

FAKE NEWS AND DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION: CHALLENGES OF INFORMATION INTEGRITY IN THE AGE OF NEW MEDIA

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Abstract

This study investigated fake news and development communication: challenges of information integrity in the age of new media. The four specific objectives of this study were to: ascertain knowledge level of journalists in Ebonyi State on fake news prevalence in the age of new media, determine the major types of fake news that exist in this age of new media, ascertain how fake news affect development communication and information integrity in the age of new media and find out ways of upholding information integrity in the age new media for effective development communication practice by the journalists in Ebonyi State. The theoretical framework of this study is Social Responsibility Theory (SRT). Survey research method was used and a population size of 296 registered and practicing journalists in Ebonyi State was adopted. The entire population of 296 was adopted as sample size due to its small and manageable size while multi-stage sampling technique was used to administer questionnaire as was instrument of data collection. Data collected were analyzed with simple percentage using simple descriptive method. The results revealed that: there is high level of fake news spreading in this age of new media, the different types of fake news are false/deceptive stories, misleading stories, slanted/biased stories, manipulated stories and humour/satire stories, fake news affect development communication and information integrity in this age of new media are by misleading public trust, public opinion/perception, betrayal of confidence and obstruction of information flow, consumption and gratifications and the ways of upholding information integrity in this age of new media for development communication practice are through fact-checking mechanism,

improvement on new media education/literacy, regulatory measures and rebuilding new media for development. Based on the findings, this study recommended that: New Media experts should collaborate with the government to continue public awareness/campaigns against the prevalence of fake news, initiate anti-fake news framework to checkmate and halt all forms or types of fake news, reposition new media to achieve information integrity and development communication and involve of more research for new media system for development communication in Ebonyi State and beyond.

Keywords: *Fake News, Development Communication, Challenges, Information Integrity, New Media*

Introduction

The age of new media in the communication industry has made a remarkable mark in the dissemination of information for the society. The new media are digital communication technologies, particularly those facilitated by the internet, that emphasize user interaction and content creation. They encompass a wide range of platforms, including social media, streaming services, and online forums, and contrasts with traditional media like newspapers and television. People connect to one another, share ideas, experiences, pictures, movies, messages and information of common interest via social interactive networks which information and communication technologies (ICTs) have bequeathed to the modern society (Nwafor, Odoemela, Orji-Egwu, Nwankwo and Nweze, 2013).

New media gave birth to social media which later developed into different platforms. Social media are interactive web-based media platforms that offer citizens opportunities and places to connect, share opinions, experiences, views, contacts, knowledge, expertise as well as other things such as job and career tips (Hassan, Hussain & Abid, 2024). Social media have in turn formed a new genre of media that focuses on social networking that allows users to express themselves, interact with friends and relatives and share information with greater ease and freedom (Nwafor, Odoemela, Orji-Egwu, Nwankwo and Nweze, 2013). In the same vein, Amah, Ezeugwu,

and Eyeke (2014) reveal that social media have created a platforms for media convergence, allow media audience to interact with and even generate mass media content thus, giving room for many people including the quacks and non-journalists to become social media news carriers. This era of social media has in so many ways played variety of roles in many dimensions of information flow and consumption.

The various social media platforms that emerged are Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Skype, Badoo, Nimbuzz, Whatsapp and Short Messaging (SMS or Bulk-SMS). Other social media channels are LinkedIn, MySpace, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, Lulu etc. More so, social media platforms like the Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, and LinkedIn have become the most visited websites in the world, with Facebook topping the list. Social media apps like Pinterest, Instagram, and Snapchat are designed to amplify the sharing of images; Video sharing/streaming platforms -one major platform that reshaped how people interact with video content is YouTube; and Discussion forums which are very essential because they allow users to ask questions and get answers from different people (Kudumula, 2022). These and other social media platforms are used in reporting diversity of societal events like politics, conflicts and developments in Nigeria.

