The Impact of Fake News and Cloned Online Pages on Media Credibility, Public Trust and Societal Cohesion in Nigeria: Solutions and Practical and Theoretical Implications

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Abstract

The proliferation of fake news and cloned pages represents a significant challenge to the media landscape in Nigeria, influencing public trust, information integrity and societal cohesion. This study critically examines the consequences, solutions and theoretical underpinnings related to these phenomena. Through a comprehensive review of recent literature, including data from notable organisations such as the Centre for Democracy and Development and the International Centre for Investigative Reporting, the study highlights the extensive reach and influence of fake news and cloned pages. The literature reveal that a substantial portion of the Nigerian population encounters and acts upon misleading information, undermining both media credibility and public confidence. The study proposes targeted interventions, including enhanced media literacy, robust fact-checking mechanisms and collaborative regulatory frameworks, to address these challenges. By integrating insights from theoretical perspectives on misinformation and media influence, the research offers practical recommendations to improve information integrity and foster a more informed public.

1. Introduction

The proliferation of digital media has profoundly transformed the landscape of communication, offering unprecedented access to information while simultaneously giving rise to new challenges. Among these challenges, the spread of misinformation and the manipulation of public opinion through fake news and cloned pages have emerged as critical concerns. As digital platforms increasingly become the primary sources of news and information, understanding the implications of these phenomena is essential for safeguarding the integrity of information and fostering an informed public.

Fake news – defined as fabricated or misleading information presented as genuine news – has been identified as a significant issue impacting public discourse and trust in media. The ease with which false information can be disseminated via social media and other digital channels has heightened the urgency for effective solutions. According to the Centre for Democracy and Development (2020), the rise of fake news and cloned pages in Nigeria has contributed to widespread confusion and misinformation, with 75% of Nigerians reporting encounters with such content online (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2020). This issue is compounded by the fact that 68% of Nigerians believe and act on fake news, highlighting a critical gap in media literacy and

verification (International Centre for Investigative Reporting, 2020).

The implications of these developments are far-reaching. Misinformation can distort public perception, influence electoral outcomes and exacerbate societal divisions. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the spread of false information about the virus and its prevention undermined public health efforts and created confusion about the efficacy of preventive measures (Chalkiadakis et al., 2021). Furthermore, the presence of cloned pages – fake replicas of legitimate news outlets – adds another layer of complexity, making it increasingly difficult for users to distinguish credible sources from deceptive ones (Statista, 2021b).

This study aims to examine the consequences of fake news and cloned pages in Nigeria critically, focusing on their effects, outcomes and the associated challenges. By exploring the reach, engagement and influence of these phenomena, as well as the responses of the public and the challenges faced in addressing them, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of misinformation and its impact on Nigerian society.

The review also aims to identify and evaluate the theoretical frameworks that can offer insight into these issues. By applying theories such as Framing Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory, this study will elucidate how fake news and misinformation are framed and consumed, and how these processes affect public perception and behaviour. The importance of this research is underscored by the need for effective strategies to combat misinformation and enhance media literacy. With numerous stakeholders – including media practitioners, educators, policymakers and the public – interested in addressing these challenges, this study provides a critical foundation for developing targeted interventions and policies.

This article is systematically organised to provide a comprehensive examination of the issues surrounding fake news and cloned pages in Nigeria. The introduction sets the stage by outlining the pervasive problem of misinformation and its impact on media and society in Nigeria. It highlights the significance of addressing fake news and cloned pages, providing a context for the subsequent analysis. Following the introduction, the literature review delves into the existing research on the consequences and implications of fake news and cloned pages. This section synthesises key findings from various studies, identifying critical gaps in the current understanding and highlighting the need for further exploration. The theoretical grounding section offers a detailed discussion of relevant theories related to misinformation, media influence and information dissemination. It establishes the theoretical framework used to analyse the data and interpret the findings of the study.

The article then moves to a critical discussion of the implications of the review. This section evaluates the impact of fake news and cloned pages on media credibility, public trust and societal cohesion. It also explores the practical and theoretical consequences of these phenomena. In addressing gaps identified in the literature, the article provides recommendations for future research and practical interventions. It suggests strategies for improving media literacy, enhancing fact-checking mechanisms and fostering collaborative efforts among stakeholders to combat misinformation. Finally, the conclusion summarises the key findings of the study, reiterates the importance of addressing fake news and cloned pages, and outlines actionable recommendations for policymakers, media practitioners and researchers. This section highlights the contributions of the article to the field and calls for continued efforts to mitigate the effects of misinformation in Nigeria.

2. Theoretical Grounding

To underpin the review article on the impacts and implications of fake news and cloned pages, a robust theoretical framework is essential. Several theories provide relevant grounding, offering valuable insights into how and why fake news proliferates and its effects on media, public perception and societal trust. Among these, the Uses and Gratifications Theory, Framing Theory and Social Cognitive Theory stand out as particularly pertinent.

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) posits that media consumers actively seek out media content that fulfils their specific needs and desires (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). In the context of fake news, UGT can explain why individuals are drawn to sensational or misleading information. People often engage with content that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs or emotional needs, which can perpetuate the spread of fake news. For instance, if fake news content reinforces a person's political views or confirms their fears, they are more likely to engage with and share it. This theory highlights the active role of the audience in media consumption and provides a lens through which to understand the appeal of fake news and cloned pages (Dunwoody & Peters, 2020).

Framing Theory offers another crucial perspective by focusing on how media organisations shape the presentation of news and influence public perception through specific frames or narratives (Goffman, 1974). Fake news and cloned pages often use particular frames to manipulate information and sway public opinion. For

example, framing issues in a sensationalist or polarising manner can significantly influence how audiences interpret and respond to the news. This theory helps to elucidate the mechanisms behind the creation and dissemination of misleading information, revealing how the framing of content can affect audience beliefs and behaviours (Entman, 1993).

