

Adopting Principles Synthesized from Hadith Criticism to Combat Information Disorder about the Nigeria Election

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Abstract

Information disorder has cut across the thin and thick of life through social media outlets. Particularly, the 2023 Nigeria election has been marred with disinformation. This has led to erosion of public trust in electoral institutions and processes. Therefore, combating information disorder in Nigeria's electoral landscape necessitates a comprehensive strategy. This should encompass collaborative fact-checking and improved media literacy. To demonstrate this, three claims around the 2023 Nigeria presidential election were subjected to test in the light of the fact-checking principles synthesized from hadith criticism. The principles are: identifying the claim's source, looking for corroborating sources, verifying all available sources by the use of Isnad criticism techniques, examining the content under the microscope of Matn criticism and, finally, creating a channel for dealing with fake news purveyors in line with the science of Narrators. The findings show that the three claims are false, and that some government officials were involved in sharing false election results, and that many pieces of disinformation centered on the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). However, the INEC has responded to most of the claims. It is also established that the motives behind some claims are partisan in nature. To stem the tide of information disorder in Nigeria, it is recommended that the Government made fabricating and sharing disinformation and misinformation punishable offense. This punishment should take into consideration the claim's context, the primary source's status in society, and the impact the claim has on Nigeria's unity and security.

Keywords: Principles, Hadith Criticism, Information Disorder, Nigeria, Election.

Introduction

Information disorder has cut across the thin and thick of life through web pages and social media outlets. Particularly, disinformation and Nigeria elections have become two sides of the same coin. The Nigerian elections have been severely marred by disinformation, especially during the general elections in February, 2023. Towards the election, there was proliferation in the number of websites established to favour or attack one party or another. Three of these new websites—Podium Reporters, which was registered in 2021; Reportera, in July 2022; and Parallel Facts, in May 2023—were examined by the BBC Global Disinformation Team. Mr. Tijani said there was a purpose why they were created at that particular time. First, he claims, it seemed as though the websites were attempting to support particular candidates' election. However, he surmises that their publishers also wanted to "get good ad revenue on their sites"¹

¹ Chiagozie N., Tukur F., and Olaronke A., *Nigeria elections: Websites use false stories to attract views and ads*, 14 September 2023. Retrieved on October 5, 2024 from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-66647768>

Information disorder during the Presidential election in February, 2023 involves false claims about electoral processes, manipulated videos and images, viral misinformation campaigns, fabricated election results and election-related propaganda. Consequently, these have led to erosion of public trust in electoral institutions and processes leading to violence and unrest during and after elections. Therefore, combating information disorder in Nigeria's electoral context requires a multifaceted approach that includes collaborative fact-checking, enhanced media literacy, proactive government communication, and the application of principles derived from Hadith criticism. It is against this backdrop that this paper applies the fact-checking principles synthesized from hadith criticism on select claims on the Nigeria Presidential election in February, 2023. Three claims were selected; one before the election, one on the day of the election and one after the election. The fact-checking principles blended from hadith criticism are:

- 1- Identifying the source of a claim
- 2- Searching for corroborating sources,
- 3- Verifying all the available sources of information by using the methods of *Isnad* criticism,
- 4- Scrutinizing the contents of claim in the light of *Matn* criticism
- 5- Establishing a conduit of dealing with the purveyors of fake news in accordance with the science of narrators.²

Concept of Information Disorder

The phenomenon of information disorder includes disinformation, misinformation, and mal-information.

Disinformation is information that is deliberately fabricated to mislead the public and misinformation is false information shared without knowing that is incorrect, while mal-information is information that is based on reality but used to cause harm.³

These forms of information disorder can lead to severe consequences, including altered voting behaviors and post-election violence⁴. However, integrating principles derived from the Hadith criticism can provide a framework for addressing information disorder.

The Claim that the Precedential election may be postponed to the 4th of March, 2023

Before the presidential election on 25th February, 2023, most of the supporters of each prominent political party such as PDP, APC and LP had started fabricating disinformation and sharing misinformation and mal-information to mar one another. One of the claims that was circulated on social media outlets on 13th February, 2023 is on the presidential election postponement. The chairman of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Prof. Mahmood Yakubu was said to have released a document indicating that the presidential election that was slated to hold on 25th February, 2023 may be postponed to the 4th of March, 2023. It was further claimed that the postponement was due to the scarcity of cash as a result

² Qaasim-Badmusi S. B. & Jangebe H. A. (2024). *A Synthetic Analysis of Fact-Checking Principles from Hadith Criticism AD-Dalil, Volume 4, No 1. June*. pp: 100. Retrieved on October 5, 2024 from <https://nataisogun.com/ad-dalil/current-issue/>