Unfortunately, the age of new/social media has given birth to fake news in different types, forms and dimensions. Fake news is a phrase word that is made up of two simple words; 'fake' – meaning, something not genuine, but meant to be taken as genuine; and 'news'- meaning, information about current event. McGonagle (2017), fake news is information that has been deliberately fabricated and disseminated with the intention to deceive and mislead others into believing falsehoods or doubting verifiable facts. In this regard, to the information professional, fake news is disinformation that is presented as, or is likely to be perceived as news. Fake news includes false information that can be verified as such, created with dishonest intention to mislead readers (Alawode, Olorede & Azeez, 2018).

Fake news is fabricated information that mimics media content deliberately created and circulated with the intent to deceive. It is a medium through which social vices like hate speech is circulated to fuel ethno-religious crises, political tension, tribal sentiment, character assassination and corporate deformation. The primary aim of promoters and mongers of fake news is to instigate acts capable of causing disunity among people. It was hate speech and fake news that contributed largely to the genocide that ravaged Rwanda in 1994. Like a wide fire, the damaging implications of fake news to national security, democratic consolidation and economic growth is indeed unquantifiable (Okakwu, 2022). More than ever before, the multi-dimensional uses of social media have made them instruments of spreading fake news. Fake news is created at will and disseminated with great ease. This situation portends great danger to the society and against national unity and development.

However, in recent years in Nigeria, fake news has become a threat to ideal journalism practice in the sense that it affects information integrity and the making of development communication in the era or age of new media (Abati, 2023). With the increasing users cum audience rate of new/social media of about 28 million people, representing 12.7 percent of the population and in 2023 the need to investigate fake news presence as a challenge to information worthiness and development communication practice in the new media age became imperative (Abati, 2023).

It is based on the above background, which this study was carried out to ascertain the nature of fake news prevalence in the new media and development communication age with a view of finding lasting solutions or remedies that will promote information integrity in developing societies like Nigeria. Thus, registered journalists in Ebonyi State were used to carry out the field inquiry of this study.

Statement of the Problem

The recent state of fake news in this age of new media assumes that the facts are mutable as people only want to hear what they expect. Journalists strive to comprehend and report the truth, but fake news stories are capturing people's curiosities and may serve needs yet unknown. However, in the light of striving for development communication, fake news has brought challenges to information integrity. It intentionally fabricates news stories and present without any credible evidence and for the apparent purpose to misinform or to persuade through misinformation, such as a widely shared article from the now-defunct website denverguardian.com with the headline (Allcott and Gentzkow (2021).

Therefore, the problem of concern to this study was the continued existence of new media or social media fake news reportage against the rules of journalism practice in the society like in Ebonyi state in spite of all mass media and government fights and campaigns against it. Based on this problem, this study was used carried out to investigate the views of journalists in Ebonyi State on fake new and development communication as challenges of information integrity in the age new media.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study was to investigate fake news and development communication as challenges of information integrity in the age of new media.

However, the specific objectives of this study are:

1. To ascertain knowledge level of journalists in Ebonyi State on fake news prevalence in the age of new media.
2. To determine the major types of fake news that exist in this age of new media
3. To ascertain how fake news affect development communication and information integrity in the age of new media.
4. To find out ways of upholding information integrity in the age new

media for effective development communication practice by the journalists in Ebonyi State

Research Questions

Based on the objectives of this study, the research questions are:

1. What is the knowledge level of journalists in Ebonyi State on fake news prevalence in the age of new media?
2. What are the major types of fake news that exist in this age of new media?
3. How does fake news affect development communication and information integrity in the age of new media?
4. What are the ways of upholding information integrity in the age new media for effective development communication practice by the journalists in Ebonyi State?

Review of Related Literature

Concept of Fake News and its Spread

The term 'fake news', may sound new, but it is not new. Being an emerging field of research, there is no single standard definition of fake news. However, the term can simply be defined as false, often sensational, information disseminated under the guise of news reporting. It can also be defined as “news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false and could mislead readers” (Allcott, & Gentzkow, 2021). It is thus different from simple misinformation because it is created with an intention to manipulate. However, disinformation can be classified as a type of fake news. The disinformation carried by fake news can spread quickly when it is aligned with the point of view held by the audience because such content is likely not to be questioned.

