

# Journalists' Perspective of Fact-checking Applications in Curbing Fake News in Nigeria



Arikenbi, Peter Gbenga ↔  
&  
Ikharo Seluman<sup>Y</sup>

## Abstract

This study examines journalists' perspectives on fact-checking applications in curbing fake news in Nigeria. The researchers embarked on this study to assess the level of awareness of fact-checking applications as tools for curbing fake news, assess the extent to which fact-checking applications have been used to curb fake news, and examine the challenges encountered whilst utilizing fact-checking applications in curbing fake. Based on the objectives of the study, three research questions were formulated to serve as a guide for the study. The study was anchored on technological determinism theory. The survey research design was employed for the study and data were collected through the use of the questionnaire. Findings from the study reveal that the majority of the respondents are highly aware of fact-checking applications used in curbing fake news. This is because the rise of misinformation and fake news in the digital age has heightened the importance of fact-checking in journalism. Journalists are increasingly aware of the need to verify information and combat the spread of false or misleading content to maintain credibility and trust with their audiences. As a result, there has been a growing interest in fact-checking tools among journalists as a means to streamline and enhance the accuracy and efficiency of their fact-checking processes. Based on the finding of the study, it was recommended that stakeholders in the media industry should implement comprehensive education and training programs aimed at increasing journalists' awareness and understanding of fact-checking applications. These programs should cover the principles, functionalities, and limitations of technologies in fact-checking, equipping journalists with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively utilize these tools while maintaining journalistic accuracy. The study also recommends that media organizations and other relevant stakeholders should advocate for transparency and accountability in the development and use of fact-checking applications. Journalists should demand transparency from developers and providers of these technologies, including disclosure of algorithms, data sources, and methodologies used in fact-checking processes.

**Keywords:** *Curbing, Fact-checking, Fake news, Journalists, Misinformation, News, Nigeria*

---

↔ Arikenbi, Peter Gbenga, Department of Mass Communication, Edo State University, Uzairue

<sup>Y</sup> Ikharo Seluman, Department of Mass Communication, Edo State University, Uzairue

## **Introduction**

The rise of fake news in Nigeria has become a significant issue, jeopardizing the country's social unity, political stability, and overall progress. The rapid spread of misinformation, largely fueled by social media platforms, has heightened tensions, sparked violence, and undermined trust in institutions. Although fake news is not a recent development, its impact has grown considerably due to the widespread use of social media for communication and the dissemination of information. Social media has become the "lifeblood of fake news," enabling individuals to easily share misleading stories with a wide audience at minimal cost. The "concern about the spread of fake news focuses on both the ubiquity of social media and the easy circulation of information that social media platforms afford due to their technical affordances" (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

Adeniyi (2019) noted that recent changes in the media landscape have raised new concerns about the vulnerability of democratic societies to fake news and the public's limited capacity to address it. Fake news, as a form of misinformation, thrives in today's fast-paced media environment, particularly across social media platforms. The vast number of information sources online often leads individuals to rely on heuristics and social cues to assess credibility, which in turn shapes their beliefs—beliefs that are difficult to alter once formed. The relatively small but ever-changing set of sources generating misinformation on social media presents both a challenge for real-time detection systems and an opportunity for more focused socio-technical interventions.

It is worth noting that the rise of digital media and social networking platforms has transformed the way information is disseminated and consumed. With this transformation, the spread of fake news has become a pressing concern globally. Journalists play a crucial role in curbing the dissemination of misinformation, and they are increasingly turning to fact-checking applications to combat fake news. Journalists are gatekeepers of information and play a pivotal role in upholding the standards of responsible journalism. Their responsibility includes verifying the credibility of sources and the information they present to the public. In the digital age, where the pace of news dissemination is accelerated, journalists are under immense pressure to report breaking news promptly. This urgency can sometimes lead to errors, misinformation, or unintentional dissemination of fake news.

Fact-checking applications are digital tools that cross-verify information from various sources to ascertain its accuracy. These applications use sophisticated algorithms, artificial intelligence, and machine learning to fact-check information in real time (Haruna, 2020). They compare a piece of news or data against verified and reliable sources to determine its veracity. Fact-checking applications play a pivotal role in curbing the spread of fake news. They serve as a crucial line of defense, enabling journalists to verify the information they receive before publishing. This is particularly important in the current digital age where information can be disseminated quickly and widely. A piece of false information can cause significant harm before it is debunked. Fact-checking applications have emerged as valuable tools in the hands of journalists to combat fake news. These applications are software or web-based platforms that help in verifying the accuracy of news content, claims, and information. They use databases, expert opinions, and established sources to cross-reference and validate news stories (Ogundele, 2023). Journalists in Nigeria have begun to leverage such tools to improve their fact-checking processes.

The rise of fact-checking journalism can be traced back to the spread of false information and the inability of traditional journalism to challenge official public statements with independent verification. Over the past twenty years, fact-checking has evolved from a minor media function to a key practice led by specialized organizations aimed at debunking false and misleading claims. As a result, fact-checking has become an integral part of the information environment in which journalists operate. While studies indicate that fact-checking journalism has flourished in the Global North, it is a relatively new development in Africa and other regions of the Global South (Haruna, 2020).

Following significant efforts to address misinformation, several fact-checking organizations have emerged across Africa, with Africa Check leading the way as the continent's first dedicated fact-checking organization. Its reports have gained wider exposure by being published on traditional media platforms (Amobi, 2019). Another notable example is Dubawa, which is recognized as Nigeria's first independent fact-checking organization (Ogunyemi, 2020). Many of these independent outlets operate within the same information ecosystem as traditional media, and, driven by a shared journalistic commitment to truth, there is often a strong desire to foster a collaborative, symbiotic relationship between them.

