Rumour: An Alternative Means Of Communication In A Developing Nation: The Nigerian Example

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Abstract
Rumour mongering constitutes one of the most common, but least understood modes of social interaction. It is often referred to as common talk or bear say. It is also regarded as news, which has no factual basis, as well as something which carries a pejorative connotation. As a human phenomenon, it permeates every strata of society from the individual, the group to the mass. As a communal property. Either within an organization or the larger society, rumour is regarded as an unverified communication transmitted by the word of the mouth while as an individual property, it is a way through which individuals gain attention and status. Because all the previous attempts at creating a proper understanding of this human phenomenon as well as establish a coping mechanism, have often been approached from the socio-metric plane and the destructive tendency of view, this paper presents rumour as an alternative, viable form of communication within an organization as well as emphasis that whenever information is controlled form the reach of or made inaccessible to employees alternative means of obtaining information are often considered. It also attempts to provide answers to questions on where rumour comes from. Is there a way of determining whether a story is true or false? What do you learn from studying this class of human phenomenon? What is the place of folklore in rumour transmission process? How does rumour relieve members of the society from the uncomfortable pressure of life through humour? In what ways will the use of humour justify the proposition that rumour assists in relieving the subjects from the uncomfortable pressure of life? This study hopes to bring to the fore the insidious nature of rumour, not only as a potent destructive and explosive means of communication but also as a means of ensuring the fluidity in interpersonal relationship amongst individuals engaged in it, especially from a developing nation’s point of view.

Preamble
Philosophers down the ages have discussed rumour. Aristotle (Ross 1995) Keerhegaard (1846) and Heidegger (1962) were of the opinion, it is characterized by its trivializing nature and its tendency to cheapen individuals including the source and the individuals spreading it. Rumour is like communication and multi-faceted in nature. Since 1900s, researchers/scholars representing diverse areas of inquiry have all analysed and reported on rumour. Hence, the study of rumour has had a long history in all disciplines especially the major ones in the social sciences including psychology, social anthropology, geography, sociology, sociolinguistics and folklores.

When at the beginning of 1998, the president of the United States was said to have been having an affair with a White House intern, a flood of gossip, conjecture and insinuation had broken out. The hour of rumour had also arrived. Various interest groups emerged to fester on the scandal that was to follow! Forever, rumours have been casting their spell over individuals; forever, individuals also have been asking whether it is true what people are saying. It is instructive to understand that, whether they travel from the periphery
to the center or the other way round, rumours provoke panic and progress, fear of war or ecstatic triumphalism, which is to say, they make history. This paper attempts to show how rumour, through history, is regarded as an alternative means/process of communication in a developing nation especially, Nigeria.

What is Rumour?

Rumour is a pipe blown by surmises, jealously, conjectures and of so easy and so plain a stop that the blunt monster with uncounted heads. “The still discordant wavering multitude can play upon it…” Williams Shakespeare, Henry IV. Rumour is defined as “talk” or “opinion widely disseminated with no discernable, source” or a “current statement or report without known authority for its truth (Webster, 1992). Rumours are similar to gossip. However, usually, rumour extends beyond a small group, conveys information that is neither that is neither authenticated nor able to be authenticated, and relate to the larger group.

What is Rumor About?

Many scholars of rumor have argued that rumor is the product of ambiguous situations: rumors resolve contradictions; they explain not only misfortune but good fortune. Rumors in Africa, Karin Barber observes, could explain how someone grew rich without working hard. Tomatsu Shibutani has called rumor "collective problem-solving" in which "men caught" in ambiguous situations attempt to "construe a meaningful interpretation...by pooling their intellectual resources." Historians have been perhaps less than eager to see rumors as explanations and collective efforts; Alain Corbin has argued that even the most contradictory rumors "revealed collective psychoses, dreams and anxieties" of a period, as when French villagers tortured and killed a harmless nobleman in 1870. But suggestions of collective problem-solving and collective psychoses both make rumors the speech of unified and homogeneous populations who have no fractures in their vision of the world; such interpretations obscure the contradictory fragments of gossip that make up any rumor.

Shibutani reports, for example, that during the American occupation of Japan there was a widespread rumor that General Douglas MacArthur had a Japanese grandparent. He argues that this rumor was a way for Japanese to reconcile their postwar experience of the general's reforms with their wartime belief that Americans in general and MacArthur in particular hated them. But such a reading of the rumor ignores all the ways in which this particular story hints at Japanese anti-war and anti-military sentiments stifled during the war. Circulating stories are not constructed on a moment-to-moment basis; they are drawn from a store of historical allusions that have been kept alive and given new and renewed meanings by the gossip and arguments of diverse social groups.

