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Mitigating Fake News Through Media Literacy Education: The Perception And Experience of Masaka Market Traders In Karu

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Abstract

It had been observed that low level of media literacy has contributed to the spread of fake news and its consequences in Nigeria. This study provides insights into traders' perceptions of, and responses to fake news in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Considering the negative effects of fake news, the researchers examined Masaka Market Traders' knowledge of, and perception about fake news. Anchored on Perception Theory, the study utilized survey research design for the investigation. Primary data was collected from 200 traders in Masaka Market through administration of questionnaire. The result of the analysis reveals that most of the traders are aware of the existence of fake news; having gone through one form of media literacy training or the other. The result of this investigation has contributed to their ability to verify information they receive from the various media of communication which helps in reducing the spread and effects of fake news among the Masaka Market Traders. Further finding reveals that notwithstanding their knowledge of the existence of fake news, a lot more needs to be done in terms of media literacy training and mitigation of fake news among Masaka Market traders. The study concludes that media literacy education has the capacity to mitigate the spread of fake news and argue that the higher the level of media literacy, the faster the spread of fake news will be mitigated in Nigeria. The study recommends among others that Karu Local Government Council and indeed the Federal and State governments in Nigeria should intensify efforts on media literacy education, while policymakers should also ensure that they make policies to combat fake news, and ensure that such policies are adequately implemented to improve the media literacy skills of the traders and others in order to mitigate the spread of fake news.

Keywords: Mitigating fake news, Media literacy, Education, Perception, Masaka Market.



Introduction

In the digital age, information flows incessantly through numerous media channels (Okocha, et al., 2024). Hence, the emergence of media literacy education has been considered as an indispensable tool for navigating the complexities of the globalized world cum network society and information overload (Manuel, 2020). Media literacy equips individuals with the critical thinking skills necessary to access, analyze, evaluate, and interpret the plethora of messages bombarding them daily; hence, the importance of media literacy education cannot be overemphasized (Modi & Mishra, 2023). This is because with the multiplicity and the density of digital landscape, comes the issues of fake news, misinformation, disinformation, and other forms of cyber issues associated with the emergence of digital communication in the online environment. Modi and Mishra (2023) argue that fake news has done more harm than good in the public sphere globally. In the digital age, fake news has emerged as a pervasive and insidious phenomenon, threatening to undermine the foundations of informed discourse and democratic governance. Defined as false or misleading information presented as legitimate news, fake news has the potential to deceive, manipulate, and sow discord among unsuspecting audiences. The complexities of fake news, its origins, impacts, and strategies for combatting its spread in contemporary society calls for a critical examination so as to chart a roadmap for mitigating its effects on individuals, groups, communities, and the larger society (Okocha, et al., 2024; Modi and Mishra, 2023; Siar, 2021).

The emergence of fake news has far reaching negative impacts. According to

Siar (2021), fake news affects the people's perception of everything. Similarly, Msughter, et al (2023) affirm that fake news is not a new phenomenon but has gained unprecedented traction with the proliferation of digital technologies and social media platforms. Its origin can be traced to various sources, including malicious actors seeking to influence public opinion, sensationalist media outlets chasing click bait, and ideological extremists propagating misinformation to advance their agendas. Fake news often exhibits characteristics such as sensationalism, selective reporting, fabricated evidence, and polarizing rhetoric designed to elicit strong emotional responses from audiences. In this case the audiences are left at the mercy of such propagandists, grappling with the need to access, critically evaluate the information they receive from the numerous mass media of communication.

In addition, Msughter, et al (2023) states that the dissemination of fake news has far-reaching consequences, not only for individuals and communities, but also for the society at large. First, at the individual level, exposure to fake news erodes trust in reputable sources, distort perceptions of reality, and exacerbates cognitive prejudices. It leads to misguided beliefs, irrational behaviour as well as violence; fake news undermines the integrity of public discourse, fosters polarization, and erodes social cohesion, posing a grave threat to democratic institutions and processes. The question remains as to "what factors are responsible for the spread of fake news?" Msughter, et al (2023) and Zafarani, et al, (2019), highlight factors that contribute to the spread of fake news in the digital ecosystem which include



democratization of media production, distribution and consumption enabled by the internet. Other factors are social media algorithms, cognitive biases, echo chambers, and confirmation bias predispose individuals to accept and share information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs and intention, regardless of its veracity (Zafarani, et al, 2019).

