



Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology: A Potential Remedy To Social Media Misinformation In Nigeria

Dr. Ratzinger E. E. Nwobodo (Ph.D)
Philosophy Department
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State.

Date of Submission: 15-03-2024

Date of Acceptance: 02-04-2024

Abstract

The evolution of communication technology in the 21st century has seen a significant shift in the means of communication. With the dominance of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, etc, traditional means of communication and dissemination of information such as radio, and television are continually relegated to the background, as a preponderance of the millennials now solely depend on social media and the internet for information. While this is a welcome development, as information can be disseminated around the globe in a matter of seconds, it raises concern as these platforms have over the years become an effective avenue for rumour-mongering, misinformation, fake news and conspiracy theories. In Nigeria, where the regulation of social media misinformation contends with the preservation of democratic access, this paper examines the motivations behind social media misinformation and proposes a remedy rooted in critical thinking towards information consumption and dissemination on social media. Recognizing the impracticality of complete regulation, this study advocates the application of Edmund Husserl's phenomenological principle, epoche, as a cognitive tool with the potential to address social media misinformation in Nigeria. In conclusion, the study encourages individuals to bracket off their preconceived notions, to foster a discerning online community, by prompting a thorough evaluation of information before acceptance or sharing. The study is significant because it contributes to the ongoing discourse on mitigating the impact of misinformation in Nigeria.

Keywords: Misinformation, Phenomenology, Epoche

I. Introduction

In contemporary times, social media misinformation has emerged as a global pandemic, facilitated by democratic access to the internet that

has transformed the world into a global village. While this interconnectedness fosters information accessibility, it concurrently serves as a breeding ground for the proliferation of misinformation. The rapid and widespread dissemination of misinformation on social media platforms poses a substantial challenge for credible sources seeking to counteract its impact. This unrestricted environment allows individuals and news organizations to freely post unverified content which is not fact-checked, further contributing to the harm caused by misinformation (Pennycook & Rand, 2019; Bondielli & Marcelloni, 2019).

Although misinformation or fake news has become an infodemic, which has grabbed the attention of researchers globally, the primary focus of this study is social media misinformation in Nigeria. According to Ibrahim and Pate (2019), the meteoric progress of technology and the widespread availability of media in Nigeria have become leverage for more individuals to actively engage in public discourse on issues that directly impact them. This surge in accessibility has facilitated increased online social interactions. However, this expanded access to technology and media has also given rise to a range of negative consequences, particularly the spread of misleading and fabricated content. This phenomenon has the potential to significantly impact people's lives and their ability to make informed decisions, especially in areas such as health, religion, and politics. Maliciously created and false information tends to proliferate, creating challenges in distinguishing fact from fiction. Notably, since 2015, election campaigns globally have underscored the threat of misinformation and fake news, revealing how targeted efforts can influence and misguide individuals, potentially even affecting election outcomes.

The consequences of this misinformation are exemplified during global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, where rumours and hoaxes about the disease's origin, outcomes, prevention, and



cure circulated widely, straining healthcare systems and adversely affecting public health (Tasnim et al., 2020). For instance, the belief in misinformation about coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has been cited to have contributed to people's reluctance to get vaccinated against the disease and lower intentions to comply with necessary public health measures ((Roozenbeek et al., 2022). Akin to this situation is the rife misinformation regarding the efficacy of saltwater for preventing and treating Ebola outbreak in Nigeria. This widespread misinformation led to detrimental outcomes for certain individuals (<http://allafrica.com/stories/201408111640.html>).

Given the unrestricted access to social media platforms and the impracticality of regulating information, it becomes crucial to approach information consumption critically to prevent the spread and belief in misinformation. This imperative aligns with Edmund Husserl's Phenomenological Epoche, a cognitive tool involving the temporary suspension of preconceived notions and biases to critically focus on the object of inquiry. In the context of social media misinformation, applying epoche becomes a potential remedy, encouraging individuals to be discerning consumers of information. It advocates for questioning the validity of information, irrespective of the source, by bracketing off personal sentiments and engaging in thorough research.

