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Synthetic Truths and Social Distrust: Evaluating How AI-Generated Content Shapes Public Perception of Credibility in Nigerian News Landscape

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ABSTRACT

Background: The increasing integration of AI-generated content into contemporary news production has raised global concerns about the authenticity and credibility of information. This emerging trend has contributed to growing audience skepticism and social distrust in journalistic outputs. In Nigeria, the proliferation of AI-generated news content presents a significant challenge to media credibility and public trust. Although existing studies have explored related issues, there remains a paucity of empirical evidence on how Nigerians perceive the authenticity and credibility of news in the context of widespread AI-generated content.
Objectives: This study aims to determine the effect of AI-generated content on public trust in news outlets and to identify the strategies employed by media organisations to detect and mitigate its negative impact on audience perceptions of credibility within the Nigerian news landscape.
Method: The study adopted a descriptive research design using a mixed-methods approach. A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 400 participants drawn from the South-East region of Nigeria using a five-point Likert scale questionnaire. This was complemented by an in-depth analysis of relevant secondary documents.
Results: Findings indicate that respondents exhibit a high level of skepticism toward AI-generated content, with mean scores below 3.0 on the Likert scale, suggesting low perceived credibility and authenticity. The study also reveals that media organizations rely primarily on fact-checking partnerships, basic verification tools, and capacity-building initiatives to address the challenges posed by AI-generated news content.
Conclusion: Nigerian news audiences generally perceive AI-generated content as lacking authenticity and credibility. Consequently, they continue to rely on traditional Nigerian media outlets as more trustworthy sources of information.
Unique Contribution: This study provides empirical evidence that, despite the increasing prevalence of AI-generated content, public trust remains more strongly associated with established Nigerian media institutions.
Key Recommendation: Nigerian media organizations should adopt advanced AI-detection systems and enforce rigorous content verification procedures to effectively identify and manage synthetic content.
Keywords: Synthetic Truths, Social Distrust, AI-Generated Contents, Shape, Public Perception, Credibility, News Landscape

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INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) technologies have developed at a very fast pace, creating a new global media environment that enables the production of synthetic content, including deepfake videos and AI-generated texts and images. These developments have raised serious concerns, particularly regarding the spread of false information and the decline of public confidence in news outlets worldwide. AI-generated content now exists across the globe, creating what has been described as a "crisis of truth," as people find it increasingly difficult to distinguish real news from false information (Newman, Ross Arguedas, Robertson, Nielsen, & Fletcher, 2025). The World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report (2025) identifies misinformation and disinformation driven by generative AI as one of the most critical threats expected to emerge over the next decade, with the potential to undermine democratic institutions, deepen social divisions, and manipulate public opinion.

In many countries, electoral systems and public discourse have already been affected by AI-generated media content. Deepfakes have been used in elections across several countries to blur the line between real events and fabricated content, leading people to doubt established news reports (Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020). The global situation is further worsened by the widespread use of social media platforms to share synthetic content, which often spreads faster than fact-checkers can verify it. Consequently, people across different contexts experience difficulty distinguishing between authentic news stories and fabricated ones. This raises concerns that public opinion may increasingly be shaped by AI-generated content (Newman et al., 2025).

Nigeria is particularly threatened by this trend due to its unique digital environment. The country has one of the fastest-growing digital ecosystems in Africa, with an estimated population of about 237.5 million people in 2025 and over 107 million internet users (DataReportal, 2025; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2024). Many people rely heavily on social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and X as their primary sources of news. While this digital expansion enhances access to information, it also increases the risk of exposure to misinformation, especially in matters relating to governance and elections.

The 2023 general elections demonstrated significant vulnerabilities, marked by increased use of AI-generated content within the Nigerian media space. Multiple deepfakes circulated, including altered audio recordings that falsely portrayed presidential candidates discussing electoral fraud, as well as synthetic videos showing fake endorsements from international figures and manipulated political statements (Ekpang & Iyorza Ekpang, 2023). These materials, widely disseminated through social media platforms, were used to spread misinformation, engage in character assassination, and intensify ethnic tensions, thereby undermining electoral integrity (Ajakaiye, 2024).

