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Fact-Checking: A Necessity to Combat the Surge of Disinformation in Nigerian Online Media

Gerçeklik Kontrolü: Nijerya Çevrimiçi Medyasında Artan Dezenformasyonla Mücadele Gerekliliği

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Abstract
Many news websites are also battling with various manifestations of disinformation in the contemporary times. To this end, this work aims to understand the extent of adoption of digital fact-checkers as an alternative measure to the traditional gatekeeping procedures in convention newsrooms. Hence, the study designed the following research question: to what extent do media houses in Nigeria fact-check information before publishing? In what ways can fact-check tools improve the quality and credibility of online news content? The study was guided by the gatekeeping ideology and the Technology Acceptance Model. A multi-method approach was utilised, suing a descriptive survey, of 146 journalists from major national newspapers were recruited and 3 editors served as participants of the key informants' interview, and the newspapers of the selected editors were also content analysed. The study adopted a multi-method analysis (descriptive analysis, narrative analysis and content analysis) to address the complex variables within the work. Out of the 146 copies of the questionnaire shared, only 106 (72.6%) were valid for analysis. The findings reveal a moderate awareness of digital fact checkers. Also, it can be deduced that fact-checking tools have improved the quality and credibility of online news contents in the Nigerian news space. A comparative analysis showed a marked improvement in news accuracy when digital fact checkers were applied (p < .05). However, challenges such as lack of commitment to deploy and fund the utilisation of digital fact-checkers, limited skills and proficiency in the use of digital fact-checkers, lack of strong policies and regulations compelling media houses to use digital fact-checkers, are some of the issues with deploying digital fact-checkers in Nigeria.

Öz
Günümüzde pek çok haber sitesi, dezenformasyonun farklı görünümleriyle mücadele etmektedir. Bu doğrultuda bu çalışma, geleneksel haber merkezlerindeki klasik kapı bekçiliği süreçlerine alternatif bir önlem olarak dijital gerçeklik denetimi (fact-checking) araçlarının ne ölçüde benimsendiğini anlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda çalışma şu araştırma sorularını temel almıştır: Nijerya'daki medya kuruluşları yayımlamadan önce bilgileri ne ölçüde gerçeklik denetimine tabi tutmaktadır? Gerçeklik denetimi araçları çevrimiçi haber içeriklerinin kalitesini ve güvenilirliğini hangi yollarla artırabilir?

Çalışmada kuramsal çerçeve olarak Teknoloji Kabul Modeli'nin (TAM) ilkelerinden yararlanılmıştır. Betimleyici tarama deseni benimsenmiş; başlıca ulusal gazetelerden 146 katılımcı araştırmaya dahil edilmiş, ayrıca kilit bilgi sağlayıcı görüşmeleri için 6 editörle mülakat yapılmış ve seçilen editörlerin görev yaptığı gazeteler içerik çözümlemesine tabi tutulmuştur. Çalışmadaki karmaşık değişkenleri ele almak için çok yöntemli bir analiz benimsenmiştir. Dağıtılan 146 anket formundan yalnızca 106'sı (%72,6) analiz için geçerli bulunmuştur.

Bulgular, dijital gerçeklik denetimi araçlarına ilişkin orta düzeyde bir farkındalık olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca, dijital gerçeklik denetimi araçlarının Nijerya haber ekosisteminde çevrimiçi haber içeriklerinin kalite ve güvenilirliğini artırdığı sonucuna ulaşılabilmektedir. Karşılaştırmalı analiz, dijital gerçeklik denetimi araçlarının kullanıldığı durumlarda haber doğruluğunda anlamlı bir artış olduğunu göstermiştir (p < .05). Bununla birlikte, dijital gerçeklik denetimi araçlarının hayata geçirilmesi ve finansmanına yönelik kurumsal bağlılığın zayıf olması; bu araçları kullanmaya ilişkin sınırlı beceri ve yeterlilikler; medya kuruluşlarını dijital gerçeklik denetimi araçlarını kullanmaya zorlayacak güçlü politika ve düzenlemelerin eksikliği gibi sorunlar, Nijerya'da dijital gerçeklik denetimi araçlarının yaygınlaştırılmasının önündeki başlıca engeller arasında yer almaktadır.

Introduction

The media is considered the "mirror" of modern society. The media shape our lives. Today, the media plays a vital role as the purveyor of information. This function is exemplified by dedicating the various channels, from television, radio, newspapers, to new media platforms as viable sources where people can get diverse streams of information daily. Paul and Rai (2021) opine that the media possess the exclusive power to select issues and events in the world, decide what constitutes news, filter and frame issues, contextualise the problem and set the agenda.

