

Research Article

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Interrogating the nexus between rumour and conflict in Nigeria

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Abstract: This study interrogated the nexus between rumour and conflict in Nigeria by examining the nature, causes, and instances of some major rumours in the country and their connection to the conflict. Rumours have permeated every sector in Nigeria, from informal to formal, causing conflicts and even violence. Social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter have become dominant channels for sharing information. There is also the traditional mass media of television and press as platforms for sharing information. Information from these platforms can lead to peace in a conflict situation. The negative is that these platforms have also become channels for spreading rumours that can cause or exacerbate existing conflicts. Using a survey research design, data were collected through a structured questionnaire known as The Nexus Between Rumour and Conflict Questionnaire (TNRCQ). Null and alternate hypotheses were tested using person correlations through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 21 (IBM Corp) at a 0.05 level of significance. From the test result, the correlation was significant at 0.01, showing a significant relationship between rumour and conflicts in Nigeria. Violence like the Alu 4 lynching and the Lekki Massacre were majorly caused by rumours. There was also a national political tension occasioned by the rumour of the death of former President Muhammadu Buhari. There is, therefore, an urgent need for the government and other stakeholders to engage in mass education of the population about the danger of spreading unverified information, especially on social media platforms.

Keywords – Conflict, Fake news, Nigeria, Rumour, Social media, Violence

1. INTRODUCTION

“don't ask me who said it but have you heard this?”, “I heard”, “they said”, “he/she said”, and many more. These are some of the phrases or expressions that characterize the start and spread of rumours in any society. They represent the starting point in communicating any information that is unverified and mostly false, and that is called rumour. Because rumours start with these uncertain phrases above, it is often hard to locate the source or origin of the information. Thus, it's unverifiable nature. The nexus between rumour and conflict is that, the latter can be the source of the former. That is, rumour can cause and escalate conflict. In the 21st century, the revolution in communication technology has made it possible to share information easily and quickly. Social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter have become dominant channels for sharing information. There is also the traditional mass media of television and press as platforms for sharing information. Information from these platforms can lead to peace in a conflict situation. The negative is that, these platforms have also become channels for spreading rumours that can cause or exacerbate existing conflicts (Akpan et al., 2013). Rumour is the act of passing on a piece of information to another person or group of people without verifying if it is true or not. That

means rumour can be true or half-truth; it can also be totally false. To Raj (2019: 54) "rumour refers to spreading of unverified information about persons, events and social processes." This unverified information can cause conflict between/among persons or group of persons. Another aspect of rumour is that, the sender does not make any effort to check the authenticity or validity of the information. It can be an act of commission or omission (Giasemidis et al, 2016). Rumour therefore, can be said to be a product of the need to engage in communication, especially when desired information is not available.

Communication is a very vital tool in human endeavours. It serves as a medium through which information is passed from one point to another. It is the fulcrum of relationships between and among people at individual, organizational, state, regional, and international levels. A breakdown in communication can lead to unhealthy relationships, conflict, and even violence. While good communication can lead to peace and possibly sustain it. No individual or nation is an island. In this interconnected world, every individual, organization or state must interact with one another in order to achieve certain objectives. Rumours are Primarily spread through informal communication until they gain traction and reach formal communication channels like TV and print media (Michelson & Mouly, 2000).

At the international level, states interact in various fields such as economic, military, cultural, diplomatic, scientific, and military, all through sharing of information in formal and informal bilateral or multilateral settings (Fronsin, 2011). Information can be said to be the raw material for international politics. That is, the functioning of the international system either in war or peace is highly dependent on the nature of information being shared; how it is shared; by who, and when it is shared. This is why Fronsin (2011: 5) asserts that "...dialogue and communication are the essence of the foreign relations". As stated above, states have devised means of spreading rumours in their bilateral and multilateral fora in order to gain a comparative advantage over competing states. A very good example is the intentional distortion of information during the Cold War between the United States of America (USA) and the former Union of Socialist Soviet Republic (USSR) (Cull et al., 2017). The invasion and annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 is an example of a sustained information warfare (IW) in contemporary times (Gery et al, 2017). This IW is at the front burner of the ongoing war in Ukraine. The famous invasion of Iraq in 2001 by USA led coalition was majorly based on a rumour from Washington that Sadaam Hussein had a tie with Al-Qaeda, and was developing nuclear weapons to attack the USA. This claim has been found to be false as stated by Hinnebusch (2007: 11):

The first hurdle the Bush administration had to clear was to legitimize war on a state that did not threaten the US. The issue of WMDs was hit upon as a way to turn the 'war on terrorism' against Iraq; to do so, Bush had to claim that Saddam Hussein was linked to al-Qaida and was actively developing weapons of mass destruction which he might turn over to terrorists or use on their behalf, and hence that Iraq represented an imminent threat to the US. These claims have not only been discredited but, additionally, there is strong evidence that the war party in Washington deliberated exaggerated unreliable claims and knew Iraq was no threat to the US. At any rate, the threat was never that WMDs would be used against the USA but that they could constrain US freedom of action in the Middle East or threaten Israel.