Husserl's epoche finds particular relevance in an era where influencers and content creators on social media wield significant influence. By encouraging individuals to critically evaluate information before making decisions or posts, this approach challenges the prevalent trend of blindly following endorsements from celebrities or content creators without assessing the information's merit. This paper aims to explore the implicit solutional assumptions within Husserl's philosophy and develop them into a potential remedial approach for addressing social media misinformation in Nigeria from a phenomenological perspective.

Understanding the Concept of Misinformation

Misinformation encompasses false or inaccurate information deliberately or unintentionally created and disseminated (Wu et al., 2019). Misinformation is an umbrella term encompassing such concepts as disinformation, rumours, spam and fake news. The live cord that binds these concepts is their innate ability for their inaccuracies to cause various harmful effects and distress (especially on social media) especially when intervention is lacking. Although these terms have

similar meanings, disinformation is often confused with misinformation. It's crucial to note that misinformation and disinformation refer to fake or inaccurate information. The essential difference between them is hinged on intention. While misinformation is not typically an intentional act aimed at deceiving, disinformation is by its nature intentional and aimed at deceiving. In Wu et al.'s (2020) study, they categorized misinformation on social media into various types for a more comprehensive understanding, and we will explore five of these types.

Unintentionally spread misinformation:

Unintentional misinformation often stems from users' trust in information sources like friends or influential figures. This can inadvertently propagate through social networks, as individuals aim to inform rather than deceive.

Intentionally spread misinformation: This involves the deliberate dissemination of misinformation, intended to deceive. It is typically orchestrated by writers and coordinated groups, these actors harbour specific goals and agendas to compile and propagate deceptive information.

Urban legend: Urban legends constitute deliberately disseminated misinformation, often intertwined with fictional narratives about local events. The primary intent is frequently entertainment-oriented.

Fake news: Fake news comprises deliberately disseminated misinformation presented in the format of news. It is news that is not genuine. It is untrue and false.

Unverified information: It has the potential to be accurate or inaccurate. Information is considered unverified until confirmation; those proven false fall into misinformation. Unverified information can evoke effects akin to other misinformation, inducing fear, and hatred. An example of this is rumour. It has the potential to be true or false.

Despite the definitions provided earlier, within the scope of this paper and in our discourse, we interpret misinformation as a comprehensive term encompassing all false or inaccurate information spread on social media, irrespective of intention.

Understanding the Concept of Phenomenology

The diverse approaches adopted by phenomenologists, who are influenced by their inclinations or schools of thought mitigate against having a thorough going definition of the term phenomenology (Agama & Onuoha, 2021). Consequently, achieving a singular interpretation of phenomenology remains nearly impossible (Giorgi & Giorg, 2003). Etymologically, the term



"phenomenology" stems from the Greek words "Phainomen," meaning "appearance," and "Logos," meaning "discourse." "Phainomen," is an offshoot of the Greek verb "phainesthai," which signifies "that which shows itself or reveals itself." The Greek meaning of "Logos" as discourse evolves into "that which opens to sight" or "lets something be seen" (Agama & Onuoha, 2021). Therefore, an in-depth understanding of phenomenology, as the Logos of the phenomenon, indicates a focused effort to open to sight that which manifests and allows it to be seen as it is (Summer 1989, cited in Agama & Onuoha, 2021). Iroegbu (1995) notes that phenomenology, as a method of researching reality differs from other Logos-compounded sciences like biology, where Logos is directly linked to the object of inquiry, such as the Logos of life or Logos of God.

However, as an inquiry method within a philosophical context, phenomenology transcends being merely a Logos of a phenomenon; it emerges as a crucial and significant method for the inquiry and discovery of reality (Iroegbu, 1995). This position augurs with the phenomenological style of Edmund Husserl, which involves describing different aspects of phenomena as they appear to consciousness. Crotty (1998), as referenced by Agama and Onuoha (2021), concisely articulates this concept by asserting that Husserl's phenomenology centres on the exploration of realities, emphasizing the quest for truth not merely through the revelation of phenomena, but within a life-world comprised of interconnected, subjectively lived experiences.

