



Challenges Nigerian Journalists Face in Spotting Fake News

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Abstract

Historically, Nigerian journalism has contended with socio-political pressures, economic constraints and regulatory threats, but the advent of fake news in the digital age has further complicated the media landscape. This study explored the perspectives of Nigerian journalists on fake news, examining their understanding of its impact, the challenges they encounter in spotting false narratives and the motivations driving the spread. Anchored on Agenda-Setting Theory and supported by the Technology Determinism Theory, the research highlighted how technological advancements have facilitated journalistic practices and allowed misinformation to thrive. Using a quantitative research method, questionnaire was administered to 200 practicing journalists across the six geopolitical regions of the country. Key findings indicate that fake news is widespread, with social media identified as a major driver. Journalists reported a lack of adequate training in verification practices. Existing fact-checking protocols were found to require reinforcement. The study underscored the need for adherence to ethical standards, enhanced media literacy among professionals and the public, collaboration among stakeholders and investment in tools and training to tackle fake news effectively. It recommends a balanced regulation that ensures accountability while safeguarding freedom of expression. Addressing these challenges comprehensively, Nigerian journalism can strengthen its role as a credible source of information and restore public trust in media reporting.

Keywords: Digital tools, fake news, Nigerian journalists, media literacy, misleading content

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INTRODUCTION

The menace of fake news is becoming a global concern. This malady is, however, not new. It is as old as humanity itself. It has always been there, spread as rumour and propaganda, in small circles within particular neighbourhoods. Scholars, including Mare (2025), have long maintained that fake news couched as propaganda has been there in Africa and it predates the colonial era. Mare (2025) stated that colonialism only institutionalised and routinised propaganda in everyday life in Africa.

Progressively, advancements in technology have increased the dimension globally and widened the reach and coverage of false and unverified information (Adams et al. 2023; Inobemhe et al. 2020; Egelhofer and Lecheler 2019). With the advent of social media and its pervasiveness, the spread has assumed a somewhat epidemic dimension with negative consequences for individuals, groups and societies (Onigbinde and Oloyode 2024).

The spread of unverified information used to be the pastime of idle revellers at drinking spots and village squares, where they engaged in idle talks, often exaggerated to keep the conversations going, to kill idle time. In recent times, idle talks about little happenings within small enclaves have left the informal spheres for more formal environments where serious issues have become victims of unverified and unprocessed packages delivered for public consumption. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) describe how contemporary social technology has introduced on a global scale a new phenomenon in communication, which they refer to as "information pollution".

This issue has been fueled by social media, creating a complex network of motivations for the packaging, sharing and consumption of these 'polluted' messages. Mohammed (2021) observed that while the tremendous potential of digital technologies cannot be denied, the associated risks must not be discountenanced. She pointed out that when left in the wrong hands, these technologies can facilitate the

spread of misinformation and hate speech and become instruments for violating human rights and conducting unbecoming activities.

Furthermore, there are various types of content and methods for amplifying fake news, multiple platforms that host and reproduce content and a rapid pace of communication among trusted peers. Jibril et al. (2025); Akpan et al. (2024); Alika and Habib (2021); Tijani-Adenle (2021); Inobemhe, et. al. (2020) concurred that the development has assumed a universal dimension, with its negative consequences becoming a source of concern.

It has neither spared clime nor orientation. It has crept into hitherto sacred entities where truth and facts were held sacred and only opinions were free. Today, in such circles, facts have become scarce while fake news has become commonplace. Opinions are deliberately being presented as reality. It has become so because several factors have conspired to make it challenging for facts to be easily accessible and orientation has made rigorous interrogation seem either unnecessary or look like punishment.

Journalism, which has a sacred responsibility of being the society watchdog has become the most prominent victim and has been rendered a lapdog, especially in jurisdictions where restraining legislations are either not in place or not enforced. In Nigeria, for instance, it has become a bigger concern because of the prevalence of purveyors of information who are largely unlicensed and not properly regulated (Alika and Habib 2021).

Fake news specifically is not a new phenomenon in the global landscape, neither is it new to the Nigerian situation. Okocha and Chigbo (2023), quoting researchers, affirmed that fake news has been around in Nigeria for time, even though they argued it had yet to reach an epidemic level. Nonetheless, their study established the prevalence of fake news in Nigeria. The proliferation started when journalists became more fascinated with sensationalism to the detriment of quality content. Thus, a new variant of news evolved. Okocha et al. (2024) posit that the variant is completely

different from what has always been known as news. Enahoro (2019) labels it a deadly scourge.

With the loose characterisation of journalism practitioners, the permissive practice environment and the widespread availability of diverse social media offerings, the Nigerian media space has become the amphitheatre of fake news. Omoera and Uwalaka (2023), alluding to the situation, stated that such a permissive atmosphere has provided an environment where all manner of online media practitioners showcase their dispositions. This scenario poses a challenge for the routine journalist to identify fake news sources, and worse for the consumers to detect unwholesome products delivered through news channels. Okocha and Akpe (2022) agree that the prevalence of fake news and misinformation poses a significant challenge to journalism in Nigeria, with potentially deadly consequences. Fake news, they insisted, has had a detrimental impact on the practice of journalism. They referenced Okonkwo (2020), who emphasised that fake news is so dangerous that it can lead to the destruction of lives, property and the reputations of innocent citizens.

As a result, the challenges Nigerian journalists face while executing their professional duty are monumental. It has been further compounded with the advent and proliferation of online media platforms, especially the widespread use of social media channels, which has greatly affected communication globally, more so in Nigeria, where legislations are lax and legitimate sources of information are often not forthcoming. Given this scenario, how can journalists fulfil their professional responsibilities in Nigeria while remaining credible and true to their audiences? How can they navigate the landmines of toxic information, which often present themselves as consumable narratives? Adopting the quantitative research approach, this study sought to identify and eventually propose remedies to the challenges faced by Nigerian journalists in spotting fake news.

Statement of the Problem

From the nationalist days to the post-independence era, Nigerian journalists have faced political and socio-economic pressures and professional hazards, with some couched in threats, repression and regulations (Tijani-Adenle 2021), challenged in professional exactitudes by deadline issues, economic pressures, perception issues (Ciboh and Ugondo 2024); and in recent times, buffeted by the proliferation of fake news made more prominent with the pervasiveness of social media (Ciboh and Ugondo 2024; Akpan, Adeyiga and Okolo 2024; Okocha and James (2023); Tijani-Adenle 2021).

Technology has greatly helped the growth of journalism practice, but it also has its obverse side. It is like a double-edged sword - it could serve for good and also for evil, depending on the deployment. It has enabled the rapid spread of information, as it does for correct information, so has it for fake and unverified narratives. The rapid spread of fake, unverified, unprocessed and uncensored information has thus made the practice landscape for the Nigerian journalist challenging for intense interrogation of issues and verification of available information, especially in the face of intense competition and limited resources.

The communication landscape is overwhelmed with deliberately misleading content from various sources through multiple channels. This proliferation has left journalists in Nigeria struggling to determine the authenticity of available information and how to distinguish credible information from unwholesome concoctions.

