

Monitoring health misinformation in Nigeria:

A collection of potentially harmful claims from Oct to Dec 2019

This study was conducted by a group of researchers from the Department of Mass Communication at the University of Lagos as part of a health misinformation fact-checking project in Nigeria. It contains a collection of potentially false and harmful health claims that circulated in the public domain during the October to December 2019 period. It is a first in a series of quarterly reports that will be shared with the network of journalists, fact-checkers, health experts and policymakers to increase the uptake of evidence-based health information in Nigeria. The project is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

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INTRODUCTION

Wardle and Derakhshand (2017) define misinformation as information that is false, but created without intent to harm. Similarly, Amobi *et al* (2019) describe misinformation as information that is false, but which the person disseminating it believes to be factual. This includes innocent sharing of made-up stories by people who believe them to be true (Cheeseman, 2019).

While misinformation is usually characterised as false information disseminated without the intent to harm, misinformation pertaining to health issues is of critical concern, particularly in Nigeria. Even though the intent of the creator or purveyor might not be outright harm, health misinformation has potentially damaging implications for the health of the population. Kim (2019) argues that widespread health misinformation is a cause for alarm, as it has the possibility to create public health crises. A prime example from Nigeria was the claim, during the 2014 Ebola virus disease outbreak, that bathing with salt water would cure Ebola. This resulted in the deaths of eight people (WHO, 2014).

Health misinformation in Nigeria ranges from rumours, like claims that bathing with salt water will cure Ebola, to ethnically-based beliefs and superstitions, such as the claim by some Yoruba people that men who eat food while it is cooking on a fire are prone to impotency, to misperceptions about causes of diseases and illnesses, their modes of transmission and treatment, and the herbal concoctions which can treat them. Social media gives people without medical backgrounds and self-proclaimed “herbal” doctors the ability to disseminate health misinformation to a wide range of people, and exacerbates the risks posed by it.

The result of health misinformation can be deadly, ranging from a patient suffering unnecessarily and protractedly from a treatable condition to outbreaks of an entirely preventable disease (Kaltwasser, 2019). There is a dire need for rapid verifications of claims and awareness of the dangerous implications of health misinformation. This research sought to identify the prevalent examples of health misinformation in Nigeria, what motivated their creation and the potential harm to the consumers of such messages. It covers the circulation of false health claims for the period October to December 2019.



The following research objectives guided the study:



1. To identify the prevalent examples of potential health misinformation in Nigeria
2. To ascertain the major sources and channels of dissemination of health misinformation in Nigeria
3. To examine the motives behind the formulation and spread of health misinformation in Nigeria
4. To determine the potential harm of health misinformation in Nigeria


Based on the foregoing objectives, the following research questions were generated for the study:

1. What are the prevalent examples of health misinformation in Nigeria?
2. What are the sources and channels of dissemination of health misinformation in Nigeria?
3. What are the motives behind the formulation and spread of health misinformation in Nigeria?
4. What are the potential harms of health misinformation in Nigeria?

COMMUNITY BELIEFS

Brief description of claim	Origin and platform circulated on	Motivation for dissemination	Possible harm
<p><i>Parquetina Nigrescens</i> (<i>Ewe Ogbo</i> in Yoruba) is claimed to be a natural tonic that helps to boost blood (haemoglobin) levels. To process, five to ten of the leaves are squeezed to extract the liquid. Milk is sometimes added to it.</p> 	<p>The Yoruba community. Circulated by traditional health practitioners and held as a community health belief.</p>	<p>To provide locals with traditional blood tonics and to promote the Nigerian traditional health sector.</p> <p>It also provides a source of income to traditional health practitioners.</p>	<p>The propagators of the claim do not provide directives as to who should or should not take the tonic or its side effects. Since it is not subjected to any scientific laboratory testing, its potential risks and side effects for the consumer are unknown.</p>
<p><i>Sorgum Bicolor</i> (<i>Poporo</i> in Yoruba) is another blood tonic believed to boost the blood (haemoglobin) level. The tonic is prepared by boiling the Poporo leaves in water, which turns red.</p>	<p>The Yoruba community. Circulated by traditional health practitioners and held as a community health belief.</p>	<p>To provide locals with traditional blood tonics and to promote the Nigerian traditional health sector. It also provides a source of income to traditional health practitioners and farmers.</p>	<p>The propagators of the claim do not provide directives as to who should or should not take the tonic or its side effects. Since it is not subjected to any scientific laboratory testing, its potential risks and side effects for the consumer are unknown.</p>
<p><i>Cassia</i> or <i>Senna</i> (<i>Ewe asunwon</i> in Yoruba) is a plant believed to cure skin diseases like eczema. The yellow seed is also used to treat haemorrhoids.</p> 	<p>The Yoruba community. Circulated by traditional health practitioners and held as a community health belief.</p>	<p>To provide traditional ways of curing skin diseases and to promote the Nigerian traditional health sector.</p> <p>It also provides a source of income for traditional health practitioners, farmers and businesspeople.</p>	<p>The propagators of the claim do not provide directives as to who should or should not take the tonic or its side effects. Since it is not subjected to any scientific laboratory testing, its potential risks and side effects for the consumer are unknown.</p>

