

EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON SOURCE CREDIBILITY OF MAINSTREAM JOURNALISM: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of social media platforms on the perceived credibility of mainstream journalism in a rapidly evolving digital landscape characterized by changes in news accessibility and audience interaction. This research assesses the relative credibility attributed by consumers to traditional media compared to social media channels, amid declining trust in conventional news institutions. The study employs source credibility uses and gratification and agendas setting theories, to provide insight into underlying mechanisms and principles. A quantitative survey method was employed to gather data from a varied respondent pool to evaluate trust patterns, platform preferences, and determinants influencing views of journalistic integrity. Research indicates that although social media platforms provide swift and captivating news formats, traditional media maintains greater credibility, especially among older and more educated populations. Nevertheless, younger demographics are progressively placing their trust in social media owing to its relatability, immediacy, and peer endorsement. The study continues by emphasizing the dynamic nature of source trustworthiness and offers advice for media institutions to adjust to these changes while maintaining professional standards. The study also recommends that social media bus messes should partner with reputable media outlets to decrease fake information and take news.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, social media platforms have significantly transformed the methods by which individuals obtain, consume, and assess news. Conventional mediums like newspapers, radio, and television have ceased to be the primary providers of information. Omosotomhe, Okhakhu, Ekhareato and Olley (2022) reported that social media are platforms that utilize accessible and scalable technologies to facilitate social interaction, enabling users to connect and share information around specific interests and characteristics

In the 21st century, social media has revolutionized global communication and information sharing, reshaping how audiences' access, produce, and consume news. Platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok have become dominant sources of real-time information, allowing users to participate actively in the creation and dissemination of content. This shift has disrupted the traditional information hierarchy once controlled by mainstream journalism—television, radio, and newspapers—leading to new patterns of news consumption and trust.

This transformation has significant implications for mainstream journalism, especially regarding its perceived credibility as a reliable source of information.

Platforms such as Facebook, X (previously Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok have become principal news sources, particularly for younger audiences.

The 2024 Reuters Institute Digital News Report indicates that six prominent networks exceed 10% weekly readership, with YouTube at 31%, TikTok at 13%, and Facebook at the

forefront with 38% (Newman, 2024). Social media platforms have become dominant channels for news consumption due to their immediacy, accessibility, and interactivity. However, these same characteristics have also facilitated the spread of misinformation, fake news, and user-generated content without professional verification (Tandoc, Lim & Ling, 2020). Consequently, audiences are now confronted with competing narratives—those from professional journalists and those from non-professional social media users—leading to shifting perceptions of what constitutes credible news.

Social media These platforms have expedited information availability while simultaneously presenting problems related to content reliability. The Pew Research Center (2024) indicates that 54% of American adults primarily obtain news from social media, frequently without checking source validity. Global confidence in news is around 40%, however concerns about bias and misinformation, particularly on social media, have escalated (Financial Times, 2024). The dependence on influencer postings, user generated material, and viral trends complicates the assessment of credibility. These dynamics prompt essential inquiries: Are consumers still able to differentiate reliable sources from misinformation? How do institutional elements such as editorial policies and professional ethics compare to platform features like likes, shares, and follower counts?

Social media's speed and accessibility make it an appealing news source, particularly for younger audiences who prefer immediacy and interactivity over lengthy broadcast or print reports (Pew Research Center, 2023).

Moreover, the algorithms used by social media platforms prioritize engagement over accuracy. This means that sensational or emotionally charged content often gains more visibility than fact-based reports (Vosoughi, Roy & Aral, 2018). As a result, the public sphere is flooded with competing narratives, influencing how individuals judge the authenticity and credibility of mainstream journalism. The more audiences rely on social media for news, the more their perceptions of traditional media credibility are shaped by online trends, influencers, and peer interactions.

Another contributing factor is the rise of citizen journalism and influencer reporting. Ordinary individuals, equipped with smartphones and social accounts, now document and share events as they unfold. While this form of participatory communication enhances diversity of voices, it also challenges professional journalists who follow established ethical codes. The growing influence of social media personalities often leads audiences to trust personal opinions or viral content over traditional news outlets (Johnson & Kaye, 2015).

