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Fake News and the Business of COVID – 19: Mis-Information, Dis-Information and Mal-Information in On-line News Sources in Nigeria

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Abstract:
The coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic has been described as the defining global health crisis of our time and the greatest challenge humanity has faced since World War Two. Since its emergence in Asia late last year, the virus has spread to every continent except Antarctica. Cases are rising daily in Africa, the Americas, and Europe. Yet understanding this human pandemic has continued to be from a diffused point. However, since the outbreak of COVID 19/Corona Virus in December 2019, various explanations have been presented for its appearance, insurgence and continuity. The virus outbreak which was initially restricted in outbreak to Wuhan in China has become pandemic, as it has spread to almost all the countries of the world. Currently it has affected a total of 212 countries and territories in the world. There have been seemingly the same explanations for the outbreak across the world. It is believed to be the rich man's affliction by the poor and those who do not have access to overseas travel. Hence this paper discussed Fake News and the Business ofCovid-19: Mis-information, Dis-information and Mal-information in on-line News Sources in Nigeria. Premised on two objectives, the authors upon further categorization, used the 3 classifications of fake news, which were adopted as units of analysis and content categories for in depth qualitative content analysis. The news articles selected for analysis were selected from the opera news application for mobile (android) phones. With the absence of stable electricity and the increasing use of smartphones by majority of Nigerians, it is only fitting that the quickest way of accessing information is through mobile smartphones. The opera news application is currently one of the top ten applications downloaded by Nigerians on their mobile phones. Upon its arrival into the Nigerian mobile app market in January 2018, it became the most downloaded mobile application by February 2018. A total of ten news reports were selected in line with the content categories as determined in this paper. In the category of Mis-information, two news stories were selected for analyses, for dis- information, four news stories were considered while in the category of mal-information, four news stories were selected. The paper concluded and recommended that it is, however, especially at this time marking the world press freedom day, that journalists, whatever their description, should practice responsible journalism to avoid the "Sword of the Damocles."

Keywords: Coivid-19, Fake News, Mis-information, Dis-information, and Mal- information

1. Introduction

Since the outbreak of COVID 19/Corona Virus in December 2019, various explanations have been presented for its appearance, insurgence and continuity. The virus outbreak which was initially restricted in outbreak to Wuhan in China has become pandemic, as it has spread to almost all the countries of the world. Currently it has affected a total of 212 countries and territories in the world. There have been seemingly the same explanations for the outbreak across the world. It is believed to be the rich man's affliction by the poor and those who do not have access to overseas travel.

The explanations often deduced for the pandemic nature of COVID 19 can be classified into three. These explanations bother on:

- Mis-Information: These are misleading pieces of information created or disseminated without manipulative or malicious intent.
- Dis-information: This refers to deliberate (often orchestrated) attempts to confuse or manipulate people by delivering dishonest information to them. This is often combined with parallel and intersecting communication strategies with a suite of other strategies such as hacking or compromising of persons.

- Mal-information: This is information based on reality but used to inflict harm on a person, organizationor country. Mal-information often violates a person's, organization's and country's privacy without the justification of public interest. (This has connections with the wedge driving form of rumour). This goes against the ethics of journalism.

It is further interesting to note that both Mis- and Dis-information are problems for the society, particularly because they are frequently organized, well-resourced and reinforced by automated technology. Research has equally proved that dis-information, especially, prey on the vulnerability or partisan potential of recipients who unwittingly enlist as amplifiers and multipliers. In consequence, these unknowing and unsuspecting recipients become conduits of these messages, thus serving as proponents who are exploited to share such information for various reasons. This explains why various social media and individual sources transmit bits and pieces of information, explaining the reality of the times we are in. Mis- and Dis-information are made possible largely through social networks and social messaging. What begs for explanation is the question of regulation and self-regulation of organizations and individuals providing these services. These intermediary platforms, content creators with little light-touch regulation have always hidden their actions within the context of freedom of expression and the dictum, 'the people deserve the right to know.'

