



# Longitudinal Designs, Associated Theories, and Communication Research in Africa

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## **Abstract**

This paper is an effort to promote the adoption of longitudinal designs and mainstream them in communication research in Africa, especially Nigeria. The concept and types of longitudinal research are explained. The reasons why longitudinal approaches are indispensable to communication research are discussed. This task is crucial since the trend among African and Nigerian researchers is to consign longitudinal approaches to the sidelines while overly emphasizing cross-sectional designs. The paper takes a cursory journey down the road of media effects theory, among others, to show that the cumulative effects of the media can better be researched with longitudinal systems than with cross-sectional ones. Three empirical works are reviewed to show the weaknesses of using only cross-sectional methodologies to study every kind of communication problem while strengthening the case for longitudinal systems. The recommendations expose researchers to the threat of extinction that longitudinal designs face as well as motivate the longitudinal habit.

**Keywords:** Communication research, longitudinal research, media effects research, media studies, research design, Nigeria, Africa.

## **Introduction**

A prima facie assessment of literature shows that longitudinal designs are rare to find in studies that originate from Africa and Nigeria, especially. While not making any categorical claim or providing numbers on the use of the longitudinal system and its purported marginalization, this plausibility serves as enough motivation to explain how the adoption of the system can intensify in the country.

Longitudinal study designs in media and communication research in Nigeria may have become more marginal among researchers over the last one or two decades, unlike the cross-sectional designs which are well mainstreamed. It appears communication researchers in Nigeria and Africa are keeping away more and more from longitudinal research in favor of cross-sectional or 'one-off' designs. The reasons for keeping away are uncertain. In any case, it is not in the primary purview of the article to ascertain the reasons why communication researchers shy away from being longitudinal in approach. The paper is rather focused on popularizing and mainstreaming longitudinal research among African and Nigerian researchers.

## **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. Create awareness of the essentialness of longitudinal study designs in media research
- ii. Promote more interest and wider adoption of longitudinal approaches in African and especially Nigerian communication scholarship

## **Significance of the Study**

The primary significance of this work is scholastic. Media and communication academics will find in this paper a keen argument interrogating the bases of the assumptions which inform our choice of methodology for any research. In the work, the case is made for communication scholars to prioritize the longitudinal methodological paradigm and to consider mainstreaming it just like the cross-sectional system which arguably appears more popular in African and Nigerian media scholarship.

The work also bears significance to the work of media professionals like journalists and public relations practitioners as it

provides some answers to questions on how media effects work on audiences. Communication policy in Africa and Nigeria will also benefit from the paper, as it draws from examples of public communication research policy of the American jurisdiction. Lastly, society at large will benefit from the work, as its larger subject matter predicates the soul of society, namely, the mass media.

### **Methodology**

The methodology adopted for this work is qualitative, specifically literature analysis. It is a non-empirical study, drawing its submissions from empirical studies carried out by other scholars.

### **Longitudinal Research: Definitions and Types**

When research is described as longitudinal, it is to contrast with cross-sectional research. Neuman (2014) explains that while on the one hand, cross-sectional research gathers data at a one-time point and creates a kind of ‘snapshot’ of social life, on the other hand, “longitudinal research gathers data at multiple time points and provides more of a ‘moving picture’ of events, people, or social relations across time” (p.

44). Cross-sectional research is like taking a still photograph of social life while longitudinal research is like capturing a motion picture of a given aspect of social relations within society. This is instructive, in light of the seeming evasion of longitudinal approaches by communication researchers in Nigeria.

Longitudinal research is of three types. These are discussed below:

#### **Time-Series Study**

Time-series studies are that type of longitudinal research in which data is collected in a series of specified time points. Collecting data on the weekly viewership numbers of a given television sitcom is a good example of a time-series study.

#### **Panel Study**

A panel study is a type of longitudinal study that collects data from a panel of the same people. An example of a panel study would be researching the effects of a given campus radio show that collects data from members of the same university class when they are in their first year, then later when they are in their second year, and then lastly when they are in their third year.

## Cohort Study

Cohort studies are longitudinal studies that collect data from a cohort of people who share a similar life experience or people who experienced a common life event. For example, collecting data from survivors of war just after the war and then later after 10 years is an example of a cohort study.

From the foregoing, the common strand in longitudinal studies is that they all collect data at multiple time points as opposed to collecting data at a single time point. Even though time-series studies are the only type of longitudinal research that has “time” in its name, care should be taken to not mistake it as the only type of longitudinal research that collects data at multiple time points. The other two types of longitudinal research also collect data at multiple time points. Time-series studies have “time” in their name only because even though the other two types of longitudinal research also collect data at multiple time points, in time-series studies, the times for collecting data are organized as a series – more regular, more specified, and more evenly spaced out than in the other two types of longitudinal research.

## **Why Longitudinal Approaches Are Important to Communication Research**

While it cannot be denied that some questions in communication research can be answered by collecting data in a cross-sectional way, many of the questions in media and communication experience cannot be adequately answered except by collecting and analyzing longitudinal data. It is not that cross-sectional research cannot answer every question; it can; but it cannot answer every question adequately (Boukes, 2021; Omojola et al., 2018).

Later in this paper, some studies are reviewed, showing how, in certain communication situations, longitudinal data collection approaches yield richer and more robust empirical results than cross-sectional ones. In the first study reviewed, we are inclined to ask: Had longitudinal approaches been in the mainstream in communication research in Nigeria, would the researcher of that study not have opted for a longitudinal approach rather than the cross-sectional one that they adopted? That researcher may have used a cross-sectional design as she did, not because cross-sectional approaches were best suited for answering the questions of her study but because

in the paradigm of the research jurisdiction in which she found herself, longitudinal approaches were far from her radar, and not in the spectrum of choices accessible to her.

Backgrounding longitudinal approaches is like trying to cut off the right of the two hands of communication research. This is not just speaking figuratively. Longitudinal research is, in actuality, a right hand that communication research cannot afford to cut off. Two strong reasons why longitudinal approaches are important, even indispensable, to communication research are discussed next.

**Reason Number One:** Longitudinal approaches are better suited than cross-sectional methodologies for researching media effects.

With what is now known about media effects in theory, we know that longitudinal approaches are better suited than cross-sectional methodologies for researching media effects (Lecheler & De Vreese, 2019; Folayan et al., 2018; Odiboh et al., 2017). The subject of media effects being a leading area of interest in media and communication research (Karlsen, Beyer & Steen-Johnsen, 2020), any weakness in the mastery of

longitudinal methods probably means a weakness in Nigeria's ability to competently research this key area of interest in media and communication research. To understand why longitudinal approaches are better fitted than cross-sectional designs for researching media effects, it will help to travel briskly down the road of the history of the evolution of media effects theory to see the different research traditions that each of the eras of media theory influenced.

The history of media effects theory can be broken into three eras:

- 1) The Era of Direct Effects
- 2) The Era of Limited Effects
- 3) The Era of Cumulative Effects

The Era of Direct Effects encompasses theoretical work beginning at the turn of the century and ending sometime in the 1930s (Werder, 2009; Sparks, 2010). The blanket assumption of that era was that the masses were nearly helpless against the overpowering influence of the mass media. Although not much empirical evidence could be garnered to support this assumption of an all-powerful media and a helpless audience, a certain radio broadcast in 1938

provided “real-life anecdotal evidence” (Werder, 2009, p. 632) that reinforced this paradigm among researchers around the world over. At the time, radio was the dominant medium in American society. Sparks comments that “if there was any doubt about the potential of radio to influence people quickly and in large numbers, those doubts ended on the night of October 30, 1938” (Sparks, 2010, p 50). Sparks’ retelling of the events of that October night is rendered here nearly in full:

On that particular evening, the CBS radio network broadcast a radio drama as part of its Mercury Theatre on the Air. A young man by the name of Orson Welles narrated a radio adaptation of “War of the Worlds”, a science fiction story written by H. G. Wells. An estimated audience of about 6 million listeners tuned in. ...The premise of the show was simple. Listeners would be lulled into a sense of relaxation and even boredom as the show began with classical music. Then, a radio announcer would interrupt and refer to an atmospheric disturbance that had been reported over

Nova Scotia. Listeners would then be returned to the light music until the announcer interrupted again. Over the course of the one-hour program, what started as an atmospheric disturbance turned into an alien invasion by Martians who had landed their invading craft in Grover’s Mill, New Jersey.

In retrospect, one would think that the discerning listener would easily recognize that the reported events were nothing more than a fictional drama. But the realistic format of cutting away from the music to feature what sounded like live news reports apparently fooled about 1 million people in the show’s audience. In some cases, random events helped to promote the illusion of reality. In the town of Concrete, Washington, a power failure occurred while the radio announcer was informing Americans that the Martians were disrupting power and communications across the country. Needless to say, the residents of Concrete didn’t need any more reason to

believe the broadcast was true. But even without such events, people up and down the eastern seaboard went into a panic. CBS eventually apologized to the public for its miscalculation (Sparks, 2010, p. 50).

Noting that October 30 was a night before Halloween gives some insight into why that radio broadcast could have had that much of an instant effect on its audience. Also, a research team at Princeton University undertaking a “postmortem” (Sparks, 2010, p. 50) of the broadcast provides further learning. One of their findings is that the broadcast had that much of an instantaneous effect on the behavior of the audience because “by and large most Americans”, at that time, “had tremendous trust and confidence in the media” (Werder, 2009, p. 632).

An enormous trust in the media among the audiences of that day and a blanket assumption among the scholars of that era that audiences were nearly helpless against the media while the media were all-powerful on the audiences, combined to influence the magic-bullet or hypodermic-needle orientation that the theories of that era were modeled after. Sparks (2010) explains that

according to the magic-bullet or hypodermic-needle view of mass communication, “the communication of a message in a mass medium can be compared to shooting a gun that contains a magic bullet or to injecting someone with a hypodermic needle” (p. 51).

The effect of that radio broadcast on the night of October 30, 1938, was like the effect of “shooting a gun that contains a magic bullet” or of “injecting someone with a hypodermic needle”. It was instantaneous. Researchers of that direct effects era assumed wholesale that the effect of whatever media on its audiences will always be like the effect of that October 30 broadcast – instantaneous, like the effect of a magic bullet or a hypodermic needle; and because they assumed that the effect of all media at all times will always be instantaneous, their approaches for data collection in researching media effects were always one-off.

However, two years after the 1938 October 30 radio broadcast, a turning away from the magic bullet/hypodermic needle orientation began. A team of researchers, Paul F. Lazarsfeld from Columbia University, Bernard Berelson from Stanford, and Hazel Gaudet from Princeton, in 1940, commenced an elaborate

research project to ascertain the effects of media messages of the United States Presidential campaigns on voter behavior at the United States Presidential Elections of 1940 and 1944 (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954).

In what was later to be known as *The People's Choice* study, the three aforementioned researchers along with their team of 15 other interviewers selected 600 households in Erie County, Ohio, wherein a total of 2,400 individual voters were interviewed in a series of 7 times throughout the presidential campaigns. Through the analysis of these periodic interviews of the subjects and control groups, the team was able to track the decision-making process and therefore the dynamics of the effect of the media.

A breakthrough of this study was the development of the Two-Step Flow Model of Communication, a paradigm shift in media and communication theory of that day; but was not the only breakthrough because the study also reshaped how scholars in Europe and America began to study media effects. *The People's Choice* study pioneered the use of longitudinal approaches for researching media effects. Klapper

(1957; 1960), after the *People's Choice* Study, had been published in 1948, corroborated the fittingness of longitudinal approaches for effects research, citing not a few longitudinal studies to make the point that "mass communication ordinarily does not serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects, but rather functions among and through a nexus of mediating factors and influences" (Klapper, 1957, p. 457; 1960, p. 5; Omojola, 2009), and also that the mass media are "one among a series of factors, working in patterned ways their wonders to perform" (1957, p. 457).

With the introduction of television in the 1940s and 1950s and its rise to becoming the dominant medium in American society in the 1960s, both theory and research began to return to an orientation of strong effects because the coming and rise of television saw a proliferation of imitative crimes, particularly among young people. Liebert and Sprafkin (1988) detail a number of these crimes in their book about the effects of television on children. One of the examples they provide is cited as it was reported in the New York Journal American:



Police arrested an 11-year-old who admitted having burglarized Long Island homes for more than \$1,000 in cash and valuables. His accomplice was identified as a 7-year-old friend. The boy said he learned the technique of burglary by seeing how it was done on television (Liebert & Sprafkin, 1988, p. 8).

Reports like the foregoing stirred much concern in American society. However, even though both the people and their government raised reservations about the violence on television, neither the people nor their government could lay their hands on any scientific studies that had established any cause-and-effect relationship between the violence on TV and the aggressive behavior manifest in society. The government began to make grant funding available for studies on media effects and the studies began to yield fruits. A new paradigm ultimately emerged from these research works of the 1960s and 1970s. It ultimately came to be known as the cumulative effects perspective of Mass Communication.

By cumulative effects, it meant that the mass media ultimately prove effectual “as a

result of cumulative exposure to similar content rather than exposure to a single event. In other words, over time audiences start to adopt the media’s framing of reality as their own representation of it.” (Werder, 2009, p. 633). The key phrase in the foregoing is the phrase, “over time”. Media effects were now known to occur over time, as opposed to previous assumptions which evaluated effects on a one-off basis.

The research that contributed to the production of this new knowledge about media effects used more sophisticated scientific techniques than before in media effects research, including experiments and quasi-experiments (Werder, 2009; Sparks, 2010). The new knowledge produced about media effects as occurring over time now informs an enlightened research tradition that researches media effects longitudinally, that is, in a time series study, in a panel study, or a cohort study, as opposed to the more primitive traditions of researching media effects using one-off approaches. As the effects of the mass media are now known to occur over time than on a one-off basis (Feezell, Glazier & Boydston, 2021), the approaches for researching such effects which occur over time should, like the occurrence itself, be longitudinal.

**Reason Number Two:** Explaining occurrences with theories like the Cultivation Theory, Agenda-Setting Theory, and Spiral of Silence Theory is possible only with the benefit of longitudinal data.

Reason Number 2 is closely related to Reason Number 1. Perhaps this reason for explaining occurrences with cumulative effects theories being possible only with the benefit of longitudinal data is the stronger reason why communication researchers cannot afford to watch longitudinal research slide to the margins. The following sheds more light on this regard.

As a classic example of the cumulative effects of the media, Cultivation Theory is in Werder's estimation "the strongest media effects model to date since the magic bullet theory" (Werder, 2009, p. 633). Propounded by Gerbner (1970), cultivation theory holds that "through repeated, heavy exposure to television, people begin to view the world as similar to the television world" (Werder, 2009, p. 633). The key words are "repeated exposure". Cultivation theory explains not just exposure but repeated exposure. It explains the effect of repeated exposure over time (Solomon, Ginzburg, Ohry, &

Mikulincer, 2021). To prove that cultivation has occurred, therefore, the data has to first show a course of repetition of exposure over time and then show also the progressive effect of the exposure as it is repeated at various time points. Only by longitudinal approaches can such data be collected.