<p>It is claimed that men who eat food while it is being cooked on a fire are prone to impotency.</p>	<p>The Yoruba community.</p>	<p>To cure impotency in men.</p>	<p>Misleads locals about the causes of impotency.</p>
<p>It is claimed that the <i>Neem</i> leaf (<i>Azadirachta indica</i>) popularly called Dogonyaro in Nigeria can be used to cure many diseases and disorders, including malaria, typhoid fever, diabetes, chronic wounds, ulcers, cancers, eczema, cardiac problems, skin infections asthma and sore throat. Preparations range from boiling the Dogonyaro leaves to make a liquid medication, to extracting oil from the seeds.</p> 	<p>This belief originated from the northern region, predominantly occupied by Hausa people, but has found acceptance across the entire country.</p> <p>It was also posted by an online magazine called Qualitative.</p>  <p>And it was posted on Facebook by Anu Agro.</p>	<p>To possibly provide natural medicines for curing diseases and disorders and to promote the Nigerian traditional health sector.</p> <p>It also provides a source of income for traditional health practitioners, farmers, and businesspeople.</p>	<p>Belief in this claim may negatively drive health-seeking behaviour as patients might use this plant extract rather than seeking treatment from medical experts. Some of the listed diseases are serious and patients are at risk only seeking orthodox treatment when it is too late, if at all, resulting in unnecessary deaths.</p>
<p>It is claimed that <i>African basil</i> or scent leaf (Known as <i>Efirin</i> in Yoruba, <i>Daidoya</i> in Hausa, and <i>Nchanwu</i> in Igbo) can be used to cure diarrhoea, dysentery, stomach ache, vomiting and to relieve colon pain and earache. It is also used for the prevention and treatment of cold and catarrh, cough, fever and malaria.</p>	<p>A national belief.</p> <p>Information was posted by Johnson Olawale/Legit.ng.</p>	<p>It encourages individuals to grow and take advantage of the benefits of basil and also promotes the Nigerian traditional health sector.</p>	<p>Belief in this claim may negatively drive health-seeking behaviour.</p>

			
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SOCIAL MEDIA HEALTH MISINFORMATION FACEBOOK

Brief description of claim	Origin and platform circulated on	Motivation for dissemination	Possible harm
<p><i>Jigsimur</i> is a drink claimed to detoxify the blood, and aid or prevent various ailments, like vagina itchiness, abnormal menstruation, fibroid, tubal blockage, unexplained infertility, weak erection, diabetes, hepatitis, cancer, liver disease and kidney stones.</p>	<p>This claim was posted on a Facebook page called African Fashion Slayers. It may also have circulated on other platforms.</p>	<p>To promote the herbal drink.</p>	<p>The claims that Jigsimur can cure almost any disease may lead to health complications as people may rely solely on the herbal drink, instead of seeking medical treatment. Another potential danger may be drug interaction, as some people take both traditional and orthodox medications simultaneously.</p>
<p>Four herbal “formulas” claimed to treat typhoid fever.</p>	<p>This claim was circulated by “Queen-Oft Marital n Genital Online Healing” on Facebook.</p>	<p>The source is a self-proclaimed herbal therapist, sex coach and marriage counsellor, who claims to treat typhoid fever and other genital and sexual diseases.</p>	<p>Since the side effects or interactions of the herbal concoctions are not indicated, the health risks to patients are unknown.</p>
<p>A “newly discovered improved cell regenerative therapy” from “natural ingredients” is claimed to be</p>	<p>This claim was circulated on Facebook. However, the source cannot be determined.</p>	<p>Stem cell therapy is a very expensive medical procedure. It is therefore logical to assume that</p>	<p>This has the potential to create health complications.</p>