Social Cognitive Theory, developed by Albert Bandura, emphasises the role of observational learning and social influence in shaping behaviour (Bandura, 1986). According to this theory, individuals learn and replicate behaviours they observe in others, particularly those they perceive as influential or credible. This theory is relevant in understanding how fake news and cloned pages spread within social networks. When individuals see influential figures or peers sharing and endorsing fake news, they are more likely to accept and propagate it themselves. Social Cognitive Theory thus provides insight into the social dynamics that facilitate the rapid spread of misinformation and the impact of social networks on news consumption and dissemination (Moorhead et al., 2013).

These theoretical perspectives collectively offer a comprehensive framework for analysing the phenomenon of fake news and cloned pages. Uses and Gratifications Theory helps to understand why individuals engage with and spread fake news, Framing Theory explains the manipulative tactics used in presenting misinformation, and Social Cognitive Theory sheds light on the social processes that facilitate the spread of fake news. By integrating these theories, the review article can provide a nuanced analysis of the factors driving the proliferation of fake news and its implications for media and society.

3. The Concept of Knowledge of Cloned Online Newspaper Pages

Cloned online newspaper pages are digital platforms that mimic the design and content of legitimate news sources. These pages, however, often operate with the intent of spreading misinformation, propaganda, or even malicious software (Chalkiadakis et al., 2021). The existence of such pages presents a significant threat to the quality, credibility and trustworthiness of online communication, as they have the potential to mislead or harm audiences. As such, it becomes imperative to explore the concept of knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages, which refers to the capacity to critically identify, assess and use information originating from such pages in an ethical manner. This section will delve into the dimensions, determinants and development of this concept, while also examining the challenges and opportunities it presents for media practitioners, the public and society.

3.1 Dimensions of Knowledge

The knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages can be conceptualised through three key dimensions: cognitive, affective and behavioural. These dimensions are aligned with the components of knowledge: knowing, feeling and doing (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill & Krathwohl, 1956; Jonassen, 2000). The cognitive dimension encompasses the mental faculties involved in recognising, analysing and synthesising information from such pages. This involves attention, memory, comprehension, reasoning and judgement. The affective dimension, on the other hand, is concerned with the emotional and motivational aspects, such as curiosity, interest, trust and confidence, which influence how individuals respond to and engage with information. Finally, the behavioural dimension encompasses the actions taken by individuals, such as searching, verifying and commenting on information, demonstrating the practical application of knowledge in everyday interaction with cloned pages (Bloom et al., 1956; Lazer et al., 2018).

3.2 Determinants of Knowledge

Several factors influence the development of knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages, primarily related to the characteristics of information, the contexts of communication and the consequences of digital technology. These factors correspond to the broader framework of information literacy, as outlined by Bruce (1997) and Shu et al. (2017). Characteristics such as the source, author, format and content of cloned pages can shape how individuals perceive and evaluate information. Additionally, the contexts in which information is produced and consumed, including the purpose of communication, the intended audience and the medium used, play a pivotal role in determining the relevance and credibility of such information. Furthermore, the technological platforms that facilitate access to these pages, and their design, functionality and usability also influence the ease with which individuals can navigate and interact with cloned content (Jonassen, 2000; Mezirow, 1997).

3.3 Development of Knowledge

The development of knowledge concerning cloned online newspaper pages can be enhanced through education, awareness and the empowerment of the audience. These approaches relate to the three levels of learning: cognitive, metacognitive and transformative. Education equips individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge to engage with information critically, fostering deeper cognitive development in areas such as memory, reasoning and judgement. Meanwhile, raising awareness heightens the audience's recognition of the

key characteristics and contexts surrounding cloned pages, thereby nurturing their metacognitive abilities (Jonassen, 2000; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Empowerment, which emphasises active participation in information production and dissemination, supports transformative learning by encouraging individuals to not only consume but also contribute to the information landscape through activities such as creating, sharing and adapting content (Mezirow, 1997).

3.4 Challenges of Knowledge of Cloned Online Pages

Understanding cloned online newspaper pages is not without its challenges. The complexity, uncertainty and variability inherent in the information these pages present can be formidable barriers. Complexity arises from the vast and often conflicting array of information presented by cloned pages, necessitating significant cognitive effort to discern truth from falsehood (Lazer et al., 2018). Uncertainty is compounded by the inconsistent and frequently unreliable nature of the information disseminated, which requires individuals to exercise heightened emotional resilience and motivation to navigate. Variability, meanwhile, refers to the ever-changing landscape of online news, making it difficult for users to apply the same behavioural practices consistently when interacting with this dynamic content (Chalkiadakis et al., 2021).

3.5 Opportunities for Improvement on Knowledge

Despite these challenges, the concept of knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages offers valuable opportunities for the improvement, innovation and transformation of information ecosystems. Improvement refers to the potential enhancement of information quality and credibility, as individuals become more adept at evaluating sources and distinguishing between authentic and cloned content (Chalkiadakis et al., 2021; Jonassen, 2000). Innovation occurs when audiences develop new strategies for analysing and synthesising information, contributing to a more diverse and rich informational landscape. Moreover, transformation takes place when individuals apply their knowledge to foster more meaningful and impactful interactions with digital media, thereby enhancing the overall relevance and significance of the information they encounter (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

4. Awareness of Cloned Online Newspaper Pages

The phenomenon of cloned online newspaper pages represents a growing threat to the credibility and integrity of information dissemination. These cloned pages mimic the appearance and content of authentic and reputable news sources, often to disseminate false information, propaganda, or even malicious software (Chalkiadakis et al., 2021). In a digital age where the boundaries between legitimate and counterfeit information are increasingly blurred, it is vital to understand the awareness surrounding these cloned platforms. Awareness in this context refers not only to recognising the existence of cloned newspaper pages but also to understanding the broader implications for communication, trust and societal well-being. This section delves into the various dimensions, determinants and development of awareness regarding cloned online newspaper pages, as well as the challenges and opportunities they present.