These three explanations create some sort of information disorder and are better expressed in the figure below.
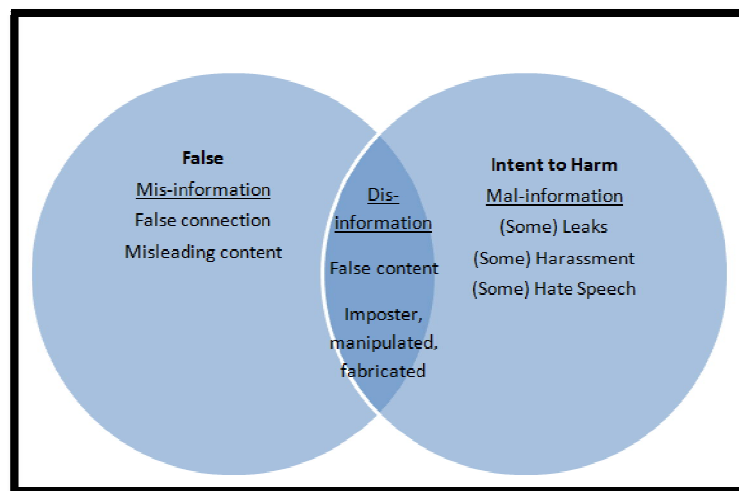

Figure 1
Source: Fake News and Disinformation. UNESCO 2018

These three, Mis-, Dis- and Mal-information are denominators of Fake News and on which the analysis of this paper will be based. However, let us proceed with the discussion and description of Fake News.

1.1. What is Fake News?

Fake news is, quite simply, *news* ('material reported in a newspaper or news periodical or on a newscast') that is *fake* ('false, counterfeit').'According to the Vice Chancellor and Principal of the University of Pretoria, Professor Tawana Kupe, 'if it is fake, it can't be news'. However, in spite of this view, he argues that the problem should be acknowledged as it is also present in the world of academia. Professor Kupe further argues that fake news is a calculated assault on democratic freedoms. While acknowledging that fake news is not new, he argues that, it is as old as news itself, with a variety of aims, ranging from propaganda and spin doctoring. He further advanced reasons for the upsurge in the rise of fake news. According to him, it is the loss of confidence in public institutions especially media institutions and the profession of journalism itself. Consequently, fakery had risen to fill this vacuum. This is often reinforced by the advancement of digital technologies and the social media. Concluding his views, Professor Kupe observed that the attraction which fake news enjoys rests in its apparent simplicity.

According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2019), fake news is, 'false stories that appear to be news, spread on the internet or using other media, *usually* created to influence political views or intended as a joke.' Across the world, there is growing concern about the power of fake news and its effect on election results. In Nigeria, fake-news has become of serious concern to the government. This has warranted the Minister of Information to publicly caution against non-verification of stories before transmitting, posting or forwarding through the social media. Furthermore, from the perspective of Merriam-Webster (2017:2), fake news 'is frequently used to describe a political story which is seen as damaging to an agency, entity, or person.' A more simple definition of fake news is provided by Gjoshevska (2018:1):'Fake news is an intentional misrepresentation of reality under the guise of being the truth, an exaggeration and distortion, dressed up as the real news. It can take many different forms being circulated as though it's accurate information often for commercial, political or ideological reasons.'

Three things mark out the intention behind fake-news; misinformation, disinformation and mal-information. Fake news is not peculiar with on-line media. It is a concern to journalists and media professionals who are bothered about how to recover trust and their image of truth tellers. In a study about journalists in Brazil who re-invented journalism practice by taking advantage of social media's open access, some bloggers openly displayed the news construction process and deconstructed how the mainstream media hide manipulation and bias in the guise of supposedly objective and neutral

journalism. These blogs further provided an encouragement to become part of the news production process as well as making provisions for comments which could be criticisms or reinforcing an already expressed view in a news story. This suggests that even in the face of fake news, it is possible for real journalism to thrive.

This paper becomes necessary based on the findings of a report recently carried out to determine how journalists use social media. The study examined the popularity of different channels and social media often used. Findings revealed that, 'based on a global survey of 257 journalists, the study discovered that 90 percent of respondents use social media for work at least once a week and 48 percent could not successfully complete their work without social media.' (Cision, 2017:1) The study shows a strong level of inter-relationship between journalists and social media. The findings imply that journalists rely on social media information in the line of duty. Unfortunately, the bulk of *fake news* circulation is on the social media hence the need to examine the relationship between journalists, social media use and fake-news.