Considering the grave consequences of fake news, combatting fake news is *sin qua non*. However, mitigating fake news requires a multi-faceted approach which involves collaboration with, and among the various key stakeholders including governments, media organizations, technology companies, educators, and civil society (Msughter, et al, 2023; Zafarani, et al, 2019). Similarly, Modi and Mishra, (2023 and Msughter, et al (2023) affirm that fact-checking initiative plays a crucial role in debunking false information and providing accurate context to counteract misinformation. Another approach is media literacy education which equips individuals with the critical thinking skills necessary to discern credible sources, evaluate information critically, and resist manipulation. Promoting informed citizenship is another very important aspect of media literacy education. Therefore, in a democratic society, informed citizenship is paramount for the functioning of a healthy, vibrant democracy. Media literacy education plays a pivotal role in cultivating informed citizens who can participate meaningfully in civic life (Msughter, et al, 2023; Zafarani, et al, 2019). Countering misinformation and manipulation are other benefits of media literacy education (Zafarani, et al, 2019). Therefore, by examining the perception of Masaka Market traders about fake

news and media literacy education, it is expected that the outcome of the research would help to mitigate or reduce the spread of fake news in Nasarawa State particularly and Nigeria in general. Understanding media literacy is imperative for everyone in the present world of information explosion. Media literacy goes beyond the traditional literacy, as it encompasses the ability of an individual to comprehend, critically evaluate, and create media content across various media platforms. It involves deconstructing messages to discern biases, recognizing persuasive techniques, and understanding the sociocultural, economic, and political influences shaping media narratives. Media literacy empowers people to question, challenge and engage with media content actively rather than passively consuming it (Okocha, et al, 2024).

It is against this bedrock that this paper explores the significance of media literacy education in mitigating against fake news, in order to foster informed citizens, promote social responsibility, and safeguarding against misinformation and manipulation.

Statement of the Problem

Social media is a major source of information among both adults and young people. According to Siar (2021) and Modi et al, (2023), it is essential in the quick dissemination of information. Through social media people receive educational, health, social, economic, and political news which help them to make informed decisions. However, it is unfortunate to note that some information/news in social media are fake news and have caused fear, death,



riot and disharmony among various ethnic groups. It is believed that because of the high level of confidence in information on social media, there is the likelihood of sharing the information without authentication. This lacuna has resulted in unfortunate situations.

People have knowingly or unknowingly shared fake news that have created problems through wrong decisions that have disastrous consequences on the people. Consequent on this, Zafarani, et al, (2019) state that fake news has also caused lack of trust in government activities, hate speech, riots, and mayhem. It has also made the youths develop unwholesome habits like taking hard drugs, self-medication, joining cults, dropping out of school, depression, and suicide. It has become necessary to teach youths how to distinguish correct news from fake ones for their well-being and the development of the country. It is on this premise that this study has been undertaken to empirically examine the perceptions of Masaka Market Traders in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa about fake news with the aim of mitigating fake news through media literacy education (Okocha, et al, 2024; Msughter, et al, 2023; Zafarani, et al, 2019).

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to find out the perceptions and experiences of Masaka Market traders about fake news and media literacy education with the purpose of mitigating fake news through media literacy education. In order to achieve the main objective, the following specific objectives were set to guide the investigation. They include, to:

- 1) examine the Masaka Market traders' awareness of fake news;
- 2) determine their media literacy skills or knowledge; and
- 3) ascertain their perceived negative effect of fake news.

Conceptual Clarification

Fake News

Prevailing expectations posit that media literacy interventions help audiences to be "inoculated" against any harmful effects of misleading information. Jones-Jang and Mortensen (2019) define fake news as "harmful information", and argue that fake news has triggered a renewed interest in various forms of media literacy. The assumption is that individuals with greater literacy (media, information, news, and digital literacies) are better at recognizing fake news, and utilize these literacies most appropriately to improve themselves and their environments (Jones-Jang and Mortensen, 2019).

Similarly, Lazer et al. (2018) define fake news as "fabricated information that mimics news media content". This view or definition by (Lazer et al., 2018) suggests that fake news is untrue, fictitious, false, and it is made up by the purveyors to cause mischief with devastating consequences. Subsequently, Egelhofer and Lecheler, 2019 see fake news as "injurious information", which supports the view of Jones-Jang and Mortensen (2019). Ultimately, fake news is detrimental, and should therefore, be avoided, minimized or completely eliminated (Lanius and Jaster, 2021). Expressing concerns about the devastating harmful effects of fake news on democratic societies, Tandoc, Lim, and Ling (2018) have



outlined a number of ways to combat fake news. In other words, while some scholars put forth the blame game and criticize producers and distributing platforms such as social media sites, others advocate for the urgent need for media literacy education that can help audience to develop the ability to better understand and handle fake news (Mele et al., 2017; Mihailidis and Viotty, 2017).