clinically approved by local and international medical experts.		people will opt for less expensive alternatives. This may have motivated the creation of a cheaper remedy, as well as the need to create and promote a local alternative	
Boiled apple is claimed to flush extra fat, make the heart healthier, prevent excess fatigue, control body sugar level and be good for diabetic patients.	Posted on Facebook page called "Health is Wealth". This claim was also circulated on WhatsApp.	To promote a healthy and organic lifestyle.	Although eating boiled apples may not be unhealthy, there is the likelihood that people who believe such unverified claims may believe other damaging claims, and this increases the risks of such posts to health.
Putting raw onion in your socks is claimed to "detoxify" the body and kill bacteria and viruses.	Posted on Facebook page called "Health is Wealth". This claim was also circulated on WhatsApp.	Motivation is unclear but the Facebook group may want to stay relevant as a promotor of good health.	It could promote fungus on the feet.
<i>Garcinia kola</i> or <i>Bitter kola</i> (<i>Aku Inu</i> in Igbo) is claimed to boost libido and overall sexual performance, sperm count, testosterone level, and combat STDs and malaria.	Posted on Facebook page called "Health is Wealth". This claim was also circulated on WhatsApp.	The Facebook group may want to stay relevant as a custodian of health information and would therefore disseminate health claims, regardless of their veracity.	People relying on bitter kola to cure the listed health conditions rather than getting appropriate medical care stand the risk of developing health complications, especially after protracted use.
It is claimed that keloids can be cured by applying the juice from onions or lemon juice on the scar.	Posted on Facebook page called "Health is Wealth".	Possibly to provide an organic cure for keloids and to stay relevant as a custodian of health information.	This claim is not backed up by any research evidence and could lead to health complications.
It is claimed that inserting a clean clove of garlic into the ear will cure earache.	Posted on Facebook page called "Health is Wealth".	Possibly to provide an organic remedy for earache and to stay relevant as a custodian of health information.	This claim is not backed up by any research evidence and could lead to health complications or aggravate the condition.
Two preparations are given, which claim to treat piles (haemorrhoids), one containing kola nuts, red onions and water, the other	Posted on Facebook page called "Health is Wealth".	There exists a common belief that haemorrhoids cannot be cured by orthodox methods. This may provide the motivation for	This claim is not backed up by any research evidence and could lead to health complications or aggravate the condition.

with garlic, mango leaves and water.		traditional health practitioners to come up with these offers. The need to stay relevant as a custodian of health information.	
Maize or corn “silk” (the long silky threads on cobs of corn) is claimed to be highly effective for reducing frequent urination, if boiled.	Posted on Facebook page called “Health is Wealth”.	To possibly provide organic treatment for frequent urination and to stay relevant as a custodian of health information.	People relying on corn silk to cure frequent urination rather than getting appropriate medical care stand the risk of developing health complications.
It is claimed that vaginal discharge can be cured by drinking a solution of bitter kola, ginger, garlic and lime juice.	It was disseminated on a Facebook group . It was also disseminated on WhatsApp by a self-proclaimed herbal therapist called “Mrs Alaka”.	To possibly provide organic treatment for vaginal discharge and to generate traffic and advertising on their Facebook page.	The claim may mislead people into depending on the solution, instead of seeking medical attention, which could lead to health complications.
Herbal cure for HIV, also recommended for herpes, cancer, hepatitis, and fibroids.	This claim was circulated by “ Dr Salami ” on Facebook.	Possibly to generate income.	The claim raises false hope, and a dependence on the herbs as a cure for HIV-Aids may place users at a risk of death.

WHATSAPP

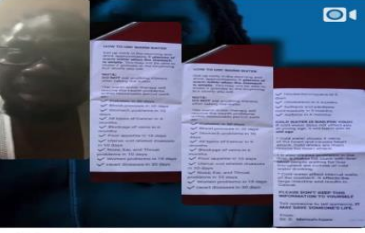
Brief description of claim	Origin and platform circulated on	Motivation for dissemination	Possible harm
It is claimed that a washed and boiled mixture of kola nut, aloe vera, ginger and garlic can cure staphylococcus.	Self-proclaimed herbal therapist “Mrs Alaka”.	Since “Mrs Alaka” is a herbal therapist, she may be driven by the need to promote her business.	Since these plants, processes and quantities have not been scientifically tested, the potency or otherwise is unclear. Anyone using the treatment may be at risk of worsening their health condition.
It is claimed that <i>Swizzle Stick</i> , also called <i>Poison Devil’s Pepper</i> , <i>African</i>	Self-proclaimed herbal therapist “Mrs Alaka”.	To perhaps provide organic ways of curing insomnia, nervous disorders, weak	Since these plants, processes and quantities have not been scientifically tested, the

