

# Executive Summary

This research on mis/disinformation on social media before, during and after the 2023 elections in Nigeria provides an insight into the extent, impact, and sources of mis/disinformation during these critical phases for democratic processes and electoral outcomes.

The study employed triangulation methods for generating data. It deployed the mixed-methods technique, combining quantitative survey data and content analysis data to gain insights into the issues that underpin the research. Data was generated from different social media platforms.

Accordingly, the key findings of the research show that mis/disinformation was rampant before, during, and after the 2023 elections, with a significant surge in the spread of false information compared to previous elections. Issues around mis/disinformation revolve around electoral rules, candidate profiling, biased reportage and false stories, all aimed at manipulating public opinion and voters' preference for or against a candidate or political party.

The amplification mechanism of the report shows that social media platforms played crucial roles in disseminating mis/disinformation, and the tonality of conversation often prioritised sensational, inflammatory, and moderate content to influence the choice of voters inadvertently.

The report identifies the impact on electoral integrity and democracy as follows: the dissemination of mis/disinformation eroded public trust in the integrity of the electoral process and institutions as well as the electoral outcome; mis/disinformation also led to polarization that made voters experience difficulty in the way they expressed

their electoral preference; there were various sources of mis/disinformation, which included political actors, foreign actors, fringe media outlets, and sponsored young social media activists who spun mis/disinformation. There was sustained mis/disinformation aimed at manipulating public opinion and sentiment to influence electoral outcome.

We recommend that social media platforms strengthen their content moderation and fact-checking mechanisms to curb the incidence of mis/disinformation; there should be a conscious effort to refine and prioritise credible sources to either reduce or eliminate the amplification of false information. In the same vein, public education campaigns should focus on media and information literacy, critical thinking, and digital citizenship, to empower users to identify and appreciate genuine information.

Transparency and accountability are also vital. Social media platforms should strengthen their internal operations to provide greater transparency in their content moderation and algorithmic process of decision making. Government and civil society should hold social media platforms accountable for the spread of mis/disinformation on social media. Social media platforms that break the law should be made to face the full weight of the law.

The research suggests and amplifies the urgency for immediate action to redress the growing incidence of mis/disinformation on social media in the context of electoral processes and outcomes.

It is pertinent for the government to collaborate with civil society and social media companies to identify,

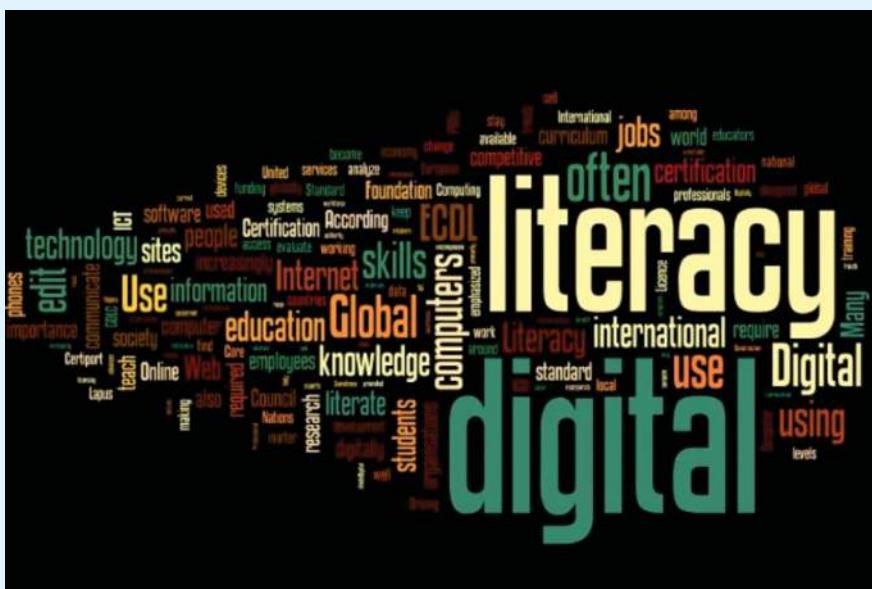
counteract mis/disinformation, and track the sources and trajectory. This intervention is critical and compelling to ensure the integrity of the electoral process and guarantee that democratic outcomes are not imperilled by the growing incidence of mis/disinformation.