Mainstream journalism, long regarded as the gatekeeper of credible and verified information, now faces intense competition from social media networks. Unlike traditional media, which operates within ethical and professional frameworks, social media allows anyone to share information instantly without formal verification (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). This democratization of content creation has blurred the lines between professional journalism and citizen reporting, raising questions about the credibility and reliability of both sources.

The credibility of information sources has become a critical issue in the digital era. Source credibility—defined by factors such as trustworthiness, expertise, and objectivity—is essential in determining whether audiences accept or reject information (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). However, the increasing exposure to unverified online content has made audiences more skeptical of traditional news outlets. Many now compare information from professional journalists with social media posts before forming opinions, suggesting that social media significantly influences perceptions of journalistic reliability.

Omosotomhe et al. (2022) argued that social media is different from traditional industrial media in many aspects such as quality reach, frequency, usability, immediacy and permanence, the internet usage effects of social media as of 2012 indicate, according to Nielsen, that internet

users continue to spend more time in social media more than any other site (Omosotomhe et al., 2022).

In this study, mainstream journalism refers to the practice of journalism by the traditional media such as newspapers, radio, television, e.t.c . Media scholars have also observed that the credibility crisis facing mainstream journalism is partly due to its delayed adaptation to the digital environment. Traditional outlets were initially slow to embrace interactivity, transparency, and audience engagement—qualities that define social media communication. Consequently, audiences began to perceive mainstream journalism as elitist or detached from the realities of online discourse, further diminishing its credibility (Tsfati & Cappella, 2005).

However, it is essential to note that social media's impact on source credibility is not entirely negative. Many mainstream media organizations have successfully integrated social media platforms into their operations to reach wider audiences, promote transparency, and enhance audience trust. By engaging audiences directly and providing real-time updates, these outlets can rebuild credibility and adapt to changing media consumption patterns.

A comparative analysis of social media and mainstream journalism is therefore crucial to understanding how audiences evaluate news credibility across different platforms. Such analysis can reveal differences in trust levels, content perception, and news reliance between social and traditional media consumers. It can also help identify demographic or behavioral factors that influence credibility judgments, such as age, education, and digital literacy.

This study underscores the ongoing transformation of the media landscape driven by social media technologies. As audiences increasingly turn to social media platforms for news, the credibility and authority of mainstream journalism are being redefined. This study seeks to examine the effects of social media on the perceived source credibility of mainstream journalism through a comparative lens, providing insights into how digital engagement, audience behavior, and technological change continue to reshape trust in journalism today.

Statement of the Problem

The emergence of social media as a principal news distributor has profoundly undermined the authority of mainstream journalism. As consumers increasingly favor platforms that emphasize speed and virality rather than accuracy and verification, concerns emerge regarding the perception of trustworthiness and the criteria employed to assess the reliability of news material. Notwithstanding the availability of fact-checking instruments, misinformation proliferates swiftly on social media, undermining confidence in conventional media outlets. This study aims to assess the credibility tensions and investigate the variations in public trust among various media platforms.

Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to evaluate the impact of social media on the perceived credibility of conventional journalism.

Specific Objectives:

1. To examine how users evaluate the credibility of news on traditional media compared to social media platforms.
2. To identify the platform features and institutional elements that influence audience trust in news sources.
3. To analyze whether demographic factors such as age, education, and media literacy affect credibility assessments.

Research Questions

- 1) How do people evaluate credibility in news differently between traditional media outlets and social media news operations?

- 2) Which platform elements and institutional components contribute to the observed differences in trust?
- 3) What demographic variables influence user judgment of credibility?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The conceptual framework for this study explores the relationship between social media usage and the perceived source credibility of mainstream journalism, focusing on how exposure to, and engagement with, social media platforms influence trust in traditional media outlets such as television, radio, and newspapers.

Social Media Influence

Within this framework, social media influence is conceptualized as the independent variable. It encompasses factors such as exposure to social media news, reliance on social platforms for information, engagement with online content, and interactions with influencers or peers.