<p><i>snakeroot</i> or <i>African serpent wood</i>, will cure insomnia, nervous disorders, weak erections and hypertension. The plant is known as <i>Igi Asofeyeje</i> (Yoruba), <i>Akata</i> (Bini) and <i>Mmoneba</i> or <i>Utoenyin</i> (Efik).</p>		<p>erections and hypertension, as well as the need to promote her business.</p>	<p>potency or otherwise is unclear. Anyone using the treatment may be at risk of worsening their health condition or even place the patient at risk of death.</p>
<p>It is claimed that hot pineapple water can kill cancer cells.</p> <p><small>Forwarded</small> Hot pineapple water please spread it !! please spread it !! Professor Chen Huiren of the Beijing Army General Hospital stressed that if everyone who receives this bulletin can carry ten copies to others' surely at least one life will be saved ... I have done some of my responsibility, hopefully you can do it too ... Thank you! Hot pineapple water can save you a lifetime Hot pineapple – can kill cancer cells. Cut 2 to 3 pieces of pineapple thinner in a cup, add hot water, it will be "alkaline water", drink every day, it is good for anyone. Hot pineapple releases anti-cancer substances, which are the latest advances in effective cancer treatment in medicine. The hot pineapple fruit has the effect of killing cysts and tumors. Proven to repair all types of cancer. Hot pineapple water can kill all germs and toxins from the body as a result of allergic / allergies The type of medicine with pineapple extract only destroys "violent cells", it does not affect healthy cells. In addition, amino acids and pineapple polyphenols in pineapple juice can regulate high blood pressure, effectively preventing the blockage of inner blood vessels, adjusting blood circulation and reducing blood clots. After reading, tell others, family, friends, Take care of your own health ... Pls don't hide the message...Spread it and you will save life.</p>	<p>Said to originate from "Professor Chen Huiren" of the Beijing Army General Hospital.</p>	<p>Since the source is unclear, it is difficult to suggest the motivation.</p>	<p>It might raise false hopes for cancer patients and might prevent cancer patients at the early stage of the disease from seeking appropriate medical care.</p>
<p>It is claimed that drinking cold soft drinks to break a fast can lead to sudden kidney failure.</p> <p><small>Forwarded</small> MEDICAL ADVICE ON FASTING Doctor Adeeb Rizvi Head of "S. I. U. T civil Hospital Karachi, who is a leading kidney specialist has appealed to everyone not to drink cold drinks such as Pepsi, Cocacola, 7up, Dew etc at fast breaking time. Because long day of fasting causes dehydration of the kidneys. Having cold and fizzy drinks suddenly causes the kidneys to fail. So, don't drink any cold drinks at fast breaking time. Instead, drink fresh warm water or fresh juices not directly from the fridge. This is a public service message from S. U. I. T. Please forward to your family, friends and loved ones. Pass it on.</p>	<p>Posted in Christ Apostolic Church WhatsApp group, the post claims to have been created by a leading kidney specialist called "Dr Adeeb Rizvi" of S. I. U. T. Civil Hospital, Karachi.</p>	<p>Since the source cannot be established and the authenticity of the message is in question, it is difficult to suggest the motivation. .</p>	<p>The danger in such posts is that many social media users are not media literate, and are unable to verify claims or treat them with the appropriate degree of scepticism.</p>
<p>It is claimed that salt can be used to deter any dangerous reptile, and that a cup of salt poured into the toilet will prevent snakes.</p>	<p>Posted in a WhatsApp group called "Health Tip Home Remedy".</p>	<p>The WhatsApp group may want to stay relevant as a custodian of health information.</p>	<p>The claim lacks any scientific basis and may lead people to rely on salt to prevent snakes, which could be dangerous.</p>
<p>It is claimed that bras cause cancer. See posted photo below:</p>	<p>Circulated on WhatsApp.</p>	<p>Possibly to prevent breast cancer.</p>	<p>Might create fear of wearing bras among women.</p>