Similarly, only by longitudinal approaches can agenda-setting be adequately researched (Smyrnaiois & Rebillard, 2019; Damstra & Boukes, 2021). Conceptualized by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, Agenda-Setting Theory explains the mass media as being powerful in controlling what is being thought about even though they may not be as powerful in controlling what is being thought (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This much about the theory is well understood by most communication scholars. What appears to not be as well understood is that "the agenda-setting effect is based on the assumption that the media agenda actually precedes the public agenda" (Werder, 2009, p. 634). The keyword here is "precede".

In agenda-setting, one agenda – the media agenda – precedes another agenda – the public agenda. In explaining agenda-setting theory, Pearce (2009) states that "the more someone sees an

issue being covered in the news, the more this person will feel this is an important issue” (p. 625). So, to prove that agenda-setting has occurred, the data must first show that an issue in question was first raised in the media as an important issue and that the public kept seeing that issue raised more and more in the media as important, and then ultimately, that the public ultimately gets to accord importance to the said issue that the media raised as important. Again, only by longitudinal approaches can such data be collected.

Only by longitudinal approaches, as well, can data that can prove the Spiral of Silence Theory be collected. Created by Noelle-Neumann (1974), the theory is based on the idea that:

...dissidents of a prevailing (media-created) idea will not speak out against it if they perceive themselves to be in the minority and thus avoid the risk of isolation and rejection. This behavior pattern in turn leads others, maybe more moderate voices, to also keep silent since they come to believe that most people agree with the majority viewpoint. In the end, the process spirals into relative silence and can

lead to the demise of viewpoints even though they might actually be held by a substantial number of people (Werder, 2009, p. 634).

The description of the “process” of the spiral of silence, beginning first with the silence of the minority voices, then the silence of the moderate voices, then the ultimate silence of most voices, is a self-evident argument why data for proving the spiral of silence can better be collected by longitudinal than by cross-sectional approaches.

### **Review of Empirical Studies**

The following three studies are reviewed to support the argument that longitudinal approaches to data collection can better answer certain questions in communication research than cross-sectional designs can.

#### **Influence of Violent Television Cartoon Programs on Children in Enugu Metropolis (Ekwe, 2018)**

The central quest of this study by Ekwe was to identify the changes that come about in children when they are exposed to the effects of TV for too long in their daily lives. Cultivation Theory was the main framework theory. Before discussing the data collection

approach adopted for the study under review, a summary of the findings will help provide context for the argument that the present paper seeks to make. In the study under review, under “Summary” in Chapter 5, it is stated as follows:

The impact of these [Euro-American] attitudes, perceptions, and constructions on children in Nigeria who watch these animated cartoon productions is evident from the way they relate to Ben 10 and Kim Possible. These relations may be imperceptible to the casual observer but data showed that the two cartoon characters are idols, image ideals and role models to children who watch animated cartoons in Enugu yet both these characters are not representative of the children they interact with every day. This is because Ben 10 and Kim Possible are ideal Euro-American white and might give the children the impression that black children cannot be heroes since they are not portrayed in these animated cartoons. Children in this study like Ben 10 and Kim because they represent power, control and are heroic in outlook.

This researcher feels that these constructions are a possible

reason why Nigerian children are prone to adoring white characters. If these two heroes were black and representative of children their age and in their environment, it could have as implication in how they see themselves. The data showed that children in the study spend a lot of time watching these programs therefore it is prudent to ask what perceptions and attitudes are being reinforced, and the implication of this on how they construct their wordier self-worth.

Itemizing the findings summarized in the study under review will read thus:

- i. The impact of Euro-American attitudes is evident in children in Nigeria who watch Euro-American cartoon productions;
- ii. Even though the cartoon characters in the productions are racially different from the children who watch in Enugu, the children idolize the cartoon characters and hold them as role models;
- iii. The children in Enugu who watch the productions like the heroics and heroism of the cartoon characters but

end up thinking they, being racially different, cannot be heroes like the cartoon characters that they watch in the productions;

- iv. Children spend time watching these cartoon productions.

The study under review sought to unearth the effects of Euro-American cartoon productions on the behavior of children in Enugu who watch these productions, but by the ‘quality’ of the findings stated, it does not seem like much new learning in Cultivation Theory was achieved by the study under review. With due respect for all the scholarly effort by the researcher of the work under review, and without being defacing, the ‘findings’ of the study under review come across like knowing that we already had even without the benefit of empiricism. Not much new knowledge about the cultivation effects of those Euro-American media products on those children in Enugu seemed to have been produced.

The undoing of the study under review is likely to be connected to the data collection approach selected for the study. The approach adopted is stated under “Research Design” in Chapter 3 thus: “The research design adopted for this study is the cross-sectional survey design”. Longitudinal rather than cross-sectional data, for a study on cultivation like this one under

review, may have yielded richer and more incisive results; results which could have been more deserving of the term, ‘empirical’.

An exemplary approach to data gathering which the study under review could have taken a cue from is cited in the study under review itself. On pages 23 and 24 of the study under review, the results of a certain study conducted on 450 school children in New Jersey, USA, are summarized. The results of that study are itemized as follows:

- i. Some 73 percent of children who were heavy viewers gave the TV answer to a question asking them to estimate the number of people involved in violence in a typical week compared to 62 percent of light viewers;
- ii. Children who were heavy viewers were more fearful about walking alone in a city at night;
- iii. Children who were heavy viewers also overestimated the number of people who commit serious crimes;
- iv. Children who were heavy viewers of action-adventure programs were indeed

found to be more fearful of life in the everyday world than were light viewers.

Most reviewers will agree that the results of this New Jersey study exude an air of empiricism that the Enugu study seems to be short of. The results of the New Jersey study provide us with new knowledge about cultivation, unarguably. The results not only come across as sure and assured, but they also come through as categorical. No wonder it was a longitudinal study. For one, it was “after 6 weeks of controlled viewing” that the “heavy viewers of action-adventure programs were indeed found to be more fearful of life in the everyday world than were light viewers”. We see in this instance that cultivation is better researched longitudinally than cross-sectionally.

### **A Meta-Analysis of New Media’s Public Agenda-Setting Effects, 1972-2015** (Luo, Burley, Moe & Sui, 2019)

In this study, Luo, Burley, Moe, and Sui analyzed empirical studies on agenda-setting conducted by other scholars from 1972 to 2015. Under a subsection titled, Time Lag in Agenda-Setting Research, the study under review established that it is with “repeated exposure to the media agenda” that the

salience of any issue is reinforced for the public agenda. For instance, in one of the studies analyzed, a team of researchers “examined agenda-setting effects by five media outlets on four issues, revealing that a time lag of 7 days produced the largest number of significant correlations relative to time lags of 1 day to 6 days”. Depending on the nature and other dynamics of the issue in question, some studies showed that it would take “3 to 4 months for the media agenda to transfer to the public agenda”, while “other studies suggest it may take 2 to 6 months”.

In many of the studies analyzed by Luo et al., where both content analysis and survey were combined in the methodology, with data on the media agenda collected side by side with the data on the public agenda, data collection was spread out longitudinally – at multiple time points. With such a longitudinal approach, the data collected was incisive and the learning they provided on agenda-setting was fresh. Here again, with agenda-setting as with cultivation, longitudinal approaches than cross-sectional approaches prove to gather richer, fresher data.

### **A Test of the Spiral of Silence Theory on Young Adults’ Use of**

### **Social Networking Sites for Political Purposes** (Chen, 2011)

The opening lines of the abstract of this study by Chen read thus:

“This study aims to test two steps of the spiral of silence theory: (1) assessment of the climate of opinion and (2) willingness to speak out about controversial political issues concerning young adults’ political use of the social networking site, Facebook, to communicate with their close friends and broader circle of friends.”

To test these two steps, needless to say, the researcher of the study under review collected data at more than one-time point. In other words, it was a longitudinal study. The researcher made the point in justifying his choice of methodology that since it was a study to test the spiral of silence, data had to be collected at more than one-time point.

### **Recommendations Going Forward**

Going forward, the following are this paper’s recommendations for winning back longitudinal approaches from the fringes to the mainstream of communication research in Nigeria:

- 1) Communication research centers in Nigeria should

wake up to the awareness of the ‘threat of extinction’ faced by longitudinal research, and respond with steps and policies akin to declaring a state of emergency in longitudinal research.

- 2) Renewed attention should be given to the teaching of research methods in longitudinal approaches, especially at the postgraduate levels of communication and media studies.
- 3) Academic supervisors of research projects, dissertations, and theses should encourage their trainee researchers to consider study areas and methodologies that tend toward longitudinal approaches.
- 4) Students who show an interest in longitudinal studies should be rewarded with added encouragement.

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# Using Background Information to Enhance News: A Study of Nigerian Newspapers' Covid-19 Stories

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## Abstract

This study evaluates Covid-19 news reports by Nigerian newspapers on the Covid-19 pandemic in a bid to establish the extent of background information used in these reports as well as factors that drive the usage. It adopts the historical methodology and oral/in-depth interviews to extract heuristic and useful information from the news desks of ten newspapers. The evaluation shows that only three newspapers reported the pandemic when it broke out in Nigeria in February 2020 while one, surprisingly, provided background information. It turned out newsroom politics, professional issues, poor sense of news judgment, undue government influence, proprietorial interests, newsroom production pressure, and the phobia of technological application inhibited the inclusion of background information in stories. More contributory to the hindrance was the fixation on the two-dimensional reporting which emphasizes the traditional 5Ws + H whose limitation is of concern. The recommendation suggests that journalists embrace the three-dimensional system which promotes comprehensive reporting.

**Keywords:** Background Information, gatekeeping, agenda-setting, news reporting, uses and gratifications, Nigeria.

## **Introduction**

Leading communication scholars across the world, especially Hulteng & Nelson (1983), Herbert (1985), Sobowale (1985), McDonald (1989), Harris (1992), Fedler et al (2005), Popoola (2009), Akinfeleye (2011), amongst others, have written extensively on the structure of a news story as well as the desirability of background information in every news story. Every bona fide news reporter has been trained or oriented on the importance of background information and why it is mandatory to include it in every news story. A news story is incomplete if it is not richly backgrounded. Background information is the research component of a news story that can be produced, among others, from back issues of newspapers, magazines, and other media outlets, including the internet Popoola, 2009; Okorie, Loto & Omojola, 2018; Folayan, et al., 2018).

A well-established news medium is enhanced by a well-stocked library. The top duty of the librarian is that of filing the clippings of stories topic-by-topic or subject-by-subject for easy sourcing or retrieving whenever the need arises to write background information. In the internet era, the librarian has become

the custodian of e-copies of various editions of media news reports. With this arrangement in place, once there is breaking news, the reporter must visit the library and request the clippings on such stories in the past, read through, and extract aspects that would be used to background the story. As this study shows, this vital professional step was surprisingly omitted by the majority of the Nigerian press at a critical time when the Covid-19 pandemic broke out in China in 2019 and on February 2, 72020 in Nigeria.

The omission was a professional blunder and delinquency in the sense that if the stories were fleshed up with adequate backgrounding, the difficulties experienced by Federal and State authorities, while trying to enforce compliance with the lockdown to prevent heavy casualties, would have been less. This failure informed the necessity of this study.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Professional news reporting began in Nigeria when two weeks vocation course in journalism was conducted in 1954 at the University of Ibadan (Akinfeleye 2007). News reporting in the country had been limited or restricted to the two-dimensional (2-D) reporting of who says what, when,

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and how, otherwise known as 5Ws + H; the serving servants of news writing and reporting. This describes a 2-dimensional reporting in which the 5Ws constitute a dimension while the H represents the other dimension.

Omojola (2012), quoting Baker (1994), described this dimension as a façade, deceptive and partial. A popular communication theory, the gatekeeping theory has similarly had unintentional negative impacts on reporters. The theory made it compelling for every news reporter, line editor, and other editorial staff involved in editorial gatekeeping to either keep certain information away or edit them out of the manuscript. What the news reporters have been offering their audience can be equated with fluids, when they ought to have given their audience something to chew/bite. This practice is part of the reasons why Nigerian newspapers failed to properly sensitize their audience to the dangers ahead when Covid-19 broke out on February 27, 2020. Across the world, news reporting has gone beyond the parameters of 5Ws + H, because it has been established that behind each of the serving servants, there are many other questions worthy of unraveling to adequately serve public interests.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study critically examines the structure of press reports on the Covid-19 Pandemic in Nigeria in the light of the following objectives:

- i. To evaluate the usage/application of professional background information by the selected newspapers in their reportage of Covid-19, when it broke out in Nigeria.
- ii. To identify factors responsible for the usage or non-usage of professional background information in news reporting of Covid-19 by the selected newspapers.
- iii. investigate the consequences of usage or non-application of professional background information on Covid-19 news break on newspaper audience in Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

The objectives are repositioned as the following questions:

- i. To what extent do news reporters in Nigeria apply professional background information in their reportage of Covid-19 when the news broke out in Nigeria?

- ii. What are the factors responsible for the usage or non-usage of professional background information in reporting Covid-19 by the selected newspapers?
- iii. What are the consequences of usage or non-usage of professional background information on the Covid-19 news break on newspaper audience in Nigeria?

### **Significance of the Study**

The study is significant because it reveals that if the newspapers had applied background information, the magnitude of 3,053 people who died of Covid in Nigeria could have been less. Across the world, news stories should provide spin-off topics for features. However, and very painful, this study observed that none of the newspapers provided a feature follow-up to the Covid outbreak after it was first reported. Traditionally and professionally, all the newspapers should have given the Covid news break an immediate feature treatment under a historical feature which would have significantly reduced the casualty.

### **Literature Review**

In the context of Fedler, et al. (2005), background information is a piece of

substantiated information that has stood the test of time, putting it in the public domain. It is described as substantiated information because, before the publication of every news story, proper gatekeeping by way of verifying for accuracy, coherence, and clarity must have taken place. Once the story is published, it becomes public domain that could be checked through public libraries or online.

Writing from the perspective of compelling reasons for background information, Popoola (2009) states that it remains the only way by which every news medium could remind, inform, educate or sensitize their audience to the history of the story under investigation. For instance, if the story is about a plane crash, once the “who says what”, “when” and “how” of the story is written, the reporter must refresh the audience with the history of the first Nigerian-owned aircraft disaster of 20<sup>th</sup> November 1969 when a government-owned DC-10 aircraft plying the Lagos-London route crashed in Lagos, killing all the 87 passengers and crew members onboard. The reporter, in the same way, would be expected in the same report to mention the last air crash, Dana Air Flight 992 plying the Abuja-Lagos route in which 153 passengers

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onboard perished on June 3, 2012, in Agege, Lagos, Nigeria.

The above reason could have made Hulteng and Nelson (1983) contend that when background information is appropriately handled, its inclusion in the overall report is unquestionably beneficial to the consumer of news.