In summary, Husserl's Phenomenology is descriptive, concentrating not on the intrinsic nature of things, even if it is acknowledged that the given phenomena may contain more or differ from what is presented. Rather, it primarily explores how things appear to consciousness. Agama and Onuoha (2021) aptly summarize Husserl's concept of Phenomenology as the:

Philosophical study of the structures of experience and consciousness, a descriptive of the givens of immediate experiences. By extension, it is an attempt to capture experience in process as lived, through descriptive analysis. It studies how things appear to consciousness, and not how they are in themselves, even if it is known that the given contains more than or is different from what is presented (p.3).

To concentrate on things as they appear to consciousness, Husserl introduced the principle known as Epoche or Bracketing. This involves

suspending previous experiences about phenomena to solely focus on how phenomena appear. Therefore, the paper advocates for the use of this essential tool in interacting with information by suspending biases, preconceptions, and inferences to fully focus on the phenomena as presented, without bias. Hence, a deeper understanding of this key principle central to Husserlian phenomenology is crucial, marking the initial step towards comprehending Husserl's phenomenological position.

Understanding Edmund Husserl's Phenomenological Epoche or Bracketing

Edmund Husserl, the proponent of phenomenology, framed it as the exploration of what is presented to human experience. In essence, he arranged human experiences into a domain of philosophy (Eruka, 2023). This act was birthed by his reflection on how our consciousness comprehends individual objects. To direct attention solely to experiences as they manifest to consciousness, Husserl innovated a principle which he termed 'epoche' also known as bracketing, to serve as a guide (Husserl 1982). "Bracketing" here is used in a metaphorical sense. It draws an analogy from mathematics, where certain parts of an equation or observation are enclosed to bring another part into focus, keeping them constant but disregarding them (Sanders, 1982; cited in Raheemson, 2016). Eruka (2023) provides a nuanced explanation. He opines that:

The world as it is, in its uncritical state, and before the application of the phenomenological method is said to be in its natural mode of being. When the action is to investigate the world phenomenologically, the first step is to bracket the world. Bracketing the world implies a paradigm shift that involves the concentration of attention, a conscious shift in focus that seeks to suspend our previous knowledge of the world; all the theories about its existence and operations; ideas already formed; beliefs and judgments. It is like starting the knowledge journey of the world afresh – more or less starting on a clean slate (p. 121).

In simple terms, he states that before applying the phenomenological method, the world is perceived as existing in its uncritical state, termed its natural mode. A phenomenological investigation starts with 'bracketing,' signifying a paradigm shift that requires consciously setting aside our natural attitude, prior knowledge, theories, beliefs, and judgments about the world. It is akin to embarking on a fresh exploration of the world, essentially



starting with a clean slate. Bracketing, or Epoche, entails a phenomenological reduction, advocating for a non-judgmental stance to avoid hindering the perception of phenomena as they are (Husserl, 1964; cited in Raheemson, 2016). This involves suspending the natural attitude that relies on past experiences or preconceptions, aiming to 'bring one's conscious experience to the forefront of reflection' (Agama & Onuoha, 2021, p. 3). Mortariand Tarozzi (n.d) emphasizes that epoche or bracketing is a transcendental method that aims at giving a phenomenological description of invariant aspects of phenomena as they appear to consciousness. This presents Husserl's phenomenological approach as a scientific method for understanding human beings at a profound level.

Crucially, for Husserl (1983), suspension of the natural attitude does not imply nihilistic scepticism. Instead, it temporarily sets aside the existence of external things that are not within immediate consciousness, concentrating on unravelling how these things present themselves as phenomena to consciousness. According to Agama and Onuoha (2021), this distinguishes Husserl's approach from Descartes' 'Cogito ergo sum,' which associates self-certainty with doubt. Husserl's stance is dialogical, embodying both doubting and reflexive attitudes, indicating an experienced subject and object. This is evident in the phenomenological epoche, affirming that consciousness is always directed towards something (Husserl 1982). The concept of 'intentionality' serves to illustrate the relationship between the experiencing subject and the experienced object. Intentionality encompasses conscious acts like perceiving, remembering, and wishing, where an object, picked out from the stream of experience, is brought into consciousness by focusing on it (Agama & Onuoha, 2021). This intentional act involves bracketing off the flow of experience to concentrate on the object.