2. The Business of Fake News and Social Media

Fake news is gradually becoming very popular in journalistic parlance and among social media experts and users. The traditional media, time (television and radio) and space (newspapers and magazine) are less guilty on the issue of fake news. The preponderance of reported fake news issues are on social media. It is said that Facebook accounts for a higher percentage of them as fake news website owners made it their favourite medium to advertise their websites. Unfortunately, the CEO of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, was slow in expressing his view on the need to tackle the challenge (Chang, Letterman, Pedersen, and Martz: 2016). The issue of fake news thrives more on social media. The reason for this is somewhat understandable: Social media contents usually do not go through the rigor of reporting and editing, and without any known conventional ways of writing. For instance, in the traditional media, there are reporters who are assigned beats and routinely write reports on the beats. There are experienced editors and proofreaders who vet both fact, logic and grammar of what is written. The contents go through lots of editing and re-writing before being certified for public consumption. This is not the case with most social media contents. In most cases, a single person does all the work (Himma-Kadakas: 2017).

Also, in the traditional media, there are sources through which news is generated. According to Sigal (1973) cited in Himma-Kadakas (2017), there are three channels through which traditional media source news. These include: routine channels, informal channels, and enterprise channels. Social media are more interested in opinions and stories that can generate *traffic*. Therefore, 'it is really easy to just make something up.'(Chang, et al., 2016:1).

Social media, as stated, are responsible for a higher percentage of fake news. In an article, while making reference to a study conducted by BuzzFeed, Chang, et al (2016:1) state that the author uncovered an unlikely breeding ground for some of the fake news sites: Macedonia, in particular Veles, a tiny, economically depressed city of 45,000 people with a lot of young people.

'Nightline' traveled to Macedonia to speak to some of the website creators, though they did not want to be identified. The creators 'Nightline' spoke to said most of their websites did not start out political and they only run these websites to make money, which they do through users clicking on ads on their sites.

'People from the states are watching your website and clicking on the banners and you're making the money,' one of the site creators said. (Chang, et al 2016:1)

Economic gain dominates why most people engage in fake news on the internet. In achieving this, they target individuals and organizations that are capable of making news. In summary, people engage in fake news in order to make money through advertisement. Another important thing to note is that doing this does not require much effort. This must have been why Chang, et al (2016:1) argue that, 'the amount of effort actually expended to create something that gets a huge amount of attention on Facebook and can earn thousands and thousands of dollars, is minimal.'

A number of facts emerged on how the stories are come by. According to Chang et al (2016:2):

Ninety percent of the traffic [to my site] is from Facebook,' one of the creators said. But the website creators were quick to argue that their sites were not fake news. 'I don't agree the sites are fake,' one of them said. 'Maybe some of the stories are fake but not all of them.'

One said he re-writes headlines, saying, 'You have to have a good headline for your story to be successful.' For example, a headline he said he wrote was, 'Rush Reveals Michelle's Perverted Past After She Dumps on Trump,' but he said the original headline was, 'Rush Reveals Michelle's Past.'

Another admits he takes his rewriting further, copying and pasting stories from other media outlets but then changing 'everything inside' the story.

And the websites these Macedonia site creators are lifting from are not exactly Pulitzer Prize winners. One website creator said he lifts stories from the following sites: 'Western Journalism,' 'Conservative Tribune' and 'The Federalist Papers.