Various prescriptive measures have been advanced to mitigate fakes news. Jones-Jang and Mortensen (2019) states “audience-centred solution” and “media literacy education approach” stand out. In the current complex digital ecosystem (Guess, et al., 2023), photographic proof is no longer sufficient to change the minds of partisans (Cook & Lewandowsky, 2023); so, fake stories lurk in every nook and cranny of the internet (Marwick & Lewis, 2024). Therefore, equipping digital users with the appropriate skillset (Farid, 2024) is required to discern facts from falsehoods. The assumption of this approach is that people with greater media literacy tend to consume false or dubious stories, but in a more critical manner it helps to mitigate the influence of fake news on society because of their ability to critically analyse and verify the information or news they consume (Okocha, et al., 2024).

Media Literacy Education

Media literacy is the ability to access, analyses, evaluate and communicate messages in a variety of forms (Hobbs, 2001). Media literacy, therefore, teaches people the ability to make effective use of social media and other forms of digital information (Farid, 2024). Tugtekin and Koc (2019) see media literacy as a range of skills that allow users to deal with

challenges and demands of living in the growing digital environment. Brown (2018) believes that the new generation should have a critical mindset instead of only technical skills. Obinna (2021) narrated the outcome of the media literacy seminar carried out by Rewired Network with the support of the United States Department of State for graduating students of Sango Secondary School, Agege, Lagos. The training focused on the need to know the sources, the facts, and opinion in order to reduce fake news. Identifying facts is the best way to know fake news (Thorson, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpinning for this study is perception theory.

Perception Theory

Perception theory, advocated with the key assumption that individuals have a multifaceted method of choosing, organizing, and interpreting sensory inspiration into a meaningful and intelligible image of the world, entails the process of selective exposure which enables people to pay attention to media messages or any other messages which are in agreement with the already conceived attitude, choosy consideration to certain aspects of media messages that are in consonant with strongly held beliefs or behaviour.

The theory was propounded by B. Berelson and G.A Steiner in 1964. Since then, perception theory has gone through several reviews. The reviews affirm that the media expect audiences to consider their messages, absorb the contents and make appropriate changes in attitudes, beliefs as well as produce the desired behavioural responses. In essence, the



theory states that the process of interpreting messages is complex which makes the goals quite difficult to achieve.

Berelson and Steiner (1964) assert that perception is a complex process by which people select, organize and interpret sensory stimulation into meaningful and coherent picture of the world. The review has identified two types of influences on human perception such as structural and functional influences. While structural influences on perception come from the physical aspect of the stimuli to which individuals are being exposed, functional influences are the psychological factors that influence perception and therefore introduce some subjectivity into the process. Its relevance to this study stems on the perceptions of the Masaka Market traders about fake news and how to mitigate the spread of fake news

Literature Review

Emergence, and Adoption of Digital Technology as Sources of News

The rapid evolution of technology has transformed the media landscape, presenting both opportunities and challenges for media literacy education. Therefore, in an era of digital convergence and ubiquitous connectivity, media literacy must evolve to encompass new forms of media, including social media, online platforms, and emerging technologies such as virtual reality and artificial intelligence. It therefore, presupposes that educators should adapt their pedagogical approaches to equip learners with the skills needed to navigate these digital environments safely and responsibly.

Invariably, the emergence of digital technology has reshaped news

consumption in diverse ways. Digital technology makes news more accessible and convenient. In other words, digital technology has democratized access to news which makes it more accessible and convenient for individuals, groups and organizations worldwide. Availability of smartphones, tablets, and computers, people can now access news content anytime, and anywhere which eliminates the constraints of time and geographical locations associated with the traditional media communication. Similarly, personalization and customization of news content helps individuals to cater for their preferences as well as interests in news consumption. It is noteworthy that digital media leverage on algorithms for users to personalize news content catering for individual preferences and interests. Another integral part of the influence of digital technology on news consumption is interactivity and engagement. There is no understating the fact that digital technology enables news consumer to have greater interactivity and engagement with news content through digital technology features such as comments, likes, shares and polls. In this case, users are able to participate in discussions, share their views or perspectives, and interact with journalists and fellow readers or listeners which fosters a sense of community and participation in the news ecosystem.