In Africa, the spreading of unverified and unsubstantiated information has led to so many atrocities in the continent. Since decolonization in the 1960s, Africa has witnessed a lot of civil wars and inter-state conflict; from the wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone to the horn of Africa in Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Kenya (Jacob et al., 2022). The most notable is the Rwandan genocide in 1994 that was caused majorly by spreading negative rumours about the Tutsi identity group that led to the massacre of close to a million people (Danjibo, 2008). Before the genocide, specifically in 1992, a rumour was spreading that the Tutsi ethnic group were planning on killing Hutu leaders around the Bugesera region of Rwanda (Bhavnani et al., 2009). This was later confirmed to be false but it persisted and led to the genocide of 1994.

In Nigeria, there is this high propensity (especially among the youth demography) to be the first to post new information on social media as news without fact-checking or verification. This trend has led to the sharing of so many fake news and rumours meant to mislead and cause chaos. Parrot Nigeria (2018) as cited by Ola (2021: 3)

affirmed that “the BBC emphasised that social media are the instruments for swift spread of rumors in the country.” Fasanwon (2019) also shares this view by stating that social media has been used to spread falsehood against governments and political opponents in Nigeria. Since 2015, a lot of rumours have been circulated in the country concerning the current regime. The most famous among them is the rumour about the death of President Muhammadu Buhari and his eventual cloning with a man called Jubril from Sudan. The president and his handlers have denied this rumour on several occasions. Just like the nature of rumour, this, no doubt, is a product of the biases and prejudices of the originator(s) (McCarthy & Menager, 2017), possibly to create a make-belief that the government is illegitimate leading to political unrest and ultimately a regime change. Rumour therefore, is an existential problem for the Nigeria state. To this end, the study set out with three objectives including an assessment of the nature of rumour in Nigeria, examination of the causes of rumours in Nigeria, and a trace of some major rumours in Nigeria and their connection to conflict.

2. LITERATURE SURVEY

2.1. Rumour and conflict: A conceptual discourse

Rumours have been part of verbal communication for a very long time in human civilisations. It is an everyday life phenomenon in every society throughout the globe. Whenever there is a vacuum of needed information, rumour is bound to fill that vacuum as an alternative means of communication because people will always look for information to satisfy their curiosity on matters that concerns the general public (Taiwo et al., 2017). According to Giasemidis et al. (2016) rumour can be defined as an “unofficial interesting story or piece of news that might be true or invented, that quickly spreads.” This definition is insufficient because it focuses only on the unofficial nature of rumour. Rumour can also be in the form of an official information emanating directly or indirectly from state and non-state actors. Kwon et al. (2013) defined rumour as any “information, which later in time get confirmed as false or remain unverified.” This definition explains the ambiguous nature of rumour from the source to the point where it is verified to be untrue or remained unauthenticated. Furthermore, Di Fonzo (2008: 38) sees rumour as “unverified information statements that circulate about topics that people perceive as important; arise in situations of ambiguity, threat, or potential threat; and are used by people attempting to make sense or to manage risk.” This definition is broader and it captures the major ideas in the two definitions above. The strength of the definition is that it brings out virtually all the nature of rumour as “unverified”, “situations of ambiguity”, “threat or potential threat” and others. Rumours take their root from one or more sources and are transmitted for a while from node to node among social groups (Vosoughi, 2015). The consequences of rumours are manifold on both individuals, institutions and states if they are allowed to spread without being confirmed as false or true (Sunstein, 2009). These consequences can be physical damage through violence and emotional damage through spread of fear and hate. As stated above, rumour arises and are spread in an atmosphere of ambiguity. In an environment where people lack knowledge about a phenomenon and are in dire need for security, rumour is bound to arise. Therefore, it is safe to assert that rumour will always arise and be sustained when verified and official information are not readily available on matters of common concern to the populace. The curiosity of people in this age of social media has increased tremendously. Thus, any gap in communication will definitely fuel towards satisfying these interests and curiosities. Tripathy et al. (2010) unraveled the fact that any increase in delay in detecting the falsehood of any rumour will only increase the spread of that rumour. A very important nature of rumour according to Rubin (2017) is that, rumours are often unverifiable information from the point of transmission. Rumour and gossip can also create and sustain social ties among and between social groups. This is done through the provision of “privy” information among peers and people who share certain identities, mostly primordial.

