



**Centre for Democracy & Development**  
**Centre pour la démocratie et le développement**

# Nigeria's 'fake news' eco-system

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# Nigeria's 'fake news' eco-system

## PRE-ELECTION ▶▶▶

Fake news is not a new concept in Nigeria, but the exponential growth in the use and availability of mobile phones with access to the internet, as well as the sheer amount of information accessible in the age of digital media, has made the task of filtering out false information far more difficult. To gain a deeper understanding of the problem, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) conducted a study of the online information landscape in order to paint a clearer picture of how information flows. This aims to understand the precise nature of disinformation (information shared with the intent to mislead), misinformation (information not necessarily shared with intent to mislead), hateful or dangerous speech, propaganda and other harmful forms of content available to Nigerians.



A young man reading information off the internet (Photo: ITWeb Africa)

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Our analysis focused primarily on social media and on Facebook and Twitter, with some data collection and fact checking through WhatsApp. Facebook data, collected between December 28, 2018 and January 27, 2019, reflected a broader and more international perspective of the electoral process. In our analysis we divided the content into three principal categories: politics, news and culture oriented clusters. Our Twitter dataset, which contained 34.5 million tweets collected between December 31, 2018 and January 30, 2019. These were collected from the accounts of major politicians, political parties and media houses as well as by using hashtags related to the general election campaign and process. Our data shows that 19.5% of accounts showed signs of automation, pointing to a high level of bot activity.

## SITES OF FAKE NEWS

The URLs which emerged out of the Facebook clusters did not always correlate with the most at-risk URLs in our dataset for the dissemination of disinformation. The websites in our database were ranked according to high levels of user engagement; how frequently their content was shared on Facebook or cited on Twitter; and how often they shared false content. The three that ranked the highest were:

- » [www.spynigeria.com/ng](http://www.spynigeria.com/ng)
- » [www.observerstimes.com](http://www.observerstimes.com)
- » [www.sojworld.com](http://www.sojworld.com)

We initially flagged SpyNigeria as a ‘fake news’ distributor because it often shared stories that were sensational, unsourced or incorrect. The results of our research proved that to be the case, with multiple indicators of suspicious activity. The SpyNigeria domain was initially created in 2015 under the name ‘Punch Newspaper’, in 2016 it was changed to SpyNigeria Newspaper, and it is now known simply as SpyNigeria - ‘spynigeria.ng’. There are two Facebook groups with over 100k followers linked to these domains- spynigeria.NG and SPYNigeria.ng; and identical content is cross-posted on another Facebook group - Punch Newspaper, which also has a significant following, which currently stands at just over 29,000. This Punch account is not associated with the newspaper of the same name, but is clearly affiliated with SpyNigeria. This we were able to confirm through analysis done with support of CrowdTangle.

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A headline from SpyNigeria, one that was fact-checked and found to be false by CDD's researchers:  
"Allow Me To Re-Colonize Nigeria And Ghana For Just A Year.....Kim Jong Un"

A headline from SpyNigeria, one that was fact-checked and found to be false by CDD's researchers: "Allow Me To Re-Colonize Nigeria And Ghana For Just A Year.....Kim Jong Un", is a clear example of disinformation. This story was posted seven times across various SpyNigeria related platforms, recording a total of 866 interactions by February 13, 2019. However, this story was also shared across multiple WhatsApp groups in Nigeria that CDD was a part of, further widening the engagement albeit on a platform where tracking this information is not possible.

## THE FAKE NEWS RUMOUR MILL

One of the more insidious and long-running rumors around Nigeria's elections was a story that Buhari was a clone. With posts suggesting that President Buhari died on a trip to the United Kingdom for health care, and was being impersonated by a clone, 'Jubrin' from Sudan. We traced the origin of these claims to a video by the Nnamdi Kanu - the infamous IPOB leader - shared initially on Twitter by user @sam\_ezeh on 3 September 2017. Soon after, this information was picked up by other twitter handles, and within months it was a trending story on the internet. In December of 2018, Buhari finally responded to the story while on a trip to Poland.

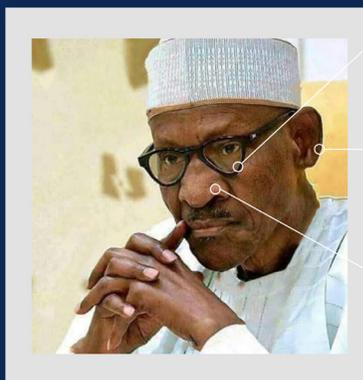
# SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

Original Image ✓



Posted on the 24th of August 2017 by Bayo Omoboriowo; the official photographer of the President of Nigeria, on his Instagram handle @bayoomoboriowo.

