

INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF FAKE NEWS ON PUBLIC PERCEPTION AND TRUST IN NEWS MEDIA IN NIGERA

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of fake news on public perceptions and trust in news media in Nigeria, a country experiencing significant challenges associated with misinformation in the digital age. The research highlights how the proliferation of fake news undermines the credibility of both traditional and online media, eroding public trust. A review of relevant literature establishes a theoretical framework surrounding misinformation and media trust, identifying gaps in empirical research specific to the Nigerian context. Employing a quantitative approach, utilizing a survey method to explore the effects of fake news on public trust and perception of Nigeria news media, the study collects quantitative data through surveys of 400 participants and statistical analysis was performed as follows: Frequencies and percentages were used to summarise respondents' characteristics and media consumption habits to derive meaningful insight. Findings suggest that misinformation significantly influences Nigerians' perceptions of Nigeria news media. The tendency of respondents to change their opinions upon realizing they have encountered false or misleading news highlights the potential risks of misinformation in shaping public discourse. They demonstrate how seriously disinformation affects public opinion and confidence in Nigeria news media demonstrates how seriously disinformation affects public opinion and confidence in Nigeria news media reliability, compounded by confusion regarding discerning credible information. In response to these challenges, the study recommends that news consumers should verify the accuracy of information before sharing it. Awareness campaigns to be conducted to evaluate the public on effective methods for verifying news dissemination. Media organisations should prioritised credibility by thoroughly fact-checking reports before publication. Overall, this research underscores the pressing need for a coordinated effort among media practitioners, educational institutions, and policymakers to combat misinformation and restore trust in the Nigerian media landscape.

INTRODUCTION

The spread of fake news has become a critical challenge in the global media landscape, significantly shaping public perception and trust in news organisations (Iguoba, et al. 2023). In Nigeria, where both traditional and digital media play essential roles in information dissemination, the rapid circulation of misinformation has raised concerns about media

credibility (Olley & Eloke, 2024). Fake news refers to deliberately false or misleading information presented as legitimate news (Omoera & Uwalaka, 2023). This has the potential to misstate public opinion, influence political decisions, and enervate trust in journalistic institutions (Shu, et al., 2017). Misinformation is capable of influencing and distorting public opinion that is circulated through both traditional and digital media platforms (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). With advancements in technology, the digital age has facilitated both the production and widespread distribution of deceptive content (Selakovic, et al., 2025).

As media consumption patterns evolve, Nigerians rely both on the mainstream newspapers and digital platforms for news (Ugwuanyi, 2017). Basically, some news media are recognized for its credibility and professional journalism. On the others, are digital-first investigative news outlet, is widely known for its citizen journalism and whistleblowing reports. Despite their reputations, both media platforms have encountered challenges related to misinformation, either as victims of false narratives or as channels through which unverified information spreads (Tandoc, et al., 2018). The evolution of social media has complicated the issue, as individuals often consume and share news without verifying its authenticity, leading to increased public scepticism towards the media (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

Trust in news media is a essential aspect of democracy, as it influences public engagement, policy decisions, and social stability. However, the frequentness of fake news has eroded certitude in journalistic institutions, with audiences struggling to differentiate between accurate reporting and misinformation (Olley & Eloke, 2024). Research suggests that once false information is embedded in public discourse, it can be difficult to correct, even when credible sources provide factual clarifications (Lewandowsky et al., 2017). For instance, Ugwuanyi (2017) posits that, The EFCC's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission claimed that "no official of the EFCC was authorised to speak with Sahara Reporters on the said story or on any issue affecting the investigation of the Paris Club refund" in response to a story published by the online platform Sahara Reporters. Additionally, the Senate President, who was the subject of the report, revealed that Sahara Reporters' publisher frequently fabricates stories and quotes anonymous sources. However, this is not an isolated incident (Ugwuanyi, 2017).

This study investigates how fake news affects public perception and trust in Nigerian media. It investigates the extent to which misinformation impacts audience trust, how these media platforms handle news verification, and the ability of their readership to distinguish between factual and misleading content. By analysing these factors, the study aims to contribute to discussions on media credibility and the broader implications of fake news in Nigeria's evolving media environment.

Statement of Problem

The emergence of fake news has become one of the defining challenges of contemporary society, particularly in Nigeria, where the proliferation of information through social media and digital platforms has transformed the landscape of public discourse. Despite advances in media technology, the challenge of misinformation remains pervasive, leading to a growing erosion of trust in news media. This presents a critical dilemma: as the public becomes increasingly susceptible to misinformation, there is a concurrent decline in confidence in credible news sources.

Research indicates that fake news significantly impacts public perception, influencing political,

social, and economic decisions. However, within the Nigerian context, there is a notable lack of empirical studies that comprehensively explore the specific mechanisms through which fake news affects public trust in news media. While existing literature addresses the general phenomenon of fake news and its consequences, it often fails to delve into the unique sociopolitical factors that shape the Nigerian media landscape and public response to misinformation.

Furthermore, prior studies have primarily focused on the role of social media as a facilitator of fake news dissemination, without adequately considering how such misinformation impacts traditional media institutions or civic engagement. There is a gap in understanding how different demographic segments respond to fake news and how this response varies across geographic, educational, and socioeconomic lines. Additionally, the implications for democratic processes remain underexplored, as the interplay between misinformation and public apathy towards political participation has not been rigorously examined in Nigeria. Such knowledge is essential for developing strategies to combat misinformation and fostering a more informed electorate.

This research aims to fill these significant gaps by investigating the nuanced effects of fake news on public perception and trust in news media within Nigeria. Specifically, it seeks to identify the ways in which misinformation influences public attitudes towards various news sources, the broader implications for civic engagement, and potential pathways to enhance media literacy and trust among the populace. By addressing these gaps, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges posed by fake news in Nigeria and informs the development of effective countermeasures to mitigate its impact.