³ Julie, P, Cherilyn, I., Claire, W., Hossein, D., Alice, M., Magda, A., Tom T., Fergus, B., & Alexios, M. (2018) *Journalism, 'Fake News' & Disinformation*, UNESCO, Paris, France. pp: 44

Abdulkabeer, Navigating the Information Disorder Sector in Nigeria Ahead of the 2023 Elections. Nigeria ⁴ Decides 2023: Essays. January 18, 2023. December 22, January 23, Retrieved on 15-10-2024 <https://republic.com.ng/nigeria/information-disorder-ahead-of-2023-elections/>

of the new Central Bank of Nigeria policy limiting daily withdrawal and availability of the newly redesigned 200 Naira, 500 Naira and 1000 Naira notes.

The above claim was captured in the INEC letterhead to mislead the public that it was originally emanated from the INEC Chairman.

Nitpicking this claim in the light of the principles synthesized from hadith criticism, there is need to first identify its source. On this basis, Imam Shafi' said regarding the source of Hadith "Whoever does not ask: 'from where?' is like a night woodcutter, carrying a bundle of firewood on his back, for perhaps there is a snake in it that will bite him."⁵

This can be identified with the INEC letterhead. According to the claim, the INEC chairman is the source of the information. Hence, there is no need to search for corroborating sources. The next stage is to verify the source using the methods of *Isnad* criticism. Fortunately, the INEC has responded to the claim through its Twitter platform that the claim was not true and that the public should disregard it.⁶ According the fifth principle synthesized from hadith criticism, it is the role of the Federal Government to fish out the fabricator of the claim through scientific methods and punish him/her in order to serve as deterrent for others who may think of following the same suit. Furthermore, it is also important to make sharing misinformation relating to elections punishable offence due to its lethal effect on the unity of Nigeria.

A copy of the claim that the INEC Chairman may postpone the election to the 4th of March, 2023 is below.

⁵ Ibn 'Adī al-Jurjānī , Abū Aḥmad 'Abdullāh (1988) Al-Kāmil fī Ḍu'afā' al-Rijāl, Taḥqīq Yaḥyā Mukhtār Ghazāwī, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr., Vol. 1. Pp: 115

⁶ Retrieved on October 5, 2024 from <https://x.com/inecnigeria/status/1625178058071195654>



13th February, 2023

INEC may Postpone February, 25 Presidential Election by a Week or Two - INEC Chairman

Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, Prof Mahmood Yakubu, Monday morning told reporters that the electoral umpire, INEC, may have to shift the February 25th presidential election to March 4, 2023, due to the scarcity of cash as a result of the new CBN policy limiting daily withdrawal and availability of the newly redesigned N200, N500 and N1000 notes.

Prof Mahmud stated this at the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja, shortly after his arrival from Lagos on Monday morning.

The INEC Boss, Mahmood, and some high profile staff of the commission had on Thursday paid the CBN Governor, Godwin Emefiele, a working visit where they were told by the later that the CBN is doing everything within its capacity to ensure that the new Naira notes are made available for Nigerians ahead of the February 25 and March 9 elections.

However, Mahmud who said INEC is also suffering the scarcity of fund and may have been compelled to postpone the February 25th presidential election by a week or two due to the scarcity of cash, maintained that it's in the interest of the commission to ensure that every eligible voter is given the opportunity to participate in the 2023 general election.

The INEC boss said Nigerians would be informed of any changes made in the election dates, stressing that the scarcity of cash is a major hindrance which pose a huge threat to the February 25 and March 9 elections.

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Figure 1 DISINFORMATION ABOUT ELECTION CIRCULATED ON FACEBOOK

Disseminating False Election Results

Fake news is not new to Nigerians but the most pathetic is when the government officials are involved in disseminating disinformation about election results. During the presidential election on 25th of February, 2023, fake election results were widely circulated through social media platforms. A spokesman for President Muhammadu Buhari, Bashir Ahmad shared on his Twitter platform on the 25th of February, 2023, the Presidential election results of Ojo Local Government Area of Lagos State as follows:

APC: 54,000.

LP: 31,661

PDP: 9233

Applying the principles synthesized from Hadith criticism to the above claim, it is either the source of claim is Bashir Ahmad or he got the information from another source. However, Bashir Ahmad is the one who shared the claim through his Twitter platform without attributing it to any source and it can only according to our investigation be traced to his Twitter platform. He was a government official but was not in charge of announcing the election result. Hence, the claim has to be subjected to further investigation. Another source of Ojo Local Government Area presidential election result is INEC that was officially in charge of coordinating and announcing the presidential election result. The result announced by the INEC is as follows:

APC: 20,603.