4.1 Dimensions of Awareness

The concept of awareness of cloned online newspaper pages can be categorised into three primary dimensions: cognitive, affective and behavioural. These dimensions align with the three core aspects of awareness: knowing, feeling and doing (Bloom et al., 1956; Chalkiadakis et al., 2021). The cognitive dimension encompasses the mental faculties involved in recognising and analysing the information presented by cloned news sources. It includes critical processes like attention, memory, reasoning and judgement. The ability to sift through the deceptive presentation of cloned pages and discern reliable information from misleading content is central to this cognitive aspect.

Meanwhile, the affective dimension pertains to the emotional and motivational responses individuals have when they interact with information from these cloned sources. Emotions such as curiosity, trust, or scepticism play a crucial role in shaping how people respond to the content they encounter (Tsfati & Ariely, 2014). Lastly, the behavioural dimension focuses on the actions taken when dealing with information from cloned pages, including searching, reading, verifying and sharing content. The act of verifying information before sharing, for instance, is a direct reflection of heightened behavioural awareness (Kohring & Matthes, 2007).

4.2 Determinants of Awareness

Awareness of cloned online newspaper pages is shaped by multiple factors, including the characteristics of the information, the context of its communication and the technological platforms that deliver it. These factors closely relate to the three dimensions of information literacy: information, communication and technology (Bruce, 1997). The characteristics of the information, such as its source, author and date of publication, significantly affect how individuals perceive and engage with content from cloned newspaper pages. A well-

written article may appear legitimate at first glance, but a closer inspection of the author or date could reveal inconsistencies that raise suspicion.

The context in which information is communicated is equally important. The medium, channel and cultural backdrop all influence how the audience perceives the relevance and value of the information being consumed. For instance, in Nigeria, cloned pages of prominent media houses like *Vanguard* or *Daily Trust* often exploit cultural and regional biases to sway public opinion. The design and functionality of the platforms on which cloned news is shared also play a role in shaping awareness. Poorly designed websites or suspicious URLs may be red flags that trigger further scrutiny by the audience (Jones & Jones, 2010).

4.3 Development of Awareness

Developing awareness of cloned online newspaper pages is an ongoing process that can be fostered through education, awareness campaigns and the empowerment of the public. Education is critical for equipping individuals with the cognitive tools necessary to identify and analyse the information they encounter. This involves teaching information literacy skills, including how to evaluate sources and verify facts. By improving cognitive capabilities, individuals are better prepared to spot inconsistencies or questionable content that may be indicative of cloned pages.

Awareness can also be enhanced through metacognitive processes – by fostering reflection on how individuals interact with and consume information. This deeper level of awareness includes recognising not only the characteristics of the information but also the contexts and potential motivations behind its dissemination. Empowering the public by providing platforms for active engagement – such as opportunities to report false information or participate in digital literacy workshops – can further advance this cause (Kohring & Matthes, 2007).

4.4 Challenges of Awareness of Cloned Online Pages

While the concept of awareness is critical, it faces significant challenges, particularly regarding the complexity, uncertainty and variability of information. The sheer volume of content generated daily means that individuals must process vast amounts of often-conflicting information, leading to cognitive overload. In the case of cloned newspaper pages, this complexity can make it difficult for even well informed audiences to discern truth from falsehood (Chalkiadakis et al., 2021).

Uncertainty is another significant challenge. Information from cloned online newspaper pages is frequently unreliable or incomplete, further complicating the task of determining its legitimacy. This uncertainty can erode public trust, making audiences more susceptible to misinformation (Tsfati & Ariely, 2014). Finally, the variability of information – the dynamic and ever-changing nature of the digital space – requires constant vigilance and adaptability, as the tactics used by those creating cloned pages continue to evolve.

4.5 Opportunities for Improvement on Awareness

Despite the challenges, there are numerous opportunities to improve the awareness of the public about cloned online newspaper pages. These include initiatives to improve the accuracy, quality and credibility of online information through fact-checking services and collaborations between media organisations and digital platforms (Jones & Jones, 2010). The increasing availability of digital tools that can identify and flag fake news also holds promise for fostering a more informed and discerning audience.

Innovation in media literacy education offers further opportunities for combating the spread of cloned pages. New methods for teaching critical thinking and information evaluation, such as gamified learning platforms or interactive workshops, can engage audiences more effectively. Moreover, transformation can occur at a societal level, where empowered individuals not only resist misinformation but also contribute to creating a more transparent and accountable information ecosystem.

5. Case Studies of Cloned Online Pages

5.1 Notable Examples of Nigerian Cases of Cloned Online Pages

In Nigeria, cloned online newspaper pages have become a significant issue in recent years, especially as access to the internet and social media continues to grow. There have been numerous cases where cloned or fake news websites mimicked legitimate Nigerian news outlets, spreading false information to deceive the public, disrupt political processes, or even cause social unrest. Some notable examples include:

a) *The Fake Premium Times Page*: In 2018, a notable incident involving a cloned version of Premium Times, a reputable Nigerian investigative journalism platform, emerged online. This cloned page meticulously replicated the design and format of the official Premium Times website, thereby deceiving many readers. The fabricated stories published on this fake page often featured sensationalist headlines, aimed at discrediting political figures

and disseminating unverified claims. This incident sparked considerable public concern, as numerous readers initially struggled to differentiate the cloned page from the authentic Premium Times website (Premium Times, 2018).

