

**MODELLING THE FACTORS THAT PREDICT  
FAKE NEWS SHARING BEHAVIOUR AMONG  
SOCIAL MEDIA USERS IN NIGERIA: THE  
MODERATING ROLE OF FAKE NEWS  
AWARENESS**

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**UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA**

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by

**APUKE OBERIRI DESTINY**

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AVE	average variance extracted
CB-SEM	covariance based structural equation modelling
CFA	confirmatory factor analysis
CI	confidence interval
CI BC	confidence interval bias-corrected
CMC	computer-mediated communication
CMV	common method variance
DOI	Diffusion of Innovations
EFA	exploratory factor analysis
ELIS	everyday life information-seeking
$f^2$	effect size
HTMT	Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations
KS	Kolmogorov-Smirnov
LL	lower limit
M	Mean
M	mediator
M	moderator
MAE	mean absolute error
MAPE	mean absolute percentage error
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Squares (Structural Equation Modeling)
$Q^2$	predictive relevance
$R^2$	coefficient of determination
RMSE	root mean square error
RSS	Really Simple Syndication
SNS	social networking sites
SmartPLS	Smart Partial Least Squares
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SD	standard deviation
SE	standard error
U&G	Uses and Gratifications
UGC	user-generated content
UL	upper limit
VIF	variance inflation factor

## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

Appendix A

Questionnaire

**MEMODELKAN FAKTOR-FAKTOR YANG MEMPENGARUHI  
PERAMALAN TINGKAH LAKU PERKONGSIAN BERITA PALSU DALAM  
KALANGAN PENGGUNA MEDIA SOSIAL DI NIGERIA: PERANAN  
PEMANGKIN KESEDARAN TERHADAP BERITA PALSU**

**ABSTRAK**

Meskipun kesedaran tentang berita palsu di media sosial meningkat, kajian yang memfokuskan tingkahlaku perkongsian berita palsu adalah terhad, terutamanya di negara-negara membangun. Justeru, bagi mengisi lompong ini, kajian ini cuba meneliti faktor orang ramai berkongsi berita palsu dan cara mencegah penyebarannya melalui kesedaran awam di Nigeria. Kajian ini membangunkan model komprehensif yang merangkumi pelbagai faktor bagi menjelaskan sebab warga Nigeria cenderung kepada perkongsian berita palsu dalam talian. Dalam membangunkan model ramalan komprehensif perkongsian berita palsu, kajian ini telah mengenal pasti beberapa faktor yang diperolehi daripada kajian terdahulu mengenai perkongsian berita dan teori yang berkaitan untuk memasukkan faktor motivasi (teori kegunaan dan kepuasan) pengguna (individu), faktor persekitaran dalam talian (teori modal sosial), faktor medium (teori kegunaan dan kepuasan), dan faktor kandungan/mesej (teori penyebaran inovasi). Kajian ini diperluaskan lagi untuk menguji peranan *kesedaran berita palsu* (pembolehubah penyederhana) dalam mengurangkan penyebaran berita palsu serta menggunakan *konstruk tingkah laku perkongsian berita* sebagai pembolehubah pengantara antara faktor motivasi individu, faktor medium, faktor persekitaran dalam talian, faktor kandungan/mesej dan tingkah laku perkongsian berita palsu. Oleh itu, kajian ini dibahagikan kepada ujian statistik lima kali ganda, iaitu pada asasnya

merupakan ujian kesan langsung, kesan pengantaraan, dan penyederhanaan. Dengan menggunakan persampelan bola salji, kajian ini telah merekrut sejumlah 664 pengguna media sosial di seluruh zon geopolitik Nigeria. Data diperolehi daripada responden melalui tinjauan dalam talian (survey monkey) dan kemudiannya dianalisis menggunakan model laluan PLS. Hasil dapatan menunjukkan bahawa faktor mesej adalah peramal terkuat bagi kedua-dua perkongsian berita dan perkongsian berita palsu dalam kalangan pengguna media sosial di Nigeria. Keputusan selanjutnya menunjukkan faktor pengguna dan persekitaran dalam talian juga menyumbang kepada peramalan tingkah laku perkongsian berita dan tingkah laku perkongsian berita palsu. Walau bagaimanapun, kajian ini tidak menyokong pengaruh faktor medium terhadap perkongsian berita dan tingkah laku perkongsian berita palsu. Berkenaan dengan analisis pengantaraan, keputusan menunjukkan bahawa tingkah laku perkongsian berita menjadi pengantara bagi perhubungan di antara persekitaran dalam talian, pengguna, faktor mesej dan perkongsian berita palsu, tetapi ia tidak menjadi pengantara bagi perhubungan di antara faktor medium dan tingkah laku perkongsian berita palsu. Kajian ini juga mendapati bahawa kesedaran berita palsu menyederhanakan hubungan antara tingkah laku perkongsian berita dan perkongsian berita palsu, dengan individu yang mempunyai kesedaran berita palsu yang rendah lebih cenderung untuk berkongsi berita palsu. Perhubungan adalah lebih kuat bagi mereka yang mempunyai tahap kesedaran berita palsu rendah berbanding mereka yang melaporkan tahap kesedaran berita palsu yang tinggi. Kajian ini dirumuskan dengan beberapa sumbangan teori, praktikal dan metodologi. Sumbangan yang paling utama adalah pembangunan model komprehensif peramalan perkongsian berita dan perkongsian berita palsu, yang mampu mencambahkan lagi perbincangan ilmiah. Namun, kajian ini mempunyai beberapa limitasi. Pertama, kajian ini menggunakan