Aim and Objectives

This research aims to fill these significant gaps by investigating the nuanced effects of fake news on public perception and trust in news media within Nigeria. By addressing these gaps, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges posed by fake news in Nigeria and informs the development of effective countermeasures to mitigate its impact, with the following objectives to:

- i. Find out the extent to which misinformation affects Nigerians' opinions of Nigeria news media.
- ii. Find out how public trust in Nigeria news media as conventional and digital news sources is impacted by exposure to false information.
- iii. Investigate how Nigerians, in a time when social media is widely used, discern between accurate and misleading news from Nigeria news media.
- iv. Find out how public responses to fake news are influenced by media consumption habits on the platforms of Nigerian news media.

Research Questions

- i. To what extent does misinformation influence Nigerians' opinions of Nigeria news media?
- ii. How does exposure to false information impact public trust in Nigeria news media as conventional and digital news sources?
- iii. How do Nigerians, in an era of widespread social media usage, differentiate between accurate and misleading news from Nigeria news media?
- iv. In what ways do media consumption habits on Nigeria media platforms shape public responses to fake news?

Scope of the Study

This study investigates the impact of fake news on public perception and trust in Nigerian news media. The research examines the extent to which misinformation affects audience trust in these media organizations, analysing their approaches to news verification, misinformation management, and credibility challenges. Additionally, it considers how effectively their readership can differentiate between factual reporting and misleading content, especially in an era of rapid digital information dissemination. This study specifically focuses on Nigerians who engage with these news platforms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

News Media in Nigeria

Over time, the Nigeria news media environment has changed dramatically, moving from conventional print and broadcast media to a vibrant digital economy (Inobemhe, 2020). The Nigerian press is one of the Africa's most dynamic media landscapes and it is essential to public education, political discourse, and democratic participation (Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2020). The media industry confronts a number of difficulties, which includes economic limitations, government oversight, and the spread of false information (Ugwuanyi, 2017).

Iwe Irohin is regarded as Nigeria's first newspaper, was founded in 1859, marking the beginning of the country's media business during the colonial era (Oso, 2012). The early 20th century saw a boom in print media, which was crucial to the nationalist movement. As radio and television broadcasting became more popular by the 1960s, news distribution's reach was significantly increased (Salawu, 2020).

The official monopoly on broadcasting and print journalism was broken by the emergence of private news outlets like Channels Television and The Guardian newspaper following the deregulation of the media sector in the 1990s (Uche, 2019). Millions of Nigerians increasingly rely on digital platforms as their main information sources, further revolutionising news consumption with the introduction of the internet and mobile technology in the twenty-first century (Iguoba et al., 2024).

Fake News on Media

Digital media has many benefits, but worries about false information and fake news still exist (Olley & Eloke, 2024). The public's view of the authenticity of news has been impacted by misinformation problems caused by the rapid dissemination of unconfirmed content on social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp (Okoro & Nwafor, 2022).

Although press freedom is guaranteed by Nigeria's constitution, when covering politically sensitive topics, journalists frequently encounter limitations, intimidation, and harassment (Olukotun, 2017). The regulatory structure, which includes the standards set forth by the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), has come under fire for restricting media freedom and suppressing dissent. As viewers move to digital platforms and advertising revenue declines, many conventional media outlets face financial viability issues (Akinfeleye, 2020). Many publications have been forced to switch to online operations due to declining circulation levels, especially for print newspapers. Misinformation continues to travel quickly, especially on social media. The public's mistrust in news media is exacerbated by unverified reports, altered photos, and deceptive headlines. Fact-checking groups like Africa Check and Dubawa have worked to lessen the effects of false information (Anyanwu & Idowu, 2023). Nigerian news outlets must embrace digital innovation, make investments in investigative journalism, and implement fact-checking procedures in order to survive in the rapidly changing media ecosystem. Programs for media literacy play a crucial role in teaching the public how to differentiate between reliable news sources and false information. Maintaining press freedom will also require legislative changes that support media independence and shield reporters from excessive government interference.

Theoretical Framework

Agenda-Setting Theory

According to the Agenda-Setting Theory, which was put forth by McCombs and Shaw in 1972, the media shapes people's perceptions of what matters by highlighting particular subjects. Nigeria news media uses this power in Nigeria by emphasising investigative journalism that reveals political scandals, corruption, and human rights abuses. It guides public debate and encourages civic engagement by continuously bringing attention to these challenges (Ekwueme & Obayi, 2021). They also have a regimented editorial approach, emphasising business, politics, and socioeconomic issues, which influences debates among professionals and politicians (Uche, 2019).

Framing Theory

Framing Theory, which Goffman developed in 1974, describes how media outlets convey information in ways that influence how viewers interpret it. In order to reveal misconduct, Nigeria news media frequently uses strong language and aggressive, investigative narratives in their investigations, which can provoke strong public reactions (Okoro & Nwafor, 2022). They also use balanced approach, providing in-depth analysis and organised reporting to appeal to a wide range of readers, including policymakers and business players (Olukotun, 2017).

Both theories show how major media outlet uses their presentation and content selection strategies to influence public perception and participation in addition to providing news coverage.