As a general rule, most journalists and news channels try to be scrupulous in their use of background information. When such reportage is well done, its inclusion in the overall report is unquestionably beneficial to the consumer of news. (Hulteng & Nelson, 1983:37)

Fedler et al. (2005) observe that many reporters are fond of devoting the second paragraph of their news story to background information thereby making the subsequent paragraphs dull because it emphasizes routine, insignificant details, the fact remains that it could come up at the beginning or tail end of a news report. For example, when mysterious deaths hit Kano, Nigeria in April 2020, about 20 prominent indigenes of the city including two royal fathers were reportedly struck by the strange illness, died, and were buried the same day. Amongst the 20 were six professors. Two days later, another

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professor, this time around, a former Head of the Department of Mass Communication also died after a brief illness. A reporter who is asked to anchor the story can commence it with background information like this:

Barely 48 hours after a strange illness struck Kano, killing 20 prominent indigenes, another professor has died of the same illness.

McDonald (1989) however adds that background information could be introduced elsewhere as needed in a news story. It is the nature of the story at hand that will determine where the background story should be placed. While alluding to McDonald's assertion, Itule and Anderson (2008) stress that background information could come from a news source who explains something technical or from the reporters in a bid to make a story clearer.

Fedler, et. al. (2005), in a related perspective, argue that some people say they are speaking off the record when they mean they are speaking on background. Most times, in such a situation the news source tends to provide background information to support or shed more light on what he or she has said, although the reporter is not expected to use such information or use without attributing

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to the source. These authors however emphasized that reporters sometimes use off-the-record information as leads to other sources. It is instructive, however, to stress that background information has transformed from the age-long analog to digital. During the analog era, reporters go to the library to consult and extract background information from newspaper clippings. However, in this era of globalization and ICT, backgrounding is carried out through the internet. Telephone calls could also be made to experts where archival information is not readily available.

Popoola (2012) further describes backgrounding as one of the ways by which every medium of information dissemination could fulfill their professional, statutory, and obligatory roles to the public. According to this author, there is no better way by which the news media could carry out the obligatory, statutory, as well as professional roles of informing and enlightening the citizenry without proper background to their news reports.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The agenda-setting of the press and uses and gratifications theories are employed to contextualize this study. Popoola (2003, 2017) contend that

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whenever the need arises to let members of the public attach seriousness to an issue, the agenda-setting theory of the press readily comes to mind. Alluding to Folarin (1998), Popoola says “agenda setting implies that the mass media predetermine what issues are regarded as important at a given time, in a given society. While noting that the theory does not ascribe to the media the power to determine what we think, he adds that it, however, ascribes to the media, the power to determine what we are thinking about.

The essential principle of the theory, according to Baran and Davis (2009) is premised on the idea that the media do not tell people what to think, but what to think about. Popoola (2017) stresses further that the principle behind the theory was meticulously and rigorously articulated by Walter Lippman through the classic text, *Public Opinion* (1922). The idea was later revised and fine-tuned by Bernard Cohen in 1963. Daramola (2012) states that the basic idea of the theory is that there is a close relationship between the manners in which the news media present issues and the order of importance assigned to those issues by those exposed to the news. In the context of this study, background information offers media



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professionals an excellent opportunity of presenting news to the audience or members of the public in a manner they would continuously ruminate over the issues.

The idea of uses and gratifications theory on its part was borne out of a concerted effort to convince communication researchers to concentrate less on probing what the mass media was doing to the people (effects) but should rather dissipate their energy on probing what they were doing with the mass media. While referencing Elihu Katz, the proponent of the theory, Blake and Haroldsen (1975), cited in Popoola (2017), maintains that even the most potent of the mass media could not ordinarily influence an individual who has no use for it in the social and psychological environment in which he lives. To date, communication scholars are united in their verdict that nobody uses the media just for the fun of it but rather out of certain fundamental reasons (Popoola 2006; Odiboh, Omojola, & Oyesomi, 2020; Igbonoba et al., 2020).

The fact remains that newspaper readers are strongly motivated by a strong desire to read a newspaper, either online or hardcopy due to certain derivable benefits. During the lockdown, despite the presence of social media, many newspaper audiences defiled the stay-at-home

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order and thronged newsstands to glance at the cover pages of the various national dailies or probably pick one or two copies of the newspaper of their choice. This is the more reason why media professionals should have seized the opportunity, which the uses and gratifications theory presents, by properly backgrounding their stories in a way that Covid-19 should have been very easy to fight. Indeed, the daily released statistical figures by the National Centre For Disease Control (NCDC) are not only scary but alarming.

### **Methodology**

In the newsroom of media organizations, background information is generally regarded as the historical account of published news reports. Therefore, the study uses the historical methodology, backed up with oral/in-depth interviews. The Faculty of Philosophy of Heidelberg University Compendium on the historical methodology described it as the method which helps historians evaluate and analyze historical source materials. Adeboye (2001) cited in Popoola (2015) similarly describes it as an interdisciplinary approach to carrying out academic research. Therefore, the study uses the historical method of analysis in analyzing the deficiency of Nigerian newspapers in their usage of

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background information in their news reports on the Covid-19 Pandemic.

The study is, therefore, descriptive and analytical in nature. It uses secondary sources such as archival materials from newspaper libraries as well as online sources. Relevant information and data obtained from the above sources were interpreted and analyzed, within the context of historical methodology. In a bid to obtain first-hand information on the factors responsible for the non-application of background information, the study similarly employed the oral/in-depth interview method in gathering information from reporters on the news desk of the selected newspapers.

**Population:** The population for the study consisted of 19 major newspapers extracted from the list of 57 print media establishments in Nigeria as identified by Popoola (2015). The population, however, excluded all the magazines in the country as well as newspapers currently out of circulation in February 2020 when the Covid-19 virus broke out in Nigeria.

**Sample Size:** The sample size for the study is ten dominant newspapers purposively selected from a population of 19. This represents 53% of all the traditional newspapers in Nigeria. The sampled newspapers are Daily Trust, New Telegraph, Daily Times, Daily Independent, ThisDay, The Guardian,

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The Punch, Nigerian Tribune, The Nation, and Vanguard.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

This study evaluated the application of background information in the reportage of the Covid-19 pandemic by the traditional media in Nigeria. The questions that guide the study are reiterated to address them empirically.

**Research Question 1: To what extent do news reporters in Nigeria apply professional background information in their reportage of Covid-19 when the news broke out in Nigeria?**

A careful perusal of the cover pages as well as the continuation pages of the selected newspapers revealed that three out of ten newspapers, that is, 30% carried the news report prominently on February 28, 2020, without background information.

The first case of Covid-19 in Sub-Saharan Africa is very significant and newsworthy, going by the magnitude of people already killed elsewhere by the disease, and therefore deserves the serious attention of every news medium in the country. The three newspapers that confirmed the story on their cover pages prominently are ThisDay, Daily Trust, and Daily Times. Incredibly and painful enough, none of them gave the story any background information by rendering the brief history of the pandemic for their audiences. The

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newspapers shortchanged their audiences.

The only newspaper that provided scanty background information, even though not on its cover page, was The Nation, that is, 10% as it reports that:

As at Friday morning, 82,294 cases of the disease have been confirmed globally. The disease has also spread to Brazil, Denmark, Estonia, Georgia, Greece, Norway, Pakistan, Romania, and Macedonia.

The implication of the above is that 10% provided background information, while 60% of the studied newspapers ignored the story. In other words, the 30% that carried the reports failed to provide timely background information which is in the best interest of the security, physical and mental health, and well-being of their audiences.

**Research Question 2: What are the factors responsible for the usage (or non-usage) of professional background information in reporting Covid-19 news stories by the selected newspapers?** Two major factors could be adduced for the non-usage of professional background information by the 60% of the selected newspapers as well as the three i.e. 30% that carried the news report without background information. Such factors from previous scholarly studies by Popoola (2009) and Akinfeleye (2011) include:

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1. **Professional delinquency:** A professional, in the words of Kessler and McDonald (1989), is one who knows what they are doing. They carry out their business with assured competence, they have high personal standards of excellence for their performance, they respect others without kowtowing to them, and they are assertive, forceful, and insistent as they do their jobs. Professional delinquents are bereft of these attributes.
2. **Inadequacy of 5Ws & H of news reporting:** News reporters in Nigeria are engrossed with two-dimensional reporting, otherwise called 5Ws & H. It is a dimension with heavy reliance on the serving servants – who says what, when, where, why, and how? This is too restrictive, narrow, and undesirable. As it is, reporters tend to feel that once they have incorporated the 5Ws & H in their news report, they are in order and good to go to the press.

**Research Question 3: What are the consequences of usage (or non-usage) of professional background information on Covid-19 newsbreak on the newspaper audience in Nigeria?**

The consequences are highly severe. People buy newspapers primarily to consume the content. Despite the economic crunch when the cry across

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the length and breadth of the country was on palliatives to cushion the effects of Covid-19, newspaper audiences still bought newspapers to gratify their desire or satisfy their needs. The needs ranged from:

- i. To be updated by getting the latest news on the pandemic within and outside the country.
- ii. To become an informed and enlightened citizen during the pandemic.
- iii. To apply knowledge gained from the papers in their day-to-day life, to avoid being infected by the virus.

All the above reasons are some of the unquantifiable benefits which newspaper audiences lost as a result of the non-usage of background information by the selected newspapers.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

A scripture from the Holy Bible goes thus:

Whatever happens or can happen has already happened before. God makes the same thing happen again and again. (Ecclesiastes 3:15 – Good News version)

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The above quote is very apt in opening this section of the paper. It confirms that truly, there is nothing new under the sun. While there is nothing new under the sun, human memory is very short. The shortness of human memory makes background information to every news story compelling in a bid to refresh the memory of the audience. Okon et al. (2018) and Opubor (1985) assert the basic goal of the media is fact-finding and fact-giving. That is the function of news operations; determining what is and saying that it is and saying so publicly.

If the scripture says it is God's act for things to happen again and again, and the role of the press is fact-finding and fact-giving, the press, therefore, remains the only institution that is constitutionally and strategically placed to avail the society of relevant things, events or occurrences that have taken place in the society over the years. The avenue through which this could be done is through background information.

This study has shown how the traditional newspapers in Nigeria failed their audiences by not devoting enough space to reporting the Covid-19 pandemic when the virus broke out in Nigeria in 2020. Some 30% of the studied newspapers carried the report without background information while only one, that is, The Nation

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representing 10%, had scanty background information. The implication of their failure could be seen in the difficulty faced by the government to enforce the various lockdown measures to stem the tide of people being afflicted daily by the Covid-19 pandemic.

An Islamic cleric in Kano was quoted by Popoola and Ejiwunmi (2020) while addressing his followers as thus:

When Cholera killed 500 people in Kano, we saw their bodies; we saw where they were buried, but where are the bodies of those killed by their Coronavirus...Coronavirus is a hoax.

Source: @Speechedge Instagram post on April 26, 2020; [https://www.instagram.com/p/B\\_bLR4vnbol/?igshi\\_d=4hj0oxkxb90](https://www.instagram.com/p/B_bLR4vnbol/?igshi_d=4hj0oxkxb90)

If all the newspapers had rendered adequate background information on the history of the pandemic, the response of the public to the various lockdown measures put in place by Federal and State Governments would have been different. Similarly, some religious leaders defied government lockdown measures, perceiving it as an attack from the Federal Government that is being led by a Muslim, who is perceived to be an enemy of Christians. Several churches and mosques were

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forcibly closed by the government. It was the same story from the drivers' union, market women, and some owners of private schools. During these high waves of the pandemic, it appears as if all the people felt that the government was being unfair to them; whereas, if the press had furnished the public with adequate background information on the 1918 pandemic, the situation would have been more tolerable or at least different, and the casualty rate which ThisDayLive put at 3,053 would have reduced.

Corroborating the need for adequate backgrounding in Press reports of Covid-19, an excerpt from a Daily Progress archive titled "Public gatherings are disallowed" that would have disarmed the warring groups stated:

At a meeting of the board of the health of the city, it was decided that in view of the spread of Influenza, that we would make no mistake to stop all public gatherings until the disease is abated. Therefore, I order all schools, public and private, churches and theatres, and all other places where there are public congregations closed — until Monday, October 14, 1918.

Source: Daily Progress — October 5, 1918; retrieved April 9, 2020.

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Similarly, Stout and Wood (2020), cited by the US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, said concerning the 1918 pandemic that it affected 500 million people, a figure which represented about a quarter of the world's population then. They further put the death toll at between 17 to 50 million people, making it the deadliest pandemic in human history.

Concerning Nigeria, on September 14, 1918, an ocean liner - S.S Bida - arrived in Lagos with passengers already afflicted by influenza. Some were said to have boarded the ship in Accra, Ghana. Upon arrival in Lagos, they transmitted the disease to Lagosians, and from Lagos, it spread to other parts of Nigeria through the railway. Overcrowded Nigerian cities such as Lagos, Ibadan, Ilorin, Calabar, Onitsha, Ogoja, and Zaria were more affected. It could, therefore, be seen that the 1918 pandemic shared many things in common with that of Covid-19, which the media ought to have used maximally for the benefit of their audience, but neglected.

The slight difference between the 1918-19 pandemic and that of the Covid-19 disease in Nigeria is that while the 1918-19 disease entered Nigeria through the seaport, that of Covid-19 entered Nigeria through the airport.

The Nigerian press, therefore, failed during the period to set agenda

for public morality, safety, health, and well-being of the people which is the main objective of the agenda-setting theory of the press. Since they failed to set the right agenda, the public thus had no useful or heuristic information to gain as rightly put forward or advocated by the theory. In a bid to ascertain factors responsible for the newspapers' non-application of background information, some factors were identified by media professionals on the news desk of the sampled newspapers. They include professional delinquency, poor sense of news judgment, newsroom politics, newsroom production pressure, proprietorial interest, the undue influence of government, and phobia of technological application.

Of these factors, 70 percent of the media professionals identified politics, that is, the art of statecraft at the newsroom level which is always at work in the choice of stories to cover, who is to cover it, where it would be published (cover page, inside page, political page or health page) prominence to be given to it, photographs to accompany it, and so forth, as the major factors. The global definition of news as who says what, when and how (Popoola 2019; Morah & Omojola, 2020) as well as the conception of politics in terms of who gets what when, and how are daily routine political functions of the newsroom of newspapers.

public at the critical moment of Covid-19.

## **Summary and Recommendations**

The study evaluated and critiqued the newspaper application of background information by the Nigerian newspapers when Covid-19 broke out in the country on February 27, 2020. The study found that only 30% of the studied newspapers carried the report but failed to give the story professional backgrounding, while 10% provided background information with 60% of the studied newspapers ignoring the story outright. The paper perceived their failure as a serious professional breach and ethically faulty. Quoting Merrill (1974), Popoola (2017) described ethics as a duty to self and others. He stressed that in this case, the press failed in their duties to themselves and the society at large just as their failure has a direct correlation with the lukewarm attitude of members of the public to the various lockdown measures announced by the Federal and State governments in Nigeria.