persampelan bola salji yang dikritik sebagai kaedah persampelan berat sebelah. Kajian akan datang disarankan menggunakan kaedah persampelan lain seperti persampelan pelbagai-peringkat (multi-stage) dan kluster. Kedua, kajian ini membuat rumusan berdasarkan faktor-faktor yang dikaji, penyelidik akan datang disarankan untuk meneroka lebih banyak faktor untuk mengembangkan keserjanaan dalam memahami tingkahlaku penyebaran berita palsu.

**MODELLING THE FACTORS THAT PREDICT FAKE NEWS  
SHARING BEHAVIOUR AMONG SOCIAL MEDIA USERS IN NIGERIA:  
THE MODERATING ROLE OF FAKE AWARENESS**

**ABSTRACT**

Despite the growing scholarship on fake news on social media, there have been limited studies that have focused on understanding fake news sharing behaviour, especially in developing countries. To fill this gap, this study attempts to realise why people share fake news and how to prevent its spread via public awareness in the Nigerian context. Thus, the study developed a comprehensive model that encompassed various possible factors to explain why Nigerians tend to share fake news online. The study identified several factors that were derived from earlier investigations on news sharing and relevant theories to include user (individual) motivational factors (uses and gratifications theory) online environmental factor (social capital theory) medium factor (uses and gratifications theory); and content/message factor (diffusion of innovation theory), to develop a comprehensive predictive model of fake news sharing. The study further extended to test the role of *fake news awareness* (moderating variable) in reducing fake news dissemination as well as used *news sharing behaviour construct* as a mediating variable between individual motivational factor, online environmental factor medium factor, content/message factor and fake news sharing behaviour. Thus, the study is divided into five-fold statistical testing, which is the test of direct effects, mediating effects, and moderations. Using snowball sampling, the study recruited a total of 664 social media users across Nigerian geopolitical zones. The data was obtained from the respondents via an online survey (*survey monkey*) and later analysed using PLS path modelling. Results indicated that message factors are

the strongest predictors of both news sharing and fake news sharing among social media users in Nigeria. The further outcome indicated that the user and online environment factors also predicted news sharing behaviour and fake news sharing behaviour. However, the study did not support the influence of medium factors on news sharing and fake news sharing behaviour. With regards to the mediation analysis, results showed that news sharing behaviour mediated the relationship between the online, user, message factors and fake news sharing, but it did not mediate the relationship between medium factors and fake news sharing behaviour. It was also found that fake news awareness moderated the relationship between news sharing behaviour and fake news sharing, in such a way that those with low fake news awareness tend to share fake news more. That is the relationship was stronger for those with low fake news awareness compared to those who reported high fake news awareness. This study concluded with some theoretical, practical, and methodological contributions. The most notable is the development of a comprehensive model that predicts news sharing and fake news sharing, which could extend the scholarly debate. This study has some limitations. Firstly, this study used snowballing sampling which has been criticised due to its sampling bias. Future studies could use other sampling methods such as multistage and cluster sampling. Secondly, this study can only conclude based on the factors studied, future researchers should explore more factors to extend the scholarship in understanding fake news sharing behaviour.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to The Study

Fake news is online misinformation organized and shared to make it look credible and real to the public (Mustafaraj & Metaxas, 2017). It is also regarded as fabricated news found in social media, mainstream news and fake news websites, without basis, but presented as being accurate (Metzger et al., 2021). Janze and Risius (2017) view it as fictitious information to delude readers without providing objective facts. According to Chakrabarti et al. (2018, p.7), it covers “all types of misleading news from sport to politics, and indeed covers all forms of misinformation including rumours”. According to Duffy et al. (2019), fake news is concocted information that mimics genuine news and is presented tactfully to influence the public. Another research viewed fake news as fallacious information which includes mythologies, gossip, conspiracy theories, hoaxes, and misleading or inaccurate content deliberately or inadvertently circulated on social media platforms (Wang et al., 2019).

Fake news has been in existence for a long time, nearly the same time as news circulation began after the printing press was invented (Mirzaei et al., 2019). The advent of fake news can be traced after the invention of the printing press in the 15th century, where news (both real and fake) was able to spread faster as newspapers and other documents could be produced quicker than handwriting (Nelson & Taneja, 2018). One notable example of fake news incidence involved George II, the King of Great Britain and Ireland in mid 1700s, who has been reported to be ill in order to amplify the rebellion move at that time (Chakrabarti et al., 2018). Although the rebellion was not successful, the fake news had harmed the King’s public image (Fletcher et al., 2018) and affected the people and the country.