Furthermore, multimedia integration is another feature of digital technology in news consumption that enables many media to be converged or integrated for users to harness as they consume news via digital technology. Digital technology platforms integrate multimedia elements such as videos, infographics, and interactive maps which



enhance the richness and the depth of news storytelling. Similarly, digital technology enables news consumers to have real-time updates and alerts about events globally. Digital technology provides real-time updates and alerts on breaking news events, keeping users informed of the latest developments worldwide as they unfold. Digital technology does this through push notifications and live updates, so that users are abreast of current events and emerging stories that enhance the timeliness and relevance of their news consumption.

Implications and challenges of adopting digital technology for news consumption

The proliferation of digital news sources has led to the fragmentation of audiences. Therefore, individuals can now access news from a diverse array of platforms and sources. The fragmentation of news sources presents for both individual news consumers and the traditional media outlets seeking to retain their audience share and relevance in an increasingly crowded digital landscape (Msughter, et al, 2023).

In other words, the proliferation of digital news sources has also facilitated the spread of fake news, misinformation, and disinformation which is fueled by viral nature of social media and the ease of sharing unverified or misleading content. Addressing the challenges of fake news, misinformation and disinformation requires collaboration among technology companies, media organizations, and policymakers to promote media literacy, fact-checking, and responsible journalism (Msughter, et al, 2023; Zafarani, et al, 2019).

Reshaping the future of Digital Technology Platforms as sources of News Consumption

The first approach is called the mobile-first approach. This approach is as a result of the increasing prevalence of smartphones and mobile devices which enables news publishers to adopt a mobile-first approach, optimizing their content and user experience for mobile consumption. Another approach is subscription and membership models. In order to diversify revenue streams and reduce reliance on advertising, many news organizations are exploring subscription and membership models that offers premium content and exclusive features to subscribers. More so, data privacy and regulation is a huge challenge in utilizing digital technology platforms as sources of news dissemination and consumption (Msughter, et al, 2023; Zafarani, et al, 2019). As the proliferation of digital technology platforms continue to increase, concerns about data privacy and online misinformation have prompted calls for greater regulation of digital platforms and transparency in algorithms. Therefore, policymakers are grappling with issues such as data protection, content moderation, and platform accountability to safeguard the integrity of digital technology news ecosystems. Also, media organizations are increasingly embracing collaboration and partnerships to enhance their reach, share resources, and produce high-quality journalism. Collaborative initiatives encompass content syndication, investigative reporting consortia, and cross-industry alliances to address common challenges and opportunities.



Invariably, the adoption of digital technology as sources of news has reshaped the media landscape, transforming how information is accessed, consumed, and shared. While digital platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for accessibility, interactivity, and personalization, they also present challenges related to fragmentation, misinformation, fake news, and revenue sustainability. In order to navigate these challenges and harness the potential of digital sources of news, stakeholders must collaborate, innovate, and adapt to the evolving needs and expectations of audiences in the digital age. Therefore, by embracing emerging trends, fostering media literacy, and upholding the principles of responsible journalism, digital news ecosystems can continue to serve as vital sources of information, insight, and public discourse in an increasingly interconnected world (Msughter, et al, 2023; Zafarani, et al, 2019).

The imperative of Media literacy education in the Digital Age

In today's media saturated world, media literacy education has become indispensable. According to Zafarani, et al, (2019), this is because by fostering critical thinking, promoting informed citizenship, countering misinformation, and fostering social responsibility, media literacy empowers individuals to navigate the complexities of the modern landscape with confidence and discernment. Ultimately, as technology continues to advance and media landscapes evolve, investing in media literacy education becomes increasingly crucial for building resilient, informed, and democratic societies. However, the absence of this creates an avenue for

people to misinform, misuse, and subsequently makes the environments hazardous to live and business.

Combating Fake News through Media Literacy Education

While it is true that fake news is not a new phenomenon, mitigating against it has been both complex and challenging (Okocha, et al., 2024). Fake news has been surging in the last few decades especially during the 2016 presidential elections in the United States of America (USA), and the 2023 general elections in Nigeria (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017). The general consensus among communication and media scholars is that fake news causes confusion, circulates widely and speedily (Silverman, (2016). However, apart from political context, professionals, educators as well as media practitioners, and experts from a wide range of domains hold different views the devastating effects of fake (Mele et al., 2017; Jang, et al, 2019).