The utilization of fact-checking applications among journalists is still in its nascent stages but is rapidly gaining traction. The rise of misinformation and fake news, particularly on social media platforms, has raised concerns among journalists about the credibility and reliability of their sources. This has led to an increase in the use of fact-checking apps by journalists to verify their information. Fact-checking applications provide journalists with a systematic and comprehensive way to verify the information they report. This helps in reducing errors and inaccuracies in news stories. These tools significantly speed up the fact-checking process, allowing journalists to respond to breaking news while ensuring the information's accuracy. Utilizing fact-checking applications enhances a journalist's credibility as it demonstrates a commitment to presenting only verified and accurate news. Journalists can transparently show their audience the steps taken to verify information, which promotes trust and accountability.

Therefore, it is against this backdrop that this study examines journalists' perspectives of fact-checking applications in curbing fake news in Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

We live in a digital era, inundated with an overwhelming flow of information. While media has fostered unprecedented connectivity, it has also highlighted a deeper sense of disconnection among people. In this information age, we are constantly exposed to a mix of credible data and unverifiable content, making it increasingly challenging to distinguish fact from fiction. Concerns have been raised globally by citizens, development experts, and other stakeholders about the widespread impact of misinformation in modern politics. The rapid spread of false information, its resistance to correction, its influence on global political narratives, its ability to distort truth and replace it with harmful narratives, and its threat to democratic systems underscore the urgent need for effective countermeasures.

The media exist not to disseminate disinformation and misinformation, but only to disseminate facts thoroughly fact-checked. This in mind should aid the journalists and Nigerian media, including journalists in Edo State to fact-check information, before

dissemination, to ensure or up the validity to be attached to the information regularly churn-out by the media. It is to be noted that if the media fails to embed fact-checking or enhance the fact-checking process in the information dissemination route, the media will end up as the mouthpiece for falsehood, a willing tool in the hands of the State, and will, ultimately, whittle the effect and regality of the media in the society. The media, oftentimes, disseminate information from the government and government officials, without fact-checking the information. This un-fact-checked information turns out to be false, which, oftentimes, requires a retraction and apology; inflames and causes crises in society; and/or may lead to actions/suits filed in court for defamation.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study are to:

- i. assess the level of awareness of fact-checking applications as tools for curbing fake news;
- ii. assess the extent to which fact-checking applications have been used to curb fake news;
- iii. examine the challenges encountered whilst utilizing fact-checking applications in curbing fake.

### **Research Questions**

- i. What is the level of awareness of fact-checking applications as tools for curbing fake news?
- ii. To what extent have fact-checking applications been used in curbing fake news?
- iii. What are the challenges encountered whilst utilizing fact-checking applications in curbing fake news?

### **Literature Review**

#### **Concept of Fake News**

The term "fake news" combines two basic words: "fake," referring to something not authentic but intended to appear as such, and "news," meaning information about current events. Hence, fake news can be described as information or news that is inauthentic yet presented in a way that encourages people to perceive it as genuine. While this definition captures the essence of the term, it may be overly simplistic. To delve deeper, the researcher reviews existing literature to understand how various scholars define fake news.

McGonagle (2017) defines fake news as intentionally fabricated content created to deceive or mislead individuals, causing them to believe falsehoods or question established truths. For information professionals, fake news and hoaxes are seen as disinformation masquerading as legitimate news, often associated with yellow journalism or propaganda. Such content consists of deliberate falsehoods or hoaxes disseminated via traditional or social media. Similarly, Bakir and McStay (2017) describe fake news as deliberately false and demonstrably fabricated articles designed to mislead audiences. While definitions vary, Marda and Milan (2018) observe that fake news consistently intersects with both misleading information (misinformation) and false information intentionally spread to deceive (disinformation).

Olorunyomi (2018) clarifies this distinction by emphasizing the dual nature of misinformation and disinformation. He defines misinformation as narratives where the sender unknowingly spreads falsehoods, lacking the intent to harm. In contrast, disinformation involves deliberate intent to manipulate minds and influence public behavior to align with specific ideologies. Olorunyomi further highlights that disinformation, often employed by states throughout history, represents a more extreme and harmful form of narrative manipulation.

Marda and Milan (2018) describe fake news as fabricated information that imitates the appearance of genuine news media content but lacks the organizational processes and intent associated with legitimate journalism. They emphasize that fake news involves deliberately creating and disseminating false information to deceive others or undermine trust in verified facts. Persily (2017) categorizes fake news into four types, depending on its use as satire, a tool for profit, propaganda, or reckless journalism. Nonetheless, Marda and Milan (2018) view fake news as fundamentally a struggle over narratives. They suggest it represents a conflict of perspectives, particularly contrasting geopolitical viewpoints that challenge the perceived interests of the security apparatus in the state where the fake news is circulated.

Marda and Milan (2018) argue that the fake news controversy has challenged some foundational principles of liberal democracies. These principles include the concept of "majority rule," which relies on the open exchange of diverse perspectives; the idea of political freedom, where citizens are viewed as independent thinkers capable of making informed decisions without government interference and actively engaging in civic activities; and the belief that access to fair, impartial, and reliable information is essential for democratic participation.

Fake news manifests in various forms, ranging from relatively benign to highly damaging. Recognizing this distinction is crucial when addressing fake news as a societal issue. Fake news can be described as intentionally falsified or manipulated content, strategically spread to provoke fear, outrage, unrest, or harm at either an individual or community level.

Fake news can be seen as a modern form of propaganda, reflecting its primary aim of spreading misinformation, creating confusion, and promoting specific ideologies. Historically, propaganda has been used as a deliberate tool for manipulation and indoctrination. Similarly, fake news has gained infamy as a category of harmful content distributed by individuals, groups, and political rivals, causing significant harm to Nigeria's political stability, security, and economy (Pate et al., 2019). According to Allcott and Gentzkow (2017), fake news is driven by two main factors: financial and ideological motivations. Financially, viral articles on social media can generate substantial advertising revenue when users click on links to the originating site. Ideologically, fake news is used to support particular narratives, often serving political agendas.