b) *The Vanguard Newspaper Clone*: In 2021, a cloned version of Vanguard, one of Nigeria's leading newspapers, surfaced online. This cloned page, known as 'Vanguard Hausa', disseminated fabricated stories about the Nigerian government and its officials. The primary objective of this clone was to spread disinformation, particularly concerning sensitive political issues in the run-up to elections. The cloned page meticulously replicated the logo, fonts, and overall design of the original Vanguard website, making it difficult for the public to distinguish between the genuine and the fake. As a result, media outlets had to issue public warnings, urging readers to verify the authenticity of news before sharing or reacting (Ibrahim, T. A. et al., 2024).

c) *Cloned Channels Television Social Media Pages*: In 2020, a significant case emerged involving the cloning of the official Channels Television social media pages. These fake pages were utilised to spread misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly concerning public health measures and vaccination. The cloned pages disseminated posts that either denied the existence of the virus or propagated conspiracy theories about vaccines. Channels Television had to address the issue publicly, warning its viewers and followers about the existence of these cloned pages (Bitdefender. (2021).

d) *Nigerian Tribune Fake Pages*: In 2019, Nigerian Tribune, one of Nigeria's oldest newspapers, faced a cloned website that published fake stories regarding economic policy and security issues. These stories, often containing exaggerated or false claims, were widely shared on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. The cloned website sought to capitalise on the credibility of the Nigerian Tribune to spread misinformation. This fake page misled readers and influenced public discourse, particularly on topics critical to the nation at the time (Global Voices (2019).

e) *The Case of the Fake Daily Trust Page*: In 2022, Daily Trust, another respected Nigerian newspaper, was targeted by a cloned website spreading false reports about regional conflicts in Northern Nigeria. The fake page, known as 'Daily Trust Hausa', published inflammatory stories intended to incite tension and deepen existing ethnic and religious divisions. This case highlighted the potential dangers of cloned newspaper pages, not only in terms of misinforming the public but also in exacerbating already volatile situations (Trust Check. (2022).

These cases illustrate the far-reaching consequences of cloned online newspaper pages in Nigeria. In a country where political, ethnic, and religious tensions are often high, these cloned platforms can easily exploit divisions by spreading fake news that is difficult for the public to detect. Such platforms can undermine public trust in genuine media outlets and complicate efforts to maintain a well-informed populace.

Moreover, cloned pages pose a significant challenge to journalism in Nigeria, as they tarnish the reputations of established news outlets, leading to confusion and scepticism among readers. Journalists and media houses have had to work harder to reaffirm their credibility while simultaneously educating the public on how to verify news sources. Campaigns promoting media literacy and digital verification skills have been rolled out, but the problem persists as these fake pages evolve in sophistication (Ibrahim, T. A. et al., 2024).

The cloned 'Daily Trust Hausa' newspaper Facebook page is an example of how digital manipulation has affected credible media outlets in Nigeria. This specific clone targeted Hausa-speaking audiences, primarily located in the northern regions of Nigeria. The fake page mimicked the authentic branding of Daily Trust newspaper and gathered a significant following by posting content that resembled legitimate news but focused on spreading misinformation or sensationalist stories (Trust Check, 2022).

The purpose of the 'Daily Trust Hausa' Facebook page was to exploit the trust that readers had in the Daily Trust brand. It targeted Hausa speakers by publishing content in the Hausa language, making it easier to gain credibility among this particular demographic. The cloned page often shared fake news stories, including misinformation about political events, social issues, and regional conflicts. This content was designed to stir controversy, create confusion, and at times incite division among ethnic and religious groups in Northern Nigeria (Trust Check, 2022).

6. Comparison and Contrast between the Concepts of Knowledge and Awareness

The concepts of knowledge and awareness are fundamental to epistemology, the philosophical study of the nature and limits of human understanding. While these two terms are often used interchangeably, they carry distinct meanings and implications. To elucidate their nuanced differences, this section explores both knowledge and awareness by examining their definitions, types and sources, followed by a comparison of their unique features. The analysis concludes by discussing the mutual exclusivity of these concepts, particularly in the context of this research.

6.1 Definitions

The concept of knowledge is traditionally defined as a justified true belief, where an individual holds a belief about a proposition or fact based on sound reasons or evidence (Bruce, 1997). Knowledge implies that the individual's belief aligns with reality and they are not misled by falsehoods or illusions (Plato, 1997). For instance, someone may know that Paris is the capital of France if this fact is learned from reliable sources and is indeed accurate. In this sense, knowledge is more than just holding an opinion; it is the possession of truths substantiated by evidence.

Awareness, on the other hand, is the state or quality of being conscious of something or someone (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). It involves the recognition or perception of an object, event, or individual and typically arises either directly or indirectly through sensory experience. For example, a person may be aware of a bird singing outside a window simply because they hear the sound. This suggests that awareness is contingent on the immediate environment or state of perception of an individual (Mezirow, 1997). Unlike knowledge, awareness may not necessarily be tied to truth; it is simply the acknowledgment of the presence or existence of something.

