of misinformation are not unique to modern society but rather a universal characteristic of human communities (Acerbi, 2020).

Due to its methodological convenience, social scientists frequently employ social media, particularly Twitter (Tufekci, 2014), in their research. However, frequent users of social media do not necessarily reflect the general population (Mellon & Prosser, 2017). Google Scholar indicates that in May 2022, just seven publications covered the terms "fake news" and "television" in their titles, as opposed to 578 papers with the terms "fake news" and "social media" (the findings for misinformation are similar, with six publications outperforming 389). According to Benkler et al. (2018) and Tsfati et al. (2020), television is a source of elites' disinformation, particularly that of politicians.

The impact of misinformation and disinformation globally and specifically in Nigeria is multifaceted and poses substantial consequences. Disinformation has been used in several countries in highly visible ways to undermine the right to free and fair elections. As an example, racially targeted disinformation campaigns were used to suppress votes from different backgrounds in the most recent major elections in Nigeria.

False information can sway public opinion, disrupt democratic processes, and exacerbate social tensions. In political contexts, misleading narratives may influence election outcomes, leading to public distrust in the democratic system. Moreover, public health misinformation can lead to the spread of harmful practices, undermining efforts to address health issues and control outbreaks. Economically, misinformation can harm businesses, damage reputations, and mislead consumers, affecting investment decisions and overall economic stability. Furthermore, the proliferation of false narratives can erode trust in institutions, media outlets, and public figures, making it challenging to distinguish reliable sources of information.

Fake news most often leads to confusion, tension, and even the tendency to be suicidal, depending on the person or institution, as the case may be, while on the other end, it waters down the efforts of serious media coverage, making it more difficult for journalists to cover significant news stories. Misinformation and Disinformation can gain traction, leading to the distortion of public discourse, undermining trust in institutions, and eroding democratic processes (Pennycook & Rand, 2019).

Misinformation and disinformation can also exacerbate social divisions, fuel conflicts, and even impact public health outcomes (Lewandowsky et al., 2017). The consequences of false information extend beyond individuals and communities. The economic impact of misinformation and disinformation is significant, as it can disrupt markets, manipulate stock prices, and harm businesses (Guess, Nagler, & Tucker, 2019). Public health is another area deeply affected by false information, with misinformation surrounding vaccines, treatments, and health practices leading to detrimental health outcomes and decreased trust in healthcare systems (Betsch et al., 2015).
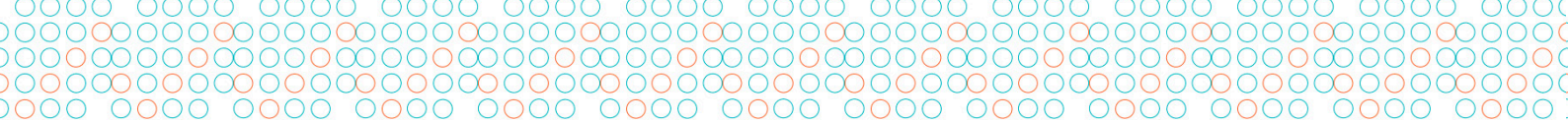
2.3.Factors Contributing to the Spread of Misinformation and Disinformation in Nigeria

Misinformation and disinformation are widespread issues in the digital age, presenting significant challenges to societies globally. Technological advancements, social media platforms, and cognitive biases contribute to the rapid spread and amplification of false narratives. Factors like information ecosystems, digital literacy levels, and social dynamics collectively play crucial roles in facilitating the dissemination of false information. Open digital communication channels, a lack of robust fact-checking mechanisms, low digital literacy, and echo chambers all contribute to the rapid propagation of false narratives. Technological advancements have democratised information sharing, but they have also enabled the swift dissemination of misleading content, while social media platforms, cognitive biases, echo chambers, and algorithmic amplification all play pivotal roles in perpetuating the spread of false information.

2.3.1.Information Ecosystems:

Information ecosystems encompass the various channels through which information is created, disseminated, and consumed. In the digital age, the information ecosystem has expanded significantly, comprising social media platforms, news websites, online forums, blogs, and messaging apps. These diverse channels provide ample opportunities for false narratives to circulate rapidly and reach a wide audience.

The information ecosystem's role in facilitating the dissemination of false narratives lies in its openness and accessibility. Misinformation and disinformation can easily be produced, shared, and amplified through these channels, often without undergoing rigorous fact-checking or editorial scrutiny. Moreover, the lack of gatekeepers and traditional editorial processes allows false narratives to gain visibility and prominence, blurring the lines between credible information and misinformation. The information ecosystem is influenced by the following:

2.3.1.1 Technological Advancements:

The rise of the internet and digital communication technologies has revolutionised information dissemination. With the advent of smartphones and widespread internet access, individuals have become active content creators and consumers. Social media platforms, search engines, and online forums enable the sharing of information with minimal barriers, allowing false narratives to circulate rapidly. Moreover, advancements in deepfake technology have facilitated the creation of highly convincing fake audio and video content, further blurring the lines between truth and falsehood.

2.3.1.2.Social Media Platforms:

Social media platforms play a central role in the spread of misinformation and disinformation. With a 55.4 percent penetration rate of the total population at the start of 2023, Nigeria's internet stood at 122.5 million internet users (Simon, 2023). The widespread use of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram, has facilitated the rapid dissemination of information, including false narratives. An estimated 32.9 million people in Nigeria actively use social media, which is 15.4% of the overall population.
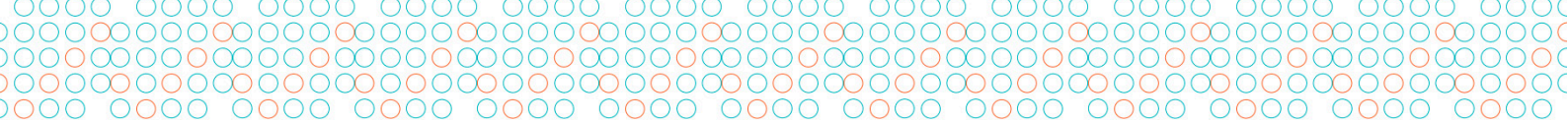
Algorithm-driven content curation and personalised news feeds contribute to filter bubbles, where users are exposed primarily to information that aligns with their existing beliefs and preferences. Echo chambers, formed within these filter bubbles, reinforce and amplify false narratives, leading to the creation of self-reinforcing misinformation networks.

2.3.1.3.Algorithmic Amplification:

Algorithms used by social media platforms and search engines prioritise content based on user engagement, relevancy, and other factors. Content that generates high engagement, regardless of its veracity, is often algorithmically amplified to reach a broader audience. This phenomenon, known as algorithmic amplification, can inadvertently promote false narratives and viral misinformation.

2.3.2.Digital Literacy Levels:

Digital literacy levels refer to individuals' ability to critically evaluate and navigate digital information effectively. Inadequate digital literacy makes individuals more susceptible to false narratives, as they may struggle to discern credible sources from unreliable ones. Understanding how to verify information, identify biased content, and distinguish credible news from misinformation is crucial to combating the spread of false narratives.

Low digital literacy levels can lead to individuals inadvertently sharing false information, perpetuating its dissemination within their social circles. Moreover, individuals with limited digital literacy may fall prey to online scams, conspiracy theories, and health-related misinformation, contributing to the amplification of false narratives in the digital space.

Human cognitive biases, such as confirmation bias, availability heuristics, and the illusory truth effect, contribute to the susceptibility of individuals to false information. People tend to accept and believe information that confirms their pre-existing beliefs, even if it lacks credibility. Additionally, the availability of false information through repeated exposure can increase its perceived truthfulness, even when corrected later.

2.3.3.Social Dynamics:

Social dynamics play a significant role in shaping the spread of false narratives within social networks and communities. People tend to trust and rely on information shared by friends, family, and acquaintances, often without critically evaluating its accuracy. This phenomenon is known as "social influence" or "social proof," where the endorsement of false information by trusted individuals can lead others to believe it and share it further.
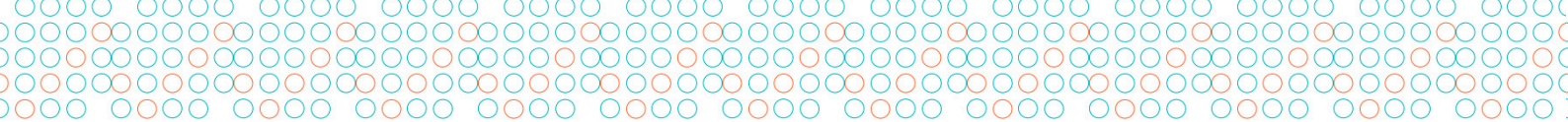
Additionally, echo chambers and filter bubbles formed within social networks contribute to the echo-chamber effect, where like-minded individuals reinforce each other's beliefs and share information that aligns with their perspectives. In such environments, false narratives can flourish and gain traction, as any attempts to challenge the misinformation may be met with resistance or rejection.