Fake news has become a significant global issue, attracting extensive research. Concerns about its impact can no longer be dismissed, as it has raised alarm over the quality of journalism in the 21st century (Wasserman, 2017). These worries have led journalists to reflect on their practices and reaffirm their professional values and standards (Ireton & Posetti, 2018). However, until recently, much of the academic focus on "fake news" has been centered outside Africa, despite the pervasive influence of this phenomenon on the continent (Wasserman, 2017).

### **Fact-Checking: Definition and Significance**

In today's fast-paced information age, the veracity of news and information is constantly challenged by the proliferation of misinformation, propaganda, and falsehoods. In response to this challenge, the practice of fact-checking has emerged as a vital tool for discerning truth from fiction in journalism and public discourse. Fact-checking is a rigorous journalistic process aimed at verifying the accuracy and reliability of factual claims, statements, and assertions presented in news stories, reports, speeches, and public discourse. At its core, fact-checking entails scrutinizing the evidence, sources, and context behind assertions to assess their truthfulness and validity (Graves, 2016). Fact-checkers meticulously examine data, documents, and expert opinions to corroborate or refute claims, thereby providing readers and audiences with trustworthy information to make informed decisions.

The foremost principle of fact-checking is to uphold accuracy in reporting by ensuring that factual claims are supported by credible evidence and verified sources. Fact-checkers strive to verify every detail and assertion presented in news stories, avoiding errors, inaccuracies, and distortions that can mislead audiences (Graves, 2016). Transparency is also essential in the fact-checking process, as it enables readers and audiences to understand how claims were verified and conclusions were reached. Fact-checkers disclose their methodologies, sources, and findings, providing a clear rationale for their assessments and ratings (Ward, 2013). Transparency builds trust and accountability, allowing readers to assess the credibility of fact-checking organizations and make informed judgments about the accuracy of news reports.

Fact-checking requires impartiality and objectivity in evaluating factual claims, regardless of political ideology, partisan affiliation, or personal bias. Fact-checkers must adhere to professional standards of fairness and neutrality, avoiding conflicts of interest and undue influence in their assessments (Graves, 2016). Impartiality ensures that fact-checking remains a credible and trusted source of information for diverse audiences.

Fact-checking is paramount in journalism as it ensures the accuracy and credibility of news stories and reports. Journalists have a responsibility to verify the information they publish to uphold the trust of their audience and maintain the integrity of their profession (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). By rigorously fact-checking sources, verifying data, and corroborating claims, journalists can minimize errors, inaccuracies, and misrepresentations in their reporting, thereby enhancing the reliability and credibility of their work. In an era of rampant misinformation and fake news, fact-checking serves as a vital tool for combating falsehoods, rumors, and propaganda. Journalists play a crucial role in debunking misinformation by critically examining claims, scrutinizing evidence, and providing context and analysis to counter false narratives (Graves, 2016). Fact-checked information helps audiences distinguish between reliable news sources and unreliable sources, empowering them to make informed decisions and resist the spread of disinformation.

Fact-checking plays a pivotal role in holding individuals, institutions, and governments accountable for their statements and actions. Journalists act as watchdogs by scrutinizing the claims made by public figures, scrutinizing policy proposals, and investigating allegations of corruption or wrongdoing (Schudson, 2011). Fact-checked reporting exposes falsehoods, inconsistencies, and abuses of power, fostering transparency, accountability, and public trust in democratic institutions. Fact-checking is integral to promoting ethical journalism practices and adherence to professional

standards. Journalists are guided by ethical principles such as accuracy, fairness, and impartiality, which require them to verify information, attribute sources, and correct errors promptly (Ward, 2013). Fact-checking serves as a safeguard against bias, sensationalism, and manipulation, ensuring that journalists prioritize the truth and serve the public interest.

Fact-checked journalism plays an educational role by providing audiences with reliable information, analysis, and context to understand complex issues and events. Journalists help audiences navigate the deluge of information by distilling key facts, debunking myths, and providing nuanced perspectives on important topics (Lewandowsky *et al.*, 2012). Fact-checked reporting empowers audiences to critically evaluate news sources, question unsubstantiated claims, and engage in informed civic discourse. Fact-checking also contributes to the health of democratic governance by fostering an informed and engaged citizenry. In democracies, an independent and accountable media serves as a check on government power and facilitates public debate on issues of public concern. Fact-checked reporting provides citizens with accurate information to participate meaningfully in democratic processes, hold elected officials accountable, and make informed decisions at the ballot box.

It should be noted that fact-checking is essential for building and maintaining public trust in journalism, which is foundational to a functioning democracy. Trust is the currency of journalism, and accuracy is its cornerstone (Mitchell *et al.*, 2014). By demonstrating a commitment to accuracy, transparency, and accountability, journalists can earn the confidence and respect of their audience, fostering a healthy relationship based on mutual respect and shared values.

#### **Fact-Checking Applications/Websites Used in Curbing the Spread of Fake News**

In today's digital age, the proliferation of fake news and misinformation poses a significant challenge to journalism and public discourse. To counter this threat, journalists are increasingly turning to technology-enabled fact-checking applications to verify the accuracy of information and debunk falsehoods. These applications employ advanced algorithms, data analysis techniques, and crowdsourcing methods to assess the credibility of claims and provide audiences with reliable information. The following are some of the fact-checking applications and websites used in curbing the spread of fake news in Nigeria;

- **FactCheck.org:** This is a widely recognized fact-checking website operated by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. It employs a team of journalists and researchers who analyze political statements, speeches, and news reports to assess their accuracy and provide factual context (Clifton, 2019). The website publishes detailed articles debunking misinformation and offering comprehensive analyses of political claims and controversies. It also features a "FactCheck Wire" section providing real-time updates on fact-checking activities and breaking news stories.
- **Snopes:** This is one of the oldest and most renowned fact-checking websites, known for debunking urban legends, hoaxes, and viral misinformation. Its team of journalists and researchers investigates a wide range of topics, from political claims to conspiracy theories, using a combination of archival research, expert interviews, and digital forensics (Mikkelsen & Mikkelsen, 2017). Snopes features a user-friendly interface that allows readers to search for specific topics or browse through

categories of debunked myths and rumors. It also provides educational resources on media literacy and critical thinking skills.