Graber (1990) asserts that the media can attract and direct attention to problems as well as solutions. He similarly argued that the media can be a channel for persuasion and mobilization. From Graber's perspective, therefore, the studied newspapers failed to attract and direct public attention to the problem of Covid-19 as well as the lockdown solutions. They similarly failed to rightly persuade and mobilize the

Consequent to the above, the paper put forward the following recommendations:

- i. There is a need for Nigerian newspapers to jettison the 5Ws and H of news reporting and embrace the 3-D dimension, which makes it compelling for news reporters to deeply probe and unravel other questions of public interest behind the Who, What, When, Where, Why and How of news reporting, with adequate backgrounding.
- ii. There is a need for training and retraining of news reporters and other media professionals that are involved in the gate-keeping chain of newspaper production.
- iii. Newsroom politics: High politics exist in the newsroom over which story to be covered and given space in the newsroom of every medium of information dissemination. Such politics should not affect stories of national interest such as that of Covid-19, which 90% of the studied newspapers failed to report with adequate background information.

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# **Fake news and political propaganda in the public sphere: An analysis of the Ghanaian media**

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## **Abstract**

The distrust for journalism practice owing to the prevalence of fake news and propaganda is a concern that needs addressing. This study explores this concern in the context of Ghana's 2006 and 2020 presidential elections. Some 230 journalists serving in dominant outlets responded to questionnaire items on the spread of fake news and the attendant policy/legal curbs, as well as how to control the menace. Findings expose the proposition that economic and political reasons do drive the production and dissemination of fake news, as 72.17 percent of the respondents claimed that the rush to break the news was a major factor. Results also show that the dominant New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) exploited fake news to their advantage, with social media showing up as a major driver of the threat. Periodic media literacy training, the strengthening of professional ethical practice, and a solid fact-checking culture can deescalate Ghana's penchant for propaganda and fake news. This study can assist researchers and citizens who need an update on the subject.

**Keywords:** Fake news, political propaganda, disinformation, journalists, dissemination, public sphere, Ghana.

**Introduction**

The media are fundamental partners in any democratic experiment (McQuail & Deuze, 2020) and Ghana is a classic case of this assertion (Yartey et al, 2021; Igbinoba et al., 2022; Owusu, 2012, Yeboah-Banin, Fofie and Gadzekpo, 2020). Writing on democracy, the public sphere, power relations, and political corruption in Ghana, Asomah (2020) ascribes to the media the Herculean task of the media in transmitting the government's policies and programs to the citizens.

An independent and socially responsible press is also critical in safeguarding citizens' rights in democratic states such as Ghana as it holds politicians and public servants accountable for their actions and inactions as enshrined in the nation's 1992 Constitution. But there is a caveat. Fake news and propaganda in the public sphere are limiting social responsibility performance (Jamil & Appiah-Adjei, 2019, Sanny and Selormey, 2020). The fake news assault is so strong in the face of the constitutional and legal frameworks in place to protect people's rights (Owusu, 2012, Gyampo, 2017).

**Problem Statement**

The reputation of Ghana's public sphere is being called to question regarding the prevalence of the disruptions and intrusions occasioned by fake news (Ayoung, Baada & Bugre, 2022). Journalists and social media commentators have been arrested and detained while a few others have been

jailed or are still in court. In November 2021, Nhyiraba Paa Kwesi Simpson, a journalist with a Takoradi-based Connect FM was arrested in connection with a fake news publication. Kwabena Bobbie Ansah, working with an Accra-based Power FM was detained in February 2022 for allegedly broadcasting false information. Others in police custody for similar offenses are Mensah Thompson, a civil activist, and Kwame Baffoe, a politician (Myjoyonline, 2022). All these arrests manifest the resolve of the government to execute the country's Electronic Communications Act (Act 775, section 76, of 2008) and the criminal offenses act of 1960 to prove its seriousness in curbing the incidents of fake news.

Some individuals and civil rights organizations are penalizing the government's move. Ghana's communication scholar, Prof. Audrey Gadzekpo, argues that security agencies must not be involved in such cases while cautioning journalists to be mindful of their professional conduct. She states that irresponsible journalism and outright false publications must be condemned for democracy to fester since the country has long decriminalized speech (Myjoyonline, 2022). However, this task should be implemented through civil litigations - not criminalization of such offenses.

The study sampled the views of journalists and news editors in Ghana's capital city, Accra to update the literature on fake news in Sub-Saharan Africa. Available literature had focused

on journalism and mobile technology (Jamil & Appiah-Adjei, 2019; Okorie, Loto & Omojola, 2018), the pros and cons of social media (Sanny & Selormey, 2020), and curbing fake news (Ayoung et al., 2022). The update zeros on the connection between fake news and political economy.

### **The Objective of the Study**

The major objective of the study is to understand how fake news spreads in Ghanaian media and the effects of that spread on journalism practice and the political system of Ghana. The study also explores the legal and policy frameworks relating to fake news and how to curb the spread of such falsehood in the public sphere. The study conjectured that economic and political reasons could provoke the production and dissemination of fake news in Ghana.

### **Research questions**

This study is guided by four research questions which include;

1. What are the economic and political motives for the production and publishing of fake news in Ghana?
2. How are 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution technologies aiding the production and dissemination of fake news and what are its economic ramifications in Ghana?
3. How are government regulatory policies impeding

or promoting fake news production in Ghana?

4. How do media outlets authenticate news stories before publication?

### **Significance of the study**

Fake news is a disturbing phenomenon across the globe and affects every sphere of life. Its production and dissemination are of major concern to conventional journalism whose primary role is to give credible, truthful, and unbiased news and information to the general public to make informed decisions. With the emergence of fake news, the role of mainstream media is jeopardized because the public tends to mistrust journalists to provide them with accurate, reliable, and factual information.

Fake news is also a worry to policymakers, governments, and civil society organizations. This is because since much effort and resources are needed to adequately disseminate information to the citizenry on government policies and programs, the presence of fake news can easily divert the public's attention from reliable information coming from trusted sources. This study fills a major lacuna in the literature on fake news and its propaganda effects on the public sphere of Ghana.

## **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

The public sphere refers to the public or forum where public opinion can be formed based on matters discussed generally without coercion (Habermas, 1997 as cited in Adut, 2012). The public sphere can be traced to the 18<sup>th</sup> century when salons used to serve as forums for public discourse by citizens on matters of public interest. The dominant approach identifies the public sphere as “the site where citizenship is exercised” (Adut, 2012:240).

This approach envisages the public in the public sphere to be a community that is acting within itself by actors who are egalitarian in an interactive conversation or participation. Adut (2012) notes that there are some impediments to what constitutes the public sphere. This is especially in situations where the publically accessible sphere is constrained by physical access criteria and other restrictions. The author stresses that the public sphere must be seen as a generic term that can denote virtual or real spaces of public discourse.

Fenton (2018) states that Habermas’ public sphere is useful in the analysis of digital communication, media, and democratic political participation because it directly links media practice and usage to democracy. The public sphere performs a significant function in articulating problems,

claims, and interests in an ideal system. The articulation of views and opinions is an important vehicle in a real democratic environment. This ensures that solutions are arrived at through opinions that are sought from a free space in which the contest of ideas is unimpeded. Chambers (2020) believes the perfection of the democratic system is affected by distortions that derail its processes. One such distortion that disrupts the democratic public sphere is fake news.

The public sphere also suppresses the marginalized and promotes the interest of the elites as emotions dominate public discourse instead of rationality (Asomah, 2020). In the case of Ghana, this study explores how the government of Ghana’s regulatory policies impedes or promotes fake news creation and dissemination. The study determines whether the existing legislations promote or restrain a free flow of communication or if there is an uneven playing field for all citizens to participate in public discourse. This study shows a clearer picture of the subject in the Ghanaian context.

The current situation where partisanship exists in the fourth estate has not only affected the way and manner journalists report on stories but how they lean on political parties and interests to practice the profession. This gives reason to doubt the stories they write and publish. Literature indicates that some

journalists especially those in private practice support political parties for monetary gains and juicy political appointments hence making the public sphere desecrated. “To a large extent, the private media in Ghana is divided between two main political lines-pro-government and pro-opposition. The main political parties often involved in using their media to make allegations and counter-allegations are the New Patriotic Party (NPP), now the ruling party, and the National Democratic Congress (NDC)” (Asomah, 2020:229). This appears alien to Habermas’ (1989) structural transformation of the public sphere which should be a free space for deliberating and articulating dominant issues of the people in a public discourse aimed at influencing the government’s policies and programs for the collective interest of all citizens.

Shardow and Asare (2016) see the political alignment of the media as problematic. The print media and to some extent the state media’s watchdog roles are compromised when they are made to be dependent on their owners in the discharge of their duties. Such media are not only mucking the public sphere but toeing the lines of their owners and writing stories based on the preferences of the media owners. Aside from contributing to existing literature, the study will also examine how media ownership and political and economic

factors contribute to the spread of disinformation and propaganda in the public sphere.

### **The Media of Ghana**

In all, the media of Ghana can be classified into state-owned or public entities and privately owned media organizations that operate for profit. The state-owned media are owned and financed by the Government of Ghana. The state media includes newspapers, television stations, and wireless services. The private media sector of Ghana is saturated with radio and television stations dotted across the country. There are also several private newspapers and online portals all serving important roles in the democratic culture of the country.

The media of Ghana which began operation in the colonial era of 1822, has transformed. In the colonial period, the media emerged to serve the colonial masters and their interests as well as a few literate native populations. Anyidoho (2016) classified the media of Ghana sociologically into three phases, the first was the era where the media involved only amateur newspaper productions without any professional markers for news production. The second phase also was amateur in nature but commercial in orientation and critiqued the colonial administration. The third, ongoing phase, is that of professionalism and being commercially oriented where



modern technology and infrastructure are used in media production dissemination.

### **Methods and materials**

The study employed a structured questionnaire to gather data from respondents via survey. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) indicate that the questionnaire is a flexible and useful instrument of data collection that can either be administered on the telephone, through the mail or self-administered. The respondents in this study got their copies questionnaire personally.

The Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) has some 800 members. It was impossible to reach out to every single individual in this study population. A total of 230 respondents were selected through random sampling. Wimmer and Dominick (2011:102) state that there is no approximate sample size for data collection stressing that “certain samples size are suggested for various statistical procedures, but no single sample-size formula or method is available for every research method or statistical procedure”. The researchers figured out that 230 respondents were adequate for the study.

Bryman (2012) indicates that by using simple random sampling as a probability procedure, inferences can be made from the sample to the

population. Walliman (2016:111) also states that simple random sampling is “used when the population is uniform or has common characteristics in all cases”. The population of this study which is the journalists of Ghana fits well with this definition because it is a uniform sample with a common characteristic. The common characteristic of the sample population is that all the elements engage in news gathering, production, processing, and dissemination. The simple random is appropriate and helps in achieving the objectives of the study.

Data for the study were analyzed using inferential and descriptive statistics. Inferential procedure in research is the generation of data to enable researchers to infer characteristics to a population of study while descriptive study measures “an accurate description of a situation or an association between variables... [as] this minimizes bias and maximizes the reliability of the evidence collected” (Kothari & Garg, 2014:33). The use of a quantitative data collection procedure, therefore, enabled extrapolation to the entire population of the Ghanaian journalists.

### **Findings**

#### **Biographical Analysis of Respondents**

The demographics show the distribution of sex, age, academic qualifications, and years of experience in journalism. Table 1 presents the summary of the responders’ profiles.

**Table 1: Respondents’ Demographics**

<b>Profile</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>No. Respondents</b>	<b>%</b>
Sex	Male	112	48.70
	Female	110	47.80
	Do not want to share	8	3.50
Age	18-30 years	112	48.70
	31-40 years	90	39.10
	41-50 years	18	7.80
	51-60 years	4	1.70
	Above 61 years	6	2.60
Education Qualification Attained	Diploma	28	12.20
	Honors degree	8	3.50
	Bachelor’s Degree	142	61.70
	Master’s Degree	50	21.70
	PhD	2	0.90
Years of experience in journalism	1-5 years	120	52.20
	6-10 years	46	20.00
	11-15 years	36	15.70
	16-20 years	12	5.20
	Above 20 years	16	7.00
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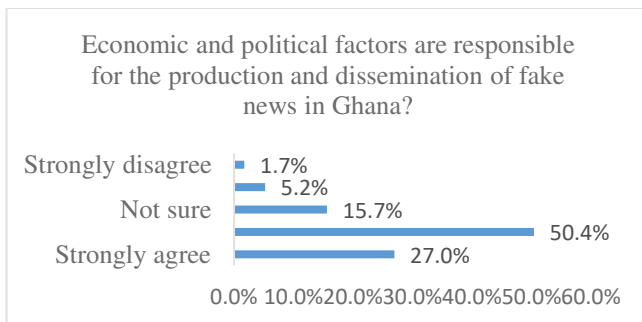
Male respondents account for 48.70% (n=112) while females make up 47.80% (n=110), thus giving a fair gender representation. However, 3.50% (n=8) of those surveyed would rather not reveal their sexual orientations. Above half of the respondents (48.70%) are under the age of 30. The 31-40-year-olds make up 39.10% (n=90) of the total population. In addition, there are respondents between the ages of 41 and 50 (n=18, 7.8 percent), 51 and 60 (n=4, 1.70 percent), and 61 and older (n=6, 2.60 percent). The distribution of respondents is reflective of the age structure of the current Ghanaian population and further indicates that journalism in Ghana is mostly practiced by the youthful segment of the population. The age differential is beneficial to this study, in terms of the diversity of the population and how this diversity reflects the respondents' views.

Also, 15.7 percent (n=36) have between 11 and 15 years of experience in journalism. Therefore, it is apparent

that the respondents had at least more than a year of experience when it comes to journalism. This is useful to this study since various experience levels of the respondents produce divergent viewpoints on the subject matter as they might have come across issues of fake news in their years of practice.

### **Economic and political motives behind fake news in Ghana**

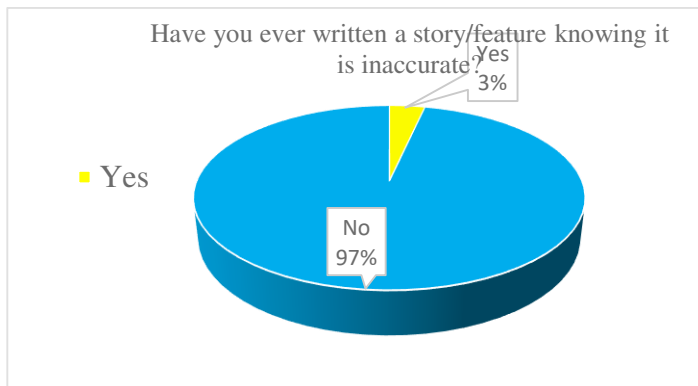
Figure 1 is a summary of the research on the causes of false news in Ghana. More than half of the respondents agreed that the production and dissemination of false news are driven by economic and political motivations. Furthermore, 15.7% of respondents were unsure as to whether or not persons working in the media create false news for economic and political motives. However, 6.9% of respondents said they did not think economic or political motivations were behind the spread of false news in Ghana



**Figure 1: Economic and political factors responsible for fake news publication in Ghana**

The breakdown shows that 3% (n=8) of respondents admitted producing an article or feature while aware of its inaccuracy, whereas 97% (n=222) have never done so. This

implies that some journalists although fewer, intentionally, publish fake news either for parochial interest or some other gains.