Similarly, Mele et al. (2017) suggest three (3) main types of solutions to fight fake news. They include information provider, crowdsourcing, and the audience. In their view, information provider approach stresses the role of information systems and providers. In other words, this approach is based on digital users encounter information on the basis of the algorithmic decisions, social media platforms such as Facebook, X, Google, have been confronted with pressure from civic society to revise their algorithms and reduce the appearance of fake news in all the media of communication (Jang et al., 2018; Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Park, Chung, and Shin, 2018). In addition, the emergence of fact-checking sites makes



fact-checking procedures progressively convenient to users. However, Wood and Porter (2019) argue that there is a mixed evidence regarding the effects of voluntary correcting efforts. This implies that offering correction approach depends on the request or requirement of the users; therefore, acceptance of the offer of correction efforts approach is optional.

Masaka Market

Karu Local Government Area, Nasarawa State, is adjudged as the biggest and most populated in Nasarawa-Karu. It operates daily as well as periodically. People from

neighboring towns, such as Lagos, Abuja, Mararaba, Plateau State and Nasarawa Toto., among other settlements, come to the market to trade. Lockable, open and temporary shops/stalls are the different categories of shops in the market. Goods, such as textiles, shoes, bags, kitchen utensils, tubers, grains, plates and plastics, provisions, jewelries, cosmetics, livestock, among others, are sold. Masaka Market originally was designed for few traders, but as population began to increase, traders also increased and the market is now experiencing high patronage level.

Methodology

The study used survey research design. Data were collected from traders in Masaka Market in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, through administration of questionnaire. The market is presented in the table below:

S/N	MARKET	NUMBER OF STORES/SHOPS	NUMBER OF STORES/SHOPS SELECTED	LOCATION
1	Masaka Market	645	200	Masaka

Source: *Researchers Field Survey, 2024*

For the purpose of questionnaire administration, systematic random sampling was adopted to select the traders in the shops/stalls. The first shop/stall was randomly selected. The subsequent unit of investigation was every 10th shop. This represented ten percent (10%) of the traders. Thus, 200

traders were surveyed in Masaka Market. Data obtained were analyzed using simple frequency counts, percentages and cross tabulation. On the variables of conditions of facilities provided for the traders in the market, the traders' perception, knowledge of and mitigation of fake news were also examined.



Data Analysis

SECTION ONE: Demographic Data of Respondents

Table 1: Demographics of Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	82	41
Female	118	59
Total	200	100
Marital Status		
Single	70	36.8
Married	64	55
Divorced/widowed	66	8.2
Total	200	100
Age Range of Respondents		
Under 18	10	5
21-30 yrs.	50	26
31-40 yrs.	66	33
41-50 yrs.	40	20
51-60 yrs.	21	10.5
Over 60 yrs.	11	
Total	200	100
Educational Attainment		
No formal education	10	6.5
Primary education	25	12.5
Secondary education	69	34.5
Tertiary	93	46.5
Total	200	100%
Respondents' years of experience as market traders		
Less than 1 year	20	10
1-5 years	67	33,5
6-10 years	64	32
OVER 10 years	49	24,5
Total	200	100

Source: *Field Survey, 2024*

Table 1 shows the analysis of the demographic data of the respondents. Majority (59%) of the respondents are females. The implication of the result is that most of the traders are women.

Further analysis also indicates that most (55%) of the traders are married; while 33% of the traders are adults within the age range of between 31- 40 years of age. The traders without formal



education are 6.5%. This indicates that most people that engaged in trading activities in the study area were within the active/working population; those who were energetic and full of ambition. Majority (33.5%) of the traders have been trading in the markets for between

1 – 5 years, followed by those who have been in the markets environments for 6 years and above having 32%. The implication of this analysis is that most of the traders are conversant with the markets and the happenings in the market.

SECTION TWO: Media Usage Behaviour/Pattern

Table 2: Which of the following do you use to get news and information?

Variables	Frequency	Percentage%
Radio	103	21.3
Television	109	23
Newspapers	48	10
Social media	113	23.3
Words of mouth	110	22.7
Total	200	100
How often do you access news from these sources?		
Daily	134	67
Weekly	27	13.5
Monthly	18	9
Rarely	13	6.5
Never	8	4
Total	200	100

Source: *Field Survey, 2024*

The analysis on Table 2 shows the media usage behaviour of the market traders. The outcome of the analysis indicates that majority (23.3%) of the respondents use social media for their news consumption. This implies that most of the market traders are conversant with the various social media platforms.