2.3.3.1.Echo Chambers:

Echo chambers refer to social environments where individuals interact exclusively with like-minded people, reinforcing their existing beliefs and isolating themselves from diverse perspectives. Social media platforms contribute to the formation of echo chambers by presenting users with content tailored to their preferences, thereby limiting exposure to alternative viewpoints. In echo chambers, misinformation can spread rapidly and gain traction, leading to the polarisation of opinions and beliefs.

2.4.Legal and Regulatory Approaches to Addressing Misinformation and Disinformation

Disinformation and misinformation have no commonly accepted definition. While the absence of unanimity makes a worldwide response difficult, it also highlights the concept's complicated, innately political, and contentious nature. The problem is that people can't tell fact from fiction

or malice from lack of malice. False information can be used by people with opposing goals. True news can be characterised as "fake news" and delegitimised. Opinions, ideas, ambiguous knowledge, and other types of expression such as parody and satire do not lend themselves neatly to a binary analysis of truth and falsity.
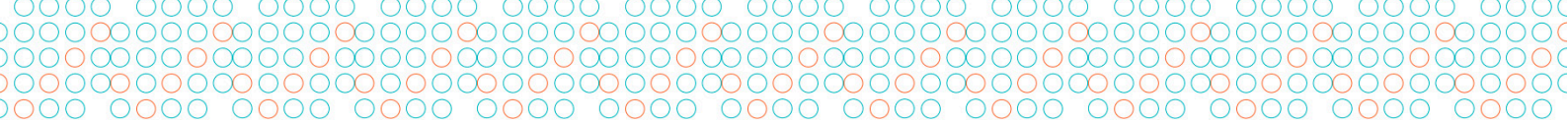
Misinformation can be spread by innocent people, amplifying malicious campaigns. Intentionally or not, harm occurs. Some forms of disinformation can amount to incitement to hatred, discrimination, and violence, which are prohibited under international law. The consequences of these for institutions, communities, and individuals are real, widespread, and legal. Much of the targeting of fake news is politically motivated against vulnerable institutions and individuals, and it undermines a wide variety of human rights, including economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights.

Developing effective legal and regulatory frameworks to combat misinformation and disinformation requires a delicate balance between protecting freedom of expression and preserving societal trust and stability. Collaborative efforts among governments, tech companies, civil society, and fact-checking organisations are essential to ensuring a comprehensive and effective response to the challenges posed by false narratives in the digital age.

There is significant evidence that robust public information systems and independent journalism are effective countermeasures to disinformation. Therefore, it is even more upsetting that smear tactics against journalists have gotten worse on social media. Khan (2021) contends that because social media platforms and internet businesses prioritise making a profit, they cannot be trusted to stop disinformation. Their business models depend on providing users with innovative and entertaining content which uses algorithms and extensive user data collection to create the ideal environment for deception

The legal and regulatory frameworks implemented in different countries to combat misinformation and disinformation vary significantly. Some countries have introduced specific laws to address false information, while others rely on self-regulatory initiatives and partnerships with tech companies. The approaches range from content removal and correction notices to fact-checking and transparency requirements. Governments and regulatory bodies have recognised the need to develop frameworks that address the challenges posed by false information while balancing the principles of free speech and expression.

Regulatory approaches vary across countries, encompassing legislative measures, self-regulation by media organisations, and collaborations with technology platforms. Some countries have enacted laws specifically targeting misinformation and disinformation, such as Germany's Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG), India's Information Technology (Intermtediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, and Singapore's Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA). These laws aim to hold

platforms accountable for the spread of false information and provide mechanisms for content removal or correction (Lewandowsky et al., 2017).

Self-regulation by media organisations and fact-checking initiatives also play a vital role in countering false narratives. Media outlets, social media platforms, and fact-checking organisations collaborate to identify and debunk misinformation and disinformation, providing accurate information to the public (Pennycook & Rand, 2019). These efforts are complemented by technology companies implementing measures to reduce the virality and reach of false information on their platforms. The European Union has adopted the Code of Practice on Disinformation, a self-regulatory initiative that encourages tech companies to take measures to counter the spread of false information on their platforms. The Code sets guidelines for transparency, fact-checking, and user empowerment. In addition to regulatory approaches, various interventions have been developed to address the challenges of misinformation and disinformation globally. Some of these include:

- Media literacy programs play a crucial role in equipping individuals with the skills to critically evaluate information sources, identify reliable sources, and discern misinformation from accurate information (Pennycook & Rand, 2019).
- Fact-checking initiatives have gained prominence, with dedicated organisations verifying the accuracy of claims and statements made in public discourse. These initiatives aim to provide the public with reliable information, debunk false narratives, and promote responsible information consumption (Vosoughi et al., 2018). Popular fact-checking platforms include: Dubawa and Africa checks
- Public awareness campaigns are also employed to educate the public about the risks and consequences of false information. These campaigns aim to promote critical thinking, encourage information verification, and foster media literacy among individuals (Lewandowsky et al., 2017).
- Collaborations among stakeholders, including government institutions, media organisations, civil society groups, and technology platforms, are vital in combating misinformation and disinformation. By working together, these stakeholders can pool resources, share expertise, and develop comprehensive strategies to address the challenges posed by false narratives (Guess et al., 2019).
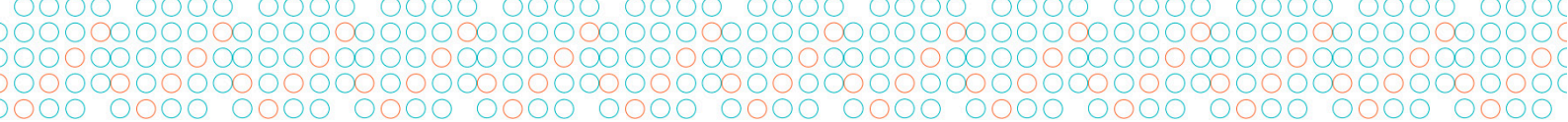
2.3.5.Legal and Regulatory Approaches to Address Misinformation and Disinformation in Nigeria:

Misinformation and disinformation have emerged as pressing challenges in Nigeria's digital age, requiring robust legal and regulatory responses to safeguard society, democratic processes, and public well-being. Various legal and regulatory frameworks have been implemented to tackle the spread of false information and enhance the information ecosystem's integrity. Here is an examination of the key legal and regulatory approaches adopted in Nigeria to combat misinformation and disinformation.

2.3.5.1.The Cybercrime Act (2015)

The Cybercrime Act is one of the primary legal instruments in Nigeria aimed at addressing online offences, including the dissemination of false information. The Cybercrime Act of 2015 in Nigeria plays a crucial role in countering misinformation and disinformation by providing legal measures to address various forms of cybercrime. Some sections of the act related to misinformation and disinformation are

- Section 24 of the Cybercrime Act addresses offences related to false information dissemination. It states that "any person who knowingly publishes false information likely to threaten the unity, security, and economic interests of Nigeria or to incite violence, hatred, or discrimination is liable to imprisonment or a fine". This section serves as a regulatory measure to deter the spread of false narratives that may cause harm to individuals or the nation at large.
- Sections 24 and 27 of the Cybercrime Act address cyberstalking and defamation offences. Misinformation and disinformation can often be used to defame individuals or incite online harassment. These sections provide legal recourse for victims and penalties for perpetrators engaging in such activities online.
- Sections 13 and 22 of the Cybercrime Act address offences related to phishing and identity theft, which can be used to spread false information or impersonate individuals for malicious purposes. These provisions aim to prevent the use of false identities to disseminate misinformation and disinformation.
- Section 22 of the Cybercrime Act criminalises false representation and provides penalties for individuals engaged in such activities. Misinformation and disinformation can involve falsely representing oneself or others, and this section addresses the legal consequences of such actions.
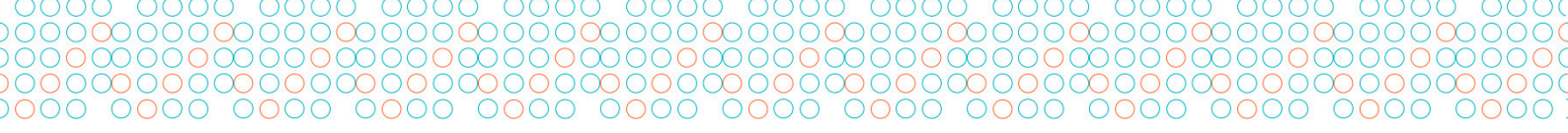
The Cybercrime Act of 2015 in Nigeria plays a crucial role in countering misinformation and disinformation by providing legal measures to address various forms of cybercrime. However, it is essential to ensure that its provisions are balanced and do not infringe upon freedom of speech and press freedom. The Act addresses some aspects of false information, but its effectiveness needs evaluation due to the changing landscape of misinformation in Nigeria.