3. The Influence and Effect of Fake News

Fake news is synonymous with *false news*. That naturally means that the concept is not new. The incidence of *false news* dates back to around 19th Century (Merriam-Webster, 2017). What is new, however, is the expression *fake news*. In the same vein, the concept of fake news is novel because of the media through which it is often circulated. The use of social media has, furthermore, ushered in a new twist to the understanding of fake news (Center for Information Technology and Society, 2019). Since the recent common use of fake news with different motives, a number of arguments have been advanced. A prominent one among them is the insinuation that fake news is capable of changing beliefs and/or capable of influencing electoral voting decisions, with Facebook ranking highest in use among other social media forms. (Chang, et al, 2016)

It is well understood that the issue of influence of any media on issues, is a complex one, hence, it cannot be overtly stated whether the influence of the social media in having manipulative tendency, is real or imagined. However, from available evidence, the ability of the social media in influencing beliefs has assumed a significant academic inquest. To this, Kurtzleben (2018) argues that:

> '[...] there is evidence that fake news is effective at changing beliefs. One 2017 study from researchers at Yale University found that the more people were exposed to a given fake news statement, the more they believed it.
> That's good news for fake news writers and the creators of Russian bots and hypothetical 400-lb. hackers in New Jersey. If it's true that showing people the same headline multiple times makes them believe it, all fake news purveyors need to do is be persistent — and hope that they continue to have platforms like Facebook for posting the things they make up.'

In another research by the Center for Information Technology Society on the influence of fake news on the 2016 American presidential election, the issue of the ability of fake news to influence voters' decision was again brought to the fore. The statement below from the Center for Information Technology Society, (2019: 1) summarizes it all.

> 'The researchers asked the voters how much they believed in three statements, each of which, according to independent analysis, had been promoted by fake news but were actually false: that Hillary Clinton was in poor health due to a serious illness, that Pope Francis endorsed Donald Trump, and that, during her time as Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton approved weapon sales to Islamic jihadists including ISIS. Although most people didn't think that these statements were true, there was a very strong link between the belief that they were true and the way people voted.'

Furthermore, another survey carried out on sources of false information and the possible impact on voters revealed another fact. The survey was carried out between October 14 and 16, 2018. Findings showed that Fifty-seven percent of the respondents expressed the view that they have observed fake news during the 2018 elections while 19 percent of the respondents expressed the belief that it influenced how they plan to vote.

Apart from the perceived influence of fake news on electoral decisions, fake news has other serious effects too. A summary of this is given by Amerland (2018:1). According to him,

> It's not just big companies that are hurt by fake news. Research conducted by the University of Chicago and the Marshall School of Business shows that fake news, left unchecked, erodes trust and leads to lower engagement in social media networks. Entrepreneurs and small businesses rely on engagement with their social media activity to leverage the network effect and gain valuable publicity at a fraction of the cost. A loss of trust adversely affects all marketing and brand-building efforts and breaks the connection with the audience that companies and brands need to gain and maintain market share.

4. Fake News, Myths and Covid 19

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues across the world, an outbreak of fake news has continued to spread. Fake news has a veritable means of reaching people wherever they are through WhatsApp messages, rogue/phoney Facebook posts, videos attributed to a certain degree of authority, all with an expression of concern.

In Nigeria, the incidence of fake news stories and myths about the treatment of COVID-19 has been on the increase. Individuals have suddenly become experts in a field they know nothing about; suddenly the number of pharmacists in the production of hand sanitizers, drugs and others; public health and infectious disease Doctors, health education/education promoters and nurses, have suddenly been on the rise; with these category of new day medics and health workers offering the expertise gratis.

Nigeria's Minister of Information, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, in one of the regular briefings, debunked these fake news and myths. According to him, the rising spate of fake news and misinformation, in spite of repeated caution by government, is distracting the fight against COVID-19. He said that the government is particularly worried about unverified local therapies circulating in the social media as a cure to COVID-19 when in actual fact; no known cure had been developed for the disease. He further said that, on WhatsApp, there are so many myths and cures for COVID-19 today.

> 'Some people will tell you, it cannot affect Africans or the disease is not even existing at all, while some will say, all you need to do is to take garlic, take ginger. 'As we speak today, there is no vaccine or medicine for COVID-19. The only weapon to combat the virus is what we call Non-Pharmaceutical Intervention (NPI), which are largely sensitization, advocacy, keeping very good hygiene, physical / social distancing, not shaking hands and no gathering. These are the only effective ways to contain the pandemic and that is why governments are declaring total lockdown.' (Lai Mohammed, 2020).