On the frequency of accessing news items from the various news sources, the analysis on reveal that majority of the traders or respondents access news from social media on a daily basis. The implication is that the market traders access news from social media platforms daily.



SECTION THREE: Traders' Knowledge of Fake News

Table 3: Have you heard the term fake news?

Variables	Frequency	Percentage%
Yes	161	80.5
No	39	19.5
Total	200	100
How would you define fake news?		
News deliberately created to deceive people.	89	44.5
Incorrect or misleading information that is spread to deceive people.	62	31
News meant to be funny and not taken seriously.	40	20
Information, especially of a biased or misleading Nature used to promote a particular political cause or point of view.	8	4
Others	1	0.5
Total	200	100
How often do you think you come across fake news?		
Very often	61	30.5
Often	59	29.5
Sometimes	43	21.5
Rarely	28	14
Never	9	4.5
Total	200	100
Examples of Fake News		
Can you provide examples of fake news you have come across?		
Vehicles carrying goods had an accident.	16	8
Death of Mr. President.	8	4
News about COVID in the market.	75	38
Scarcity of farm produce.	44	22
Demise of someone close.	47	23
Others	10	5
Total	200	100

Source: *Field Survey, 2024*



As regards the traders' knowledge of fake news, the analysis on Table 3 indicates that 80.5% of the traders are aware of the existence of fake news. This implies that there is a high level of awareness of fake news among the traders.

Majority (44.5%) of the traders have a fair idea of how fake news is defined. Their ideas of the definitions of fake news include news deliberately created to deceive people, incorrect or misleading information that is spread to deceive people. This finding shows or implies that with a fair idea of what fake news is, the traders should be able to identify fake news when confronted with it.

On the frequency of the spread of fake news around the market where they trade, most of the traders (30.5%) said they come across fake news very often, while only 14% of the trader said rarely and never (4.5%) respectively.

Analysis shows the respondents' views about the examples of fake news. Majority (38%) of the respondents said news about COVID-19 has the highest spread in the market where they trade.

SECTION FOUR: Practice of Fake News

Table 4: Have you ever shared news you later found out was fake?

Variables	Frequency	Percentage%
Yes	103	51.5
No	97	48.5
Total	200	100
If yes, how did you react when you discovered it was fake news?		
Ignored it.	52	26
Deleted it.	38	19
Informed others	110	55
Others	-	-
Total	200	100
Why do you think people share fake news?		
Lack of awareness.	78	39
To mislead others.	61	30.5
For fun	41	20.5
To promote reactions	20	10
Others	1	0.5
Total	200	100

Source: *Field Survey, 2024*



The analysis on Table 4 further shows the respondents' involvement in the practice of fake news. The outcome of their responses reveal that majority (51.5%) of them were involved in sharing fake news. This finding affirms the reality of the existence and spread of fake news in Nigeria.

On the efforts of the respondents in mitigating fake news, the analysis also shows that majority (55%) of respondents, having realized their

involvement in the spread of fake news and its consequences, started making efforts to combat it.

On why people share or spread fake news, the analysis on Table 4 further reveals reasons people have for sharing fake news with lack of awareness leading by 39%. Therefore, this implies that the market traders share or spread fake news for lack of awareness.

SECTION FIVE: Effect of Fake News

Table 5: How do you think fake news affects your business or personal life?

Variables	Frequency	Percentage%
Positively.	22	11
Negatively.	119	59.5
No effect	59	29.5
Total	200	100

Can you describe any specific instance where fake news impacted you or your community?

Yes	93	46.5
No	107	53.5
Total	200	100

Source: *Field Survey, 2024*

On the effect fake news has on their personal life and business, the analysis shows that fake news affects their personal life and businesses negatively (59.5%). The implication is that fake news has a negative consequence on both the personal and business life of the people who spread it.

On the specific instance where fake news impacted on the community of the respondents, the analysis on Table 12 indicates that majority (53.5%) of the respondents said that they could not describe any specific instance where fake news impacted on their community.

SECTION SIX: Knowledge of Media Literacy

Table 6: Are you aware of any media literacy education programme?

