

Dangers of Unnamed News Sources and the Negative Impact on Economic Growth

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria's economy remains fragile, owing to multiple factors such as growth and vulnerability to changes in external conditions, especially oil price, fluctuations as well as internal factors due to political and social unrests; hence this research investigated how the arbitrary use of anonymous sources could lead to the spread of disinformation and also endanger the nation's economy. Anchored on the uses and gratifications theory, the paper asserts that fake news about Nigeria has negative consequences on her image and the ability to attract foreign investments into the country, thus, constituting a danger to the nation's growing economy. It further identified other factors such as financial misinformation, fall in the nation's stock price, panic withdrawals of depositors' funds as a result of unforeseeable factors which could be a liquidity crisis for the bank, among others. This paper therefore concluded that as a way to check disinformation, there should be a policy by news organisations in Nigeria, stating that any reporter who wants to use anonymous sources in news reporting should obtain permission from his/her editor.

Keywords: News source, Economy, Disinformation, Reporting and Dangers.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is faced with a number of socio-political and cultural challenges that are worsened by fake and inaccurate information, as well as a weak economy [1, 2, 3]. Efforts to promote factual and accurate information necessary for development are hardly achieving the desired results [6, 7, 8]. Also, several attempts at reinvigorating the economy with the right policies have met with insignificant outcomes [9, 10]. These are partly attributable to wrong and inaccurate information disseminated through the media for public consumption. This paper, therefore, evaluated the dangers of unidentified news sources and its threat to economic growth [9, 10]. Unnamed sources have been used by investigative reporters who determine to reveal truths that would never have been known if they had not reported them [11, 12, 13]. Those who volunteer the information are people who fear reprisal for disclosing hidden information and, therefore, decide to hide their identities. It, therefore, provides legal security for the reporter in the discharge of his or her onerous responsibility of disseminating important

information for the good of the citizens and for the nation's growth and development without disclosing the origin of the information. Journalists and the public at large have benefitted from anonymous sources. The information that unidentified sources have brought to light has helped to expose truths such as corruption and unethical business practices [1]. Unnamed sources are applied sometimes as the only measure to open up a big story, remove the lid on corruption and bring to fruition the journalistic missions of watchdog on the government [2]. But, if the concept of anonymous sources is not discreetly applied to news reporting, it could be a promoter of fake news or disinformation, serve a negative objective different from the original intent and purposes of the term, and consequently cause economic destabilisation. This explains why Suleiman & Akintayo [10] and Allen, Howland & Mobus [4] posited that the spread of falsehoods decreases trust in public policies and institutions. This in turn could have significant impact on the economy of a nation.

Concept of Disinformation

Disinformation is the deliberate leakage of misleading information (Chambers Dictionary) and it encompasses a wide range of information types such as fake news, rumours, deliberately factually incorrect information, inadvertently factually incorrect information, propaganda, politically-slanted information [4; 3] and is found not only online, but also in the traditional media [5]. The goal of disinformation is to bring about a change in beliefs and attitudes of the recipients thereby promoting behaviour that serves the purpose of the creator of the information [10]. Although, the information may sometimes be true, it is taken out of context. Disinformation may also be a mixture of truth and lies so that the known facts give credence to the lies. Whereas in other cases, the

information may be true, its significance is blown out of proportion or the timing of the release of the information may be calculated to cause the most harm possible. Disinformation is capable of influencing the citizens' perception of the seriousness of the government to face the critical task of curbing poverty and growing the economy of a nation, particularly in a third world country such as Nigeria. The Disinformation in Society Report (2019) of the Institute for Public Relations (IPR), says that 63% of Americans view disinformation as posing a major danger to society's stability economically, politically and socially. This explains why the issue of disinformation and Nigeria's economic stability requires important attention.