Conflict is an inevitable part of social life. “However, violent conflict is not inevitable and as such is an anomaly” (Francis, 2006: 20). Conceptually, conflict is simply the clash of interest or incompatible goals between two or more groups. It is an absence of agreement between parties; a form of opposition between parties; a way to solve social contradictions; and a natural process in human social interaction (Lukin, 2007). Popularly refers to as the father of peace and conflict studies, Johan Galtung (1969) defines conflict as “...a dynamic process in which

structures, attitudes and behaviours are constantly changing and influencing one another.” This definition leans towards the prism of structural violence as it shows the intersection between structure, attitudes and behaviours and how they interact to cause conflict. To Coser (1956) conflict “... is a struggle between opponents over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources.” This definition is more relatable to the situation in Nigeria where politicians, ethnic groups and insurgent groups are all fighting over either values, power and status, or over scarce resources. One major cause of this type of conflict in Nigeria is not even the struggle over scarce resources but the sharing or distribution of the available resources. From all these definitions therefore, one can see that conflict is neither negative nor positive, but the actors determine its outcome.

At the intra-personal level, we are routinely faced with life choices that sometimes disturbs our inner peace. At the inter-personal level, we have a lot of reasons every day to disagree either with the conductor, the taxi driver, the police officer, the cashier at the counter, the lecturer in front of the class or even your wife/husband in the matrimonial bed. These chains of events are what defines us as humans with different ideals, backgrounds, orientations and goals. Because no man is an island, the pursuit of these goals must come into conflict with one another. But as rational beings, we have always found ways to manage a lot of these daily misunderstandings from degenerating into violence. At the national level, the need for recognition and redistribution of national resources have pitched one group against another especially in our multi-ethnic Nigeria. The agitation by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), the Militancy in the Niger Delta, and various ethnic clashes in the state were born out of perceived or actual marginalisation of one group by another. This is what Stewart (2001) refers to as horizontal inequality.

2.2. Types of rumour

Extant literature suggests that there are basically four types of rumour. These are highlighted below:

- i. *Pipe dream or wish fulfilment*: as the name implies, this type of rumour expresses the desire of those who start it (Bugge, 2017). It is meant to fulfil their wish, especially in an organisation. For example, workers in an organization may start a rumour about salary increase that may catch the attention of management. In the Nigerian context, this type of rumour has been peddled recently about salary review for workers where the Minister of Labour, Dr. Chris Ngige had to officially clarify that they are reviewing peculiar allowances and not salary increase (The Cable, 2022).
- ii. *Bogey or anxiety rumour*: this type of rumour is created and spread in an atmosphere of fear and insecurity (Bugge, 2017). It creates anxiety among people about current security situation or about the future. In Nigeria, numerous direct messages have been spread on social media (especially on Facebook and WhatsApp) about security threats bothering on the socio-cultural and religious inclinations of the people. Taiwo et al (2017) identified some of these rumours in the country to include, the purported death of President Muhammadu Buhari in early 2017; killer numbers from mobile phones allegedly transmitting high frequency signal that could cause brain haemorrhage and death; fruits and vegetables poisoning by Boko Haram; and American conspiracy to spread HIV and cause infertility among Muslim girls through polio vaccines in Northern Nigeria. At the organizational level, this type could take the form of rumour about retrenchment or company takeover. This creates fear and personal security concerns among workers.
- iii. *Anticipatory rumour*: this type of rumour is started and spread in an environment of ambiguity and uncertainty (Witte, 2022). It is a situation where a needed information is unavailable or not clear. In an organizational setting, anticipatory rumour can be in the form of whether a new general manager will be appointed within the organization or from somewhere else. In Nigeria, anticipatory rumour can be seen in the appointment of political officers after every election circle. In 2015, it took President Muhammadu Buhari six months to appoint ministers. This generated a lot of rumours as regard who will be appointed and into which ministry.
- iv. *Aggressive rumour*: this type of rumour starts with the intention to harm the target. It is closely related to gossip because it can impugn on the character of the target, usually an outside group (Bugge, 2017). It is also