These circumstances prompted this study to explore how Nigerian journalists themselves view the unbecoming trend and what they are doing to stem the proliferation of fake news. Having a proper perspective of these evolving patterns is critical for developing effective interventions that can enhance journalistic practices and restore public confidence in media reporting in Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The research objectives are to:

- determine the level of Nigerian Journalists' understanding of the issue of fake news
- identify the challenges faced by Nigerian Journalists in spotting fake news.
- investigate the motivations driving the spread of fake news among journalists in Nigeria.
- seek potential remedies to the challenges posed by fake news in Nigeria.

Conceptual clarifications

Fake News: Is usually associated with misleading information, often intentionally put together with negative intentions, to misinform or mislead.

The term “fake news” was first used in the 1890s (Greene 2025); but became widespread during the US presidential election in 2016 (Quandt et al. 2019). Greene (2025) said the definition of ‘what it is and what it is not’ is often difficult, as it depends on the users. He nonetheless said that fake news could be considered a cover term for various information categories and news media, including misinformation, disinformation, propaganda, and even advertising. Quandt et al. (2019) said fake news was at the time conceived differently but has since changed into an ambiguous and difficult concept, currently used as a derogatory term denouncing media and journalism and an umbrella term for various forms of wrong, misguided or fabricated information.

However, Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) define it as news articles that are deliberately and verifiably false and capable of misleading readers. The contents are without verifiable or accurate facts, quotes or sources. Jibril et al. (2025) define it as fabricated and misleading information presented as genuine news. Okonkwo (2020) says it is falsehood and lies told and spread to deceive and destroy for selfish interests.

There are several definitions, but the main concerns involve false information and a lack of verifiability. Aïmeur et al. (2023) point out that while scholars may have

differing views on the precise definition, they all agree that its authenticity is fundamentally undermined by falsehood. This issue is pervasive in the Nigerian media ecosystem and is becoming a serious problem that requires urgent attention.

Misinformation: This is wrong information, not necessarily to deceive or mislead. The intention might not be mischief but ignorance. It could be a combination of facts, opinions and outright falsehoods, often arising from limited knowledge, misunderstandings, or even pressure to break news or lack of critical thinking. It results sometimes, in journalism circles, when reporters rely on familiar sources or when certain information align with pre-existing beliefs (Stepney and Lally 2024; Batalha 2020). APA (2025) puts it simply as getting the facts wrong. Greene (2025) defines it as inaccurate information created and disseminated either intentionally or otherwise. It is information disseminated without first verifying for accuracy or authenticity. The Nigerian media, particularly in this era of digital technology, is a serial victim, falling prey frequently.

The main difference between misinformation and fake news lies in the intention, creation and dissemination of the material. Understanding these differences is crucial for media literacy and for combating the spread of false information.

Disinformation: According to Arnaudo et al. (2023), there is no internationally accepted legal definition of disinformation, but going through the web of definitions put out by them from different disciplines, it became obvious that the motive underlying disinformation is deliberate mischief – to deceive and to mislead. APA (2025) defines it as intentionally misstating the facts. The CSI Library (2025) indicate that disinformation is intentionally fabricated content or manipulated information purposefully shared to harm or deceive.

In comparison with fake news, disinformation is viewed as a broader category of intentionally false information while fake news is a specific type of disinformation. In essence, all fake news is disinformation - when deliberately false; but not all

disinformation is fake news, as disinformation can take many other forms beyond news-style content.

Propaganda involves disseminating information aimed at influencing public opinion or persuading people and making them respond or act in a tailored way. Its main motive is to manipulate the thinking and feelings of the public and promote a biased perspective or specific agenda. Referencing the Oxford English Dictionary, the John Hopkins University Library (2024) described propaganda as "the systematic dissemination of information, especially in a biased or misleading way, to promote a political cause or point of view." When necessary, governments and big organisations employ propaganda to shape public opinion, influence attitudes and direct actions in a particular way.

In Nigeria, propaganda is more experienced during electioneering campaigns. The media, particularly those with vested interests in the political persuasions, are easily co-opted to push such narratives. It is also a potent weapon employed in war times. A typical example, apart from Joseph Goebbels' exploits in Nazi Germany (Grey and Sullivan 2023), is what happened during the Nigeria–Biafra civil war, when Chief Okokon Ndem spearheaded the rebel government campaign on Radio Biafra. Omaka (2018) mentioned how the rebel government exploited the enormous propaganda potential of radio and tactically took advantage of it.

Propaganda is considered relevant in this discussion as information disorder because the media – particularly radio, television, newspapers and social media platforms - are usually employed to carry out these manipulated narratives. Propaganda could employ fake news as one of its methods, but essentially its mission is to shape opinions and behaviours, while fake news' mission is the fabrication of news content to mislead.

Conspiracy Theory: Ordinarily, the word conspiracy denotes a negative plot, a secret plan. So, in Nigeria, the mere mention of conspiracy theory is often associated

with mischief. Nonetheless, Radu and Schultz (2017) hold that conspiracy theories are not always wrong or about evil acts. They argue that conspiracy theories can serve as working hypotheses for investigative journalists and their sources and, if confirmed, could be shared with the public as journalistic content. However, Vermeule (2009) posits that Conspiracy Theory is basically “an effort to explain some event or practice by reference to the machinations of powerful people, who attempt to conceal their role, at least until their aims are accomplished” (p.205).

Notwithstanding, these positions do not invalidate the point that unproven conspiracy theories about malicious intent persist in the media. Such may distract from reality during contentious situations, potentially leading to negative reactions. Conspiracy theories explain events through secret plots, but fake news is broader, as it is used to spread various types of fabricated or misleading information, including conspiracy theories. It is also why conspiracy theories are relevant in this study context, especially as they affect the media.

False Attribution: In the media, false attribution refers to the misrepresentation or incorrect assignment of a quotation, work or claim to an individual or source (Mastrine 2021; McGlone 2005). False attribution can occur when genuine images or quotes are linked inappropriately to events or individuals for a purpose. False attribution also occurs when a statement or work is attributed mistakenly to the wrong person or group. It also happens when statements are taken out of context, altering their original meaning and creating misleading narratives. Such omissions undermine transparency and accountability in reporting (McGlone 2005). Therefore, false attribution may be used as a maneuver within fake news. Fake news, however, encompasses a wider phenomenon that involves creating and spreading news content that is wholly or largely false.

Other types of partisan offerings like sponsored content, clickbait, satire, hoaxes and errors might convey misleading narratives or seek to influence audiences in particular ways. Given that fake news is yet to be a well-defined concept, and since this work is

focused on Nigerian journalists and fake news, these last set would be regarded as general information disorders, not fake news.

Although Jubril et al. (2025) and Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) used the word “misleading” to characterise fake news, the definition by Greene (2025) that it could be considered a cover term for various categories of information and news media including misinformation, disinformation and propaganda, is more appealing because the propagation of false information through the media is the core focus of this research.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is best situated within a multidisciplinary framework that integrates media-fake news relationship theories such as Agenda-Setting Theory (AST) and Technological Determinism (TD) with media sociology frameworks such as Habermas’s Public Sphere and Bourdieu’s Field theories.

The Agenda-Setting Theory (AST), developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972, highlights how media influences public perception by prioritising certain issues. Journalists, as gatekeepers, shape public priorities by selecting which stories to cover (Sydnor 2018). Yeoman and Morris (2022) point out that this power can disproportionately affect vulnerable groups and contribute to the spread of fake news. Tsfaty et al. (2020) argue that increased media focus on fake news can enhance its presence in the public consciousness. Consequently, while AST sheds light on media influence, it also reveals a limitation: the risk of reinforcing the visibility of misinformation. Journalists must navigate this carefully to avoid unintentionally legitimizing false narratives.

