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## **Towards a Sustainable National Security: Examining the Effect of Regulations Against Fake News and Hate Speech in Nigerian Media**

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### **Abstract**

Sequel to the high prevalence of ventilating fake news, misinformation, and hate speech in the media, most especially by social media users; and taking into cognisance the resultant insecurity, instability, and disunity that such an act portends, many countries including Nigeria, have been swiftly responding, by formulating different policies to "regulate" the use of social media platforms and its contents, to curtail the growing menace. This study which is hinged on agenda setting theory, therefore, investigated whether or not all these regulations have been of any effect to curb or completely eradicate the ugly trend in the Nigerian society and

media space. The study utilised library research to arrive at secondary data and thematically discussed the topic by dissecting existing and relevant scholarly literature and articles that are useful for understanding the issues surrounding the investigation. Findings revealed that these regulations in Nigeria are not only repressive but ineffective; and that social media users could hardly be encumbered by government regulations, at least for now, largely because of the nature of the internet which is not limited by geographical boundaries. The study, therefore, recommended among others, that both the government and media owners should organise, from time to time, media literacy campaigns that will instill a sense of responsible use of the media space in the consciousness of social media users.

**Keywords:** Fake News, Hate Speech, Regulations, National Security, Nigerian Media.

### **Introduction**

The phenomenon of reading fake news or listening to hate speeches in both the mainstream and new media, especially social media, should no longer be strange to an average media user in Nigeria. There is hardly any Nigerian's news medium that one can absolve of this "crime" against ethical journalism and standard practice of the profession; a tide that is rapidly becoming a 'tsunami' threat to national security and stability.

There have been, and there are still avalanches of fake news and hate speech reports in various Nigerian media, mostly propagated by social media users who are referred to as citizen 'journalists.' They churn out volatile news that is capable of not only destroying the fragile economy and socio-political fabrics of the country but that which are potentially dangerous for the peace and progress of the country, all in the guise of fundamental freedom of expression and right to access information (Aikulola, 2022; Agency Report, 2021; Adavize,2018; & Vanguard, 2018).

Underscoring the devastating effects of hate speech, the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech (2019) emphasised the position of the United Nations Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres that, over the past 75 years, hate speech has been a precursor to atrocity, crimes including genocide, from Rwanda to Bosnia to Cambodia.

Hate speech is in itself an attack on tolerance, inclusion, diversity, and the very essence of our human rights, norms, and principles. More broadly, it undermines social cohesion, erodes shared values, and can lay the foundation for violence, setting back the cause of peace, stability, sustainable development, and the fulfillment of human rights for all. (United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and Responsibility to Protect, 2019, para. 7)

In a similar vein, Ugwuanyi (2017) argues the anti-social and unwholesome practice of spreading fake news when he underscores the comments of the founder of an online news medium, *The Cable*, Mr. Simon Kolawole, on the occasion of the third anniversary of the establishment, as the founder admitted the medium's unprofessional misconduct of disseminating unverified news reports.

In Mr. Kolawole's remarks according to Ugwuanyi (2017), the biggest mistake made by the online newspaper was a false report in May 2015 that the Nobel Laureate, Professor Wole Soyinka, made hate speeches in the United States against the people of Igbo extraction in Nigeria; a report which was later found out to be the reporter's mere interpretation and not the actual words used by the literary icon. According to Mr. Kolawole, "The embarrassment was universal for us, and sadly, there were those who stopped trusting our stories after the episode." (The Cable 2017, in Ugwuanyi, 2017, p. 5).

More so, it is an open secret how the country experienced hate speeches and fake news during the 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections in

its media space. Both the social and traditional media, including government-owned media such as Nigerian Television Authority (N.T.A.), and Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (F.R.C.N), as well as privately-owned media like African Independent Television (A.I.T), were all inundated with derogatory and denigrating speeches, expressed even in local dialects to demean and label opponents in bad light (Muideen & Ibrahim, 2022).