Meanwhile, the information role of the media has also assigned a unique responsibility to the media, which is the "gatekeeping" role. This function has directly vested the media with the role of determining what should be made known to the public and what should not. In other words, the media is then seen as being in control of the messages and information that are circulated in the society. They determine access to news and information (Asemah, 2016). In the views of Kovach and Rosentiel in the *American Press Institute* (2017), they posit that the purpose of journalism is not only defined by technology, journalists, or the techniques they employ; rather, it is defined by something more basic, which is the functionality of news in the lives of people. Information is then seen as the core element that drives the digital society and the key to how the digital society adds value and redistributes power (Shin & Park, 2017).

The new technologies have also increased the mobility of Nigerian reporters, ensuring regular updates and keeping the public informed, to the point where texts, videos, photos, and podcasts can now be sent on-the-spot and, in some cases, emailed to or uploaded into the headquarters' server from thousands of miles away (Olaito, 2016). However, the introduction of digital technology, particularly social media, presents newsrooms with new ways to engage with their audiences. Journalists use various tools and platforms to communicate with their audiences in the digital age, including online platforms, comment sections, discussion forums, social networks, and audience analytics (Belair-Gagnon et al. 2018; Usher, 2016).

As online news production and dissemination become more complex, the traditional newsroom filtering process, which is typified by the gate-keeping procedure in conventional journalism, becomes increasingly elusive. This arrangement is in place to prevent the intrusion of several news pollutants; meanwhile, disinformation has been identified as one of the corrosive news pollutants that the contemporary news information is currently battling with in this digital age. In the reasoning of Tekoniemi et al. (2022), the democratisation of information through online channels has, unfortunately, opened the floodgates to misinformation and disinformation. In the digital age, disinformation can proliferate through social media and other online channels (Pérez-Escolar et al. 2021). This captures the sentiment of Schankiya (2018), which indicates that as more and more false information lands in front of us, it is becoming more difficult to identify something as inaccurate.

With this, disinformation has been described by McGonagle (2017, p. 203) as "information that has been deliberately fabricated and disseminated to deceive and mislead others into believing falsehoods or doubting verifiable facts; it is disinformation that is presented as, or is likely to be perceived as news." The existence of disinformation and fake news is not new according to Taylor (2016). It is seen as totally or partially false content, created intentionally to deceive and/or manipulate a specific audience, through a format that imitates news reports to attract the readers' attention and to persuade them to believe in falsehood, to obtain more clicks and shares across social media platforms (Baptista & Gradim, 2020).

Inventors of fake news publish stories to misinform, sway opinions, spread propaganda, incite hate, alter perceptions, etc., through opinions, predictions, and blatantly fabricated narratives (Muigai, 2020). This has continued to erode the credibility of news and information, even though some studies have established that they travel faster than credible news (Grant, 2018; Langin, 2018). However, the development makes it incumbent on journalists to fact-check information before dissemination. This is because online news platforms need some semblance of purification, filtering, and a form of gate-keeping process. This activity is fulfilled with the emergence of fact-checking efforts.

Leonard et al. (2020) assert that fact checking is a form of critical, investigative inquiry. It includes various approaches and practices. Justifying the importance of fact-checking information in journalism, Lewandowsky et al. (2012) believe that fact-checking is the bulwark of journalistic practice and that its absence will castrate journalism. The whole idea of digital fact-checking refers to the use of modern digital tools to verify the authenticity of information.

Michael (2023) insists that disinformation can reduce the credibility of any news media. Therefore, there is an urgent need to deploy effective means to curb disinformation, especially in the online space. Of course, the traditional gatekeeping may not be feasible in this case. Anipah (2020) and Tomkin (2020) justify the need for digital factcheckers and online journalism continues to gain relevance, and they imply that it is an effective way to determine the accuracy and truthfulness of any information. Maphosa (2024) pontificated that fact-checking safeguards the intrusion of credible news against news pollutants. This will make news more reliable and trustworthy (Karlsen & Aalberg, 2021).

Bateman and Jackson (2024) strongly believe that fact-checking can be an effective measure against disinformation, but they are silent of the long-term efficacy of these tools. Jacob, (2024), confirmed that automated fact-checking is easy for editors and allows for real-time verification of any information. It is also affirmed that digital fact checkers help online media spot inaccuracies or misinformation before they are published. Even though Nigerian scholars like Chukwu (2021), who surveyed 15 media houses in River State Nigeria and Simon et al. (2024), who conducted a study using 30 journalists from five newspaper houses in the FCT, contend that the adoption and use of digital automated factcheckers are still very low in the Nigerian Newsroom. Futurists like Graves and Mantzarlis (2020) express optimism that digital fact checkers are gradually becoming an irrefutable cornerstone in the fight against disinformation in the online space.