Technological Determinism, rooted in Thorstein Veblen’s early ideas and expanded by Marshall McLuhan, serves as a framework for understanding how

technology drives social change, including communication. It argues that innovations in communication technology reshape how information is produced, distributed and consumed. In journalism, the shift from traditional gatekeeping to digital platforms has transformed news production and verification norms, enabling rapid, participatory information sharing but also blurring lines between credible news and misinformation. Jan et al. (2020) and West and Turner (2007) argue that technology's impact is mediated by social and political factors, highlighting that the proliferation of fake news also reflects weakened editorial controls and audience behaviour. Similarly, Postman (2000) emphasised that both media producers and consumers co-create culture, asserting that changes in communication systems determine human adaptation and survival.

The theory of technological determinism underscores the significant role technology plays in the dissemination of misinformation, but it is equally important to consider the human and systemic factors that shape journalists' responses to these challenges. Buldygin (2020) asserts that prevailing social values and power dynamics inform the design and implementation of technology. Adler (2006) further contends that technology does not unilaterally drive social change; rather, it functions within a complex interplay of cultural and political influences. Dafoe (2015) emphasises that grasping these dynamics is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the media landscape. This theory remains pertinent in analyzing the evolution from traditional one-way mass communication to the interactive, user-generated content increasingly found on social media platforms (Abdulahi et al., 2014). However, a primary limitation of technological determinism is its assumption of technological neutrality.

Jürgen Habermas's **Public Sphere Theory**, introduced in 1962 in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, explores how citizens engage in rational-critical debate over public issues, independent of state or market influence. The theory views the public sphere as a democratic arena for free conversations that shapes public opinion and political action, including how fake news can undermine participatory democracy. Its strengths lie in emphasising communication, media and

citizen participation as foundations of democracy (Calhoun 1992). However, it has notable limitations, chief of which is that its idealised model overlooks social inequalities, power disparities and the exclusion of marginalised groups (Fraser 1990). Moreover, commercialisation and digital media fragmentation have further diminished the modern public sphere.

Pierre Bourdieu's **Field Theory**, developed in the 1970s–1980s, explains how social arenas or “fields” like journalism function as structured spaces of power where actors compete for economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital under specific rules. It shows how social hierarchies are reproduced and how individuals navigate power shaped by institutional norms. In journalism, it helps reveal how media practices reflect broader social and economic inequalities. While the theory provides a powerful framework for analysing power and social dynamics, it is often criticised for being conceptually complex, difficult to apply empirically and prone to overemphasizing structure over individual agency.

These theories collectively offer a comprehensive framework for analysing the complexities surrounding fake news in Nigeria's journalism field. While the Agenda-setting theory emphasises the responsibility of journalists in shaping public discourse around fake news, the Technological Determinism highlights the necessity of understanding the technological landscape that facilitates misinformation, Public Sphere Theory highlights how fake news undermines deliberative democracy and public trust, and Bourdieu's field theory, explains journalistic power dynamics and professional norms within Nigeria's media environment.

Literature Review

Challenges faced by the Nigerian Media in spotting fake news

Identifying fake news can be a challenging task due to the widespread influence of social media and the diverse range of news sources. Wyorkson and Okocha (2023)

say the speed at which the new media churn out information makes fake news and hoaxes inevitable. Conspiracy theories couched in smooth narratives that resonate with their respective audiences make it more challenging. Jibril et al. (2025) say that the proliferation of such toxic information represents a significant challenge to the media landscape in Nigeria, as it impacts public trust, information integrity and societal cohesion.

The various types of fake news make it difficult for journalists to categorise and respond effectively, especially since fake news can imitate legitimate reporting styles. This increases the challenge of spotting fake news (Tsfati et al. 2020). The sophistication of fake news campaigns, including the use of technology to create realistic-looking content, poses a significant challenge for journalists attempting to identify falsehoods (Onigbinde and Oloyede 2024). The complexity and scale of information pollution present an unprecedented challenge (Wardle and Derakhshan 2017). It is even more challenging to combat the proliferation of political propaganda, Osimen and Adeyefa (2024).

Discussions are still ongoing among scholars regarding where members of the public get the most fake news. Quandt et al. (2019) say fake news is often spread through fake news websites, using attention-grabbing headlines and mimicking credible news organs to gain credibility. Tsfati et al. (2020) slightly varied that position, saying that a large proportion of the public becomes aware of major fake news stories through mainstream news outlets. Nonetheless, both researchers concurred with previous studies indicating that fake news websites have limited reach and impact. These sites attract only a small segment of the population and their content is infrequently shared, thus affecting only a limited portion of people (Tsfati et al. 2020).

This suggests that although the fake news media might be the primary source of fake news to the public in most cases, it is the mainstream news media through their news outlets that effectively take it to the general public. And, because the public tends to believe mainstream news outlets more than fake news websites, their content becomes more believable and therefore impactful.

The rise of fake news in mainstream media may be related to the level of awareness and discipline among gatekeepers. Habib and Alika (2021) in their study found that there are no standardised measures by media professionals or regulatory bodies to combat fake news. It was more so with many and varied online news sources where the information presented as news is often largely unverified, unprocessed and uncensored. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) explained that while the historical impact of rumours and fabricated content are well documented, the complexity and scale of information pollution in our digitally connected and increasingly polarised world present an unprecedented challenge. It does not seem as if the menace is going away as there are currently no mechanisms in Nigeria to regulate or penalise the spread of false or misleading information on social media (Osimen and Adeyefa 2024). This lack of oversight makes it even more challenging to combat the spread of fake news.

Nigerian journalists have always found a way of navigating and overcoming obstacles in their professional path. Tijani-Adenle (2021) recalled the exploits of Nigerian journalists since the colonial days, from the military to the democratic dispensation, but feared that the same resilient Nigerian journalist and the media industry that withstood such enormous trials without wavering, may be brought down by information disorder; something he described as a more insidious endogenous challenge that many have identified but do not significantly appreciate. Tijani-Adenle (2021) noted that information disorder encompasses the various ways in which the integrity of published information is compromised.

Triggers and Motivations driving the spread of fake news

The complexity and scale of information pollution present an unprecedented challenge. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) explained that contemporary social technology has given rise to a novel phenomenon: a multifaceted network of motivations driving the creation, dissemination and consumption of these 'polluted' messages. This includes a diverse array of content types and techniques for amplifying content,

numerous platforms that host and reproduce this content and rapid communication speeds between trusted peers.

The Nigerian media landscape is saturated with fake news, posing a significant challenge for digital journalism today. This issue has arisen due to the rise of online media platforms, which has created a situation where nearly anyone can claim to be a “digital journalist.” As a result, news stories—regardless of their accuracy—can be spread rapidly and widely. Omoera and Uwalaka (2023). Ciboh and Ugondo (2024) list money, political interest, the desire to be popular and the rush to breaking news as the motives behind the spread of fake news among journalists. They concluded that fake news could creep into the mainstream media (radio, television, newspapers and magazines) when the journalists are driven by the desire to stay ahead of others – make headlines, gather and submit stories to fulfil all righteousness without examining the information and verifying the sources. When journalists allow sentiments, greed and pursuit of fame to overshadow their responsibility of serving public interest, fake news will dominate the information space with dire implications on political stability (Ciboh and Ugondo 2024).