Ishola (2018), in Aduko, Nimenibo, Samuel & George (2021) recalled that in 2015, top politicians associated with former President Goodluck Jonathan, employed Cambridge Analytics to produce and distribute an Islamophobia video, portraying General Muhammadu Buhari as a sponsor of the insurgent Boko Haram, deliberately to scare the electorate from voting for the opposition.

But prominent among such unprofessional and irresponsible reports in the past was the rumoured death of General Muhammadu Buhari, no sooner than he embarked on a healthcare leave to the United Kingdom on January 19th, 2017, after he was elected Nigeria's President. Ugwuanyi (2017, p. 2) underscores the desperation of these fake news mongers when he states thus:

So audacious were the masterminds that they cloned Metro Newspapers of the United Kingdom or Huffington Post of the United States, announcing in the spoofs that President Buhari had died in London. While 'Metro' reported the 'death' of the former Nigerian President, 'The Huffington Post' alleged that he was caught "committing suicide."

The so-called widely but falsely reported dead man was at the helm of affairs of Nigeria for two consecutive terms of eight years as President and Commander-in-Chief of the country. The dramatic crescendo of it all was the grandstanding face-off between the Nigerian government and the

social media giant, Twitter, (now X) in the middle of 2021; accusing and counter-accusing each other of promoting hate speeches and engendering disunity.

Specifically, on Friday 4th June 2021, the Nigerian government announced an indefinite suspension of Twitter's operations (now X) in the country after the latter deleted a post by the Nigerian President then for allegedly violating the platform's safety rules and guidelines. In her vehement efforts to justify her sledgehammer of the indefinite suspension of the social media platform, the Nigerian government alleged that the microblogging and social networking service was being used to undermine "Nigeria's corporate existence," asserting that the medium was allowing "the spread of religious, racist, xenophobic and false messages" that "could tear the country apart" (Onireti 2021, p. 2).

The Nigerian government further claimed that their decision was based on a myriad of problems with various social media networks in Nigeria that spread misinformation and fake news through their outlets, thereby causing violent consequences.

Encapsulating the dangers and potential dire consequences of misinformation and hate speeches, Umaru, Danjuma & Adamkolo (2019), brought all these into proper perspectives when they argue that the public can be misled and thrown into tension and chaotic situations through fake news, and this can as well lead to tension in an already tensed political environment, culminating into communal and reprisal attacks here and there.

In the same vein, Umaru (2018) underscores the need to eschew the unethical practice of disseminating untrue, unverified information and hate speeches that fan the embers of discord and insecurity in our society when he asserts that fake news can undermine the unity and peace of the country with explosive consequences. He further posits that fake news

can exacerbate distrust, division, and violence in the already divided diverse polity; and ultimately promote anti-democratic tendencies that can subvert confidence in the system.

From the foregoing and from other different unwholesome consequences that the act of spreading fake news and hate speeches portend for individuals and society at large, as espoused by media scholars above, the Nigerian government had in the past, and in recent times, formulated policies and regulations that are meant to curtail, if not eradicate, the excesses of social media users, who unprofessionally use the media to spread inciting hatred and falsehood that are capable of making the country volatile or jeopardizing the fragile peace and stability of the country, as well as increasing insecurity in the land.

One such regulation was the directive by the Federal Government of Nigeria, commandeering all Over the Tops (OTTs) and social media platforms operating in Nigeria to register with the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (N.B.C) and obtain a license (Chinedu, 2021), a decision that is perceived in some public spaces as a fallout of the impasse between the Nigerian government and social media giant, X, (formerly Twitter).

Before that directive, a couple of social media bills, notably those of 2015 and 2019 have been designed under different captions, and sponsored by members of the Eighth and Ninth Nigerian National Assembly respectively, to regulate digital media space in the country, but all have been greeted with stiff opposition and outcry by members of the civil society and the public in general.

Again, in recent times, specifically in October 2023, the President Bola Ahmed Tinubu-led administration re-introduced a new anti-social media bill, sponsored through the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), which is aimed at regulating digital platforms for the umpteenth time. The

bill seeks to repeal and reenact the NBC Act, CAP L11, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004 (Africanews, 2023).