Empirical Review

Olley and Elope (2024) conducted a research on *Public Perception of Political Disinformation and Trust in Mainstream Media during Electoral Campaigns in Nigeria*. They explored how political disinformation influences public trust in mainstream media during electoral campaigns in Nigeria. The study employed a descriptive survey method to gather insights from 394 respondents in Asaba, Delta State. A structured 20-item Likert-scale questionnaire was used to assess respondents' perceptions of disinformation and its impact on media credibility during elections. The research findings indicate that 92.64% of participants recognized the prevalence of political disinformation during election periods. Furthermore, 71.07% of respondents identified alternative media platforms as significant sources of false information. This suggests that, although digital platforms offer alternative political news sources, they also play a role in amplifying misinformation. Despite widespread awareness of political disinformation, confidence in traditional media remains low. The study revealed that only 59.65% of respondents trusted the accuracy of traditional media's election coverage. This resulted in a mean score of 3.41, which falls below the credibility benchmark of 3.5. Additionally, 68.53% of respondents expressed the belief that some traditional media outlets actively contribute to the spread of misleading information. This finding raises concerns about media bias and the role of mainstream media in shaping electoral narratives. Overall, the study highlights the declining trust in traditional news sources due to the influence of political disinformation. It also underscores the role of alternative media in shaping public opinion, despite concerns about misinformation. The findings emphasize the need for enhanced media literacy, ethical journalism, and stronger regulatory measures to safeguard the credibility of political news reporting in Nigeria.

Egielewa (2023) conducted a study on the *Rhetoric of Fake News and Social Media Activism in Nigeria*. He examined that with the growth of social media activism, the dissemination of false information has emerged as a significant problem in Nigeria's digital media environment. Egielewa (2023) assert that the discourse surrounding fake news has a major impact on social movements and public opinion formation. Their research investigates the spread of false information on digital platforms and how it affects media activism and credibility in Nigeria. Social media has become a double-edged sword, according to him, since it allows for political engagement and action but also makes it easier for misleading information to spread quickly. Their study focuses on instances where public fury has been stoked by viral disinformation, which has occasionally resulted in protests or changes to legislation. They also stress how misinformation tactics frequently target internet news outlets, eroding public confidence in their reporting. Additionally, their results show that audiences' media literacy skills affect their capacity to distinguish between reliable and false information. According to the report, political players and interest groups frequently spread false information, making the fight against fake news even more difficult. Therefore he recommends advocacy for more fact-checking systems and digital literacy programs to combat the detrimental impact of false information on public debate.

Fake news remains a pressing issue in Nigeria, particularly in the era of digital media. A study by Umejei et al. (2024) on *Fake News in Nigeria – Global Phenomenon, Local Realities* explores the motivations behind the spread of misinformation on social media, conceptualizing these platforms as digital commons. The research, based on twelve focus group discussions with ninety-two participants from Nigeria's three major regions—north, east, and west—provides

insight into how social, political, and cultural factors shape misinformation dynamics in the country. The findings suggest that individuals often share fake news due to motivations such as patriotism, altruism, ethnicity, religion, and regional allegiances. These factors create an environment where misinformation thrives, ultimately leading to the misuse of digital platforms. Although digital spaces are globally interconnected, the study highlights that the abuse of these commons is influenced by Nigeria's unique socio-political realities. Furthermore, network ties—such as family, friends, and political affiliations—play a significant role in shaping audience reactions to false information. The study also addresses the broader implications of fake news in Nigeria's transitional democracy. The prevalence of misinformation not only distorts public perception but also impacts political engagement and social cohesion. Umejei et al. (2024) emphasize the need for digital literacy initiatives and policy interventions to mitigate the negative effects of misinformation, particularly in politically sensitive periods.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach, utilizing a survey method to explore the effects of fake news on public trust and perception of Nigeria news media. A structured questionnaire served as the primary instrument for data collection, targeting Nigerians as the target audience.

Study Population, Sample and Sampling Techniques

The study population consists of Nigerian citizens, referencing the 2006 National Population Census, which recorded a total population of 140,431,790 (National Population Commission, 2010). The projection growth is 3.53% yearly multiply by 19 years is $3.53 / 100 = 0.0353$ multiply by 19 = 67.07 divided by 140,431,790 = 2,093,809. The population of 2025 is 142,525,599. Given the widespread adoption of digital media, a stratified random sampling method will be implemented also; the sample size of 400 was drawn from the population of 142,525,599, using the Taro Yamane method. Simple random sampling technique was used as the sampling method in this research. With this technique, everyone in the country has an equal chance of being chosen for the sample.

Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire was utilised to obtain responses. The questionnaire featured closed-ended questions and Likert-scale items, and sent using Google form.

Data Analysis

To derive meaningful insights from the collected data, statistical analysis was performed as follows: Frequencies and percentages were used to be computed to summarize respondents' characteristics and media consumption habits.

Reliability and Validity

To ensure the credibility and accuracy of the research findings, the following steps were undertaken. Pilot Study was undertaken. The internal reliability of the Likert-scale items was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Media and communication specialists evaluated the questionnaire to ensure content validity and relevance.

DATA PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

Presentation of Data

A total of 400 participants in the population of the study population were given questionnaire. The result is presented below:

Demographics of respondents

Table One: Gender of Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Male	187	46.8%
Female	213	53.3%
Total	400	100

The above table shows the gender of the respondents. Majority of the respondents 53.3% of 400 are female, while 46.8% are male.

Table Two: Age of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
16-25	125	31.3%
26-39	146	36.5%
40-49	102	25.5%
50-59	24	6%
60 & above	3	0.7%
Total	400	100

As can be seen in Table Two above, the highest percentage of respondents are between the ages of 26 and 39, followed by those between the ages of 16 and 25 (31.3%) and those 60 and older (0.7%).

Table Three: Educational Qualification

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Primary School Leaving Certificate (PSLC)	21	5.3%
SSCE	48	12%
NCE/ND	69	17.3%
HND/ B.SC/ B.A/ B.ED	185	46.1%
M.SC & Above	77	19.1%
Total	400	100

The respondents' educational backgrounds are displayed in Table Three above. The highest percentage of respondents (46.1%) have an HND, B.Sc., B.A., or B.Ed. Those with an M.Sc. or higher (19.1%) and those with an NCE or ND (17.3%) were next in line. The population's lowest value is made up of 5.3% of 400 PLSC holders and 12% of SSCE holders.