2.3.5.2.The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Code

National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Code is a regulatory framework in Nigeria that governs broadcasting activities in the country. NBC is responsible for regulating broadcasting in Nigeria and issued a revised broadcasting code in 2020. The code includes provisions on "Hate Speech," "Incitement to Violence," and "Unverifiable Claims," which attempt to tackle false information in broadcast media. It plays a significant role in curbing the spread of misinformation and disinformation through the media via the following means:

- Content Standards and Accuracy: The NBC Code includes provisions that mandate broadcasters to ensure accuracy and fairness in their content. Section 0.2.3 of the Code states that "broadcasters must provide accurate and reliable information to the public." This requirement is essential in countering misinformation and disinformation as it promotes responsible journalism and discourages the dissemination of false information through broadcast media.
- Prohibition of Hate Speech: Section 5.6.2 of the NBC Code prohibits hate speech and incitement to violence on broadcast media. Hate speech is often associated with false narratives aimed at creating divisions and spreading disinformation to incite violence. By prohibiting hate speech, the NBC Code helps in curbing the spread of false information that may have harmful consequences.
- Responsibility of Broadcasters: Section 0.2.11 of the NBC Code emphasises the social responsibility of broadcasters to promote national interest, peace, and unity. This provision serves as a safeguard against the dissemination of false narratives that may threaten national security or societal cohesion.
- Monitoring and Sanctions: NBC is responsible for monitoring broadcast content to ensure compliance with the Code's provisions. When broadcasters violate the Code, NBC can impose sanctions, including fines, warnings, or the suspension of broadcasting licences. Such measures act as a deterrent against the spread of misinformation and disinformation through broadcast media.

It is important to note, however, that the NBC Code's effectiveness in curbing the spread of misinformation and disinformation is being challenged. Concerns have been raised about the potential of NBC restricting freedom of the press and expression under the guise of combating false information. NBC faces challenges in enforcing the Code and monitoring Nigeria's vast broadcasting landscape. The rapid evolution of digital media and online misinformation may require NBC to adapt its regulatory approach.

2.4.1.4.The Protection from Internet Falsehoods and Manipulation Bill

The Protection from Internet Falsehoods and Manipulation Bill, also known as the "Social Media Bill," was a proposed legislation in Nigeria aimed at addressing misinformation and disinformation on the Internet. The Protection from Internet Falsehoods and Manipulation Bill had not been passed into law. Proposed in 2019, this bill aims to combat misinformation and disinformation online, concerns were raised over its potential to stifle free speech, leading to public opposition and subsequent non-passage. The bill generated significant controversy and debates within Nigeria and internationally, with concerns about its potential impact on freedom of expression and access to information.

- Definition of Falsehoods and Manipulation: The bill defines "internet falsehoods" as false statements of fact and "manipulation" as actions intended to deceive the public. By providing clear definitions, the bill seeks to identify and curb false information and deceptive practices on the internet.
- Regulating Online Platforms: The bill proposes measures to regulate online platforms, including social media networks and internet service providers, to address the spread of false information. These platforms would be required to take measures to prevent the dissemination of internet falsehoods and manipulation.
- Penalties for Offences: The bill prescribes severe penalties for offenders involved in spreading internet falsehoods and manipulation. Penalties may include imprisonment, fines, or other sanctions. The imposition of strict penalties aims to deter individuals from engaging in the dissemination of false information.
- Government Oversight: The bill proposes the establishment of a National Council for the Coordination of Internet Broadcasts Operations, tasked with overseeing Internet broadcasting and content regulation. This council would be responsible for implementing the provisions of the bill and ensuring compliance with its regulations.
- Rights and Freedoms Concerns: Critics of the bill have expressed concerns about its potential impact on freedom of expression and the right to access information. They argue that the broad definitions of falsehoods and manipulation, coupled with the severe penalties, could be used to stifle legitimate dissent and limit access to information.

- Lack of Clarity: Some critics have pointed out that the bill lacks clarity on specific aspects, such as the criteria for determining falsehoods and manipulation, leading to potential abuses and arbitrary enforcement.
- Potential for Overreach: The bill's provisions for regulating online platforms raise concerns about potential government overreach in content moderation and censorship. Critics worry that such regulations could be used to target political opponents or silence dissenting voices.

The Protection from Internet Falsehoods and Manipulation Bill aimed to address misinformation and disinformation on the Internet in Nigeria. While it sought to regulate online platforms and impose penalties for offenders, it also raised concerns about potential impacts on freedom of expression and government overreach. The bill's fate remains uncertain, and further discussions and revisions may be necessary to strike a balance between countering false narratives and protecting fundamental rights and freedoms.

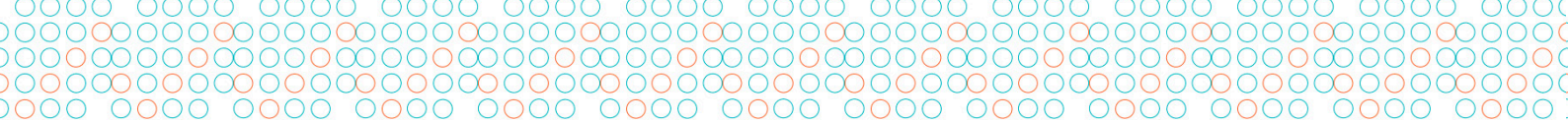## 2.4.Comparative Perspectives on Countering Misinformation and Disinformation

Misinformation and disinformation pose significant challenges worldwide, and countries across different continents have adopted various experiences, strategies, and interventions to address this growing concern. This comparative analysis examines how different regions globally have responded to combat false information and the lessons learned from specific examples.

2.4.1.Nigeria:

Nigeria has implemented a combination of legal, regulatory, and media literacy approaches to tackle misinformation and disinformation. The Cybercrime Act and the NBC Code are among the legal frameworks addressing false information on digital and broadcast media. Media literacy initiatives aim to empower citizens to critically assess information and discern credible sources. However, challenges in implementation and the potential to infringe on freedom of expression have been identified.

2.4.2.Other African Countries:

Several African countries have developed strategies to address misinformation and disinformation. For instance, South Africa established the Independent Media Commission, focusing on media regulation and addressing the spread of false information. Kenya has initiated fact-checking organisations like PesaCheck and Africa Check, providing citizens with verified information.

However, some African countries face challenges related to media freedom and political interference, which impact the effectiveness of interventions.

2.4.3.European Countries:

European countries have adopted diverse approaches to combating misinformation and disinformation. Germany's Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG) holds social media platforms accountable for removing illegal content, including false information. France has enacted the "Fake News Law" to combat misinformation during elections. The European Union's Code of Practice on Disinformation encourages self-regulation among tech companies. These initiatives reflect the importance placed on democratic processes and election integrity

2.4.4.Asian Countries:

Asian countries have also implemented strategies to counter misinformation and disinformation. Singapore's Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) empowers the government to take down false information and issue correction notices. India has introduced guidelines for social media platforms and digital news outlets to address false information. China employs a state-controlled media environment to regulate information dissemination. However, concerns have been raised regarding potential censorship and a lack of media freedom in some Asian countries.

2.4.5.North America:

In the United States, fact-checking organisations like PolitiFact and Snopes play vital roles in debunking false information. Social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, have also introduced fact-checking initiatives to label and limit the spread of misinformation. However, striking a balance between free speech and countering false narratives remains a challeng

2.4.6.South America:

South American countries have used various strategies to tackle misinformation and disinformation. Brazil's Supreme Electoral Court collaborates with fact-checking organisations to debunk false information during elections. Some countries in the region face challenges from misinformation in political contexts, impacting public trust in institutions.

2.4.7. Australia and Oceania:

Australia has proposed legislation to hold tech companies accountable for false information on their platforms. The region also faces challenges related to misinformation impacting public health responses.

The experiences, strategies, and interventions to combat misinformation and disinformation vary among Nigeria, other African countries, Europe, Asia, and across all continents. Countries have implemented a range of legal, regulatory, and educational interventions to combat misinformation and disinformation. While some countries prioritise legal frameworks, others focus on media literacy initiatives and fact-checking organisations.

Each region's unique political, social, and cultural context influences the approach taken to address this global challenge. Collaborative efforts, knowledge sharing, and cross-border cooperation are essential for countries to learn from one another's experiences and develop more effective and comprehensive strategies to combat the spread of false information globally.
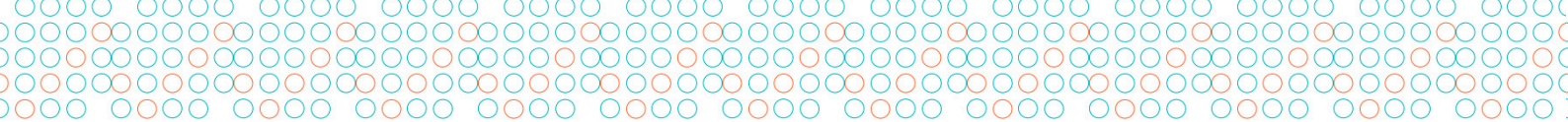
2.5. Media Literacy and Fact-Checking Initiatives

The proliferation of misinformation and disinformation in the digital age has spurred the implementation of various interventions to combat false narratives. Among these interventions, media literacy programmes and fact-checking initiatives have emerged as key strategies to promote critical thinking, enhance digital literacy, and empower media consumers to discern credible information from false content.