Fake news is an inaccurate, sometimes sensationalistic report that is created to gain attention, mislead, deceive or damage a reputation. Second, fake news is created with dishonest intention to mislead consumers. This definition has been widely adopted in recent studies (Mustafarajm and

Metaxas, 2021). Broader definitions of fake news focus on the either authenticity or intent of the news content. Some papers regard satire news as fake news since the contents are false even though satire is often entertainment-oriented and reveals its own deceptiveness to the consumers. Other literature directly treats deceptive news as fake news, which includes serious fabrications, hoaxes, and satires. In this article, we use the narrow definition of fake news (Shu, Sliva, Wang, Tang & Liu, 2021).

There are several examples of fake news circulated in the past and in our own time. Fake news has historic roots in the United States and is far from being a new phenomenon. As early as 1782, fake news has played a role in the political arena of the United States (Goodwin-Ortiz, 2021). In that year, Benjamin Franklin published a fake news article in the United States stating that Indians were terrorizing innocent Americans when that was not actually true. His purpose was to expedite the signing of a peace treaty being negotiated with Great Britain because the Indians had aligned themselves with that nation against the United States during the Revolutionary War. This was the just the beginning of fake news in our new nation.

Wardle cited in Ogbette, Idam, Kareem and Ogbette (2019), identifies six types of fake news that exists in various social media platforms that are disseminated for public consumption. These six classes are presented in the figure below:

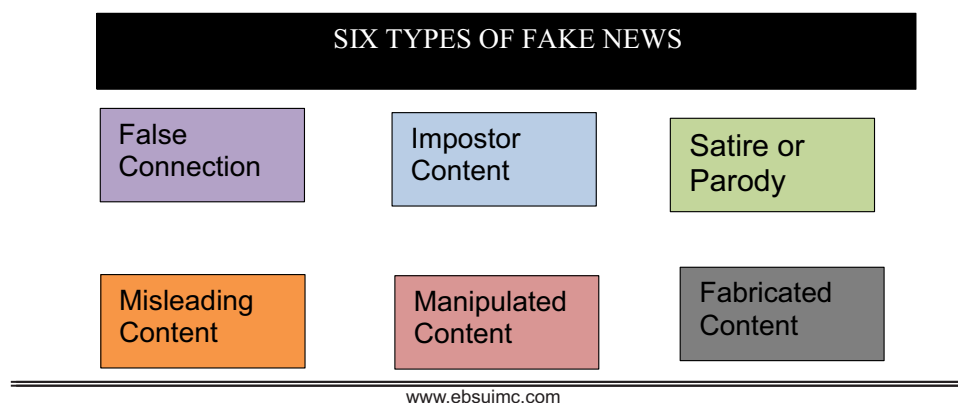


Figure 1: Different Types of Fake News

1. False Connection - when headlines, visuals or captions do not support the content
2. Imposter Content - when genuine sources are impersonated with false and made-up sources
3. Satire or Parody - no intention to cause harm, but has potential to fool
4. Misleading Content - misleading use of information to frame an issue or an individual
5. Fabricated Content – when news content is 100% false, designed to deceive and do harm.

From the foregoing, it is clear that fake news takes different forms, from the harmless to the harmful. This understanding is needful in discussing 'fake news' as a societal vice. Therefore, we define fake news as deliberately manipulated or fabricated information or news content carefully disseminated with the intent of causing anxiety, uproar, incitement and harm at either individual or communal scale. It was in the fall of 2016 during the presidential elections in the United States of America that fake news began to dominate news headlines and fuel public discourse.

Causes/Reasons for Fake News

A recent study by a team of researchers at MIT found that fake news was perpetuated by users who were quick to re-share information that aligned with their views and values, regardless of the credibility of the information. Researchers at Penn State found that people, with no heed to the credibility and source, often choose to advocate and promote information that aligns with their worldviews (Mihailidis2022). Another study by researchers at Yale found that those spreading fake news were small in number but proficient in leveraging networks to spread stories far and wide. These studies point to a new media ecosystem where “real” news organization competes alongside alternative media and personal expression for eyeballs and clicks.

Moinuddin, Vezer, Menzies, and Morrow (2021) explained that the motivation for publishing fake news ranges from systematically misinforming the public for political or other reasons to generating advertising revenues. The authors noted that as social media users engage with fake news stories, fake news publishers and social media hosts collect revenues from advertisers who pay fees in proportion to website traffic. They argued that social media networks are fertile grounds for fake news because their revenue models reward content engagement rather than content quality.