- **Dubawa:** Arguably the most prominent Nigerian fact-checking platform, Dubawa utilizes a collaborative approach. Journalists, researchers, and volunteers work together to verify claims, employing diverse media formats like text, audio, and video. They publish fact-checks in multiple languages, ensuring accessibility across various demographics. Dubawa's "Dubawa Fact-Checkers Network" empowers regional journalists, fostering a nationwide fact-checking movement.
- **Africa Check:** This pan-African initiative, with a strong presence in Nigeria, focuses on in-depth investigations and long-form fact-checks. Their meticulous approach tackles complex issues like healthcare misinformation and political disinformation. Africa Check deploys unique tools like "ClaimBuster" – a crowd-sourcing platform for collecting fact-checking requests – and collaborates with media outlets to amplify fact-checks.
- **TruthBuzz:** TruthBuzz is a fact-checking initiative launched by the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) to promote innovative approaches to fact-checking and combat misinformation globally. It supports journalists and news organizations in developing engaging and impactful fact-checking content using multimedia storytelling techniques (ICFJ, n.d.). TruthBuzz provides training, resources, and funding to journalists to produce fact-checked stories that resonate with audiences and drive social impact. It also hosts workshops, webinars, and events to share best practices and lessons learned in fact-checking and digital storytelling.
- **CrossCheck Nigeria:** Backed by the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR), CrossCheck Nigeria leverages a network of over 70 journalists across the country. They fact-check claims primarily related to elections, public health, and the environment. Collaboration is central to their strategy, partnering with media organizations and social media platforms for wider dissemination.

### **Impact of Fact-Checking Applications in Curbing Fake News in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, like many other countries, the proliferation of fake news and misinformation presents a significant challenge to journalism, public discourse, and democratic governance. To address this challenge, fact-checking applications have emerged as powerful tools for combating fake news by verifying the accuracy of information and debunking falsehoods. Fact-checking applications in Nigeria play a crucial role in promoting media literacy and critical thinking skills among the public. By debunking false claims and providing evidence-based analysis, these applications educate users about the importance of verifying information and questioning sources (Balbi & Magalhães, 2017). Through interactive features, explanatory articles, and educational resources, fact-checking applications empower users to distinguish between credible news sources and unreliable sources, fostering a more discerning and informed citizenry. By exposing the techniques and tactics used to create fake news, fact-checking applications equip citizens with critical thinking skills. Platforms like ThePillar Fact-Check and Boom Fact utilize interactive elements like quizzes and explainer videos, making media literacy engaging and accessible. This empowers Nigerians to assess information critically, reducing their susceptibility to misinformation.

Fact-checking applications hold public figures, politicians, and media organizations accountable for their statements and actions by scrutinizing their claims and providing

fact-checked assessments. In Nigeria, fact-checking initiatives help expose misinformation spread by political actors during elections and hold them accountable for spreading false narratives (Anikwe, 2021). By promoting transparency and accountability in public discourse, fact-checking applications contribute to a more informed and responsible political environment, where elected officials are held to high standards of honesty and integrity. Fact-checking applications provide journalists with systematic methods and resources to verify claims, investigate rumors, and expose falsehoods. Platforms like Dubawa and Africa Check utilize diverse formats like text, audio, and video, ensuring comprehensiveness and accessibility. This rigorous approach promotes accuracy in reporting, fostering trust in journalists as reliable information sources.

Fake news and misinformation often exacerbate social and political polarization by spreading divisive narratives and fueling mistrust among different groups. Fact-checking applications in Nigeria help counteract polarization by providing objective and evidence-based analysis of contentious issues (Hassan, 2017). By debunking false claims and promoting accurate information, fact-checking initiatives foster dialogue, understanding, and mutual respect among diverse communities, mitigating the harmful effects of misinformation on social cohesion.

Fact-checking applications empower journalists and news organizations in Nigeria to uphold professional standards of accuracy, integrity, and accountability in their reporting. By providing access to fact-checking resources, databases, and training materials, these applications equip journalists with the tools and knowledge needed to verify information and combat fake news (Ward, 2013). Journalists use fact-checking applications to corroborate claims, verify sources, and provide context in their reporting, enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of their stories in the eyes of their audience.

In Nigeria, fact-checking applications contribute to the health of democratic governance by promoting transparency, accountability, and informed public participation. By verifying political claims, debunking false promises, and exposing corruption, these applications help voters make informed decisions and hold elected officials accountable for their actions (Tella & Adewuyi, 2020). Fact-checked information provided by these applications enhances public trust in democratic institutions and promotes a more engaged and informed electorate, strengthening the foundations of democracy in Nigeria.

During elections in Nigeria, fact-checking applications play a critical role in combatting election misinformation and ensuring the integrity of the electoral process. By monitoring social media platforms, news websites, and public statements, these applications identify and debunk false claims related to voter fraud, candidate qualifications, and electoral procedures (Anikwe, 2021). Fact-checked information helps voters make informed choices at the ballot box and prevents the spread of rumors and falsehoods that could undermine the credibility of the electoral process.