**Figure 2: Ever written a story/feature knowing it is inaccurate**

According to the survey, 3% of respondents (Figure 2) have produced a story or feature knowing it is erroneous due to their inability to complete sufficient cross-checking of facts before publishing. This could also be a form of sloppy or unprofessional journalism.

According to the results shown in Table 2, only 27.83 percent of respondents (n=64) cited being the first to publish as a factor in the reporting of false news, while 72.17 percent of respondents (n=166) disagreed. Also, 63.48 percent

(n=146) blamed propaganda or politics for the prevalence of false news stories in the media, while just 36.52 percent (n=84) disagreed. A total of 124 respondents or 53.91% do not think financial incentives play a role in the proliferation of false news, while 46.09% (n=106) disagreed. The survey found that 51.3% (n=118) blamed unprofessionalism among journalists for the prevalence of false news articles, while 48.7% (n=112) disagreed. The majority of news writers, 70.43 percent (n=162) do not believe that trends have a role in the

spread of false news in the media, whereas just a third of the respondents (n=68) hold this view.

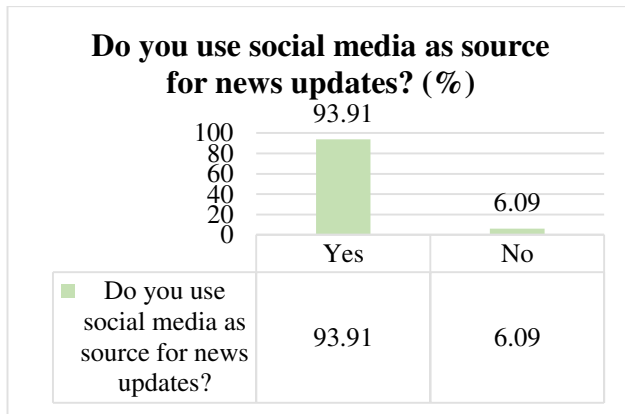
**Table 2 Motives for the production and publishing of fake news in Ghana**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>No. Respondents</b>	<b>%</b>
If yes, state the reasons for the inaccurate	Not Applicable	222	96.52
	Lack of Accurate Research	8	3.48
First to Publish as a reason accounting for fake news stories in news reporting	No, not the first to publish	166	72.17
	Yes, First to Publish	64	27.83
Propaganda/Political as reasons accounting for fake news stories in news reporting	No, not Propaganda/ Political	84	36.52
	Yes, Propaganda/ Political	146	63.48
Economic benefits as reasons accounting for fake news stories in news reporting	No, not for economic benefits	124	53.91
	Yes, For Economic benefit	106	46.09
Unprofessionalism as the reason accounting for fake news stories in news reporting	No, not unprofession alism	112	48.7
	Yes, Unprofession alism	118	51.3
To trend as reasons accounting for fake news stories in news reporting	No, not to trend	162	70.43
	To trend	68	29.57

The respondents believe that the sponsors, investors, and owners of the media have their own socio-cultural, political, and economic interests, which is why they fund and publish false news. According to the survey, there is a widespread belief among media professionals that some phony stories are published to further personal interests rather than for the citizens' economic or political benefits. This study found that this practice escalated during the Covid-19 and around election times (2016 and 2020 elections), and was compounded by the weak controls that the internet is known for.

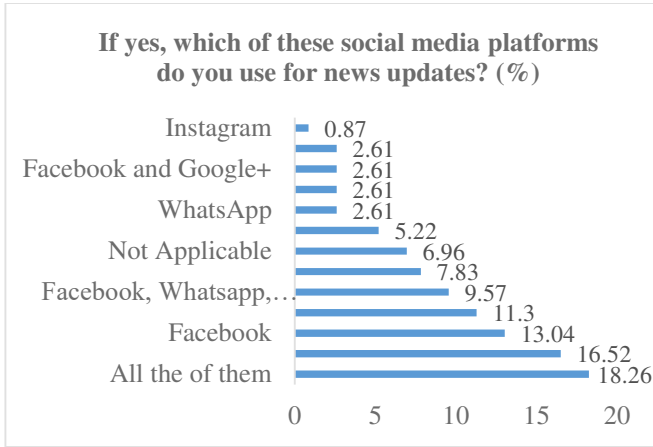
**How 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution technologies aid the production and dissemination of fake news in Ghana**

The purpose of this section is to determine the influence of the 4th industrial revolution technologies on the creation and distribution of false news in Ghana. To that end, the survey participants were first asked about their usage of social media for news. Based on the data shown in Figure 3, 94% (216) of respondents rely on social media for their news. This means that nine out of every 10 journalists surveyed, get their news from social media. This is an indication of the remarkable role technology plays in the work of journalism.



**Figure 3: social media as source for news updates**

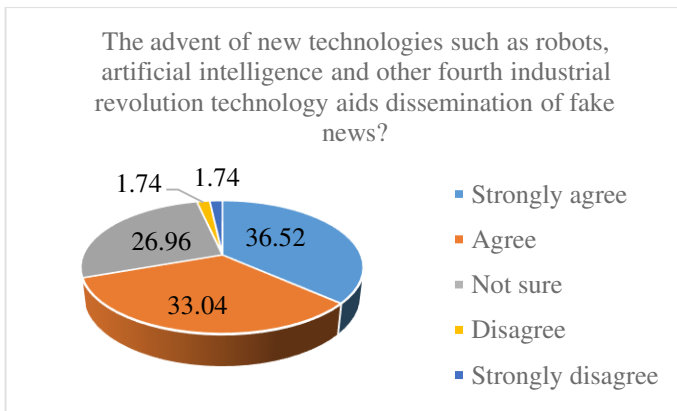
Figure 4 displays the numerous social channels where respondents get their news. Respondents utilized Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp to stay abreast of breaking news.



**Figure 4: Social media platforms used for news updates**

In addition, participants were asked if they agree that artificial intelligence, robotics, and other technologies associated with the Fourth Industrial Revolution aid the spread of false news. Figure 5 is a summary of the responses showing that 36.52% of

respondents strongly agreed and 33.18% agreed that these technologies propagate fake news. Furthermore, 26.96% of respondents were unsure while 4% did not think that the technologies were part of the problem



**Figure 5: New technologies as means of dissemination of fake news**

**Table 3: The role of technology in promoting fake news publications**

Statements		Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Digital technology is the reason for the increasing spread of fake news	No. Respondents	66	130	22	12	0
	%	28.7	56.52	9.57	5.22	0
Social media is the reason for the high rate of fake news in the country	No. Respondents	74	120	30	6	0
	%	32.17	52.17	13.04	2.61	0
Technology cannot be blamed for the spread of fake news	No. Respondents	18	54	46	96	18
	%	7.83	22.61	20	41.74	7.83
Social media plays a minimal role in the dissemination of fake news	No. Respondents	10	24	44	98	54
	%	4.35	10.43	19.13	42.61	23.48
Robots or artificial intelligence are used to spread fake news	No. Respondents	10	54	116	36	12
	%	4.42	23.01	51.33	15.93	5.31

Consequent to Table 3 and Figure 5, the researcher asserts that the advent of the Fourth Industrial Revolution's hallmark systems - AI, robots, and other technologies - aid in

the dissemination of fake news. The internet encapsulates these technologies to set fake news in motion. The use of the internet, via social media, has exacerbated the



production and distribution of news with little or no editorial supervision (Amodu et al, 2019). With the undermining of the gatekeeping system these days it is difficult to know which stories to adjudge not fake as reputable news outlets also publish fake news, though many would retract the stories even after the damage has been done. Ghana is an archetype for these fake news problems.

**How government regulatory policies impede or promote fake news production in Ghana**

This study set out to determine whether or not governmental regulations in Ghana help or hinder the dissemination of disinformation. The results of the analysis are summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4: How government regulatory policies impede or promote fake news production in Ghana**

Statement	Response	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The laws of Ghana make provisions to regulate the production and dissemination of fake news.	No. of Respondents	42	88	56	32	12
	%	18.26	38.26	24.35	13.91	5.22
The provisions of fake news laws in Ghana are enforced by the government of Ghana.	No. Respondents	10	66	80	50	24
	%	4.35	28.7	34.78	21.74	10.43
News stories produced by journalists in Ghana are factual and truthful.	No. Respondents	12	126	54	34	4
	%	5.22	54.78	23.48	14.78	1.74

Table 4 shows 56.52 percent (n=130) of respondents proving the assertion that Ghanaian laws have the requisite mechanisms to restrict the creation and transmission of false news. Others disagreed or were unsure that the government of Ghana enforces provisions of fake news regulations. The respondents' composite view was that the legal frameworks in existence were not well implemented.

The shortfall in government regulation indicates the necessity of self-regulation in enhancing fake news de-escalation. The researcher posits that mass media, online media, social media, blogs, and websites must be self-regulated. Industry captains must work together more closely than before to combat fake news by investigating suspected fake news, prohibiting the publishing of such stories, and devising penalties organizations, beginning with the reporter and ending with the editor and that tools and methods were in existence to rapidly fact-check

## Discussion

This study has shown that the production and dissemination of false news are driven by economic and political motivations. It discovered that media owners have motives, such as sociocultural, political, and economic interests which influence

for news outlets that violate self-regulatory guidelines. Organizations representing journalists should adopt self-regulatory mechanisms, guidelines, legislation, punishments, and the like as deterrents against fake news pushing. Furthermore, the low impact of governmental intervention in fake news problems indicates that regulations should be more severe.

## How media outlets authenticate news stories before publication

The media outlets' perspective on how they verify news articles before publication was examined in this study. The response numbers are posted in Table 5 below. The majority of respondents (n=190) believe that the news goes through a series of gatekeeping stages before being published. The table also shows that 83% of respondents felt that there is a clear line of authority in news suspected fake news but difficult to use, indicating that the fact-checkers were not put to use in much of the time.

the content of the media, especially the dissemination of fake news. This result aligns with Carr et al. (2020) who argue that propaganda and fabricated stories in the name of socio-political and economic interests should be discouraged as it destroys democratic governance.

**Table 5: How media outlets authenticate news stories before publication**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Not sure</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
News processing follows gatekeeping steps, from the reporter to the editor before publishing	No. of Respondents	84	106	26	6	8
	%	36.52	46.09	11.3	2.61	3.48
News follows a chain of command from the reporter to the sub-editor and then to the editor	No. of Respondents	82	108	28	8	4
	%	35.65	46.96	12.17	3.48	1.74
There is a system in place to fact-check fake news stories	No. of Respondents	46	96	72	10	6
	%	20	41.74	31.3	4.35	2.61
There are no means to immediately fact-check fake news stories	No. of Respondents	14	40	72	96	8
	%	6.09	17.39	31.3	41.74	3.48
There is a fact-checker but the process is cumbersome to use and so it is not used	No. of Respondents	18	56	78	68	10
	%	7.83	24.35	33.91	29.57	4.35

The study observes that some individuals consider the publication of false information as a lucrative business opportunity. They acknowledged making economic capital of fake news

(Chambers, 2020). Another contributor to fake news prevalence is the lack of oversight on the internet which makes it easy for some individuals to create websites typically resembling reputable

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media outlets to fool their readers into thinking they are receiving accurate information (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019).

Respondents indicate utilizing Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp to stay abreast of breaking news. Participants also agreed that robotics, artificial intelligence, and other 4IR technologies helped escalate fake news. This aligns with the postulation that algorithms, artificial intelligence, and big data are converging to generate a new digital newsroom with the potential of changing how humans operate and more importantly, replacing human journalists with robotic journalism.

Ghanaian laws have mechanisms to restrict the creation and transmission of false news. However, the majority of the respondents expressed worry over implementation challenges. It also confirms that social media and the internet evolution serve a dual role by enhancing democratic governance, but being used to consolidate authoritarian regions (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019; McQuail & Deuze, 2020; Yarlikaya, 2020).

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

This study concludes that economic and political incentives motivate the creation and distribution of fake news as indicated by 50.4 percent of the respondents and thus confirming the conjecture along that line. The widespread abuse of 4IR technologies throughout Ghana also facilitates the production and transmission of false news. The situation is exacerbated by

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the mainstream media which fails to adhere to professional standards. This form of weak journalism makes the practice unethical.

The study also discovered that some credible media outlets control the material they publish via many layers of editorial gatekeeping. Articles are sent from the reporter to the sub-editor and then to the editor as part of the gatekeeping processes. Again, the study found that government regulations to limit the dissemination of fake news exist but implementation is a huge challenge. The presence of techniques to rapidly fact-check bogus news articles is being considered a major stop-gap measure against the dissemination of fake news in Ghana.

The study recommends the need for professional bodies in the media industry to work together to combat online fake news peddling and devise effective penalties for ethical violations. When self-control fails, that indicates more stern regulatory measures (Omojola & Yartey, 2016; Omojola, 2008), usually by the government. The need for media organizations to fact-check the content they produce before publication is significant in checking fake news.

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## **Influence of Social Media on Political News Credibility in Kogi State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

News content from social media comes from several platforms whose credibility, according to literature, cannot be vouched for, unlike the traditional sources which are subject to several editorial gatekeeping checks. Notwithstanding the credibility, it appears the influence of the conventional media as providers of information is waning particularly among young people who rely more on social media for news. This study examined political news consumption in social media by 384 respondents who completed a questionnaire to determine the source credibility in one of Nigeria's 36 states - Kogi. Findings confirm a preponderance of news consumption in social media



with the following sample means Twitter ( $\bar{x}$ =3.23), Facebook ( $\bar{x}$ =3.16), blog ( $\bar{x}$ =3.05), Instagram ( $\bar{x}$ =2.78), YouTube ( $\bar{x}$ =2.59) and Yahoo News ( $\bar{x}$ =2.58) for political news. Findings also show that there is a significant difference in the credibility of political news information on social media among the state's three senatorial zones. One thing is certain: traditional media should start dropping the idea that social media sources are not credible. They should emphasize their social media strategies to reach out to more people, especially the youth. The study is useful for researchers and observers who are interested in knowing the level of trust consumers have in news sources.

**Keywords:** Social media, news, information, politics, Kogi State, Nigeria

## Introduction

Newspapers, magazines, radio, and television were the main mass-media communication channels up until a few decades ago, and professional journalists were solely responsible for disseminating news and information. But with the development of new media technologies, especially social media, the exclusivity that the mainstream media and professional journalists once enjoyed has ended (Omojola, 2014; Bruns, Highfield & Lind, 2012). Alternative media are now the new mainstream media, and internet news sources have a much larger readership than print publications.

In a sea of information where current news comes in from both reliable and unreliable streams, the issue of credibility and believability is inevitably raised. According to Johnson and Kaye (2010), free access is one of the fundamental features of the Internet as anyone can upload any kind of information without much scrutiny. However, such unrestricted access can undermine the authority of

online news as a source of information. Mustapha et al. (2022) note that newspapers, books, and television all double-check their facts before publishing them, but fact-checking is less applied on social media.

