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ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA NEWS CREDIBILITY AMONG THE RESIDENTS OF ENUGU METROPOLIS

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Keywords:

Abstract

The study investigated social media news credibility among the residents of Enugu Metropolis. The survey research design was used in the study. The sample size was 369 and the population comprised the residents of Enugu Metropolis which is 764,289. Multi-stage sampling technique was employed in selecting the sample systematically after which the questionnaire was distributed online and some physically. The findings in the study shows that the most used social media platforms among residents of Enugu Metropolis are Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp more than the other platforms and they use these platforms mostly for information and communication. The Majority of the participants had the opinion that social media news are credible based on timeliness, source, citations and credibility of the author or organization. Based on the findings of this study, the following were recommended; that necessary codes of conduct and ethics should be adopted by social media owners to guarantee credibility and accuracy of information. Media literacy should be encouraged among the users of social media to enable them control and determine what they do with the information that they receive over the media. It is recommended that effort should be made on the part of the audience to compare information obtained from social media with other available news sources before accepting or even fleeting the same information to other helpless users and many more.

Introduction

The use of social media platform has become so popular that it has become the most visited and used media type.. Social media is different from traditional media in so many ways such as reach, frequency, accessibility, immediate feedback and more. According to Digital Report of Nigeria (2023) showed that there were 122.5 million internet users in Nigeria and Nigeria's internet penetration rate stood at 55.4 percent. Of the total population, 28.20 million used social media; Facebook had 21.75 million users, 31.60 million users on Youtube, 7.10 million users on Instagram, 1.2 million users for LinkedIn, 12.35 million users for Snapchat, 4.95 million users for Twitter, and 33 million users are active on Whatsapp.

In an era dominated by digital connectivity, social media has become a pervasive source of information. Recent concerns about credibility of news on social media are mainly because of rapid dissemination of news and easy access to information production. Nowadays, anyone can be a writer or a reporter per say, as there is no requirement for content creation on the internet or social media; this makes the issue of credibility increasingly paramount. In fact, many websites operate without much supervision or editorial review unlike the traditional media (i.e., print) publishing, information posted on the web may not be subjected to filtering through professional gatekeepers, and it often lacks traditional authority indicators such as author identity and there, nobody or organization, responsible for regulating these activities.

Social media can be described as modern information communication technologies used for quick gathering, processing, storage, dissemination, of news stories/information and which allows for instantaneous feedback. The social media in Nigeria has become a steady source of news for Nigerians but how credible are the contents from these various social media platforms?. The credibility of news on social media is like a "border line" that mediates an organization and its strategic publics (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2000).The credibility of the channel/medium of communication affects the selective participation of the audience with the medium.

Accordingly, individual audiences are paying closer attention to the media that they perceive to be credible. When individual audiences rely more on a certain communication medium for information seeking, they are likely to rate the medium more credible than other media. Fast-developing technology, especially in the digital media environment, has empowered individuals and other stakeholder organizations to be creators of communication messages rather than remaining as the stagnant receiver of communication content (McClure, 2007), unlike the olden days when organizations were often the only senders of messages, the communication process has increasingly become multidirectional, amplifying horizontal influences among individual public members themselves. Additionally, as the influence of emergent social media continues to increase, individual members of publics are starting to demand participatory communication with and from organizations instead of being passive recipients of messages, publics are now active enough to select communication channels, especially when they care about an issue (Rubin, 2002).

Oxford Dictionary defines news as a broadcast or published report of news that is newly received or noteworthy information. News usually contains facts, events and issues happening locally, nationally or globally with the sole aim of informing the public and providing them with timely and relevant information. News Credibility refers to the perceived trustworthiness, reliability and accuracy of information presented by news sources or channels. The Internet has become integrated into our lives as an important, if not very essential tool for information and communication (Fallows, 2005). The large quantity of information available online combined with heavy reliance on the Internet by information seekers raise issues of the credibility or quality of information found online. Credibility simply means the believability or reliability of information or its source.