According to Wyorkson and Okocha (2023), the push to share news might not necessarily be because people want to create panic or cause some untoward situations but because they feel a sense of responsibility to inform, advise and warn others. Notwithstanding, these and other contextual reasons, including media control, interpersonal trust and youth unemployment, might contribute to the spread of fake news in Nigeria.

Also, Ogbette et al. (2019) hang it on the internet. The proliferation of fake news is caused by the internet’s ever-connected nature and the preference for speed over accuracy. They indicated that because internet content providers and distributors are in a Zero-sum, winner-takes-all battle for attention and advertising revenue, they will do everything to boost traffic. Ogbette et al. (2019) were skeptical about the elimination of fake news from the system because the motivation is strong.

The unfortunate reality, as they observed, is that so long as people are willing to buy sensational newspapers and read blogs that demonstrably contain lies and half-truths, and as long as there are uneducated people who cannot differentiate between real and fake news, there will still be motivation and market for fake news.

Impact and threat to stability

There is no doubt that fake news is not just capable of misleading the populace and threatening the future of journalism, but could constitute a potent threat to the stability of the country (Habib and Akila 2021). The people rely on the media for information to live their lives and hold their government to account; therefore, when there is a crisis of confidence between the people and the media, there is likely to be a bigger problem of stability of the polity. The people will turn to any available information and act on it. Jibril et al. (2025) noted that a substantial portion of the Nigerian population comes across and acts upon misleading information, undermining media credibility and public confidence.

Quoting the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR) Report of 2020, Jibril et al. (2025) claim that about 65% of Nigerians believe and act on fake news, highlighting a critical gap in media literacy and verification and underscoring the need for effective strategies to combat misinformation and enhance media literacy for the sake of the people and the polity. Tijani-Adenle (2021) argues that because of the proliferation of fake news, the mainstream media may lose the trust of their audiences while political actors will use the resulting confusion as a justification for push their oft desire to gag the media. However, Okocha and Chigbo (2023), while acknowledging the prevalence of fake news in Nigeria concluded that it impacts average and gullible people and those who seek information that aligns with their beliefs and fulfills their information needs.

Fake news purveyors are often out to attract attention so their offerings are usually sensational and very likely to spread quickly. Many of these offerings fail the

acid test of journalism, but they get consumed because the line between quacks and professional journalism is thinning out. Ogbette et al. (2019) are concerned that since the platforms containing such offerings already have a massive reader base that looks up to them for information, the stories will most likely be believed by people who read them. The prolonged effect of this will be chaos that might threaten the stability of the polity and society.

Sensational reporting, especially on sensitive topics like terrorism or crime, can create an exaggerated perception of danger, potentially harming national security by portraying a country in a negative light. Consequently, it can deter investment and tourism by creating a false narrative about safety and stability (Onanuga 2024). Mohammed (2018) describing fake news as a scourge, pointed to the 1994 Rwandan genocide and stated that fake news whether at the local, national or international levels has the potential to threaten the peace, security and the corporate existence of a country. He largely blamed the disaster on fake news.

The rapid spread of violence during the October 2022 *#EndSARS*, the August 2024 *#EndBadGovernance* protests in Nigeria and the 2010 Arab Spring uprisings across the Arab world was significantly fueled by misinformation disseminated through social media, often by "street journalists." These events underscore the profound impact of unregulated information dissemination by uncoordinated groups on society.

As technology evolves, there is the possibility of a further surge in the misuse of social media platforms by those who wish to take advantage of them to peddle misinformation, deceive people and cause confusion (Mohammed, 2025).

What could be done to curb the menace

Fake news has evolved into a global phenomenon, not only in Nigeria but worldwide, with its purveyors leveraging social media platforms to disseminate toxic information and conduct smear campaigns targeting both specific and general audiences. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) explained that contemporary social

technology means that the world is witnessing information pollution at a global scale. Newman and Cherubini (2025) predicted that fake news was going to be a big problem in the long term.

In Nigeria, fake news has become a significant challenge to the media landscape (Jibril, Ibrahim and Ibrahim, 2025). It is increasingly becoming a sub-culture among the populace (Omoera and Uwalaka 2023), the Achilles' heel of the Nigerian news media (Tijani-Adenle 2021), and used for spreading false information against adversaries (Akpan et al. 2024).

Despite the widespread concern, there is a lack of understanding about the efforts to mitigate its negative impacts (Yeoman and Morris 2022). Nonetheless, researchers have emphasised the importance of gatekeeping as a fundamental bulwark against the widespread dissemination of fake news; and there is a near unanimity that something needs to be done to curb the menace that fake news is increasingly becoming.

Scholars like Jibril et al. (2025), Akpan et al. (2024), Wyorkson and Okocha (2023), Omoera and Uwalaka (2023), Tijani-Adenle (2021) and Habib and Akila (2021), who focused their research on fake news and the Nigerian media from different perspectives, all blamed unrestricted entry into the information dissemination space as the main culprit. Jibril et al. (2025) attribute the ease with which false information is being spread through social media and other digital channels as a major contributor to the problem and expressed the need for urgency in finding effective solutions.

Researchers agree that media literacy and public enlightenment are essential to address the situation. Wyorkson and Okocha (2023), for instance, recommended that social media users should be consistently informed through effective advertising, workshops, conferences and other forms of awareness campaigns about the consequences of sharing fake news, how to identify and distinguish fake news from fabricated information, and the importance of being self-aware before forwarding any

message. Heuar (2017) explained that literacy adds to the ICT literacy knowledge as well as skills and abilities to be knowledgeable in and to meaningfully use not only the Internet (technically) but also the environment of digital networks conceived in a more complex way.

Interestingly, Jibril et al. (2025), Akpan et al. (2024), Wyorkson and Okocha (2023), Omoera and Uwalaka (2023), Habib and Akila (2021), Tijani-Adenle (2021) and Ogbette et al. (2019)), who carried out various studies on fake news in Nigeria in the last seven years, Heuar (2017) who looked at the global scene, and Yeoman and Morris (2022) who focused their study on the United Kingdom, while pointing to the implications of non-restraint, all highlighted the need for digital media literacy as a comprehensive approach. In some cases, moderate regulations to protect the public from harmful information and safeguard society was recommended.

In addition to improvement of digital media literacy, Omera and Uwalaka (2023) recommend reorientation among Nigerians towards critical thinking in order not to fall prey to purveyors of fake news; but Tijani-Adenle (2021) was more emphatic about news media organisations in Nigeria re-designing their management models so that they can remain competitive without losing the integrity that has preserved the news media in the country. Wyorkson and Okocha (2023) emphasised the need for increased fake news awareness. Referring specifically to the role of citizen journalism in muddling the waters of news dissemination, Habib and Akila (2021) noted that though it has broadened people's access to a variety of news, there was an urgent need for proper synergy between mainstream journalism and citizen journalism to work out the best approach for effective and efficient journalism practice in the country.

Aligning with this line of thinking, Newman and Cherubini (2025) noted that while some in the media space are more focused on the negative trends, the fallouts are providing emerging gateways for those who want to make a difference, through forging more aligned partnerships based on trusted information and working together to deliver more engaging and powerful content. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) also emphasised the immediate need for collaborative engagement for workable solutions, and provided

a framework for the different stakeholders involved in research, policy discussions and technical innovations connected to the phenomenon of information disorder.