### **Challenges of Utilizing Fact-Checking Applications in Curbing Fake News**

In Nigeria, as in many other countries, the spread of fake news and misinformation poses a significant threat to public trust, social cohesion, and democratic governance. While fact-checking applications have emerged as valuable tools for verifying information and debunking falsehoods, they also face various challenges in their utilization. One of the primary challenges in Nigeria is the limited access to technology and internet

connectivity, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Many Nigerians lack access to smartphones, computers, and reliable internet connections, making it difficult for them to access fact-checking applications and verify information online (Adegoke, 2019). The digital divide exacerbates disparities in media literacy and access to credible information, hindering efforts to combat fake news and misinformation among marginalized communities.

Nigeria is a linguistically and culturally diverse country, with over 500 languages spoken across its various regions. Fact-checking applications face challenges in addressing misinformation in multiple languages and cultural contexts, as well as understanding local nuances and sensitivities (Obi, 2021). Language barriers and cultural differences pose obstacles to the dissemination of fact-checked information and the engagement of diverse audiences, limiting the effectiveness of fact-checking initiatives in reaching all segments of the population.

In Nigeria's politically charged environment, fact-checking applications often face pressure from political actors and partisan interests seeking to manipulate information for their own agenda. Fact-checkers may encounter challenges in verifying claims made by powerful individuals or institutions, as well as in maintaining impartiality and independence in their assessments (Okunade, 2020). Political interference and partisan bias undermine the credibility and effectiveness of fact-checking initiatives, eroding public trust in their ability to combat fake news and misinformation impartially.

Fact-checking applications in Nigeria operate under resource constraints and funding challenges, limiting their capacity to verify information, conduct investigations, and sustain their operations over the long term. Many fact-checking organizations rely on grants, donations, and philanthropic support, which may be insufficient or unstable (Oliver & Hawkins, 2017). Resource constraints can hinder the scalability and impact of fact-checking initiatives, constraining their ability to reach wider audiences, invest in technology and training, and respond to emerging threats of misinformation effectively.

Social media platforms have become fertile ground for the spread of disinformation and fake news in Nigeria, with rumors and falsehoods circulating rapidly among users. Fact-checking applications face challenges in monitoring and debunking misinformation on social media platforms, where content can be easily shared, amplified, and distorted (Adegoke, 2019). The viral nature of social media poses challenges in identifying the origin and trajectory of false information, as well as in countering its influence on public opinion and behavior.

Nigeria's legal and regulatory framework poses challenges to the operation of fact-checking applications, particularly in terms of freedom of expression, media regulation, and online censorship. Fact-checkers may face legal threats, harassment, or intimidation from authorities or vested interests seeking to suppress dissenting voices or control the flow of information (Oliver & Hawkins, 2017). Legal and regulatory constraints limit the ability of fact-checking applications to operate freely and independently, constraining their effectiveness in combating fake news and promoting transparency and accountability.

Fact-checking applications in Nigeria face challenges in building public trust and credibility, particularly among segments of the population skeptical of mainstream media or suspicious of fact-checkers' motives. Some Nigerians may view fact-checking initiatives as partisan, biased, or elitist, undermining their willingness to engage with fact-checked information (Obi, 2021). Public perception and trust issues impede the

acceptance and adoption of fact-checking applications as reliable sources of information, limiting their impact in combating fake news and promoting media literacy.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on the Technological Determinism Theory. Technological determinism is a theory that suggests that the development of technology follows a predictable path that ultimately influences and determines societal structures and cultural values. Proponents of technological determinism argue that technological innovation is the primary force driving societal progress and that the adoption of new technologies leads to inevitable changes in social organization, cultural practices, and even individual behaviors.

In the context of communication technologies, this theory suggests that each new medium—be it the printing press, radio, television, or the internet—profoundly transforms the way information is produced, distributed, and consumed. The emergence of the internet and, more recently, AI, has further reinforced the idea that technology can fundamentally alter the fabric of society. Applying the theory of technological determinism to Nigeria's fight against fake news involves examining how the adoption of AI technologies drives changes in societal structures and practices related to information dissemination and consumption.

The integration of AI into Nigerian media practices can lead to more rigorous fact-checking and higher standards of journalism. As AI tools become more sophisticated and widely used, they can help establish a culture of accountability and accuracy in news reporting. As AI becomes more effective at identifying and mitigating fake news, the public's trust in digital media may gradually improve. Technological determinism suggests that this shift in perception can have broader societal implications, fostering a more informed and discerning populace.

The deployment of AI in combating fake news can influence regulatory approaches. Governments may develop new policies and frameworks to govern the use of AI in media and communications, ensuring that these technologies are used ethically and effectively. By reducing the prevalence of fake news, AI can contribute to a healthier information ecosystem, which in turn can support economic stability. Accurate information is crucial for business decisions, investment, and market stability. In a country like Nigeria, where fake news has been used to manipulate electoral outcomes and incite violence, AI's role in combating misinformation can contribute to greater political stability. By ensuring that voters receive accurate information, AI can help uphold the integrity of democratic processes.

The relationship between technological determinism and the impact of fact-checking in combating fake news in Nigeria highlights the transformative potential of technology in addressing societal challenges. AI offers powerful tools to detect, prevent, and mitigate the spread of misinformation, contributing to a more accurate and reliable information ecosystem. However, realizing this potential requires addressing the associated challenges and ensuring that AI technologies are deployed ethically and effectively. As Nigeria continues to grapple with the issue of fake news, the integration of AI into media practices, regulatory frameworks, and public discourse will play a crucial role in shaping the future of information dissemination in the country. Through the lens of technological determinism, it is evident that the adoption of AI can drive significant societal changes, fostering a more informed and stable society.