meant to cause conflict or even outright violence among and between social groups. Ethnic contestations in Nigeria have been associated with this type of rumour. The ethnic clash between Yoruba and Hausa in Ife in March 2017 was exacerbated by mere rumour that a Hausa boy slapped a Yoruba girl. This violence resulted to the killing of 46 people while 96 were wounded (Omonobi, 2017). Rumours of arbitrary attacks and killings have been proven to be one of the trigger causes of farmer-herder conflict in Nasarawa state (Tade & Yikwabs, 2021).

2.3. Rumour and social media in Nigeria

The advent of social media has greatly increased the emergence and spread of rumour in contemporary times. It has also broadened the scope of academic literature on rumour. In the past, rumours were generated and spread with the word of mouth through face-to-face communication, but in today's world, social media has made it possible to spread rumour with a simple touch of keypads on smart phones, laptops, and other devices to a very wider population. There are 32.9 million active social media users in Nigeria as at January 2022 (Statista.com, 2022). This huge number has made it possible for rumours to spread quickly and wide with more impacts or consequences. Friggeri et al. (2014) likened the spread of rumour on the Nigerian social space as a community disease that keeps increasing with every new technology that makes human communication easier. Social media has been a blessing and a curse to Nigeria. The users, majority of whom are youth, tend to get caught up in the euphoria of being the first to share a news content. In the process, information gets exaggerated from the source while the end users do not care, most often, to verify their authenticity. In order to get more traction or believability, social media users in Nigeria have devised means of backing up their rumours or misinformation with mostly fake or photoshopped images and videos (Akinwale & Onokala, 2022). A point in case was the images and videos shared in 2018 by Boko Haram, which was later confirmed to be doctored and fake by the Nigerian army (Erunke, 2018). At the height of the farmer-herder conflict in Benue, Taraba, and Nasarawa in 2016-2018, many fake images and videos were shared on social media as proof of killings by either of the conflicting parties (Tade & Yikwabs, 2021).

As stated earlier, social media has also been a blessing to Nigeria. It has become the voice of the masses. It has proven to be a platform for ordinary citizens to share real time information, get emergency services in terms of health and security, mobilise for social change, and hold governments accountable. People no longer depend exclusively on traditional media platforms for news and issues relating to politics, governance, economy, and socio-cultural. They engage in rea-time sharing of informations and it is called citizen journalism in communication parlance (Apuke & Ayih, 2020). The #Endsars protests in October 2020 is a very good example of how social media can be a veritable platform/tool for social mobilization, especially among the youth demography. Be that as it may, social media has also become the major platform for creating and spreading rumours that threatens the peace and security of individuals, groups and the country at large. Traditionally, the spreading of rumour has always been a concern but social media has made it very easy and faster, thereby increasing its destructive nature.

2.4. Rumour speaking: A model of analysis

This study is anchored on the Daley-Kendal (DK) model of rumour spreading developed in 1965 by Daley and Kendall (Rahman & Johan, 2020). The main thesis of the model is that rumours are spread and sustain within a closed homogenous group of people that are constantly mixing with one another. This population is divided into three viz:

X(t) Denotes those individuals who are ignorant of the rumour (ignorants)

Y(t) Denotes those individuals who are actively spreading the rumour (spreaders) and

Z(t) Denotes those individuals who know the rumor but have ceased spreading it (stiflers)

Initially, $X(0) = N$, $Y(0) = 1$ and $Z(0) = 0$, while for all t , $X(t) + Y(t) + Z(t) = N + 1$

Because this population of people are constantly mixing with one another, anyone can become any of the categories above at any point in time. The modeling analysis is that rumour is being spread in this closed and mixed

population through contact between the ignorants and the spreaders. The assumption is that if a spreader engages in a pairwise meeting with an 'ignorant', then the later will become a 'spreader.' But if the spreader interacts with a fellow spreader or stifler, he/she becomes a stifler. Thompson et al. (2003) argues that the weakness of the model is in the fact that it assumes that everybody in the population is the same. It does not take into consideration the personality traits of the individual spreading or receiving the rumour. Also, it does not give the 'ignorant' the benefit of doubt to hear the rumour and decides if they will spread it or not. It automatically assumes that, once an 'ignorant' hears a rumour, he/she automatically becomes a 'spreader.' However, this model is still very relevant in the modeling and analysis of rumour spreading. In relation to this study, the DK model captures the nature of rumour spreading in the Nigerian context. Nigeria's population is multiethnic and multireligious in nature with low literacy rate. This has created a closed and mixed population where rumour is spreading easily and fast. The political, religious, and ethnic contestations in the country have made it possible for rumour to thrive. Spreaders of rumour in the country have an already ignorant population that they are preying on to push out their primordial agenda in pairwise meetings and especially on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter (now X).