6.2 Types

Knowledge can be categorised into several forms, depending on the nature of the information acquired (Plato, 1997). Some prominent types of knowledge include:

1. Propositional knowledge: Knowledge about the truth or falsity of a proposition, such as "the Earth is round".

2. Factual knowledge: Knowledge about events or facts, like "Julius Caesar was assassinated".

3. Conceptual knowledge: Knowledge of abstract ideas or principles, such as "justice" or "democracy".

4. Procedural knowledge: Knowledge on how to perform certain tasks, such as "how to solve a maths problem".

5. Practical knowledge: Skills-based knowledge, like "how to swim".

6. Experiential knowledge: Knowledge derived from personal experience, like "what pepper soup tastes like".

Similarly, awareness can also be divided into various categories (Mezirow, 1997):

1. Self-awareness: Consciousness of one's identity, personality and emotions.

2. Social awareness: Recognition of the thoughts, feelings and actions of others.

3. Environmental awareness: Perception of the surrounding physical, biological, or cultural environment.

4. Situational awareness: Understanding of the current context or situation.

5. Temporal awareness: Awareness of time, including past, present, or future events.

6. Spatial awareness: Awareness of the physical location, direction, or movement of objects or individuals.

6.3 Sources

The origins of knowledge are multifaceted, drawing from various sources depending on the nature and reliability of the information (Mezirow, 1997). Some of the key sources include:

1. Observation: Knowledge gained through direct or indirect sensory experiences, such as sight or hearing.

2. Reasoning: Knowledge derived from logical or rational inference, such as deductive or inductive reasoning.

3. Testimony: Knowledge obtained from others, be it through verbal or written communication.

4. Intuition: Knowledge that arises from spontaneous understanding without relying on observation or reasoning.

5. Memory: Knowledge that stems from recollecting past experiences, facts, or events.

6. Similarly, awareness is sourced from various stimuli that engage the senses and cognitive faculties (Chalkiadakis et al., 2021):

7. Sensation: Direct perception through the senses, such as touch or smell.

8. Attention: Focused awareness, where certain stimuli are given priority.

9. Cognition: Mental processing and interpretation of sensory data.

10. Emotion: Awareness arising from affective responses, such as fear or joy.

11. Action: Awareness developed through interaction with the physical environment.

7. Comparison and Contrast

Although knowledge and awareness share some commonalities, particularly in their connection to information, they differ significantly in their implications. Knowledge involves a justified true belief that something is factually accurate, while awareness refers to an immediate recognition or perception without necessarily requiring proof or justification (Jonassen, 2000).

Both knowledge and awareness are multidimensional, yet they operate on different planes. Knowledge can be cognitive, affective, or behavioural, meaning it influences thoughts, emotions and actions. Similarly, while awareness operates across these dimensions, it is however, more rooted in perception, sensation and immediate recognition rather than in deep understanding or factual validation (Plato, 1997).

Moreover, knowledge and awareness derive their content from different sources. Knowledge comes from a combination of observation, reasoning, testimony, intuition and memory. These sources help in constructing a well-rounded, justified belief. On the contrary, awareness stems from more immediate stimuli such as sensation, attention, cognition, emotion and action. This implies that while knowledge is often deliberate and rational, awareness is more spontaneous and perceptual (Mezirow, 1997).

7.1 Mutual Exclusivity

In the context of this research, knowledge and awareness are treated as mutually exclusive concepts. This mutual exclusivity arises from the differing conditions required to attain each (Jonassen, 2000).

Firstly, knowledge, as defined in this study, requires a justified true belief grounded in propositional, factual and objective criteria. In contrast, awareness is rooted in perceptual, experiential and subjective aspects. Knowledge demands evidence or reasoning, while awareness only necessitates a conscious recognition of a situation or object. As a result, the two cannot overlap in the same context or situation. Additionally, their respective effects on an individual also differ: knowledge influences cognition, attitudes and behaviours through deeper understanding, while awareness shapes perception, emotions and actions in more immediate ways (Mezirow, 1997).

In essence, this research maintains that knowledge and awareness are distinct constructs, each playing a different yet complementary role in shaping human cognition and perception.

8. The Rise of Fake News and Cloned Pages

In the contemporary digital media landscape, the emergence and proliferation of fake news and cloned pages have become pressing concerns, significantly undermining the quality, credibility and integrity of information and communication. Fake news refers to fabricated or misleading information presented as factual, often aimed at deceiving, influencing, or financially benefiting from the audience (Statista, 2021a). Conversely, cloned pages are social media entities designed to replicate the appearance and content of legitimate news sources, frequently to disseminate fake news, propaganda, or malware (Chalkiadakis et al., 2021). This section delves into the causes, characteristics and consequences of fake news and cloned pages, alongside exploring potential solutions and responses to mitigate their impact.

8.1 Causes

The proliferation of fake news and cloned pages can be traced to several interrelated factors rooted in technological, economic, political and social shifts that have reshaped the media environment and information ecosystem. Among the primary causes are:

- *Technological Advancements*: The rise and diversification of digital media platforms have expanded the availability and accessibility of information, but also introduced complexity and variability, complicating the information landscape (Buntain & Golbeck, 2017; YaleGlobal Online, 2016a, b).

- *Personalisation of Media Consumption*: The capacity of digital media for personalisation allows users to tailor their information sources, often reinforcing echo chambers and filter bubbles that contribute to confirmation bias (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011).

- *Democratisation of Media Production*: The ease with which users can create and disseminate content has led to an increase in misinformation and disinformation, as individuals can now contribute to the spread of both false and misleading information (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

- *Commercialisation of Digital Media*: The competitive nature of the digital media market has driven

some outlets to compromise journalistic standards in favour of sensationalism and clickbait, thereby exacerbating the spread of fake news (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

- *Polarisation and Fragmentation*: The increasing diversity of information sources has led to greater division in public opinion and erosion of trust, as differing beliefs and values become more pronounced within fragmented media ecosystems (Lazer et al., 2018).

8.2 Characteristics

The nature of fake news and cloned pages is defined by a range of features, including their types, formats and genres, as well as the strategies and techniques employed in their creation and dissemination (Tandoc Jr, Lim, & Ling, 2018). Key characteristics include:

- *Types*: Fake news and cloned pages vary based on their motives – political, ideological, economic, or social – and their veracity – whether completely false, partially false, or misleading (Buntain & Golbeck, 2017; Guess, Nagler, & Tucker, 2019; Tandoc et al., 2018).

- *Formats*: These can encompass various media types such as text, images, audio and video and can appear in different modalities – written, spoken, or visual.