Evaluation of Nigeria's Economic Performance

Nigeria's economy remains fragile [6]. This is as a result of multiple factors such as growth and vulnerability to changes in external conditions, especially oil price fluctuations and also internal factors due to political and social unrests. Ten out of the 46 sectors in the economy, which contributed approximately 27.1 per cent of the output, contracted in 2019 [7]. While the Agriculture sector continues to grow slowly, the service sector in 2019 remained the largest contributor to the output at 53 per cent. However, growth in these sectors were adversely affected by rising incidences of

insecurity and the manner in which the media framed the reporting. The NESG in its report said Nigeria needed to do more to attract real investments into key sectors of the economy, and a high and sustainable economic growth that is accompanied by job creation and poverty reduction. Otherwise, the growing scourge of unemployment and poverty would fuel youth restiveness and social unrests [7]. The need to attract and protect investments and existing inadequate infrastructure is, therefore, paramount, and it cannot be achieved with disinformation.

Depletion in Foreign Reserves and Inflation:

The African Development Bank Group [8] stated that Nigeria's economic outlook remains unenviable and risks reduced fiscal space, should oil prices remain depressed. Meanwhile, flooding and rising insecurity are hampering agricultural production, while further depletion in foreign reserves is leading more to sharp exchange rate depreciation and higher inflationary pressures. But with accurate information on the nation's economic potential, the situation can be reversed positively

2021, up by 0.16 per cent points from 0.91 per cent recorded in October 2021 [9]. Nonetheless, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which earlier in 2022 projected the country's economy to grow by 3.1 per cent by 2023 [10]. Any or a combination of several factors could negate this projection which is a positive for the nation. This might have accounted for the reason why Moody's Investors Service downgraded Nigeria's rating from B2 to B3 in October, 2022 over worsening fiscal position and uncertainty in the financial recovery ability of the country.

Unemployment: Between 2015 and 2021, Nigeria's unemployment rate has more than tripled. The food sub-index increased by 1.07 per cent in November

Public Debt Stock: The country's socio-economic problems are still very much virulent. Nigeria's Debt Management

Office (DMO) puts the country's total public debt stock at N35.465 trillion as of June 30 2021. Nigeria's Budget Deficit to GDP was -4.3 percent, as of November 2021 and Debt to GDP ratios of 30 per cent, as of September 2021, is said to be the lowest among Africa's leading economies [11]. This situation demands care which, if not handled well, could worsen by disinformation.

Financial Risk: The general development in the economy, to a high degree, determines the development in the financial sector. A reduction in credit quality and a slowdown in the economy could increase the risk of financial crisis. Loans granted when the economy is booming, can become problematic if the economy nose dives or slows down due to misleading information about the health condition of the nation's financial sector. Nigeria's domestic debt as at June 2022 was N20.95trillion, while her domestic debt service rose to N5.24trillion (Debt Management Office data, 2022 data). Similarly, Nigeria

Theoretical Framework

The uses and gratifications theory was deployed to explain the uses and functions of the media for individuals, groups and society in general. Uses and gratifications approach as noted by [12; 13] also postulates that the media compete with other information sources for audience's need satisfaction. The theory is relevant to this subject because it helps to explain how individuals use mass communication to gratify their needs, that is, what people do with the media. The theory also assists to discover underlying motives for individuals' media

Impact of Disinformation on Economic Performance

Against the background of the foregoing, disinformation about government and its activities could instigate unrest and lead to aggravated consequences in the already bad economy such as:

Foreign Direct Investment: Lai Mohammed, Nigeria's information minister once expressed the view that fake news about Nigeria has negative consequences on her image and the ability to attract foreign investments into the country. He noted that

Godfrey External Debt reached 40.1 USD billion in the same period. While government believes her debt profile is not a major problem, information in the public domain projects government as being economical with the truth. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in 2021 published that Nigeria's foreign direct investment (FDI) fell to its lowest level in over 11 years. Specifically, FDI dropped to \$77.97 million in Q2 2021, indicating a 49.6% and 47.5% decline compared to \$154.76 million and \$148.59 million recorded in the previous quarter and Q2 2020 respectively. The last time Nigeria recorded lower FDIs, was in Q1 2010 when it managed to attract foreign direct investments valued at \$73.93 million. Foreign Direct investment boosts the creation of jobs in the host country as investors build new companies in the country, which in turn leads to increased income, more purchasing power, and an overall boost in the economy.