The Nigerian news environment remains highly vulnerable due to factors such as varying levels of media literacy, a history of election-related misinformation, and rapid internet expansion, which continues to challenge existing regulatory frameworks (Newman et al., 2025). Public concern about identifying false information online is among the highest globally, with 84% of

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respondents expressing worry (Newman et al., 2025). The increasing sophistication of AI-generated content has further complicated efforts to verify information, leading to declining trust in news organisations and the journalistic profession.

The rise of AI-generated content is reshaping how people perceive credibility in the Nigerian news media, posing significant risks to social trust and democratic processes. While AI offers advantages such as improved data analysis and enhanced operational efficiency in journalism, its potential to create convincing synthetic realities presents serious challenges. When such artificial content influences individual and collective opinion formation, the consequences for society can be profound.

This study, therefore, addresses this gap by exploring how AI-generated content shapes public perception of credibility in the Nigerian news landscape, while also identifying strategies to mitigate declining public trust and social division. In other words, there is limited empirical evidence on how Nigerian audiences perceive the credibility of media messages in the context of increasing AI-generated content. Investigating this issue will contribute to strengthening public confidence in Nigerian news media as they strive to maintain positive audience perception

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do Nigerian audience perceive the credibility of news content at the present time?
2. What impact does AI-generated content have on public trust in Nigerian news outlets and journalistic works?
3. What are the major strategies that the Nigerian media organizations employ to detect, label, or mitigate the negative effects of AI-generated content?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Global Perspectives on AI-Generated Content and Media Trust

Since the 2014 launch of Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) synthetic media development has progressed at a fast pace. The term "deepfake" emerged in 2017 from online communities as a term for non-consensual content which soon spread to become a common term with accessible tools and improved algorithms. Deepfake numbers doubled every six months between 2023 and 2025 because people could access deepfake technology through simple-to-use applications which had developed better audio and video and full-body synthesis capabilities (World Economic Forum, 2025). Deepfakes create an intense effect on the public's understanding of truth because they use realistic visual and auditory elements to produce doubt and disbelief. People who watch synthetic media content will lose their ability to differentiate between real and fake materials because they develop a "liar's dividend" which makes them treat actual evidence as false while losing confidence in visual evidence that people used to trust (Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020). Worldwide studies show that people experience more anxiety because they consider AI-powered misinformation as their topmost dangerous threat which leads to a crisis of knowledge (Newman, Ross Arguedas, Robertson, Nielsen, & Fletcher, 2025).

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International cases demonstrate how AI-generated false information poses a threat to democratic systems. The 2023–2024 elections faced deepfake attacks which targeted officials in Slovakia who appeared in an audio recording that claimed election fraud and affected people in the US through a Biden robocall that told voters to stay home and impacted Indonesia and Turkey and Taiwan through foreign attacks that used fake endorsements. The incidents which most commonly received state support or political backing led to voter opinion manipulation and voter reputation destruction and election process disruption which resulted in increased social division because of their unproven status (World Economic Forum 2025). These results show that institutional trust decreases and social divisions increase and democratic processes face obstacles which demonstrate the urgent requirement for both detection technology and regulatory frameworks.

AI-Generated Content in the African and Nigerian Context

African digital ecosystems have developed synthetic media because internet usage has grown rapidly and people use social media at high rates especially in nations that have young populations and better access to mobile networks. The entire continent demonstrates how generative AI tools generate fake content which people use to spread false information during political events. Deepfake technologies became widely available to the public around 2020 which led to an increase in their usage for traditional misinformation methods that existed before this period (Ajakaiye, 2024). These developments use WhatsApp, which functions as a closed platform because its encrypted forwarding system allows content to spread quickly beyond the ability of fact-checkers to monitor.

Nigeria experienced its first significant wave of artificial intelligence content during the 2023 general elections which became the country's first major instance of AI-generated content in its electoral process (Ekpang Iyorza & Ekpang, 2023). The primary purpose of deepfake technology became its use for creating defamatory material which served as propaganda tools. A study that used surveys discovered deepfake content which included both visual and auditory elements spread through social media platforms as tools for political character attacks and for displaying candidates as unsuitable for leadership positions (Ekpang Iyorza & Ekpang, 2023). The public in Nigeria shows high levels of concern about identifying authentic online information because 84% of people in the country experience doubt about what they see online (Newman Ross Arguedas Robertson Nielsen & Fletcher 2025).