<p>Ladies please be careful the type of bra you buy or you wear in ur body, the bra of nowadays has been causing Cancer into the body of women, I'm begging you in the name of God. Please pass the short information to your families, friends and your love ones, God bless u all !!!</p> 			
<p>It is claimed that Covid-19 can be cured by eating eight boiled cloves of chopped garlic, and drinking the water it was boiled in, as proven by an old Chinese doctor.</p> <div style="background-color: #e0e0e0; padding: 10px; border-radius: 10px;"> <p>Forwarded~~</p> <p>Good news, Wuhan's corona virus can be cured by one bowl of freshly boiled garlic water. Old Chinese doctor has proven it's efficacy. Many patients has also proven this to be effective. Eight (8) cloves of chopped garlics add seven (7)cups of water and bring to boil., Eat and drink the boiled garlic water, overnight improvement and healing. Glad to share this.</p> </div>	<p>Circulated on WhatsApp by different groups and individuals.</p>	<p>The deadliness of the Ebola virus disease, which ravaged some West African countries including Nigeria, may be generating fear in the minds of people and causing the dissemination of unverified claims about Covid-19. The source may also be driven by the desire to provide a local alternative to orthodox (Western) medicines.</p>	<p>Anyone who believes the claim is at a high risk, since the new coronavirus can be deadly.</p>

INSTAGRAM

Brief description of claim	Origin and platform circulated on	Motivation for dissemination	Possible harm
<p>Daddy Showkey, a Nigerian entertainer has claimed that warm water can cure all sorts of diseases, including cancer. See photo below:</p>	<p>A manual was posted on the entertainer's Instagram page and was viewed over 17,000 times. See link.</p>	<p>Daddy Showkey is an entertainer with no known medical qualifications. This makes the motivation</p>	<p>Water is not expected to harm anyone, but the claim may raise false hope and prevent people from seeking prompt and appropriate medical attention.</p>

 <p>17,156 views daddyshowkey How una dey, I beg listen to message, no take am play Na something wey fit help your body I beg</p>		for the claim difficult to suggest.	
It is claimed that <i>Cardamom water</i> boosts digestive health, relieves acidity, cures bad breath, “mental stress” and depression and can improve blood circulation and sexual health.	Posted on the Instagram page “ Beautiful your Tips ”	Possibly, to drive traffic and advertising to the page and create relevance as a disseminator of health information.	Since there is no known scientific basis for the drink, the claim could mislead people into using only cardamom water instead of seeking prompt and appropriate medical attention.

WEBSITES



Brief description of claim	Origin and platform circulated on	Motivation for dissemination	Possible harm
It is claimed that ten different herbal treatments can be used as “strategies” for strengthening cells to prevent HIV from multiplying. It is claimed that aloe vera can be eaten or juiced and drunk to provide immunity and digestive support for those with HIV.	From the website “ Wealth Result ”	To direct traffic and generate advertising for the website.	It might raise false hope for people with HIV.
It is claimed that there are 33 natural, healthy ways to trim or flatten the stomach.	From an online article by “ Jennifer89 ”. It also circulated on the online community platform “ Nairaland ”.	Possibly to drive traffic and advertising to the websites.	This claim might lead to health complications as there are no real testimonies or proof that the “remedies” work. Furthermore, it is not known whether the source is a health expert or nutritionist.
It is claimed that an anti-hypertensive herbal remedy that	Posted on a website called Daily Post .	To promote product sales.	It might raise false hopes and discourage people from seeking prompt and



lowers blood pressure and reverses hypertension has been discovered.			appropriate medical attention, possibly placing the patient at risk of stroke or death.
It is claimed that “alkaline water” from lemon kills cancer and is a powerful disinfectant and antibacterial compound which will also help in the treatment of numerous other conditions, from bad breath to cholera.	Posted online .	Possibly to drive traffic and advertising to the website.	It might raise false hopes and discourage people from seeking prompt and appropriate medical attention
It is claimed that “Neo Life”, a nutritional supplement, can “cure” stroke.	Circulated on Nairaland .	To promote product sales.	Many Nigerians believe stroke cannot be cured by orthodox medical means, and claims such as this could more influence vulnerable people into relying on “Neo Life”, rather than seeking prompt and appropriate medical treatment.
It is claimed that a herbal solution packaged as tea, reverses glaucoma, cataracts, blurry vision and other severe eye problems, without using eye drops or undergoing surgery.	Circulated by Linda Ikeji .	To promote product sales. The blogpost includes supposed comments and reviews from past buyers as well as contact phone numbers.	It might raise false hopes and discourage people from seeking prompt and appropriate medical attention.
<i>Vernonia amygdalina</i> , also called <i>Bitter leaf</i> (<i>Onugbu</i> in Igbo) cures malaria, typhoid, diabetes, diarrhoea, tuberculosis, gallstones and kidney disease, prevents cancer and lowers hypertension.	Circulated on pulse.ng .	To provide organic treatment for ailments and diseases and generate traffic to the blog.	This claim could discourage people from seeking prompt and appropriate medical attention.
<i>Bush</i> or <i>Candle</i> plant (Known as <i>Ogalu</i> in Igbo and <i>Asunrun Oyinbo</i> in Yoruba)has been claimed to	Posted by Johnson Olawale .	To possibly promote traditional medicine as a viable alternative to	This claim could discourage people from seeking prompt and