Rumors about colonial bureaucracies, corporations, events, and diseases thus are not really "about" those things at all; rather, they are narratives, explanations, and theories in which colonial bureaucracies, corporations, events, and diseases are subjects. It would be difficult to argue that rumors about clothing, food, and either deliberate or inadvertent additives—the snake in the coat, the mystery lizard in the kitchen of a popular eatery in Ibadan, Nigeria, rat in the fried chicken, the urine in Mexican beer—are about the corporations named in the stories; it would be as easy to say that these stories are about the bodily fluids contained, contaminated, or injured in these stories. Arguing that these stories are about the corporations named in the stories, or about the foodstuffs contaminated, suggests that there is only one audience for a rumor, and only one possible hearing of the rumor by that audience. Are the names of companies, countries, and corporations the site of the rumor, the level of detail that makes it a better, more credible rumor, or the subject of
the rumor? Do the detail and specificity of brand names make a story any more compelling or important than does the presence of any other detail? The regional variations within a rumor, however, fragmentary and elusive, suggest genealogies of local concerns and historical fixations that would not otherwise be apparent.

Asking, let alone deciphering, what a rumor is about makes a rumor about one thing. It makes rich texts of half-truths and local knowledge linear and simplified. Several stories from East and Central Africa, each involving sugar, may make this point. In batumbula stories from the colonial Congo, "The captives of batumbula did not eat maize meal. They drank sugar water or they ate sugarcane. The captives who were favored this way became fat and hairy and were taken to the Hotel Biano, where they were killed and eaten. When there were enough captives, one group was transported to Belgium and another to America." A student at Makerere University College in Uganda wrote an essay about peoples' anxieties about the 1948 census: "[R]umours are being spread by ignorant people that the government wanted to know the density of the population so they could check the increase of population by giving people medicine indirectly—say mixed with sugar—for indeed when brown sugar was introduced into my country people refused to buy it because of the rumours.

In 1952, an anti-Central African Federation pamphlet circulating in Northern Rhodesia reported that "on 28th October the 'House of Laws' in London had decided to put poisoned sugar on sale for Africans, commencing on February 8...1953." The poisoned sugar would cause stillbirths in women and would make men impotent. "The sugar would be recognized by the letters LPS on the packets". Rumours contain raw facts. This was similar to stories told about the oral vaccination in Nigeria and. Rumors do not take off from the truth but rather seek out the truth." [9P! They are open to many interpretations and speak to different factions within the most homogeneous audiences. It is in their exchange and evaluation that they take on sophisticated analysis. To pull these sugar stories apart to explain the failure of brown sugar sales in one place or African conceptions of global commodity circuits in another would strip them of the rich ambivalence of the well-fed captives and the codes by which poisoned sugar was to be identified. It is the allusions and loose ends of the story that give it widespread currency and credibility. Rumors do not seek truth by themselves; the people who tell and the people who interpret rumors do.

There is no single correct interpretation of any single rumor; there are interpretations and contextualizations instead. Rumors rarely lose their specificity or get covered up, but once they are captured in oral or written texts, their diverse and contradictory elements become bundled together, so that teasing out a single meaning, or single hierarchy of meanings, is virtually impossible. Indeed, giving a rumor a single meaning turns rumor into something it is not, something much less rich and complex.

**Historicizing Rumour and Gossip**

**Think about this!**

Rumour. Think about this word. Say of loud. Rumour. It has such ugly connotations doesn’t it? A statement that cannot be proved or disproved. Rumour rhymes with rumour.

Davidhizar R. Dowd S(1996) writing on the dynamics of rumour in the clinical setting was of the view that, hospital rumours are rarely addressed in the nursing literature or in nursing education because educators may wish to appear authoritative and avoid the negative aspects of story telling. The researcher views this as most unfortunate as most nurses encounter rumour on a daily basis with most of them having a deleterious effect. According to the writer, some nurses are more likely to believe what they are told by older,
experienced staff and pass on misinformation. Examining rumour from both the psychological and social dynamics, Dowd (1996) argues that rumour states for a variety of reasons as most people enjoy stories while storytelling is a traditional mode of transmission of information. Expatiating further, the author feels compelled to argue that when a subject is controversial or stimulates emotion, rumour likely occurs. This agrees with the position that rumour occurs when a subject is surrounded by ambiguity. Arguing from a psychological dynamics, Dowd (1996) was of the opinion that rumour can have a conspirational basis.