Additionally, trust transfer acts as a moderating factor. As audiences increasingly follow influencers and citizen journalists on social media, trust once reserved for institutional news sources may shift toward these online personalities (Johnson & Kaye, 2015). This shift challenges the authority of mainstream journalism and redefines how credibility is constructed in the digital era. Comparative analysis across demographic groups or regions may reveal how this trust transfer varies based on social media habits and cultural contexts.

The conceptual framework, therefore, proposes that social media use directly affects audience perceptions of mainstream journalism's credibility, with mediating and moderating variables influencing the strength and direction of this relationship. The interplay among these variables can either reinforce or diminish trust in traditional journalism depending on user behavior, platform characteristics, and the quality of information encountered online.

The framework illustrates a dynamic process where social media functions both as a competitor and a complement to mainstream journalism. It provides a foundation for comparative analysis across groups, platforms, or societies to understand how digital interactions shape trust in journalistic institutions. By integrating the principles of source credibility, uses and gratifications, and agenda-setting theories, the framework highlights the evolving nature of media trust and its broader implications for the future of journalism in the social media age.

Comprehending the criteria by which audiences assess source credibility is crucial for evaluating the impact of media platforms on journalism. Source credibility denotes the degree to which a message recipient views a source as trustworthy, competent, and reliable.

Social media platforms have transformed into vibrant news ecosystems. Their impact on information consumption, trust, and dissemination is significant. According to research from the Pew Research Center (2024), more than 50% of adults in the United States now consume news via Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, with intermittent usage being typical.

These platforms are appealing because to their rapidity, accessibility, and social endorsement. Users obtain algorithmically customized content—frequently recommended by peers or influencers—thereby augmenting the perceived relevance and credibility of such content. Tandoe Jr., Ling, Westlund et al. (2018) contend that these characteristics facilitate expedited information dissemination while simultaneously heightening susceptibility to fraudulent or unverified content. A seminal study by Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral (2018) shown that misleading information disseminates markedly more rapidly and extensively than factual news, particularly on Twitter (now X), where real users, rather than bots, propel this phenomenon through likes and retweets. These findings underscore the dichotomy of social media news: it is captivating and instantaneous, yet its trustworthiness is frequently undermined.

Tandoe and Vos (2016) revealed that social indicators, including the number of shares or the identity of the sharer, might supersede content quality in users' assessments of trustworthiness. This presents a considerable problem to journalism as it indicates that trustworthiness assessments are frequently heuristic, relying more on social cues than on factual accuracy.

Credibility of Mainstream Journalism

The dependent variable, source credibility of mainstream journalism, includes the perceived trustworthiness, expertise, and objectivity of professional news organizations. The study posits that increased social media usage may either erode or enhance perceptions of mainstream media credibility depending on how audiences evaluate online content. Established media organizations such as The New York Times, BBC, and CNN uphold editorial standards founded on transparency, truth, and ethical journalism. Notwithstanding these measures, public trust has significantly diminished in recent years. The 2024 Reuters Digital News Report indicates that under 40% of participants from 29 nations continuously trust major news sources.

Numerous experts ascribe this to the sense of bias, political influence, and a sluggish response to rising news patterns. Nonetheless, basic research indicates that professional newsrooms, because to their systematic gatekeeping, generally exhibit more credibility and reliability than content creators on social media (Tandoe Jr. et al., 2018).

Mainstream media have endeavored to close this divide by modifying material for social networks. For example, NBC and The New York Times currently utilize TikTok to engage younger audiences, merging professional journalism with captivating styles (Wall Street Journal, 2025). Nonetheless, the fundamental contradiction persists: can conventional credibility endure in a platform culture characterized by rapidity, personalization, and social validation?

Theoretical framework

Source Credibility Theory

The study is grounded in Source Credibility Theory, which posits that the trustworthiness and expertise of a communicator significantly influence how information is perceived and accepted (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). In the context of this research, mainstream journalism represents the traditional credible source, while social media introduces alternative information sources that challenge or reinforce these perceptions. As users rely more on social media for news, their evaluation of credibility may shift from institutional trust in journalism to interpersonal trust in online communities or influencers.