3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The social problems associated with rumour in any society cannot be overemphasized. Like fake news, the source of every rumour is to achieve certain aim or objectives. These objectives can be political, economic, social or cultural (Zheltukhina et al., 2016). They can also be personal or group interest that can be achieved by spreading rumours through word of mouth, press, radio, television, cinema and internet (Zheltukhina et al, 2016). The intention is to spread narratives that may or may not be true in order to elicit actions (most often negative) from the target population. These actions are most often negative responses leading to conflict and even violence. Rumour therefore, creates conflict, victimizes people, and lower the productivity level as well as the morale of workers in an organization (Novac et al, 2014). Other effects of rumour at the organizational level include but not limited to loss of trust between management and staff and also among coworkers; decrease in sales; union strikes; bad press; increase workers stress at work; loss of trust by customers; and bad reputation for individuals and the company (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2000).

In Nigeria, rumour has been proven to be destructive if allowed to fester for long without being officially confirmed to be false (Taiwo et al., 2017). According to Matthews (2013), "...defamation, protests, and destruction of properties, spread of fear, hate, or euphoria..." constitute some of the effects of rumours in every society. The Nigeria context serves as a very fertile ground for rumour to thrive (Taiwo et al., 2017). Not only is the country the most populous black nation on earth, it is multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-religious in nature, setting the stage for identity politics, mistrust, and ethnocentrism (Danjibo, 2008). Some of the ethnic clashes in the country are products of unverified rumours mostly spread by ethnic identities that are in constant contestations for scarce resources and power.

From a general perspective, the earliest studies of rumour were carried out by anthropologists who related it to past events (Guha, 1983; Lefebvre, 1973; Stoler, 1992; Tambiah, 1996; Thompson, 1963). Others have looked at it from the prism of its ability to cause political violence, rebellion or violent resistance (Kirsch, 2002; Stewart & Strathern, 2004; Guha, 1983; Thompson, 1963). Contemporary studies have focused on the advent of telecommunication in mass and social media vis-a-vis the explosion in fake news and rumours, and their impacts on governance and the society at large (Taiwo et al., 2017; Aricat, 2017; Wilson & Umar, 2019; Zheltukhina et al., 2016). Others approach the topic from the context of organizational setting by analysing the effects of rumours on business corporations (Matthews, 2013; Kosfeld, 2005; DiFonzo & Bordia, 2000; Michelson & Mouly, 2000). Most of the studies that tried to link rumour and conflict with case study analysis were set outside Nigeria (Rahman & Johan, 2020; Zizumbo-Colunga, 2020; Raj, 2019; Chen, Lu, & Suen, 2016; Larson & Lewis, 2014, 2018; Edmond, 2007; Bhavnani et al., 2009). Thus, the gap in literature and the significance of this study. To fill this gap in knowledge, this study attempted an interrogation of the nexus between rumour and conflict with focus on Nigeria through case studies analysis.

4. METHODS

The study made use of descriptive survey research design in order to be able to describe the nature of rumour and those who spread them. This design was also chosen in order to get the opinions of individuals from sample population and be able to draw generalization. The study was set in Nigeria, with a population of 140,003,542 million people according to the National Population Commission. However, a recent projected population of the country stands at 216,783,381 according to the National Bureau of Statistics in 2022. This population is too large for this kind of study to cover. As a result, the study made use of social media platforms – Facebook and Twitter (now X) to collect data from a target sample population of 50 respondents. Respondents were purposively selected and a structured questionnaire known as The Nexus Between Rumour and Conflict Questionnaire (TNRCQ) were sent to them on those two social media platforms. This sample population was purposively chosen because of availability, convenience, and knowledge of the subject matter. Respondents included active Facebook and Twitter (now X) users who have shown good knowledge and awareness of socio-political issues in the country, especially those bothering on rumour and conflicts. This was determined through a careful review of their timelines in order to uncover their suitability in terms of the messages they share and their general online engagements. Special attention was given to the geographical spread of the respondents to ensure that all regions of Nigeria were captured in the study. To this end, 25 questionnaires were administered to respondents based in southern and another 25 to those in Northern Nigeria, giving a total of 50 questionnaire. 40 questionnaires were retrieved out of the 50 that were administered, and were successfully analysed and presented using Microsoft Excel and statistical tools such as tables, percentages, and frequencies through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 21 (IBM Corp). The hypothesis was tested using Pearson correlation at 0.05 level of significance.