Research Questions One: To what extent does misinformation influence Nigerians' opinions of Nigeria news media?

Table Four: To what extent do you believe misinformation influence your perception of news reports from Nigeria news media?

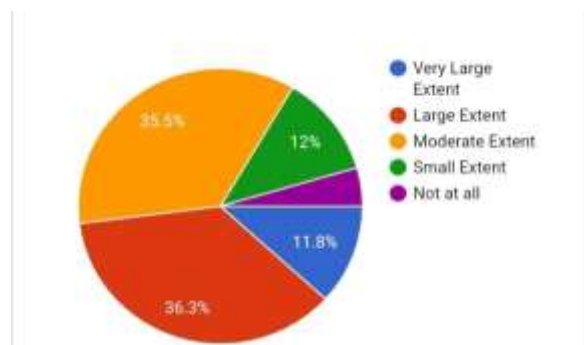


Table Four presents a graph illustrating the extent to which respondents believe misinformation affects their perception of news reports from Nigeria news media. Among the 400 respondents, 36.3% – the majority – believe misinformation influences their perception to a large extent, while 35.5% say it does to a moderate extent. Additionally, 12% indicate a small extent, 11.8% believe it has a very large impact, and the smallest proportion of respondents state that misinformation has no effect at all. These findings suggest that respondents perceive misinformation as a factor that can influence their trust in the Nigeria news media.

Table Five: Have you ever changed your opinion about a news story after discovering it was false or misleading on Nigeria news media?

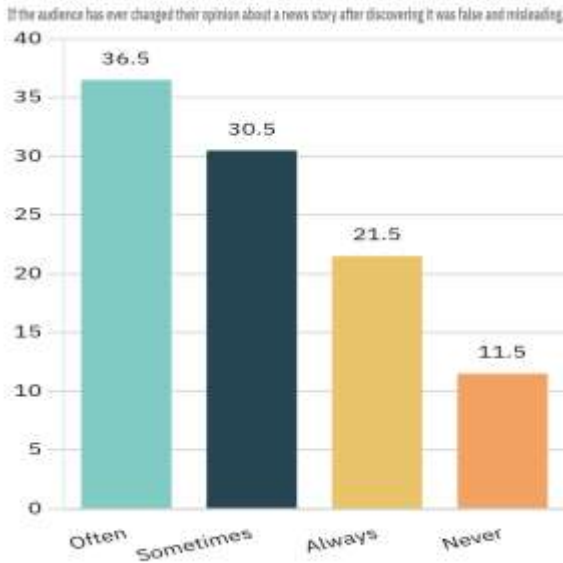


Table Five illustrates whether respondents have changed their opinions due to misleading reports from Nigeria news media. The results indicate that a majority (36.5%) reported changing their opinions often, while 30.5% said they do so sometimes. Additionally, 21.5% stated they always change their opinions, whereas 11.5% indicated they never do. These findings suggest that respondents are divided between changing their opinions often and sometimes.

Table Six: How often do you verify news from Nigeria news media before forming an opinion?

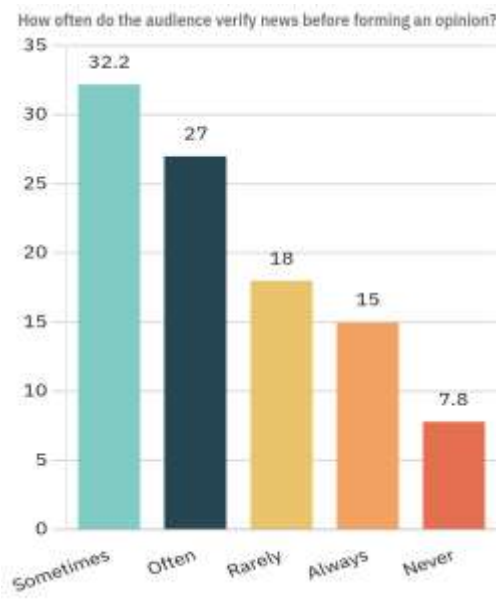


Table Six presents data on how often respondents verify reports from Nigeria news media before forming an opinion. The majority (32.2%) stated that they verify reports sometimes,

while 27% reported doing so often. Additionally, 18% admitted to rarely verifying, 15% said they always verify, and 7.8% indicated they never verify. These findings suggest that most respondents tend to fact-check reports from Nigeria news media before drawing conclusions.

Research Questions Two: How does exposure to false information impact public trust in Nigeria news media as conventional and digital news sources?

Table Seven: How has exposure to false information influenced your level of trust in Nigeria news media?

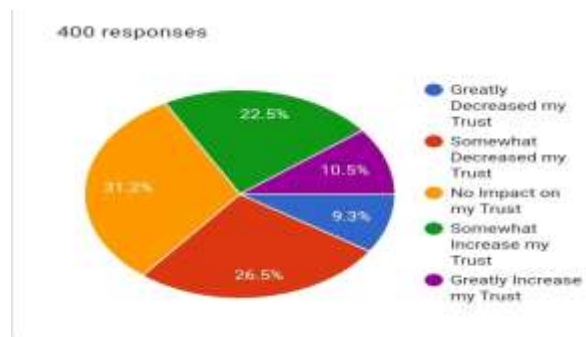


Table Seven examines respondents' exposure to false information and its influence on their level of trust. The majority (31.2%) reported that their trust remained unaffected, while 26.5% stated that their trust was somewhat decreased. Additionally, 22.5% noted a slight increase in trust, 10.5% indicated a significant increase, and 9.3% reported a significant decrease in trust. These findings suggest that exposure to misinformation from Nigeria news media has a mixed impact, with most respondents experiencing little to no change in their trust levels.