In another research by Li and Chang, (2022), they discovered that the media audience may not be ready to completely trust online news stories due to factors such as the large volume of stories, varieties of topics, unceasing mass of information, divergent contexts and the gateless nature of the online platforms, which they say can stifle the accurate detection of disinformation. They further assert that many media houses have to rely on their professional judgments, manual sorting and traditional verifications rather than deploy digital fact-checkers that are automated to verify stories. In a study by Liu et al. (2023), the researchers praised human professionals' traditional fact-checking instincts as being superior, but not in all cases. They affirmed that AI and digital alternatives are inexpensive and yet very effective in combating disinformation and fake news.

Therefore, the questions about the efficacy of digital fact checkers remain highly contested in the literature. For instance, Walter et al. (2020) raised concerns about the moderating factors on the efficacy of fact-checkers, while DeVerna et al. (2024) argued that these tools do not really improve the ability to discern the accuracy of information. Meanwhile, Wood and Porter (2019), even though they believe digital tools can be used to reduce misinformation, raised a question on the 'backfire effect' (emphasising on AI errors, weak corrections and false negatives). Therefore, this study relies on the reports of media practitioners from various online newspapers and media through surveys to investigate the effectiveness of digital fact-checkers in curtailing disinformation and fake news in Nigeria.

From the foregoing, this study will focus on the following questions:

RQ1. To what extent do media houses in Nigeria fact-check information before publishing?

RQ2. In what ways can fact-check tools improve the quality and credibility of online news content?

RQ3. What are some limitations associated with the deployment of digital fact-checking tools in Nigerian media organisations?

Hypotheses

H01: Journalists in Nigeria have low awareness levels of digital fact-checking tools.

H02: Fact-checking tools have NOT positively impacted the quality and credibility of online news content in Nigeria.

Deployment of Fact-Checking Mechanisms in Online News Publishing

Fact checking stemmed from the proliferation of false information and the failure of the conventional gatekeeping process in the online media space. (Amazeen, 2017). In the past two decades, fact-checking has grown from an in-house media function to dedicated fact-checking organisations and digital tools that can be deployed in the new journalism to counter false and inaccurate claims made in public; hence, it is part of the information landscape in which journalists work (Brandtzaeg et. al, 2018). While research has shown that fact-checking started and has tremendously grown in the global North (Wekesa et al, 2017), it is very recent in Africa and elsewhere in the global South (Cheruiyot & Ferrer-Conill, 2018).

Graves (2016) offers a history of fact-checking and a description of fact-checking methods, principles, and significance for journalism. Fact-checking has become an essential function necessitating that reporters and desk editors ensure that all materials and information are verifiable and credible. The high rise of fake sources and fake content necessitated the need for journalists to crosscheck the information at their disposal before they see the light of day, especially now that new media technologies have created avenues for all to create and handle information (Sanny& Selormey, 2020).

While the practice of fact-checking has since spread worldwide (Graves 2018), scholars and audiences have critiqued fact-checkers and their ability to determine "truth" (Brandtzaeg et al. 2018; Lim 2018; Uscinski and Butler 2013). Nevertheless, fact-checking has become a key feature and fact-checking sites have found their place in the media ecosystem (Graves 2016; Lowrey 2017).

Regarding the awareness and deployment of fact-checking sites, some studies suggest that those who are more likely to be aware are those with higher education, who are more liberal, more interested in and engaged with politics, and who produce and consume news (Amazeen et al. 2019; Gottfried et al. 2013; Graves 2013). The works of Graves's 2016,2018 research affirmed that the websites are more familiar to liberals and those most engaged with news from outlets that have been noted to cite fact-checks more frequently (Graves 2016, 2018) and which have been labelled/perceived as liberal (Knight Foundation 2018). Vargo et al. (2018) found the influence of fact-checkers in the media landscape to be small. However, the findings of

the paper raised questions about whether individuals are exposed via news outlets or whether exposure is being facilitated through other means, for instance, via more frequent shares of fact-checks by liberals on social media (Amazeen et al. 2019; Shin & Thorson 2017; Vargo et al. 2018).

Today, journalists are not the only content creators, a practice that introduces citizens into the media profession (Matyek, 2020; Samuel, 2021), and creates an increase in un-factual media content that now demands fact-checking to retain the normative media role in society. Based on this, AfricaCheck established a partnership with Twitter to provide support for Twitter's efforts to "provide better, accurate context" for Nigerians on key moments in the 2019 election campaign (Amobi, 2019). It was reported that by the end of 2019, AfricaCheck had trained 3,000 journalists in more than a dozen countries and launched the Africa Facts network of fact-checking organisations in African countries (Calvo, et al., 2021).