possess antibacterial, antifungal, anti-inflammatory, anti-tumour, analgesic, diuretic, and laxative properties. It is also claimed to have anti-fungal properties and that it can be used to treat parasitic skin infections and eczema.		orthodox medicine. Possibly to drive traffic and advertising to the website.	appropriate medical attention.
Wild lettuce (Known as <i>Efo Yarin</i> in Yoruba) is claimed to possess healing qualities and also to have been used as relaxant and sedative for thousands of years.	Also posted by Johnson Olawalet .	To possibly promote traditional medicine as a viable alternative to orthodox medicine. To drive traffic and advertising to the website.	This claim could discourage people from seeking prompt and appropriate medical attention.
<i>Philippine/ Florida Spinach</i> or <i>Water Leaf</i> (Known as <i>Gbure</i> in Yoruba, <i>Ebe-dondon</i> in Edo, <i>Inine</i> in Igbo) is claimed to possess medicinal benefits such as preventing the onset of cancer and tumours.	Posted on a blog called " Rasta Livewire "	To possibly promote traditional medicine as a viable alternative to orthodox medicine. To drive traffic and advertising to the website.	Since the claim has no scientific support, this claim could discourage people from seeking prompt and appropriate medical attention.
It is claimed that <i>Turmeric</i> reduces arthritis and joint pains, chronic inflammation, allergies, asthma, anxiety and depression, regulates blood pressure and cholesterol, as well as preventing diabetes, Alzheimer's disease, hypertension, Parkinson's disease and dementia, and enhances brain function.	Posted by Olufunke Faluyi on PunchNG, the online platform of Punch newspapers, on 12 January 2020.	To possibly promote traditional medicine as a viable alternative to orthodox medicine. To drive traffic and advertising to the website.	Since the claim has not been subjected to laboratory testing, users may be at risk, and this claim could discourage people from seeking prompt and appropriate medical attention.


<p>It is claimed that Lassa fever is caused when <i>Garri</i>, a popular staple cassava product, is contaminated by rats. Nigerians are cautioned not to eat Garri prepared with cold water.</p>	<p>An article titled “Lassa Fever: Medical Expert Cautions Against Drinking Garri” quoted the Director of Public Health, Enugu state, Dr Boniface Okolo, and was published in the Daily Times newspaper, on 18 January 2020. It was also posted on the newspaper’s Facebook page.</p>	<p>To create awareness among readers about how one might contract Lassa fever and to drive traffic to websites.</p>	<p>Garri is a staple for many Nigerians, which increases the importance of verifying the claim and coming up with an evidence-based rejoinder to the story if it is untrue, because behaviour change is difficult.</p>
<p>Nigerians are being advised to keep cats at home to prevent rats and thus guard against the spread of Lassa fever, as rats are carriers of the Lassa fever virus.</p>	<p>An article titled “Medical Doctor Canvasses Catkeeping to Curb Lassa Fever”, quoting medical practitioner Dr Ajayi Abass was published on 25 January 2020, in the Daily Times Newspaper and on Facebook.</p>	<p>To create awareness among readers about how one might contract Lassa fever and to drive traffic to websites.</p>	<p>Nigerians do not widely keep cats as pets, so adopting this new behaviour would require a lot of sacrifice on their part. Fact-checking the claim becomes necessary as it appears to be anecdotal inference, rather than evidence based.</p>
<p>Nigerians have been advised to stop eating rats as 29 deaths have been recorded due to a Lassa fever outbreak in the country. The disease is transmitted to humans through contact with food or household items contaminated with rodent urine or faeces.</p>	<p>An article titled “Nigerians Should Stop Eating Rats To Avoid Lassa Fever- Minister Warns”, quoting Dr Mohammed Abubakar, was published on 27 January 2020 in the Daily Times newspaper and on Facebook.</p>	<p>To create awareness among readers about how one might contract Lassa fever and to drive traffic to websites.</p>	<p>Many readers expressed doubts about the claim, arguing that their ancestors ate rats and other bush animals without contracting diseases. This is similar to what happened during the Ebola outbreak when many Nigerians refused to stop the consumption of bush meat. It increases the importance of verifying the claim and coming up with an evidence-based rejoinder to the story if it is untrue.</p>

TRADITIONAL MEDIA NEWSPAPERS (HARD COPY)