Table Eight: Do you believe that Nigeria news media take sufficient measures to fact-check and prevent the spread of misinformation?

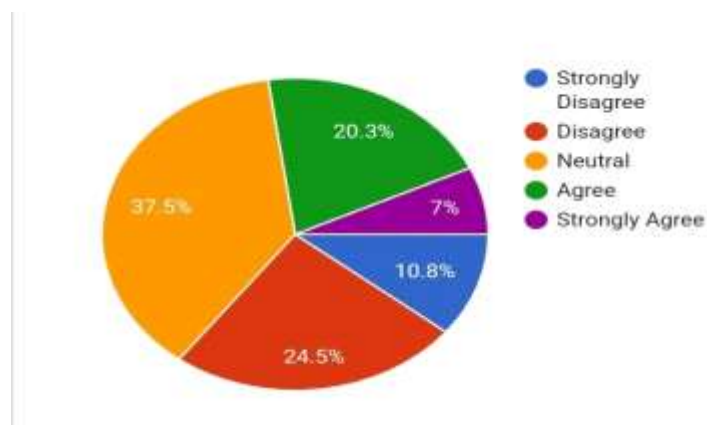


Table Eight assesses whether respondents believe that Nigeria news media scrutinize their reports before dissemination. The majority remained neutral, while 24.5% disagreed, 20.3% agreed, 10.8% strongly disagreed, and 7% strongly agreed. These findings suggest that a significant portion of respondents are skeptical about the extent to which these media outlets verify their reports before publication.

Table Nine: How likely are you to trust political news from Nigeria news media compared to other Nigerian news platforms?

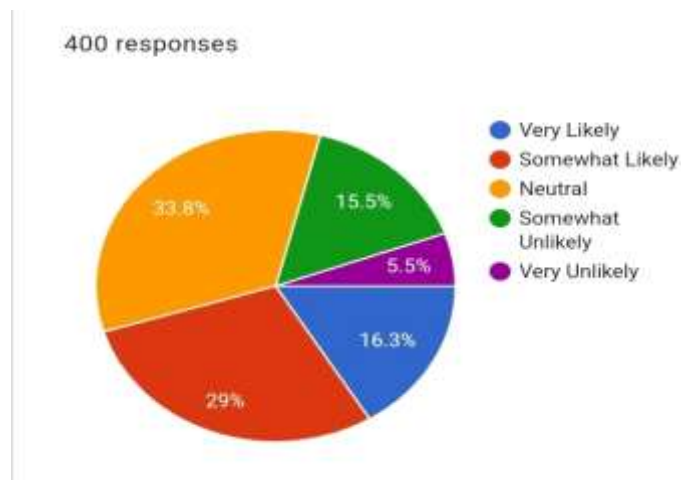


Table Nine presents respondents' level of trust in political news from Nigeria news media. The majority (33.8%) remained neutral, followed by 29% who found political news somewhat trustworthy. Additionally, 16.3% considered it very trustworthy, 15.5% found it somewhat untrustworthy, and 5.5% deemed it very untrustworthy. These findings suggest that most respondents hold a neutral stance toward the trustworthiness of political news from these sources.

Research Question Three: How do Nigerians, in an era of widespread social media usage, differentiate between accurate and misleading news from Nigeria news media.

Table Ten: What factors help you determine whether a news report from Nigeria news media is credible?

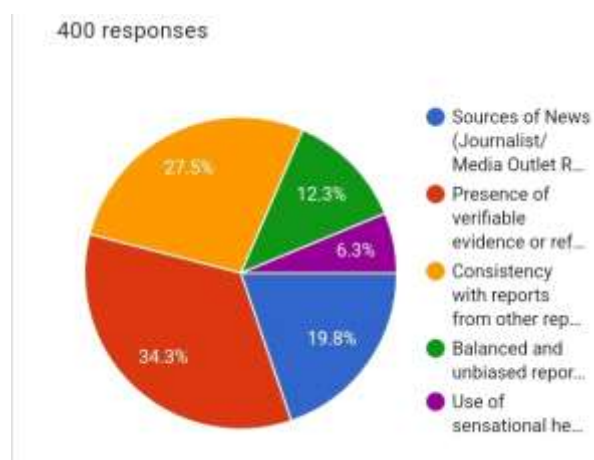


Table Ten examines the factors that determine the credibility of Nigeria news media. The majority (34.3%) attributed credibility to the presence of verifiable evidence or references, while

27.5% considered consistency with reports from other sources as a key factor. Additionally, 19.8% based their judgment on the reputation of the journalist or media outlet, and 6.3% relied on the use of sensational headlines. These findings suggest that verifiable evidence or references play the most significant role in establishing news credibility.

Table Eleven: Have you ever encountered misleading news from Nigeria news media, and how did you verify its accuracy?

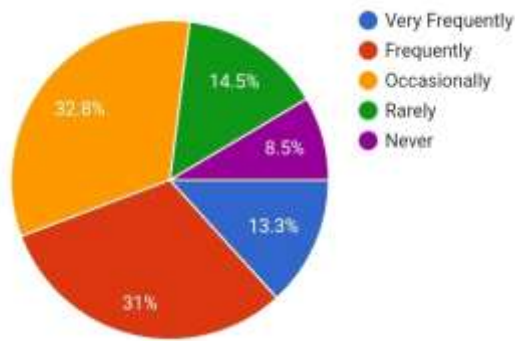


Table Eleven examines whether the 400 respondents have encountered misleading news from Nigeria news media. The results show that 13.3% reported encountering misleading news very frequently, 31% frequently, and 32.8% occasionally. Additionally, 14.5% stated they rarely came across misleading news, while 8.5% said they never had. These findings suggest that most respondents have encountered misleading news at least occasionally.