2.5.1. Media Literacy Programmes:

Media literacy programmes aim to equip individuals with the skills to navigate the complex media landscape, identify false information, and critically evaluate sources. These programmes empower media consumers to be discerning, active, and responsible participants in the digital information ecosystem. Research by Hobbs (2018) found that media literacy education fosters the development of critical thinking skills and increases media consumers' ability to question the authenticity of information. Similar findings by Livingstone & Helsper (2008) demonstrated that media literacy interventions enhance individuals' scepticism towards unreliable sources and misinformation.

Furthermore, media literacy education has been shown to positively impact student's ability to identify false information online. A study by Tyner & Henderson (2019) revealed that students who received media literacy training were more likely to detect false information and evaluate sources critically. Additionally, media literacy programmes can lead to improved news consumption behaviours, as shown in a study by Van den Bulck et al. (2020), which highlighted the association between media literacy education and reduced belief in misinformation among adolescents.

2.5.2.Fact-checking Initiatives:

Fact-checking organisations play a crucial role in debunking false information, verifying claims made by public figures, and providing accurate information to the public. Studies by Guess et al. (2018) and Lewandowsky et al. (2012) emphasised the effectiveness of fact-checking initiatives in reducing belief in false information and correcting misperceptions among media consumers. Fact-checking interventions are particularly influential during high-profile events, as highlighted by Nyhan & Reifler (2013), who observed that fact-checks can effectively counter misinformation circulating during election campaigns.

Furthermore, fact-checking organisations have been shown to have a positive impact on social media platforms. Research by Pennycook and Rand (2019) demonstrated that fact-checking labels on false information posts led to a decrease in the sharing of misinformation on social media. Similarly, studies by Guess & Nyhan (2018) and Vosoughi et al. (2018) found that fact-checking interventions on social media platforms can reduce the spread of false information and promote more accurate information sharing.

In addition to media literacy programmes and fact-checking verification tools, critical thinking approaches have also been explored as effective interventions in countering misinformation and disinformation. Research by Pennycook et al. (2020) highlighted the role of cognitive reflection in reducing belief in misinformation, emphasising the importance of critical thinking in media consumption. Moreover, studies by Pennycook et al. (2018) and Guess et al. (2019) showed that providing prompts encouraging individuals to think critically about the content they encounter online can lead to a reduction in the acceptance of false information.

These interventions empower media consumers to navigate the digital information landscape, identify false information, and engage in responsible information consumption. The evidence indicates that media literacy education enhances critical thinking skills, scepticism towards unreliable sources, and the ability to discern credible information from false narratives. Fact-checking organisations play a vital role in debunking false claims and reducing belief in misinformation, particularly during high-profile events. Verification tools and critical thinking approaches also contribute to promoting accurate information sharing and countering the spread of false narratives. The combination of these interventions offers promising and effective strategies to address the global challenge of misinformation and disinformation.

2.6.Public Awareness Campaigns and Stakeholder Collaborations

Public awareness campaigns and stakeholder collaborations have emerged as crucial interventions to raise awareness about the risks of false narratives and combat their spread.
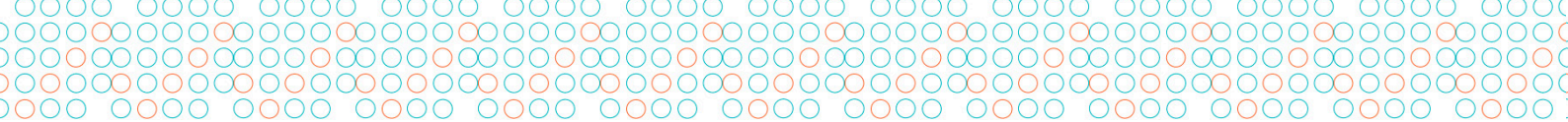
2.6.1. Public Awareness Campaigns:

Public awareness campaigns are designed to educate and inform the public about the dangers of misinformation and disinformation. These campaigns aim to empower individuals to critically evaluate information, discern credible sources, and engage responsibly in online and offline spaces. Research by Roozenbeek et al. (2020) highlighted the effectiveness of public awareness campaigns in reducing the belief in false information, particularly when campaigns provide corrective information and debunk myths. Similarly, studies by Guess et al., (2020) and Lewandowsky et al. (2015) found that public awareness campaigns that emphasise the consequences of false narratives can lead to increased scepticism among media consumers.

Moreover, public awareness campaigns play a crucial role in promoting media literacy and digital literacy skills. Research by Bremmer and Wasserman (2019) demonstrated that media literacy campaigns led to improved information evaluation skills among participants, enabling them to navigate the digital information landscape more effectively. Similarly, campaigns that target specific demographic groups, such as youth or vulnerable populations, have been shown to enhance media literacy and reduce susceptibility to misinformation (Pennycook and Rand, 2021).

2.6.2. Stakeholder Collaborations:

Stakeholder collaborations involve partnerships between media organisations, government institutions, civil society, and technology platforms to collectively combat misinformation and disinformation. These collaborations leverage diverse expertise, resources, and reach to develop comprehensive strategies to address the challenges posed by false narratives. Research by Bode and Vraga (2018) emphasised the importance of cross-sector collaborations in countering misinformation, as they can enhance information credibility and debunk false claims effectively.

Partnerships between media organisations and fact-checking initiatives have shown promising results in debunking false information and correcting misperceptions (Guess et al., 2019). Collaboration between government institutions and social media platforms has led to the implementation of fact-checking labels and measures to limit the spread of false narratives on online platforms (Vosoughi et al., 2020). Moreover, civil society organizations play a crucial role in monitoring and countering false narratives, as highlighted by Thorson and Wells (2018), who found that grassroots initiatives can effectively raise awareness about misinformation risks and promote accurate information sharing.

2.7.Challenges and Limitations in Addressing Misinformation and Disinformation

The prevalence of misinformation and disinformation in the digital age has raised significant challenges for societies worldwide. Despite efforts to combat false narratives, various limitations hinder the effectiveness of interventions. These key challenges encountered in addressing misinformation and disinformation include the speed of information dissemination, the balance between freedom of speech and regulation, the role of algorithmic biases, and the ethical considerations associated with content moderation and removal.

2.7.1.Speed of Information Dissemination:

The rapid spread of false information through social media and online platforms poses a major challenge. Studies by Vosoughi et al. (2018) and Zubiaga et al. (2016) found that false information spreads faster and reaches a broader audience than accurate information. The viral nature of false narratives makes them challenging to contain once they gain momentum. The real-time nature of social media further complicates efforts to address misinformation promptly, as fact-checking and verification processes may take longer than the dissemination of false information.

2.7.2.Balance Between Freedom of Speech and Regulation:

Ensuring a balance between freedom of speech and the regulation of false information is a complex ethical dilemma. While it is crucial to protect freedom of expression, the unfettered dissemination of false narratives can have severe consequences. Implementing regulations to counter misinformation without infringing on free speech is challenging. Studies by Roberts and Moy (2019) and Sunstein (2009) explore the tensions between limiting misinformation and preserving democratic values, underscoring the need for nuanced and transparent regulatory approaches.

2.7.3.Role of Algorithmic Biases:

Algorithmic biases on social media platforms can inadvertently amplify false narratives. Research by Diakopoulos (2019) and Tufekci (2015) revealed that algorithms may prioritise sensational content and engage users with false information due to their higher click-through rates. Such biases can lead to the formation of echo chambers, where users are exposed to content that aligns with their existing beliefs, further reinforcing false narratives and hindering corrective information.

2.7.4.Ethical Considerations in Content Moderation and Removal:

Content moderation and the removal of false information raise ethical considerations. Determining what constitutes misinformation and disinformation can be subjective, and enforcing consistent standards can be challenging. Studies by Gasser and Nugent (2018) and Gillespie (2018) highlight the complexities of content moderation decisions, including potential biases, transparency, and the role of tech companies as gatekeepers of information.

Addressing misinformation and disinformation is fraught with challenges and limitations. The rapid speed of information dissemination, the delicate balance between freedom of speech and regulation, the role of algorithmic biases, and the ethical considerations associated with content moderation and removal pose significant hurdles. However, understanding these challenges is critical to developing effective and ethical strategies to combat false narratives. Collaborative efforts between policymakers, technology platforms, fact-checking organisations, and civil society are essential to navigate these complexities and foster a more informed and resilient society in the face of misinformation and disinformation challenges.