Variables	Frequency	Percentage%
Yes	96	48
No	104	52
Total	200	100
Have you ever received any training or education on how to identify fake news?		
Yes	82	41
No	118	59
Total	200	100
If yes, where did you receive this training?		
School	36	18
Community workshop	56	28
Others	108	54
Total	200	100
Practice of Media Literacy		
Has media literacy education changed the way you consume news?		
Yes	119	59.5
No	81	40.5
Total	200	100
Do you feel confident in your ability to handle fake news?		
Very confident	42	21
Confident	39	19.5
Neutral	34	17
Not very confident	38	19
Not confident at all	47	23.5
Total	200	100
Do you think media literacy education can help in identifying and mitigating fake news?		
Strongly agree	60	30
Agree	55	27.5
Neutral	48	24
Disagree	29	14
Strongly disagree	8	4
Total	200	100



How important do you think it is for market women to be able to identify fake news?

Very important	72	36
Important	64	32
Moderately important	44	22
Slightly important	18	9

Not important	2	1
Total	200	100

Would you be interested in participating in media literacy workshop?

Yes	84	42
No	69	34.5
May be	47	23.5
Total	200	100

Source: *Field Survey, 2024*

On the knowledge of the market traders about media literacy, analysis reveals that majority (52%) of the respondents said they were not aware of any media literacy education programme. This implies that the media literacy level of the most of the traders in the market is low.

On the ability of the market traders to identify fake news, the analysis indicates that majority (59%) of the traders did not receive any training or education on how to identify fake news. However, 41% said they received training on how to identify fake news. All the respondents received training on how to identify fake news ranging from school (18%), community workshop (28%) and from other sources having the largest number (108) respondents representing 54%. The implication of this analysis is that all the market traders sampled have a fair know of to identify fake news.

On whether or not the media literacy education received changed the way the market traders consume news, majority (59.5%) of the respondents agree that their know of media literacy has changed the way they consume news. This implies that media literacy skill of the respondents has positively impacted on their news consumption.

The analysis further shows that 40.5% of the respondents are very confident and confident about their ability to handle fake news respectively. This implies that the media literacy education that the market traders received has not only changed the perceptions about fake news but has also increased their level of confidence about the they consume news.

On the core issue of identifying and mitigating fake news, an overwhelming majority (57.5%)



of the respondents agree (27.5%) and strongly agree (30%) that media literacy education can help to identify and mitigate fake news. The implication of this finding is that media literacy education is sine qua none to resolving the challenges and the negative impact of fake news.

On the importance of media literacy education to enable market traders to identify fake news, the analysis of the data also shows that majority (36%) of the respondents think that it media literacy education is very important in identifying fake news. This is closely followed by those who agreed that it is important (32%) while 22% of them attest that it is moderately important. Ultimately, 99% of the market traders affirm that it is

important for market traders to be able to identify fake news. The implication of this finding is that market traders recognize the negative effects of fake news and are willing to efforts towards identifying fake news so that they can avoid it. Analysis also displays whether or not the respondents would be interested in participating in media literacy workshop. Finding indicates that majority of the respondents representing 42%, agree that they are interested in participating in media literacy workshop. This means that the traders are willing to be enlightened about media literacy which would eventually help them to fight against or mitigate against the spread of fake news.

SECTION SEVEN: Solution to fake news.

Table 7: What support do you think is needed to effectively educate people on fake news?

Variables	Frequency	Percentage%
Government programmes	68	34
Community initiatives	74	37
Educational institutions	38	19
Non-government organisations (NGOs)	20	10
Others		-
Total	200	100

Do you think community leaders and market associations should be involved in promoting media literacy?

Yes	135	67.5
No	21	10.5
May be	44	22
Total	200	100



What support do you think is needed to effectively educate people on fake news?

Creating awareness using various media platforms.	42	21
Publicly educating the marketers on the need to verify news before consuming.	64	32
Availability of Communication Professionals to help distinguish between fake and authentic news.	51	25.5
Promoting media literacy.	43	21.5
Total	200	100

Source: *Field Survey, 2024*

Table 7 shows the analysis of the data collected on the needed support to effectively educate people about fake news. The finding shows that community initiatives aimed at educating people about fake news has the highest (37%) of the responses. This is closely followed by government programmes designed to educate people about fake news which has 34% of the respondents. This implies that both the government and community leaders should collaborate in order to adequately and effectively educate the people about fake news.

On the need to involve community leaders and market association in the promotion of media literacy among the market traders, the analysis on Table 7 also reveals that 135 traders representing 67.5% of the respondents attest that involving community leaders and market associations in promotion of media literacy is a great idea.