However, despite all these policies and proposals towards social media regulation, coupled with the directive of registration and re-registration of the digital media platforms and OTTs in the country by the immediate past administration of former President Mohammed Buhari and the incumbent President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, to streamline and checkmate the use of social media, specifically in the context of what is perceived to be misinformation and hate speeches, the phenomenon seems to still rear its ugly head.

To this end, this study most importantly, interrogated the different extant social media regulations to reduce the menace of hate speech and fake news or misinformation by successive governments in Nigeria, as a drive towards achieving a peaceful co-existence among different entities and ethnic nationalities in the country; thereby fostering a sustainable national security and development. Hence, the study examined whether all these extant regulations have any effect so far against fake news and hate speeches in Nigeria.

This study will fill a gap in the existing literature on fake news and hate speeches in Nigeria by different media and communication scholars, as none of such studies have exhaustively brought to the fore the effect (if any) that government social media regulations can have on the dreaded scourge of misinformation and hate speeches in Nigeria.

## **Conceptual Clarifications**

### **Understanding Fake News**

Misinformation in the media is not new. It has been with us for a very long time. The digitisation of news has challenged traditional definitions of news. Online platforms provide space for non-journalists to reach a mass

audience. The rise of citizen journalism challenged the link between news and journalists, as non-journalists began to engage in journalistic activities to produce journalistic outputs, including news (Robinson & DeSlano 2011; Edson, Zheng & Richard (2017).

Citizen journalists were initially confined to blogging, but eventually, social media offered a wider platform for non-journalists to engage in journalism (Wall 2015 in Edson et al. (2017). Through their social media accounts, users can post information, photos, videos, and narratives about newsworthy events they witness firsthand. (Hermida 2011; Jewith 2009 in Edson et al. 2017). Social media sites are not only marked by having a mass audience, but they also facilitate the speedy exchange and spread of information. Unfortunately, they have also facilitated the spread of wrong information, such as fake news.

So, what makes fake news false? If news refers to an accurate account of a real event, what then does fake news mean? News is supposedly—and normatively—based on truth, which makes the term "fake news" an oxymoron. The word "fake" is often used interchangeably with words such as copy, forgery, counterfeit, and inauthentic (Andrea 2016 in Edson et al. 2017).

Fake news can also be situated within the larger context of misinformation and disinformation. While misinformation refers to the unintentional dissemination of false information, disinformation implies a conscious creation and transmission of information known to be false (Edson et al. 2017). Fake news can be concocted in several ways as identified below in some scholarly studies, but the salient element of their falsity is what remains a common denominator to them all.

**News satire:** This refers to mock news programmes which typically use humour or exaggeration to present audience members with news updates. Peifer and Lee (2019) explain the concept as a discursive practice that



provocatively serves to challenge an existing political or social order playfully. Caufield (2008, p. 4 in Peifer & Lee, 2019, p. 3) explicates further by defining it as 'an "artful political critique" designed to expose a folly, hypocrisy, and—or an absurdity'. Satire's main idea is one of attack and (nonviolent) aggression (Knight, 2004, Peifer & Lee (2019), even as it can sometimes appear without harm at the surface.

**News Parody:** This is a second format of fake news which shares many characteristics with satire as both rely on humour as a means of drawing an audience. But what differentiates parodies from satires is their use of non-factual information to inject humour. Instead of providing direct commentary on current affairs through humour, parody plays on the ludicrousness of issues and highlights them by making up entirely fictitious news stories. Sinclair (2019) argues that while parody can be used to generate fake news, it can also be used as an antidote to it.

**News Fabrication:** This refers to articles that have no factual basis but are published in the style of news articles to create legitimacy. Unlike parody, there is no implicit understanding between the author and the reader that the item is false.

**Photo Manipulation:** Fake news has also been used to refer to the manipulation of real images or videos to create false narratives. Manipulation of images has become an increasingly common occurrence with the advent of digital photos, powerful image manipulation software, and knowledge of techniques.