Even though fake news has always existed in some form or another, it is now more prominent and prevalent than ever before (Talwar et al., 2019), and as a result, the spread of fake news has become a worldwide problem (McGonagle, 2017). Supporting this view, past research also argued that false news is not new, but it has become more bothersome as social media now permits easy communication and dissemination of information (Zhou & Zafarani, 2018). Since users of social media can now propagate ideas and information via retweets, shares and likes, they are exposed to an overwhelming amount of information/news coming from independent sources (Apuke & Omar, 2021a). As a result, social media has become a platform for quickly disseminating misinformation and false content (El Rayess et al., 2018b). Another research has also proven that social media is a powerful device for the dissemination of a large quantity of unfiltered information (Lazer et al., 2018), permitting a misinformation phenomenon and subsequently exasperating the likelihood of manipulating the people's discernment of the realism between fake and real news (Ireton & Posetti, 2018). As a result, social media is considered the "lifeblood of false information," as it allows anybody to distribute viral fake stories to people at a minimal cost (Klein & Wueller, 2017).

Furthermore, research has indicated that the spread of fake news is now a major concern throughout the world, and social media platforms facilitate the increasing prevalence of such misinformation, making the evaluation of the credibility of online news content more difficult (Leeder, 2019). This suggests that it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish which news is true and which is false, and one major concern about false information is its rapid spread (Haug & Gewald, 2018). Thus, the widespread of fake news content online hurts both individuals and society at large. It tends to hamper the authenticity balance of the news ecosystem. It also

persuades people to accept unfair and false ideas and as well alters the way people interpret and respond to real news content (Shu et al., 2017). This implies that news consumers' perception regarding news quality and sources has been altered, and the affordance of social media where everyone can be a reporter or author of news has also made it possible to spread fake news (Kruikemeier & Lecheler, 2018). According to one recent study, false news and its speedy spread is now a foremost subject in this age of social media, where anonymity and self-created content promote fakes news sharing (Talwar et al., 2020).

Scholars have paid attention to find solutions to address fake news menace in today's digital environment. Many argue that media literacy (Bulger & Davison, 2018; Marwick, 2018) could go a long way in curtailing fake news. To curtail fake news, this current study introduced and established fake news awareness which is a subsidiary of media literacy. Torres et al. (2018, p. 86) advocated that "as individuals become aware that news items from a particular source and media may be misleading, at best they may perceive that source to be incompetent and may begin to question the integrity of the source or media". This proposes that high fake news awareness may reduce the likelihood of fake news sharing (Apuke & Omar, 2020a). Fake news awareness is seen in this study as the knowledge of fake news and the skills to be able to identify fake news found on social media. Past researchers found that better media literacy and awareness of fake news will minimise the spread of misinformation on social media (Bulger & Davison, 2018; Marwick, 2018). Individuals have the power to combat misinformation by becoming better media literate via critical thinking and scepticism which leads to the rejection of misinformation (Maksl et al., 2017; Kahne & Bowyer, 2017). Recent research found that much of the spread of fake news on social media is attributed to human action, suggesting that people come across false information on

social media and actively circulate or consume it (Buchanan, 2020). Thus, the role of fake news awareness can never be overemphasized.

Fake news in this social media age requires serious attention because it leads individuals to be misinformed through the presentation of false information about different aspects of life. And this issue is increasing due to the increase in social media users (Gjylbegaj, 2018). Generally, one interesting question that has attracted the attention of many people today is why do people want to share information and news online, “what makes them click the share button” ? (Gjylbegaj, 2018). The next section provides an overview of what generally motivates sharing on social media as well as highlights some factors that predict fake news sharing.

### **1.1.1 Online News Sharing and its Predictors**

News content does not disseminate on its own, but rather individuals actively decide to send, post or share any given information (Ihm & Kim, 2018). Evidence suggests that online information sharing is now occurring at a rapid pace. This indicates that a large number of people go online to share different information ranging from photos, videos, ideas, philosophies, status updates, opinions and even views and emotions (Khan & Idris, 2019). Consequently, in today's online-driven community, consuming online information has become the norm. An increasing number of individuals get their news via social media instead of reliable news sources. According to one 2017 study, two-thirds of Americans reported getting the majority of their news from social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (Jeffrey et al., 2017).

An increasing body of scholarships on news sharing among social media users have acknowledged some motivational factors that forecast sharing behaviour. For example, Lee et al. (2011) found informativeness to be the most striking motivation for sharing news online. This suggests that people have a habit of attributing news sharing as a suitable way of seeking and retrieving information and social media provides the avenue for people to access pertinent news content. This is in line with the previous research that identifies status-seeking and information sharing as the primary motivators for people to share news online (Thompson et al., 2019).

Furthermore, Ma et al. (2014) found that opinion leadership, tie strength, online networks, and online news interest all have significant effects on social media users' intentions to share the news. While perceived news credibility and homophily were not found to predict news sharing. Similarly, Anr et al. (2014) found entertainment, information seeking, socialization, and status-seeking to be strong motivations and predictors for sharing news online. This infers that individual might disseminate news to store important information, keeping up to date with current trends, while others may share news to exchange ideas with people. Others may as well share news content to obtain status and feel important. Likewise, another study confirms that people share news to provide information, entertain themselves and socialize (Sihombing, 2017)