The most prevalent elements of media credibility that have been identified in previous studies, in addition to plausibility, are accuracy, fairness, lack of prejudice, completeness, depth, and trustworthiness (Wada, 2018). The majority of new media literature relies on these criteria because the source, message, and media dimensions have all been studied concerning the concept of credibility (Okorie, Loto & Omojola, 2018; Mba, 2015, Omojola, 2008). For instance, the early study examined the accuracy of news reporting to determine the reliability of sources. Research on source credibility and interpersonal communication are the key sources for internet-related credibility, but traditional media credibility research is also included. The degree to which websites and

online information are credible, reliable, unbiased, etc., are common variables.

The amount of fake news currently circulated exceeds consumers' expectations while also posing a significant challenge to official sources that are progressively proving unable to offer the public alternatives and measures to combat false information (Vasu, Ang, Jayakumar, Faizal & Ahuja, 2018). The publication of records like newspapers has recently been significantly outpaced by more recent and visually appealing false information sources, giving those looking to topple an administration or advance their viewpoints a wealth of opportunities to taint the information airspace on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp and any other social media platforms at their disposal. (Yartey et al., 2021; Amodu et al., 2019; Damien, 2017). Given this, it is obvious that when researching the topic of misinformation, false news, and the loss of trust in conventional media, the veracity of the material that circulates in an online environment is a crucial component since it can explain the extent or influence of the phenomenon.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The issue of reliability, integrity, and believability is particularly crucial given the abundance of information on social media. Much of the news and information on the Internet comes from multiple sources, as opposed to

conventional news, which is subject to several checks and editorial gatekeeping. The veracity of online political information has, however, come into question. These issues are important since trustworthiness is the foundation of journalism. The public is less inclined to pay attention to the press if they do not trust or believe it (Attah and Amana, 2021).

Thus, as a result of technological advancements that led to the development of the internet and other online media, also known as alternative media, scholars in social media communications have been more interested in the veracity of information coming from these platforms. This new trend has sparked lots of controversy in scholarly literature. However, other researchers have discovered that, in some situations, the credibility of online media was on par with that of traditional media, despite the prevalence of false material online (Dare, 2011).

Preliminary studies (e.g. Mustapha et al., 2020, Folayan, et al., 2018; Olaniru, Olatunji, Ayandele & Popoola, 2019; Morah, Omojola & Uzochuwku, 2016; Mba, 2015; Dare, 2011; Bruns, Highfield & Lind, 2012) have concentrated more on how trustworthy people believe material and news sources to be in the conventional media, but little is known about the credibility challenge that social media like Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc. have brought about. Since trustworthiness, objectivity, believability, and specialist input on

social media information are fundamental concerns in communication ethics, the credibility issue linked with social media news is a major source of worry. Given the foregoing, this study, therefore, sought to examine the influence of social media on the credibility of political news information in Kogi State.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent do users depend on social media for political news?
2. To what level do social media users perceive online political news as credible?
3. Does the credibility of online news influence the perception of political news?
4. What are the factors that influence users' perception of the credibility of political news on social media?

### **Hypothesis**

H<sup>1</sup>: There is no significant difference in the credibility of political news information on social media among the three senatorial districts of Kogi State, Nigeria.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study is beneficial to media practitioners, governments/policy makers, individuals and corporate organizations, researchers, students, and among others. The study's

findings demonstrate the applicability of how social media may assist consumers credibly in disseminating political news. It especially sheds light on how much young people trust news and information from social networks, compared to traditional mass media, and which news sources they prefer.

The study's findings are helpful to policymakers by giving them knowledge on how to use social media to spread the news to improve governance. This study is revealing the most effective approaches to raising the credibility of alternative media material for the media business as a whole. Theoretically, this study is adding to the body of knowledge regarding the validity of using social media as a news source. What is more, the study is beneficial to academics because it can uncover new areas of research.

### **Literature review**

Social media consists of web-based tools such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Wikipedia, LinkedIn, Reddit, Instagram, WhatsApp, Pinterest, and the like that enable individuals and organizations to create public or semipublic profiles using the Web 2.0 ideology and technology (Yemi-Peters & Oladokun, 2022). One of the primary ways that people now communicate with others who are geographically

distant is through social media (Akoja & Nwenezi, 2020).

The credibility and dependability of a news source is a crucial factor that affects how a message is perceived by a particular person (Martin, 2018). This fact is even supported by Kang (2010), who adds that the audience's decision to engage with a channel or medium of communication depends on its credibility. According to Bondoc (2019), source trustworthiness has a big impact on how audience attitudes and opinions change. Edogor, Jonah, and Ojo (2015) also support that users' preference for a different medium may be influenced by how trustworthy the medium is. Mande et al. (2022) buttress that today's online material is evaluated, among other things, based on its credibility. However, Edogor et al. (2015) argue that it is essential to distinguish between different types of online sources since the results of information receivers' credibility assessments may vary based on whatever source characteristics are prominent at the time they are analyzing the given information.

Mustapha et al. (2020) added that readers and viewers of the media have started to doubt the accuracy of the news that is posted online every day. As a result, to strengthen the credibility of the information, individuals who give or publish on the Internet must have a high level of credibility. Intriguingly, several

studies have discovered that information on social media is more trustworthy than other media, despite some features, such as the freedom of information exchanges and the free flow of information (Popoola, 2019).

The boundaries between media and credibility have become more blurred as a result of the internet (Akoja and Nwenezi, 2020). Moreover, concerning how the internet influences messages in mass media, Agu (2011) adds that the ability to connect to more networks and communicate with a bigger global audience is made feasible by the internet as breaking news may now quickly spread around the world because to the advent and widespread use of the internet.

According to Mba (2015), it is widely recognized that social media and breaking news go hand in hand. Social media platforms are flooded with the tales being reported before the credible reporter even puts pen to paper. The most obvious advantages of new media over traditional ones are their constant accessibility, availability, and use. Misinformation is frequently spread on social media, whether on purpose or out of ignorance, as the source of most of it cannot always be verified (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Goyanes (2020) states that the use of the Internet and social media by despotic regimes for spying, propaganda, and diverting voters

from politics has also been witnessed by observers. These observers attribute social media in democracies to the rise of populism, the dissemination of xenophobic ideas, and the proliferation of fake news (Mande et al., 2022; Akoja & Nwenezi, 2020; Wada, 2018). Since the general public relies on mass media for news and information, the media has a considerable impact on knowledge and attitudes (Bode, 2016). According to scholars, the use of and access to news media are necessary for political awareness (Möller and de Vreese, 2015).

Similarly, Agu (2011) revealed that the usage of political news and political awareness are positively correlated. The more often people get the news through media like television, radio, newspapers, or the internet, the better informed they become about politics, which is essential for political engagement (Delli Carpini, 2010). The tendency exists for citizens' understanding of current events to increase as a result of the widespread availability of news and political information on the internet and satellite television. Vinod et al. (2018) have proved that political information may be inadvertently exposed through search engine results and web portals that mix news headlines with entertainment items. This information frequently has a favorable relationship with political

information. Wada (2018) found that persons who choose news and those who prefer entertainment have wider disparities in political information and electoral involvement as a result of increased media options.

Edogor et al. (2015) and Okon, et al (2018) found that the influence of newspapers and magazines on citizens' political conduct appears to be reduced as a result of the combined effects of television, radio, the internet, and social media. Similarly, Bode (2016) reveals that due to satellite television, there is a 20% drop in political knowledge because viewers prefer entertainment shows. He acknowledged in his findings that, there are many information sources available to citizens, including the internet, social media, television (local and satellite), radio, newspapers, and magazines, all of which tend to limit access to political information. Just as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, blogs, and other social media apps were used by Nigerian youths to force down fuel prices after #Occupy Nigeria (Oyero, 2013) and to monitor the polls during the 2015 general elections (Mustapha, et al. 2020). Supporting this, Bode (2016) recognizes that social media is quickly becoming one of the most significant news sources, helping to inform the public.

Relatively, Mande et al. (2022) agree there is a correlation between increased access to the usage of news

media and political awareness, which they claim was influenced by age, gender, or educational attainment. A study conducted by Hitesh (2019) indicated that older Americans tend to have more political awareness than younger Americans while younger Americans prefer to watch more television and visit the internet. Summarily, millions of Nigerians utilize the media, according to some of the limited empirical studies that have been conducted, particularly those that focus on social media. However, no empirical research has been done to determine the reliability of social media networks in spreading political news information.

### **Theoretical framework**

This study is anchored on the source credibility theory and technology acceptance model. In the case of source credibility theory, according to Hovland, Janis, and Kelly (1963), people or receivers are more likely to be persuaded when the source presents itself as credible. According to the source credibility proposition, when a source promotes itself as credible, people are more likely to be convinced. Message recipients respect communicators who have a high level of credibility and are more likely to believe their comments. Relating to this study, source credibility theory agrees that people believe in the characteristics or attitude of the sender/source and are not bothered about the medium the

sender has employed. This theory asserts that when there is high believability on the part of the sender, then the persuasion to accept the idea/message (political news) is given.

On the other hand, Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was created by Davis (1989) to analyze and forecast computer usage patterns. Supporting the tenet of the theory, Davis (1985) suggested that three variables—perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and attitude toward using the system—can be used to explain why users are motivated. He proposed that a user's attitude toward a system had a significant role in determining whether the user would utilize or reject the system. Perceived utility and perceived ease of use were thought to be the two main factors influencing the user's attitude, with perceived usefulness being directly influenced by perceived ease of use. TAM is a theory of information systems that simulates how users adopt and use new technology. Relating to this study, TAM advocates that people accept the use of online platforms such as social media applications in search of political news items and others. This indicates that social media users agree to take political news items on social media platforms as real, reputable, and accurate due to their perceived usability, perceived simplicity of use, and other aspects

permitting the intention to utilize technology for news information readership.

## **Method**

The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The study's use of a questionnaire to gather and describe respondents' opinions and behavior meant that the design was appropriate to examine the influence of social media on the credibility of political news information in Kogi State, Nigeria. Therefore, the population of this study comprised all residents across the three (3) senatorial districts in Kogi of Nigeria.

The population comprised residents from Kogi West, Kogi East, and Kogi Central senatorial districts of Kogi state totaling 4,473,500 as projected to 2021 (kogistate.gov.ng 2021). Using Krejcie and Morgan's table for sampling size as a guide for this study, a population of 4,473,500 can be scaled down to 384 samples. Therefore, the sample size through the random system comprised 384 residents spread across the three districts. The results represent those three areas not the entire Kogi State of Nigeria.

The questionnaire was used as the instrument of data collection. The questionnaire items underwent face and content validity by experts in the fields of information science, political science, and communication studies. The reliability test was established by administering the questionnaire for trial testing on thirty (30) respondents at Yagba West and Ankpa and Okehi at 10 copies per place. The scores obtained from the trial testing were subjected to reliability analysis. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha for each item arriving at 0.82 which revealed that the instrument is reliable and can produce the desired result. Mean and standard deviation was used to analyze the research question. Analysis of variance was used to test the hypothesis (ANOVA). The ANOVA was employed to examine the mean variations between several groups. The error limit is set at 0.05, while the level of significance for mean differences is set at 95%.

## **Data presentation and analysis**

A total number of 384 questionnaires were distributed to the selected numbers of population and 352 were completed and returned representing a 91.6% return rate.

**Table 1: Extent to which users depend on social media for political news**

S/n	Items Statement	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
1.	Facebook	352	3.16	1.071	Very High Extent
2.	Twitter	352	3.23	.900	Very High Extent
3.	Instagram	352	2.78	.966	High Extent
4.	LinkedIn	352	2.16	1.242	Low Extent
5.	Blog	352	3.05	.892	Very High Extent
6.	YouTube	352	2.59	1.260	High Extent
7.	Instant messaging	352	2.37	.724	Low Extent
8.	RSS feeds	352	2.65	.970	High Extent
9.	Wikis	352	2.21	1.249	Low Extent
10.	Podcast	352	2.56	1.197	High Extent
11.	Yahoo news	352	2.58	.909	High Extent
12.	Google news	352	2.35	1.277	Low Extent
<b>Mean</b>			<b>2.64</b>	<b>.355</b>	<b>Accepted</b>

Table 1 shows a total acceptance by the respondents on their opinion on the extent to which users perceive online news as credible in Kogi State as it amounts to a grand mean of 2.64 with a Standard Deviation of 0.355. This grand

mean is above the mean of 2.50. In furtherance, the table shows that users depended on Facebook, Twitter, and Blog for political news to a very high extent.

**Table 2: Social media users perceive political news as credible**

S/n	Items Statement	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
13.	News about government activities is fake	35 2	2.14	.882	Disagreed
14.	Payments of civil servants' salaries are not true	35 2	2.38	.656	Disagreed
15.	Stories about winners of elections at state and local government levels are falsified	35 2	2.79	1.027	Agreed
16.	News about free and fair elections in the state and local government areas is not authentic	35 2	3.00	1.149	Strongly Agreed
17.	News about political appointments is believed by people when published online	35 2	3.17	.893	Strongly Agreed
18.	Stories on politicians' decamping are not believed on social media	35 2	2.15	.692	Disagreed
<b>Grand Mean</b>			<b>2.53</b>	<b>.464</b>	<b>Accepted</b>



Table 2 presents data from respondents on the level at which social media users perceive political news as credible. The table shows a total acceptance by the respondents on their opinion on the level in which social media users perceive political news as

credible in Kogi State as it amounts to a grand mean of 2.53 with a Standard Deviation of 0.464. This grand mean is higher than the mean of 2.50. This implies that several political news stories on social media were perceived as credible.

**Table 3: The extent to which users' perception of the credibility of social media influences their perception of political news information in Kogi State**

S/n	Items Statement	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
19.	Election-related reports	352	2.75	1.205	Agreed
20.	Political parties activities	352	3.13	.768	Strongly Agreed
21.	Government budget and allocations	352	3.16	1.044	Strongly Agreed
22.	Campaign news	352	2.95	.895	Agreed
23.	Road construction and infrastructure	352	2.20	.588	Disagreed
24.	Appointments of government officials	352	2.90	.938	Agreed
25.	Employment and retrenchment of civil servants	352	2.95	.801	Agreed
26.	Inter-party crises	352	2.75	1.081	Agreed
27.	Intra-party crises	352	2.86	1.111	Agreed
28.	Payment of salaries	352	2.78	1.089	Agreed
29.	Establishment of agencies and institutions	352	3.17	.828	Strongly Agreed
<b>Grand Mean</b>			<b>2.87</b>	<b>.272</b>	<b>Accepted</b>

Table 3 presents data from respondents on the extent to which users' perception of the credibility of social media

influences their perception of political news information in Kogi State. The table shows a total acceptance by the

respondents on their opinion on the extent to which users believe political news content in Kogi State as it amounts to a grand mean of 2.87 with a Standard Deviation of 0.272. This is

acceptable because the grand mean is above the criterion mean of 2.50. This implies that the majority of respondents believe in political news content on social media.