**Advertising and Public Relations:** Fake news has also been used to describe advertising materials in the guise of genuine news reports, as well as to refer to press releases published as news. In this context, fake news is defined as when public relations or advertising practitioners adopt the practices and/or appearance of journalists to insert marketing or other persuasive messages into news media.

**Propaganda:** Propaganda simply refers to news stories that may not be factual but are created by a political entity to influence public perceptions. The overt purpose is to benefit a public figure, organisation, or government. Similar to advertising, propaganda includes bias that promotes a particular side or perspective, the goal of which is often to persuade rather than to inform.

### **The Concept of Hate Speech**

Explaining the concept of hate speech is as challenging as the phenomenon itself. There is yet no internationally accepted definition of the term “hate speech”. Characterising a speech that is 'hateful' seems controversial and disputed. United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech (2019, p. 2) argues that:

the term hate speech is understood to be any kind of communication in speech, writing, or behaviour that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language concerning a person or a group based on who they are. In other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender, or other identity factors.

The document further explains that this is often rooted in and generates intolerance and hatred and in certain contexts can be demeaning and divisive.

Corroborating the complexity in defining the term, “hate speech,” Article 19 (2015) also underscores the fact that the term is an emotive concept and that there is no universally accepted definition of it yet in international human rights law. This, according to Article 19 (2015), is because international and regional human rights instruments apply varying standards for defining and limiting “hate speech.”

However, Article 19 (2015), simply defined hate speech as *any* exhibition of prejudiced hate towards people but which may not portend a particular

consequence. But, within the context of this study, hate speech is defined as any form of communication, verbally, non-verbally, visually, or otherwise, that engenders incitement to discrimination, hostility, and violence, which may also lead to or include terrorism or criminal atrocities.

### **The Nigerian Media**

Nigeria, the most populous country on the African continent, has a fairly, well-established media industry. It has a virile press and a resourceful broadcast industry, and the presence of both on the online channels cannot be over-emphasized.

In Nigeria, the media are publicly and privately owned. The press was the first and the oldest, and with Decree 38 of 1992, the broadcast industry was liberalised and the media space became bubbling with many privately-owned television and radio stations, the earliest of which include African Independent Television (A.I.T) and Minaj Broadcast International (M.B.I) in Lagos. However, with the advent of the internet and advancement in media technology, there has been a paradigm shift in media practice vis-a-vis media content production, distribution, and ownership.

Thus, for this study, the term "Nigerian media" refers to various media that are used to persuade, entertain, enlighten, mobilise, and inform the Nigerian citizenry. These media are classified into two broad categories—the traditional (mainstream) media and the new media which includes the social media.

The traditional media in Nigeria include the radio, television, newspapers, magazines, periodicals, books, film (theatre), etc. while the new media includes but is not limited to online versions of all the traditional media; social media such as Twitter (now X), Whatsapp,

Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Hangout, Telegram, TikTok, etc., using media devices such as smartphones, smart T.V., palmtops, tablets, desktops, as well as cable and satellite broadcast media networks.

However, instead of the Nigerian media leveraging the seemingly vibrant and strong media system that it has created for itself, by becoming a change agent and fourth estate of the realm to reckon with, available media scholarships, as indicated earlier, reveal that the media space, especially the social media in Nigeria, is being used as conduits to disseminate fake news and hate speech; a phenomenon that promotes instability and disunity, among other social vices, and that which hampers the overall development of the country and national security.

### **National Security**

In the context of this study, national security refers to the freedom from actual and potential threats to national life that may arise as a result of human actions or inactions; or from disasters such as earthquakes, famine, drought, disease, and other national calamitous events resulting in deaths, human suffering and material change.

National security is the freedom from danger or absence of threats to the multi-dimensional elements that may affect the nation's ability to protect and develop itself, promote its cherished values and national interests, as much as promote and boost the well-being of its people.