Brief description of claim	Origin and platform circulated on	Motivation for dissemination	Possible harm
<p>A self-proclaimed doctor offers herbal solutions to health questions asked by readers. He claims to have creams and capsules that solve several sexual problems.</p> 	<p>Advertorial by Uche Edochie MD of Zee Virtual Media, in Vanguard newspaper, 9 October 2019, page 25. His email address is: Zeevirtualmedialtd@gmail.com</p>	<p>To promote business.</p>	<p>Since the preparation process and measurements are have not been subjected to laboratory testing, readers may be at risk.</p>
<p>It is claimed that an “enlargement capsule” can permanently enlarge the male genitals without any side effects.</p> 	<p>Published in Vanguard newspaper on Thursday 10 October 2019, page 15.</p>	<p>To promote business.</p>	<p>Ingesting capsules that are not medically approved can be dangerous, since the ingredients may not be listed.</p>
<p>It is claimed that “Rhino 69” and “Blue Turbo” pills will enhance arousal and erections and increase libido.</p>	<p>Advertorial by Uche Edochie MD of Zee Virtual Media, in Vanguard newspaper on Sunday 10 November 2019, page 21, under the title “Common Sexual Problems and Their Novelty Based Solution”. His email address</p>	<p>To promote business.</p>	<p>Side effects, drug interactions, potency and safety of these pills are unknown. Thus their ingestion could lead to health complications.</p>

	is: Zeevirtualmedialtd@gmail.com		
<p>It is claimed that pumpkin reduces one’s risk of chronic diseases. The vegetable is said to be packed with vitamins that boost immunity, including vitamin A, lutein and zeaxanthin which protects eyesight, promotes weight loss, lowers risks of cancer and contains potassium, vitamin C and fibre.</p> 	<p>Source of claim is Doris Obinna, in an article titled “Tips for healthy living: Pumpkin and its benefits” published in the Daily Sun newspaper on Thursday 7 November 2019, page 21.</p>	<p>To possibly provide health tips.</p>	<p>It might mislead people into depending solely on pumpkin to treat the listed diseases in the post, rather than seeking prompt and appropriate medical attention.</p>
<p>It is claimed a capsule boosts the sperm count, cures prostate problems, diabetes, difficult urination, HIV and Aids, hepatitis, herpes and weak erections.</p> 	<p>Classified advert in Vanguard newspaper on 20 November 2019, page 6. The listed telephone numbers are 08023093598 and 0817701772.</p>	<p>To promote sales of the capsules.</p>	<p>Side effects, drug interactions, potency and safety of these pills are unknown. Thus their ingestion could lead to health complications.</p>
<p>It is claimed that bitter leaf (<i>Vernonia amygdalina</i>) relieves stomachache, fights prostate cancer, pneumonia and insomnia, and enhances fertility.</p>	<p>Source of claim is Doris Obinna, from an article with the title “Tips for healthy living: Why bitter leaf is healthy?” published in Daily</p>	<p>To possibly provide information about the health benefits of plants.</p>	<p>It might mislead people into depending solely on bitter leaf to treat the listed diseases in the post, rather than seeking prompt</p>

	<p>Sun newspaper on Thursday 21 November 2019, page 21.</p>		<p>and appropriate medical attention.</p>
<p>It is claimed that water leaf (Philippine or Florida spinach) enhances cognitive ability, improves the blood cells, promotes heart health, and eliminates infections and diseases.</p> 	<p>Source of claim is Doris Obinna, from an article titled "Tips for healthy living: Nutritional facts of Water Leaf" published in Daily Sun newspaper of Thursday 28 November 2019, page 21.</p>	<p>To possibly provide information about the health benefits of plants.</p>	<p>It might mislead people into depending solely on water leaf to treat the listed diseases in the post, rather than seeking prompt and appropriate medical attention.</p>
<p>It is claimed that "Rhino 8", "Rhino 7" and "Rhino 69" will enhance the sexual "performance" of men struggling with weak erections and unable to engage in multiple rounds of sex back to back.</p>	<p>Advertorial by Uche Edochie MD of Zee Virtual Media, in Vanguard newspaper on Sunday 3 December 2019, page 23, under the title "Common Sexual Problems and Their Novelty Based Solution". His email address is: Zeevirtualmedialtd@gmail.com</p>	<p>To promote the sale of the listed supplements.</p>	<p>Side effects, drug interactions, potency and safety of these pills are unknown. Thus their ingestion could lead to health complications.</p>

