

Public Awareness of the Implications of AI in the Proliferation of Disinformation on Public Safety and Nigeria's National Security

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Abstract

The study examined public awareness of the effects of AI-proliferated misinformation on national security and public safety in Nigeria. Agenda Setting Theory served as the study's foundation. Both primary and secondary sources provided data. Questionnaires were used to survey samples of 385 respondents who live in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) in Abuja. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The results of the study demonstrated that the emergence and domination of information and communication technology, especially social media, in the information environment of the twenty-first century have increased the spread of misinformation. The spread of misinformation by AI affects both national security and public safety. In particular, the speed with which AI-enabled cyber-tools could be used, as well as the possibility for a single algorithm to propagate false information, is now being used to spread misinformation. AI-driven disinformation spreads fear throughout society. Social media misinformation has the potential to influence societal ethnicity and religion. It enables criminals to access public information for heinous activities. To combat insecurity in Nigeria, the government should be practical and use AI specialists on all fronts.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, disinformation, public safety, national security and Nigeria.

Introduction

In contrast to the natural intelligence exhibited by humans and animals, artificial intelligence (AI) technology, sometimes known as machine intelligence, refers to the type of intelligence expressed by machines. Although many nations, particularly industrialised ones, have already embraced it in the twenty-first century, many Nigerians remain unfamiliar with the notion (Zakari, 2024). Since at least World War II, autonomous systems utilising artificial intelligence (AI) have been employed in combat. As enabling technologies have advanced, so too has the amount of human control that is delegated to these systems (Okezie, 2019). Land mines and other very basic devices that use a sensor to initiate an autonomous military operation have been in use for centuries.

Computers have been increasingly responsible for using force in recent decades (Roff, 2016). AI technology is the ability of machines, particularly computer systems like speech recognition and machine vision, to simulate human intelligence processes. It is a branch of computer science that focuses on building intelligent devices, including robots (Hoehn & Smagh, 2021), that can work and react like people and carry out human-like tasks (Cavus et al., 2021).

This study emerged from the challenges that artificial intelligence poses in light of the globalisation and expansion of information technology, which has led to security issues. Nigerians depended on conventional media as a reliable and legitimate source of information before the rise of social media. This is because traditional media outlets give the general public well-considered, gate-kept, and thoroughly researched stories. Under this arrangement, democracy blossomed beautifully. Social media gives people the flexibility to produce and share content however they see fit. This contemporary model has been abused for several petty and self-serving motives (Oloyede & Esimokha, 2018). It provides the public with protection from order and confidentiality. As a result, some dishonest people with a hidden agenda publish and spread false information on social media.

Such news has led to economic threats, political unrest, social unrest, and public chaos (Radulov, 2019). Because Nigeria has a large and diverse population, false news may pose a threat to the country's developing democracy (Adegboyega & Obun, 2022). Understanding the extent of AI compliance in Nigeria and its implications for national security are the main reasons for this research. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to raise public awareness of the potential of AI in the spread of false information that may threaten Nigeria's national security and public safety.

Problem Statement

Before the rise of social media, Nigerians depended on conventional media as a reliable and legitimate source of information. This is due to the fact that traditional media outlets give the general public well-considered, gate-kept, and thoroughly researched stories (Pate, 2018). Under this arrangement, democracy blossomed beautifully.

Social media gives people the flexibility to produce and share content however they see fit. This contemporary model has been abused for several petty and self-serving motives. It provides the public with protection from order and confidentiality. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has entered the technological information space, making social media more pervasive and faster in the dissemination of information using algorithms that strengthen the information echo chamber. The internet, which has been saturated with fake and hoax news, providing a platform for disinformation, is now equipped with AI, making it more susceptible to issues of public safety and national security. Thus, some dishonest elements with ulterior motives use social media to publish and disseminate fake news, which has caused public chaos, communal conflicts, political turmoil, and economic threats.

It is worth noting that many of the mundane office tasks of security agencies can be performed by intelligent security devices, provided they have high-quality computerised systems with AI capabilities. As a result, new reservations are being made to enhance police presence in urban areas. However, it is well known that Nigeria's security apparatus does not completely use AI-enabled technologies in its operations (Nsude, 2022). It is believed that terrorists, bandits, and others utilise social media to spread false information. The Internet's widespread use and society's insatiable desire for connectedness create security issues that are always changing in tandem with the quick advancement of technology, which is now significantly affecting both national security

and public safety. Therefore, this study will use the survey to understand public awareness of the implications of AI in the disinformation war on public safety and national security.