Given the avalanche of concerns expressed, there is no gainsaying that some cautionary regulation has become necessary. Although Akpan et al. 2024 and Habib and Akila (2021) highlighted the urgent need to sensitise Nigerian journalists on the proper use of the emerging brand of journalism, they also recommended that offenders be sanctioned, those engaged in mass dissemination of information should be registered and all licenced media organisations should upgrade their gatekeeping roles.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research approach and utilised the Descriptive Survey Research method for data collection and analysis.

Descriptive Survey Research provides a comprehensive overview of the characteristics, behaviors and opinions of a specific population, enabling researchers to gain insights into the phenomena under investigation without manipulating any variables (Singh 2023; Raman et al. 2023; Sirisilla 2023). In this method, the researcher observes and measures variables as they naturally occur, without exerting control or influence over them (McCombes 2023). A semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect data for this study.

The study's population consisted of practicing journalists in Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. The sample for this study was meticulously curated through a systematic approach that involved sourcing respondents from reputable organisations and networks within the journalism and academic fields. Specifically, respondents were drawn from the membership registers of the Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE), ensuring that a diverse range of experienced editors was included. Additionally, ranking members of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) were tapped to provide insights reflective of journalistic practice and standards in Nigeria. To further enrich

the data set, notable professionals from academia with practical experience in journalism were also included, thereby integrating scholarly perspectives with real-world practice. This multi-faceted sampling strategy aimed to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the subject matter at hand. Three hundred copies of the questionnaire were distributed online utilizing Google Forms, with explicit assurance of participant anonymity clearly articulated within the form. About 200 responded through the same process.

To ensure proper coverage of the various segments of the media and improve transparency and generalisability, respondents were selected based on media ownership: privately-owned, government-owned and training institutions; media organisation type: print, broadcast, online; platform type: conventional, online, social media; and status of respondents, activity areas including the newsroom, the field and in the classroom. The exercise was conducted within a period of two months.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic information

Table 1: Demographic distribution of respondents

Items	Frequency	
Percentage		
1. Age		
30 - 40	28	14.0
41 - 50	33	16.5
51 - 60	91	45.5
61 and 70	47	23.5
71 -80	1	0.5
Total	200	100
2. Gender		
Male	158	79
Female	42	21

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Total	200	100
3. Media organisations by ownership		
Privately owned	157	78.5
Government owned	6	3.0
Academic/training institutions	14	7.0
Unspecified	23	11.5
Total	200	100
4. Media organisations by type		
Online media	91	45.5
Broadcast media	54	27.0
Print	16	8.0
Mixed	16	8.0
Unspecified	23	11.5
Total	200	100
5. Platform		
Online	72	36.0
Conventional	118	59.0
Social Media	10	5.0
Total	200	100
6. Position/Status		
Editorial	75	37.5
Executive leadership	51	25.5
Field Reporter	23	11.5
Academic/Training	14	7
Student/intern	15	7.5
Others	22	11
Total	200	100
7. Years of experience in journalism		

0 - 5	13	6.1
6 - 10	12	5.7
11 - 20	47	22.2
21 -30	57	26.9
31 – 40	65	30.7
Unspecified	06	8.4
Total	200	100
8. Geographic spread		
South West	61	30.5
South South	50	25
South East	13	6.5
North Central	51	25.5
North East	9	4.5
North West	16	8.
Total	200	100

Source: Field Study, 2025

Demographic analysis

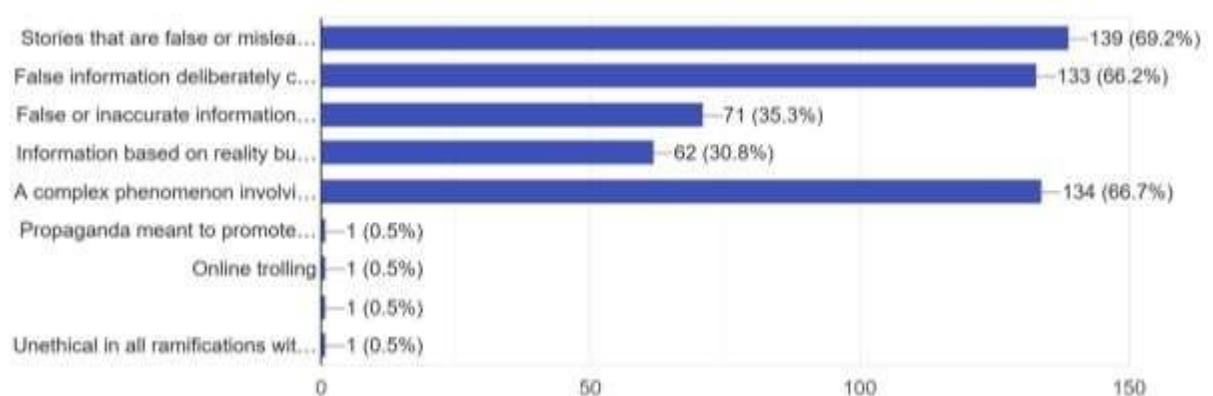
The survey reveals that most respondents are experienced journalists aged between 51 and 70, with nearly 80% having over 11 years in the field. This depicts accumulated expertise over decades of practice, who have seen both the traditional and digital seasons in journalism; and can make comparisons. There is a notable gender imbalance, with male journalists dominating, reflecting the Nigerian media landscape. Online platforms lead in media type representation at 45.5%, highlighting the growth of digital-native journalism, while broadcast media (Radio and TV) remain significant due to their local and national spread. Print media shows a decline, reflecting its reduced influence in the digital age. Most respondents work in conventional media (newspapers, magazines, radio, TV), followed by those exclusively in online media.

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Executive leadership, newsroom and field reporters, who shape newsroom content, constitute 74.5% of participants. Regionally, the South West is the media hub, with the highest number of respondents, followed by the North Central zone, including the Federal Capital Territory, while other regions have fewer media presence, indicating limited national coverage outside these areas. Major media activities in Nigeria are concentrated in the core commercial and administrative zones, which is why the South West and North Central zones have the bulk of professionals, whereas the other zones largely have regional outfits mainly owned by government. Practitioners are more of public service employees than professionals.

Awareness and Training

9. Understanding of fake news



Source: Field Study, 2025

Given the pattern here, respondents tend to view fake news primarily through the lens of factual inaccuracies and lack of verification, showing an awareness of its complexity and intent. However, there is limited recognition of related issues such as online trolling, propaganda and unethical media practices. This narrower perspective may impact media literacy efforts and strategies to combat misinformation, highlighting the need for a better understanding of these interconnected phenomena.

10. Formal training on identifying fake news

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	132	66.0
No	68	34.0
Total	200	100

Source: Field Study, 2025

The indication is that the bulk of the respondents have received formal training on fake news, while a lower but significant percentage have not. The notable percentage of those not trained in the subject may account for the proliferation of fake news in the media.