Effective and coordinated strategies are important to enhance electoral trustworthiness and must include promotion of media and information literacy, social media platform responsibility, effective and non-partisan legislative instrument to curb mis/disinformation and serve as deterrence for those who infract on the law. The government should promote fact-checking initiatives and independent verification of information to mitigate the impact of mis/disinformation. This will help in inculcating in citizens critical thinking skills that will empower them to discern factual information from mis/disinformation. This is important to ensure the safeguard of the democratic foundations of society.

Undoubtedly, mis/disinformation on social media platforms had significant impact on the 2023 election in Nigeria, from the pre-election period and after. It is important that a multi-faceted approach is adopted with combined regulatory efforts, collaboration with social media tech companies and media and information literacy to engender a more informed electorate and safeguard the integrity of future elections. Government must strengthen the regulatory gaps by enacting effective legislations that would monitor and track social media content and sources and enforce appropriate sanctions to secure the society and deepen democratic culture.

## MITIGATION STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*Mitigating the impact of mis/disinformation requires a multifaceted approach involving individuals, communities, technology platforms, and policymakers*



**M**edia and Information Literacy and education: Government at all tiers, civil society organisations and international organisations should promote media and information literacy programmes among citizens to empower them to critically analyse and evaluate media messages and make informed judgments on information sources. Media and information literacy programmes should be included in the curriculum of schools from primary school to tertiary institutions to inculcate consciousness of the relevance of information to development and democracy.

The ability to critically relate with media and information in general, technically called media and information literacy, has now become essential the same way literacy became essential in fighting illiteracy centuries ago. Media and information literacy (MIL) skills empower citizens, particularly young people who are the digital majority, on how best to use the social media to overcome the menace of mis/disinformation during elections and in other areas of

life. To this end, training institutions should be empowered to engage in training of youth, students, teachers, and practitioners in the information and communication ecosystem.

**Conventional mainstream media (print and electronic)** should adhere strictly to journalism ethics and professionalism in reportage and information dissemination by making correct and true information readily available to citizens. The mainstream media must ensure that information is disseminated to the public to solely protect the public interest. There appears to be wide scepticism about the willingness of mainstream media, for

different reasons, including ownership structure, to provide the public the information they need, fuelling a strong belief among citizens that authentic information can only be sourced from social media. Once the conventional media platforms adhere strictly to professionalism and ethics as the guiding principle, there would be less enthusiasm among citizens to either use social media for sharing information or solely rely on the credibility of the information disseminated on/by social media.

**Fact-checking:** The government, civil society organisations, international partners and other critical stakeholders must make a concerted effort to establish fact-checking organisations that would help citizens to verify information and equally debunk falsehood or propaganda. This would help to contain the excesses that are associated with social media. Awareness must also be created to fact-check information before it is taken as a fact and shared.

**Establishment of a National Media Commission:** Government must consider the creation of this Commission to sanitise the information ecosystem. This Commission should compose of



government nominees, representatives of civil society organisations, the media, educational and research institutions, religious bodies, and other critical stakeholders, to ensure the social media space is closely monitored to ensure that it is not used for purposes that undermine credible information dissemination. The Commission must not be under the absolute control of the government and must be seen as an ombudsman.

**Social Media regulation:** It is important that government must initiate measures to regulate social media. Such intervention measures must be divested of political consideration so as not to muzzle and fetter social media and freedom of expression. Relevant stakeholders must be involved and listened to at every step that would lead to this decision to ensure that intervention measures are products of

inclusive and participatory deliberations. The objective of these regulatory measures would be to curb the spread of mis/disinformation on social media platforms.

**Responsible and Responsive Journalism:** Inclusive intervention measures must be taken by the government and relevant stakeholders to encourage media platforms to consider objectivity, impartiality and accurate information as not only important to reporting but also to the sustenance of society and democracy. This would ensure the cultivation of responsible self-censorship culture to check information that could be damaging to the democratic process and national cohesion.

**Partnership with tech companies:** Government and relevant stakeholders must ensure they work and collaborate with technology companies on content

moderation. This would allow a process of filtering the information mechanism system before it becomes detrimental to society as a whole.

### **Data-based Monitoring**

**Mechanism:** The government and relevant stakeholders must consider an effective process through which data-based organisations are central to containment measures that would either pull down inflammatory stories that promote hate speech or divide the society along ethno-religious cleavages. Setting up a mis/disinformation observatory manned by civil society organisations has become imperative.