Research Objectives

The study aims to investigate public awareness of the implications of AI in the disinformation war on public safety and national security. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To investigate what motivates individuals to disseminate false information on social media.
2. To assess public awareness of the effects of the spread of misinformation by AI on national security and public safety

Literature Review

Social Media and Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Social media platforms continue to be a vital resource for communication, idea sharing, and information distribution. Improvements and developments over the past few years have made them more accessible and user-friendly. Users can exchange and spread information online using social media platforms. According to Okafor & Onyenekwe (2020), social media are essentially internet-based platforms that promote cooperation, communication, sharing, teamwork, and connection. These platforms are now among the most widely used means of communication and information sharing for people of all ages, genders, and nationalities. Unquestionably, social media platforms are among the best means of disseminating information and advanced instruments for communication, exchange, mobilisation, and public education (Okafor & Onyenekwe, 2020).

Artificial intelligence refers to the technology that allows machines, particularly computer systems like speech recognition and machine vision, to simulate human intelligence processes. The development of intelligent devices, such as robots, that function and behave like humans and carry out human-performed tasks is the focus of this branch of computer science (Uwadileke, 2019). Therefore, the study of computations that enable perception, reasoning, and action is known as artificial intelligence or the automation of processes like learning, problem-solving, and decision-making that are linked to human thought. According to Russell & Norvig (2020), artificial intelligence (AI) refers to systems that can learn from experience, adapt to new data, and perform tasks autonomously under uncertain conditions, often with minimal human oversight. Many people are concerned that AI robots will replace them in their jobs, but more people are still needed in the workforce to perform various tasks and functions, particularly in the area of security, according to the ICT expert, who is hopeful that AI won't replace jobs that need to be done by humans. AI will only begin to perform hazardous or boring tasks. If nothing else, humans and machines will cooperate.

Artificial Intelligence and the Spread of Disinformation

Social media and conventional media are two categories of information media. Social media has grown in popularity due to artificial intelligence, making it a vital instrument for the spread of knowledge. For example, because they supply more data than traditional media, they can improve the decision-making process and may occasionally be used as a tool for information distribution. Since conflict and drama sell and draw an audience, social media portrayals can sometimes serve to exacerbate the narrative of oppositional forces and irreconcilable, value-based differences. AI has become a vehicle for false and inflammatory messages and values that do not promote respect or well-tempered dialogue and discussion. Negative messages can help perpetuate the stereotypes that foster violence and divide communities (Zakari, 2024).

Common sense can be manipulated by artificial intelligence. For example, the quality and cost of AI-enhanced audio and video media forgeries are fast improving. The foundation of trust in many institutions will be threatened in the future by AI-generated forgeries (Allen & Taniel 2017). Therefore, artificial intelligence (AI) presents significant hazards since it may be significantly more adept than computers at altering content, creating fake images, producing doctor speech that accurately mimics tone and rhythm, and producing films that are difficult, if not impossible, to tell apart from the real thing (CRS, 2020).

Nigeria's National Security and Public Safety

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), enduring challenges such as hunger, illness, and oppression are all part of human security. Security is the protection of daily living patterns in homes, workplaces, or societies from unseen and detrimental disruptions. Another way to define security is the condition of being shielded from harm, etc. According to Wehmeier & Ashby (2002), security can alternatively be defined as protection against potential future events or as the actions involved in protecting a country, a structure, or its citizens from hazards. Security must be linked to the presence of tranquillity, safety, contentment, and the preservation of material possessions rather than the lack of emergencies, threats of damage, etc. Peace could facilitate advancement. In quantitative terms, security cannot be measured or expressed as a fraction. Spending on security, however, can be used as a stand-in to assess the security level if it is effective. The President or Governor takes an oath to safeguard life and property, among other things, at the beginning of every government. Because of this, the Nigerian government (at all levels) places a high premium on security.

According to Torulagha (2004), good governance is a component of national security, as its significance is diminished if it is not fully realised. Economic disparity, environmental problems, terrorism and the spread of weaponry, global health challenges, worldwide migration, natural resources, etc., are now recognised by the rest of the globe. The entirety of a country's actions to protect itself as a sovereign entity, encompassing all facets of its life and existence, is referred to as national security (Okafor & Malizu, 2014). This implies that the welfare of a country's institutions, interests, development plans, economy, and citizens can all be impacted by its national security. In addition to these, it covers matters like food security, national image, and the physical protection of a country's citizens, landscape, and independence.