11. Type of training received

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Workshops/Seminars	92	46
Online Courses	9	4.5
Formal Education	6	3
In-House Training	1	0.5
Other/Unclear	24	12
Nil	68	34
Total	200	100

Source: Field Study, 2025

The data reveal that workshops and seminars constituted the predominant forms of training received by participants, facilitated largely by external partners. However, a notable proportion of responses were either vague or too broad to be categorised, suggesting inconsistencies in the nature and scope of training experiences. Moreover, there was limited evidence of engagement with online learning platforms or structured academic programmes specifically addressing misinformation and fake news. The data reveal that workshops and seminars constituted the predominant forms of training received by participants, facilitated largely by external partners. However, a notable proportion of responses were either vague or too broad to be categorised, suggesting inconsistencies in the nature and scope of training experiences. Moreover, there was limited evidence of engagement with online learning platforms or structured academic programmes specifically addressing misinformation and fake news.

12. Effectiveness of training in identifying fake news

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Very Effective	89	44.5
Effective	47	23.5
Neutral	57	28.5
Ineffective	2	1.5
Very Ineffective	5	2.5
Total	200	100

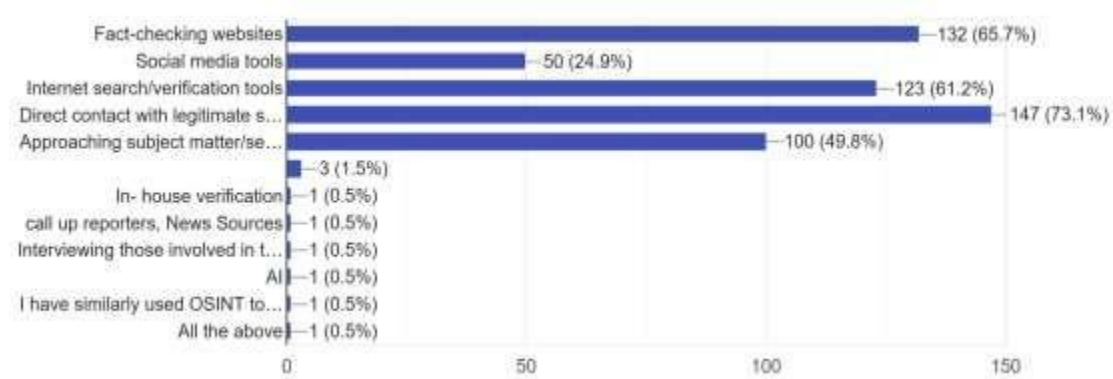
***Source:** Field Study, 2025*

This implies that while the majority of participants (more than 68%) perceived the training as effective, a significant minority were neutral or found it unhelpful, indicating inconsistencies in training quality or relevance. Again, this gap suggests a

need to better align training content with participants' needs and real-world contexts to improve overall effectiveness.

Tools and resources

13. Tools used to authenticate news stories



Source: Field Study, 2025

The table indicates that journalists primarily use direct contact with legitimate authorities, fact-checking websites, internet verification tools and consultations with subject matter experts to authenticate news materials. Social media, open-source intelligence tools, AI and internal methods are less frequently employed. It suggests that most journalists in Nigeria prefer direct sourcing and independent fact-checking over technology-based automation.

14. Accessibility of Tools

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Very Accessible	77	38.5
Accessible	108	54.0
Neutral	6	3.0
Scarcely Accessible	9	4.5

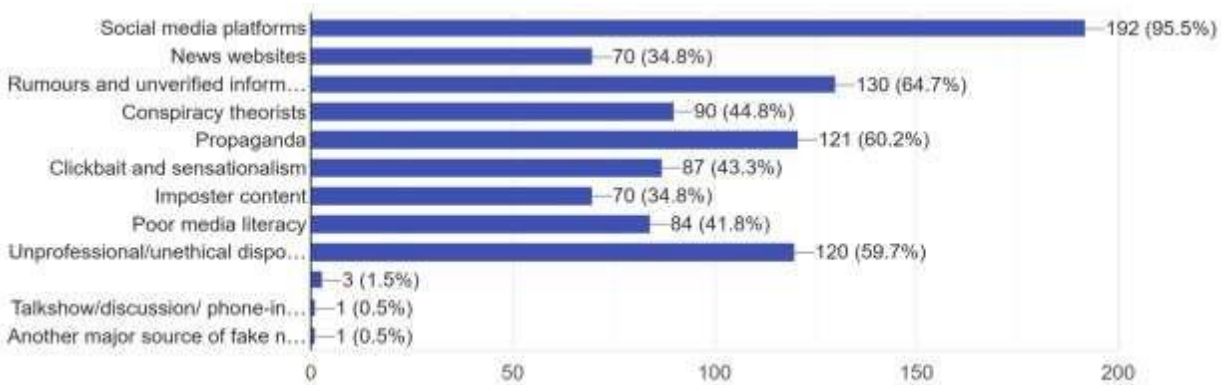
Total	200	100
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Source: Field study 2025

While the majority (over 92%) find tools at least somewhat accessible, a small but important minority face limitations that could hinder their ability to effectively verify information. The implication here is that although most users can access verification tools, the minority experiencing access limitations may struggle with effective information verification, potentially creating disparities in digital literacy and undermining efforts to combat misinformation for that group.