5. Corona Virus/Covid 19 - A Little Understanding

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The disease was first discovered in December 2019 in Wuhan, the capital of China's Hubei province, and has since spread globally, resulting in the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Common symptoms include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Other symptoms may include muscle pain, sputum production, diarrhea, sore throat, loss of smell, loss of taste and abdominal pain. While the majority of cases present with mild symptoms, some progress to viral pneumonia and failure. Today, over five million cases have been reported in over two hundred countries and territories resulting in over 300, 000 deaths while over one million people have recovered.

The virus is mainly spread through close contact with a carrier, and by small droplets produced when people cough, sneeze, or talk. These small droplets may be produced during breathing but the virus is not generally airborne. People may also contract COVID-19 by touching contaminated surfaces and touching their faces afterward. The virus can

survive on surfaces up to 72 hours. It is most contagious during the first 3 days after symptom onset, although spread may be possible before symptoms appear and in later stages of the disease. Time from exposure to onset of symptoms is generally between one and fourteen days, with an average of five days. The standard method of diagnosis is by testing samples from a swab; a combination of symptoms; risk; and a chest CT scan showing features of pneumonia.

Recommended measures to prevent infection include frequent hand washing, using alcohol-based hand sanitizers, social distancing (maintaining physical distance from others, especially from those with symptoms), covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or inner elbow, and keeping unwashed hands away from the face. The use of face masks is recommended for those who suspect they have the virus and their caregivers. Recommendations for the use of face masks by the general public vary, with some authorities recommending against their use, some recommending their use, and others requiring their use. Currently, there is no vaccine or specific antiviral treatment for COVID-19. Management involves treatment of symptoms, supportive care, isolation, and experimental measures.

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the coronavirus outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on 30 January 2020, and a pandemic on 11 March 2020. The symptoms are being daily reviewed; this is as a result of the dynamic nature of the research on the subject matter.

5.1. Objectives

The following are the objectives which serve as the guide upon which the analysis and discussion of data in this paper are premised.

- To determine the underlying/imputed motives in the reports selected for analysis
- To determine whether these reports reflect the COVID 19 pandemic and the anxiety nature which people have towards the disease.

5.2. Analysis and Discussion

When it comes to discussing the motives behind fake news and whether the stories reflected the pandemic nature of the disease, as reflected in the news reports selected for analysis, it is pertinent to discuss them within the context of the three classification of fake news:

- Mis-information
- Dis-information and
- Mal-information

These classifications help us to understand and determine the motives behind the selected news reports as well as determine whether the stories reflected the pandemic nature of the disease. Consequently, to achieve these objectives, 29 COVID–19 related news stories were selected. Upon further categorization, the authors equally used the 3 classifications of fake news, which were adopted as units of analysis and content categories for in depth qualitative content analysis.

The news articles selected for analysis were selected from the opera news application for mobile (android) phones. With the absence of stable electricity and the increasing use of smartphones by majority of Nigerians, it is only fitting that the quickest way of accessing information is through mobile smartphones. The opera news application is currently one of the top ten applications downloaded by Nigerians on their mobile phones. Upon its arrival into the Nigerian mobile app market in January 2018, it became the most downloaded mobile application by February 2018.

A total of ten news reports were selected in line with the content categories as determined in this paper. In the category of Mis-information, two news stories were selected for analyses, for dis-information, four news stories were considered while in the category of mal-information, four news stories were selected.

5.2.1. Mis-information

In an earlier part in this paper, we defined Mis-information as misleading pieces of information created and/or disseminated without malicious intent. The news articles selected for analysis in this category were considered because, while the reports were misleading, the intention was not to cause harm, rather, it was intended to reveal people's wishes and desperation for a solution to the covid-19 pandemic. This agrees with the description of the wishful-thinking category of rumour (Allport and Postman cited in Oyewo 2002).

The first article analysed is titled: 'Smart way of killing Corona-Virus Finally Discovered.' This headline suggests that some sort of smart cure for covid-19, albeit erroneously, has been discovered. It is only after reading the news report that one discovers what the article is about an ingenious way of dis-infecting people who are passing through the area where this 'disinfectant/dis-infecting machine 'is located. This report was included in this category because, while is seems to be a helpful solution in curbing the spread of COVID-19, it is misleading in a number of ways:

- The headline suggests that a smart cure COVID-19 has been found
- Once one disinfects the outside, one automatically becomes COVID-19 free/immune.