The Source Credibility Theory posits that credibility is founded on three essential components: trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness. These elements collectively influence individuals' interpretation and engagement with media content (SME Hospitality Blog, 2022).

In digital media environments, especially on social media, these pillars exhibit distinct characteristics. Trustworthiness is frequently associated with the personal integrity or honesty of the content creator. Expertise is evidenced by recognized authority or specialization within a specific subject area. Attractiveness, while appearing superficial, significantly affects attention and engagement, particularly on visually driven platforms such as Instagram and TikTok.

A substantial amount of research indicates that users on platforms such as Reddit assess credibility based not only on content but also on community endorsement, moderator presence, and post popularity. Hartzell et al. (2021) found that individuals assign greater credibility to users with substantial follower counts or those verified by moderators. Pentina, Zhang, and Basmanova (2023) developed a social media credibility scale, demonstrating that users associate visual appeal, relatability, and peer influence with credibility.

Conventional media institutions establish credibility based on editorial standards, factchecking, ethical guidelines, and institutional history. The foundations seek to establish consistency and

reliability; however, they face growing scrutiny in a context characterized by fragmented information flows.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The framework also draws on the **Uses and Gratifications Theory**, which explains that individuals actively select media based on their personal needs and motivations (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973). Many users turn to social media not just for information but for entertainment, social interaction, and participation in public discourse. These gratifications influence how they perceive and compare the credibility of social media and mainstream journalism, depending on which medium best satisfies their informational and emotional needs.

Agenda-Setting Theory

Another theoretical lens is the Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), which traditionally emphasizes the role of mainstream media in shaping public priorities. However, social media has disrupted this agenda-setting function by allowing users to determine what issues gain visibility through likes, shares, and trending topics. This participatory agenda-setting process alters audience perceptions of mainstream journalism's authority and relevance, thereby influencing its perceived credibility.

Comparative Empirical Findings

Recent studies indicate notable variations in the perception and assessment of credibility among different demographic groups across various media platforms. Pew Research Center (2024) indicates that individuals aged 18 to 29 exhibit a greater trust in social media content, particularly that which is shared by peers, compared to information from traditional news organizations. In contrast, older adults tend to depend more on traditional news sources, which they link to editorial discipline and ethical standards.

A global trust survey by Edelman (2024) indicates that local news has the highest trust level at 74%, followed by national news at 59%, whereas trust in social media is significantly lower at 37%. Institutions such as businesses (64%) and NGOs (66%) exhibit higher credibility ratings than media outlets, indicating a wider credibility crisis.

Mainstream journalism continues to hold respect among educated adults, who demonstrate greater awareness of source verification, bias, and fact-checking practices. This indicates that perceptions of credibility are influenced by factors such as the platform used, educational attainment, media literacy, and user expectations.

METHODOLOGY

This research utilized a quantitative survey methodology, employing structured questionnaires to gather data from a chosen sample of media users in Lagos and Abuja, Nigeria. The objective was to analyze how people evaluate the credibility of conventional journalism in contrast to social media platforms.

Population of the Study

The target market comprised adult media consumers aged 18 and older in Lagos and Abuja, urban hubs noted for their media exposure and significant digital engagement. The reason for chosen Lagos and Abuja is based on the fact that most media outlets are based in Lagos and most of their head offices are in Abuja. This encompassed students, professionals, entrepreneurs, and civil workers who regularly engage with both conventional and digital news formats.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

One hundred eighty-seven valid respondents participated in the survey. The sample size was calculated utilizing Yamane's method (1967) based on an anticipated population of 1,000 media

consumers in both locations. A multi-stage sampling method was employed. Lagos and Abuja were intentionally chosen for their media engagement. Random sampling was utilized to disseminate surveys across academic institutions, media outlets, and public organizations within these cities.

Research Instrument

The principal instrument for data collection was a self-constructed questionnaire, formulated to elicit responses across four thematic domains:

Demographics: encompassing age, gender, educational attainment, and occupation. Media Consumption Trends: emphasizing platform selection and frequency of news access.