The urgency to embrace new tools in the age of disinformation has reached a new height due to the incessant influx of corrosive materials in the online space. Scholars like Silas 2021 and Busari 2020 feel there is a critical need to augment the newsrooms with digital tools and automated fact-checking tools, even with the presence of traditional gatekeepers, i.e., journalists and editors. However, to researchers like Tangcharoensathien et al. (2020), who express their fear about the amount of information available on the internet and the ocean of false contents that media consumers and many information seekers navigate through on a regular basis. The researchers also established that fake news and related by-products are likely to share 70% of the time more than credible information. For Don and Kenzie (2025), trusting news materials in the hands of few individuals, no matter their expertise in this age, is a dangerous exploit that could further worsen the growing level of disinformation in this age.

The whole idea of what traditional gatekeeping represents has been called into question by digital media and technological advancements. The new reality and the antecedent 'information-overload," and how fast any information can be published without much constraint, which greatly stifles the capabilities of human gates. This means that the role of gatekeepers and the speed and flow of information in the current age may overwhelm the human gates. Therefore, where the traditional control and human gates are failing, there is a need to regain control of online information flow through a deliberate synergy of sophisticated automation and conventional journalistic techniques (Simmonds, 2011). The internet comes with various multimedia formats, ranging from hypertextual, interactive, and multimodal features that are very unique for digital media (Finnemann, 2011). Consequently, this has affected the volume of information exchange on the internet, both in the ways people access information and the way information flows.

The human gates may have become very porous and seemingly helpless in the digital age because the dissemination, flow, access and distribution of online news cannot be subject to the control of a few individuals or authorities. One reason for this is that news has become greatly decentralised and the information age comes with unrestricted access to an overwhelming volume of information from countless sources, individuals and other data generated by non-human sources, including algorithms and generative AIs (Don & Kenzie, 2025). Human editors may have potentially lost control of the gate, and there is a drastic call for an immediate shift from the traditional gatekeeping process, to normalisation of an automated method to regain control of selecting accurate information, combat fake news and disinformation and deploying tools that can prioritise faster information access and dissemination, while operating within strict journalistic codes with a clearer understanding of news values (Beverly boy, 2025).

Theoretical Foundation

This research is anchored on combining ideologies—the Gatekeeping Theory and Technology Acceptance Model. The whole idea behind the gatekeeping theory explains the process adopted by the media to filter

news information by keeping unwanted information away from reaching the public. The theory sees a 'gate-keeper' as a person who peruses information in a media outlet and decides if such should be permitted to make it to the audience (Wogu, 2015). Thus, the ideology sees the process or the various stages involved in filtering news information as the 'gates."

To Lewin and White (1947), in an attempt to popularise the theory, they recognised that their many checks involved in processing information before it finally became news. These scholars also recognise the professionals and institutions put in place to determine what gets to the public and what does not, as the 'gatekeepers'. The whole idea behind this theory is to keep unwanted and controversial information out of the reach of the public.

The gatekeeping theory sees the editors as wielding the traditional and professional power to decide what becomes news and what information to remove. The editor is guided by ethical principles and industry policy, as well as editorial policy to pass such judgement and filter information before it is published. This role was previously explained to be the painstaking process involved in determining, selecting and publishing handpicked news stories from millions of news information and events that occur daily.

The current understanding and expansion of the gatekeeping process have emerged from different literature in the contemporary time to promote the idea of digital gatekeeping. For example, Wallace (2017) posits that intervention and the mediating roles of non-journalists and the influx of news information from non-traditional sources in today's information society have reduced media professionals (original gatekeepers) to mere gate watchers, which makes it imperative to recognise digital gatekeeping as an important transition of the traditional media filtering process. The work of Well (2016) labelled this as 'curated flows'. This simply explains a situation where several 'curators' (gates) exist to shape the flow of information.

The rising controversy on the effectiveness of traditional gatekeepers has been studied by some authors. The work of Welbers (2016) questions the effectiveness of desk editors and other traditional gatekeepers in media organisations in the era of digital and social media technologies. His study then advocated for a computerised approach to gatekeeping. Therefore, it is the intention of this study to shift the minds of scholars towards digital fact checkers as a necessary alternative or complement to the traditional gate-keeping process. This situation has led researchers like Voinea (2025); Hermida (2020); Salonen, et al. (2022) to conclude that the gatekeeping process now relies on both humans and technology. The rationale behind this is that even the human gatekeepers have been faulted and are constantly combating with information credibility and story verification. Since human skills and capabilities are limited in the face of the floodgates of misinformation and fake news that the society is currently struggling with, it becomes very important to look towards the use of algorithms and computer-assisted processes for gatekeeping news information in the current age. This is where the motivation to adopt technology comes in as explained by the tenets of the Technology Acceptance Model.

Thus, the technology acceptance model implies that an active audience or users intentionally make rational decisions whether to use a particular technology or medium depending on the benefits derivable from it.