These impressions are steeped in erroneous beliefs that outward cleanliness and hygienic practices are the solutions to COVID-19. This is wrong because, an asymptomatic carrier could have left the virus in other places and could also transfer the virus, even after dis-infecting him/herself. The second report is religious in dimension. Highly religious people, especially Christians have always sought to provide answers to everything around them using the Bible as a frame of reference. This news report is a follow-up on circulating videos that claimed that Italians were throwing their money on the streets because to them, it no longer had any value in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic. Several reasons have been postulated for the money in the street video. The reason for the money in the streets video is not known at the moment for all we know; the video might be a hoax or an old video of a separate event from covid-19. The article is misleading because,

it stems from a place of fear that the world is finally coming to an end (a belief held by Christians that one day, the world would come to an end and there would be chaos in the land). While it seems that Christians are being warned to get ready for the return of Christ the article backed up by Bible verses – Revelation 9:20, creates an atmosphere for fear for the fate of the world. At the heart of this article is the tendency of Christians to link any new event or occurrence to the end of the world. Anytime an epidemic breaks out, the next thing we hear is that the world is about to come to anend' as predicted by the Bible (Kolawole, 2020)

5.2.2. Disinformation

This is described as the deliberate attempts to confuse or manipulate people through delivering dishonest information to them. The first article is titled 'people throwing their money away in Italy'. It is a report about the video circulating on social media about Italians throwing their money into the streets from their windows. While the headline is straight forward, the content article-text, pictures are what make it an instance of disinformation. The article was published on the 2nd of April, 2020, when Italy was the worst affected country in the world with 13,915 covid-19 deaths; however, the first picture after the lead is a chart that is showing the early stages of the pandemic. The intention of the author is not known; however, anew reader of the site could assume that this was authentic information and use it to further the'covid-19 is a myth' school of thought. Some other photographs are included; the one that stands out is an aerial shot of roads (presumably in Italy) of some white objects littered on the ground. We do not know if this is actually money or accumulated litter. After the photograph is a statement attributed to 'most Italians': 'Most Italians said 'what is the use of money when it cannot save our lives and protect us from this virus?' This statement raises the following questions:

- Who are the 'most Italians' that spoke?
- Where did they make this statement?
- Who did they say this to?

This question the credibility of the source of the information.

A second news report in this category, titled:'WHO said about 39,000 Nigerians will be infected with the coronavirus-Apostle Suleman', is a prime example of disinformation as a category of fake news. The article is a report about a tweet by a prominent Nigerian Pastor. In his tweet, he said WHO anticipated 39,000 Nigerians will be infected with covid-19. The problem is that because the author of the tweet is a prominent Nigerian Pastor, there was little or no fact checking about the authenticity of the information contained in the tweet. The statement was made by the Lagos State Commissioner for Health based on the Lagos State Ministry of Health's mathematically modeling. The figure was to show the worst-case scenario. The source of this information is deliberately manipulating Nigerians especially those of the Christian faith to create an atmosphere of fear. This finds justification in Carl Jung's discussion of the significant variables of anxiety and uncertainty in rumour transmission as expressed in Oyewo (2002). In the same vein, Apostle Suleman's tweet equally finds credence in Bogey type of rumour as noted in Knapp and Allport cited in Oyerokun (1993). The explanation for Bogey type of rumour is rooted in anxiety, fear and uncertainty.

The other two articles in this category, are closely related but from different news sites and with slightly different headlines. They are titled, 'COVID-19: High ranking member of Buhari's cabinet reportedly dead' and 'CORONA Virus: High ranking member of Buhari's cabinet is dead '- Kemi Olunloyo. They are both reports about a tweet by an infamous self-proclaimed journalist, Kemi Olunloyo. They were both published on 2nd April, 2020. They are both classified as dis-information because they instigated the rumours that Abba Kyarihad died shortly after testing positive for COVID-19. They were rumours circulating that Abba Kyari or even the President had died of the Virus. The Federal Government did not announce the death of any cabinet member until the death of Abba Kyari on the 17th of April, 2020. Kemi Olunloyo as the source of a news story is not considered particularly reliable, this is evident in her recent tweet that the IPOB leader, Nnamdi Kanu was dead and her subsequent retraction after it was found to be false.