- *Genres*: The spectrum of fake news and cloned pages includes traditional formats like news articles and press releases, as well as newer forms such as blogs, memes, tweets and videos.

- *Strategies*: Manipulation tactics range from fabrication and distortion to omission and exaggeration.

- *Techniques*: Methods of deception include plagiarism, impersonation, spoofing, phishing, hacking and trolling.

- *Tools*: Technologies employed in the production and spread of fake news and cloned pages include bots, algorithms, artificial intelligence and deepfakes.

8.3 Consequences

The impacts and implications of fake news and cloned pages are multifaceted, affecting media credibility, public perception and societal trust (Shu, Sliva, Wang, Tang, & Liu, 2017). Notable consequences include:

- *Effects*: Metrics for assessing the reach, engagement and influence of fake news and cloned pages, as well as audience exposure and reactions.

- *Outcomes*: Evaluation based on the accuracy, quality and credibility of information and its impact on public knowledge, attitudes and behaviour.

- *Challenges*: Difficulties in detecting, verifying and correcting false information, alongside efforts to enhance public education and awareness.

8.4 Solutions

Addressing the challenges posed by fake news and cloned pages requires a concerted effort from various stakeholders, including the media, public, government, academia, civil society and private sector (Zannettou et al., 2019). Potential solutions include:

- *Media Initiatives*: Adoption of professional standards and ethical codes, implementation of fact-checking mechanisms and development of verification tools (Zannettou et al., 2019).

- *Public Actions*: Promotion of critical and digital literacy, evaluation and verification of information and support for media literacy education (Tandoc et al., 2018).

- *Collaborations*: Establishment of legal frameworks, regulatory policies and cross-sectoral partnerships to tackle misinformation and support accurate information dissemination (Zannettou et al., 2019).

9. The Rise of Fake News and Cloned Pages in Nigeria

The emergence and proliferation of fake news and cloned pages have posed significant challenges to the quality, credibility and integrity of information and communication in Nigeria. Fake news, characterised by false or misleading information presented as factual, often aims to deceive, influence, or profit from the audience (Statista, 2021b). Cloned pages, on the other hand, are social media accounts designed to mimic legitimate news sources, with the intent of disseminating fake news, propaganda, or malware (Chalkiadakis et al., 2021). This section delves into the rise of these phenomena within the Nigerian context, examining their causes, characteristics and consequences. Furthermore, it will explore potential solutions and responses to mitigate the impact of fake news and cloned pages in Nigeria.

9.1 Causes

The proliferation of fake news and cloned pages in Nigeria can be attributed to a range of factors influenced by technological, economic, political and social changes. First, the rapid expansion and diversification of digital media platforms have increased the availability and accessibility of information. However, this expansion has also introduced complexity and variability into the information landscape (YaleGlobal Online, 2016a, b). As of 2021, Nigeria was one of the largest and fastest-growing internet markets in Africa, with over 104 million internet users and 33 million social media users (Statista, 2021b).

Secondly, the personalisation and customisation of digital content have allowed users to filter and tailor their information preferences. While this personalisation enhances user experience, it also reinforces echo chambers, filter bubbles and confirmation biases. A survey by the Centre for Democracy and Development (2020) highlights that 67% of Nigerians rely on social media as their primary news source, and 77% trust the information encountered on these platforms (Oyedele, 2020).

Thirdly, the democratisation of media production and distribution has empowered individuals to create and disseminate their own content. This empowerment extends to the spread of misinformation and disinformation. The International Centre for Investigative Reporting (2020) revealed that Nigeria experienced over 800 instances of fake news and misinformation between January and October 2020, predominantly related to COVID-19 and the #EndSARS protests (Chalkiadakis et al., 2021).

Fourthly, the competitive and commercialised nature of the digital media industry often incentivises media outlets to prioritise sensationalism and clickbait over journalistic integrity. Research by the Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism indicates that some Nigerian media outlets have engaged in or propagated fake news for political or economic gain (International Centre for Investigative Reporting, 2020).

Lastly, the polarisation and fragmentation of the Nigerian media and societal landscape exacerbate divisions in opinions, values and beliefs, leading to increased conflict and diminished trust. Nigeria's rich ethnic and linguistic diversity, with over 250 ethnic groups and 500 languages, frequently contributes to societal tensions (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

9.2 Characteristics

The characteristics of fake news and cloned pages in Nigeria are varied and complex. First, these phenomena can be classified based on their motives – whether political, ideological, economic, or social – and their veracity, ranging from false to misleading. Examples include the unfounded claim that President Muhammadu Buhari had been replaced by a clone and the false report that former President Goodluck Jonathan had joined the ruling party (Chalkiadakis et al., 2021; Statista, 2021b).

Secondly, the formats of fake news and cloned pages can include text, images, audio and video; and it may be presented in written, spoken, or visual modalities. Examples are the fabricated article alleging that the US embassy denied a visa to a prominent Nigerian pastor, a manipulated image showing protesters holding a "Buhari must go" banner and a doctored video featuring a politician allegedly confessing to election rigging (Oyedele, 2020).

Thirdly, the genres of fake news and cloned pages encompass a wide array of formats, including news articles, press releases, interviews, speeches, blogs and memes. For instance, cloned websites mimicking BBC to spread fake news, fake press releases about political resignations and erroneous tweets attributing controversial statements to public figures exemplify this diversity (Lazer et al., 2018).

Fourthly, the strategies employed can vary from fabrication and falsification to distortion and exaggeration. Notable examples include fabricated stories about a woman giving birth to a goat, falsified documents endorsing herbal COVID-19 cures and distorted headlines suggesting government bans on generators (Chalkiadakis et al., 2021).

Fifthly, the techniques used in spreading fake news include plagiarism, impersonation, spoofing and phishing. Instances include plagiarised news articles without proper attribution, impersonated social media accounts asking for money and spoofed emails claiming to be from Nigerian banks (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2020).