LP: 38,859

PDP: 3,701⁷

Using the *Matn* criticism technique, if there is a real contradiction between two claims, priority is given to the account of an individual who was a part of the Hadith incident above that of others. INEC in this case has the first-hand information about the election results and the preference is given to its announcement on that of Bashir Ahmad. Being a government official, he should not have shared the election results that had not been approved by the INEC. However, he later deleted his tweet. It is understood that he deleted the tweet after realizing the gravity of the crime he committed for sharing misinformation about the election results. Below is a copy of the tweet.

⁷ <https://www.stears.co/elections/2023/president/LA/>



A Claim that INEC deliberately Rigged the 2023 General Election

Circulation of disinformation and misinformation did not stop after the presidential election on the 25th of February, 2023. Some supporters of Labour Party claimed that the INEC rigged the elections in favour of the ruling party, APC. The presidential candidates of both PDP and LP headed to courts to claim their victories.

According to Associate Professor Sam Amadi, Director of the Abuja School of Social and Political Thoughts, INEC purposefully chose to sabotage the general election in 2023. The INEC deliberately chose to run a very flawed election, he added. It is a purposeful attempt to rig the election, not a technical or logistical issue.⁸

The source of the claim is Dr. Sam Amadi as reported by “This Day” and confirmed through other sources. Dr. Sam Amadi was an Imo State Governorship aspirant under the Labour Party, LP, in the off-season election of November 11, 2023.⁹ Using the method of *Isnad* criticism to verify the source, any claim from an opponent source must be taken with extra care, i.e. it must not be solely relied on, especially if there is an indication that the motive behind the claim is enmity. The enmity may be tribal, religious or partisan in nature¹⁰. The lack of supporting evidence makes it very evident that his argument is motivated by partisanship. It is evident that his assertion is untrue when it is subjected to the *Matn* critique technique, since it stands in

⁸ Chuks Okocha. INEC Deliberately Rigged 2023 General Election, Amadi Alleges. Retrieved on October 5, 2024 from https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2023/04/05/inec-deliberately-rigged-2023-general-election-amadi-alleges/#google_vignette

⁹ Comfort Obi. Dr Sam Amadi, Randy Politicians, And Young Girls. Retrieved on October 5, 2024 from <https://thesourceng.com/dr-sam-amadi-randy-politicians-and-young-girls/>

¹⁰ Qaasim-Badmusi S. B. & Jangebe H. A. (2024). *A Synthetic Analysis of Fact-Checking Principles from Hadith Criticism AD-Dalil, Volume 4, No 1. June*. pp: 102 Retrieved on October 5, 2024 from <https://nataisogun.com/ad-dalil/current-issue/>

stark contrast to the INEC-approved election results. According to the principle, primary sources' contents are prioritized above secondary ones when there is a genuine discrepancy between their contents.¹¹ The primary source in this instance is the INEC-approved election results, while the secondary source is Associate Professor Sam Amadi. Other than accusations, his assertion lacks any supporting evidence to support its veracity.

Based on the punishment prescribed in Science of Narrators for the narrators of weak Hadith and fabricators, the government should apply a deterrent punishment for creating or disseminating false information in order to combat information disorder regarding the Nigerian election. It should also be taken into consideration while applying the punishment the claim's context, the primary source's status in society, and the impact the claim has on Nigeria's unity and security.

Findings and Recommendations

An attempt had been made in this small piece to adopt the principles synthesized from hadith criticism to combat information disorder about the Nigeria election. Having gone through the three claims around the 2023 Nigeria presidential election in the light of the fact-checking principles synthesized from hadith criticism, it is evident that:

1- The three claims around the 2023 Nigeria presidential election that were subjected to the principles synthesized from hadith criticism are false.

- 1- Among those who were involved in sharing false election results are government officials
- 2- Many pieces of disinformation about the 2023 Nigeria presidential election centered on the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). However, the INEC has responded to most of the claims.
- 3- The motives behind many claims around the 2023 Nigeria presidential election were partisan in nature.

In the light of the above explanation, it is recommended that the Government made fabricating and sharing disinformation and misinformation punishable offense in order to stem the tide of information disorder around the Nigeria election. It is also suggested to conduct in-depth research on integrating Science of Hadith and investigative journalism.

¹¹ *Ibid* pp: 103

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