**Table 4: Factors that influence users’ credibility of political news on social media**

S/n	Items Statement	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
30.	Age of users	352	2.98	1.062	Agreed
31.	Gender of users	352	1.72	.885	Disagreed
32.	Level of education	352	2.74	.997	Agreed
33.	Religious disposition	352	2.94	.936	Agreed
34.	Political ideology	352	2.90	.843	Agreed
35.	Media literacy	352	3.25	.905	Strongly Agreed
36.	Reliability in the media based on the accuracy, factuality, and fairness of their report	352	3.02	1.022	Strongly Agreed
37.	Audience attitude towards the news	352	2.29	.868	Agreed
38.	Interpersonal discussion	352	2.74	1.077	Agreed
39.	Medium’s trustworthiness	352	3.22	.942	Strongly Agreed
40.	The personality of the reporter	352	2.98	1.203	Agreed
41.	The number of followership/readership	352	3.16	.933	Strongly Agreed
<b>Grand Mean</b>			<b>2.82</b>	<b>.434</b>	<b>Accepted</b>

Table 4 presents the data from respondents on the factors that influence users’ credibility of political news on social media. The

table shows a total acceptance by the respondents of their opinion on the factors that influence users’ credibility of political news on social

media as it amounts to a grand mean of 2.82 with a Standard Deviation of 0.434. This is also acceptable because the grand mean is above the criterion mean of 2.50. The table indicates that media literacy (3.25), medium’s trustworthiness (3.22), number of followership/readership (3.16), reliability of the media based on accuracy, factuality, and fairness in their report (3.02), the personality of the reporter and age of users (2.98), religious disposition (2.94), political ideology (2.90) and interpersonal discussion and level of education (2.74) were regarded as factors that influence users’ credibility of political news on social media.

**Test of Hypothesis**

The hypothesis is: There is no significant difference in the credibility of political news information on social media among the three senatorial districts of Kogi State.

To determine if there is a statistical difference among the three senatorial districts of Kogi State regarding political news credibility on social media, as stated in hypothesis one, an analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was implemented. The result of the analysis is presented below:

**Table 5: ANOVA in Respect of the Hypothesis**

	<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Between Groups	335.846	2	67.923	3.187	.031
Within Groups	71.628	349	12.205		
Total	407.474	351			

Table 5 shows that a calculated F-value of 3.187 resulted in the difference in the three senatorial districts towards online news credibility on social media. This value is statistically significant, given a p-value of .031 which is less than a 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, hypothesis one was accepted, meaning there is a

significant difference in the credibility of political news information on social media among the three senatorial districts of Kogi State.

**Findings**

Concerning research objective one, which is on the extent to which users depend on social media for political

news information, findings show that the majority of respondents who participated in the research are from Kogi East, Kogi Central, and Kogi West senatorial districts respectively. This may not be unconnected with the fact that there is a significant improvement in the use of social media in Kogi State and a high perception of the credibility of online news because the majority of people in the state depend on social media for news as it amounts to a grand mean of 2.64 with a Standard Deviation of 0.355. Findings show that the majority of the users depended on Facebook, Twitter, and Blog for political news to a very high extent and believed in the reasonable credibility of online news.

Also, some of the respondents made use of Instagram, Youtube, RSS feeds, podcasts, and yahoo news to a high extent. On the other hand, LinkedIn, instant messaging, wikis, and googles news were used to a low extent. This result is consistent with a study by Martin (2018) that the majority of respondents (98.4) utilize nearly every social network investigated in the study, with Facebook and Twitter having the highest user populations. Furthermore, it supports Akoja and Nweneazizi's (2020) findings that the majority (n=300+, 75.0%) of people who used social networks to get information did so through Facebook. This also validates the study of Mande et al. (2022) who

found that Twitter was a popular social media site that young adults in the United States used to access the news. Overall, this outcome demonstrates how effective Facebook is as a source of news and information. This is confirmed by Vinod et al. (2018) who revealed that young people nowadays mostly browse the internet and social media to get information on politics.

Findings from the field survey show the level at which social media users perceive online political news as credible in Kogi State. Respondents agreed that news about free and fair elections in the state and local government areas is not authentic and news about political appointments is believed by people when published online. Stories about winners of elections at state and local government levels which are being falsified were highly regarded as credible political news. Furthermore, the study shows that news about government activities is not fake, payments of civil servants are true and stories on politicians' decamping are believed on social media. This implies that several political news stories on social media were perceived as credible.

This study agrees with the findings of Vinod et al. (2018) who established that citizens who are informed and knowledgeable about politics tend to make decisions that reflect their real interests. Citizens can easily access a wealth of

information that can assist to advance and enhance government performance and accountability while also lowering corruption by simply watching the news, listening to the radio, reading the newspaper, or browsing the internet or social media.

Also, this study is in agreement with the findings of Mustapha et al. (2020) who found that Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, blogs, and other social media apps were used by Nigerian youths to force down fuel prices after #Occupy Nigeria and to monitor the polls during the 2015 general elections (Mustapha, Gbonegun and Mustapha, 2016). Similarly, Wada (2018) stated that social media was quickly becoming a key news source that helps create informed citizens.

Concerning research objective three, the study discussed the extent to which users believed political news content in Kogi State. Findings show that news about the establishment of agencies and institutions, government budget and allocations, political parties' activities, news on employment and retrenchment of civil servants, appointments of government officials, interparty crises, intraparty crises, and election-related reports were believed by respondents on social media. Meanwhile, reports about road construction and infrastructure were regarded as unrealistic by users. This implies that

the majority of respondents support social media's use for political news items. This result deviates from the findings of Watson (2019), who discovered that broadcast (traditional network news) was the most popular news source among locals (mean=5.17 hours). Edogor et al. (2015) concur that social networking sites were more favored (n=300, 70.3%) for accessing political news among respondents' source preferences.

Concerning research objective four, the study covered the factors that affect how people judge the veracity of political news on social media. The study revealed that media literacy, medium's trustworthiness, number of followership/readership, reliability of the media based on accuracy, factuality, and fairness in their report, the personality of the reporter and age of users, religious disposition, political ideology and interpersonal discussion and level of education were all regarded as factors that influence users' credibility of political news on social media.

Conversely, findings show that audience attitude towards the news and gender of users were rejected as factors that influenced users' credibility of political news on social media in Kogi State. The results of the current study align with Hitesh (2019) who recognized a link between increased access to and usage of news media and political

awareness, which he said was influenced by factors such as age, gender, or educational attainment. Also in alignment, Martin (2018) asserts that young people nowadays browse the internet and watch television, a few of them read the newspaper while older people in the U.S. tend to have a higher level of political knowledge than young people.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

If social media-driven campaigns like EndSars, Arabsprings, Bring Back Our Girls, Occupy9ja and Next Level could be used to enlighten and mobilize people, then it is possible to use the internet and social media to boost political knowledge and participation amongst citizens. It was clear that social media significantly influenced the respondents' attitudes. Social media was primarily used by the youths to communicate with their friends and families. Most people believed they could not live without social media because it is a part of who they are, especially since they were born at this time of developing technology – the Gen-Z. They relied on it for a variety of beneficial things, including research, contact with old friends, and being up to date on events happening locally, nationally, or worldwide.

Source credibility has been a crucial topic of study for many years. Particularly when analyzing

information on crises and risks in social media, perceived source reliability becomes an increasingly crucial factor to consider. Several factors influence the credibility of the media and political news stories, some of which are related to media literacy, the medium's reliability, the number of followers/readers, the reliability of the media based on accuracy, factuality, and fairness in their report, the personality of the reporter and age of users, religious orientation, political ideology, and interpersonal discussion were taken into consideration.

These variables alter social networking sites' function as news sources, prompt journalists to rethink their roles in the communication process, and create a new kind of news. These elements could be both beneficial and detrimental to journalists and journalism. However, news credibility is a key concern for new media, and journalists' viewpoints and attitudes toward new media platforms like social networking sites are the fundamental pillars for providing good, effective, and most importantly, credible news. Although the new media has in some ways sped up the news cycle and made media more participatory, journalists and good journalism must always ensure that news, regardless of the source, is credible and dependable. Additionally, many younger Nigerians get their news only from social media, but the older

generation also uses other news sources of their choosing. However, it validates the researchers' concerns that most social media users may not always take the time to verify the legitimacy or authenticity of a news item before using, sharing, or acting on it. Given the findings of the study, these recommendations were reached:

1. That traditional media and other conventional media should adopt the use of social media sites for the promotion of news items and other related matters to the interest of the people since online political news has high credibility.
2. That there is a need for social media site programmers to consequently regulate and monitor unconfirmed reports or fake news items shared and published by media organizations. In this way, news items or reports should be verified by certain regulatory bodies on social media applications before they are published or shared with the public, this is to prevent the crumpling of the high credibility of online credibility.
3. That media organizations should create accounts with social media sites such as

Facebook, Twitter, etc with verifiable information/licenses that cannot be duplicated or produced by impostors, this is so because of the high credibility of online news.

4. Social media users should be advised to believe content or reports only on verified accounts of media organizations. Hence, they are liable to be held accountable and responsible in the cases of misinformation and disinformation.
5. Print and electronic media should take advantage of social media as that is where young people are active and because social media is the future of media.

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# Radio's Contributions to Knowledge of Gender Equality Among Women in Rural Badagry, Nigeria

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## Abstract

The study set out to analyze the contributions of radio to the knowledge of gender equality among women in Badagry, Lagos State, Nigeria. It adopted the focus group discussion method to gather data from 40 women aged 20 years and above, and purposely selected, from four groups in four rural communities in the Badagry local government area. The discussion transcripts were thematically analyzed. Findings show that radio stations, especially the public ones did promote gender equality issues through talk shows, discussion, news, and drama. The programming enabled discussants to know more about gender issues, including skill acquisition, girl-child education, domestic violence, reproductive health, and women's political participation. However, it is unimpressive that these respondents perceived these programs as not comprehensive enough for an in-depth understanding of gender issues. They regarded the content as mere informatory. It will take specialized radio broadcasting to make the knowledge of gender equality issues more impressive.

**Keywords:** Gender equality, Gender Issues, Knowledge, programs, Radio, Rural communities, Women

## **Introduction**

Gender issues are quite topical in many parts of the world, especially in Africa (World Health Organization, 2019). Over 80 million women and girls in Nigeria have significantly worse life chances than men in other comparable societies. Violence, exclusion and marginalization are often some of the issues that confront women (British Council, Nigeria, 2012). Gender stereotyping makes the matter controversial in many societies. Previous studies have brought to the fore gender discrimination and inequality as it relates but is not limited to politics, reproductive health, education, entrepreneurship, and even the mass media (Edinyang & Angiatiang, 2018), and manifest as misrepresentation or underrepresentation of women.

Goal Five of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) widely supports gender equality. Nigeria, like several other countries, subscribes to the goal. However, it is surprising that the goal is just a policy on paper and not in implementation as there is still a wide gap between men and women regarding self-expression and self-realization. Women are hugely limited by traditional and cultural practices and are often relegated (Igbuzor, 2008). Although gender equality is not about women and men being the same. It is about women and

men possessing equal rights and opportunities in the scheme of things economically, societally and politically.

Undoubtedly, the mass media as a socially-responsible arm of society, ought to set agenda for public discourse on gender equality, as well as frame and prime the news to promote gender equality at all levels of society, particularly in rural communities (Okon et al., 2018; Odiboh et al., 2017; Al-Hassan, Andani & Abdul-Malik, 2011; Omojola, 2008) where it appears the problem is more visible. Myers (2009) alludes to research conducted on eight sub-Saharan countries by Balancing Acts in 2008 regarding the most-listened-to-content on the radio. The study found that people use radio primarily as a source of news and music, recommending, therefore, that media managers design programs that put men and women on the same pedestal so as boost the social, economic, and sustained development of both genders.

This finding has been corroborated by other studies (Dinye, 2003; Godwin, 2013; Akinfeleye, 2008). The struggle for self-expression and self-realization is still rife in many rural communities in Nigeria and it is expected that mass media, including the radio, can promote the advocacy that fosters a

better society (Heywood & Ivey, 2021).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Scholars in Nigeria have conducted studies on the role of media in sensitizing people to gender-related issues (Oyewole & Olisa, 2017; Oyinade, Daramola & Lamidi, 2013; Ryerson, 2014; Messina, 2014). However, most have paid little or no attention to the role of radio in promoting knowledge of gender equality in rural areas of the South-West – which is low profile regarding this issue despite the region’s claim as the most educated in Nigeria.

Summarily, the extant literature acknowledges that women are exposed to media especially radio in terms of information, but the information garnered from this medium is insufficient to push for gender equality as it relates to empowerment, poverty alleviation, and political participation among others. The results show that the radio programs are insufficient in causing a significant positive change and the needed awareness of gender equality. Further, these studies treat gender equality from an elitist perspective, forgetting that most women in the urban areas, unlike in the rural communities, listen far less to the radio. This study investigated how the radio contributes to knowledge about gender equality. This is important

because women, especially those in rural areas are critical stakeholders and development agents in society. (Somolu, 2013). This challenge is problematized into three objectives.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To examine the knowledge of rural women in Badagry Local Government Area about gender equality-based radio programs.
2. To examine the formats in which rural women in Badagry Local Government Area receive gender equality issues on the radio.
3. To examine the gender equality issues frequently discussed on the radio.

### **Research Questions**

1. What do rural women know about gender equality-based radio programs?
2. What formats do women in rural communities in Badagry Local Government Area receive radio programs?
3. What gender equality issues are frequently discussed on the radio?

### **Significance of the study**

The study is significant to both industry professionals and the government. It will help bridge some gaps in media content as professionals will leverage the

findings to build a framework for the policy that will translate into improving the content of gender equality programs on radio. Moreover, the government gets the opportunity with the findings to make policies or decisions that will further drive women's inclusion in key strata of the country's economy. What is more, the United Nations (UN) now has the opportunity to update on SDG 5 concerning rural women in Nigeria.

## **Literature Review**

### **Gender Equality and Radio**

Gender equality as enshrined in the 17 SDGs of the UN entails equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for women, men, girls, and boys. It does not require that girls and boys or women and men, be the same or that they be treated exactly alike. According to WHO (2002), gender equality is the absence of discrimination based on a person's sex in opportunities, the allocation of resources and benefits, or access to services. In Nigeria today, one of the pertinent issues of gender equality revolves around women's empowerment, poverty alleviation, political participation, and inclusion. Gender equality and women empowerment are universally acknowledged as human rights that lie at the heart of development towards overcoming the barriers of stereotypes and prejudices

economically, socially, culturally, and politically. It is about providing a level playing ground where all have equal opportunities to grow and develop potential.

Radio offers a level playground opportunity by which crucial information on the affairs of any society, including the well-being and development of people, are discussed (Leandro, 2014). It is an essential source of information for women experiencing structural inequalities (Heywood et al., 2021) and enables them to navigate issues regarding their rights and break negative stereotypes (Siscawati, Adelina, Eveline & Anggriani, 2020). Since radio's emergence in the 1920s, it has provided the space for women to be heard in a male-dominated environment, bridging gaps and connecting boundaries, and attempting to change the status quo.

Before gender equality became an issue of debate, women played key roles – both as broadcasters and listeners – thus affirming radio as a tool of development because, in those days, radio was saturated with feminine-based programming which addressed issues confronting women in politics, health, marriage, or intimate relationships. Through community radio, women empowerment in Africa has also been promoted as women are gradually

getting the required awareness, information, and education required to improve their skills and as a whole propel their social, cultural, political, and economic development (Ike, Omojola & Aririguzoh, 2018; Nirmala, 2015; Myers, 2009).