While extant research on news sharing provides valuable insights into the motivation for news sharing among social media such as socialization, entertainment, status-seeking, information sharing, and information seeking. These studies were frequently carried out in accordance with the uses and gratifications framework. According to these studies, news sharing is primarily motivated by general media use motivations as well as basic social and psychological needs. Additionally, most of these studies focused largely on the individual motivational factors (socialization,



entertainment, information sharing, status-seeking, and information seeking). It has been suggested that information sharing has different levels of influence to include individual, message/content, online community, and medium influence (Ma et al., 2014). Such diverse influence could likewise prompt people to share the news. Further studies are required to explore factors that motivate or prompt people into sharing news beyond the individual motivating factors that are rooted in UGT (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2017). Thus, more research is needed to integrate and explore theories that could improve our knowledge of news sharing on media platforms. Such studies will provide a more comprehensive understanding of individuals sharing motivations within the social media ecosystem. Even though fake news is attracting the attention of many researchers, studies conducted on news sharing behaviour paid attention to the factors that influence news sharing without extending to find out if these factors or motives tend to predict fake news sharing. More empirical studies are therefore required to ascertain if general news sharing motivation found in extant literature could as well lead to fake news sharing. It should be noted that news sharing and fake news sharing are not the same. News sharing is the sharing of an account of recent, dramatic, significant, and interesting event that affect people (Tandoc et al., 2018; Kershner, 2011). As such, it has been attributed to an output of journalism expected to encompass an accurate, reliable, comprehensive and independent information (Bill, 2007). While fake news sharing has to do with intentional or unintentional sharing of information/news that is not genuine, yet, presented and expected to be conceived as true (Fletcher et al., 2018).

In general, prior studies indicate some factors that encourage the spread of fake news on social media. Most often, the factors were derived from the process of communication that include the sender/receiver, the medium and the message. This

study examined each important element of communication process ranges from user, medium, online environment and message factors to uncover why people share fake news. In terms of user factors, socialization, information sharing, altruism, status-seeking, and self-expression were discovered to predict the circulation of fake news (Apuke & Omar, 2020a; Apuke & Omar, 2021a; Chen et al., 2015). Furthermore, in respect of online environment factors, online trust, homophily, the norm of reciprocity and tie strength have been associated with fake news sharing (Duffy et al., 2019; Goh et al., 2019). Streams of studies focusing on the medium factors suggested that the trust in social media, its ability to ease interaction with other network members and the perceived credibility of the medium is a significant motivation that leads one to share fake news on social media (Apuke & Omar, 2020b; Lee & Choi, 2018). Additionally, researchers who examined the message factors reported that the perceived news credibility, the entertaining aspect of a message, as well as the perceived relevance the message has to users, predict fake news sharing behaviour (Islam et al., 2020; Marwick, 2018; Tom Buchanan & Benson, 2019; Tsang, 2020; ).

Despite scholars' efforts to identify the factors that predict fake news sharing behaviour, theoretical and empirical research on fake news sharing behaviour is still in its early stages. A large number of the above studies focused on the COVID-19 context (Apuke & Omar, 2020a,b; Apuke & Omar, 2021a,b). Secondly, studies that focused on the Nigerian context mostly focused on the user factors that predict fake news sharing and a large emphasis has been on the uses and gratification theory (Apuke & Omar, 2020a; Apuke & Omar, 2021a,b). Overall, the study's main goal is to create a model that incorporates various possible factors to explain why Nigerians share fake news on social media. The study identified several factors that were derived from earlier investigations on news sharing and relevant theories including individual

motivational factors (uses and gratifications) online environmental factor (social capital theory) medium factor (uses and gratifications); and content/message factor (diffusion of innovation theory), to develop a predictive model of fake news sharing. This is an extension of the studies that highlight the predictors of fake news sharing behaviour. The section that follows discusses fake news in Nigeria.

### **1.1.2 Fake News in Nigeria: The Study Context**

A large number of empirical existing studies on news sharing and exploratory investigations on fake news have been conducted in Asia (Lee & Ma, 2012; Hussain et al, 2019), United States (Choi, 2016; Thompson et al., 2019) and the European context (Karnowski et al., 2018). Research on the African context is growing, but studies that examine an extended model comprising numerous possible factors to explain fake news sharing among social media users in this context are limited. The current study takes up the case of a developing country, by examining fake news sharing in Nigeria. Nigeria is a unique case to examine fake news sharing due to its distinctive circumstances. “Nigeria is the most populated country in Africa, and the 7th most populated in the world with over 200 million people and 250 ethnic groups characterized by diversified religious and political fault lines” (See Figure 1.1) (Apuke & Tunca, 2019, p. 12). A report by Statista (2020) disclosed a high internet usage penetration in Nigeria. In 2018 it was reported that 47.1 percent of the Nigerian population use the net. The same report shows that 54% use the net in 2020, and this pattern is projected to go to 84.5 percent in 2023. Specifically, WhatsApp was found to be the most popular social network, with a 41 percent penetration rate. These findings support the result of a recent survey by Udodiong (2019) which showed that compared to 2018, there has been an increase of 4 million internet users in Nigeria

amounting to 98.39 million. Of the 98.39 million internet users, about 54% make use of the internet daily and 24 million have an active social media account, with an average usage of 3 hours 17 minutes in a day. WhatsApp was ranked the number one platform Nigerians use, followed by Facebook, Instagram, and Facebook Messenger. Emphasising on the size of Nigerian online population in 2019, a recent study showed that “about 75 per cent of Nigeria’s online population use social media; and the number keeps growing on both social networking sites and blogging sites” (Gyaisey et al., 2019, p. 10).