Given the definition and ramifications of national security, it is critical to emphasise that it is an issue that affects a country's stability, progress, well-being, and posture. According to Okafor & Malizu (2014), it outlines the entirety of a country's endeavours from sociopolitical, cultural, economic, and global viewpoints. Thus, national security is a topic that reflects a country's position in the world in areas such as the protection of its citizens, freedom and well-being, property and intelligence safety, national integrity, sovereignty, and international interests. All of these contribute to the general stability and harmonious cohabitation of the country's citizens as well as that of the country internationally.

Protecting national values is the goal of national security. Furthermore, survival, self-preservation, and self-perpetuation are the most fundamental values of any nation. Therefore, Nigeria's national security objective has always been to contain domestic unrest and drive out external hostility. The state and military might be the main focus of such a paradigm. According to the National Defence Authorisation Act's (NDAA) (2019) memo to the Presidential Committee on National Security in Nigeria, national security in its broadest sense thus denotes the lack of threats to people's lives, property, and socioeconomic well-being.

Implications of Disinformation to National Security

Disinformation is not a new phenomenon; it has existed for as long as anyone can remember. However, it has intensified recently due to several factors, including widespread internet use, low-cost access to social media channels, competitive politics, increasing poverty, and ethno-religious rivalry.

Nigeria is a country in turmoil, with security concerns in many parts of the country. These threats manifest as multiple conflicts, systemic and massive corruption, crippling poverty, weak governance, secession threats, perceived marginalization, anxiety, hostility, and economic crises in a time when the importance of false information is growing - the so-called post-truth era (Harsin, 2018). These issues are brutally, slowly, and ruthlessly destroying relationships, inflaming enmities across societies, and jeopardising the nation's democratic preservation (Pate, 2018).

Recent changes in the country's political landscape point to new developments and unique challenges facing the democratic system. Generally speaking, the nation's current political culture is inextricably linked to the information and communication technologies' (ICT) explosive growth (Audu, 2018). Fake news has the potential to mislead the public and exacerbate an already tense political environment by occasionally provoking retaliatory and communal security breaches. Nevertheless, the spread of fake news can be curtailed if the media cultivates a culture of fact-checking and verifying information before going to press.

On the dysfunctional side, media surveillance may cause unwarranted worry, indicating that this functionality may have two sides. The speed at which the media spreads information and the worldwide coverage of topics, especially on social media, are the main issues that this study is concerned with. For example, protesters carried out demonstrations in every state simultaneously during the End-SARS rally, the rate at which information circulated throughout the Federation was astounding. Social media, with the introduction of algorithms and AI, makes information from every quarter circulate easily in the country. Bandits, terrorists, kidnappers and even traffickers are using social media to spread propaganda content. Videos from these criminals abound on social media.

At the moment, nothing seems to threaten the peace and tranquillity of the Nigerian State like the menace of fake news because it has emerged as the propeller to the forces that engender insecurity. This position was acknowledged by Nigerian former Minister of Information Lia Mohammed, who submitted that fake news threatens the peace, security and corporate existence of Nigeria, describing it as a time bomb waiting to explode.

Theoretical Framework

The study was underpinned by the arguments of Agenda setting theory, propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, who originally used the phrase "agenda setting" in *Public Opinion Quarterly* in 1972 (McQuail & Deuze, 2020). According to the thesis, the media are tools that are used to shape public opinion by highlighting certain issues and persuading people that they are significant. Social media accomplishes this by regularly covering and/or elevating particular concerns. The implication is that the more frequently and prominently a disinformation piece is promoted on social media, the more significant it is to readers. To put it another way, the public problems are caused by the misinformation in the media.

As a result, the public is exposed to the negative effects of misinformation as social media places a greater emphasis on it. This explains why terrorists and bandits are using artificial intelligence (AI) to disseminate information on social media. The idea was also deemed appropriate for this study because social media can raise public awareness of significant

insurgency issues and the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) to prevent militants from winning the conflict.