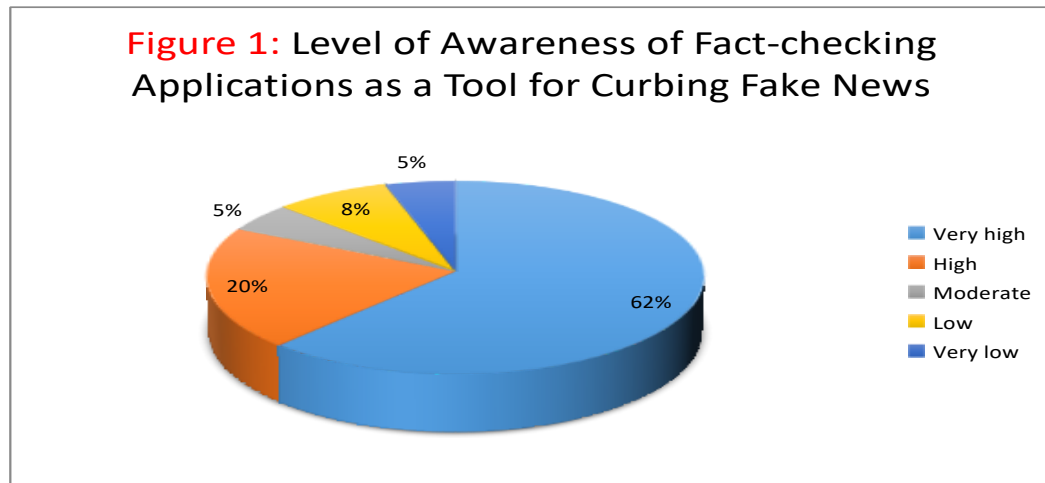
### Methodology

This study adopted the survey research design. This type of research design refers to the methodology and approach used to collect data from a sample population through the administration of questionnaires or interviews. The survey research design involves designing the survey instrument, selecting the sample population, administering the survey, and analyzing the collected data to draw conclusions or make inferences about the larger population.

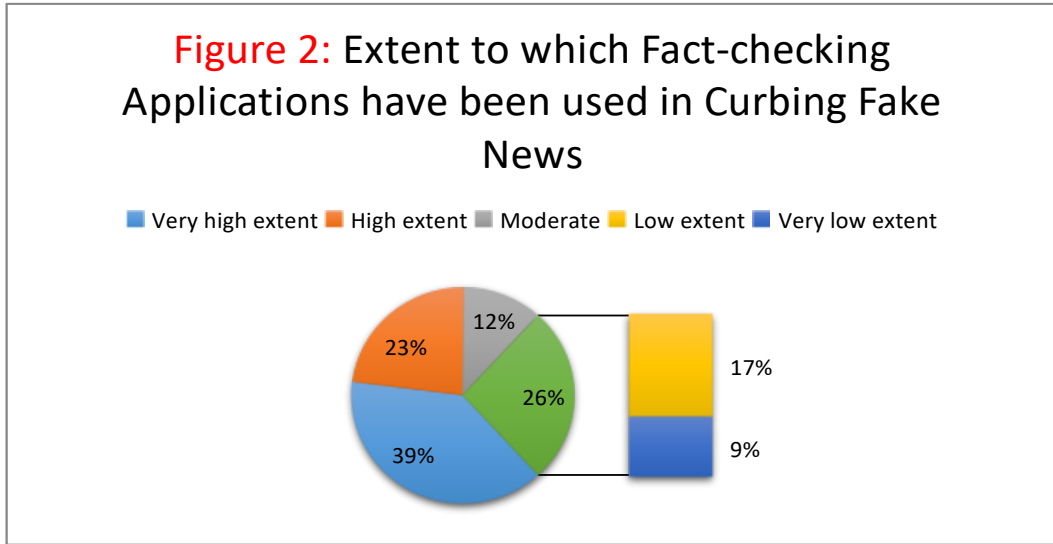
The population of this study consists of all registered journalists of the Nigerian Union of Journalists, Benin Chapter which cut across 15 chapels. The number of all registered journalists in the 15 chapels is 261 (NUJ, 2024). Due to the manageable size of the population, the researcher adopted the entire population using the census approach. Therefore, the sample size for this study will be 261.

### Findings

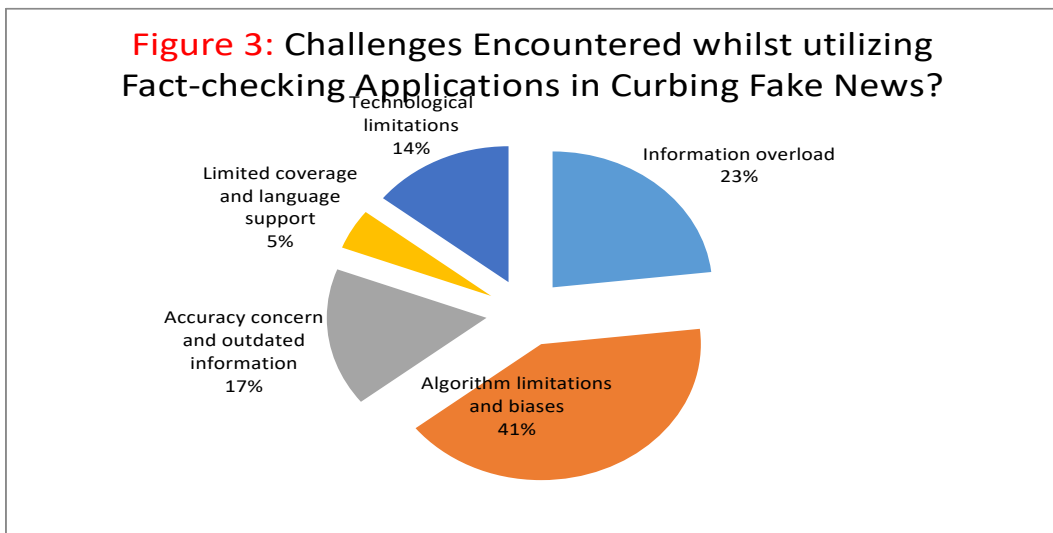
During the course of this research, 261 copies of questionnaires were distributed to the respondents but 11 copies were wrongly filled whilst 250 copies were filled correctly and found useable.