The information contained in a rumour can allow for social exchange. During a long procedure, such as a theatre case where numerous sutures are needed, some entertaining information about the theatre department manager's personal life can provide spice and interest even though only half true. Later, in the coffee room, the same story is likely to be told to other staff setting the rumour on its way. If the story is not sufficiently interesting, it may become spiced up and be quite different when repeated for the third or fourth time. Rumours can also provide a way to resolve questions or provide background information on an issue or person others know little about (Wurzbach 1985). For example, a new member of staff or recently qualified nurse whom people are unfamiliar with is especially vulnerable since staff have little information and can easily embellish what they do know.

A rumour may have the positive social effect of relieving tension, problem solving, or providing a method of adapting to change. For example, an untrue but colourful joke about another staff member can promote laughter and thus relieve tension. However, a rumour can also have the negative social effect of supporting a hostile belief system and increasing stress and conflict.

**Psychological Dynamics**

Rumours can have a conspiratorial basis. For example, the incorrect information may be spread in an attempt to divide staff, or to discredit and demoralise an individual or group of staff. When rivalry between staff exists, such as between staff who belong to a union and staff who do not, rumours are a common way to stimulate discontent. Rumours often function as expressions of unconscious fear and anxiety. For example, when a new director of nursing is appointed and staff know little about his or her philosophy of nursing, information regarding potential changes may circulate among the staff. If the new director provides little information and is seen infrequently by staff, information about changes will continue to circulate and rumours will proliferate. The more important and ambiguous the situation, the more rumours will circulate.

Another psychological factor, which contributes to rumours, is a situation where strong personal emotions are aroused. The presence of a strong emotion often precipitates other strong emotions so that high anxiety may be joined quickly by feelings of guilt, envy or hostility. A person who is unable to resolve his or her anxiety realistically may conceive a somewhat paranoid resolution to the anxiety and, by retelling the solution, start a rumour. A rumour may function as a psychological process, occurring in a rigid social structure when a conflict develops around opposing values or mutual misperceptions. The individuals in a group may spread the rumour to confirm their own conviction and intensify their feelings about the conflict. When conflict is present, individuals find it useful to spread rumours since rumours may confirm their rigid position in the conflict and thus support their belief that they are right. This position strengthens the conspirational model in rumour stories.
Empirical Studies and Theoretical Perspectives

It is common knowledge that talk is cheap and can also be a precious commodity in social exchange. Its value is derived from its myriad functions. It can titillate—imagination, comfort or excite and, manipulate to maintain the status quo. When scepticism is high and gullibility seems to be high, hearsay can provoke people to do and believe incredible things.

This section focuses on empirical evidence from previous studies, which relate to the topic under investigation. To understand the nature of rumour requires a close analysis of the various viewpoints of scholars, especially, social scientists, because rumour is interdisciplinary in nature, there seems to be a simple agreement on the primary function or purpose of rumour. In the same vein, it seems possible that each of the interpretations surveyed in this section represents a part of the truth.

The theoretical work by psychologists on the function of rumour conforms to a form of "medical mode", which presupposes that rumour is an • expression of individual states of mind in the same way diseases, symptoms are regarded as basically individual physical manifestations. Allport and Postman, cited in Fine et al (1988), adopting the "medical" analogy, were of the view that importance and ambiguity are the key variables in rumour mongering. According to them, individuals are motivated to make sense of their environment to eliminate chaos and uncertainty, by "effort after meaning". Allport and Postman's mathematical explanation of rumour is an example of simplicity. The formula, \( R = i \times a \), emphasises on the variables of importance and ambiguity. (This has already been explained on page 17 of this, thesis). This has enjoyed various empirical support. For example, Shibutani (1976), Schachter and Burdick (1955) Susan (1973), Buhler (1988) Nkpa (1976), Rosnow (1988) O'Hair (2002) Tallahassee Democrat (2001) have all based their submission on the relevance of the two variables in rumour mongering.

Carl Jung, proceeding from the psychoanalytic viewpoint, argues that, sensation and curiosity are important variables in rumour mongering. As expressed by Jung, rumour mongering is accomplished by the process of projection, with anxieties being converted into lesser threats or feelings that are actually an individual's own to outside forces. Illustrating this principle, Jung based his analysis on a study he conducted among young girls, based on the semi-erotic dream of one of the girls. The dream and the rumour expressed the ambivalent love-hate relationship between the student and her male instructor. Jung summarises that the dream formed the first expression for something that was already in the air, it was the spark, which fell in to the powder magazine. Leon Festinger, cited in Fine et al (1976), in his well-known cognitive dissonance theory, premised his study on the ago defensive mechanism of rumour. According to him, dissonance will exist between two ideas when the opposite of one follows from the other. The inspiration for cognitive dissonance was Festinger's attempt to reconcile an intriguing discrepancy in the reported behaviours of local inhabitants after a major earthquake in India. The result of the study follows that, contrary to the hedonistic assumption that people will put unpleasant things out of their minds, if there were constant flow of rumours predicting calamities. In conclusion, Festinger explained rumours as attempt to reconcile dissonant cognition as people in the untouched regions without concrete reason for their fears, manufactured reason in order to reduce the psychological discomfort resulting in holding two contrary ideas, unharmed yet anxious and apprehensive.