Also, it is becoming easier now to set up a website or even to manipulate a webpage to include the information desired, as well as a rise in social media use in line with how suited social media is for fake news broadcasting. Fake news on the internet distorts the truth for emotional gain. In the U.S. election, many thought that the use of this information was purely for political gain. However, this is not always the case. It is also a quick and easy money maker, via advertising. The culmination of a rise in social media use, a widening access to and advances in technology, and a major rise in the volumes of information available online have all resulted in the lines between what is true and what is not getting increasingly blurred (Okakwu, 2022).

In Nigeria, fake news has been circulated in one form or the other. However, its popularity as a form of news in Nigeria can be said to have become noticeable after the 2016 US presidential election and the use of the phrase “Fake News by Donald Trump” to label media outfits that attacked his government. Fake news is an epidemic sweeping the world. If left unchecked, it could be worse than all the plagues that the world has recorded put together. It presents danger to global peace and security. It is a threat to democracy. Mixed with hate speech, it is a disaster waiting to happen” (Mohammed, 2022 cited in (Okakwu, 2022).

For the media, the epidemic is even worse. This is because fake news, in most cases, is designed to misinform, undermines confidence in the media. And once the people lose confidence in the media, the society is in trouble. Furthermore, “If Nigerians see a particular media outlet as a purveyor of fake news, and then it means the outlet is no longer credible and its fellowship will drop significantly making them to run out of business.” (Mohammed, 2022 as cited in Onyeji, 2022). The minister argue that about 50% of what the public reads in social media is not true but unfortunately even when it is not credible, it goes viral and people believe the fake stories.

Agbase (2022) states that fake news is meant to hurt and hurt and its hurts; it is meant to destroy and destroy and it destroys. He notes that all nations have woken up to the dangers of fake news and are responding to it with legislations intended to cripple it. Currently, many people no longer doubt that fake news made it possible for Donald Trump, the man whose democratic rival in the presidential election, Hillary Clinton, described as the “least qualified and the least prepared to be the president” of America to win. This shows the reach and the capacity of fake news and it shows it's evil too. It shows that if the American electorate could so easily and comprehensively be influenced by fake news, no country in the world is safe.

Threats of Fake News on Information Integrity

Most of the panics and anxieties that characterize elections in Nigeria are generated and transmitted by peddlers of fake stories and rumor mongers who have no incentive to be honest. Using the instrumentality of the social media, they fabricate false insightful materials about political parties, political actors, and electoral body to cause tension in the country. In some cases, they go the extent of concocting and spreading fake election results which are not authenticated by the electoral umpire, thereby fueling widespread violence when the original results go contrary to the already circulated fake ones.

The negative impact of fake news on electoral processes is not peculiar to Nigeria. According to McGonagle (2017), fake news is often blamed for having a disruptive impact on the outcomes of elections and referenda and for skewing democratic public debates, with the 2016 US Presidential elections and Brexit referendum often cited as examples. Indeed, fake news has been flagged for fuelling propaganda, hate speech and electoral violence. There are about 250 ethnic groups speaking over 500 different languages across the length and breadth of Nigeria. Greater numbers of Nigerians owe their allegiance first to their tribe/ethnic group, followed by their religion with very little interest in the entity called Nigeria.

Fake news is also used as instrument for gaining political advantage especially during electioneering. In this circumstance, political actors and their supporters peddle all manners of propaganda and fake stories to smear and dint the public image of their opponents. In other words, they engage in carefully planned and systematic character assassination to diminish public perception of individuals perceived as obstacles. Where this 'unholy project' is successfully executed, it could turn the people against their leaders and may result to widespread violence.

The spread of fake news is obviously one of the fueling factors contributing to the rising cases of jungle justice. Ogbette et al (2019) reported that a dozen people were killed in India just because of fake news of hoax messages. The victims were lynched after they were falsely accused of child abduction based on fake news circulated via WhatsApp platforms. Such cases abound in Nigeria where people are victimized for unverified allegations by mischief makers spread through the social media.