Evaluation of Source Credibility: employing a 5-point Likert scale to measure trustworthiness, expertise, and bias.

Comparative Assessments of Credibility - juxtaposing credibility markers of social media and conventional journalism.

The instrument underwent evaluation by communication specialists and was pretested with a pilot group of 30 participants to ascertain clarity and reliability.

Validity and Reliability

Content and construct validity were validated by expert assessment and correspondence with previous academic instruments. The Cronbach's Alpha test for internal consistency produced values between 0.518 to 0.801, accompanied by a composite reliability score of 0.7868, signifying acceptable reliability for humanities oriented social research.

Method of Data Collection

Questionnaires were disseminated both physically and digitally during a three-week duration. Ethical approval was obtained from the appropriate authorities, and all participants granted informed consent. Anonymity and confidentiality were rigorously maintained throughout the procedure.

Method of Data Analysis

The responses of 187 participants were evaluated utilizing descriptive statistics with SPSS version 25. Frequency distributions, percentages, and mean scores were calculated and displayed in tables. Data analyses adhered to Likert scale standards, providing organized insights into audience opinions of media credibility across various channels

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter delineates the findings obtained from the distributed questionnaires and examines them in relation to the study's aims and research inquiries. The results are categorized into sections: demographic attributes of respondents, reliability of measurement tools, descriptive analysis of the four fundamental elements of the study, and a comparative assessment of credibility between traditional journalism and social media platforms. The analysis is based on participants' replies and illustrates the observed trends within the sample population.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic distribution of the 187 genuine respondents offers crucial information for interpreting the credibility evaluations. Table 4.1 encapsulates the age, profession, educational qualifications, social media engagement, and favored news sources.

Table 1: Respondents’ Demographic Characteristics

Age	Frequency	Percent
Less than 19years	69	36.9
20-23years	100	53.5
24-29years	16	8.6
30years and above	2	1.1
Total	187	100.0
Occupation	Frequency	Percent
Students	173	92.5
Others	14	7.5
Total	187	100.0
Educational Level	Frequency	Percent
ND	126	67.4
HND	59	31.6
Others	2	1.1
Total	187	100.0
Social Media Surfing per hour daily	Frequency	Percent
Less than 5hours	84	44.9
5-10hours	72	38.5
11-15hours	23	12.3
16-20hours	8	4.2
Total	187	100.0
Preferred News Sources	Frequency	Percent

Mainstream Media	110	58.8
Social Media	74	39.6
Others	3	1.6
Total	187	100.0

Interpretation:

According to the data, respondents who were between the ages of 20 and 23 made up the highest percentage (53.5%), followed by those under the age of 19. Only 1.1% of the population was 30 years of age or older, suggesting a young demographic. In terms of occupation, the majority of respondents –92.5% –identified as students, indicating that the sample was primarily drawn from educational settings. The majority had some tertiary education, as evidenced by the fact that 67.4% had a National Diploma (ND) and 31.6% had a Higher National Diploma (HND). The majority of respondents used social media for less than five hours (44.9%) or five to ten hours (38.5%) each day on average. It's interesting to note that even though they utilize digital platforms extensively, most of them (58.8%) still selected mainstream media as their main news source, indicating that conventional media is still seen as credible by this demographic.

Reliability of Measurement Instrument

To confirm the internal consistency of the survey dimensions, Cronbach’s Alpha reliability test was applied. Table 2 presents the results.

Table 2: Reliability Scores of Key Dimensions

Dimensions	Composite Cronbach’s Alpha	Items Cronbach’s Alpha	N
	0.5968		Items
Main Stream Journalism		0.801	3
Social media and news consumption		0.748	3
Source Credibility on Social media		0.608	3
Comparative Analysis		0.518	3

Interpretation:

Table 2 presents the reliability test results of the key dimensions using Cronbach’s Alpha. The findings indicate a high level of internal consistency for the mainstream journalism dimension ($\alpha = 0.801$), suggesting that the items demonstrate excellent reliability. The analysis of social media and news consumption revealed a high level of consistency ($\alpha = 0.748$), whereas the reliability of source credibility on social media was found to be moderate ($\alpha = 0.608$). The dimension of

comparative analysis exhibited the lowest reliability ($\alpha = 0.518$), yet it remains within the acceptable range for exploratory studies. The overall composite reliability was 0.7868, indicating a satisfactory level of internal consistency across the instrument, thereby validating its application in humanities-based social research.