use. At the core of uses and gratifications theory is the assumption that audience members actively seek out the mass media to satisfy individual needs. Investors rely on the media for useful information on investment opportunities in the country, and the state of the nation's economy. Negative information arising from false information about the Nigerian economic environment could sway potential investors from the country to other nations with favourable information about their economy.

disinformation was a danger to the nation's growing economy [14]

Financial Misinformation: [15] said misinformation or disinformation could bring about dire consequences on a nation's production and consumption levels. In India for instance, fake news on the interrelationship between chicken consumption and contracting COVID-19 led to serious impact on the poultry industry with prices falling from 200 rupees per kg of chicken to just 70-60 rupees. Drastic action by the farmers saw

day-old chicks buried alive to avoid having to continue feeding them when future demand was predicted to drop significantly. This also negatively impacted India's maize and soya industries as the poultry industry was the biggest buyer of these crops. Consequently, huge numbers of farmers and businesses were badly affected by "fake news." In addition, fake news cost the Indian stock market \$39 billion loss and \$17 billion as a result of financial misinformation.

Fall in Stock Price: Disinformation may also cause a nation's stock price to fall and thus destabilize the nation's economy. In 2017, Facebook shares plunged in high volume to 4.5% on a single day. It was the highest single-day drop since the 5.6% decline on November

Justifiable Use of Unnamed Sources

Unnamed sources should not be used indiscriminately. The grounds upon which the use of anonymous sources should be permitted, so as to check disinformation are:

Informational: The concept of unnamed sources should be allowable if the news is basically for information and it is crucial to the information reported. This view is supported by the Associated Press (AP) which states that anonymity should only be used if the material is not opinion or speculation but purely information that it is vital to the report.

Availability: Sometimes journalists encounter difficulty getting official information from official sources. This leaves room for other ways to obtain information. This implies that anonymous sources should be allowed if the information is not available except under the conditions of anonymity imposed by the source.

Reliability: Anonymous source could be used if a source is reliable and in a

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The researcher investigated how the arbitrary use of anonymous sources could lead to the spread of disinformation and also endanger a nation's economy. As such, news organisations should work with governments, businesses, and media platforms to uncover and address

3 of the previous year. This fall was as a result of news reports that linked Mark Zuckerberg to plans to sell a huge volume of the stock. Also, Zuckerberg acknowledged that Facebook had indeed been manipulated to report fake information [16].

Panic withdrawals of depositors' funds:

This could result from disinformation. Should a huge chunk of a bank's deposits be withdrawn within a brief period, the bank may not be able to grant loans to and receive deposits from the public. These deposits are kept liquid, so that customers can withdraw their deposits as they require. But, should there be any panic withdrawals as a result of unforeseeable factors, there could be a liquidity crisis for the bank.

position to have direct knowledge of the information. Should any news source request anonymity, the reporter should demand from the source why anonymity is requested. On the other hand, it is important for the reporter to give the explanation in the story why the source requested anonymity. It is not sufficient to simply say, for example, "a government official who does not want his name mentioned." The reporter should, when it is relevant, state the motive of the source for disclosing the information. If the story anchors on documents, as opposed to interviews, the AP says, the reporter should describe how the documents were obtained, at least to the extent possible.

Attribution: The story also must provide attribution that establishes the source's credibility; simply saying "a source" should not be allowed. Attribution establishes the source's credibility. Otherwise, it provides a platform for the spread of disinformation.

harmful misinformation and deliberate disinformation through early intervention. There should be separate staff in media organisations who should oversee the verification of digital content before consumption or usage. Also, as a way to check

disinformation, there should be a policy by news organisations in Nigeria, stating that any reporter who wants to use anonymous sources in news reporting

Godfrey should obtain permission from his/her editor. Anonymity can then be used within the context, based on its approvability.

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