Table Twelve: How frequently do you cross-check news from Nigeria news media with other sources before believing it?

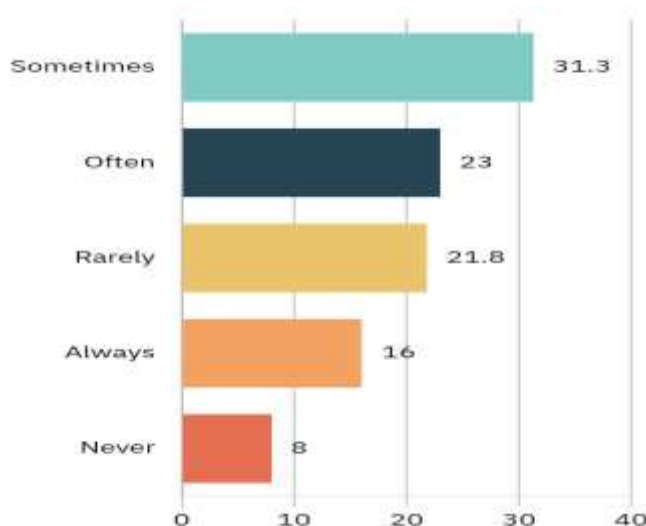


Table Twelve examines whether respondents typically verify news from Nigeria news media. The results indicate that 8% never verify, 16% always verify, 21.8% do so rarely, and 23% verify often. The majority, however, stated that they verify news sometimes. These findings suggest

that while a significant number of respondents check the credibility of news from these sources, most do so only occasionally.

Research Question Four: In what ways do media consumption habits on Nigeria news media platforms shape public responses to fake news?

Table Thirteen: How frequently do you consume news from Nigeria news media, and does this influence how you respond to fake news?

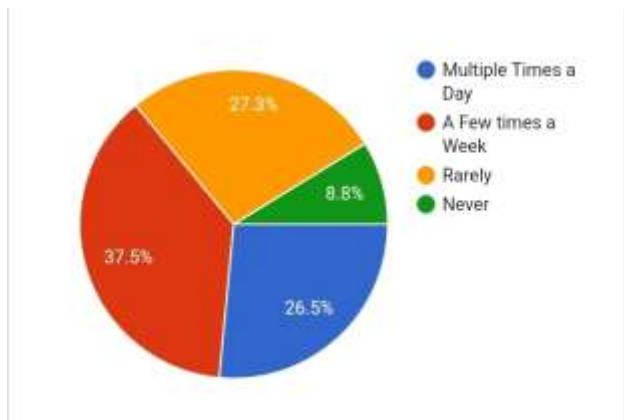


Table Thirteen examines how frequently respondents access news from Nigeria news media. The results show that 8.8% never access these news sources, while 27.3% check them multiple times a day. Another 27.3% rarely access the news, and the majority (37.5%) read it a few times a week. These findings suggest that a significant number of respondents engage with these news sources on a weekly rather than a daily basis.

Table Fourteen: Do you think the type of media platform (website, social media, newspaper) you use to access Nigeria news media affects your reaction to fake news?

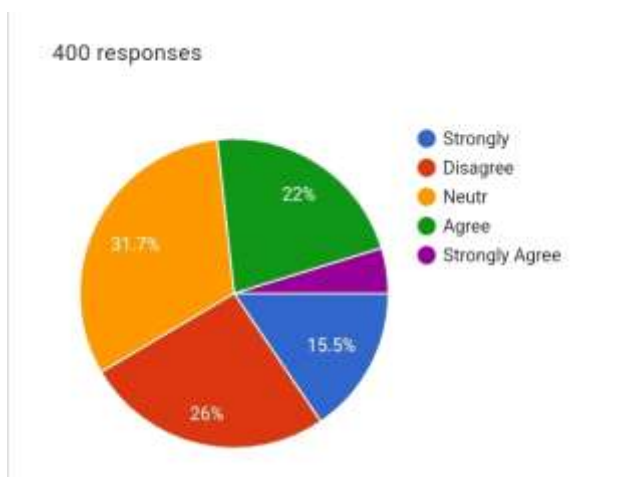


Table Fourteen examines whether accessing Nigeria news media through the internet (including social media) influences respondents' reactions to fake news. The results show that 31.57% remained neutral, 26% disagreed, 15.5% strongly agreed, 22% agreed, and the least

number of respondents strongly disagreed. These findings suggest that the online nature of these news sources does not necessarily determine their credibility.

Table Fifteen: Have you ever shared a news report from Nigeria news media without verifying its accuracy, and what prompted you to do so?

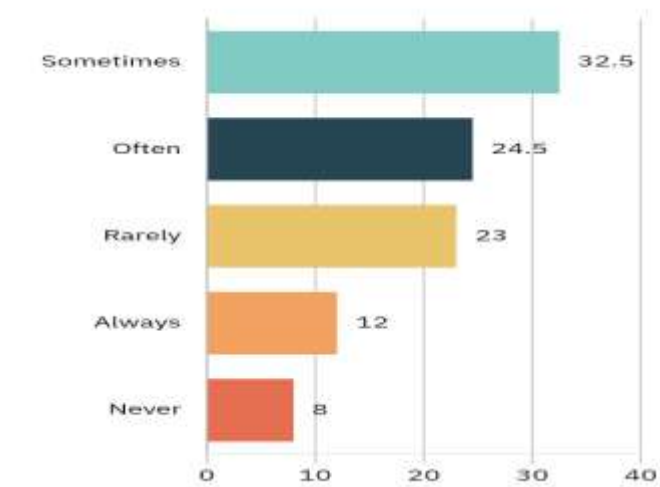


Table Fifteen presents a bar chart illustrating whether respondents have shared news from Nigeria news media without verifying its accuracy. The results indicate that 12% always share, 24.5% do so often, 32.5% sometimes, 23% rarely, and 8% never share without verification. These findings suggest that the majority of respondents occasionally share news without confirming its accuracy.