To this end, the misuse of Nigerian media, especially the abuse of social media in spreading misinformation and hate speech by its users, becomes worrisome bearing in mind the dire multi-dimensional consequences of national insecurity, which may be economic, social, environmental, political, military or epidemiological, that this act is capable of breeding.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is premised on the cardinal propositions of agenda setting theory. The beginning of the theory can be traced as far back as 1922, when Walter Lippman argued on the vital role that mass media can play in influencing the setting of certain images in the public's mind (Lippman, 1922, pp. 9-16, in Zain (2014).

The term, agenda setting theory was first used by McCombs and Shaw in 1972. The agenda setting theory is a theory that discusses the influences of the mass media on certain issues as a public agenda. The public agenda is the main focus or prime issue that the members of the society or the public are concerned about.

Zain (2014) points out that this theory underscores the link, vis-à-vis the relationships that exist between the significance that the mass media attach to an issue, and the reaction the media audience members attach to such issue.

This study, therefore, hinged on this theory considering the enormity of influence both traditional and new media wield on their audience in shaping their focus and prioritizing their interest in public discourse by placing emphasis and importance on such media issues.

It is in recognition of this powerful effect of the media that this study investigates whether the extant laws and regulations against fake news and hate speech being disseminated in Nigerian media are of any effect to the extent of either curbing or eradicating the menace.

### **Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings**

**Fake News/Hate Speech Regulations: Effective or Repressive?**

The menace of misinformation, disinformation, fake news, or hate speech is not a threat that is limited to Nigeria's democracy alone; other climes in

both the North and South divide of the world experience the ugly tide as well.

To this end, in response to nipping the bud in the head, and considering its attendant devastating consequences such as insecurity, social instability, and disunity; many governments across the globe, have formulated one policy, regulation, or other that is peculiar to their sociocultural and political environments to combat the "scourge" which has seemingly pervaded the global community.

Some of these regulations in Nigeria include the Cybercrimes Act, 2015; Frivolous Petitions Bill, 2015; Internet Falsehood Bill, 2019; Hate Speech Bill, 2019; (Obia, 2023), as well as the policy directive of the Nigerian government in 2021, ordering all social media networking sites to obtain license for their operations in the country, and the current 2023 anti-social media bill to reenact National Broadcasting Commission Act, CAPL11.

However, the varied perceptions of the public towards these different laws and policies meant to regulate the new media, especially the social media which are primarily used to disseminate fake news and hate speeches on one hand; and the (in) sincerity of purpose on the part of the authorities concerned on the other hand, call for a review of these regulations.

Available scholarly literature and studies revealed that, in most discourses in both public and media spaces, the global public views these regulations as ones which contravene their constitutionally guaranteed fundamental human rights to freedom of expression; and equally important is their suspicion of sinister motives by their respective governments to cow and suppress the media from legitimately discharging their social responsibility as the fourth estate of the realm.

Corroborating the above position, Kelly et al. (2017) pointed out the observation of Freedom House's 2017 Report, when they observed that there has been an increase in efforts by governments around the globe over some time now, to gag information on social media, adopting unsuspecting methods to influence public discussion and crush dissent.

Against this backdrop, this section of the study examined various government regulations (ill-intended or not) against fake news and hate speech in Nigeria; bringing to the fore the impact of these regulations in the country, and particularly emphasizing whether or not these regulations have had any effect at all towards eradicating or reducing the growing menace of fake news, misinformation or hate speech in Nigeria.

Egbunike (2020 in Tsegyu & Kelvin (2021), noted that, though the anti-social media bills were targeted at mitigating the dissemination of falsehood, fake news, and outright disinformation on online network sites, it seems that the covert intention behind those bills was to suppress free expression and criticisms of any form. They opined that since the conventional media are regulated it is the belief by many that the call to control social media too is a strategy to gag free speech.

This corroborates the position of Mohammed (2021), who also argued that these social media regulations are being criticized and perceived with suspicion by the public in some quarters, because there is a history of trust deficit between the people and the government, thus rendering these regulations unacceptable and ineffective.