News sharing refers to the act of disseminating information, typically in the form of news articles, reports or updates with others through various channels like the traditional media, social media platforms, messaging apps or direct communication. News sharing is a significant means by which the public can keep abreast with happenings around them, beyond their immediate environment, stay connected and also discuss significant topics. A shift has been

noticed in news sharing process with the emergence of new media. News sharing has moved beyond the usual 9.00pm broadcast on national television to the website people visit, the post they read on social media and WhatsApp, the tweets seen on twitter, videos watched on Blogs etc. and these pieces of information make up the news in this new media age. Social media have transformed the landscape of news sharing.

With social media, participatory journalism, creation of online community, instantaneous feedback, easy and fast news delivery, wider access to news stories is made possible and easier (Olise, 2019). In spite of these emerging benefits and potentials received from the use of social media for news sharing, there exist a raise on the issue of social media news credibility because anyone with the required exquisite device and Internet connection can adequately be involved in the production and distribution of any type of news that may look very believable even when it is just fake news (Siapera, 2018) and we are also in an era where misinformation and disinformation can easily spread through social media channels. It is against this background that this study investigates social media news credibility among residents of Enugu Metropolis.

Statement of the Problem

The widespread use of social media as a source of news consumption has transformed the information landscape and has great impact on how individuals perceive and engage with news content. Nowadays, residents of Enugu Metropolis find themselves immersed in the use of social media platforms as a source of news and the credibility of this news has become a subject of great concern due to the high rate of misinformation and disinformation. Studies such as Zubiaga et al. (2018) concluded that the rapid dissemination of information on social media can lead to the amplification of both accurate and misleading content, making it imperative to evaluate the trustworthiness of news sources in this digital age. Pennycook and Rand (2018) emphasized the understanding of the factors that influence news credibility judgments which is crucial for devising effective strategies to mitigate the spread of false information. Vosoughi et al. (2018) highlighted the contagious nature of misinformation on social media, emphasizing the urgency of developing interventions

that address credibility perceptions among residents. Apparently, a need for future research to build on existing findings becomes inevitably obvious. Hence, the need to empirically assess social media news credibility among residents of Enugu Metropolis.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to access social media news credibility among residents of Enugu Metropolis. Specific objectives of the study were to;

1. Find out the extent to which residents of Enugu Metropolis consume social media news.

2. Ascertain the perception of social media news credibility among the residents of Enugu Metropolis.

3. Determine the impact of social media news on the residents of Enugu Metropolis.

4. Find out how residents of Enugu Metropolis verify credible news on social media.

Literature Review

Social Media

Social media is an internet-based form of communication used as a means of interaction among people in which they create, share and/or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. An average smart phone user, cannot go a day without visiting at least one social media platform, it may seem like one have missed out on a lot. Social media platforms are used to have conversations, share information, educate, make connections, broaden your knowledge, learn new things, advertise and create web content.

Social media refers to online platforms and technologies that facilitate the creation, sharing, and exchange of user-generated content, ideas, information, and multimedia (such as text, images, videos, and audio) in virtual communities and networks. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media can be defined as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. This definition emphasizes the user-centric nature of social media and its reliance on user-generated content. Furthermore, Boyd and Ellison (2008) define

social network sites (SNSs), a subset of social media, as "web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. Some Social Media Tools and Platforms include Blogs, Snapchat, LinkedIn, WeChat, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other social networking sites.

Impact of Social Media Credible News Dissemination

Social Media has redefined the structure, dimensions and the complexity of the news (Berkowitz and Schwartz, 2016). By providing access to a large amount of information, people can share different beliefs and values; however one of the implications of this is fake news. (George et al, 2018). Fake News has become a major part of social media because it raises doubts about information credibility, quality and verification since anyone can share any information if the user owns a smart phone and also they are mostly shared to generate a high flow of online traffic in order to create wealth. Circulating misinformation on social media can have real-world consequences, ranging from public health risks to social unrest. Assessing the credibility of social media news allows for the identification of potentially harmful content and enables stakeholders to take appropriate measures to mitigate its impact and prevent harm to individuals and communities.