Furthermore, intentionality attributes specific characteristics, qualities and meaning to both the subject and the object. In the words of Agama and Onuoha (2021), intentionality:

Orients the person to an object in a specific way and so carries an "interpretative sense" or "meaning-context" that is dependent on the person's particular perspective and the temporal referent with which he or she views the object (p. 3)

This implies that the same object can be subject to diverse interpretations, dependent on the experience or the type of act involved. Husserl strives to establish a common ground for these interpretations, suggesting that through an essential

understanding of the thing in itself, diverse interpretations can be reconciled.

To achieve this understanding, he introduces the 'eidetic method,' examining various aspects of an object across prior perceptions, imaginings, and remembrances, identifying what remains constant as the object's essence. Eidetic reduction involves unveiling the 'essential' by stripping away the seeming appearances of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). It involves a process of totally transcending the conventional patterns of thoughts and actions to reveal the meaning structure. Going further he noted:

Although the Epoche is rarely perfectly achieved, the energy, attention, and work involved in reflection and self-dialogue, the intention that underlies the process, and the attitude and frame of reference, significantly reduce the influence of preconceived thoughts, judgments, and biases. Further, regular practice of the Epoche process increases one's competency in achieving a presuppositionless state and in being open to receiving whatever appears in consciousness, as such. (p. 90)

Summarily, it implies that despite the challenge of rarely achieving a perfect epoche, the reflective process significantly diminishes the influence of preconceived thoughts, judgments, and biases. Regular practice enhances competency in achieving a presuppositionless state, fostering openness to whatever appears in consciousness. Combining these elements with phenomenological epoche or bracketing forms the foundation for our exploration, with relevance to mitigating social media misinformation in Nigeria. However, a prerequisite to this exploration is to have an in-depth understanding of social media misinformation in Nigeria.

Social Media Misinformation and fake news in Nigeria

The rapid advancement of technology and the widespread accessibility of media in Nigeria have empowered individuals to actively participate in public discourse on issues directly affecting them (Ibrahim & Pate, 2019). In today's era, social media has streamlined information sharing among people. According to Statista (2023), the number of internet users in Nigeria has surged from 97.2 million in 2017 to 122.5 million in 2023, with active social media users increasing from 1.8 million to 31.6 million during the same period. This illustrates the growing prominence of the internet and social media as household means for interpersonal and public communication in Nigeria and globally. A



significant portion of the Nigerian population now heavily relies on social media and online blogs for information (Sulaiman et al., 2020). Globally, social media has become a central source of information and entertainment, giving room for the creation of content that keeps people informed and engaged (Sulaiman et al., 2020). However, it has also become a breeding ground for misinformation and fake news. Destiny Apuke & amar (2020) argue that social media is the "lifblood of fake news" (p. 318), as it enables the widespread dissemination of viral fake stories at a low cost. Concerns about the proliferation of fake news and misinformation stem from the ease of access to social media and its technical affordances that facilitate easy information circulation (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). In Nigeria, the advent of social media and the users' ability to generate their content has increased the presence and reach of misinformation. False claims can spread in less than a minute, taking on the garb of truth and making the need for swift verification more pressing (Destiny Apuke & Omar, 2020). Incidents of social media misinformation and fake news abound in Nigeria which has had dire consequences.

In 2014, during the Ebola outbreak, Carter (2014) in his study reported the incident of a fake text message which went viral on various WhatsApp and Facebook Platforms. The message claimed that people could avoid catching the disease by bathing in and drinking large quantities of saltwater even though there was no medical basis for it. The message reads: *"Please ensure that you and your family and all your neighbors bathe with hot water and salt before daybreak today because of the Ebola virus which is spreading through the air"* In what could be considered altruistic motives, friends and families shared this unverified news on different social media platforms even though there was no medical basis for it. Carter reports that the consequences of this misinformation were grave. He states that the high prevalence of hypertension in Nigeria, coupled with the excessive consumption of saltwater killed two people and left several hospitalized (Carter, 2014).