Figure 1.1 Map of Nigeria (Lenshie & Yenda, 2016)

Indeed, there is a high dependency and usage of social media among the Nigerian population (Aguwa, 2019), and the increasing use of social media and internet facilities could amplify the intentional spreading of false information (Haug & Gewalt, 2018).

One of the countries in the African region that have witnessed a large amount of fake news sharing in recent years is Nigeria (Apuke & Omar, 2020c), which is the

focus of this current study. The Federal Government of Nigeria launched a nationwide anti-fake news campaign in 2019 (Apuke & Omar, 2020c). While the campaign against false information is introduced, Nigerians still extremely share falsified information. Pate et al. (2019) observed that fake news is a big challenge in Nigeria because the country has a fragile social setting, high level of illiteracy, poverty, the depressive human condition, inflation and intolerance amongst people in the country as well as a high percentage of disunity. Reiterating this concern, Pate et al. (2019) emphasized that “like many other countries in the world, Nigeria is battling with the increasing level of youth radicalisation, terrorism, ethnic nationalism, extremism, populism politics, hate speech and *fake news*”. For example, the large dissemination of false news by social media users that bathing and drinking salt will cure Ebola in 2014 was confirmed. This fake content shared among numerous people led to the death and hospitalisation of many (Apuke & Omar, 2020c). Edwin and Yalmi (2019) reported that the tense situation between herders and farmers is exacerbated by the concocted illustration of inter-community clashes in Nigeria. In 2019 there was a massive circulation of the image of a woman who lay on her blood, which was connected to the Jos crisis but was later realised to be from domestic violence that occurred in 2011. Furthermore, Ojebode (2018) stressed that fake news circulation in Nigeria has intensified the inter-ethnic tension in Nigeria. For instance, in 2018 a picture of a baby who was killed in Congo was circulated on social media suggesting that the Fulani herders were responsible for the murder. This fake news aggravated the tension between the Fulanis and Beroms in Jos, leading to massive bloodsheds.

Pate et al. (2019, p.18) remark that “the wide usage of the internet, cheap access to social media platforms and competitive politics, deepening poverty, ethno-religious fight for supremacy has intensified the spread of fake news in Nigeria”. According to

the same authors, fake news flourishes in Nigeria because objective facts have "become as illusory as a mirage to many Nigerians, particularly citizens of social media". This means that stories that resonate with people's emotions and personal beliefs appear to be able to influence public opinion.

Another popular fake news in Nigeria's social media is that President Buhari is dead and replaced by a Sudanese clone named Jubril (Ugwuanyi, 2017). There was widespread news in October 2019 via social media that the president had taken a new wife (Adebayo, 2019). It was reported that a high amount of false news, gossip and rumours are circulated among Facebook and WhatsApp group members in Nigeria each day, adding to the divide between ethnic groups (Ugwuanyi, 2017). Another recent study found that a large number of Nigerians are sharing fake news regarding the concocted cure for COVID-19 and this unverified information has led many into taking false medication compounding the issue at hand (Apuke & Omar, 2020b). With false news growing in Nigeria, it should be used as an example to study the factors which could cause fake news sharing among social media users.

It should be noted that, despite the growing dangers of fake news circulation in Nigeria, empirical studies into the factors that prompt fake news sharing are still in their early stages. For example, Apuke and Omar (2021b) and Apuke and Omar (2021a) focused on fake news sharing on COVID-19. Aside from these efforts, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, most studies on fake news in Nigeria have been more of exploratory research, rather than empirical and modelling research. For example, studies on fake news in Nigeria have attempted to understand the consequences, impact, meaning, circulation and prevention of fake news (Apuke & Omar, 2020c; Pate & Ibrahim, 2019; Pate et al., 2019). For example, Apuke and Omar's (2020) qualitative study examined fake news sharing in Nigeria with a focus

on understanding fake news consequences, motivations, and preventions. It was found that Nigerians share fake news because they view it as a civil obligation to inform others and offer advice. Further motivations that prompted fake news sharing include interpersonal trust and unemployment.

Edwin and Yalmi (2019) via a literature review, found that Nigerians share news on social media without authenticating and this has resulted in violence and a lack of trust in the governance. Corroborating this view, Wilson and Umar (2019) studied the effect of fake news in Nigeria. The study found that a lot of Nigerians share news on social media. The study further found that despite some reported having awareness of fake news, yet, they are less sceptical of the information they share leading to the circulation of fake news.

Some investigations have also been conducted to determine the root causes of fake news in Nigeria. In this view, Samuel et al. (2019) examined the causes of fake news proliferation in Nigeria through the consultation of secondary sources. It was found that the desire to be relevant, hostile government, and the poor regulation of the internet are some of the causes of fake news in Nigeria. It was also revealed that fake news proliferation has resulted in increasing tension and divide of the country as well as Fulani and herders' conflict. Similarly, Pate et al. (2019) examined the issues of fake news in Nigeria and its impact on the country's polity. Results suggest that fake news circulation is posing threat to the country's polity.