Challenges in spotting fake news

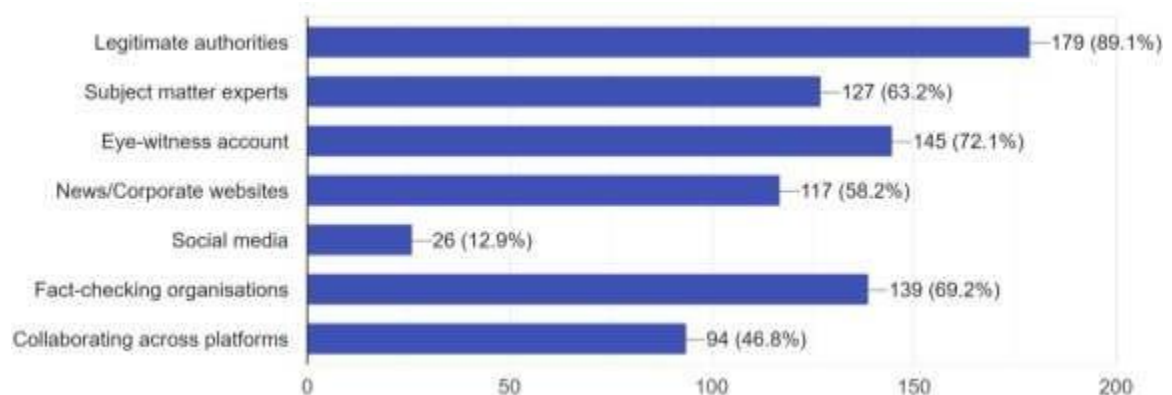
15. Most common sources of fake news



Source: Field study, 2025

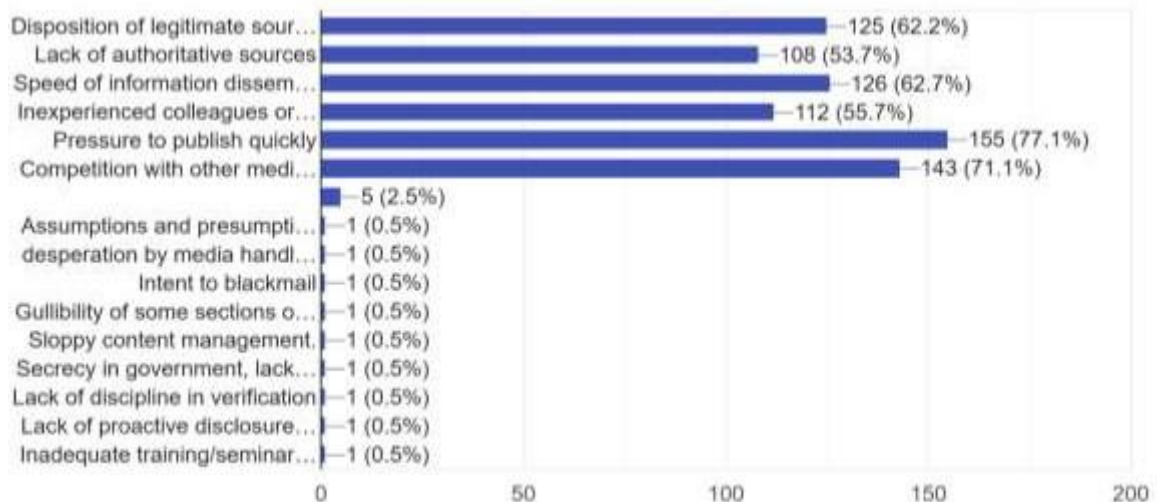
The result that social media serves as the primary conduit for fake news, closely followed by rumours and unverified information, has critical implications for information integrity and public trust. It underscores the pervasive influence of digital platforms in shaping perceptions and amplifying misinformation, often beyond the reach of traditional gatekeeping mechanisms.

16. How Nigerian journalists verify authenticity of news



The pattern of responses shows that legitimate authorities, eyewitness accounts, fact-checking entities and subject matter experts are the most common avenues Nigerian journalists verify the authenticity of news materials.

17. Common challenges faced in spotting fake news



Source: Field Study, 2025

This implies that the urgent need for quick publication and competition for audience attention often compromises the accuracy of identifying fake news. Additionally, the frequent lack of legitimate sources or roadblocks encountered in the process further complicates verification, highlighting systemic challenges in balancing timely reporting with reliable information verification.

18. Frequency of fake news encounters

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Very Often	74	37.0
Often	63	31.5
Sometimes	49	24.5
Rarely	12	6.0
Never	2	1.0
Total	200	100

Source:

That an insignificant percentage indicated rare or no encounters indicates clearly that fake news is a widespread and persistent issue.

Impact of fake news on journalism

19. Prevalence of fake news on audience trust

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Seriously Affected	63	31.5
Affected	48	24.0
Neutral	17	8.5
Barely Affected	45	22.5
Not Affected	27	13.5
Total	200	100

Source: Field Study, 2025

Trust erosion appears to be a significant concern among respondents based on their feedback. More than half indicated that it negatively impacts trust within their organisations. A notable number disagreed with this view, while a small group expressed uncertainty about its effect on trust levels.

20. Social Media effects on new credibility

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Seriously Affected	126	63.0
Affected	61	30.5
Neutral	8	4.0
Barely Affected	4	2.0
Not Affected	1	0.5
Total	200	100

Source: Field Study, 2025

There was a near consensus that social media plays a significant role in shaping perceptions of news integrity, with only 6.5 percent remaining neutral or dismissive. It indicates the monumental effect social platforms have had on the quality of information disseminated within the media landscape.

21. Role of social media in the spread of fake news

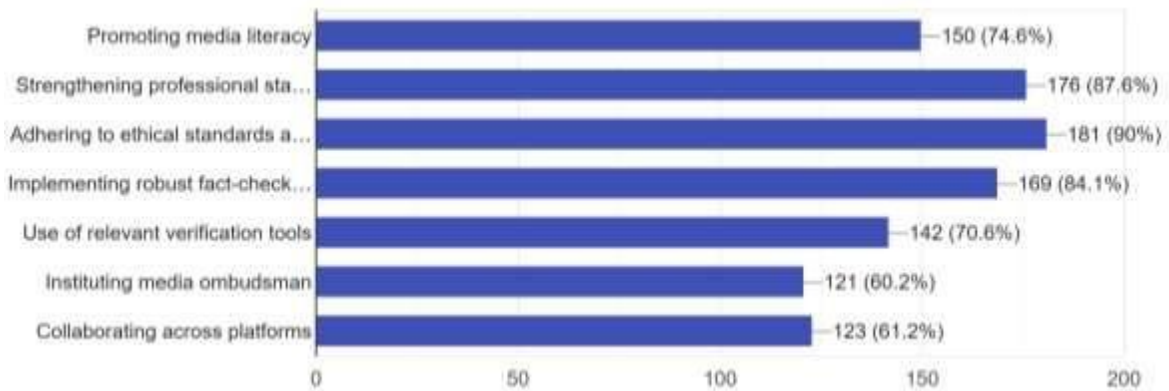
Item	Frequency	Percentage
Very Significant	167	83.5
Significant	32	16.0
Neutral	1	0.5

Total	200	100
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Source: Field Study, 2025

An overwhelming majority asserted that online media platforms are the main conduits of fake news and other forms of misinformation, thus showing social media not just as a significant conveyor of fake news but a major contributor to the erosion of news credibility.

22. How can journalists effectively address fake news?



Source: Field Study 2025

The trend of responses suggests that journalists in Nigeria want not just tools but a holistic and structural approach to address the issue of fake news. The feedback reveals a strong preference among many respondents for ethical standards and disciplinary actions to enhance professional integrity, as well as the need for robust fact-checking systems and the promotion of media literacy.

23. Significant factor contributing to the spread of fake news

Item	Frequency	Percentage
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Pecuniary Interest	54	27.0
Deadline Pressure	22	11.0
Illiteracy/Ignorance	27	13.5
Mischief arising from vested interest	80	40.0
Influence/Power	17	8.5
Total	200	100

Source: Field study 2025

This suggests that deliberate manipulation driven by vested interests is the primary cause of misinformation or related problems, with financial motives also playing a significant role. Factors such as illiteracy, ignorance, deadline pressure and influence collectively contribute significantly, indicating that both intentional and structural issues fuel the challenges observed.

Discussion of Findings

This work sought to determine the level of Nigerian Journalists' understanding of the issue of fake news, identify the challenges faced by Nigerian Journalists in spotting fake news, investigate the motivations driving the spread of fake news among journalists in Nigeria, seek potential remedies to the challenges posed by fake news in Nigeria.

The survey indicates that journalists frequently encounter fake news, signposting a broad awareness of the existence and prevalence of false information and its entrenchment within the Nigerian media ecosystem. These factors contribute to the challenge journalists face in identifying fake content, especially when racing against deadlines. Notably, this struggle affects journalists across all age groups and experience

levels, meaning that even the most seasoned professionals are not immune to the difficulties of recognising fake news.

The permissive media environment and the widespread availability of various social media platforms further compound the problem. This finding is in tune with Omoera and Uwalaka (2023), who argued that the widespread availability of diverse social media offerings has made the Nigerian media space the domain for fake news, where all sorts of online media practitioners showcase their dispositions. It also speaks to the concern expressed by Habib and Akila (2021) that the situation requires an urgent collaboration between mainstream journalism and alternative forms of journalism to develop effective and efficient practices in the country. However, this concern might be a hard push if the institutional and regulatory structures are not reinforced to ensure certification and compliance with professional and ethical requirements by all those in the field.