Expressing similar fear and negative perception of the government's regulations of social media use, Apuke and Omar (2020) also underscored the fact that lack of public trust in the government's policies makes nonsense of such regulations and exposes it to suspicion for manipulation, as the government is perceived to be corrupt and has the

tendency to use the regulations for propaganda purposes. Tsegyu and Kelvin (2021), therefore, concluded that the clamour to regulate social media has received the utmost resistance from Nigerians, regardless of their political divides.

Tsegyu and Kelvin (2021) argued further that in recent times, even amid a democratic administration, free speech has been threatened with different pieces of legislation being put forward by Nigeria's legislative arm of government. They claim that with Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, freedom of expression has taken center stage in intellectual discourses; and that attempts in the past to infringe on it have always been met with vehement opposition in the country.

This negative impression of the social media regulations is further heightened by the reports of Amnesty International (2019b in Tsegyy & Kelvin (2021), which argued that Nigeria is already targeting journalists and other media practitioners with existing laws such as the Cyber-crime Act and Terrorism Prevention (Amendment) Act, 2013.

According to Amnesty International (2019b in Tsegyu & Kelvin (2021), in 2019 alone, over 19 journalists and media practitioners in Nigeria were detained, arrested, assaulted, or forced to disappear. The report further posited that with more regulations in the offing, it is feared that journalists will be subjected to heightened levels of harassment (this time, with the backing of the law).

Furthermore, pointing out the ineffectiveness of these regulations, Hanson (2014 in Ahmad (2018), noted that previous attempts to control content using filtering software on the web were not so successful. Apuke and Omar (2020) lent their voices to this claim when they observed that there has been a wide range of solutions developed to overcome the proliferation of fake news with a focus on algorithms and machine-based approaches, which have also proven to be abortive.



In line with the above position, Ahmad (2018) argued that there have been serious concerns about whether or not there is a possibility of controlling the internet and social media, particularly in the information age. However, he noted that the challenge will not be the availability of regulatory mechanisms, but how to apply the same mechanisms to produce the desired results.

Another challenge to the effectiveness of fake news/hate speech regulations is that the majority of the corporations that own social media platforms are mostly private and support free speech. According to Cummings (2018 in Tsegyu & Kelvin (2021), part of the challenges to social media regulations is that the interests of social media platform owners are at variance with those of regulatory authorities, and because social media are largely private, therefore, these digital media platform owners can make their rules to protect their interests.

The ubiquitous nature of the internet is another inhibiting factor that makes social media laws and regulations in Nigeria, less impactful. One of the impediments to regulating social media is the nature of the internet, which is complex and cannot be fettered by any geographical boundaries; and this constitutes tremendous challenges for regulations and regulatory authorities in Nigeria (Tsegyu & Kelvin, 2021).

The internet has a borderless nature, and it is possible that there are virtual operationalities of the virtual environment where someone may operate it in one country, while it is hosted in another, and then those connecting can be from entirely different countries (Selmone, 2018 in Tsegyu & Kelvin (2021).

The above position by Selmone (2018 in Tsegyu & Kelvin (2021) cannot be truer, as this became evident during the ban on Twitter (now X), when some social media users in Nigeria, succeeded in circumventing the

provisions of the directive issued to the communication network providers in the country to prevent Nigerians from using the platform, by digitally outwitting the Nigerian government through the use of Virtual Private Networks (V.P.N), which enabled them to operate on the platform even when it was under suspension.

David (2021, p. 5) buttressed this claim when he argued that “despite the ban, many Nigerians still have access to the site, using Virtual Private Networks (V.P.N) and can share their opinions on other apps, like Indian-based micro-blogging site, Koo.”

This also aligns with Livingstone and Lunt's regulation theory (2007 in Tsegyu & Kelvin (2021), that social media is taking a more global outlook, making it even tougher for any country's regulatory agency or body to effectively regulate the platforms.

Livingstone and Lunt (2007 in Tsegyu & Kelvin (2021), further argued that the globalized scope given to media with the advent of social media is making regulations less likely to be successful. For example, they posited that in the case of social media, it will be a daunting task for an American citizen to be prosecuted because of a comment made about Nigeria in his native country, whether or not such a comment is inciting, provocative or derogatory.