Indeed, the implications of fake news for national security are diverse and damaging. In recognizing the dangerous potentials of fake news, the United Nations (UN) Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Representative on Freedom of Expression, and African

Commission on Human and Peoples' Right (ACHPR) Representative on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information, in a joint declaration of 'Freedom of Expression and Fake News, Disinformation and Propaganda' emphasized that, disinformation and propaganda may harm individual reputations and privacy, or incite to violence, discrimination and hostility against identifiable groups in society (International Specialized Mandate on Freedom of Expression, 2017). A recent report released by the BBC revealed that fake news was responsible for the escalation of farmers and herdsman's crisis in most parts of the country.

New Media and Development Communication

Lee (2025) in her brief study on development communication, states that development communication is a crucial aspect of societal progress, and the media plays a significant role in shaping perceptions, influencing attitudes, and driving behavioral change. In this article, we will explore the complex relationship between media and development communication, examining its effects on society and the various channels used to convey development messages.

Research shows that development communication has three fundamental forms of communication: direct communication, communication through conventional printed or electronic media, and communication through a broad range of new media and multimedia (Singhal & Rogers, 2018). Communication campaigns often combine all three forms, as it aids effective development. It is apt to note that development communication involves much more than just producing videos or radio broadcasts or organizing awareness-raising events. A communication tool is only the starting point for a communication process (Olajide & Nwang, 2022). For communication to be effective, the channels to be used as well as the audience to be reached and the opportunities for dialogue to be created must be considered. A successful development project

requires a suitable combination of development communication tools aimed at different audiences and new media can be such.

New Media have made contributions on development communication by Shaping Perceptions. Lee (2025) reveals that the new media have the power to influence societal attitudes and behaviors, making it a critical component of development communication. By shaping public perceptions, the media can either promote or hinder development goals. Effective media campaigns can raise awareness, educate, and persuade audiences to adopt desired behaviors. The media's influence on societal attitudes and behaviors is multifaceted. It can: raise awareness about social issues, such as health, education, and environmental conservation, educate audiences on best practices and promote behavioral change, influence public opinion and policy decisions and provide a platform for marginalized voices to be heard

However, in sending and receiving a message through this form of communication involves making use of the new media and multimedia. One of the tools under this form of communication is social media (Gil-Garcia, 2018). Social media has become a very important means of disseminating information because more people now spend an increasing amount of time on social media and online platforms. Anyone who wants to disseminate information and get people to take action or launch a debate cannot ignore social media.

Unfortunately, development agencies that decide to invest in a Facebook page or a YouTube channel or a blog to take part in the global information market tend to underestimate the specialized resources required to have a continuous presence on the web (Ibrahim & Kavanagh, 2020). Blogs are a particularly useful tool, as they enable participants to report on development-related challenges and achievements from a personal

perspective (Jensen & Soensen, 2016). Experience shows that people trust personal accounts from participants more than the official information supplied by mainstream media. A disadvantage of this tool is that it requires a small effort to create an account, but maintaining it requires a high cost (Ibrahim & Kavanagh, 2020).

Empirical Review

In a study by Azzimonti and Fernandes (2022) on Social Media Networks, Fake News, and Polarization, the investigators used regression analysis and random network models and stimulation and simulated a large number of social media networks by varying their characteristics in order to understand what the most important drivers of polarization were. It was found that the extent that regular agents can be partially influenced by these signals directly by 'following' the partisan agent, or indirectly by following friends who are themselves influenced by fake news, generates polarization in the long run. In other words, fake news prevents information aggregation and consensus in the population. The results suggested that the recent increase in polarisation could be associated with the radical shift in communication technology experienced in the last twenty years.