In 2018, false information on Facebook is said to have caused an inter-ethnic crisis. According to the study carried out by Ojebode (2018), the incident occurred in Plateau State Nigeria. It happened that a graphic image of a mutilated baby, killed in Congo Brazzaville in 2012, was shared with the claim that the act was perpetrated by the Fulanis against the Beroms in Jos, in 2018. The media reported that Berom youths took to the streets and systematically sought out Fulani men for

reprisal attacks. Authorities believed that this incident was caused by the Facebook post, which contributed to the attacks. Going further, Ojebode, (2018) confirms that that the same image has been used to stoke deadly crises in other regions of Africa. Destiny Apuke and Omar (2020) "commenting on the event states that it is this type of false information that has intensified the regional and religious crisis in Nigeria, further dividing the peace and unity among Nigerians"

In addition, in October 2019, there was widespread information circulated on social media suggesting that the President was taking another wife (Edwin & Yalmi, 2019). To substantiate this rumour, invitation cards were also circulated. After a few days, the President debunked the issue stating that he had no plans of taking another wife. Incidence like this demonstrates how viral fake news could be disseminated among the Nigerian populace without much verification. Such fake news spread is continuously destabilizing the system, and political stability, inciting people to violence and weakening the people's confidence in the government.

In the study carried out by Edwin and Yalmi (2019), they reported a similar incident. This time it was on Twitter. According to them a gruesome photo of a woman lying in a pool of blood was widely circulated on Twitter with the claim that she was a victim of the herdsmen and farmers clash. It was later revealed that the image was of a traffic accident in the Dominican Republic. Unfortunately, this fake Tweet by then already caused inflammatory comments and further chaos resulting in the death of many Nigerians (Edwin & Yalmi, 2019).

Apuke and Omar (2020) cites Siddiki (2019) who, in his study, reported a similar incident. He discovered a certain story about the Fulani disguising themselves to attack people in some parts of Osun State trended on various WhatsApp platforms. The statement reads;

"Alert! Alert!! Alert!!!: good day, please pass this message to everyone in Osogbo and its environs. ... from 7 pm every day, their gate should be well locked. The Fulanis now dress in Yoruba outfits with dangerous weapons in their hands (with the) plans to come in and kill. If there is a knock on the gate from 7 pm adult should attend to the person. Please don't open up and don't talk. Let the person talk first. Tell your children also. Sent as received"

It is evident that it is reports like this that exacerbate the conflicts that exist between herdsmen and farmers (Edwin & Yalmi, 2019)



Summarily, the above incidents exposed how social media misinformation has become rife in Nigeria and the dire consequences it births if not nipped in the bud. However, the above discussion still begs the question, what motivates social media misinformation in Nigeria? An understanding of this will aid in proffering a viable solution.

Motivation Of Social Media Misinformation

Several studies have examined the motivations of misinformation and fake news in Nigeria. Ogbette et al. (2019) point out that one of the primary causes of media misinformation, both globally and in Nigeria, is the pursuit of financial gain. The desire to attract viewers to social media platforms, websites, or blogs to earn money, gain followers, and improve ratings, combined with the public's inclination towards sensational stories, often leads social media users to create content that satisfies these needs, even if false.

Studies by Wasserman et al., (2019); Pate et al., (2019); Tandoc et al., (2018) and Chakrabarti et al. (2018) suggest that the motivations for sharing fake news in Nigeria can be classified into three themes: individual motivations, contextual or cultural factors, and trust in the network.

Chakrabarti et al. (2018) identify individual motivations for fake news sharing among Nigerians. The desire to stay informed and be "in the know" is a key driver, framing fake news sharing as a form of social currency. Nigerians view news sharing as a civic obligation, prioritizing potential harm from not informing over the risk of sharing false information. Additionally, sharing news is seen as fostering social cohesion, driven by emotional impact, relevance to recipients, and the sender's intention to provide advice or warnings. This altruistic attitude is characteristic of Nigerians, who believe in democratizing information access, regardless of its authenticity, to promote widespread sharing.