TAM draws its strength from a principle derived from TRA, which states that humans are capable of making voluntary decisions and behaviours that they consciously plan and wilfully determine which technology to adopt and which to reject. The model believes (postulates) that the use of technology or an information system is determined by the behavioural intentions of individuals, which, on the other hand, might be determined by the person's attitude and perception of utility. Overall, TAM is directly linked with the theory of behaviourism, which is dependent on the voluntary attitude of the individual towards the use of technology.

There are two factors that influence such decisions:

(A) Perceived usefulness

(B) Perceived ease of use

These fundamental principles have been supported by the studies of Alsahli, et al. (2023) and Salam, et al. (2023), which dictate that the better a user perceives that a specific medium or technology (which in this case is digital factcheckers) will enhance its performance (in the newsrooms), and also requires less effort to use the higher the adoption rate will be. In this sense, the Technology Acceptance Model predicts that an individual (journalist, editors-gatekeepers) or organisation (media houses) will readily adopt a new technology once that technology can serve a higher purpose—higher operation output, improved performance, increased efficiency rate, improved quality, etc. It also argues that perceived utility goes hand in hand with ease of adoption and use, which means less stress, ease of access, availability, low cost (sometimes) sustainability, moderate/modest subscription rate, less complexity, user friendly etc., Davis (1986).

This theory, therefore, provides a clear direction for this work in the sense that this study seeks to understand the importance of fact checking to journalists in Nigeria and what motivates them to deploy fact checkers in news production and dissemination. It then becomes very imperative to test the reality of Davis' postulation in the Nigerian context, bearing in mind its two dominant factors, which he says are determinant for technology adoption and use.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a multi-method design. For the survey, 146 practising journalists were identified on the basis of the data got from the Nigerian Union of Journalists' register of three states (Ogun, Ondo and Oyo). The was found useful because we needed responses, opinions, attitudes, motivations and behaviours of journalists towards digital fact-checking McNabb). The survey was conducted between August and December 2025. After data cleansing, only 106 copies of the questionnaire were found usable (representing a 76% response rate). We also purposively selected six online newspapers from three news media that were reported by the participants. The editions covered the periods between December 2024 and February 2025. Finally, we conducted a key informant interview that lasted about 30-40 minutes to draw qualitative data from three seasoned editors. All these methods were adopted to triangulate the study findings. This methodical triangulation is often used to increase the reliability of the research and to reduce the limitations of a single approach (Madugu & Ibrahim, 2024), thus allowing the phenomenon to be investigated from various standpoints (Valencia, 2022).

Participants

Survey Respondents

The respondents were mainly professionals and highly trained journalists. The researchers purposively selected editors, sub-desk editors, and long-serving field reporters for the study. These journalists are practitioners attached to various national dailies and popular online newspapers. The data that informed this population were obtained from the Nigerian Union of Journalists'-NUJ register of three states (Ogun State, Ondo State and Oyo State), with the careful selection and recruitment of participants through respondent-driven sampling (RDS) chain referrals technique. This technique allows researchers to recruit one or two participants and then ask the initial participants to recruit others (Salmons, 2023). This was very effective,

as some of the individuals recruited were chapel heads, and it was then easy to get them to bring in more professionals to participate in the study.

Content Analysis

For the content analysis, six straight news stories (three editions each) from two different national newspapers published online were purposively selected (the selected was based on the declared use of digital fact checkers by the editor). Thus, three fact-checked stories and three unfact-checked stories were selected for comparison). The selection of the story was based on random selection from the online databases of the media houses. The spread across political and general interest stories posted between December 2024 and February 2025.

Key Informant Interview

For the interview, the three key informants recruited for the study were news editors who had worked in both traditional and online news outlets. The interview guide was used to ascertain the awareness, adoption and barriers of digital fact checkers in Nigerian newsrooms. Each interview session lasted between 30 and 40 minutes. The goal is to obtain deeper expert insights and other nuanced information that was not previously supplied by the survey respondents or to offset any bias in the questionnaire response. The least experienced participant had 12 years of being a desk editor and the most experienced participant had over 25 years of editorial experience. The KII was undertaken to provide answers to research questions about the deployment of digital fact-checking tools in newsrooms and the challenges therein. The researchers were more inclined on the depth of professional knowledge rather than numerical representativeness. The constitution of the small participants for the interview clearly followed the prescription of Pahwa et al. (2023), which dictates that a limited number of key informants can be constituted if the study utilised other forms of data (which is clearly so in this study). The researchers further lean on Yin's assumptions (2017) to justify the avoidance of data redundancy.

Instrumentation

The study utilised an online questionnaire, using the online Google form, which was clearly written in English and in two sections; section A is for demographic data and the section B is for the psychographic data. The structure of the instrument was set in a 5-point Likert-Scale and the Dichotomous scale to ascertain journalists' knowledge of disinformation and digital fact-checkers.