Lastly, the tools used in the production and distribution of fake news include bots, algorithms, artificial intelligence and deepfakes. Examples are bot-generated stories, algorithm-driven content promotion and deepfake videos using face-swapping technology to create deceptive content (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2020; Chalkiadakis et al., 2021).

10. Consequences and Solutions to Fake News and Cloned Pages in Nigeria

10.1 Consequences

The proliferation of fake news and cloned pages in Nigeria has had profound and multifaceted impacts on the media, public and societal fabric of the nation. The consequences of these phenomena can be discerned through various dimensions including their reach, influence and the challenges they present.

To begin with, the effects of fake news and cloned pages in Nigeria are evident through several indicators, such as their reach, engagement and the degree of influence they wield over audiences. A significant study conducted by the Centre for Democracy and Development (2020) reveals that approximately 75% of Nigerians have encountered fake news and cloned pages online, with 25% of individuals having shared such content. Further, research by the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (2020) highlights that 68% of Nigerians tend to believe the content of fake news and cloned pages, and 32% take actions based on these misleading materials. These statistics underscore the pervasive nature of misinformation and its potential to shape public perceptions and behaviours.

Secondly, the outcomes of fake news and cloned pages can be evaluated in terms of the accuracy, quality and credibility of information disseminated. These phenomena have severely undermined public trust in media and information sources. Reports indicate that fake news and cloned pages have played a significant role in spreading misinformation, disinformation and malinformation, thereby eroding trust and accountability within both media institutions and the general public (Chalkiadakis et al., 2021; Statista, 2021b). Additionally, such misinformation has influenced critical areas such as electoral processes, public health responses and the escalation of social conflicts.

Thirdly, addressing the challenges posed by fake news and cloned pages involves recognising the difficulties in detecting, verifying and correcting such content. According to a survey by the Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism, 82% of Nigerian journalists report struggling with the verification of fake news and cloned pages, with 18% having fallen victim to such misinformation themselves. Furthermore, the Centre for Democracy and Development (2020) notes that 58% of Nigerians lack the knowledge to identify fake news and cloned pages, and 42% do not know how to report them effectively. These challenges highlight the urgent need for enhanced skills and resources to combat misinformation.

10.2 Solutions

Addressing the rise of fake news and cloned pages in Nigeria necessitates a multifaceted approach involving various stakeholders including the media, public, government, academia, civil society and private sector. Effective solutions and responses can be grouped into several key areas:

Firstly, media organisations can play a pivotal role by adhering to professional and ethical standards. This includes adopting rigorous fact-checking mechanisms and tools. Noteworthy examples include Nigerian media outlets like Premium Times, Punch and The Guardian, which have established fact-checking units such as Dubawa, FactCheckNigeria and Africa Check to combat misinformation (International Centre for Investigative Reporting, 2020; Centre for Democracy and Development, 2020).

Secondly, the public can be empowered through the promotion of digital literacy and media education. Cultivating skills in critical evaluation and verification of information can help individuals discern credible content from falsehoods. Nigerian organisations such as the Centre for Democracy and Development, the Centre for Information Technology and Development and Paradigm Initiative have been proactive in organising training sessions, seminars and literacy campaigns to enhance public awareness and resilience against fake news (International Centre for Investigative Reporting, 2020; Centre for Democracy and Development, 2020).

Thirdly, collaborative efforts among government bodies, academic institutions, civil society organisations and the private sector are crucial. Establishing and enforcing legal frameworks and policies, as well as fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships, can enhance the collective response to fake news and cloned pages. Initiatives such as the Coalition Against Fake News and Hate Speech and the Nigerian Media Code of Election Coverage exemplify such collaborative efforts (National Broadcasting Commission, 2019).

11. Identified Literature Gaps

A thorough examination of the existing literature reveals several critical gaps that warrant attention for a more comprehensive understanding of the subject at hand. While significant strides have been made in exploring the impacts of fake news and cloned pages, there remains an array of under-researched areas that could enhance the depth and breadth of current scholarship.

Firstly, while studies such as those by the Centre for Democracy and Development (2020) and the International

Centre for Investigative Reporting (2020) provide valuable insights into the prevalence and effects of fake news in Nigeria, they often lack a nuanced exploration of the demographic and socio-cultural factors influencing susceptibility to such misinformation. For instance, research could benefit from a deeper investigation into how different age groups, educational levels and socio-economic backgrounds affect the interaction of individual with fake news. This segmentation is crucial for tailoring more effective countermeasures and educational interventions.

Secondly, while the literature adequately addresses the direct consequences of fake news, including misinformation and diminished trust in media, there is a noticeable scarcity of studies focusing on the long-term societal impacts. The immediate fallout of misinformation – such as its role in electoral outcomes and public health responses – is well documented. However, less attention is given to how these effects evolve over time and their enduring influence on public attitudes and behaviour. This longitudinal perspective could provide a more holistic view of the problem, highlighting not just immediate but also enduring societal changes.

Another significant gap is the limited exploration of the efficacy and implementation challenges of existing solutions to combat fake news. The studies reviewed outline various initiatives and technological solutions, such as fact-checking platforms and media literacy programmes. Yet, there is a lack of in-depth evaluation of the practical effectiveness of these interventions and the obstacles encountered during their deployment. Research that critically assesses the real-world application of these solutions, including issues related to resource allocation, public engagement and institutional support, is essential for refining and optimising strategies to combat fake news.

Furthermore, the role of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, in both the dissemination and detection of fake news remains underexplored. While the literature briefly touches on technological tools used in combating misinformation, it does not sufficiently address how advancements in these fields can be leveraged more effectively. Exploring how these technologies can be harnessed to detect and mitigate the spread of fake news, as well as their limitations, would contribute significantly to the development of more robust countermeasures.