5. RESULTS

Table 1: Demographics of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	21	52
Female	19	48
Age		
18-25	5	12
26-35	22	55
36 and Above	13	33
Education		
HND/BSc/BA	22	55
M.A/M.Sc.	12	30
Others	6	15

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

In assessing the sex of respondents, table 1 shows that 21 (52%) are male, while 19 (48%) are female. The second variable shows that 5 (12%) of the respondents are between the ages of 18-25. 22 (55%) are between the ages of 26-35, while 13 (33%) represent 36 years and above. Last but not least variable shows the educational level of respondents. 22 (55%) have HND/B.Sc/B.A, 12 (30%) have M.A/M.Sc, and 6 (15%) have other educational qualifications.

Table 2: The Nature of Rumour

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD
1	Rumours are spread with word of mouth through face-to-face communication	22 55%	14 35%	4 10%	0 0%
2	Rumours are created and spread on social media, television, and the press	20 50%	16 30%	4 15%	0 0%
3	Rumours provide information about a person, event or condition	14 35%	17 42%	7 18%	2 5%
4	Rumours are mostly unverifiable at the time of transmission	22 55%	11 27%	5 13%	2 5%
5	Rumours emerge and get sustained in an atmosphere of ambiguity	14 35%	22 55%	3 8%	1 3%

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

Table 2 above presents the data collected from the respondents' opinion on the nature of rumour. In the first item, 55% of the respondents strongly agreed that rumours are spread with word of mouth through face-to-face communication, 35% of the respondents agreed, 4% of the respondents disagreed and no respondent strongly disagreed representing 0%. In the second item, it was strongly agreed by 50% of the respondents that rumours are created and spread on social media, television, and the press, 45% of the respondents agreed, 5% of the respondents disagreed, and 0% of the respondents strongly disagreed. Likewise, in the third item, 35% the respondents strongly agreed that rumours provide information about a person, event or condition, 42% of the respondents agreed, 18% of the respondents disagreed, while 2% of the respondents strongly disagreed. Item four also reveals that 55% of the respondents strongly agreed that rumours are mostly unverifiable at the time of transmission, 28% of the respondents agreed, 13% of the respondents disagreed, and 5% of the respondents strongly disagreed. The last but not the least item shows that 35% of the respondents strongly agreed that rumours emerge and get ssustained in an atmosphere of ambiguity, 55% of the respondents agreed, 8% of the respondents disagreed, and 3% of the respondents strongly disagreed.

Table 3: The Causes of Rumour in Nigeria

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD
5	The quest for political power and relevance causes rumour in Nigeria	23 58%	11 28%	4 10%	2 5%
6	Religious and ethnic bigotry represent a major cause of rumour in Nigeria	19 48%	18 45%	2 5%	0 0%
7	Poor regularization of the internet is one of the major causes of rumour in Nigeria	7 18%	9 23%	14 35%	10 25%

8	The quest for making money through violence also causes rumour in Nigeria	13 33%	19 47%	6 15%	2 5%
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Source: Fieldwork, 2022

In examining the causes of rumour in Nigeria from table 9.3 above, 58% of the respondents strongly agreed that the quest for political power and relevance causes rumour in Nigeria, 28% of the respondents agreed, 10% of the respondents disagreed, and 5% of the respondents strongly disagreed. In item 6, 48% of the respondents strongly agreed that religious and ethnic bigotry represent a major cause of rumours in Nigeria, 45% of the respondents agreed, 5% of the respondents disagreed, and 0% of the respondents strongly disagreed. On item 7, 18% of the respondents strongly agreed that poor regularization of the internet is one of the major causes of rumours in Nigeria, 23% of the respondents agreed, 35% of the respondents disagreed and 25% of the respondents strongly disagreed. In the last item on the table, 33% of the respondents strongly agreed that the quest for making money through violence also causes rumours in Nigeria, 47% of the respondents agreed, 15% of the respondents disagreed, and 5% of the respondents strongly disagreed.