Contextual and cultural factors significantly contribute to the prevalence of fake news sharing among Nigerians. Factors like media control, distrust in news media, unemployment, gossip, rumour, and satire play crucial roles. Studies by Wasserman and Madrid-Morales (2019) establish a connection between low trust in news media and the dissemination of false information. Pate et al. (2019) highlight general distrust in elites and politicians, delayed official information, and media limitations as contributors to fake news proliferation. Government control and commercialization in broadcast media further drive people to social media for information dissemination. Contextual challenges like youth

unemployment, smartphone access, and cultural reliance on informal sources also amplify the susceptibility to fake news in Nigeria.

Trust in networks also significantly contributes to misinformation in Nigeria. A recent study reveals that WhatsApp is the primary platform for sharing fake news in Nigeria due to its high trustworthiness among family and friends (Wasserman et al., 2019). This emphasizes the inclination to trust information from close contacts over strangers. In Nigeria, sharing fake news signifies trust, fellow feelings, and mutuality, extending beyond the news to encompass emotions, patriotism, and various topics (Tandoc et al., 2018).

Given all that has been discussed so far, it is obvious that globally and in Nigeria there is a new wave of research bordering on fake news and misinformation. These studies have of course offered solutions to the problem of misinformation. This study advocates for Edmund Husserl's Phenomenological Epoche as a potential remedy for addressing social media misinformation in Nigeria.

Application of Edmund Husserl's Phenomenological Epoche to Social Media Misinformation in Nigeria

The accessibility and immediacy of social media have greatly enabled the generation and spread of misinformation, including rumours, spam, and fake news (Wu et al., 2019). The substantial volume of content on social media presents a challenge in meeting the editorial standards of traditional media (Brindha et al., 2020). Initially, social media platforms lacked accountability for their content. However, they have since implemented a combination of automated and human-driven processes for editing, promoting, or filtering published content, recognizing their platforms as primary information sources for many users (Niam Yaraghi, 2019, as cited in Brindha et al., 2020). Concluding his study on misinformation during the Ebola outbreak in Nigeria, Carter (2014) emphasized that, despite the perceived intent of preserving lives, Nigerians often share messages without verifying their authenticity, contributing to panic, death, and injury caused by social media misinformation. It is in light of the above facts that this paper suggests Edmund Husserl's Phenomenological epoche as a viable solution to ameliorating social media misinformation in Nigeria. Hence, would be exploring how Husserl's Epoche comes to bear on it.

Husserl's Epoche, derived from the Greek term "bracketing," advocates for temporarily setting aside pre-existing biases and misconceptions. This



entails intentionally suspending prior knowledge to impartially approach the truth without the interference of preconceived notions. By doing so, individuals can concentrate solely on the phenomena or objects within their immediate experience. This necessitates a critical approach, directing attention to the object of consciousness for observation, analysis, abstraction, and description, all free from preconceptions or biases. Essentially, it involves deliberately putting aside any positive or negative prejudices one may already hold.

Interpreting this concept within the context of social media misinformation in Nigeria reveals its potential utility. Given the pervasive nature of content creation and the swift sharing culture on various social media platforms, misinformation is inevitable. In this scenario, Epoche presents a solution, advocating for a discerning approach to shared information, irrespective of the source. This requires setting aside our inherent biases and prejudices, whether towards celebrities, influencers, fellow tribe members, or religious leaders and focusing solely on the information they convey. By temporarily suspending our deference and sentiments towards these individuals, we adopt a more open-minded stance, allowing for a critical analysis of the information's credibility. This approach makes us less susceptible to misinformation, as we evaluate content based solely on its merit, devoid of preconceived notions.

Husserl expands the scope of Epoche through his concept of Intentionality. "Intentionality" denotes the connection between a perceived object and the perceiver (subject). It involves conscious acts, such as perceiving, remembering, and wishing, through which the subject directs attention to an object. In this intentional act, the individual selects an object from the ongoing stream of experience and brings it into consciousness by focusing solely on it. Additionally, Intentionality attributes specific qualities, characteristics, and meaning to the chosen object. It serves as an "interpretative sense" or "meaning-context" that relies on the individual's particular perspective and the temporal reference through which they perceive the object.