CHAPTER THREE

3.METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides the necessary information on the methods employed in carrying out the study
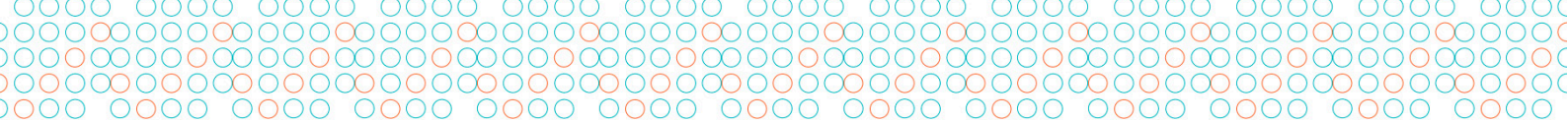
3.1.Research Design

The research design for this study follows a mixed-method approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative data will be collected through interviews and focus groups to gather in-depth insights into the experiences, perspectives, and strategies related to misinformation and disinformation in Nigeria. Quantitative data will be collected through surveys to obtain statistical information on the prevalence, impact, and characteristics of misinformation and disinformation. The combination of qualitative and quantitative data will provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and support the development of evidence-based recommendations and interventions.

3.2.The population of the Study

The study population is the number of subjects or the environment of interest to the researcher. The population of interest for this study includes individuals residing in Nigeria who are exposed to misinformation and disinformation through various communication channels.

3.3.Sample and Sampling Techniques

Sampling is the process of selecting a unit (people or organisation) from a population of interest so that, by studying the sample, we may fairly generalise our results back to the population from which they were chosen (Krejcie, 2010). Due to the large population size, a representative sample will be selected to ensure the generalizability of the findings. The sample will be drawn from different geographical regions, demographic groups, and information consumption patterns using appropriate sampling techniques, such as stratified random sampling and cluster sampling, to capture diverse perspectives and experiences related to misinformation and disinformation.
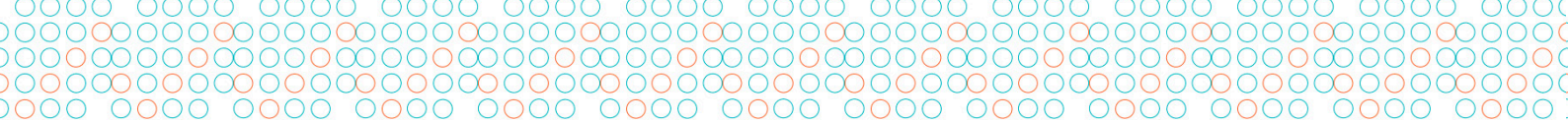
3.4. Research Instrument

The research instrument for this study will consist of multiple components to gather comprehensive data on the prevalence, impact, and regulatory framework of misinformation and disinformation in Nigeria. The research instrument includes:

- Survey Questionnaire: A structured questionnaire will be developed to collect quantitative data on participants' experiences, attitudes, and behaviours related to misinformation and disinformation. The questionnaire may include items on 1.information sources, frequency of exposure to false information, perceived impact, trust in information sources, and awareness of fact-checking initiatives. Likert scales, multiple-choice questions, and open-ended questions are used to capture a range of responses.

- Focus Group Discussion Guide: A focus group discussion guide will be designed to facilitate group discussions with individuals from diverse backgrounds, including community members, media professionals, and representatives from civil society organisations. The guide will include prompts to stimulate discussions on the impact of misinformation and disinformation, community engagement, media literacy, and collaborative efforts. The focus group discussions will provide valuable insights into collective perspectives and identify potential interventions and strategies.

- Document Analysis: A systematic review and analysis of relevant policy documents, legal frameworks, and regulatory guidelines will be conducted to assess the existing legal and regulatory framework in Nigeria. This will involve examining laws, regulations, guidelines, and policies implemented by institutions such as the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA).

3.5. Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

Validity is the ability to measure what is intended to be measured accurately (Taherdoost, 2016), while reliability refers to the extent to which a measurement of a phenomenon provides stable and consistent results (Schut & Glebova, 2022). The research instruments for this study were carefully designed and validated to ensure reliability and validity. Piloting of the instruments was conducted to assess their clarity, comprehensiveness, and appropriateness.

3.6.Data Collection and Analysis

The instruments were administered in a manner that promotes participant comfort and confidentiality through online surveys and virtual platforms. The data collected from these instruments will provide a robust foundation for analysis and the generation of meaningful insights for the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.DATA PRESENTATION, AND ANALYSIS

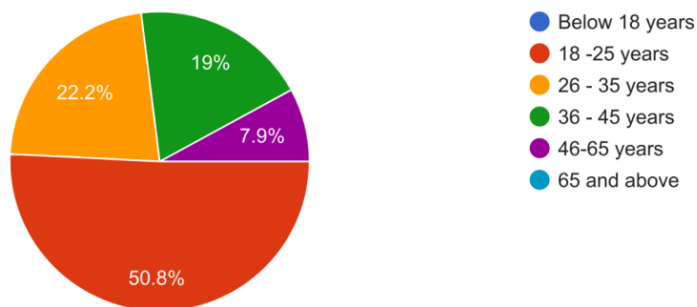This chapter provides the necessary information on the methods employed in carrying out the study

4.1.Introduction

The findings of this study and their implications are discussed in this chapter. This study adopted qualitative and quantitative research designs to seek an understanding and countering of misinformation disinformation in Nigeria and Beyond: Assessment of the Legal and Regulatory Framework. Several important implications emerged from the comprehensive survey for gaining a deeper understanding of and combating misinformation and disinformation in Nigeria. To present this, the data gathered with the survey, and focused group discussion were interpreted and analysed below.

4.2. DATA PRESENTATION & ANALYSIS
4.2.1.Demography

What age group do you belong to?
63 responses

- Below 18 years
- 18 -25 years
- 26 - 35 years
- 36 - 45 years
- 46-65 years
- 65 and above

19%
22.2%
7.9%
50.8%

The spread of the respondents' age group in the study span 18 - 65 years. The majority of respondents fall within the age range of 18–25 years, which indicates that the survey mostly captures the perspectives of youth.

The gender distribution chart below highlights that males (62.9%) are more represented in the survey than females (37.1%). This shows possible implications for understanding the prevalence and perception of misinformation and disinformation between different genders.

Which gender do you identify as?
63 responses
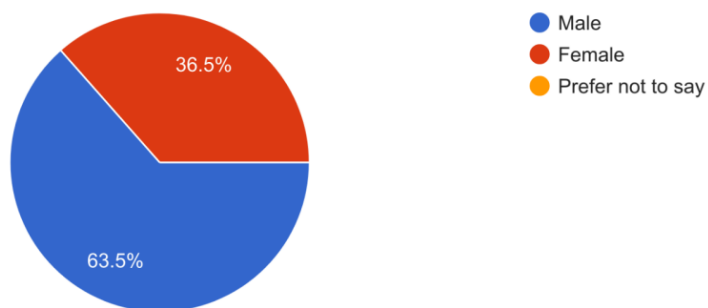
The majority of the respondents (93.7%) in this study have attained the tertiary level of educational qualification. The respondents cut across occupations from different walks of life including Students; Corp members; Teachers; Fashion designers; Drivers; Civil servants; Legal practitioners; Media and communication experts (journalists, social media managers, researchers, brand designers, public relations officers, customer service representative and so on); Health practitioners (public health specialist, safety and environment supervisor); Business personnel (entrepreneur, and development sector workers); Tech specialist (software engineer, data scientist, and computer engineer).

4.2.2.Prevalence and Impact of Misinformation and Disinformation in Nigeria

- **Research Question:** What is the prevalence and reach of misinformation and disinformation in Nigeria, and how do they impact society, democratic processes, public health, and the economy?

The survey found that a vast majority of respondents (88%) have come across information that they suspect to be false or misleading. Of those, 30.6% have come across this type of information very often, 38.7% have come across it often, 25.8% have come across it occasionally, and only 4.8% have come across it rarely. This suggests that false and misleading information is a widespread and highly prevalent problem that is affecting a large number of people in Nigeria. It is important to be aware of this problem and to be able to identify false and misleading information when you see it. There are several resources available to help you do this, such as fact-checking websites and media literacy training.