In the African setting, there is an immense degree of false news dissemination that endangers people's lives, but few studies have been done to explain what causes fake news to spread (Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2019). In addition, existing research uses more of the qualitative or exploratory approach to understand the causes and the consequences of fake news and less empirical testing to provide evidence and

solution. Empirical evidence on how to decrease the spread of disinformation in this context is also lacking. It is therefore necessary to undertake this study in the Nigerian context.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

The issue of fake news is gaining much scholarly attention in recent years. There have been a lot of studies that have attempted to understand the prevalence of fake news (Reuters Institute, 2017), causes and solutions to fake news phenomenon (Bakir & McStay, 2018), the current state of fake news, its challenges and opportunities (Figueira & Oliveira, 2017), and the effect of fake news sharing on society, stock markets and political leaders (Ferrara et al., 2016). There is also a strand of research that specifically examines the end-users or the audience such as how individual's authenticate information obtained on social media (Tandoc et al., 2018), the motivations for the creation of fake news (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Marwick, 2018), audiences' perspective on fake news sharing (Nielsen & Graves, 2017) and fake news identification behaviour on popular Twitter (Buntain & Golbeck, 2017). Some studies have focused on fake news regulation and media literacy (Jang & Kim, 2018), techniques used in fabricating news (Wang et al., 2018), and the recipe of how social media networks are employed to disseminate misinformation (Mustafaraj & Metaxas, 2017). Other studies on fake news have been on text analysis by investigating the spread of fake news through the analysis of news feeds, tweets, and Facebook posts (Jang et al., 2018; Shin et al., 2018) and examining the root content and the sharing history of identified fake news, through randomised controlled trial of partisan mobilization posts and assessment of information in forms of tweets, articles and comments (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Handayani & Alaika, 2017; Pothast, 2017).



Despite this huge growing body of studies researching fake news, there are still limitations that require further consideration which this current research seeks to address.

Firstly, most of these existing studies have attempted to understand the phenomenon of fake news from various perspectives, and notably, there is less attention given to uncovering why people share fake news on social media. There are a few studies (e.g: Apuke & Omar, 2020a,b; Apuke & Omar, 2021a,b), that have examined the motives for fake news sharing. These studies, however, focused mainly on user or individual motivation for fake news sharing. It is imperative to note that some studies investigated other factors than user motivations such as online environmental network factors (Brummette et al., 2018; Duffy et al., 2019; Goh et al., 2019; Himelboim et al., 2016; Koranteng & Wiafe, 2019; Sherline, 2014), message factors (Bergström & Jervelycke Belfrage, 2018; Gan & Li, 2018; Hafezieh & Eshraghian, 2017; Sukhu et al., 2015; Visentin et al., 2019) and medium factors (Appelman & Sundar, 2016; Apuke & Omar, 2020b; Gan & Li, 2018; Visentin et al., 2019). None of them, however, tend to examine these multiple factors together in a single study. Talwar et al. (2019) noted that there is a gap in the study of social media users' sharing of fake news as little research attention has been given to understand the factors that affect fake news sharing and dissemination on social media. In their recent study, Talwar et al. (2020) highlighted the lack of clarity regarding insights and behaviour that are fundamental to the spreading of fake news on social media. To address these gaps, the current study extends past research by examining various possible factors, namely the user (individual) motivational related factor (i.e. status-seeking, entertainment, socialization, information seeking, etc) (Anr et al., 2014; Ghaisani, Handayani, & Munajat, 2017; Lee & Ma, 2012; Lee et al., 2011; Ma, Lee,

& Goh, 2011; Plume & Slade, 2018; Thompson et al., 2019), the content (message/information) (Gerhart & Sidorova, 2017; Ma et al., 2014) (i.e. perceived news relevance, perceived news credibility and entertainment), online environmental factor (network characteristics) (Ma et al., 2014; Ma, Lee, & Goh, 2013) (i.e. tie strength, norm of reciprocity, trust-in-network and homophily), and medium related factor (Sukhu et al., 2015) (i.e. perceived medium credibility, interactivity and trust in SNS) to test fake news sharing behaviour to better understand fake news sharing.

Second, prior literature lacks theoretical frameworks and models that empirically expand our understanding of fake news sharing behaviour in social media, whether knowingly or unknowingly (Talwar et al., 2019). There have been some empirical attempts to test a model of news verification behaviour (Russel et al., 2018) and a socio-technical model of media effect to establish that individuals share fake news guided by their pre-existing beliefs, media affordances and the structure of the messages (Marwick, 2018). Some recent studies have developed a research model depicting the relationships between multiple factors and fake news sharing, but the context is narrowed to the COVID-19 pandemic (eg: Apuke & Omar, 2021a; Islam et al., 2020; Laato et al., 2020), and marketing and advertising research (Talwar et al., 2019). The study by Talwar et al. (2019), for example, examined the individual (user) and online environmental motivational factors to understand fake news sharing by consumers of a brand, contextualizing fake news in advertising and marketing, thereby limiting the strength of the findings in generalizing fake news sharing behaviour among social media users. For fake news to be curtailed in society, it is necessary to understand the reasons behind the sharing. Exploring the reasons and related conducts that encourage people to spread falsehood on social media platforms can therefore help to find a solution to the growing threat of the spreading of fake news (Talwar et al.,

2020). Laato et al. (2020) indicated that before an intervention is designed for fake news, it is necessary to understand the rationale behind fake news sharing behaviour. To accomplish this, it is important to develop a comprehensive model, guided by theories, for empirical testing.