In order to ensure internal consistency and reliability of the instrument (the online questionnaire), especially in the sections that relied on the 5-point Likert Scale, the Cronbach's alpha (α) was utilised on the data to determine the coefficients of key clusters;

Extent of digital fact checking- RQ1: $\alpha = 0.88$

Impact of quality and credibility of news- RQ2: $\alpha = 0.91$

Some limitations to digital factcheckers- RQ3: $\alpha = 0.84$

Thus, all the values above exceeded 0.70, which is the threshold, indicating that the instrument possessed the internal consistency and reliability needed for this study.

The content analysis used a simple code sheet to determine news credibility based on a set of predetermined criteria such as (a) news source, (b) proper attribution, (c) verifiable news elements such as pictures, (d) original source of the story, (e) verifiable claims and (f)outright judgement of how credible the news story is. These were subjected to two of the tools identified by the key informants who also provided information about news outlets making use of digital fact-checkers and those who do not use digital fact-checker but

depend on human gatekeepers. The researchers selected six national news stories randomly from two news outlets identified by the editors and ran such stories on the AI fact checker, Longshot, and Google fact-check.

The code sheet was assessed based on Cohen's Kappa (κ) intercoder reliability using the 5 elements designed to assess the credibility scores of the stories: (1) source attribution, (2) headline accuracy, (3) factual accuracy of claims, (4) image verification, and (5) evidence of external corroboration, which was computed across all five variables. The average κ value obtained was 0.84, which exceeds the 0.80 benchmark typically regarded as a strong agreement in content analysis (Lombard, et al. 2002). Discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus before computing the final scores used in the analysis.

For the KII, a simple interview guide was designed to elicit specific questions on fact-checking and how it impacts the news and credibility of online stories. The interview guide addressed newsroom practices, awareness of verification tools, and institutional hurdles to implementation. The interview guide was set in English and comprised open-ended questions and follow-up questions. The sessions were audio-taped and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

Method of Analysis

A multi-method analysis was used in this study. The quantitative data adopted a descriptive survey. The survey was split into two sections:

The first section intends to capture whether our respondents fact-check news stories in their outfits.

We also tested responses for the frequency of how journalists fact-checked their stories using digital fact-checking tools; the actions taken after verifying the story; the credibility of fact-checked stories; respondents' perception; and the extent to which fact-checking has improved the quality of their news stories and readership.

Responses were presented using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics to determine the mean, median, mode, and standard deviation.

In addition, content analysis of six articles was conducted to ascertain the quality of news articles based on the declared use of fact-checking tools and types of fact-checking tools. Thus, based on the declared information by the key informants, three news stories that were fact-checked using digital fact-checkers were selected, and we controlled for the absence of digital fact-checkers by including three stories that were not previously fact-checked using digital tools.

In addition, three key informant interviews of editors of newspapers were conducted, using between 30-minutes and 40-minutes long interview questions for each participant. The data from the participants were analysed using the systematic narrative analysis to capture the opinions of the key informants (Riessman, 2008; Braun & Clarke, 2019). In addition, the narrative analysis carefully relied on the audit trail, reflexive memos, and triangulation with the survey data.

Results

Out of the 146 questionnaires that were sent out, only 106 responses were found useful for this study, which represents 72.6% of the total sample. The elimination was based on the question to determine professional practice in newspaper outfits, which was inconsistent with the research intention.

The study reveals that all the participants have fair knowledge of digital fact-checking and disinformation. The findings also show that journalists agree that they deploy fact-checking tools to verify news in their organisations. The mean value for this cluster ranges from 3.54 (SD = 1.24) to 4.28 (SD =.93). This confirms that online news media houses deploy fact-checking tools in their organisations.

RQ1: Assessment of the Extent to which Media House Fact-Check Information Before Publishing

Table 1

Media House Fact-Checking News Before Publishing

n=106	Mean	Std. Deviation
All our published news contents are duly fact-checked by digital fact-checkers	3.81	1.15
It is a matter of editorial policy to fact-check all our news contents before publishing	3.89	1.05
Government related news stories are subjected to digital fact-checkers	3.76	1.06
To a large extent, our news organisation utelize digital fact-checkers	3.99	0.99

The mean scores represent the averages between Strong Agree (5) and Strongly Disagree (1)

The average mean score from the result is between 3.8 and 3.9, meaning that Nigerian journalists possess fair knowledge of digital fact checkers, and moderately agreed that fact checking news is a common practice in the Nigerian newsrooms. However, the value is far from strong agreement (≥4.5), implying that the use of digital fact checkers is not consistent and the adoption largely depends on individual newspaper, rather than industry standard.