The election in Nigeria which took place in 2023 witnessed disinformation as audio deepfake recordings claimed that Atiku Abubakar and his associates had created rigging plans which were distributed to the public three hours before the voting began to exploit existing public doubts about vote rigging (TheCable, 2023; Ajakaiye, 2024). The public received fabricated videos which showed celebrities supporting Peter Obi according to reports from AFP Fact Check 2023 and Africa Check 2023. The altered clips connected candidates with contentious organizations which increased ethnic conflicts (BBC, 2023; Ajakaiye, 2024). People used WhatsApp which delivered audio content through the system and they also used X and Facebook and TikTok to share content that proved their existing beliefs while people who disagreed with them remained separated from their social circle (Ajakaiye, 2024). The incidents which first gained popularity

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online later received fact-checking from Dubawa and Premium Times but those events demonstrated Nigeria's digital system deficiencies which resulted in decreased public confidence (Ajakaiye, 2024).

Audience Perceptions of News Credibility in the Era of Synthetic Content

Multiple factors determine how people perceive the credibility of digital news because it depends on both the characteristics of sources and the content of messages and the signals that different platforms provide. Digital environments require organizations to assess visual realism and algorithmic recommendations because traditional models consider accuracy and fairness and expertise as essential evaluation factors (Newman et al., 2025). The synthetic content creates artificial cues which make audiences believe in its hyper-realistic fabrications of authentic journalism because they use mental shortcuts instead of validating facts through formal methods. People around the world experience serious difficulties when they try to separate genuine news from fake news with 58 percent of survey participants expressing their concerns about the issue while 84 percent of online respondents from Nigeria reported the same (Newman, Ross Arguedas, Robertson, Nielsen, & Fletcher, 2025). Social media platforms create increased anxiety because they allow fast content sharing which makes contextual signals like endorsements and shares more important than actual content evaluation.

People show different reactions to content which they believe to be created by artificial intelligence because they struggle to determine its authenticity. Experimental studies show that deepfakes create two effects which lead viewers to doubt material because they see it as less believable from actual content which exists. The "liar's dividend" phenomenon occurs when deepfake technology creates doubt about real content because it misleads viewers (Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020). Most people lose their trust in AI generated news when they learn about machine creation. People find machine produced news to be less credible yet they judge synthetic content to be more reliable when its origin remains unknown. Political contexts cause two different reactions because confirmation bias leads people to accept synthetic narratives which match their beliefs while disconfirming ones trigger skepticism. The repeated testing of research studies has shown that machine writing decreases people s trustworthiness assessment of content by a small but steady amount. The loss of credibility becomes more prominent when content displays machine authorship through explicit labelling.

Media literacy and demographic variables play important roles in moderating these responses. Higher media literacy enables better discernment because interventions improve accuracy judgments of false and true headlines without eroding trust in legitimate news. The demographic factors of age and education and digital exposure determine how vulnerable people are to different threats because younger and more educated urban users show higher receptiveness to transparency cues while lower literacy segments depend on perceptual realism which makes them more vulnerable. In Nigeria, different literacy levels create educational disparities because rural and less educated people cannot identify manipulative content on social media which they depend on for information.

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Media Organisations' Responses and Mitigation Strategies against AI Generated Contents

Nigerian media organizations use different detection and verification tools to combat threats that come from AI-generated content. The fact-checking coalitions Dubawa and the Nigerian Fact-Checkers Coalition work together to monitor events in real time using manual reverse-image searches and the new AI technology MyAIFactChecker which analyzes audio and video content. International partnerships provide access to platforms such as Microsoft's Video Authenticator, though adoption remains limited by cost (GIJN, 2024)

The labeling practices together with the transparency measures require media outlets to use clear disclaimers which identify synthetic content and watermark their original materials. Some media outlets require reporters to reveal their sources when they use AI tools for their work, while fact-checkers provide verdicts which they attach to viral content on social media platforms (European Union AI Act, Article 50, 2024). The organization uses editorial guidelines on deepfake handling as part of its transparency initiatives to restore audience trust, but it continues to implement these guidelines in an inconsistent manner.