This suggests that our understanding of things is contingent on our perspective, allowing for various interpretations as perceptions are not absolute or dogmatic. In the context of this study, intentionality prompts us to recognize that individuals sharing information do so based on their interpretation unless they are authorities in the field. In such cases, it remains their opinion, rooted in their understanding and sentiments. Intentionality

also advocates for bracketing, allowing us to set aside diverse interpretations and biases, directing our focus to the object itself. This approach fosters a critical assessment of opinions and information shared on social media. Simultaneously, it instills caution in disseminating unverified information, emphasizing the need for fact-checking in the realm of social media content.

Misinformation prevails on social media fueled by emotional content. False information with emotional appeal garners clicks, rapidly spreads through social networks and is often accepted, especially if it aligns with one's political beliefs (Paschetto et al., 2020). In a country like Nigeria, characterized by volatile ethnic and religious divisions, there is a tendency for some individuals to misrepresent facts about other tribes or religions. Negative stereotypes and biases are widespread, perpetuated by mainstream media, often triggering people and leading to violence. In such a scenario, Husserl's Epoche becomes relevant, acting as a filter in our approach to such information.

II. Conclusion

The phenomenological investigative approach begins by intentionally redirecting attention, prompting a systematic and reflective engagement with one's relationship to the world in its natural state. In this process, the familiar natural world undergoes a transformative shift in the phenomenological perspective. The world, as perceived through this lens, is no longer static; instead, it opens itself to the investigative mind, revealing previously concealed values. The initial gross presentation of the world is subjected to a new relationship that seeks to reduce and refine it, shedding the thick layers that had previously obscured these inherent values from view (Edwards, 1972)

This paper asserts the imperative adoption of Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology, specifically the application of Epoche or Bracketing, in engaging with information on social media. Emphasizing the need for a discerning approach to social media information as a pivotal strategy to counteract misinformation, the study centres its analysis on Nigeria. Despite the democratization of information facilitated by social media, the unfettered proliferation of misinformation has become a formidable challenge. The ubiquity of internet access and social media platforms has amplified the dissemination of misinformation, making the task of distinguishing reality from falsehood exceedingly complex. This research advocates for a heightened sense of scrutiny among



citizens when encountering information on social media, urging them to verify, scrutinize, and validate the information they consume, endorse, or disseminate.

Encouraging individuals to momentarily set aside preconceptions and biases, the paper recommends a deliberate focus on the information at hand. This involves conducting thorough research and consulting knowledgeable individuals in the relevant field to ensure the accuracy of information before acceptance or dissemination. This proactive approach is posited as a significant step towards curbing the rampant spread of misinformation on social media. Furthermore, the paper contends that fostering a culture of fact-checking will compel content creators on social media to adhere to a more rigorous verification process before sharing information. In conclusion, by advocating for the integration of phenomenology into our interaction with social media information, this study envisions a more informed and vigilant citizenry capable of mitigating the adverse effects of misinformation in the digital age.