Table 4: Some Major Rumours in Nigeria and their Connection to Conflict

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD
9	The Alu 4 incidence was a rumour of theft in 2012 that led to the burning of four students alive till death	26 65%	12 30%	2 5%	0 0%
10	The rumour about the death of President Buhari and the Jubril of Sudan saga caused tension and fear of political unrest in Nigeria	19 48%	15 38%	5 13%	1 3%
11	The taking of and bathing with salt as preventive measure against Ebola in 2014 was a national rumour that led to sickness and even death of some people	25 63%	15 38%	5 13%	0 0%
12	The Lekki massacre during the #Endsars protest was majorly caused by the widespread rumour on social media that singing the national anthem while holding the national flag will prevent soldiers from shooting	15 38%	12 30%	10 25%	3 8%

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

In tracing some of the major rumours in Nigeria and their connection to conflict from table 9.4 above, 65% of the respondents strongly agreed that Alu 4 incidence was caused by a rumour of theft in 2012 that led to the burning of four students alive till death, while 30% of the respondents agreed, 5% disagreed, and 0% strongly disagreed. Also, 48% of the respondents strongly agreed that the rumour about the death of President Buhari in 2017 and the Jubril of Sudan saga caused tension and fear of political unrest in Nigeria, 35% of the respondents agreed, 5% of the respondents disagreed, and 1% of the respondents strongly disagreed. In item 11, 63% of the respondents strongly agreed that the taking of salt as preventive measure against Ebola was a national rumour that led to sickness and even death of some people, 38% of the respondents agreed, 13% of the respondents disagreed, and 0% of the respondents strongly disagreed. The responses on the last item, 38% of the respondents strongly agreed that the Lekki massacre during the #Endsars protest was majorly caused by the widespread rumour on social media that singing the national anthem while holding the national flag will prevent soldiers from shooting, 30% of the

respondents agreed, 25% of the respondents disagreed, while 8% of the respondents strongly disagreed.

6. TEST OF HYPOTHESIS

H₀: There is no significant relationship between rumour and conflict in Nigeria

H₁: There is a significant relationship between rumour and conflict in Nigeria.

		Correlations			
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Q1	Pearson Correlation	1	.933**	.903**	.894**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	40	40	40	40
Q2	Pearson Correlation	.933**	1	.896**	.912**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	40	40	40	40
Q3	Pearson Correlation	.903**	.896**	1	.806**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	40	40	40	40
Q4	Pearson Correlation	.894**	.912**	.806**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	40	40	40	40

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

In testing the hypothesis, the Pearson correlation was used by the researcher. From the test result, the correlation significant level is significant at 0.01 level. This implies that the null hypothesis is not attainable, and the alternate hypothesis is accepted. The import of this is that, there is a significant relationship between rumour and conflict in Nigeria.

7. DISCUSSIONS

The study demonstrates a correlation between rumour and conflict in Nigeria. Rumours have permeated every sector in Nigeria, from informal to formal, causing conflict and even violence. The results of this study have shown that some major rumours in Nigeria have caused conflict, tension, fear, hatred, destruction, and death. The Alu 4 lynching is one of the worst cases of jungle justice in the country. A student, accompanied by his three friends who were also students of the University of Portharcourt went to a debtor's house to retrieve his money, unfortunately fight broke out and the debtor raised a false alarm accusing them of theft. This aggressive rumour led to the capture, torture, and lynching of these innocent students by an ignorant mob who did not care to verify the authenticity of the rumour. This is in line with the DK model where the 'ignorants' can spread and take action based on unverified rumour. This level of violent action based on unverified rumour affirmed the postulation of Taiwo et al (2017) about the consequences of rumour. The rumour about the death of President Buhari since 2017 is still spreading till today. In 2017, the nation almost went into political unrest because of how this rumour was being spread with veracity by even prominent politicians. On his return from London after over three months, there emerged a sister rumour that the President has been cloned with a double known as Jubril from Sudan. This also raised tension and fear in the country about possible regime change.

One of the major rumours that came as a national catastrophe was the rumour that people should take salt and bath with it as a preventive measure against Ebola virus in 2014. A lot of people got sick and some died because they ignorantly responded to an unverified rumour. It was reported that 2 people died and 20 others were hospitalized in Jos, Plateau state alone (Vangaurd News, 2014). Apart from phone calls, social media was the main

medium where the rumour was spread speedily in the night. The message that permeated the social media space read thus *"Please ensure that you and your family and all your neighbours bath with hot water and salt before daybreak today because of Ebola virus which is spreading through the air."* This is in tandem with the assertion of Friggeri et al. (2014) who likened the spread of rumour on the Nigerian social space as a community disease that keeps increasing with every new technology that makes human communication easier.