The key informant interview reinforces the results of the survey, as it shows that being aware of the digital fact checker may not often result in a high rate of adoption. For instance, Editor 2 shared critical information that resonated with the other participants:

Yes, as a regional editor of my media organisation here, I am conversant with some of the software that aids fact-checking in newsrooms, such as Google advanced search, website verification, image verification and video verification. However, this came up less than a year ago when I attended a training organised by Dubawa in partnership with the Centre for Journalism and Investigative Development (CJID) and Google News Initiative

Editor 1 however made the following submission:

…at this critical time, if any of the media organisations are saying they are not aware of the digital fact-checking tools. The media organisation is sitting on the keg of gunpowder. We are in the era of technology and with the rate at which disinformation is spreading, no organisation or any editor would joke with such important tools

Hypothesis Testing: One-sample t-test statistics at the 0.05 level of significance and 95% confidence intervals. Journalists in Nigeria have moderate awareness level of digital fact-checking tools. This is because the p-value of 0.00 was less than the 0.05 level of significance; therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. We can then conclude that Nigerian journalists have a moderate level of awareness of digital fact-checking tools.

RQ2: In what ways have fact-checking tools improved the quality and credibility of online news content?

Table 2

Fact-Checking Tools and the Quality and Credibility of Online News Content

n=106	Mean	Standard Deviation
We deploy digital fact-checkers to ascertain credible news sources	4.01	1.05

n=106	Mean	Standard Deviation
Our organisation uses digital fact-checkers to determine the legitimacy of news information	3.89	1.04
There have been occasions where digital fact-checkers discouraged the editors from publishing a shoddy story	4.01	1.01
Digital fact-checkers have helped improved the quality of our information	4.11	0.90
Because you deployed digital fact-checkers, your online news readership has increased considerably	4.01	0.95
People now trust every news content published by your organisation because you fact-check stories	4.00	0.86
Your organisation has never been embroiled in cases of disinformation and fake news because of the digital fact-checkers	4.01	0.97

The mean scores represent the averages between Strong Agree (5) and Strongly Disagree (1)

The mean score of 3.9- 4.11 shows a high level of agreement among the respondents that digital fact checkers are capable of enhancing the quality of news. The strongest impact is seen in how digital fact checkers can potentially improve the information quality (M = 4.11, SD = 0.90). Also, there is a high rating for the discouragement for poorly sourced stories (M = 4.01, SD = 101). The respondents further indicated that fact checking can strengthen audience trust (M = 4.00, SD = 0.86) and improved readership (M = 4.01, SD = 0.95). Although the score for determining news legitimacy in the various newsrooms (M = 3.89, SD = 1.04), this result shows the inconsistent use of digital fact checkers in the Nigerian news organisations. Overall, the results prove that digital fact checkers not only serve as a tool for internal quality control but also go further to improve the credibility and reputation of the news organisation and the online outlet.

Interview Data

Regarding the importance of digital factcheckers, all three key informants accepted that all media houses must deploy digital fact-checking tools in their organisations. They think that any media organisation that is not fact-checking its news content is on the verge of dishing out incorrect information. Although disinformation and fake news have become a pandemic in the Nigerian media industry, participants strongly believed that the practice can still be reduced. According to them, "a lot of good can result when we adopt digital fact checkers at all the stages of news production."

However, in clear contrast to the submission of the majority of the journalists in the survey, the key informants expressed doubt as to the popular use of digital fact checkers in the Nigerian newsrooms. They indicated several challenges that could make most media houses slow down in deploying digital fact checkers, such as funding and the cost of deployment. They all noted that many media houses in Nigeria are currently struggling and suffocating under the existing economic realities in the nation. While two of the editors agreed that some media houses with international sponsors and government backing do have some fact-checking tools, the dominant claims reveal that online newspapers in Nigeria cannot afford training, subscription and utilisation of digital fact-checkers, and that the majority still relied on human gates.

Editor 1 expressed the following views:

Both private and government media organisations should find other sources of generating money for their organisations and ensure that they make it an integral part of their news processes. Using the tools appropriately and always by media professionals will checkmate unethical practices in the pen profession. However, the level of using fact-checking tools among journalists is very low., Most of us are not very competent in using any of these fact-checking tools, despite claiming to be aware of the tools.

Another major indication of low competence among journalists is the fact that most use Google to check the genuineness of information while others confirm information by checking credible news sources.

Editor 2 shared the following information:

Although I learned about the digital fact checker recently, it has made the job easier for me. My organisation will soon organise a fact-checking seminar that was conducted by reputable fact-checking institutions in Nigeria. This is what we wish to continue to do because we believe that information in the public domain should be correct, and journalists should be ethical. Fact checking is a very new area. We are looking for partners who will specifically deal with certain areas. That is what we are concentrating on.

Editor 3 has these to say:

Every editor should know that news is based on facts, and these facts are not based on opinions and therefore it's a basic tenet in the journalistic world. Part of what we use to tell our reporters about fact-checking is to double check and leave out when in doubt. I am well knowledgeable on this and constantly pass this on to their reporters.