However, apart from any functions that rumour and rumour mongering have for individuals, they also play a social function of serving the needs of the collective. Consequently, proponents of the sociological school of thought argue that, in some instances, both the individual and collective needs are sometimes opposed. According to
them, wartime rationing programmes are the collective need but not the commodity needs of individual citizens. Furthermore, it is" usually assumed that rumours spread in clusters or are discussed by the collective. This is derived from the belief that the primary determining factor in rumour spread/mongering is consensus, which is only feasible when a group hears the rumour and gives a reasonably rapid chain of feedback. Second, it is assumed that once the group shares a common concern, there is the possibility of consensus. It is equally argued that once a group has arrived at a position favoured by the majority, a bandwagon effect can develop fairly quickly.

This position explains the attendant consequences that characterised the 1990, 1991 Anti-SAP riots, the 1999 Shagamu and Bodija riots, the 1988 religious riot in Kano and the Sokoto riots in 1988. Shibutani's (1966) in his work, Improvised news, expressed the view that rumour is a collective transaction whose component part consists of cognitive and communicative activities. He believes that there exists something akin to natural selection of the survival of the latest rumour. According to him, as a group strives for consensus, there is the elimination of rumours that are least satisfactory in terms of the contingencies of behaviour accepted by the group. Expressed in a more general term, because societies are in a state of flux, crises often arise whenever some events cannot be understood on the basis of established assumptions.

Locating this explanation on the aftermath of the effect of a murder committed in 1921 in the old society Hill section of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the victim of the murder was identified as a local prominent police surgeon. Rumours proliferated with attempts made to explain speculations about who, what and why of the murder. On the other hand, Turner. Killian, Roos and Jung (1959), point out that rumour can serve to validate some course of action, (especially some rumour that precede a riot) or to confirm or express a commonly shared image or mood that sounds so intense as to require validation in some collective attitude or action. Ansah-Koi (1994), adopting a purely document observation, in writing about the rumour phenomenon in Ghana's politics, traced the conspiratorial approach to rumour generation and transmission. According to him, the historiography of Ghana seems to be replete with instances where rumour formed a basis for important official action or inaction or something politically congenital in one way or the other.

Following from a common perception of the rumour phenomenon as a categorical evil, successive regimes in Ghana, according to Ansah-Koi, consistently viewed rumour mongering with apprehension and concern. To them, rumour mongering was commonly perceived by the various regimes as stuffing the ears of men with false reports. This, to him, was illustrative of the negative perception of the phenomenon. Nkpa (1976) conducted a research on rumour mongering in wartime. The study, which was based on replicating the Allport and Postman's classification of rumours, especially during a crises period in Eastern Nigeria - war- adopted two methods of data collection. First was the holding of discussion on the progress of the civil war with Biafra villagers and with former Biafra urbanites who had evacuated the cities to take shelter in the rural villagesvas a result of constant-air raids. Second, the researcher, asked 125 undergraduates in introductory sociology and those who had spent civil war years in Biafra, at the university of Nigeria, Nsukka and Enugu campuses, to write term papers on, “Rumours that I heard during the civil war”. Results of Nkpa's study revealed that 121 rumours were finally extracted, while a fourth class of rumour, circulated in Biafra. Titled, Neo-pipe Dream rumour, the rumour was a development finding on the Allport and Postman's classification.

The result strongly confirms the Allport and Postman's hypothesis that the essentials of rumour are importance and ambiguity. Other empirical works are those of Knopf (1988),
Buckhout and Hart (1988), which seek to present a promising eclectic interpretation of rumours associated with racial rioting in the United State of America as well as experimental study on eyewitness testimony, which videotaped a staged assault on a college professor in the presence of 141 eyewitnesses. Knopf, (1975) on one hand, postulates what is regarded as the process-model of rumour with emphasis on a functional basis with certain contextual features in the sociological vein while Buckhort and Hart cited in dumper (2002) argued that the key to understanding a rumour is found in the element operating during the person-to-person transmission of a report. According to them, a study passing from person to person will change due to willful manipulations of the transmitter but un-conscious forces and elements in the process itself.