One of the most noteworthy limitations of previous studies is their over-reliance on the uses and gratification theory (UGT) to explain the motivation for sharing news and fake news on social media (Anr et al., 2014; Apuke & Omar, 2020b; Apuke & Omar, 2021a; Lee et al., 2011; Lee & Ma, 2012; Plume & Slade, 2018; Thompson et al., 2019). To better understand the factors prompting individuals to share fake news online, it is required to corroborate the UGT with other theories. To date, there have not been any comprehensive efforts to integrate the user, content, message related factors that induce sharing behaviour into a single model to understand the weight and relevance of these factors in predicting fake news sharing. This current study incorporates these multiple factors and adds environmental factors because pieces of evidence from prior investigations demonstrate their significant effects on news sharing behaviour (Kim et al., 2015). Broadly speaking, unlike most prior studies (with the exception of e.g. Talwar et al., 2019; Ma et al., 2014), this present study integrates three theoretical perspectives to include Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT), Social Capital Theory (SCT) and Diffusion of Innovation Theory (DOI) to explain four main factors that lead to news sharing behaviour and fake news sharing. The rationale for combining these theories stems from the purpose of this study which is to understand the factors that prompt fake news sharing beyond the personal motivational factors highlighted in the UGT. There are other external factors such as the online environment and message factors that could prompt sharing which are not entirely captured in the UGT perspective. Therefore, the SCT which focuses on the

relationship that occurs in the online environment, as well as DOI which looks at the attributes of a message, were used to support the UGT, to have a more robust understanding of the influence personal, medium, message and online environment factors have on fake news sharing behaviour.

Thirdly, most empirical studies treated the factors individually and hence, the use of an advanced algorithm and higher-order construct modelling for data analysis is not common in past research. There are a few studies that used Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to test the relationships (Apuke & Omar, 2021a; Islam et al., 2020; Laato et al., 2020; Talwar et al., 2019), but none of them tested any of the variables as higher-order constructs. This is because most studies did not attempt to integrate various factors together in a single research model. In this study, four first-order constructs were created; (1) individual motivational factor are formed by *status-seeking, altruism, socialization, and information sharing*, (2) online environmental factor also known as network characteristics are formed by *tie strength, trust in network, norm of reciprocity, and homophily*, (3) medium factor are formed by *perceived medium credibility, trust in SNS and interactivity*, and (4) content/message factor are formed by *perceived news relevance, perceived news/message credibility and entertainment*. All of these factors are derived from the three theoretical lenses (UGT, SCT and DOI) as well as past research on information, news, and knowledge sharing.

Additionally, studies that focused on curbing the issues of fake news sharing are growing with a large focus on using machine learning for fake news detection (Figueira & Oliveira, 2017; Rubin et al., 2016; Zhang & Ghorbani, 2020) while others have focused on investigating the news sources to decrease the propensity of spreading misinformation (Kim & Dennis, 2019). In previous studies, it has been proposed that

users of social media should assess the content they find online and determine whether to transmit this information to others (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2017). As a result, sufficient knowledge and awareness of false news are expected to aid users to decrease the inclination to share falsified information (Leeder, 2019; Torres et al., 2018). In this view, this study examined the role of fake news awareness in curtailing fake news spread. It developed and tested measures of fake news awareness, which is a welcomed contribution to knowledge. Thus, the present study not only contributes to the stream of research that focuses on understanding the factors that predict fake news dissemination behaviour, but it also supports recent studies that have started focusing on the essence of fake news awareness and media literacy in curbing the spread of fake news.

Finally, a limitation that could also be noticed in many past studies is their over-focus on the western region with slight attention paid to developing regions of Africa, especially Nigeria, although the literature is now growing as shown in the contextual section above. In other words, empirical and theoretical studies on fake news have focused more on the Western world (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Ruddick, 2018; Tavernise, 2016), with less focus on the developing countries. A large chunk of studies on fake news focused on the US 2016 elections (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Kristof, 2016; Ruddick, 2018; Tavernise, 2016). Researchers have been encouraged to look beyond the investigation of fake news from the Western context and extend it to other regions (Duffy et al., 2019). In short, the factors that prompt fake news sharing behaviour is still less well studied (Talwar et al., 2019; Talwar et al., 2020) and many studies on fake news have focused more on the western part of the world.

Hence, this current study addresses several research gaps found in past studies by developing a comprehensive research model, derived from multiple theoretical

lenses and also incorporated the possible solution (i.e: fake news awareness) for reducing fake news spread, and later tests it in the Nigerian setting. Table 1.1 summarizes the gaps this current study is filling.