Table Sixteen: What prompted you to share the news without verifying?

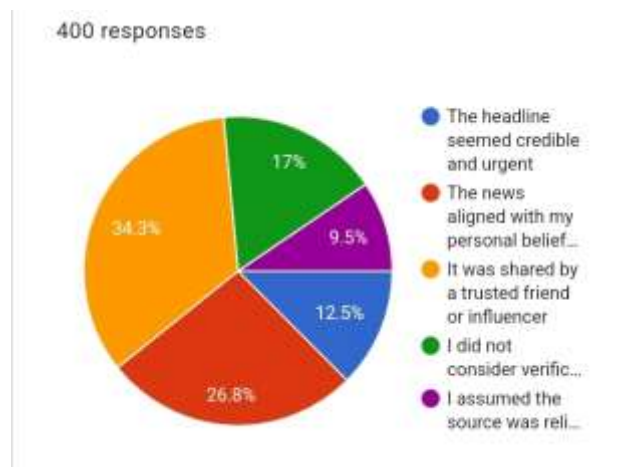


Table Sixteen explores the reasons why respondents share news without verifying its accuracy. The findings show that approximately 53% either do not verify or only do so occasionally. Additionally, 34.2% share news because it comes from a trusted friend, 26.8% do so because it aligns with their personal beliefs, 17% admit they do not consider verification at the time, and 9.5% assume the source is reliable. These results suggest that the influence of friends and

trusted figures plays a significant role in respondents' decision to share news without verification.

Discussion of Findings

Research Questions One: To what extent does misinformation influence Nigerians' opinions of Nigeria news media?

The research findings indicate that misinformation significantly impacts Nigerians' perceptions of news reports from Nigeria news media. The data from Table Four demonstrates that a substantial proportion of respondents acknowledge the influence of misinformation on their perception of these media outlets. 36.3% states that misinformation affects their views to a large extent and 35.5% indicates a moderate influence. It is evident that misinformation plays an essential role in shaping public trust in news sources. This aligns with Vosough et al. (2018) that posits that misinformation can erode media credibility and affects audience perceptions. Furthermore, Table Five provides insight into how misinformation alters public opinion. A considerable percentage of respondents (36.5%) reported frequently changing their opinions upon discovering misleading reports, while 30.5% stated that this happens occasionally. This pattern suggests that misinformation can influence audience beliefs, potentially altering their stance on critical issues. Prior research of Omoera and Uwalaka (2023) highlighted how exposure to misleading content can create cognitive biases, leading individuals to reassess previously held views. Table Six explores the extent to which respondents verify news before forming an opinion. The findings reveal that 32.2% of respondents verify news reports sometimes, while 27% do so often. However, a notable proportion of respondents (18%) rarely verify, and 7.8% never engage in fact-checking. This indicates a concerning trend where misinformation can easily spread due to a lack of rigorous verification by the audience. Studies have shown that individuals who fail to cross-check news sources are more susceptible to misinformation, particularly on digital platforms where misleading narratives proliferate rapidly (Pennycook & Rand, 2019). Overall, the findings suggest that misinformation significantly influences Nigerians' perceptions of Nigeria news media. The tendency of respondents to change their opinions upon realising they have encountered false or misleading news highlights the potential risks of misinformation in shaping public discourse. Additionally, while a notable proportion of respondents verify news before forming opinions. Olley and Elope (2024) notes that the fact that many do not consistently engage in fact-checking, there is a need for greater media literacy initiatives.

Research Questions Two: How does exposure to false information impact public trust in Nigerian news media as conventional and digital news sources?

The study examined how exposure to false information affects public trust in Nigeria news media as both conventional and digital news sources. Table Seven reveals that misinformation has a mixed impact on audience trust. While 31.2% of respondents stated that their trust remained unaffected, 26.5% reported a slight decrease in trust, whereas 22.5% noted a slight increase. Additionally, 10.5% indicated that their trust had greatly increased, while 9.3% reported a significant decline. These findings align with research suggesting that misinformation does not always lead to distrust; rather, its impact varies depending on audience perception and prior beliefs (Tandoc, Lim, & Ling, 2018). Table Eight evaluates whether respondents believe these media organizations take adequate measures to fact-check and prevent misinformation. The results indicate widespread skepticism, with the majority of

respondents remaining neutral, 24.5% disagreeing, and 10.8% strongly disagreeing. Only 20.3% agreed, while 7% strongly agreed. This suggests that a significant portion of the audience is uncertain about or lacks confidence in the credibility-verification processes of these news outlets. Prior studies have emphasised the importance of transparency in media fact-checking as a way to bolster public trust (Karlova & Fisher, 2013). Table Nine further explores trust in political news from Nigeria news media. The majority (33.8%) maintained a neutral stance, while 29% expressed moderate trust. Additionally, 16.3% considered political news from these sources highly trustworthy, whereas 15.5% viewed it as somewhat untrustworthy, and 5.5% found it very untrustworthy. This reflects a broader trend in media trust, where political bias and perceived misinformation contribute to audience skepticism (Newman et al., 2020). Overall, these findings suggest that while misinformation does impact trust in media, its effects are not uniform. Some respondents remain unaffected or even increase their trust levels, possibly due to selective exposure or confirmation bias. However, the notable level of skepticism toward fact-checking processes highlights the need for greater transparency and accountability in news reporting.

Research Question Three: How do Nigerians, in an era of widespread social media usage, differentiate between accurate and misleading news from Nigeria news media?