On the need to educate about fake news, analysis shows that majority (32%) of the respondents affirm that publicly educating the market traders

on the need to verify news before consuming them is a good way to carry out the campaign. The implication of this finding is that though respondents think that there are other ways to effectively educate people about fake news, public education of the traders in Masaka Market under investigation stands out.

Discussion of Findings

The first objective of the study is to examine the perception and experience of the traders about the traders’ perception about the existence of fake news. The finding shows that most of the traders utilize television and social media as sources of their news consumption. Further findings reveal that the traders in Masaka Market use other channels or media for news consumption such as radio, newspapers and words of mouth. The view of the traders corroborates the key assumption of perception theory that individuals have a multifaceted method of choosing, organizing, and interpreting sensory inspiration into a meaningful and intelligible image of the world around



them. It also entails the process of selective exposure which enables people to pay attention to media messages or any other messages about fake news which are in agreement with the already conceived attitude, choosy consideration to certain aspects of media messages that are in consonant with strongly held beliefs or behaviour.

The second objective of the study seeks to determine the existence of fake news among the traders, especially, as it relates to spread of fake news. The outcome of the data analysis indicates that the traders affirm the existence of fake news among them. This agrees with the assumption of the researcher as well as the affirmation by Msughter, et al. (2023) of the existence and rapid spread of fake news occasioned by the emergence of digital media technology and other channels or sources of information.

The third objective of the study is designed to ascertain the perceived effect of fake news. The result of the analysis shows that the respondents are aware that fake news has negative effect. The implication is that the traders, with some low level of media literacy, are aware of the negative consequences of fake news. This finding corroborates the assertion by Allcott and Gentzkow (2017), Okocha, et al. (2024) and the general consensus among communication and media scholars that fake news causes confusion, circulates widely and speedily via the instrumentality of digital media

technology (Pew Research Centre, 2017).

This further suggests that the traders need to be constantly enlightened, not only on the importance of media literacy, but also they should be taught the media literacy skills. This will enable them to get information from reliable sources and therefore mitigates against fake news. Media literacy skills also enable them to verify the information they consume from the diverse media of communication in the digital age. This is also in agreement with Okocha, et al. (2024).

Similarly, Mele et al (2017)'s three (3) main types of solutions to fight fake news are also corroborated which include information provider, crowdsourcing, and the audience. In their view, information provider approach stresses the role of information systems and providers. In other words, this approach is based on digital users encounter with information on the basis of the algorithmic decisions, social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly called Twitter), Google have been confronted with pressure from civic society to revise their algorithms, and as Okocha, et al. (2024); and Odeba, et al. (2022) state that this will go a long way in reducing the spread of fake news in all the digital media of communication, especially among market traders, both in the rural and urban environments (Jang et al., 2018; Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Park, Chung, and Shin, 2018).



Conclusion

The outcome of the study has revealed that fake news exists, particularly among the traders in Masaka Market, Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. There is therefore, no gainsaying the fact that fake news has negative consequences as it has been established from both earlier studies and this current one that fake news causes confusion and that it is misleading. Similarly, this has further established that the emergence of digital media technology which has polarized the channels of communication contributed significantly to the rapid spread of fake news among market traders.

The study has also proven consumption of news stories from diverse sources contributed to the spread of fake news in Karu Local Government Areas of Nasarawa State. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the traders in Masaka Market assert that media literacy education would help them to mitigate against fake news as they would be able to access, analyse, and critically scrutinize the information they receive from the various channels of communication.

Recommendations

Considering the devastating negative effects of fake news, the study recommends as follows:

- 1) Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State should intensify their efforts in media literacy education and enlightenment of the traders in Masaka Market about

media literacy skills and how to avoid fake news.

- 2) Policy makers should endeavour not only to make policies, but also ensure adequate proper implementation of the policies they formulate about the need to mitigate the spread of fake news.
- 3) The Federal and State Government should further device strategies to educate the general populace about the dangers of consuming and spreading of fake news. The strategies should include special projects through National Orientation Agency (NOA) utilizing well designed campaign programmes that should be aired on national television and radio stations aimed at mitigating against deliberate and unintentional spread of falsehood or fake news.
- 4) The fight against the spread of fake news should be the battle for all and by all; therefore, all hands must be on deck to eliminate the spread of fake news. The management of the Masaka Market should be in the vanguard of the fight against the spread of fake news. The implication is that stakeholders (government, tech companies through their various social media platforms such as Facebook, X,



Instagram, etc., corporate organisations and individuals) must work in harmony to attain the desired success or goal.

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