In a related study by Gunther, Nisbet, and Bec (2022) on **Trump may owe his 2016 victory to 'fake news,' the study found that social media users and intensely partisan news broadcasts disseminated a massive number of messages during the campaign. Many of these messages demonized candidates and seriously distorted the facts presented to voters. The study concluded that fake news most likely did have a substantial impact on the voting decisions of a strategically important set of voters.**

Ngwainmbi (2022) studied the impact of fake news on society in the era of new media. he examined the implications of fake news for nation building between developed countries and developing countries of the world. The researcher argues that users of social media platforms in both parts of the world may be less interested in working to decipher phony news

content because it provides intrigue. The study claims that fake news reporting shared on social media can have significant implications on nation-building, particularly the socio-economic advancement of countries. His findings show that while phony news sharing is more common in industrialized nations because of users' easy access to portable devices, those in developing countries share news content on a massive scale, in part, because they do not have the resources to filter real news from fake news.

Theoretical framework

This study was anchored on the social responsibility theory of the press propounded by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm in 1956. The theory postulates that, the press is attached with freedom but must act responsible in carrying out fundamental functions of mass communication. McQuail (2005:172) encapsulates the basic tenets of the theory as follows: (i) the media have obligations to society, and media ownership is a public trust, (ii) News from the media should be free but self regulated, (iii) the media should adhere to certain stipulated codes/ethics in order to guide its practices (iv) and in some circumstances, government could intervene to defend the public interest.

Juxtaposing this study with the theory, a journalist is expected to shield himself away from gratification as this could disrupt his sense of social responsibility which calls for objectivity, fairness and adherence to codes of ethics guiding his practices. He ought to play the watchdog roles, rather than a pet dog who accepts whatever is given to him. Being socially responsible make the journalist shun any form fake news but strives to uphold information integrity and as well serve as agent of development. Therefore, with social responsibility theory, this study was positioned to evaluate and ascertain the impact of fake news on development communication and information integrity in the age of new media.

Methodology

Research Design

The survey research method was adopted for this study. Hardy and Bryman (2004) note that the survey research design is used for observing the social and behavioural characteristics, attitudes values and beliefs of a large population using only a few people or items considered to be representative of the entire group.

The population

The population comprised of 296 active journalists registered under Nigerian Union of Journalist (NUJ), Ebonyi State chapter who work with different media houses in the state. They include EBBC reporters, Government House Press Unit, NTA, Abakaliki reporters, Unity FM reporters, Glorious FM, Legacy FM and News Agency of Nigeria (NAN). Others were reporters from National Orientation Agency, Ebonyi State, National Dailies newspapers, AIT and Local Newspapers reporters (government and private) in the State. (Source: NUJ, Ebonyi State Chapter 2025).

Sample size Determination

The sample size of this study was determined by using census sampling method the population was small, all the elements were studied. Thus, all the members of NUJ Ebonyi State were included in the sample size.

Sampling Technique

The study employed census sampling technique since the entire members of NUJ, Ebonyi State Chapter were studied.

Instrument of Data Collection

The instrument of data collection was questionnaire. It was administered to get the views and opinions of the selected journalists based on the problem of this study.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The questionnaire was constructed and subjected to face validity exercise whereby a given set of people in Abakaliki metropolis participated. The instrument was tested by a lecturer and a research consultant in communication to ensure that it is valid and reliable to the study. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained by using the Test and Re-test Method. This method involves the administration of instrument of data collection to the same population after which the instrument proved reliable and was used for this main study.

Method of Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected from the respondents through the administration of 296 copies of questionnaire by the researcher. The respondents-journalists in Ebonyi State were visited in their various media houses/offices in Abakaliki metropolis. All data collected were presented and analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency tables and simple percentages to ensure objective interpretation of data. Out of 296 copies of questionnaire distributed, 288 were duly filled and retrieved. This implies that, there is high response rate.

Data Presentation and Analysis

In this unit, data generated through questionnaire were analysed and presented in frequency and percentage tables. Apart from data on the respondents' bio-data, all data were presented in line with the research questions. More so, quantitative data were interpreted to avoid mere data reading. Out of the 296 copies administered, only 8 copies were lost while 288 were valid and used for this analysis.