Reference

- [1]. Agama, C & Onuoha J (2021). Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology: A Viable Theory for Rendering Solution to Boko Haram Insurgence in Nigeria. *Journal of Philosophy and Ethics*, 3 (1), 1-8 ISSN 2642-8415 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22259/2642-8415.0301001>
- [2]. Bondielli, A., & Marcelloni, F. (2019). A survey on fake news and rumour detection techniques. *Information Sciences*, 497, 38-55. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ins.2019.05.035>
- [3]. Carter, M. (2014). How Twitter may have helped Nigeria contain Ebola. *BMJ: British Medical Journal* (Online), 349. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.g6946>
- [4]. Chakrabarti, S., Rooney, C., & Kweon, M. (2018). Verification, Duty, Credibility: Fake News and Ordinary Citizens in Kenya and Nigeria. London: BBC News. <http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/bbc-fake-newsresearch-paper-nigeria-kenya.pdf>.
- [5]. Destiny Apuke, O., & Omar, B. (2020). Fake news proliferation in Nigeria: consequences, motivations, and prevention through awareness strategies. *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews*, 8 (2), 318–327. <https://doi.org/10.18510/hssr.2020.8236>
- [6]. Eruka, R. (2023). Husserlian Phenomenology as Foundationalism: Critical Review Of A-World-In-Brackets AMAMIHE: *Journal of Applied Philosophy*. 21 (2). ISSN: 1597-0779. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.34702.02882
- [7]. Giorgi, A. & Giorgi, B. (2003). "The Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method". In *Qualitative Research in Psychology: Expanding Perspective in Methodology and Design*. Ed. P. Camic, J. Rhodes, & L. Yardley. Washington, DC: American Philosophical Association, 243-6373.
- [8]. Husserl, E. (1983). *Cartesian mediations: An Introduction to phenomenology*, trans., D Casims. Haunge: Martinus Nijhoff.
- [9]. Ibrahim, A. & Pate, U. (2019). In a Democratized Media Context What a Hoax Can Do, a Misinformation Can Do Even Worse: Influences of Fake News on Democratic Processes in Nigeria. *New Media and Mass Communication* 79. ISSN 2224-3267 (Paper) ISSN 2224-3275 (Online). DOI: 10.7176/NMMC
- [10]. Iroegbu, P. (1995). *Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy*. International Universities Ltd, Owerri.
- [11]. Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*, . London: Sage
- [12]. Nanlong, M. T. Nigeria: Ebola-two dies after drinking salt water in Jos Vanguard. 2014 [Online] Available from: <http://allafrica.com/stories/201408111640.html>. Accessed on 16 November 2023
- [13]. Ojebode, A. (2018). Fake news, hate speech and the 2019 general elections: the redemptive role of the Nigerian media. 13th Annual Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) Lecture 29, 1-12.
- [14]. Pasquetto, I., Swire-Thompson, B. & Amazeen, M. A. (2020). Tackling misinformation: What researchers could do with social media data. *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review*. <https://doi.org/10.37016/mr-2020-49>
- [15]. Pennycook, G. & Rand, D. G. (2019). Lazy, not biased: Susceptibility to partisan fake news is better explained by lack of reasoning than by motivated reasoning. *Cognition*, 188, 39-50. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2018.06.011>
- [16]. Tasnim, S., Hossain, M. M. & Mazumder, H. (2020). Impact of Rumors and Misinformation on COVID-19 in Social Media. *Journal of Preventive Medicine and Public Health*, 53 (3), 171–174. <https://doi.org/10.3961/jpmph.20.094>



- [17]. Raheemson, F. A. (2016). Corruption and Conflict: A Phenomenological Study of the Experiences of Nigerian Citizens. Nova Southeastern University
- [18]. Jayaseelan, R., Brindha, D., & Waran, K. (2020). Social Media Reigned by Information or Misinformation About COVID-19: A Phenomenological Study. SSRN Electronic Journal. 1-18, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3596058>
- [19]. Roozenbeek, J., Van Der Linden, S., Goldberg, B., Rathje, S. & Lewandowsky, S. (2022). Psychological inoculation improves resilience against misinformation on social media. *Science Advances*, 8 (34), eabo6254. <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abo6254>
- [20]. Statista Research Department: The Number of Internet Users in Nigeria 2017-2023. September 6, 2023. Available from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1176087/number-of-internet-users-nigeria/> Accessed on November 17, 2023.
- [21]. Sulaiman, A., Adeyemir, I. & Ayegun, I. (2020). Information Sharing and Evaluation as Determinants of Spread of Fake News on Social Media among Nigerian Youths: Experience from COVID-19 Pandemic. *International Journal of Knowledge Content Development & Technology*, 10 (4), 65-82
- [22]. Ugwuanyi, S. U. (2017). Influence of Fake News on Public Perception of Nigeria's Online Newspapers. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science: A Arts & Humanities -Psychology*, 17 (5), 4-12.
- [23]. Wu, L., Morstatter, F., Carley, K. M., & Liu, H. (2019). Misinformation in Social Media: Definition, Manipulation, and Detection. *ACM SIGKDD Explorations Newsletter*, 21 (2), 80-90. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3373464.3373475>