However, from the socio-economic, and even political angle of view, there is no doubt that some of these regulations and policies had negative effects and took their toll on some sectors of the nation. After 222 days that the social media giant, Twitter (now X) was banned in Nigeria, the country's authorities announced the lifting of the ban on January 13th, 2022; but, not without the reverberating economic effects while the suspension of their operation lasted.

David (2021, p. 1) argued that “...even though Nigerians found an alternative means of accessing the social media application through the use of Virtual Private Networks (V.P.N), the rippling effect of the ban from the social, political, and economic viewpoint leaves much to be desired.”

He noted that Nigeria reportedly lost #247.61 billion within the first one hundred days of the ban. According to NetBlocks, a watchdog organization that monitors cyber-security and governance of the internet, as cited in David (2021), about \$366.88 million was lost by businesses while the shutdown took effect. The toll also showed it cost Nigeria's economy #103.17 million every hour during the period.

Based on the foregoing, it is quite evident that the ban by the Nigerian government on X, (formerly Twitter) in the country did not benefit either the government, the citizens, or the American-based social media company in any way (David, 2021).

David (2021), therefore, concluded that the idea of banning systems of expression will not proffer the desired solution, but rather, these measures will encumber the freedom of expression and the economic interests of Nigerians.

Aptly encapsulating the above position, Ahmad (2018) further underscored the ineffectiveness and fruitlessness of these regulations when he argued that, although the phenomenal spread of fake news has devastating effects on the credibility of the journalism profession and societal well-being as a whole; it is clear that censorship is not the panacea to the drive towards stemming the tide.

From the analysis of all the above empirical studies, one can safely posit that despite several government regulations put in place by the Nigerian

authorities to check the spread of fake news, misinformation, and hate speech, these regulations barely have any effect on the mongers who use the Nigerian media, particularly, the different social media platforms to disseminate such contents.

Therefore, the act of seemingly gagging the media or restraining the freedom of expression of the public, through overt or covert regulations of social media by the Nigerian government, seems undesirable and ineffective.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This paper argues that dissemination of misinformation or disinformation, (generally referred to as fake news), and hate speech in Nigerian media, particularly on social media platforms, can breed social disorder, which potentially can engender restiveness, instability, and insecurity in the country.

However, several attempts by the Nigerian government to regulate and combat this "monster" are perceived in many quarters in the country, especially by civil society groups such as the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP), as not only having political/sinister undertones but also capable of suppressing both the media practitioners and the public from discharging their professional responsibilities and exercising their fundamental freedom of expression, respectively.

The study concludes that these policies and regulations have little or no effect at all against the spread of fake news and hate speech in various Nigerian media, especially social media networks. This is primarily because, the internet, which is the engine room of all these social media platforms and micro-blogging sites, cannot be fettered.

To this end, it is recommended that the Nigerian government and other stakeholders, such as the communication network providers and media owners, should engage more in advocacy and media literacy campaigns that will educate the public, most especially social media users, on how to use both the traditional and the new media responsibly.

Furthermore, public media education/literacy should be inculcated in the country's academic curricula, right from the basic primary level of education to the tertiary. This will, in a way, instill and equip the citizenry with the right attitude, mentality, and knowledge for appropriate usage of the media, especially on how to discern and disregard fake news and hate speeches; thus ultimately fostering a sustainable national peace, security and development.

Importantly too the fact that government should endeavor to furnish the public with prompt and factual information about their policies and programmes at all times, by adhering more to the provisions of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, and stop brandishing propaganda to deceitfully gain public trust and confidence. As BBC News (2018a in Ahmad (2018), aptly observes, the absence of official information can sometimes lead to a vacuum, which, as a result, is then filled by grapevine; and this can only aggravate the tension in the polity.

Finally, it is recommended that further studies be carried out to investigate whether the 2023 anti-social media bill which is currently being sponsored in the Nigerian National Assembly by the National Broadcasting Commission to reenact a new NBC Act, is effective or not, when and if it is eventually signed into law.

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