How often do you come across information that you suspect to be false or misleading?
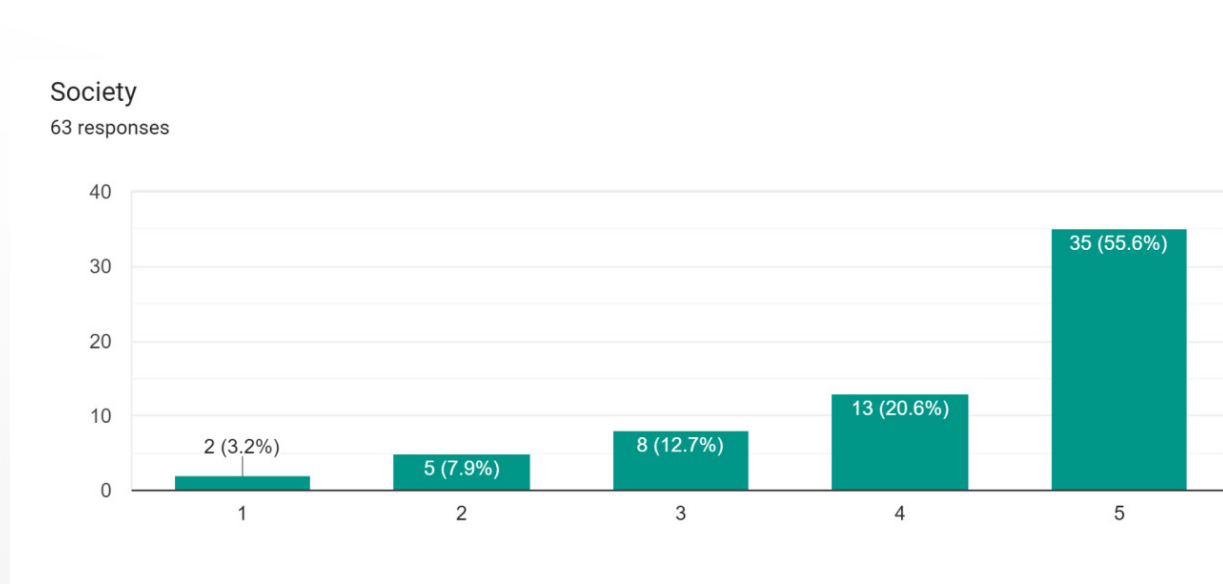63 responses

- Very Often
- Often
- Occassionally
- Rarely
- Never

27%
38.1%
30.2%
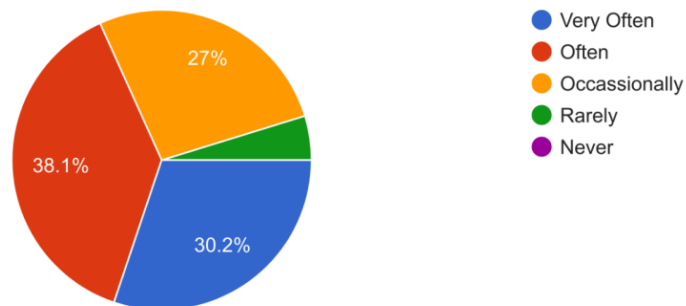
Do you believe that misinformation and disinformation pose significant challenges to Nigeria's development and progress?
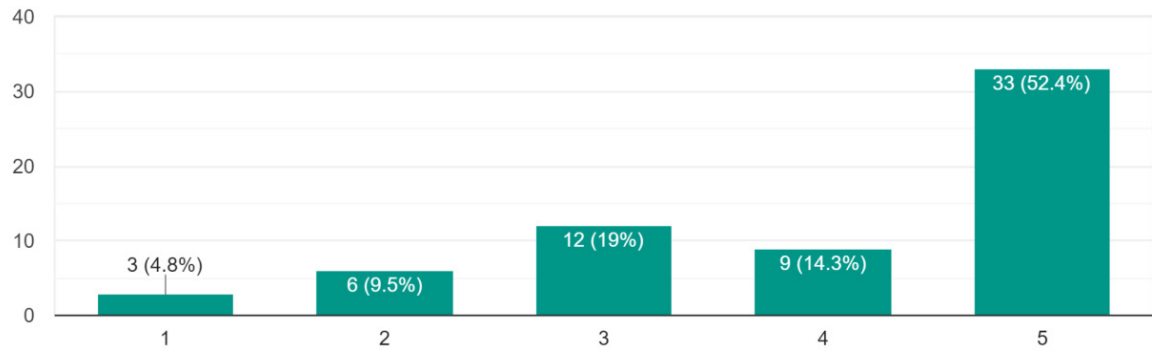63 responses

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

96.8%
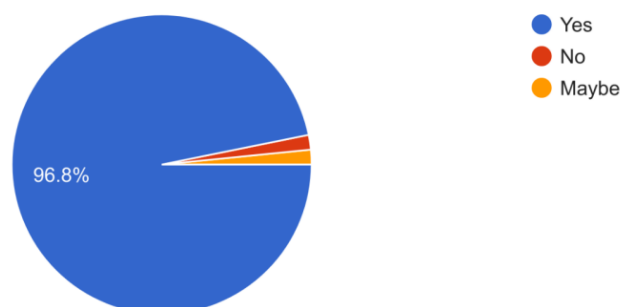
More than 96% of the respondents in the survey believe that misinformation and disinformation pose significant challenges to Nigeria's development and progress. Results from the survey further revealed that many respondents believe that misinformation and disinformation have a significant impact on society, the democratic process, public health, and the economy in Nigeria. Discussion in the focused group from the study showed that these impacts are negative. This is because misinformation and disinformation can have a negative impact on the country's economy, security, and democracy. Misinformation and disinformation can lead to social unrest, political instability, and economic problems. They can also undermine trust in institutions and lead to people making bad decisions.For example, misinformation and disinformation can be used to spread fear and panic, which can lead to violence and instability. They can also be used to undermine trust in institutions, such as the government and the media. This can make it difficult for the government to function effectively and for the media to report the news accurately. In addition, misinformation and disinformation can be used to manipulate public opinion, which can lead to bad decisions being made. For example, misinformation and disinformation can be used to convince people to vote for a particular candidate or to support a particular policy. This can have a negative impact on the country's development and progress.

Respondents were asked to rank the impact of misinformation and disinformation on the following aspects in Nigeria on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "Not significant" and 5 being "Very significant". The findings are presented in the charts below
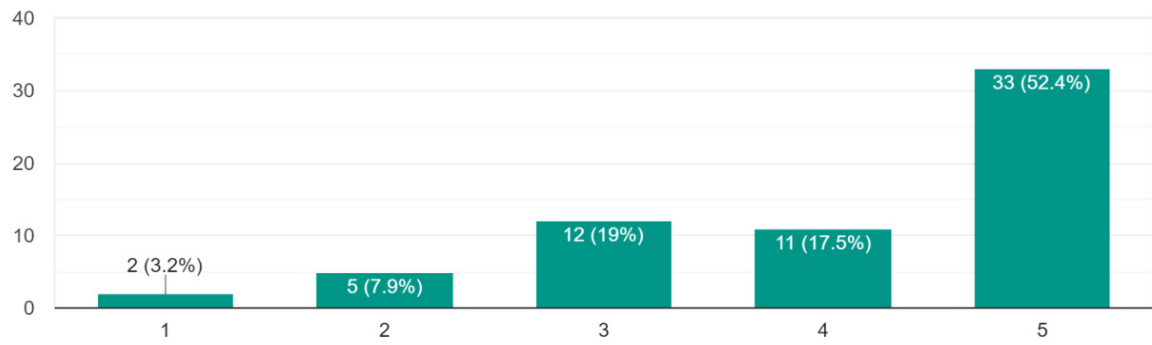
Society
63 responses

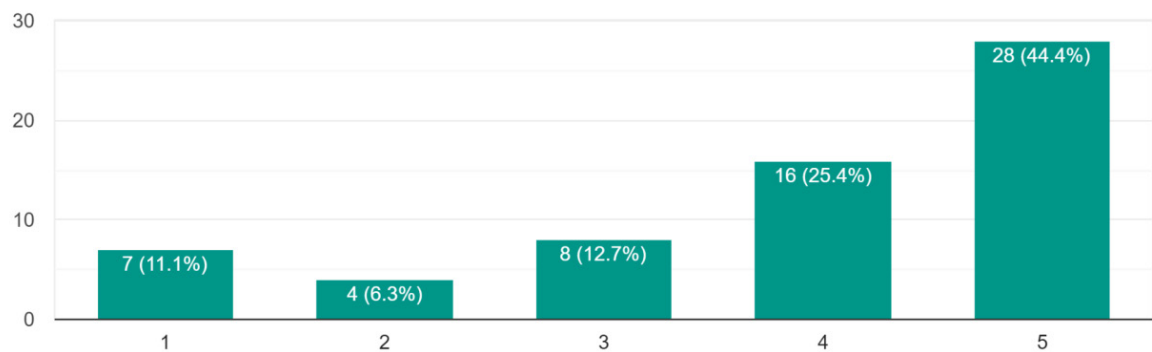## Public Health

63 responses

Economy

63 responses

Democratic processes

63 responses

In essence, it is important to be aware of the dangers of misinformation and disinformation and to take steps to combat them. Here are some of the ways to combat misinformation and disinformation:

- Be critical of the information you see online.
- Check the source of the information.
- Be aware of your own biases.
- Share accurate information.
- Report misinformation and disinformation.
- Support fact-checking organizations.

4.2.3.Influence of Cultural, Social, and Technological Factors

- **Research Question:** What cultural, social, and technological factors influence the spread of false information, and how do they impact Nigeria's challenges with misinformation and disinformation?