Table 1: Data on Demography of Respondents/Journalists in Ebonyi State

Category of Variables	Opinion/options	Frequency	Percentage
Sex of Journalists	Male Journalists	161	55.9
	Female Journalists	127	44.1
	Total	288	100%
Educational level of journalists	ONH/Nat Diploma	76	26.4
	HND/First Degree	127	44.1
	M.Sc Degree	63	21.9
	Certificate in Journalism	22	7.6
	Total	288	100%
Class of Journalists	Government Media Journalists	217	75.3
	Private Media Journalists	56	19.4
	Freelancer Journalists	15	7.3
	Total	288	100%
Religion of journalists	Christian	169	58.7
	Muslim	81	28.1
	Traditionalist	38	13.2
	Total	288	100%

Nwambam, 2025

The data gathered on the demographic cum bio-data of the respondents reveals that majority of the respondents were male journalists. The table above also reveals that majority of the respondents are well educated. The table equally reveals that majority of the respondents representing 217 (75.3%) were working in government media while 15 (7.3%) were freelancers. On religious affiliation, majority of the journalists were Christians.

Table 2: What is the knowledge level of journalists in Ebonyi State on fake news prevalence in the age of new media?

Category of Opinion/Options	Frequency	Percentage
High level of knowledge on fake news in the age of new media	202	70.1%
Average level of knowledge on fake news in the age of new media	63	21.9%
Low level of knowledge on fake news in the age of new media	23	8.0%
No level of knowledge on fake news in the age of new media	0	0.0%
Total	288	

Nwambam, 2025

The findings on the knowledge level of journalists in Ebonyi State on prevalence of fake news in the age of new media reveals that majority the respondents had high knowledge of fake news in this age of new media.

Table 3: What are the major types of fake news that exist in this age of new media?

Category of Opinion/Options	Frequency	Percentage
False/deceptive stories	93	32.3%
Misleading stories	56	19.4%
Slanted/biased stories	76	26.4%
Manipulated stories	40	13.9%
Humour/satire stories	23	8.0%
Total	288	100%

Nwambam, 2025

On this question on the major types of fake news that exist in this age of new media, majority of the respondents said that fake news came in form of false and deceptive stories, which they understood as misleading stories. However, some respondents understood it as slanted or biased stories while others saw it as manipulated stories. Those in the minority (8.0%) took it as humour or satire stories disseminated for public consumption.

Table 4: How does fake news affect development communication and information integrity in the age of new media?

Category of Opinion/Options	Frequency	Percentage
Negative public perception of news stories	101	35.1%
Kills confidence and trust of information sources and channel	106	36.8%
Obstructs the truth of information flow and usage	81	28.1%
Total	288	100%

Nwambam, 2025

Data collected and analyzed on how fake news affect development communication and information integrity in this age of new media reveals that the majority of the journalists in Ebonyi State agreed that it caused negative public perception of news stories. Others said it kills public confidence and trust of information sources and channels while smaller number of the respondents (28.1%) said that fake news obstructs the truth of information flow and usage in the society.

Table 5: What are the ways of upholding information integrity in the age new media for effective development communication practice by the journalists in Ebonyi State?

Category of Opinion/Options	Frequency	Percentage
Information/facts checking mechanism	104	36.1%
Improved media education and literacy initiatives	66	22.9%
Regulation of media channels and platforms of fake news	44	15.3%
Rebuilding new media for development communication	74	25.7%
Total	288	100%

Nwambam, 2025

The above table shows that journalists in Ebonyi State agreed that effective development communication could be practiced by effective fact checking before uploading information, information integrity, media education and literacy initiatives. This way new media could be rebuilt for development communication.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of the findings was carried out to ascertain the result implications of this study in line with some already made studies in the related. The discussion was drawn from the responses to the research questions by the respondents which formed the basis of the study. Based on the data gathered and analyzed, it was discovered that journalists in Ebonyi State used as respondents were sampled from different media outlets and houses both private and government. The journalists were made up males and females with different educational qualifications, having worked for a reasonable period of time and of different religious classes.

Findings on question one revealed that majority of the respondents had a very high knowledge of fake news spreading in the society mainly through social media platforms in this age of new media. This means that the new media age which is made manifest by the avalanche of various social media platforms contributed to the spread of fake news. This directly affects the mainstream mass media activities. The findings have clearly shown that new media attributes wield significant influence over user engagement, resulting in transformative changes in news consumption and dissemination.