Methodology

In order to give the public accurate and factual information on the emerging patterns of AI's roles in disinformation about Nigerians' safety and national security, this study used a quantitative survey research design. The population in the FCT, Abuja's AMAC and Bwari Area Councils is therefore the general public. Survey research was deemed most suitable for this study since it enabled the researchers to gather a wealth of information from the study participants.

The study investigates the interrelationships between variables, enabling explanatory conclusions to be drawn about public awareness of the implications of AI in the spread of misinformation on national security and public safety among young people in AMAC and the Bwari Area Council of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014). All of the young people living in the Abuja Municipal Area Council and Bwari Area Council, Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, made up the study's population.

According to data from Worldometre (2024), there are roughly 925,936 youths in total in Abuja Municipal Area Council and 261898 youngsters in Bwari Area Council. 1,187,834 young people made up the study's total sample size. With a 95% confidence level, a 5% error margin, a 50% population proportion, and a population size of 1,187,834, the sample size for this study was 385, as determined by the online sample size determination tool SurveyMonkey (2024) (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/sample-size-calculator/>).

Three hundred and seventy-three (373) respondents completed the questionnaire and were deemed useful for the analysis. This study used a multistage sampling technique to sample respondents, first selecting four towns from the Abuja Municipal Area Council and three towns from the Bwari Area Council, respectively, resulting in seven major towns being sampled in the study. Purposive sampling was chosen over other sampling techniques because it allowed for the inclusion of towns that were more prominent and had a higher population of youths. Therefore, univariate frequency distribution tables and basic percentages were used to examine the acquired data. To prevent errors from manual computations, SPSS was employed as a statistical tool for data analysis.

Results

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Demographic Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Age Group		
Less than 31 years old	127	34.0
31-40 Years Old	91	24.4
41-50 years Old	124	33.2
Above 50 years Old	31	8.3
Total (M=33.1, SD=8.4, Min =19, Max=62)	373	100.0

Gender		
Male	219	58.7
Female	154	40.3
Total	373	100.0
Education Completed		
Secondary School	15	4.0
Diploma/NEC	89	23.8
HND/Bachelor's Degree	137	36.7
Post Graduate (PGD, MSc & PhD)	132	35.4
Total	373	100.0

Source: Researchers' field work, 2025

The respondents in this study are evenly distributed between digital natives, digital immigrants, and digital settlers, though with some degree of overlap. For gender, male respondents were slightly ahead of female and the majority of the respondents had attended some level of tertiary education.

Research Question One: What motivates people to use social media to promote false information?

The first objective garners responses on what motivates people to use social media to distribute false information. Table 2 provides the details:

Table 2: The Factors that lead people to spread Disinformation via social media

Factors	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD	OVERALL (%)
For Self-promotion	9.2	14.3	7.6	30.3	38.6	3.75	1.34	75
Gaining more followers on social media	6.2	8.9	10.0	33.8	41.1	3.95	1.19	79
To create panic among the public	7.8	6.5	7.8	24.3	53.5	4.09	1.25	81.8
Haste to break news	7.8	15.1	10.3	19.7	47.0	3.83	1.36	76.6
To draw attention of the public	6.5	14.3	5.1	24.1	50.0	3.97	1.31	79.4
TOTAL						3.92	1.29	78.4

Source: Researchers field work 2025 Note: 2.5 is the cut-off point between agreement & disagreement on table

The data in Table 2 shows that to create panic among the public is the major factor that motivate people to spread disinformation via social media ($M=4.09$, $SD=1.25$). Also, gaining more followers on social media is another factor ($M=3.95$, $SD=1.19$), drawing of public attention ($M=3.97$, $SD=1.31$), self-promotion ($M=3.75$, $SD=1.34$) and to break news ($M=3.83$, $SD=1.36$). Therefore, people spread disinformation on social media so as to achieve selfish objectives.

Research Question 2: Are the public aware of the implications of AI generated disinformation on public safety and national security?

The second objective examines public awareness of the implications AI proliferation of disinformation on public safety and national security. Table 3 provides the details.

Table 3: Respondents' views on their awareness of the implications of AI proliferation of disinformation on public safety and national security.