57% of respondents believed that cultural factors, such as social status, social dynamics, and language, have a significant impact on the spread of false information in Nigeria. This is likely due to the fact that Nigeria is a very diverse country with a wide range of cultures and languages. This diversity can make it difficult to verify information, as people may be more likely to believe information that is consistent with their own cultural beliefs and values. Culture affects values, which in turn affects communication, access to information, and information dissemination. The quality of information decreases as it is passed on, which can lead to misunderstandings and unwanted reactions. Additionally, the use of social media has made it easier for people to spread false information quickly and easily. This is especially true in Nigeria, where there is a large population of people who are active on social media.

To what extent do you believe social factors contribute to the challenges of misinformation and disinformation in Nigeria?

63 responses
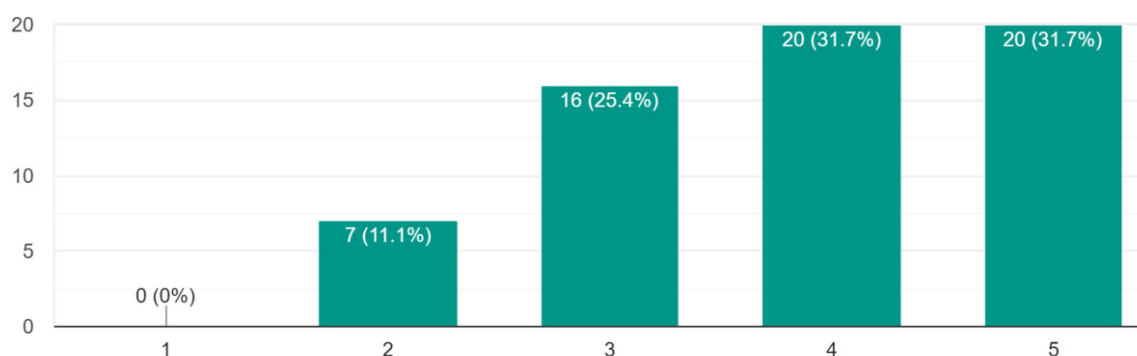
More than 63% of Nigerians who participated in this survey believe that social factors in Nigeria significantly contribute to the challenges of misinformation and disinformation. Several key social aspects influence how false information spreads and why it can be difficult to combat:
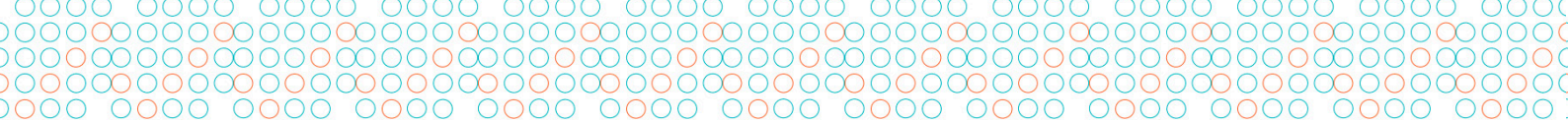
- Low levels of digital literacy: Many Nigerians lack the skills to critically evaluate the information they see online, making them more susceptible to believing false information.
- High levels of social media use: Nigerians are among the most active social media users in the world, which provides a fertile ground for the spread of misinformation.
- Political polarisation: Nigeria is a deeply divided country, and social media is often used to spread misinformation that reinforces existing political biases.
- Economic inequality: The gap between rich and poor is growing in Nigeria, and this can lead to resentment and distrust of institutions, which can make people more likely to believe false information.
- Lack of trust in the media: Many Nigerians do not trust the mainstream media, which can make them more likely to believe false information that is shared online.

These are just some of the social factors that contribute to the challenges of misinformation and disinformation in Nigeria. It is important to be aware of these factors so that we can better combat the spread of false information.

To what extent do you believe technological factors impact the spread of false information in Nigeria?

63 responses
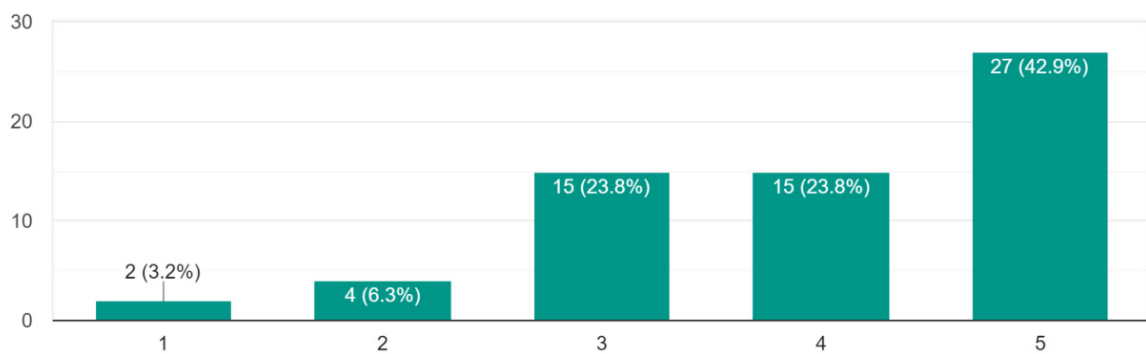
The spread of false information in Nigeria is a major problem, and it is only getting worse. In this survey, more than 66% of respondents said that they believe the impact of technological factors on the spread of false information in Nigeria is very significant. This is likely due to the fact that Nigeria is a very diverse country with a large population, and it is easy for false information to spread quickly through social media and other online platforms.

There are a number of reasons why technological factors have made it easier for false information to spread. First, social media platforms make it easy for people to share information quickly and easily with a large number of people. Second, algorithms on social media platforms are designed to show people content that they are likely to be interested in, which can lead to people being exposed to false information that they would not have seen otherwise. Third, it is easy to create fake news websites and social media accounts that look legitimate, which can make it difficult for people to tell the difference between real and fake news.
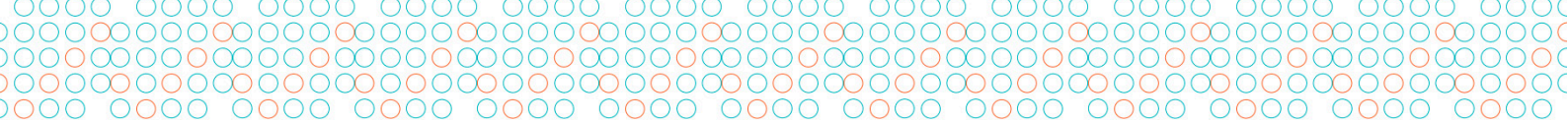
4.2.4.Assessment of Legal and Regulatory Framework

- **Research Question:** What are the strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in the existing legal and regulatory framework in Nigeria designed to counter misinformation and disinformation?

Are you aware of any existing legal and regulatory measures in Nigeria aimed at countering misinformation and disinformation?

63 responses
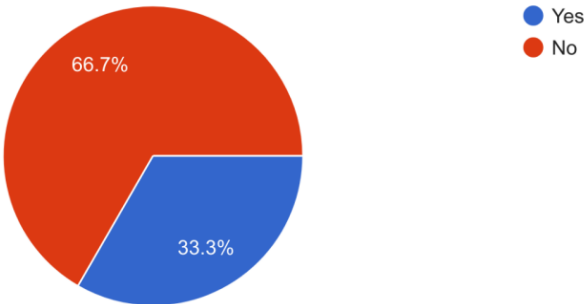
Only a small percentage of respondents (33.9%) are aware of any existing legal and regulatory measures in Nigeria aimed at countering misinformation and disinformation. The frameworks that they are familiar with include the Cyber Crime Act, Fact-Checking Initiatives, Law against False Information, and National Orientation Agency. These frameworks are designed to protect people from the dangers of misinformation and disinformation. The Cyber Crime Act makes it a crime to create, send, or post false information online. Fact-Checking Initiatives are organizations that work to verify the accuracy of information online. The Law against False Information makes it a crime to spread false information that could harm national security or public order. The National Orientation Agency is a government agency that works to educate the public about the dangers of misinformation and disinformation.

In your opinion, do you think the current legal and regulatory framework in Nigeria effectively addresses misinformation and disinformation?
63 responses
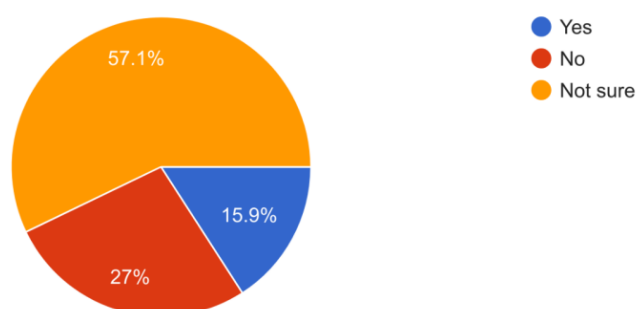
The survey showed that the majority of Nigerians (56.5%) who participated are not sure whether the current legal and regulatory framework in Nigeria effectively addresses misinformation and disinformation. 27.4% believe the frameworks cannot effectively address it, while only 16.1% think they are effective enough to address the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation in the country. There are a number of reasons why Nigerians may be unsure about the effectiveness of the current legal and regulatory framework. One reason is that many of the frameworks have not been fully tested and evaluated. Additionally, the frameworks are believed to be complex and cover a wide range of issues, which may make it difficult to understand and implement effectively. Finally, the frameworks are not without their critics, who argue that they are too broad and could be used to stifle legitimate dissent. It is suggested that further research be conducted into the effectiveness of the current legal and regulatory framework in Nigeria. This research should focus on understanding how the framework is being implemented and whether it is having the desired effect of reducing the spread of misinformation and disinformation.