Table 3

Analysis of the Assessment of the Impact of Fact-checking Tools on the Quality and Credibility of Six Selected Online News Content in Nigeria

Category of News Stories	n	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	t(df)	p-value	Cohen's d
Fact-checked stories	3	90.0	5.0			
Non-fact-checked stories	3	52.3	6.4			
Difference	—	—	—	−8.69 (4)	.001	6.54

Note. The t-test for independent samples revealed a statistically significant distinction between the groups, $t(4) = 8.69$, $p = .001$, with a huge effect size ($d = 6.54$).

An independent-samples t-test revealed a significant difference between fact-checked (M = 90.0, SD = 5.0) and non-fact-checked (M = 52.3, SD = 6.4) stories, t(4) = 8.69, p = .001, Cohen's *d* = 6.54. Given the small sample, however, (n = 6), this large effect size may not be representative enough. Because the p-value was significantly less than 0.5, the null hypothesis that fact-checking does not increase online news quality was then rejected.

Therefore, Table 3 clearly shows the huge distinction between fact-checked stories and unfact-checked publications. The stories that were later subjected to digital fact checkers and then adjusted appropriately using the set criteria became more refined and got higher ratings in credibility score and news quality when compared to the unfact-check editions.

In practical terms, fact-checked stories were nearly twice as accurate as unverified articles. This demonstrates how the employment of computer fact-checkers not only improves the quality and reliability of news content but also protects against the risks of disinformation. Despite the modest sample size (n = 6 articles), the findings show the important role of fact-checking in enhancing media standards in Nigeria.

RQ3: What are some the limitations associated with the deployment of digital fact-checking tools in media organisations in Nigeria?

The mean values of each item ranged from 4.02 (SD =.93) to 4.40 (SD =.88). It can thus be inferred that limitations such as lack of training, lack of commitment to deploy and fund digital fact-checkers, limited

skills and proficiency in the use of digital fact-checkers, lack of strong policies and regulation compelling media houses to use digital fact-checkers and that digital fact-checkers may be prone to technical glitches and cyber-attacks are evidently some of the challenges journalists indicated to be associated with the deployment of digital fact-checking tools in media organisations in Nigeria.

Interview Data:

All key informants declared that lack of training, adequate funding, government support, and staff capacity have beset the effective deployment of digital factcheckers in Nigerian newsrooms.

Discussion

To ascertain the extent to which Nigerian online media fact-check news stories before publishing, the results showed an impressively positive response, which indicates that many online news media in Nigeria fact-check stories before publishing them. This result is very similar to what Lin and Chang (2022) established in their study. The scholars agreed that fact checking is an essential task in the media and it can help sanitise the media space. Also, Brandtzaeg et al. (2018) discovered that fact-checking has grown from an in-house media function to new tools used to counter false and inaccurate claims made in public. However, these findings run counter to the work of Chukwu (2021), which revealed that Port-Harcourt media houses do not fact-check news stories and are not aware of independent fact-checkers. For Welbers (2016), gatekeeping proficiency now depend on digital tools and automated technologies to be accurate in the age of disinformation. Thus, many researchers such as Voinea (2025) and Hermida (2020) have linked the efficiency of the newsroom gatekeeping process to the adoption of digital tools.

Table 2 shows that fact-checking tools have improved the quality and credibility of online news content in Nigeria. The studies of scholars such as Jacob (2024) and Graves and Mantzarlis (2020) have lent a huge credence to the significance of digital fact-checkers in online media. This fact is also buttressed in the findings of Liu (2023), that digital fact-checkers are very efficient in the fight to get rid of disinformation and fake news from online news stories. In a similar manner, the postulation of Tam clearly states that a piece of technology will potentially be adopted by users based on their perceived utility and ease of use.

To answer the question on the limitations of adopting digital fact checking, the result of this study indicates that the journalists all agreed that there are various levels of challenges associated with the adoption of digital fact-checkers. In line with this, the study of Simon et al. (2024) justifies why the adoption of digital factcheckers has been so low in most of the Nigerian news houses. In this sense, an assumption of TAM postulates that 'ease of use" determines any adoption of technology. By extension, knowledge and technological awareness and literacy will play a huge role in making journalists adopt digital fact-checkers.

Conclusion

The media landscape has changed drastically from what it used to be in the past decades. Digital technologies have continued to break new ground; introducing new challenges, and of course, offering cutting-edge solutions to address emerging new problems and trends that may erode media functionality and responsibility. The adoption of digital fact-checkers has proved to be a holistic measure to curb the menace of disinformation in the digital space, as well as in the online news media. Even though it is understood to be a little expensive and demand technical skills, Nigerian news media will perform ethically and optimally in the digital era, while confronting uncertainties of and social realities arising from news pollutants within the online space with proactive tools.

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