Furthermore, the event of 20th October, 2020 at the Lekki toll gate in Lagos, popularly known as the Lekki Massacre was avoidable if only the protesters had good information about the rumour that gave them the audacity to stand their ground in the face of an impending threat to life from the Nigerian Army. On that faithful evening, rumour circulated the social media space about possible military action against protesters. Because rumours are created and spread in an atmosphere of ambiguity, there was a counter rumour that the soldiers cannot shoot any citizen singing the Nigerian national anthem while waving the national flag. This spread quickly on social media (particularly Twitter) and protesters all over the country quickly mobilized and made provision of thousands of flags to use as symbolic shield. Unfortunately, this was just a rumour as the military opened fire on the peaceful protesters who were singing the national anthem while waving their flags. Amnesty International (2020) reported that at least 12 protesters were killed while many injured.

8. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study underscore the profound impact that rumors can have on social stability and public safety in Nigeria. The pervasive nature of rumours across both informal and formal sectors has been shown to incite conflict, instill fear, propagate hatred, and lead to significant destruction and loss of life. The implications of these findings are enormous. One, there is need for policy makers to create a robust communication channel where rumours are counteracted on various platforms with verified, reliable and quick information, especially during crises. Two, enacting and enforcing laws against the deliberate spread of false information is crucial. This include holding accountable those who intentionally spread harmful rumors that result in violence or public unrest. Three, policymakers should initiate community-based programs that educate citizens on the dangers of spreading unverified information. These programs could involve local leaders and influencers who can advocate for verification before dissemination. Four, media outlets must commit to ethical journalism practices by verifying information before publication. The role of media in either quelling or fueling rumors is significant, and adherence to journalistic standards can prevent the spread of false information. Five, establishing independent fact-checking organizations or collaborating with existing ones can help debunk false rumors rapidly. Media houses should regularly highlight these fact-checks to educate the public on discerning credible information. Six, integrating media literacy into school curricula can equip students with critical thinking skills needed to evaluate information sources. Lessons on how to distinguish between verified news and rumors should be included in educational programs from an early age. Last but not the least, individuals must be encouraged to critically evaluate the information they receive, particularly from social media. Promoting a culture of skepticism where people question the validity of sensational claims before sharing them can significantly reduce the spread of rumors.

9. CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study provides empirical evidence on how rumours can escalate into conflicts, thereby enriching the existing literature on social dynamics and conflict studies. By documenting specific cases such as the Alu 4 lynching, the false alarms about President Buhari, the Lekki Massacre, and the Ebola virus misinformation, the research underscores the tangible and often tragic consequences of unverified information. This evidence supports theoretical models like the DK model, which describes the actions of 'ignorants' based on unverified rumours.

Future research should look into the specific mechanisms through which rumours propagate in both digital and physical spaces. This include studying the role of social media algorithms, network structures, and influential figures in the spread of misinformation. Understanding these mechanisms can help develop more effective countermeasures to prevent the rapid spread of harmful rumours. Investigating the psychological and social

factors that make individuals and communities susceptible to rumours is another critical area for future research. Studies could explore how fear, uncertainty, trust (or lack thereof) in authorities, and social cohesion influence the spread and acceptance of rumours.

10. CONCLUSION

In contrast to the null hypothesis that was tested at *P-Value* of 0.05 with the correlation result of 0.01 level of significance, this study has proven through the analysis of past rumours and how they caused conflict, fear, tension, violence, destructions and death in the country that, there is a significant relationship between rumour and conflict in Nigeria. This finding is in line with the work of Rahman and Johan (2020) who showed through a quantitative method, the role of social media rumours in social unrest in Bangladesh. 99.2% of their respondents agreed that social media rumours have caused social anarchy in the country and have left many in gruesome conditions. The generalizability of the results presented above is limited by the sample size for this study. The study makes generalization about Nigeria but data were collected from a small group of postgraduate students in Madibbo Adama University. However, the data contribute a clear understanding of the nexus between rumour and conflict in Nigeria. There is therefore, need for the government and other stakeholders to engage in mass education of the population about the danger of spreading unverified information especially on social media platforms.

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