Analysis by Research Dimensions

The subsequent sections provide an analysis of the mean scores for each primary construct, derived from the responses of participants using a 5-point Likert scale.

Mainstream Journalism Measures Table 3: Mean Scores - Mainstream Journalism

Mainstream journalism Measurements	N	Mean	Likert Scale	
			Rate	
How would you rate the credibility of mainstream news sources in general?	187	3.64	4	Very Credible
How often do you consume news from main stream sources (NTA, AIT, TVC)	187	2.28	2	Occasionally
What factors influence your perception of mainstream news sources credibility?	187	3.89	4	Source reputation

Interpretation:

Table 3 illustrates that respondents assigned a mean credibility score of 3.64 to mainstream news sources on a 5-point Likert scale, signifying their perception of these sources as "very credible." However, when asked how frequently they consumed such news (e.g., from NTA, AIT, TVC), the mean score was 2.28, showing they viewed mainstream news only "occasionally." The primary determinant influencing their sense of mainstream credibility was source repute, which received a high mean score of 3.89. This indicates that institutional legacy and journalistic standards continue to significantly influence the perception of mainstream media, especially among younger media consumers.

Social Media and News Consumption Table 4: Mean Scores - Social Media Engagement

Social Media and News Consumption	N	Mean	Likert Scale	
			Rate	
How often do you consume news on social media?	187	3.32	3	Occasionally
Which social media platforms do you use to consume news?	187	1.72	2	LinkedIn
How do you typically engage with news content on social media?	187	4.08	4	Watching videos

Interpretation:

Table 4 demonstrates that respondents infrequently engage with news on social media, as evidenced by the mean score of 3.32. Of the sites analyzed, LinkedIn exhibited the highest average score (1.72), indicating its status as a favored medium for news consumption within this group. Respondents indicated that their predominant method of interacting with social media news is "watching videos," which attained the highest mean score of 4.08. This underscores the significance of audiovisual content in capturing attention and influencing perception within the contemporary news landscape.

Source Credibility on Social Media Table 5: Mean Scores - Source Credibility

Source Credibility on Social media	N	Mean	Likert Scale	
			Rate	
How important is it for you to know the source of a news article when reading it on social media?	187	3.76	4	Very important
Do you think social media has increased or decreased the credibility of mainstream journalism?	187	2.58	3	Increased

Looking for corroboration from other sources

How do you assess the credibility of a news on social media? 187 3.52 4

Interpretation:

According to Table 5, respondents expressed substantial agreement that identifying the source of a news piece on social media is "very important" (Mean = 3.76), indicating a significant knowledge of the dangers of disinformation. The average response to whether social media has enhanced or diminished the credibility of mainstream journalism was 2.58, indicating a small inclination towards the belief that social media has positively influenced it. Participants indicated that they evaluate news reliability by seeking corroboration from additional sources, which received a high mean score of 3.52. This indicates a propensity among users to engage in fundamental fact-checking practices while consuming news on social media.