These empirical reviews have provided the survey of a wide range of observations concerning the nature of rumour. Sociologists contend that rumour mongering is often employed to validate or crystallise a commonly shared belief, image, or mood by associating it with a course of action. They interpret rumour mongering as a collective problem solving adaptation to social change. Psychologists, on the other hand, emphasise that rumours are an effort to provide meaning as human beings strive to make sense of their environment. as well as providing a means for reconciling dominant beliefs. It becomes pertinent at this instance to examine four theories associated with rumour studies. These theories are significant in this study because they offer significant explanations of the rumour phenomenon from the level of the individual to that of the society. Equally, they provide insight into why, what and who is involved in rumour generation and transmission. Consequently, the following theories, of psychological, functional, conspiratorial and process will be discussed. Within each school of thought, most investigators address themselves strictly to the general question of rumour formation without reference to a particular situation or setting. This broad treatment of rumour formation by no means precludes its applicability to riot.

The Psychological Theory

Rumour, according to this theory, emanates from the urge by individuals to satisfy certain basic human needs, desires and interests. The theory also recognises rumour as an emotional outlet, a defence mechanism, a process of explanation of, or against, feelings, which might be unacceptable to the individual or at least difficult to handle. Knapp, (1944), while suggesting that the hostile, aggressive quality of rumour often served to reassure the individual, of his worth and strength, also emphasises the importance of individual anxiety in various classes of rumour. In the same vein, Allport and Postman, cited in Knopf (1975), view rumour as a rationalising force in the emotional life of an individual. According to them, rumour is set in motion and continues to travel in a homogenous social medium by virtue of the strong interests of the individuals involved in the transmission. The powerful influence of these interests requires that rumour should serve largely as a rationalising agent, explaining, justifying and providing meaning for various emotional interests at work. Consequently, personality traits play a considerable role in rumour construction. The individual imputes certain of his desires, motives on others, hence, rumour could be explained as serving as a means of enhancing a poor self-image.

Expatiating on this, Shibutani and Fine (1976), point to the desire of some individuals to attract, some attention to themselves, as well as to achieve a distinct place among their peers as the possessor and originator of the latest news. Similarly, Schall, Levey and Tresteselt, in a study cited in Knopf (1975) suggest that rumour serves as attention-getting device, while Exposito (1988), believes that "inside information enhances an
individual's prestige and position." However, in the process of actualising a good self-image, certain transformational variables are capable of manifesting. These variables are summarised as distortion. At this instance, the person transmitting the rumour may be motivated to forget certain details, which may cast doubt on the credibility of the story and its source, stressing only those details that may increase its chance of being believed. Such stories, in the process of retell, are subjected to various individual imputation latent with certain personal prejudices. For example, Jung, (1959), analyses the case of a 13-year-old girl expelled from school for "spreading a "rumour about her teacher's sexual activities. It was reported that the rumour emanated as a result of the girl's erotic fantasies for sexual union with the teacher in a dream. Hence, the secret desires of the girl culminated in the spread of the rumour. Furthermore, some investigators have described rumour as being a pathological phenomenon, more than something to be expected of all normal persons under certain conditions. Judging by these, rumour is thought to be generated and transmitted by persons suffering from severe emotional disorders, especially noticeable in-patients with panic, hallucinatory conditions. Patients in such states often turn ordinary events into imaginary frightening threats or stories.

Consequently, Hert, cited in Knopf (1975), a psychoanalyst, believes that hallucinating rumour often takes the form of atrocity stories. However, Allport and Postman, (1945), contend that mental illness should not be regarded as a precondition for rumour generation. According to them, normal individuals are also capable of hallucination under severe stress and strain. In essence, the psychological approach to rumour, in spite of its emphasis on the individual's personality traits and emotions, does not preclude social factors. To some researchers, rumour is seen as a social as well as a psychological problem. The prevalence of rumour during crisis situations such as panics, epidemics, wars, disasters and riots are reference points. Attempting an explanation further, Allport and Postman, cited in Shibutani and Fine (1975), regard the relationship between personality traits and rumour, as a "law of social psychology", emphasising that no riot nor disorders take place in the absence of rumours. However, an obvious missing link in the theory is the inclusion of social, alongside psychological factors. The theory grants the role of rumour in social situations but fails to account for the social situation in which rumours form. Invariably, certain conditions within the community such as setting, environment, circumstance, are ignored. As would be expected, the theory retains the individual as the supreme factor in rumour formation at all times. During such times, the needs, desires, interests and actions in-group behaviour are also ignored. Thus, at crisis times, the question of rumour formation comes down to the individual. However, rumour transmission and formation extends beyond the individual. It stretches to rumour being a social phenomenon, consequently, our discussion logically shifts to the explanation of the functional theory.