Fake Image ✗



Manipulated photo circulating on the internet

Irregular glasses frame showing photo manipulation

Enlarged ears showing photo manipulation

Enlarged nose showing photo manipulation



A fact check by the CDD researchers showing a photo manipulation of President Muhammadu Buhari's image that went viral on social media

The rise in violent clashes between farmers and herdsmen over the last few years has also proven to be fertile ground for propaganda, hate speech and disinformation. An example of this is the story that emerged from a Facebook group called Adamawa Facebook Group, claiming that the former Minister of Defence, Lt. Gen Theophilus Danjuma, had accused President Muhammadu Buhari of being the direct founder and sponsor of Miyetti Allah (a cattle herders association), who he labelled Fulani jihadists. The rumour was widely shared on WhatsApp as a copy-paste message with the title: 'Gen . TY Danjuma explodes' having initially appeared on NairaLand (a popular public web forum) in October 2018. Later the story was picked up by newsflash247, a news site that we have identified as a source of other false stories. That article had 4507 shares on its platform as of February 14, 2019, and our research found it had been posted in over 60 Facebook groups with a collective following of over two million people, gaining over 5000 likes, 3500 comments and 4000 shares.

Within our dataset we identified five Facebook pages, with hundreds of thousands of followers between them, that repeatedly linked to news websites that often share false stories. All of these pages linked to at least two of the problematic sources listed above:



- ◇ Nigerian Public Opinion page (link) – **159,058** followers
- ◇ Edo Political Forum (link) – **113,614** members
- ◇ PDP Supporters in Nigeria and Diaspora (link) – **67,258** members
- ◇ Nigerian’s Diaspora Political Awareness Group (link) – **43,911** members
- ◇ Nigerian People’s Parliament (link) – **322,282** members

These Facebook groups, the types of content they share and the websites that are used to host fake news stories were identified by CDD’s research team during the one month study. They represent a small portion of a much larger ecosystem of social media groups and online sites used to share false content.

Our research found many other suspect online newspapers in the Facebook and Twitter datasets including [biafracfacts.blogspot.com](http://biafracfacts.blogspot.com), [edokowilson.com](http://edokowilson.com), [sycamoretimes.com](http://sycamoretimes.com) and [elombah.com](http://elombah.com). These were often linked to popular Facebook groups such as Hope for Nigeria, the Nigerian People’s Parliament and SpyNigeria. While many present themselves as credible online news sources, their content often reveals clear biases for or against a particular political party or individual. They are also prone to publishing stories that constitute disinformation or misinformation, with unknown, unverifiable or incorrect sources. Below is a table with some of the sites we have extracted that exhibit these tendencies:

APC Support	PDP Support	Biafra
» <a href="http://aledeh.com">aledeh.com</a>	» <a href="http://anambrariannews.com">anambrariannews.com</a>	» <a href="http://dailytimetv.com">dailytimetv.com</a>
» <a href="http://citymirrornews.com">citymirrornews.com</a>	» <a href="http://authorityngr.com">authorityngr.com</a>	» <a href="http://bctworldtv.com">bctworldtv.com</a>
» <a href="http://dangote-group.africa-newsroom.com">dangote-group.africa-newsroom.com</a>	» <a href="http://atiku.org">atiku.org</a>	» <a href="http://biafranewsmill.com">biafranewsmill.com</a>
» <a href="http://bengbenro.com">bengbenro.com</a>	» <a href="http://aero-dynamiek.nl">aero-dynamiek.nl</a>	» <a href="http://apnews.com">apnews.com</a>
» <a href="http://dailyinfo.com.ng">dailyinfo.com.ng</a>	» <a href="http://citizenng.com">citizenng.com</a>	» <a href="http://bvichannel.com">bvichannel.com</a>
	» <a href="http://dailynigerian.com">dailynigerian.com</a>	» <a href="http://9newsng.com">9newsng.com</a>

A further issue found in our study relates to the role of satirical content. Satire is not very well established in Nigeria which means that an article which is satirical in nature might be presented or interpreted as completely true. In WhatsApp groups and on Facebook pages we found several examples where satirical articles were presented as true information or held opinions.

Due to a deficit in media and information literacy, and since users often receive material meant to misinform, content that might simply be satirical, or even an opinion, can be manipulated and doctored to serve a political purpose.



**Centre for Democracy & Development**

**Centre pour la democratie et le development**

The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) was established in the United Kingdom in 1997 as an independent, not-for-profit, research training, advocacy and capacity building organization

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