<p>It is claimed that African star apple, also known as African cherry, can prevent and manage diabetes and heart disease, prevent and treat scurvy due to its vitamin C content, and that its sweet and sour taste acts as natural remedy for constipation, toothache, sore throat and indigestion, as well as a long list of other uses.</p>	<p>Published in Punch newspaper on 15 December 2019, page 16.</p>	<p>To possibly provide information about the health benefits of the plant.</p>	<p>It might mislead people into depending solely on African star apple to treat the listed diseases in the post, rather than seeking prompt and appropriate medical attention.</p>
<p>It is claimed that bitter melon (<i>Momordica charantia</i>) has “anti-HIV” qualities, and is active against other retroviruses such as herpes.</p> 	<p>Article titled “More Medicinal Plants Employed in HIV Treatment” published in the Guardian newspaper on 19 December 2019, page 31.</p>	<p>To possibly provide information about the health benefits of the plant.</p>	<p>Some patients undergoing HIV treatment might immediately start taking bitter melon. The article should include that patients seek appropriate medical interventions, so that quacks do not capitalise on this claim.</p>
<p>It is claimed that the West African spice alligator pepper, also called grains of paradise or Guinea pepper, aids in the digestion of food, preventing constipation and bloating, treats measles, lowers blood sugar, eliminates fibroid, expels worms, boosts sperm count and treats leprosy. (Known as atare in Yoruba, chitta in Hausa.)</p>	<p>Article titled “Nature Heals: Alligator Pepper: Amazing Gifts of Nature (2)” was published in the Sun newspaper of 21 December 2019, page 31 and in Health Digest.</p>	<p>To possibly provide information about the health benefits of the plant, while promoting the source as a traditional health practitioner or herbal expert.</p>	<p>It might mislead people into depending solely on alligator pepper to treat the listed diseases in the post, rather than seeking prompt and appropriate medical attention.</p>
<p>It is claimed that cabbage contains vitamins C, E, and folic acid, which have many therapeutic functions, such as</p>	<p>Claim was made by Ifeoma Chukwuma, a herbal health consultant, in an article titled “Cabbage: Vegetable Beyond</p>	<p>To encourage readers to expect healthy tips from the herbal health consultant and to enhance her marketing</p>	<p>It might mislead people into depending solely on cabbage to treat the listed diseases in the post, rather than seeking prompt and</p>

<p>anti-diarrheal and anti-allergenic.</p>	<p>the Slaw!” published in Daily Sun newspaper on Thursday 26 December 2019, page 28. The consultant included her telephone number and e-mail address: naturealherbals@yahoo.com 08038202980</p>	<p>potential as a self-acclaimed expert. It would also boost patronage of the newspaper, and create a symbiotic relationship between the contributor and the newspaper.</p>	<p>appropriate medical attention.</p>
<p>It is claimed that brown rice is rich in proteins, calcium and potassium, and that these ingredients help prevent the formation of blood clots, control diabetes and aid in weight loss.</p>	<p>Article titled “Tips for Healthy Living: Brown Rice This Yuletide” published in Daily Sun newspaper o26 December 2019, page 21.</p>	<p>To encourage readers to expect healthy tips from the herbal health consultant and to enhance her marketing potential as a self-acclaimed expert. It would also boost patronage of the newspaper and create a symbiotic relationship between the contributor and the newspaper.</p>	<p>Although the health benefits of brown rice are listed, people react differently to certain foods. The claim may also create false hope among consumers.</p>
<p>It is claimed that “African Superman Erection Enhancer” and “Rhino 8” pills enhance sexual “performance”.</p>	<p>Advertorial titled “Common Sexual Problems and Their Novelty Based Solutions” published in the Vanguard newspaper on 14 January 2020, page 27. The contributor of this claim also doubles as the marketing distributor of drugs and sex toys for the company Zee Virtual Media Ltd. Telephone number 08171912551.</p>	<p>To promote product sales.</p>	<p>Side effects, drug interactions, potency and safety of these pills are unknown. Thus their ingestion could lead to health complications.</p>

TELEVISION

Brief description of claim	Origin and platform circulated on	Motivation for dissemination	Possible harm
A TVC newscaster reported that: “It is estimated that about one in fifty-thousand (50,000) births to one in one-hundred-and eighty-nine-thousand (189,000) births are conjoined twins. Now out of this number, half are still born and additional one third (1/3) of the babies die within the first twenty-four hours (24hrs).”	News broadcast from TVC News, a major Nigerian television station. The segment was titled “78 Nigerian Medical Doctors Separate Conjoined Twins” and it was posted on YouTube , on 8 January 2020.	To inform viewers about current events in Nigeria.	Newscaster did not cite the exact source of the data, and this makes the information unreliable.

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