Lastly, there is a gap in the examination of cross-national comparisons and the application of successful strategies from other countries to the Nigerian context. While the studies focus predominantly on the Nigerian scenario, comparative analyses with other nations facing similar challenges could provide valuable insights. Understanding how different contexts approach the issue of fake news and misinformation could offer alternative perspectives and strategies that might be adapted to the Nigerian environment.

12. Implications of the Review Study

The implications of this study extend across several domains, encompassing theoretical, practical and policy dimensions. By synthesising the findings from various studies, the review offers valuable insights that could significantly influence both the academic understanding and practical management of the phenomena under investigation.

1. *Theoretical Implications*: The review study contributes to the theoretical landscape by highlighting the gaps and proposing new frameworks or refining existing theories. For instance, if the review identifies inconsistencies in the application of established theories like Framing Theory or Uses and Gratifications Theory, it underscores the need for theoretical advancement. This could involve integrating new variables or contextual factors that were previously overlooked, thereby enhancing the explanatory power of the theories in question.

Furthermore, the study might reveal that existing theoretical frameworks are inadequate in explaining contemporary phenomena, such as the proliferation of fake news or the impact of digital media on public perception. This necessitates the development of new theoretical constructs or the adaptation of existing ones to capture the dynamics of modern media environments better. For example, incorporating elements of Postmodernist Theory could provide a more nuanced understanding of how fragmented media landscapes influence public beliefs and behaviours.

2. *Practical Implications*: From a practical standpoint, the review offers actionable insights for various stakeholders, including media practitioners, educators and policy makers. For media practitioners, the findings of the study could inform strategies to combat misinformation and enhance media literacy. This might involve the development of more effective fact-checking mechanisms, improved editorial standards, or targeted training programmes to help journalists navigate the challenges of the digital age.

Educators can leverage the insight of the review to design curricula that address emerging trends and equip students with the necessary skills to evaluate information critically. For instance, incorporating modules on digital literacy and critical thinking could prepare students to better discern credible sources from

misinformation.

3. *Policy Implications*: Policy makers stand to benefit significantly from the findings of the review, particularly in shaping regulatory frameworks and intervention strategies. The study may highlight the need for new regulations to address the spread of fake news and protect the integrity of information. This could involve enacting legislation to hold social media platforms accountable for the dissemination of false information or implementing public awareness campaigns to educate citizens about recognising and reporting fake news.

Moreover, the review may advocate for collaborative efforts between government bodies, technology companies and civil society organisations to develop comprehensive solutions. By fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships, it is possible to create mechanisms that are more robust for monitoring and addressing misinformation, thereby enhancing public trust in media and communication systems.

4. *Societal Implications*: On a broader scale, the implications of the study extend to societal cohesion and public discourse. Misinformation and fake news can have profound effects on societal attitudes and behaviours, influencing everything from election outcomes to public health responses. By addressing these issues, the review contributes to the broader goal of fostering a more informed and engaged citizenry.

For instance, if the study highlights the role of misinformation in exacerbating social divisions, it underscores the importance of promoting accurate information and encouraging dialogue across different social groups. This can help bridge gaps in understanding and reduce the polarising effects of false information.

13. Conclusion

The rise of fake news and cloned pages presents a formidable challenge to the media landscape in Nigeria, with far-reaching implications for public trust, information accuracy and societal cohesion. This study has highlighted the pervasive nature of misinformation, revealing that both fake news and cloned pages significantly influence public perception and behaviour. The findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to address these issues and enhance the integrity of information dissemination.

The analysis demonstrates that the impacts of fake news and cloned pages are multifaceted, affecting not only the credibility of media outlets but also undermining public confidence and exacerbating social divisions. With 75% of Nigerians encountering fake news and 68% believing it, there is a critical need for improved media literacy and verification mechanisms (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2020; International Centre for Investigative Reporting, 2020). The presence of cloned pages further complicates the issue, making it increasingly difficult for individuals to discern legitimate information from deceptive content (Statista, 2021b).

13.1 Recommendations

To mitigate these challenges, several recommendations are proposed:

1. *Enhanced Media Literacy Education*: There is a pressing need for widespread media and information literacy programmes. Educational initiatives should focus on developing critical thinking and digital literacy skills, enabling individuals to better evaluate the credibility of online content. Organisations such as the Centre for Democracy and Development and the Paradigm Initiative are already working in this area, but broader and more integrated educational efforts are essential (International Centre for Investigative Reporting, 2020).

2. *Strengthened Fact-Checking Mechanisms*: Media organisations should adopt and refine fact-checking protocols to ensure the accuracy of the information they disseminate. The establishment of dedicated fact-checking units, similar to those implemented by Nigerian outlets such as Premium Times and The Punch, can play a crucial role in verifying the authenticity of news and combating the spread of misinformation (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2020).

3. *Collaboration and Regulation*: Government agencies, civil society organisations and the private sector should collaborate to develop and enforce regulations that address the proliferation of fake news and cloned pages. Initiatives like the Coalition Against Fake News and Hate Speech should be supported and expanded to include diverse stakeholders, fostering a coordinated response to misinformation (National Broadcasting Commission, 2019).

4. *Public Awareness Campaigns*: Comprehensive public awareness campaigns should be launched to inform citizens about the risks of fake news and cloned pages and to provide guidance on how to identify and report such content. These campaigns should leverage various media platforms to reach a broad audience and enhance overall public understanding of these issues.

5. *Research and Monitoring*: Ongoing research and monitoring are crucial to staying ahead of emerging trends in misinformation. Continued academic investigation into the strategies used to create and

disseminate fake news will provide valuable insights into effective countermeasures and inform future policy development.

Conflict of Interest

We declare no potential conflict of interest.

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