Even though the overwhelming indication is that social media is very significant in fake news proliferation, which is a global trend, it carries unique implications for Nigeria where digital platforms are now central to news consumption and dissemination. The rapid flow of information, coupled with a lack of fact-checking and the popularity of viral content, creates a volatile environment where falsehoods thrive, a factor that makes journalists more vulnerable to political propaganda during elections. This finding supports the perspective of Wyorkson and Okocha (2023), who assert that the speed at which new media generates information makes fake news and hoaxes inevitable. Their position was that though evolving, the menace is yet to hit epidemic levels; but that is at variance with the level of concern by respondents on the effect of fake news on the credibility of news offerings in the Nigerian landscape and the postulation by Omoera and Uwalaka (2023) that the Nigerian media landscape was fast becoming the habitat for fake news and misinformation.

The findings echo concerns from researchers like Adams et al. (2023), Inobemhe et al. (2020) and Egelhofer and Lecheler (2019), who observed that technological advancements have expanded the reach and complexity of misinformation, leading to what Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) called information pollution. The polluted information landscape has infected the journalists' professional nose for news, especially while processing information for public consumption.

The pollution of the media landscape with fake news is helped by certain factors, the same factors that have tended to block the sensibilities of journalists against recognising and, or acknowledging unwholesome information during gathering and processing of news materials. It has become disturbing as the desire to break the news tends to assume preeminence over professional judgement.

The survey identified deadline pressure as a major culprit. Competition for attention in a crowded media space, lack of authoritative sources, speed of information dissemination and the activities of non-professionals who have invaded the practice space form the collective that impairs the professional consciousness of journalists while gathering and processing information. These point to systemic problems where institutional gaps and deadline pursuits make it more difficult for journalists to adhere to the ethical standards, critical judgment and sense of responsibility that define professional journalism.

Overreliance on familiar sources or when specific information aligns with pre-existing beliefs becloud the sense of interrogation by journalists. These issues were also identified by Stepney and Lally (2024) and Batalha (2020). The survey suggests that the identified problems stem more from professional shortcomings than institutional or economic gaps. The first three issues are all factors that diligence and professional handling can resolve. Even the fourth item - disposition of legitimate sources, often results from a lack of confidence in the journalist involved. However, resorting to confidentiality of information has also been a regular tool in official quarters to evade interrogation of situations.

Another challenge was training and capacity gaps. While 66% of respondents reported having received some form of training on fake news detection, only 45% of the trained rated the training as very effective. It indicates a gap between the training programmes provided and the practical needs of newsrooms. Workshops and seminars were the most common training methods among participants, and these were usually organised by external partners, probably with vested interests. These interests may not align with professional requirements that could help in dealing with information disorders but helping to project vested interests.

It was evident that a significant portion of Nigerian Journalists do not have the basic training in journalism and rely on on-the-job experience to carry out their duties. This lack of basic training largely determines their level of understanding of news and, consequently, the output of their offerings and the consequences it wreaks on the larger society, concerns already expressed by Wyorkson and Okocha (2023), who also noted that the unregulated environment gives impetus to proliferation – another pointer in this work which indicated that a notable percentage of the untrained might account for the proliferation of fake news in the media.

Notwithstanding, indicators suggest the existence of verification practices; however, most journalists rely on traditional verification methods: direct sources, subject matter experts and fact-checking websites. Moreover, the use of advanced digital tools and the extent of collaboration across platforms remain notably low. This limitation highlights the necessity for increased technological empowerment and robust institutional support. In this context, a comprehensive and structural approach is imperative to address the pervasive issue of fake news.

Addressing these challenges requires not only the leverage of technological capabilities but also the cultivation of collaborative frameworks that facilitate the dissemination of accurate information. There was a strong preference among many respondents for ethical standards and disciplinary actions to enhance professional

integrity, including the need for robust fact-checking systems and the promotion of media literacy. These viewpoints align with themes in media sociology regarding the restoration of trust in media and enriching the public's critical media literacy, as this is essential in the conversation about rebuilding trust in an era defined by "post-Truth" politics.

Motivations

Nevertheless, certain motivations drive the spread of fake news among journalists in Nigeria. Six major factors, among others, were identified as giving impetus to fake news in the journalism space in the country. These are: pressure to publish quickly, as opposed to the normal production deadline pressure; competition with other media outfits which often results in rushing to the public with half-baked offerings; the speed of information dissemination which allows instant gathering, processing and dissemination; disposition of legitimate sources which pushes journalist to publish only what they have; and inexperienced hands who have flocked the arena without proper certification nor accreditation.

Given these factors, regulation becomes inevitable. Regulation of activities that involve the public's right to expression has always been a contentious issue in Nigeria. It is more so with digital media, which has democratised the media space. Though proponents of regulation argue that it is necessary, they also seek a balance taking into account oversight, the protection of free expression and the promotion of a thriving digital economy. Their position has been that while digital media regulation is necessary in Nigeria to address emerging challenges, it must be designed to avoid infringing on freedom of expression, economic opportunity and individual privacy. A collaborative, balanced approach is essential for fostering accountability and democratic values in the digital age.

Remedies to the malaise are woven around the key issues from the survey and include strengthening professional training because there is a need for more comprehensive, targeted and regular professional development programmes that connect with the current realities in journalism; enhancing verification practices by

adopting advanced digital tools and collaborative platforms to improve fact-checking efficiency; institutional and regulatory reinforcement through a balanced regulatory framework that promotes accountability while protecting freedom of expression; promoting ethical standards by enforcing ethical standards and disciplinary measures to maintain professional integrity in journalism. Importantly, there is a need for intensive media literacy and public awareness campaign to help individuals critically assess information and combat the various shades of misinformation.

CONCLUSION

This study presents a picture of Nigerian journalism's struggle with fake news. Two significant findings were highlighted: first, the scope of the problem and the preparedness of journalists to address the challenge, provided they have adequate support and training; and second, the necessary infrastructure, including tools and a conducive working environment, to address misinformation.

As Nigeria continues to navigate the complexities of digital transformation, enhancing the skills capacity of its media professionals is not just desirable - it is a necessity. The insights from this study provide a solid foundation for developing practical, policy-oriented and collaborative strategies for strengthening journalism practice and restoring public trust.

Recommendations

1. The government and industry stakeholders should develop and implement comprehensive, targeted and ongoing professional development programmes for journalists, focusing on digital verification techniques and ethical standards. This will entail the implementation of targeted professional development strategies for journalists, emphasizing specialised training in digital verification methods such as fact-checking and geolocation. Integrating ethics training that emphasises accuracy and accountability is crucial. It should foster collaboration

among stakeholders and include regular refresher courses to promote continuous learning.

2. There should be a collaborative effort between the government and media stakeholders to establish a balanced regulatory approach that provides oversight while respecting freedom of expression and fostering democratic discourse.
3. Media owners, professional bodies and the ombudsman should enforce strict ethical standards and implement disciplinary actions within the journalism profession to uphold integrity and prevent the spread of misinformation. Media literacy is key in this pursuit. Implementing media literacy campaigns and enforcing ethical standards in journalism is imperative. These initiatives will promote critical evaluation of information, reduce misinformation and restore public trust, thereby fostering accountability and informed civic participation, ultimately revitalizing the public sphere and supporting democratic resilience and transparency.

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