This will enable citizens to track and counter mis/disinformation and also name and shame institutions and individuals involved in the act. This role cannot be left for government to avoid the observatory being used for political interest. There is an urgent need to support civil society organisation, including religious organisations, to lead campaigns against mis/disinformation during elections.

**Legal Action:** Government must enforce measures against those who are found guilty spreading mis/disinformation. Such deterrent measures must be divested of political interests.

Intensification of advocacy for policy change and diligent enforcement of existing regulations, laws on media practice, including the law of libel. In most cases it is the failure to enforce existing legal frameworks that fuel impunity.



# HOW TO IDENTIFY FAKE NEWS

You may be wondering how to identify fake news on Facebook and other social media sites? As a student, how to avoid fake news? Or how to avoid accidentally sharing misinformation online? Here are ten tips to identify misinformation, recognize fake news websites, and think before you share:



## Check the source:

Check the web address for the page you're looking at. Sometimes, fake news sites may have spelling errors in the URL or use less conventional domain extensions such as ".infonet" or ".offer". If you are unfamiliar with the site, look in the About Us section.

## Check the author:

Research them to see if they are credible – for example, are they real, do they have a good reputation, are they writing about their specific area of expertise, and do they have a particular agenda? Consider what the writer's motivation might be.

## Check other sources:

Are other reputable news or media outlets reporting on the story? Are credible sources cited within the story? Professional global news agencies have editorial guidelines and extensive resources for fact-checking, so if they are also reporting the story, that's a good sign.

## Maintain a critical mindset:

A lot of fake news is cleverly written to provoke strong emotional reactions such as fear or anger. Maintain a critical mindset by asking yourself – why has this story been written? Is it promoting a particular cause or agenda? Is it

trying to make me click through to another website?

## Check the facts:

Credible news stories will include plenty of facts – data, statistics, quotes from experts, and so on. If these are missing, question why. Reports with false information often contain incorrect dates or altered timelines, so it's a good idea to check when the article was published. Is it a current or old news story?

## Check the comments:

Even if the article or video is legitimate, the comments below may not be. Often links or comments posted in response to content can be autogenerated by

bots or people hired to put our misleading or confusing information.

## Check your own biases:

We all have biases – could these be influencing the way you respond to the article? Social media can create echo chambers by suggesting stories that match your existing browsing habits, interests, and opinions. The more we read from diverse sources and perspectives, the more likely it is that we can draw accurate conclusions.

## Check whether it's a joke:

Satirical websites are popular, and sometimes it is not always clear whether a story is just a joke or parody. Check the website to see if it's known for satire or creating funny stories.

## Check images are authentic:

Images you see on social media could have been edited or manipulated. Possible signs include warping – where straight lines in the background now appear wavy – as well as strange shadows, jagged edges, or skin tone that looks too perfect. Bear in mind, too, that an image may be accurate but simply used in a misleading context. You can use tools such as Google's Reverse Image Search to check where an image originates from and whether it has been altered.



*Use a fact-checking site: Some of the best known include: Snopes, PolitiFact, Fact Check, BBC Reality Check*

*Fake news relies on believers reposting, retweeting, or otherwise sharing false information. If you're not sure whether an article is authentic or not, pause and think before you share. To help stay safe online, use an antivirus solution like Kaspersky Total Security, which protects you from hackers, viruses, malware, and other online threats.*



## Introduction to Media And Information Literacy

**Literacy:** The ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning, wherein individuals are able to achieve their goals, develop their knowledge and potential, and participate fully in their community and wider society.

**Media:** The physical objects used to communicate with, or the mass communication through physical objects such as radio, television, computers, film, Etc. It also refers to any physical object used to communicate messages.

**Media Literacy:** The ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media in a variety of forms. It aims to empower citizens by providing them with the competencies (knowledge and skills) necessary to engage with traditional media and new technologies.

**Information:** A broad term that covers processed data, knowledge derived from study, experience, instruction, signals or symbols.

**Information Literacy:** The ability to recognize when information is needed, and to locate, evaluate, and effectively communicate information in its various formats.

**Technology Literacy:** The ability of an individual, either working independently or with others, to responsibly, appropriately, and effectively use technological tools. Using these tools an individual can access, manage, integrate, evaluate, create and communicate information.

Source: <https://www.studypool.com/documents/21897469/media-and-information-literacy-grade-12-reviewer>