Social Media News Credibility

Social Media News Credibility can be defined as the level of trustworthiness, reliability, and accuracy of news content disseminated through social media platforms. It encompasses the evaluation of various factors that contribute to the credibility of news sources, content, and information shared on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and others.This involves assessing the reputation and reliability of the news outlet or individual sharing the news on social media. Factors such as the organization's track record, journalistic standards, and editorial practices contribute to source credibility. Evaluating the accuracy, completeness, and objectivity of the news content through fact-checking, verification of information, avoidance of

sensationalism or bias, and adherence to ethical standards. Cross-verify the information with other credible sources. If the news is true, it's likely to be reported by multiple reputable news sources.

Review of Related Studies

The empirical review gives evidence based and factual analysis of related works done in the same area of study or are related. They are;

Ezema and Ezema (2023) in their study titled "*the impacts of social media during the 2023 presidential election in Enugu Metropolis*"revealed that Enugu metropolis residents get information from social media mostly from facebook and whatsappand that it had great influence on their decision during the election. This work differs from mine by the population studied.

Okorji (2020) conducted a study on "*perception of social media as news sources among residents of south-east Nigeria*" He found out that the residents of south East do not perceive social media platforms as credible sources of news and recommends that proper checks should be done to ascertain the authenticity of the news gotten through social media This work differs from mine by the population and final result.

In relation to this, Chukwu (2022) in his study "*perception of Abakaliki residents on social media coverage of Covid-19 pandemic: implication for crisis management in Nigeria*"showed that social media carry lots of news items of public interest which mainstream media ignore and covers official corruption and bad governance but the absence of checkpoints makes it unprofessional. It recommends the strengthening of social media for complimentary journalism. This work differs from mine by the topic studied.

Similarly, Igben and Oronukpo (2022) carried out a research on "*influence of news credibility on public perception of the broadcast media in Nigeria*". The study revealed that the public confidence in government owned broadcast media is low compared to private owned broadcast stations. The work differs from mine in the population studied and topic.

In the same vein, Agboola, Essien and Okpanachi (2016) in their study on *"credibility of news on social media: a perceptual survey of Abuja residents"* shows that factors such as accessibility, convenience and ease of use, has made it impossible for user to deliberate on the authenticity of the information that spread across social media. Most respondents use social media for both informative as well as communication purposes but prefer social media to the traditional media. This study is different from mine in the population.

Theoretical Framework

Social Responsibility Theory

The Social Responsibility Theory of the press is a significant framework in understanding the role of media, particularly in assessing the credibility of news disseminated via social media platforms. This theory was primarily developed by the Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press in 1947, led by Robert M. Hutchins, who chaired the commission. The theory was a response to the growing concerns over the concentration of media ownership and the potential for abuse of power by media conglomerates. It was established as a way to balance the freedom of the press with the need for media to act responsibly and serve the public good. The Social Responsibility Theory posits that media, while enjoying freedom, should also be held accountable for serving society's best interests. Unlike earlier libertarian theories that emphasized absolute freedom of the press, Social Responsibility Theory introduces the idea that media has a duty to inform the public truthfully, provide diverse perspectives, and promote societal welfare. This is particularly relevant in today's digital age, where social media platforms have become dominant sources of news. Social Responsibility Theory has been widely used in various studies to examine the ethical obligations of the media and their impact on society. For example: McQuail (1987) discusses the theory in his book Mass Communication Theory, highlighting its relevance in modern media systems where the balance between freedom and responsibility remains crucial. Shoemaker & Reese (1996) apply the theory to analyze media content, emphasizing that media professionals have a duty to prioritize public interest over commercial gains.

The Social Responsibility Theory is relevant to this study because it provides a framework to examine the role of social media platforms in disseminating news and the ethical implications of their practices. According to the theory, media platforms should ensure that the news they distribute is accurate, fair, and verifiable. In Enugu Metropolis, as the study seeks to understand the extent to which residents consume social media news, the theory suggests that these platforms have a responsibility to provide credible information. The theory would argue that social media companies should implement stringent measures to prevent the spread of misinformation.