**The Functional Theory**

This theory assumes that rumour is essentially a social phenomenon with social factors considered on two levels. On the one, rumour is regarded as a collective enterprise, based on the premise that rumour is simply not the creation of any one individual, it is noted to have arisen and been shaped by the collaboration of many persons. However, in reality, individuals are involved in any rumour transmission. These participants are brought together to discuss matters of common pre-occupation, with ideas diversely offered and expressed. Some individuals venture opinions as to what might have happened, others make comparisons with previous situations, yet; others introduce new bits of information. In this case, opinions are weighed, statements are challenged, explanations are sought while certain
information takes precedence over others. Through these series of action, a collective interpretation of the issues or event (a rumour) often develops. Second, interest is centred on certain conditions and circumstances. The birth and life span of rumour are rooted in the immediate situation where an unusual event brings people together albeit, temporarily. The event which may be highly dramatic - for example, an assassination, a coup attempt, a kidnapping, and epidemic, a riot and sudden death could succeed in altering the daily routine of life, thus, paving the way for diverse shades of stories in the form of rumour. Under this theory, events leading to rumour are often shrouded in ambiguity. Several questions to which answers are sought are often raised in such situations with extreme tension. However, the problematic nature of the situation lies at the heart of this approach, since information is urgently needed to understand and adjust to changed and uncertain circumstances. In such cases, the public becomes highly responsive to news. This demand for news often stems from the importance placed upon the event; the more important the event, the greater the demand for news. (The Abiola and Abacha's sudden deaths 1998).

Knopf (1975:81) summarises this explanation thus:

"Big news" affects a large public and is about matters that require immediate attention.

The mass media, which serve as the channel from which news emanates/flows, are often regarded as being authoritative and reliable. Consequently, they are regarded as the largest suppliers of news. Modern societies have, however, established a complex communication network stretching across the globe. This vast network is able to speed the flow of news to the public almost-instantly. However, the mass media are not considered the only authoritative source of news. A certain measure of public esteem and respect is often accorded individuals holding public office. These important public office holders are severely handicapped by the number of people they can reach directly. As a general rule, they also are heavily dependent on the media for communicating with the public - a fact which accentuates the media's importance even further.

Individuals, caught in a situation, which they do not adequately comprehend, often turn to the mass media, particularly radio, television and the newspapers for clarification and verification of what they have heard. This way, the news provided by the media becomes the standard by which reports obtained from other sources are contested. Ironically, the demand for news may exceed the supply made available through formal channels. For example, an event may be so sensational that the best efforts of the news media may be insufficient with the inflated demand, or for a variety of reasons, the news may be blacked out. In the same vein, occasions may also arise where the system malfunctions, with communication proving inadequate or getting suspended entirely. By this, information, which the public vitally needs, may not be forthcoming; hence, collective tension arises, with rumour constructed as a form of improvised news.

Rumour, in this regard, assumes a functional role, seeking to explain what is not clear, provides details, answers questions, aids in decision-making and relieves collective tension. Shibutani (1966:81) sees this as representing a kind of collective problem solving, "a recurrent form of communication through which men caught together in an ambiguous situation attempt to construct a meaningful resource". He further admits that ambiguity is very important in rumour generation and transmission. Alluding to the Chappaquiddick tragedy involving Massachusetts Senator Edward M. Kennedy in 1969, and 60 different situations which accounted for 471 rumours, Shibutani explains that the appearance of
rumour is preceded by an unusual but dramatic event, with many of the situations marked by ambiguity.

The functional theory, like most explanations of rumour formations, rests upon an assumption of its universal applicability. Recognising that the social unrest provides a perfect spawning ground for rumour, Shibutani, cited in Knopf (1975:94), summarises that:

rumours flourish in situations characterised by social unrest.

Those who undergo strain over a long period of time - victims of sustained bombings, survivors of a long epidemic, a conquered populace coping with an army of occupation, civilians grown weary of a long war, prisoners in a concentration camp, residents of neighbourhoods marked by inter-ethnic tension - become restless and dissatisfied.