Table 1.1  
*Gap the current study fills*

<b>Type of contribution</b>	<b>Description of gap</b>	<b>Gap addressed</b>
Construct contribution and novel link across the construct	<p>The user, medium, online and message factors have not been incorporated in a single model.</p> <p>There has been more focus on the user and information factor that leads to fake news (Laato et al., 2020; Talwar et al., 2019).</p> <p>No study has developed these constructs to form a second-order construct. The recent studies have been all reflective.</p>	<p>This study introduces the user, medium, online and message factor as a second-order construct incorporated into a single model with reflective first-order variables such as status-seeking, socialization, entertainment, homophily, trust in network etc. The reflective formative type II was developed and validated in this study.</p>
Gap in theory	<p>No study has incorporated the U&amp;G theory, social capital theory and diffusion of innovation theory to test fake news sharing behaviour.</p>	<p>This study incorporated the U&amp;G theory, social capital theory and diffusion of innovation theory to develop a comprehensive model to test fake news sharing behaviour.</p>
The methodological gap	<p>Researches that used the structural equation modelling (with the exception of Laato et al., 2020; Talwar et al., 2019) technique to analyse fake news sharing behaviour are developing.</p> <p>Most of the fake news studies have been exploratory, conceptual, and qualitative in nature with only a few that developed a model and empirically tested it (Laato et al., 2020; Talwar et al., 2019).</p> <p>The few studies that have used the Structural equation technique (PLS in specific) failed to use the highly recommended advanced algorithm (PLS predict) to realise the predictive capabilities of the research model.</p>	<p>This study will use the Structural equation modelling technique with PLS to analyse the model.</p> <p>The study developed a comprehensive model that predicts the fake news sharing behaviour among social media users. Therefore, this study is empirical research. This study will make use of the PLS predict, which has been highly recommended for evaluating a model's out of sample predictive strength (Hair et al., 2019).</p>

Table 1.1 Continued

<b>Type of contribution</b>	<b>Description of gap</b>	<b>Gap addressed</b>
The gap in practice	Most of the studies that examine fake news sharing used the student sample. This might limit generalizability. Focus has also been on either Facebook or WhatsApp.	This study extends and focuses on general social media users as well as introduced fake news awareness as a moderating variable. The outcome will help policymakers to formulate strategies that would help in the curbing of the menace of fake news.



### 1.3 Research Questions

Why people share fake news, and how to prevent its spread through public awareness in the Nigerian context? These are the overarching questions that this study aims to answer. Thus, the study develops a comprehensive model that encompasses various possible factors to explain why Nigerians tend to share fake news online. The study identified several factors that were derived from earlier investigations on news sharing and relevant theories to include user (individual) motivational factors (uses and gratifications) online environmental factor (social capital theory) medium factor (uses and gratifications); and content/message factor (diffusion of innovation theory), to develop a comprehensive predictive model of fake news sharing. The study further extends to test the role of *fake news awareness* (moderating variable) in reducing fake news dissemination as well as uses news sharing behaviour construct as a mediating variable. This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. To what degree does user/individual, content/message, medium and online environmental factors predict news sharing behaviour among social media users in Nigeria?
2. What is the role of (user) individual, content/message, medium and online environmental factors have in predicting fake news sharing among social media users in Nigeria?
3. What is the connection between news sharing behaviour and fake news sharing among social media users in Nigeria?

4. What is the role of news sharing behaviour in mediating the relationship between factors predicting news sharing and fake news sharing among social media users in Nigeria?
5. What is the role of individual fake news awareness in moderating the association between news sharing behaviour and fake news sharing among social media users in Nigeria?

#### **1.4 Aims and Objectives of The Study**

This study aims to uncover the effects of user/individual, content/message, medium and online environmental factors predict news sharing which in turn affect fake news sharing behaviour among social media users in Nigeria. Thus, the study is divided into five-fold statistical testing, which is basically the test of direct effects, mediating effects, and moderations.

Firstly, in terms of the direct effects, the study statistically confirmed if the above factors (*individual, content/message, medium and online environmental factors*; independent variables) are positively and directly associated with news sharing behaviour (mediator variable). Secondly, it further examined if news sharing behaviour (mediator variable) is directly associated with fake news sharing (outcome variable). Thirdly, it tests to realise if the above factors (*individual, content/message, medium and online environmental*) directly lead to fake news sharing. Fourthly, with regards to the mediation, it examined the role *news sharing behaviour* has in mediating between *individual, content/message, medium and online environmental* factors and fake news sharing. Finally, it showed how fake news awareness reduces the correlation between news sharing behaviour and fake news sharing. To achieve the aims of this research, the following objectives are formulated:

1. To examine the role (user) individual, content/message, medium and online environmental factors have in predicting news sharing behaviour.
2. To examine the role (user) individual, content/message, medium and online environmental factors have in predicting fake news sharing.
3. To realise the link between news sharing behaviour and fake news sharing.
4. To examine the role news sharing behaviour has in mediating the effect of (user) individual, content/message, medium and online environmental factors on fake news sharing.
5. To study the role fake news awareness has in moderating the effect of news sharing behaviour on fake news sharing.

### **1.5 Significance of The Study**

Recent years have seen a growing body of research conducted to determine the factors motivating news sharing on social media. Yet, there are limited or no studies that demonstrate whether these factors could as well lead or motivate one to share fake news online. Despite the serious threat that fake news has posed in recent decades, there has been little empirical research on fake news sharing behaviour. According to a recent study, researchers only provided a hazy understanding of the motivations for sharing fake news on social media (Talwar et al., 2020). As previously documented, a large number of empirical existing research on news sharing and exploratory research on fake news has concentrated on the Asian region. (Hussain et al., 2019; Lee & Ma, 2012), United States ( Choi, 2016; Thompson et al., 2019) and the European context (Karnowski et al., 2018), with less focus on developing countries. As a result, the current study, which focuses on the Nigerian context, investigates fake news sharing