5.2.3. Mal-Information

This is information based on reality but used to inflict harm on a person, an organization, or a country. The news stories selected for analysis in this category are mostly about China and the origin of COVID – 19. While the COVID – 19 originated from a city in China – Wuhan, which is a reality, these stories further fuel animosity towards China as a country by spreading information that could cause further harm to China's reputation in the world. One of the articles titled: Disappeared, Chinese research papers traced COVID-19 to China bio lab in Wuhan', discusses the research findings of two Chinese scientists who traced the origin of COVID-19 in China to a laboratory in Wuhan. The author of the story claims that there was a cover-up in China concerning the origin of COVID-19 and the snowball effect around the world today. While the author backs up his claims with evidence from research articles, videos and news stories, the article is presented as a deliberate spread of propaganda against China which would further fuel the existing distrust and animosity against China.

Another news story under analysis in this category is a report about a prominent Nigerian Pastor's prophecy about China and covid-19. The article is titled: 'China created coronavirus, not a natural disaster, here's what they are planning next-Apostle Suleiman reveals another prophecy'. This story article has as its source a video message of Apostle Suleman, a prominent Nigerian Pastor. According to him, China is evil and a danger to the world especially America. The release of covid-19 marks the move towards a new world order. Like all the other articles in this category this article is also a blow to the already damaged reputation of China and fuels the conspiracy theory of the existence of a cult-like new world order. Two other articles titled: 'Britain pulls out of 5G contract with a Chinese firm and Huawei' and 'Good news:USAarrested a Chinese scientist that created coronavirus, US releases latest report' are presented as 'wins' against China. It presupposes that there is some kind of war between China and the rest of the world. The UK/Britain's pulling out of the 5G contract because of contaminated Covid-19 test kits that were donated to the UK by China, suggests a tit-for-tat

approach response to punish China for its part in the emergence in the covid-19. The British government has since debunked this as an unfounded rumor. The USA's arrest of a Chinese citizen that allegedly created coronavirus is portrayed as a 'gotcha' moment where the 'bad guy' has finally been caught after committing several crimes. It is interesting to note that in spite of all these propaganda against China and the blame game by several world leaders, the number of infections and subsequent death from Covid-19 is consistently rising, with over 4 million cases and close to 300,000 deaths (as at the time of writing this article). These stories raise the following questions:

- Is there an agenda against China by world 'super powers'?
- Will China ever live down this embarrassment?

5.2.4. Conclusion

One of the significant issues about stories, sources and platforms on which COVID- 19 is rendered, is that of control, especially in the spread of fake news. While some believe that fake news is evasive and pervasive, just like rumour, yet others believe that it could be controlled like other societal issues. They often recommend legal processes in the control of fake news. A member of parliament in Nigeria advocated for capital punishment for the offenders while President Emmanuel Macron, of France, amid criticism that it poses a potential threat to press freedom, strongly advocated for legal actions against perpetrators of fake news. According to him, the measure would allow judges to block content deemed false during a three-month period preceding an election.

Mr. Macron's action was premised last year by a phony internet-spread story claiming he had an offshore account in the Bahamas. Mr. Macron reportedly in a press interview, told a press gathering that he would aim to 'protect our democracy from these false stories' by cracking down on phony reports.' In an instant,' through thousands of accounts, the President said, 'lies created to sully a politician, a personality, a public figure, a journalist can spread throughout the world, in every language.' Under the new law, judges would have 48 hours to decide if 'any allegation or imputation' in a news item was 'devoid of verifiable elements that would make it credible.' Only items written 'in bad faith' could be blocked, and again it would be up to the judge to decide. It is, however, desirable, especially at this time marking the world press Freedom Day, that journalists, whatever their description, should practice responsible journalism to avoid the 'Sword of the Damocles.'

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