The study explored how Nigerians distinguish between accurate and misleading news from Nigeria news media in an era of widespread social media usage. Table Ten investigates the factors that contribute to assessing the credibility of news reports from these media outlets. The majority (34.3%) of respondents identified the presence of verifiable evidence or references as the primary determinant of credibility. Additionally, 27.5% considered consistency with reports from other sources as an important factor. Another 19.8% assessed credibility based on the reputation of the journalist or media outlet, while 6.3% relied on the use of sensational headlines. These findings highlight the critical role of verifiable evidence in shaping audience perceptions of media reliability, aligning with previous research that underscores the importance of factual references in combatting misinformation (Lewandowsky, Ecker, & Cook, 2017). Table Eleven examines the extent to which respondents have encountered misleading news from Nigeria news media. The findings indicate that 13.3% reported encountering misleading news very frequently, while 31% encountered it frequently. Additionally, 32.8% came across misleading reports occasionally, 14.5% rarely, and 8.5% never. These results suggest that misinformation is a common concern among the audience of these news platforms, reinforcing studies on the prevalence of fake news in digital media (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018). Table Twelve assesses whether respondents verify news from Nigeria news media before accepting it as credible. The results reveal that 8% never verify information, while 16% always do. A larger portion of respondents (21.8%) rarely verify, and 23% verify often. However, the majority stated that they verify news only sometimes. These findings suggest that while some respondents actively engage in fact-checking, many do so inconsistently. This pattern aligns with research showing that cognitive biases and trust in familiar sources often influence the willingness to fact-check news (Pennycook & Rand, 2019). Overall, these findings indicate that Nigerians rely on evidence-based assessments to determine news credibility but do not consistently verify information.

Research Question Four: In what ways do media consumption habits on Nigerian news media platforms shape public responses to fake news?

Media consumption habits significantly influence how individuals engage with and respond to fake news, particularly on digital platforms. The frequency of news consumption plays a critical role in shaping public responses to misinformation. According to the findings presented in Table Thirteen, a significant portion of respondents (37.5%) consume news from these platforms a few times a week, while only 27.3% access them multiple times daily. This pattern suggests that the majority of users engage with news periodically rather than continuously, potentially affecting their ability to detect inconsistencies or verify reports promptly. Moreover, the mode of accessing news influences audience reactions to misinformation. Table Fourteen indicates that while 31.57% of respondents were neutral, a combined 37.5% agreed or strongly agreed that the platform type (website, social media, or newspaper) affects their perception of news credibility. However, 26% disagreed, indicating skepticism about the role of platform type in shaping responses to fake news. This finding aligns with prior research suggesting that social media platforms amplify misinformation due to their algorithm-driven content delivery, which reinforces users' pre-existing biases, prior to Iguoba, et al. (2023) that notes that people has pre-existing biases on institutions based on what they have heard. Additionally, news-sharing behaviour plays a crucial role in the spread of fake news. Table Fifteen reveals that while 32.5% of respondents sometimes share news without verifying its accuracy, a combined 36.5% do so often or always. This trend underscores the challenge of misinformation proliferation, as individuals frequently disseminate unverified news, inadvertently contributing to the spread of false information. Scholars such as Pennycook and Rand (2019) emphasize that cognitive biases and limited engagement with fact-checking contribute to the uncritical sharing of misinformation. Furthermore, the motivations behind sharing unverified news highlight the role of social trust and belief systems. Table Sixteen demonstrates that 34.2% of respondents share news because it originates from a trusted friend, while 26.8% do so because it aligns with their personal beliefs. These findings are consistent with existing literature, which suggests that trust in sources and ideological alignment are key determinants of misinformation spread (Lazer et al., 2018). The influence of social networks and personal biases in shaping information-sharing behaviour indicates the necessity for media literacy programs to enhance critical engagement with news content as recommended by Ngonso (2019).

In a nutshell, the study's findings illustrate that media consumption habits on Nigeria news media influence public responses to fake news through frequency of exposure, mode of access, news-sharing behaviour, and underlying motivations.

Summary and Conclusion

The study demonstrates how seriously disinformation affects public opinion and confidence in Nigeria news media. Notwithstanding, Nigerians' interactions with news content are shaped by false information, which also affects their perspectives and degree of confidence. Many respondents agree that being exposed to misleading material influences how they view various media sources, frequently resulting in skepticism and shifting viewpoints. There is a complicated relationship between disinformation and media credibility, though, since some respondents retain or even grow their faith in their reporting, suggesting that trust in these platforms is not completely undermined.

The study also shows that although many Nigerians make an effort to distinguish between reliable and false news, verification procedures are still not uniform. A significant percentage of people continue to spread unverified news because they trust their personal networks or

because it supports their preexisting opinions, even though other people base their decisions on verifiable facts and cross-referencing with other sources. This emphasises the persistent problem of the spread of false information, especially in digital media environments where social influence is crucial in forming public opinion.

Reactions to bogus news are also greatly influenced by media consumption patterns. The frequency and method of news consumption, whether via social media or conventional websites, influence how people interact with and evaluate the reliability of information. The study emphasises the importance of social networks and cognitive biases in news-sharing behaviour, highlighting the necessity of fact-checking and increased digital literacy.

To sum up, inaccurate information continues to be a significant issue that erodes public trust in Nigerian media. To solve this problem, media organisations, lawmakers, and the public at large must cooperate by promoting transparency, fact-checking, and critical engagement with news content. Future research should focus more on how digital algorithms work in news delivery and how they impact audience perceptions of credibility.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. News consumers should verify the accuracy of information before sharing it.
2. Media organisations should prioritise credibility by thoroughly fact-checking reports before publication.
3. Awareness campaigns should be conducted to educate the public on effective methods for verifying news before dissemination.
4. Audiences should critically evaluate news content rather than relying on pre-existing biases when engaging with media platforms.

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