Implications	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD	OVERALL (%)
Disinformation pushed by AI creates panic in society	4.6	8.1	5.7	33.8	47.8	4.12	1.12	82.4
Disinformation on social media can lead to ethnic and religious tensions in society	4.6	10.0	10.3	30.8	44.3	4.00	1.17	80
Disinformation can result in jungle justice in society	5.9	6.8	5.4	37.0	44.9	4.08	1.14	81.6
Makes bandits and terrorists gain popularity	0.0	19.5	8.9	23.0	48.6	4.02	1.18	80.4
The potential for disinformation can be propagated by a single algorithm, as well as the speed of AI-enabled cyber tools	4.6	8.1	5.7	33.8	47.8	4.12	1.12	82.4
Privacy and ethical issues which compromise citizens' personal information	13.2	13.8	15.1	28.9	28.9	3.46	1.38	69.2
AI enable bandits and terrorists to get local and international collaborators	9.2	14.9	7.8	29.7	38.4	3.73	1.35	74.6
The safety of the citizens is being compromised	6.2	8.9	10.5	33.2	41.1	3.94	1.20	78.8
Criminals have access to public information	5.9	6.8	5.4	37.0	44.9	4.08	1.14	81.6
TOTAL						3.91	1.22	78.14

Source: Researchers' field work 2025 Note: 2.5 is the cut-off point between agreement & disagreement on the table

Generally, the study shows that the majority of the respondents (78.14%) agreed on the implications of AI proliferation of disinformation on public safety and national security ($M=3.91$, $SD=1.22$), specifically, the potential for disinformation propagated by a single algorithm as well as the speed of AI-enabled cyber tools ($M=4.12$, $SD=1.12$). Disinformation pushed by AI create panic in the society ($M=4.12$, $SD=1.2$); disinformation on social media can lead to ethnicity and religious tension in the society ($M=4.00$, $SD=1.17$); criminals can access public information ($M=4.08$, $SD=1.14$) bandits and terrorists gain popularity ($M=4.02$, $SD=1.12$); get local and international collaborators ($M=3.73$, $SD=1.35$); the safety of the citizens is being compromise ($M=3.94$, $SD=1.20$); therefore, the public is aware of the implications of AI proliferation of disinformation on public safety and national security.

Discussion

The result of this study, as indicated in Table 1, showed that the factors responsible for spreading disinformation are self-promotion, gaining more followers on social media and intention to create panic among the public, as 78.14% of the respondents agreed. Also, 78.14% of respondents agreed that some of the negative implications of disinformation include the creation of panic, ethnic and religious tension in society. This result corroborates the study of Adegboyega & Obun (2022), who found that fake news on social media has negative implications for Nigeria's national security.

AI proliferation of disinformation on public safety and national security, as 78.14% of respondents agreed, as shown in Table 3. Specifically, the potential for disinformation to be propagated by a single algorithm, as well as the speed of AI, is enabled by these cyber tools. Disinformation pushed by AI can create panic in society, as agreed by 82% of the respondents. Disinformation on social media can lead to ethnic and religious tensions in society. Criminals having access to public information will make society susceptible; bandits and terrorists will gain popularity. AI enables bandits and terrorists to get local and international collaborators and the safety of the citizens is being compromised. This aligns with the finding of Allen & Taniel (2017) that artificial intelligence has a role to play in national security.

Conclusion

The results of the study demonstrated that some of the elements that cause disinformation include self-promotion, acquiring more social media followers, and the desire to incite public fear. Additionally, the study's findings demonstrated that misinformation can cause panic in society, ethnic and religious conflicts and jungle justice. The emergence and domination of information and communication technology, especially social media, in the information environment of the twenty-first century has increased the spread of misinformation. Although it may be challenging to completely remove the overall pattern of disinformation, if all parties involved are committed to doing everything within their power, its negative consequences can be minimised or controlled, thus, AI could significantly reduce the capacity to disseminate concepts that endanger national security and public safety. As a result, intelligence operations will have access to more sources than before, for determining the truth. The quality and cost of AI-enhanced audio and video media forgeries are rapidly improving. The foundation of trust in many institutions will be threatened in the future by AI-generated forgeries. Furthermore, the role of the media in information dissemination was highlighted. They are expected to create awareness on the use of AI in combating insecurity.

Recommendations

1. Since AI has implications for national security, Nigeria's government should use AI specialists on all fronts in an effort to combat insecurity.

2. There should be continuous awareness creation on the ill effects of disinformation on social media so that the general public's AI literacy can be enhanced.
3. The media should make a concerted effort to promote media literacy so that the general public can distinguish between facts and fiction.

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