The Conspiratorial Theory

This theory, unlike the psychological and functional theory, emphasises that rumour is manipulated or controlled artificially as part of an organised effort. Proponents of this theory similarly grant that rumour is deliberately planted in situations where there is a strong divergence of interests. Rumour, in such situations, is employed to advance or consolidate an individual's position. The objectives of this may involve winning new converts, finding out information or defeating the opposition by discrediting, demoralising or dividing it. An avalanche of techniques, ranging from deliberate mis-representation of facts, the exploitation of existing beliefs and values and the manipulation of the media are often tactfully employed.

It is apt to say that rumour within this theory can be classified as bogey because of the danger it portends when transmitted. When rumour is planted under this theory, anonymity is a major advantage, while the source is usually quite difficult to trace. Significantly, the rumour, once planted, is launched into spreading under its own power. An area which research has proved to be most prone to rumour spread is the stock exchange or the financial market. For example, a rumour alleging an American stock exchange firm, F.I. Dupant, Glove Forgan and G of intending to announce liquidation and subsequent withdrawal from the securities business was traced to two men who were fined one thousand pounds each for circulating an untrue story (Knopf, 1975). Another-potent rumour area is, politics, which could also provide another virile setting for contrived rumour. For example, the tricks employed on President Richard M. Nixon's re-election campaign in 1972 affords researchers another case study in the manufacture of rumour. They confuse and harass political opponents through the spread of false and malicious rumour. Deliberately planted rumour such as this generally can and 'do occur. It flourishes in situation's where there are conflicting interests, while it equally easily gets distinguished from other types of rumour by its malicious intent. Humphrey and Lee, cited in Knopf (1975:101), posit that this planted rumour manifests in three forms before becoming explosive. These are:

1. reports of alleged insults and discriminations,
2. stories of imminent violence of, by other race, and
3. invasion plans from another city and inflammatory accounts of rapes, beatups and murders.

These rumour forms, Rosnow and Fine (1976), have observed, are spread very rapidly with changing character. Accordingly, they are susceptible to artificial creation and traceable to the rumour-mills of certain groups. They remark that:
these rumour symptoms circulate with increasing rapidity in barbing shops, beauty parlors, bars, churches, in lobbies, business gathering, union meetings and family conclaves, in face to face talks, telephone conversations and even in rare instances over the radio and in the newspapers.

**The Process Theory**

The process theory is offered as an explanation to rumour with respect to social/ethnic disorders. Social/ethnic disorders are neither mysterious nor random occurrences; they arise out of the structural arrangements within society. They are also part of the same process. It should be noted that rumour does not naturally cause violence neither does violence cause rumour. However, rumour should be seen as one of a series of factors underlying violence. It should further be considered as one determinant out of many which increases the likelihood of violence.

However, the process theory approaches rumour formation, generation and transmission from a convergence of disciplines which are sociological — (structural features of society,) socio psychological - (group attitudes and beliefs,) historical - (episodes taken from the past, violent past). Within the social structural content, the issue of violence within the society focuses on six key issues:

(a) the violence itself
(b) the culprits
(c) the causalities
(d) the amount of destruction
(e) the duration
(f) the force necessary to stop it; while other explanation towards the determination of underlying factors responsible for the disorders include the following factors:
(g) industrialisation
(h) migration
(i) poverty and other conditions.

Furthermore, this theory recognises that there may be something fundamentally wrong with individual social environments, while specific periodic episodes of violence may ultimately be the result of a specific malfunctioning of the social system. For example, Smelser, cited in Knopf (1975), regards such structural strains as inequality between races/tribes/workers in the same workplace. Acknowledging violence as inevitable of such structural strains, Smelser remarks that it is a good deal less important than the group relationships, which produced it. It is instructive to also note that some form of structural strain could be present if an episode of collective violence is to occur. Consequently, certain basic aspects of societal strain are embedded in society's social fabric. Such aspects include:

**Rumour Throughout History: The Case with Nigeria**

Few of us are completely objective and reliable in seeking, disseminating and verifying information. Neither are we experts in most subjects. To a greater extent than we realise, we are all prone to formulate and circulate rumour. Rumour plays an extremely important role in every facet of human endeavour from the ordinary individual level to business, politics and governance. In advanced countries like the U.S.A, the issue of rumour had attracted the establishment of a clinics where every story not proceeding out of institutional channels are analyzed and critically examined in the light of uniform standards.
However, the trust in this section is the examination of rumour within the context of a developing nation especially Nigeria. How rumour has become an alternative means of communication.