Methodology

The researchers adopted the survey research method because the design allows respondents to express their opinions and provide sensitive information without fear of judgment or consequences. The population of study comprised of the residents of Enugu Metropolis, made up of Iva-valley, Government Residential Areas, New GRA, New Haven, New Haven Extension, Asata, Ogbete/Coal Camp, Ogui, New Layout, Independence Layout , Nike, Emene, Trans-Ekulu, Abakpa, Achara Layout, Uwani, Maryland and Gariki. The population of the study is 764,289. This was obtained using a projected population of 722,664 from the 2006 National population Census as (provided by the National Bureau of Statistics). Sample size of 369 wad obtained using the Australian Online Sample Size Calculator, developed by the National Statistical Service of Australia. The multi-stage sampling technique was adopted. Questionnaire was the measuring instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was given to an expert in mass communication to ensure both face and content validity. The test Re-test reliability method was used to find out whether the test scores are reliable. Copies of the questionnaire were administered personally by the researcher and collected immediately. Data collected through the questionnaire were analysed using the simple frequency and percentage method.

Discussion of Results/Findings

Research question one: *To what extent are residents of Enugu Metropolis consume social media news***?** The findings indicate that the majority of the respondents have social media accounts so they are

exposed to social media platforms where they get news. The majority of the respondents prefer Facebook and Instagram was the second most used, followed by Whatsapp, Twitter and Youtube, .On how often they receive credible news, they receive credible news to a large extent. Residents of Enugu Metropolis use social media frequently, majority use social media daily, others few times weekly and the rest rarely. From the above, we can conclude that residents of Enugu Metropolis consume social media news.

Research question two: *What is the perception of social media news credibility among the residents of Enugu Metropolis***?** The Majority agree that they get very credible news form social media, the second most see them as credible the least number see social media platforms as non-credible source credible but this level of credibility still leaves room for uncertainty and it is a sign of low-level credibility of the social media. This finding contradicts the submission of (Johnson & Kaye, 2009) that when individual users rely more on a particular medium for information, they consider it to be more credible than other media. Most respondents here use social networks as their primary means of information, yet they have varying degrees of doubts about the credibility of this social media. From the above, we can deduce that residents of Enugu Metropolis perceive social media news as credible.

Research question three: *What is the Impact of social media news on the residents of Enugu Metropolis***?** The Majority of the respondents agree that social media news have an impact on their lives and that they use social media mostly for information and communication. Their exposure to unverified news on social media tend to affect the trust they have on the media but research have found that people react differently based on individual differences. As revealed above, social media have an impact on the residents of Enugu Metropolis.

Research question four: *How do the residents of Enugu Metropolis verify the credibility of news on social media***?** The Majority of the respondents state that through reputable sources, timeliness, credibility of author or organisation followed by citation are ways they verify credibility of news on social media but most of the respondents are likely to share news without verification when it involves safety before they verification.

Recommendations

The use of social media is a phenomenon that is fast and easily spreading among the residents of Enugu. Factors such as credibility, accuracy, news-worthiness and believability can sometimes be questioned in the use of social media because it is in great accessibility, convenience, and ease of use which has somehow made it impossible for individuals to deliberate on the authenticity of the information before they share across social media.

Based on the findings of this study, the following were recommended: that necessary codes of conduct and ethics should be adopted by social media owners to guarantee credibility and accuracy of information. Media literacy should be encouraged among the users of social media to enable them control and determine what they do with the information that they receive over the media. It is recommended that effort should be made on the part of the audience to compare information obtained from social media with other available news sources before accepting or even fleeting the same information to other helpless users. Special social media accounts should be created by the government to give out information on social media and also debut fake news.

Social media should also be used to create awareness on important issues on the law and human rights of the people and often bottom-to-top communication should be encouraged because through the social media you get to hear the needs and problems of the people you govern.

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