This has consequently created an avenue for the birth and spread of fake news. Olan, Uchitha, Emmanuel, Jana & Shaofeng (2022) collaborate that fake news on social media rose to prominence in 2016 during the United States of America presidential election, leading people to question science, true news and societal norms, hence journalists and societies are suffering from the scourge to a high extent.

The findings made from question two of this study on the major types of fake news that exist in this age of new media, it was revealed that five types of fake news associated with new/social media were in existence. These are false and deceptive stories, misleading stories, slanted or biased stories manipulated stories and humour or satire stories disseminated for public consumption. These types or forms of fake news have been affecting news originality, value and consumption among media audience. As a result of many types of fake news, Tandoc, Jenkins & Craft (2019) observe that fake news has become a major part of social media, raising doubts about information credibility, quality, and verification. Studies investigating the influence of fake news on social media have appeared in various fields such as digital media, journalism, and politics; however, in-depth analyses of the impact of fake news on society remain scarce.

On the question on how does fake news affect development communication and information integrity in the age of new media, the journalists in Ebonyi State stated three main ways in which it did. Among them are negative public perception of news stories as not truthful, killing of public confidence and trust of information sources and channels as well as obstruction the truth of information flow and usage in the society. The import of this finding is that fake news has negative and destructive effect on achieving development communication targets and ensuring information integrity in the contemporary society.

The implication is that digital technologies and platforms of new media have altered how people communicate, engage with content, and

consume news. It was discovered that despite progress in research, a gap persists in understanding how attributes like communication, collaboration, convergence, creativity, and community synergize to enhance user engagement, shaping news consumption habits and fostering a socially-driven news culture. This is a true challenge that requires more research and policy driven effort to arrest in this age of digital communication system. The increasing faces of fake news in the quest for development communication and information integrity, Olan et al (2022) agree that sensitive information; the fundamental principles are embedded in the concepts of truth as well as the theories of accuracy in communication

The findings made on the ways of upholding information integrity in the age new media for effective development communication practice by the journalists in Ebonyi State can be helpful to stop or reduce fake news and restore the powers of information as well as the confidence of news consumers. The findings revealed that in this new media and development communication era, information integrity can be achieved through information/facts checking mechanism, improved media education and literacy initiatives. It could also be through regulation of media channels and platforms of fake news said by rebuilding new media for development communication.

Thus, achieving information integrity and development communication especially in this new media age, Attah (2024) in his study observes that it is imperative that communication strategies are designed to inform, engage, and mobilise target audiences about development initiatives, activities, and their potential impacts. By doing so, the government can enhance the transparency, effectiveness, and sustainability of its policies, ultimately leading to more successful and impactful development outcomes. Also, there must be a deliberate effort to integrate development communication into every stage of the policy process, ensuring that the voices of all stakeholders are heard and that the intended beneficiaries are

fully informed and engaged. This can be achieved when and where there is less or zero tolerance to fake news no matter the source or channel.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to investigate fake news and development communication as challenges to information integrity in the age of new media. The use of practicing journalists in Ebonyi State as target audience or respondents for data collection was to ensure that useful and valid facts or answers were obtained. Thus, this study concluded that fake news is one the major cankerworms affecting information integrity and development communication practice in the age of new media. Unfortunately, research has revealed that new media forms such as social media gave birth to the increasing spread of fake news in the society.

This study, based on its findings, has created much concern and attention on new/social media scholars, engineers and artists to fashion functional regulatory and management measures that will guarantee zero or near zero existence of fake news. This can pave way for an atmosphere of information integrity and ideal development communication practice.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion made on this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. New Media experts should collaborate with the government to continue public awareness campaigns against the prevalence of fake news in this age of new media. This can be through conventional mass media such as radio, television and print media.
2. Institutions of communication, government via National Communication Commission (NCC) and new/social media owners should strategize and initiate anti-fake news framework that will be used to checkmate and halt all forms or types of fake news in this age of new media.
3. New media scholars should collaborate with new media

organisations to reposition and repackage the functionality of new media system towards upholding information integrity, objectivity, truthful and balanced reportage of events in contemporary society.

4. A two-way research approach should be conducted by communication scholars on how to regulate new media information flow and initiate a new media system for development communication in Ebonyi State and beyond.

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Journal Page 719

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