The Nigerian media organizations encounter significant challenges which restrict their operational capabilities. The organizations face resource limitations which prevent them from obtaining advanced tools because most of them depend on financially weak partnerships during times of economic difficulties (Umeora, 2025; Onebunne, 2024). The fast development of artificial intelligence exceeds the ability of detection systems to keep up with its progress and the lack of platform collaboration between different platforms has caused WhatsApp content to spread more quickly.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

A study by Ekpang, Iyorza, and Ekpang (2023) examined the forms, reasons, and effects of deepfakes during Nigeria's 2023 general elections. The research objectives aimed to discover which deepfake types were most commonly used and to analyze their reasons for usage and their effects on public opinion and electoral processes. The study used quantitative survey methodology to collect data from 1,500 voting-age respondents who completed questionnaires throughout five South-South states: Cross River, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Delta, and Bayelsa. The researchers achieved random selection and analysis through simple percentages. The study's findings showed that deepfakes showed their most common form on social media through fake audio and visual content which users employed to create negative political attacks and to spread false information about candidates. The study recommended the creation of laws which would control deepfake usage in political situations, especially during elections, to stop harmful uses. This research is relevant to this study because it demonstrates through real data that artificial intelligence produced content has spread throughout Nigerian media while showing its intention to deceive voters during an important election period. However, the study primarily focused on how people use media and what drives their usage but it fails to assess how people see newsworthiness and trust in organizations which creates a knowledge gap that this current research will solve by studying how AI-generated content reconfigure public perception of credibility in the Nigerian news space

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A study by Emovwodo and Ayo-Obiremi (2024) explored the occurrences and implications of deepfake technology on Nigerian politics and elections, drawing comparisons across the 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections. The main purpose of this research study was to examine how deepfake technology developed during election campaigns and to determine its effects on voter behavior and the protection of democratic systems. The research study used a qualitative exploratory research method to examine documented cases and secondary data. The findings stated that the 2023 elections witnessed a rise in deepfake usage which reached its peak because people used it to create negative content which included defamation and propaganda that changed political stories and voting patterns. The recommendations proposed building detection systems for electoral systems through educational programs which will help with upcoming elections. This study is relevant because it documents the evolving threat of synthetic media in Nigeria's electoral news environment which creates risks that affect both public perception of authenticity and public trust. However, the research needs quantitative data about how people respond to AI-generated content because it only examines historical events through qualitative research methods.

A study by Gabriel and Owa (2025) investigated the dual role of artificial intelligence in Nigerian elections, evaluating its potential as a tool for safeguarding democracy versus a weapon for deepfakes and disinformation, with a focus on the 2023 general elections. The research targeted three specific objectives, which included assessing deepfake usage throughout its deployment period and determining its impact on voter perceptions and identifying possible solutions to address this issue. The study implemented quantitative research methods through systematic literature review and survey data analysis which covered the South-South geopolitical zone. The results showed that deepfakes had been extensively used to change how voters viewed candidates while they also used deepfakes to create false images of politicians and deepfake technology showed its value through automated fact-checking abilities. The recommendations suggested practical solutions which included better detection systems and partnerships between different stakeholders to decrease potential threats. This study is relevant because it shows how AI-generated content uses deceptive techniques to sway public opinion and damage electoral trust throughout the Nigerian news media system. However, the study depends on literature review and regional survey data which limits it from investigating how different audiences view credibility across the nation and how trust in journalism institutions has changed because this research gap requires investigation through in-depth research about how Nigerian public reacts to media coverage and how media outlets respond to this issue.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Media System Dependency Theory, by Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach and Melvin L. DeFleur (1976) explains the relationships between individuals, media systems, and the broader social system. The theory states that people who depend on media to acquire knowledge and find their way through life and to engage in activities will experience greater media effects on their thought processes and social attitudes and their actual conduct. The theory also states that people from contemporary societies need to access media content because their social environment has become more complex. The need for media content grows during times when people face uncertainty and experience conflicts and changes in their environment. People who depend on

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media more will experience stronger media effects which include agenda-setting and attitude formation and guidance for their actual behavior. The relationship between audiences and media organizations and societal institutions establishes different levels of dependency which create unbalanced power dynamics.