4.2.5.Comparative Perspective

- **Research Question:** What are the experiences and strategies employed by other countries in combating misinformation and disinformation that can provide valuable insights that are effective and relevant to the Nigerian context?

Do you believe that the extent and impact of misinformation and disinformation in Nigeria are significantly different from those in other countries?
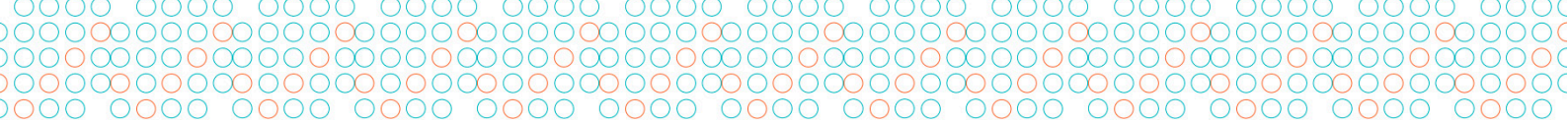63 responses
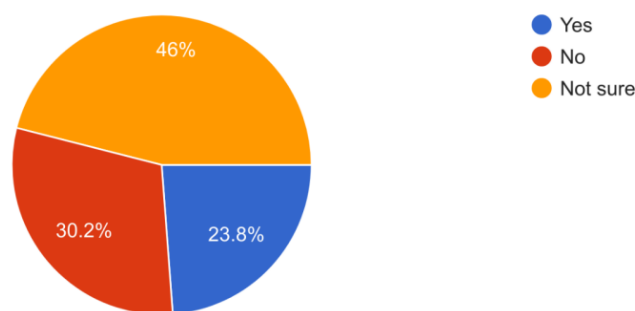
Only 24% of the respondents in this study believe that the extent and impact of misinformation and disinformation in Nigeria are significantly different from those in other countries. This suggests that the majority of people believe that misinformation and disinformation are global problems and that Nigeria is not particularly susceptible to them. However, it is important to note that this study was conducted with a relatively small sample size, so it is possible that the results are not representative of the general population.

The respondents in the focused group discussion highlighted that false information is the same across countries, but the rate at which it spreads differs. Misinformation spreads through similar channels, but media literacy varies. Citizens in Western and developed countries are better at spotting misinformation.

In Nigeria, misinformation spreads quickly through social media platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook. This is because these platforms are widely used in Nigeria, and they make it easy for people to share information quickly and easily. Misinformation is also spread through traditional media outlets, such as newspapers and television stations. However, traditional media outlets are more likely to fact-check information before they publish it, so misinformation is less likely to spread through these channels.

Media literacy is the ability to critically evaluate information and identify misinformation. Citizens in Western and developed countries are generally better at spotting

misinformation than citizens in developing countries. This is because they are more likely to have access to education and information about media literacy. They are also more likely to be exposed to a variety of viewpoints, which helps them to develop critical thinking skills. The respondents in the focused group discussion suggested that the following can be done to combat misinformation in Nigeria:

- Increase media literacy among citizens.
- Fact-check information before it is shared on social media.
- Promote critical thinking skills.
- Support independent journalism.
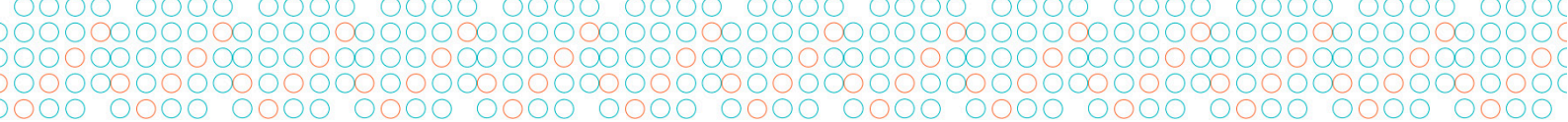- Regulate social media platforms.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1.Conclusion

This research provides valuable insights into the widespread and complex nature of misinformation and disinformation in Nigeria. It offers a comprehensive understanding of how these issues impact various aspects of society, including democratic processes, public health and the economy. The study reveals that false narratives not only harm social unity but also undermine democratic principles, jeopardise public health outcomes and hinder economic growth. Furthermore, the research explores the intricate web of cultural, social and technological factors that contribute to the spread of false information in Nigeria. By acknowledging these factors, policymakers can develop targeted interventions to address the root causes behind false narratives and promote a more resilient information ecosystem.

The evaluation of Nigeria's existing legal and regulatory framework emphasises its strengths, such as comprehensive coverage and collaborative efforts. However, it also highlights weaknesses and gaps like lack of implementation, vague definitions and limited focus on digital platforms. This underscores the importance of dedicated legislation, media literacy, critical thinking and fact-checking mechanisms to strengthen Nigeria's defence against misinformation. Taking a comparative approach, this research situates Nigeria within a global context by drawing insights from experiences and strategies employed in other countries across Africa, Europe, Asia and beyond. These lessons from different countries shed light on effective methods and offer valuable suggestions, promoting the exchange of knowledge and international cooperation to address the worldwide issue of false information and deceptive content.

In light of the evolving nature of misinformation and disinformation in the digital era, this research advocates for collective efforts to enhance media literacy programs, fact-checking initiatives, and public awareness campaigns. Equipping individuals with critical thinking skills and cultivating a culture of responsible information consumption can fortify Nigeria's defences against false narratives and create a more informed and empowered society.
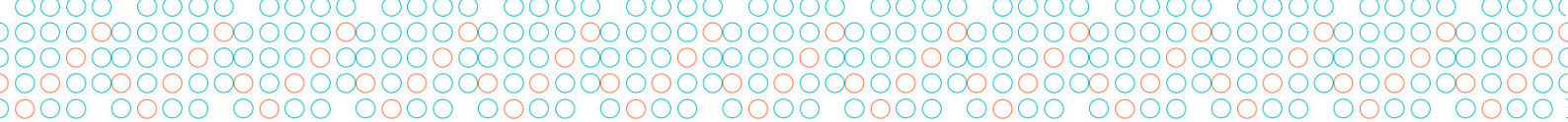
5.2.Recommendations:

Based on the findings and analysis of the study the following recommendations are proposed:

- Strengthening Legal and Regulatory Framework: Enhance the existing legal and regulatory framework in Nigeria to specifically address the challenges posed by misinformation and disinformation in the digital age. Develop dedicated legislation that defines and targets false narratives, taking into account the unique characteristics of digital platforms.

- Fact-Checking Mechanisms: Establish reliable and independent fact-checking organizations and tools in Nigeria to systematically verify information and debunk false narratives. These mechanisms will provide citizens with credible sources for information verification and contribute to a more informed society.

- Media Literacy Education: Implement comprehensive and widespread media literacy programs across educational institutions and communities to empower individuals with critical thinking skills. Media literacy education should focus on identifying and countering false narratives, fostering responsible information consumption, and promoting digital citizenship.

- Public Awareness Campaigns: Launch public awareness campaigns to raise awareness about the risks of misinformation and disinformation. Collaborate with media organizations, government institutions, civil society, and technology platforms to disseminate accurate information and promote media literacy.

- Collaborative Efforts: Foster strong partnerships and collaborations between various stakeholders, including media organizations, government institutions, civil society, and technology platforms. Joint efforts can contribute to a more coordinated response in countering false narratives.

- Global Cooperation: Engage in international collaboration and knowledge sharing with other countries facing similar challenges. By learning from experiences and best practices abroad, Nigeria can enhance its strategies in countering misinformation and disinformation.

- Freedom of Expression and Content Moderation: Ensure a delicate balance between countering false narratives and safeguarding freedom of expression. Develop ethical guidelines for content moderation, striking a balance between removing false information and preserving legitimate speech.

- Empowering Technology Platforms: Encourage technology platforms to implement measures to curb the spread of false information within their systems. This may include improved algorithms to limit the reach of false narratives and promote credible sources.

- Research and Monitoring: Support ongoing research and monitoring efforts to assess the evolving landscape of misinformation and disinformation. Continuous monitoring of trends and challenges will inform policymakers and stakeholders of emerging issues that require attention.

- Long-Term Awareness Programs: Invest in sustained long-term awareness programs that promote media literacy and critical thinking as a fundamental skill for citizens of all ages. Long-term education is key to building a more resilient society against false narratives.

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