The history of the Nigerian nation is replete with various degrees of rumour from the seemingly ordinary to the bizarre. However, rumour consequently has according to Gurin (2006:3) “a range of conventional properties that can be utilized in diverse ways”. This underscores the importance of rumour in Nigeria. However, it is important to note that, the effect of rumour had been diverse. Form destruction to lives and property, disruption of public peace, stagnation in business growth, sullied public image and fear and anxiety. Insidious and destructive as rumour may seem, it also possesses the fluidity in interpersonal relationship amongst individuals engaged in it, especially within the context of a developing nation like Nigeria. Rumour stories in Nigeria had ranged from those on issues, individuals and policies; though different times in history; from peace time to time of war! Between 1967 through the periods of various heads of nation/government, Nigeria had been confronted with series of stories about individuals either in their official or private capacities which the media had also oftentimes helped in perpetrating. Thus rumour becomes a process of explanation; let us examine the following examples:

NKPA in 1970 collated various degrees of rumour during the Nigerian civil war.

(a) Ten battalions of well-armed, white mercenaries who were former employees of the Shell B.P.

Company, together with Nigerian soldiers, tried to reach Pport-Harcourt from the Midwestern State of Nigeria through a huge oil pipeline to reinforce the Nigerian forces there. But they were, while still in the pipes, gassed to death by poisonous gas that was manufacture red by Biafran scientists.

(b) A Russian cargo boat that was bringing bombs and guns from Russia to Nigeria collided with a British passenger boat in the Atlantic Ocean. There was a mighty explosion and the two boats sank within to seconds of the explosion. Not even a single life was saved.

Other stories collated are:

• Early last year, many mobile phone users in Nigeria anxiously checked the number that was calling them before answering. A rumour has spread ‘like wildfire’ that, if you, answered a call form certain killer number the rumour went ‘you would die immediately’.

• About a decade ago, rumour emerged that a killer brand of beans was in circulation. People were warned to desist from eating beans in whatever form. If you refused to heed this warning, you would die!.

• In the same vein, in 2005, a rumour had it that 200 children had died eating the popular children’s meal – Indomie Noodles. Parents were warned not to expose their children to the noodles.

Consequence: The producer spent money buying media space to refute the allegation.
In 1993, Fan Milk Plc, an organization that produces various dairy products, was said to be owned by Francis Arthur Nzeribe, a notorious politician. The organization had to spend huge sums of money to buy media space to deny the rumour to stem irate mob’s action.

Procter and Gamble in Nigeria fulfilling one of its corporate responsibility, distributed free samples of its Always Sanitary Pad in 2003 to female undergraduate students in the University of Maiduguri. One of the beneficiaries claimed that she contacted HIV/AIDS after its use. The consequence of this singular action was a temporary suspension of the production activity of P & G. This was, however, later resolved when an authority spoke on the issue. Indeed, Nigeria had been a wellspring of Rumour affecting the low and the mighty.

This writer in a paper titled “YarAdua’s rumoured death, and the question of literacy in Nigeria,” chronicled through history, how leaders in Nigeria had been objects of various forms of rumour; ranging from the seemingly harmless to that overtly destructive. These stories collated over a period of time are presented.

1. Abubakar Tafawa Balewa: Nigeria’s First Prime Minister. He was said to have attended an International Conference of Heads of Nations. He was served tea but being a Hausa man with a low level of education and poor sense of decorum, kept his tea cup open - face-up. Effects: his cup was perpetually filled thus making him to applaud the generosity of the white man!

2. General Yakubu Gowon: His wife Victoria was said to have given birth to a reptile. Apparently, because of his sins; getting married during the war! While others were dying, he was relishing in happiness!

3. Muritala Ramat Mohammed: Before his death, he was said to have secretly signed Nigeria into QIC (Organisation of Islamic Countries). He was also said to be planning to turn Nigeria into an Islamic nation. This story was common amongst Christians. This was said to be the reason behind his early death!

4. Obasanjo Olusegun: Chief/General Obasanjo was said to:
   (a) Maintain a detention camp in his Ota farm
   (b) Kill his workers in his Ota farm under the pretext of stealing!
   (c) Kill his wife, Stella apparently for rituals to stay in power beyond 2007
   (d) Mastermind Bola Ige’s and S.M. Afolabi's death for selfish reasons

5. Shehu Shagari: Was said to have gone blind, lost four sons in a ghastly motor accident due to the sins he committed against Nigeria when he was president corruption/ineptitude.

6. IBB: He was alleged to have killed his rival's, (a musician, based in Jos, Plateau State), son - few days before the young man's wedding ceremony!

7. Abacha Sanni. He was said to have died after eating apples from three ladies – of India decent!

Conclusion:
What do you think of rumour? A monster? A tiger? A wolf? A Dove? This paper might have provoked your perception of what rumour is to you especially from a Nigerian perspective.

REFERENCES