Comparative Perceptions: Mainstream vs Social Media
Table 6: Mean Scores - Comparative Analysis

Comparative Analysis	N	Mean	Likert Scale	
			Rate	
Do you think mainstream journalism is more or less credible than social media sources?	187	2.18	2	Less credible
Have you ever encountered fake news or misinformation on social media?	187	1.08	1	Yes
Do you think mainstream journalism is more or less credible than social media sources?	187	1.98	2	Prompt currency of reportage

Interpretation:

Table 6 indicates that respondents perceived mainstream news as marginally "less credible" than social media, as evidenced by the mean score of 2.18. Simultaneously, almost all respondents acknowledged their exposure to fake news or misinformation on social media, as seen by a notably low mean score of 1.08 (indicative of "Yes"). Nonetheless, respondents judged the timeliness and relevance of social media reporting superior to that of traditional journalism (Mean = 1.98), underscoring a belief that social media offers swifter updates, but potentially compromising accuracy.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Discussion of Findings

This study aimed to evaluate the impact of social media on the perceived trustworthiness of mainstream news. The results, derived from the analysis of data gathered from 187 respondents, indicate shifting patterns in media trust and content consumption among young, educated Nigerians. The discourse is structured in accordance with the study's three principal research inquiries.

1. How do people evaluate credibility in news differently between traditional media outlets and social media news operations?

The findings presented in Table 3 and Table 6 illustrate a multifaceted credibility landscape. Respondents recognized the credibility of mainstream journalism with a mean score of 3.64, while they rated social media as marginally more credible, reflected in a mean score of 2.18. This perception was especially pronounced regarding timeliness, which garnered a mean score of 1.98. This reflects the global trends identified by Newman (2024) and the Pew Research Center (2024), indicating that although institutional media is valued for its professionalism, social media is preferred for its immediacy, relatability, and accessibility. Respondents reported a high frequency of encountering misinformation on social media (Mean = 1.08), yet they persist in using it for updates illustrating a willingness to accept risk in pursuit of immediacy and interaction.

2. Which platform features and institutional components contribute to the observed differences in trust?

The results indicate that the reputation of the source is a significant factor in assessing the credibility of mainstream journalism (Mean = 3.89). Conversely, the assessment of credibility on social media relies heavily on personal validation methods, including the corroboration of information from various sources (Mean = 3.52), as indicated in Table 5. This is consistent with the principles of Source Credibility Theory, highlighting the importance of expertise and trustworthiness (Metzger & Flanagin, 2015). Furthermore, the emphasis on understanding the source (Mean = 3.76) indicates that users recognize the credibility risks associated with unverified content, despite their continued engagement on these platforms.

3. What demographic variables influence user judgment of credibility?

The demographic profile (Table 1) indicates that a significant portion of respondents are students (92.5%), predominantly within the age range of 20–23 years (53.5%), and possess a foundational tertiary education (ND or HND). This demographic engages with digital platforms while maintaining a strong appreciation for the credibility of mainstream media. A majority of individuals dedicated less than 5 hours daily to social media, potentially elucidating the preference of 58.8% for traditional news sources. This supports earlier findings (Edelman, 2024; Hartzell et al., 2021) indicating that although young users are attracted to social media, they exhibit a critical perspective, frequently striving for equilibrium between traditional and modern media.

Conclusion

This study examined the comparative effects of social media on the perceived credibility of mainstream journalism in Nigeria, particularly among young, educated respondents. The findings suggest that although social media platforms are extensively utilized for news because of their promptness and engagement, traditional media continues to maintain significant credibility, especially owing to its established reputation and commitment to editorial standards.

Nonetheless, the distinction between the two mediums is becoming increasingly indistinct, as audiences employ personal verification methods for both. The findings indicate that credibility is no longer restricted to specific platforms; rather, it is shaped by a blend of the source, the way content is presented, and the media literacy of the user.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and analysis, the following recommendations are made:

- 1) **Traditional media houses should embrace hybrid engagement strategies.** Mainstream journalism must evolve to align with social media content delivery formats especially short videos, infographics, and interactive storytelling while maintaining factual accuracy and editorial integrity.
- 2) **Media literacy programs should be institutionalized in tertiary education.** It is crucial to incorporate digital media literacy classes that teach source evaluation, bias identification, and verification techniques because the majority of responders were students. Young users will be more equipped to appropriately navigate traditional and digital news environments as a result.
- 3) **Social media platforms should prioritize credible content partnerships.** Social media businesses should encourage partnerships with reputable media outlets and fact-checking groups in order to decrease false information and increase user confidence. It is possible to prioritize verified information algorithmically without restricting the right to free speech.

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