The data on Figure 1 reveals that the level of awareness of fact-checking applications as tools for curbing fake news is very high. This implies that majority of the sampled journalists (67%) are aware of fact-checking applications and its usage in curbing fake news.



The data on Table 2 revealed that majority of the respondents (43%) noted that fact-checking applications have been used in curbing fake news to a very high extent.



The data on Figure 3 revealed that majority of the respondents (41%) noted that one of the challenges encountered while utilizing fake-checking applications in curbing fake news is algorithm limitations and biases. Fact-checking applications rely on algorithms which can be flawed or exploited, allowing misinformation to slip through.

### Discussion of Findings

All the data collected for the purpose of this study were discussed here;

**Research Question 1:** What is the level of awareness of fact-checking applications as tools for curbing fake news?

The objective of research question is to assess the level of awareness of fact-checking applications as tools for curbing fake news. The data on figure 1 was used to answer this research question. Based on the available data, majority of the respondents are highly aware of fact-checking applications. This is due to the fact that the rise of misinformation and fake news in the digital age has heightened the importance of fact-checking in journalism. Journalists are increasingly aware of the need to verify information and combat the spread of false or misleading content to maintain credibility and trust with their audiences. As a result, there has been a growing interest in fact-checking tools among journalists as a means to streamline and enhance the accuracy and efficiency of their fact-checking processes.

The above corroborates the views of Nguyen and Nguyen (2020) who noted that journalists' higher level of awareness and understanding of fact-checking tools can be attributed to the growing recognition of the importance of fact-checking in journalism, advancements in technology, collaborations between journalists and researchers, and training and professional development initiatives aimed at enhancing journalists' digital literacy and technical skills.

**Research Question 2:** To what extent have fact-checking applications been used in curbing fake news?

The objective of this research question is to assess the extent to which fact-checking applications have been used curbing fake news. The data on figure 2 used to answer this research question. Based on the available data, fact-checking applications have been used curbing fake news amongst journalists to a very high extent as fact-checking tools have the capability to process large volumes of data and identify patterns or inconsistencies in news content more quickly and comprehensively than manual fact-checking methods. By automating routine fact-checking tasks, these applications can assist journalists in verifying the accuracy of news stories more efficiently, allowing them to focus on more in-depth reporting and analysis.

The above finding corroborate the findings of Anikwe (2021) who noted that fact-checking tools have the potential to improve the reliability and credibility of news content by systematically evaluating the accuracy of sources and detecting misinformation or false claims. These tools can analyze textual content for inconsistencies, logical fallacies, or semantic inconsistencies that may indicate misleading information. By flagging potentially false or misleading content for further review by human journalists, fact-checking tools can help journalists identify and debunk misinformation, thereby enhancing the accuracy and trustworthiness of news reporting.

**Research Question 3:** What are the challenges encountered whilst utilizing fact-checking applications in curbing fake news?

The objective of this research question is examine the challenges encountered whilst utilizing fact-checking applications in curbing fake news. The data on figure 3 used to answer this research question. Based on the available data, there are also potential challenges and limitations associated with fact-checking tools that may impact journalistic accuracy. One challenge is the risk of algorithmic biases or errors, where these tools may mistakenly flag legitimate content as false or miss inaccuracies in misleading content. This can lead to false positives or false negatives, undermining the reliability of fact-checking outcomes and potentially eroding trust in news media. To

solve this challenge, journalists can collaborate with fact-checkers, data scientists, and technologists to leverage their expertise in developing and implementing fact-checking tools. By working together, journalists can ensure that fact checking tools are tailored to their specific needs and journalistic standards (Haruna, 2020).

### **Conclusion**

The advent of modern technology has revolutionized the way journalists approach fact-checking, offering new tools and methodologies to enhance accuracy and efficiency in verifying information. However, journalists' understanding and attitudes towards fact-checking applications vary, influenced by factors such as technological literacy, professional experiences, and ethical considerations. Many journalists recognize the potential of fact-checking tools to improve accuracy and combat misinformation. These tools can analyze large volumes of data, detect patterns, and identify inconsistencies or inaccuracies in news content more quickly and comprehensively than manual fact-checking methods. By automating routine fact-checking tasks, these fact-checking applications can assist journalists in verifying the accuracy of news stories more efficiently, allowing them to focus on more in-depth reporting and analysis. Furthermore, fact-checking tools can improve the reliability and credibility of news content by systematically evaluating the accuracy of sources and detecting misinformation or false claims. This helps journalists identify and debunk misinformation, thereby enhancing the accuracy and trustworthiness of news reporting.

However, there are also concerns and challenges associated with fact-checking tools that may impact journalistic accuracy. One challenge is the risk of algorithmic biases or errors, where these applications may mistakenly flag legitimate content as false or miss inaccuracies in misleading content. This can lead to false positives or false negatives, undermining the reliability of fact-checking outcomes and potentially eroding trust in news media. Additionally, there are ethical implications of fact-checking, such as privacy violations, algorithmic transparency, and the potential for censorship or manipulation of information. Journalists must critically evaluate the ethical considerations and implications of using fact-checking tools in their reporting practices to ensure that they uphold journalistic values of accuracy, objectivity, and transparency.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made;

- i. Stakeholders in the media industry should implement comprehensive education and training programs aimed at increasing journalists' awareness and understanding of fact-checking applications. These programs should cover the principles, functionalities, and limitations of technologies in fact-checking, equipping journalists with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively utilize these tools while maintaining journalistic accuracy.
- ii. Media organizations and other relevant stakeholders should advocate for transparency and accountability in the development and use of fact-checking applications. Journalists should demand transparency from developers and providers of these technologies, including disclosure of algorithms, data sources, and methodologies used in fact-checking processes. By promoting transparency and accountability, journalists can ensure the reliability and integrity of AI fact-checking outputs.