### **Gender Equality and Related Issues in Nigeria**

Gender equality (and women's empowerment) has become one of the central themes in global treaties and discussions. It has been a catalyst to clear-cut development strategies targeted at poverty reduction, improved standard of living, good governance, and profitable productive investments that are critical to the creation of an enlarged capacity that provides men and women equal opportunity and unrestrained access to decision-making and policy implementation and processes" (Ejumudo, 2013; p.59). In a 2012 report by the British Council Nigeria, Nigeria ranks 118 of 134 countries in the Gender Equality Index and women make up only 21 percent of the non-agricultural paid labor force due to their level of education. Nigeria also records one of the lowest rates of women entrepreneurs in sub-Saharan Africa, with the majority of women in casual, low-paid informal sector jobs with limited access to credits (British Council, Nigeria, 2012).

Despite the adoption of the National Gender Policy by the federal government, very little attention has been paid to the empowerment of women in the nation's annual budget. Many women still live below \$1 per day amidst claims of the paucity of funds by the government. He adds that the relatively insufficient budgetary allocation for women's development has been used for the production of maternal advocacy programs and jingles on the radio!

A startling report by the World Poverty Clock reveals that the number of Nigerians who are extremely poor and living under \$1.90 a day is about 94 million, with women making up about 70 percent of the figure (Obiukwu, 2019). It is noteworthy that women contribute so much to food production in the country, but most times are less likely than men to enjoy the benefits of these endeavors. For instance, female farmers contribute almost half of all agricultural labor in sub-Saharan Africa, yet their challenges in production are not adequately addressed. They benefit less from their production than men due to underlying causes such as inequitable access to land, information, productive resources, decision-making process, and unequal access to profits – a situation that could have been different if women had more



information and better support for their agricultural endeavors.

Often, women are the most disadvantaged in terms of access to media both as receivers and producers of information and the cause has been blamed on poor access to education, stereotypical roles which confine women to domestic roles, and restriction in mobility which limits the establishment of interpersonal communication.

Women also suffer untold marginalization in politics unlike what was obtainable in the pre-colonial days where women had the opportunity to play prominent and active roles in the traditional and political affairs of the society (Oyewole & Olisa, 2017). Despite the women's clamor for 35 percent affirmative action in government, they ended up with only seven in the current Buhari cabinet (Obiukwu, 2019). Restrictions placed on leadership roles including religious ones are common with women. In some cases, the restriction is statutory. For instance, in the 12 northern states practicing the sharia law, equity between men and women is forbidden (British Council Nigeria, 2012). Women fight hard to be heard and whenever such an opportunity to be heard arises, they are often at the center of sensationalist and stereotyped news (Moyo & Dhliwau, 2019).

Several instances speak to the fact that women struggle to have a voice in Nigeria. One such instance is that of a female activist, Aisha Yesufu who was tongue-lashed for coming out to speak against the alleged tyrant and repressive activities of Buhari's administration during the #EndSARS protest. Buhari was reported as saying his wife and First Lady Aisha should not dabble in the affairs of his administration but instead focus on the kitchen and the 'other room'. The now popular term – 'other room' - translates as a bed for copulation.

### **Theoretical Review**

Theories exist to underpin the fundamental role of radio in ensuring gender equality through its contents. Access to media and communication channels is crucial for nurturing participatory democracy, gender equality, and reducing poverty under theoretical guidance. In this study, the Development Media Theory (DMT), propounded by Dennis McQuail in 1989, helps explain how useful the media can be.

The theory canvasses media support for an existing government and its efforts to bring about socio-economic development. It argues that until a nation is well established and its economic development underway, the mass media must be supportive rather than critical of the government, as well as assist in implementing

policies. Critics of the theory believe that the media is no doubt given power but there is no check, implying that the limitless disposition can be oriented towards unguarded commercialism instead of development. This theory's bottom line is that there can be no development without communication. Concerning this study, radio stations should prioritize gender equality issues in their programming towards solidifying the confidence of rural women who are regarded as agents of development.

Also, because gender equality issues have in recent times gained international attention, the onus lies on radio stations and content producers to come up with laudable ideas that help rural women have their say. Of course, doing this will contribute significantly to the development of the community.

The import of this development media theory assumption in this study is that producers of gender equality programs must give priority to local content not only in programming but in choice of words and language. In this part of the world, language could be a barrier to growth and development, therefore to drive the development and growth of rural communities, the locality must be considered for easy and smooth dissemination of information. The

media must accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with the national established policy which in many cases accommodates rural development. Without prejudice to the mass media's traditional functions of information, education, and entertainment of the public, media should help in the special development tasks of national integration, socio-economic modernization, promotion of literacy, and cultural creativity. Media should carefully identify and give due attention in their foreign news to link with other countries having similar socio-cultural orientations and/or political and economic aspirations.

### **Extant Research on Radio and Gender Equality**

There has been a handful of research efforts on issues of gender equality in Nigeria and a review of a few of them on the subject matter helps establish the significance of radio in development. Jah, Connolly, Barker and Ryerson (2014) investigate the effect of radio serial drama on gender and reproductive outcomes in northern Nigeria. A total of 793 respondents, in the reproductive age of 15–49 for women and 15–59 for men, were interviewed across four states. The study sought to fill the existing gap in simultaneous assessments of program effects on

changes in both reproductive and gender outcomes, especially in both males and females. The researchers found that exposure to radio drama had a positive association with knowledge about reproductive health, while in terms of behavior, it was discovered that exposure to the drama led to a significant positive change in spousal communication about family planning.

Sow (2014) examines the role of women's radio in Africa, particularly in Senegal. Specifically, the study sought to access the role of Gindiku community radio in the pursuit of development and progressive social change among women in Senegal. Using a mixed method, the researcher purposively sampled 466 respondents comprising 414 members of listening groups and 52 women reporters through structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews with stakeholders, including representatives from the government, women associations, and community radio associations. The researcher found out that the marginalization of women in Senegal in both mainstream media and alternative community media, as well as women's needs, led to the emergence of community radio. It further found that community radio has been able to secure the loyalty of most women because it has implemented gender-based programming targeting

inequality, social injustices, and women's subordination.

Rasheed and Maraimalai (2018) investigate the role of public and private sector radio in women's development in India. Being a qualitative research, the researchers employed the in-depth interview to elicit views from 25 staff members of All India Radio (AIR), including directors and announcers. Specifically, the study sought to know the contribution of private and public radio stations in Chennai toward the development of women in society. They found that radio was identified as a powerful medium to grab the attention of women listeners through various program genres and radio content. Women-focused programs are aired on All India Radio or focus on harassment and violence aiming to give solutions to overcome such situations.

Godwin (2013) examines what factors drove women's participation in governance. Using a mainly secondary source of data collection, the researcher found that there was high women participation in governance in other parts of the world than in Nigeria, adding that the poor attitude of women towards local governance was borne out of a lack of funds to achieve the 30 percent affirmative action declaration' for women at the grassroots. Ifeanyi,

Martins, and Alexander (2012) assess the role of media in gender balance and politics in Nigeria. The study among others, ascertained if the media had succeeded in creating a smooth and equal playing field for both male and female folks in Nigerian politics. They found that media messages that are political in nature contain marginalized campaigns which favor the male folk as against the female folk, while coverage given to gender inequality coverage was very little and in most cases insignificant.

Fombad and Jiyane (2016) investigate the role of community radio in information dissemination to rural women in South Africa. The study investigated the extent to which community radio stations contribute to the dissemination of information and the development of rural women in South Africa. Two community radio stations were investigated in the qualitative research. The researchers found that there are not many information awareness programs tailored towards women and that women are more at the receiving end in these radio stations rather than active participants in the ownership and management of the programs.

## **Methodology**

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was adopted to gather data from residents

of four rural communities namely Agbojedo, Ibereko, Itoga, and Topo in the Badagry Local Government Area of Lagos State. There were 327,400 persons living in the LGA with 119,267 females according to the 2006 National Population Commission census. Using the purposive sampling system, forty (40) women were selected to participate in the group discussion. Robson (2002) suggests between eight and 12 participants for FGD, while Krueger and Casey (2014) argue that as many as five focus group sessions are appropriate for an in-depth conversation. Lazar, Feng and Hochheiser (2017) aver that relying on one or two group sessions should be discouraged because such might not give room for validity, reliability, and generalization of data. The authors add that the participation of many persons in FGD allows a broad range of viewpoints and insights. All these opinions on FGD research guided this research.

The criteria for selecting the discussants included literacy, age (from 20 years and above), occupation, marriage, and radio listenership. The minimum educational qualification set for the respondents was the First School Leaving Certificate as well as the ability to read and write; occupation as a criterion was set to select those who were employed, self-employed

and unemployed. Married and single women were invited to participate in the group discussions.

### **Research Ethics**

The discussants were given a synopsis of the research. They were informed that the study was meant for academic purposes only and that their anonymity would be guaranteed. As such, the respondents were not asked for their names but were given tags or labels. The researcher received informed oral consent from every discussant before data collection. The discussion session was recorded. The researchers transcribed the discussions manually and verbatim to ensure that every word was captured. After transcription, the researchers categorized the discussants' responses under key themes which were then discussed using thematic analysis.

### **Results and Discussion of Findings**

The respondents' general standpoint is that communication is essential for gender equality to be well established in Nigeria. They also reported that gender equality is an issue that must be pursued holistically through effective advocacy and engagement. The results of the research were presented under the following themes and sub-themes:

### **Radio Programmes on Gender Equality**

The first set of questions sought to identify the programs on gender equality that women listened to and how they informed the understanding of gender equality and women empowerment as well as promoting it. The composite views of the respondents' standpoints are reported. The discussants mentioned different types of radio programs on gender equality - talk shows, phone-in programs, commercials, and dramas they listened to such as "Tiwan Tiwa" "Toko Taya", "Aare", "Olori" all on Faaji 106.5 FM. They noted that radio programs such as "Abala Egbeyewo", and "Tojubole" talked about different gender equality issues. This finding proves that radio is a thriving medium for the promotion of gender equality among rural women and corroborates the submission of Rasheed and Maraimalai (2018) that radio as a medium has not only grabbed the attention of women listeners but also appears to have broken the barriers of distance and literacy.

### **Knowledge of Gender Equality Among Rural Women**

Most participants agreed to have heard about the term "gender equality" be it in the marketplace, in schools, in books, in social media, at

political gatherings, in NGOs, and on radio programs. According to them, oftentimes when it is discussed, it bothers on skill acquisition, women empowerment, girl-child education, the fight against rape and domestic violence, and political inclusion in their community. One of the participants said the following:

It was in the past, in the days of our fathers that they held the belief that the girl-child should not be given a chance to be educated but all thanks to the programs we listen to on the radio. For example, there is a program on the radio that encourages women to assume positions, especially government jobs. If we look at the economy, we now have female lecturers, as we have male lecturers and also female principals in schools.

The participants identified some radio stations and gender equality-based programs including Abala Egbeyewo on Faaji 106.5FM from 9-10 am on Mondays-Fridays and Tojubole on Radio Lagos 107.5FM that discuss women's issues, especially domestic violence. They also listened to radio dramas such as Toko Taya, Aare, and Olori on Faaji FM and Radio Lagos respectively. The participants agreed that the contents on gender equality provided

clarity on the concept, especially on the dynamism that characterizes it, a disclosure that is consistent with the findings of Somolu (2013).

### **Gender Equality Issues Addressed on Radio Programmes**

Another common view among the respondents is that several gender equality programs on the radio focus on the economic gratification and independence of women. The claim is that the content zeros in on skills acquisition and political prospects of women. One respondent said that she came across lots of business ideas such as '*Recharge and Get Paid*' with as low as #3,000 (\$7) start-up funds, headgear design, make-up lessons, nail artistry, and the like while listening to the radio. She said:

I heard about this 'Recharge and Get Paid' business idea and how to print recharge cards to earn money and women were told to come to a place called 'Ajangbadi' to learn about this new way of making money, we could start this business with as low as three thousand naira.

Furthermore, content on girl-child education, female genital mutilation (FGM), domestic violence, and family planning were gender also discussed in the programs. A participant added:

We are told that rather than women staying home and being subjected to giving birth only, they should be encouraged to embrace family planning so they can focus on their business to help their flow of income to the family.

### **Rural Badagry Women's Perception of Gender Equality Programmes**

Generally, the participants agreed that although the world is rapidly evolving, gender equality issues do not exist in the real sense of it because not all cultures and countries have embraced it. They suggested that nations of the world should make gender equality a core of their advocacy for change, adding that radio programs on gender equality are worth their time and have contributed meaningfully to their lives and their communities at large. One of the participants said:

I see Faaji 106.5 FM as an evangelist station because most times it feels like they just have a way of knowing what I'm going through. Their programs speak to me directly and help me personally.

Another discussant reported that not all times do they believe in the gender equality programs aired on the radio because it sometimes sends the wrong

information to the listeners and causes some women to misbehave and become uncontrollable for their spouses. She said that gender equality programs by the radio stations do not exhaust the many issues associated with gender equality adding that it is only discussed on the radio during an incident such as rape or murder or when certain government policies touch on it and during such events as International Women's Day. Her words:

The last time I heard about gender equality on the radio was recently when rape was on the rise in the country and one that involved a lady in Benin. The nation went agog with awareness programs on radio.

This view was penalized by a discussant who blamed the scantiness of gender issues on the radio on too many advertisements. Her opinion:

I think in such a situation, gender-related programs should be produced in series for them to be given adequate coverage and for good listenership.

Generally, the participants suggested the establishment of specialized radio stations for the broadcast of programs on gender equality and advised that such programs be prioritized in the programming.

Furthermore, some participants demonstrated a deep understanding of the benefits of gender equality in society while others dismissed it as a concept that is preached by successful single women to confuse women. They described gender equality as a mere dream that could not be realized because men and women are different in terms of their physical and emotional make-up. Some respondents were of the patriarchal belief that the *“husband is naturally the head of the home”*. This is consistent with extant studies (Oyewole & Olisa, 2017; Anorue, Obayi & Onyebuchi, 2012; Fombad & Jiyane, 2016 and Al-Hassan, Andani & Abdul-malik, 2011) which also reveal that there are not many information awareness programs tailored towards women on the radio. A few of these suggest that this challenge can only be addressed if women become active participants in the ownership and management of radio stations.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Radio, no doubt, is valuable in promoting gender equality but this value is limited. This is why it makes sense to with the view of some of the discussants that media professionals should make the mass media gender-friendly if they are to break the existing stereotypic perspectives about the female gender. On top of

this are the following recommendations:

1. In line with the view of some discussants, gender equality programs on the radio should be prioritized and the programming should be women-specific.
2. The government should consider establishing specialized radio stations for an effective broadcast of programs on gender equality while such programs should long-lasting not seasonal.
3. The media should design programs in local languages (Adeyeye et al., 2020; Igbino et al., 2020) to effectively suit the information needs of rural women on issues of gender equality.



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