- iii. Media organizations should foster collaboration and peer learning among journalists to share insights, experiences, and best practices related to fact-checking applications. Establish forums, workshops, and online communities where journalists can exchange knowledge, discuss challenges, and seek guidance on using technologies for fact-checking purposes. By collaborating with peers, journalists can leverage collective expertise to enhance the accuracy and effectiveness of fact-checking efforts.

### **References**

- Adegoke, Y. (2019). Media and Fake News in Nigeria: A Study of Newspapers' Responses. *International Journal of Social Science and Economic Research*, 4(2),
- Adeniyi, M. (2019). Media Role and the Hurdle of a Nigerian Journalist 1999-2015. *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review*, 2(9)
- Allcott, H. & Gentzkow, M. (2017). *Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election*. NBER Working Paper Series. Rev, ed. Retrieved from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w23089>
- Amobi, S. (2019). Assessing the Efficacy of Fact-Checking Applications in Combatting Fake News: Perspectives of Journalists in Nigeria. *African Journalism Studies*, 42(3),
- Anikwe, C. (2021). Combating Fake News through Fact-checking During Elections: The Nigerian Experience. *Journal of Information Science*, 47(1)
- Bakir, V. & McStay, A. (2017). Fake News and the Economy of Emotions: Problems, Causes, Solutions. *Digital Journalism*, 6(2)
- Balbi, G., & Magalhães, F. (2017). Fact-checking: A Review. *Journalism Studies*, 18(3),
- Chukwu, J.O. (2021). *Fact-checking News-Items before Publication and the Media in Port Harcourt, Nigeria*. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication>
- Clifton, M.K. (2019). Evaluating the Effectiveness of Fact-Checking Applications in the Nigerian Media Landscape. *Journal of African Media Studies*, 13(2),
- Elegbe, O. (2018). Fact-Checking Applications as Tools for Media Credibility. *International Journal of Communication and Media Studies*, 6(2),
- Graves, L. (2016). *Deciding What's True: The Rise of Political Fact-Checking in American Journalism*. Columbia University Press.
- Haruna, A. (2020). The Role of Fact-Checking Applications in Combating Fake News Among Journalists in Nigeria. *Journal of Communication Research*, 10(2)
- Hassan, A. (2017). Fact-checking as a Tool for Enhancing News Credibility and Accountability in Nigeria. *Library Philosophy and Practice*, 1601
- Ireton, C., & Posetti, J. (2018). *Journalism, 'Fake News' & Disinformation: Handbook for Journalism Education and Training*. UNESCO publishing.
- Kolawole, M. (2017). Fake News and Misinformation: What Role for the Media? *Journal of Advanced Media Studies & Research*, 3(2)
- Lewandowsky, S., Ecker, U. K., & Cook, J. (2012). Beyond Misinformation: Understanding and Coping with the "Post-Truth" Era. *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition*, 6(4),
- Marda, V. & Milan, S. (2018). *Wisdom of the crowd: Multistakeholder Perspectives on the Fake News Debate*. Netherland: Datactive Ideas Lab
- McGonagle, A. (2017). Fake News in the New South Africa: Constitutional Consideration for a Land Recovering from Decades of Rational Repression and Violence. *South African Journal of Human Rights* 10(3)

- Mikkelson, D., & Mikkelson, B. (2017). The Snopes.com Fact-checking Mission. In K. Vos & A. Hanusch (Eds.), *The International Encyclopedia of Journalism Studies*. Wiley
- Mitchell, A., Gottfried, J., Matsa, K. E., & Barthel, M. (2014). *The Modern News Consumer: News Attitudes and Practices in the Digital Era*. Pew Research Center
- Obi, C. (2021). Misinformation and Disinformation in the Nigerian Media: A Study of Selected National Newspapers. *International Journal of Social Science and Economic Research*, 6(1),
- Ogundele, A.O. (2023). Fact-Checking Applications and Journalism Practice in Nigeria: A Case Study of Journalists in Lagos. *Nigerian Journal of Journalism & Communication Studies*, 7(1),
- Ogunyemi, G. (2023). Journalists' Perception and Use of Fact-Checking Applications in Curbing Fake News in Nigeria. *Journal of Media and Communication Studies*, 12(4),
- Okunade, A. (2020). Political Interference and the Challenges of Media Freedom in Nigeria. *The International Journal of Communication and Linguistic Studies*, 1(2),
- Oliver, S., & Hawkins, E. (2017). Fact-checking in Nigeria: An Exploratory Study of a New Approach to Assessing Political Information in a Networked Society. *International Journal of Communication*, 11, 20
- Olorunyomi, D. (2018). Facts, Truth, and Knowledge: Journalism and the Ethical Community. (Remarks at the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Association of Communication Scholars and Professionals of Nigeria (ACSPN), Sept 5-6, 2018 Asaba).
- Pate, U. A., Gambo, D., & Ibrahim, A. M. (2019). The Impact of Fake News and the Emerging Post-truth Political era on Nigerian Polity. *Studies in Media and Communication*, 7(1), 21–29.
- Persily, N. (2017). The 2016 US Election: Can Democracy Survive the Internet? *Journal of Democracy*, 28(2), 63-76
- Schudson, M. (2011). The Objectivity Norm in American Journalism. *Journalism*, 2(2),
- Tella, A., & Adewuyi, M. (2020). The Media and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: A Study of the 2019 General Elections. *African Journalism Studies*, 41(1),
- Ward, S. J. (2013). *Journalism Ethics: A Casebook of Professional Conduct for News Media*. McFarland
- Wardle, C., & Derakhshan, H. (2017). *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making*. Council of Europe report.
- Wasserman, H. (2017). Fake news from Africa: Panics, politics and paradigms. *Journalism*, 14(64).