The relevance of this theory to the present study lies in its explanation of how heightened individual and societal dependency on digital media for information in Nigeria amplifies vulnerability to AI-generated content and synthetic manipulations. Social media and online platforms have become the primary news sources for audiences who increasingly depend on these platforms because of the continuous digital expansion and the ongoing electoral uncertainty, which makes synthetic media more effective in altering public trust toward news organizations (Newman, Ross Arguedas, Robertson, Nielsen, & Fletcher, 2025).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted descriptive research design. Consequently, a mixed research method approach was used by researchers to ensure in-depth study of the subject matter. The researchers gathered quantitative data through a cross-sectional survey which used a Likert-Scale questionnaire to elicit data distributed as google platforms. This was complimented by qualitative data generated through analysis of secondary sources/documents. This was done by fact-checking reports on media guidelines and documented AI-generated content cases.

Population of the Study

The population for the study consists of adult residents of Ebonyi State. In the context of this study, adult is taken to mean those aged 15 years and above. Meanwhile, the estimated population of adult residents of Ebonyi State as at December 31st 2025 stood at approximately 1.9 million people, (City Population, 2025; DataReportal, 2025; Worldometer, 2025).

Sample Size

The sample size for the quantitative survey is 400 respondents, determined using the Australian online sample size calculator for finite population.

Instrument for Data Collection

As earlier mentioned, the researchers used structured 5-point Linkert-Scale questionnaire validated by Communication selected communication experts and confirmed reliable through a test-re-test to generate quantitative data. This was by the qualitative data generated through secondary document analysis.

Method of Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive (means, frequencies) and inferential statistics (correlation, regression) in SPSS. Qualitative data were subjected to thematic content analysis. Findings were integrated at interpretation/discussion stage.

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RESULT

Section B: Perceptions of Credibility of AI-Generated News Content

S/N	Questions	SA	A	SD	D	N	Mean	Result
1.	News content that I suspect is AI-generated (e.g., deepfake videos or AI-written articles) appears believable to me.	55	71	24	140	110	2.98	Rejection
2.	When news is confirmed to be AI-generated, I consider it accurate and trustworthy than human-produced news.	63	22	47	158	110	2.74	Rejection
3.	AI-generated news content (such as synthetic images or videos) increases my confidence in its authenticity.	19	32	98	136	115	2.35	Rejection

Fieldwork, 2025

The survey results show strong skepticism toward AI generated news content in the Nigerian news space. All the mean scores in the table indicate the rejection of each of the three questionnaire items. This suggest that the Nigerian media audience have strong aversion for AI generated news contents.

Section C: Impact on Public Trust in Journalism

S/N	Questions	SA	A	SD	D	N	Mean	Result
1.	Exposure to AI-generated news content has decreased my overall trust in Nigerian news outlets.	111	121	23	24	121	3.68	Agreement
2.	The presence of AI-generated or manipulated content makes me more skeptical about journalism as a profession in Nigeria.	119	101	61	74	45	3.36	Agreement
3.	Because of AI-generated fake news, I now have less confidence in the ability of Nigerian media especially social media to provide reliable information.	118	88	30	65	99	3.50	Agreement

Fieldwork, 2025

The survey results (N=400) reveal a notable erosion of trust due to AI generated content in the Nigerian news space. Using mean scores on a 5 point Likert scale (Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Neutral = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1), all items exceed the neutral point of 3.0, indicating agreement with statements on trust erosion.

Section D: Media Organistional Responses and Mitigation Strategies

The qualitative document analysis of 25 secondary sources from 2023–2025 shows that Nigerian media organizations use three main strategies to handle content created by artificial intelligence.

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Detection strategies rely primarily on partnerships with fact-checking entities such as Dubawa, Africa Check, and the Nigerian Fact-Checkers Coalition. Journalists commonly use reverse-image search tools (Google Reverse Image and TinEye) and video verification software (InVID Verification) which they supplement with new AI detection tools (MyAIFactChecker and Dubawa's AI chatbot for text and image and audio verification) (Gwadi et al., 2024; Dubawa, 2025).

Labeling practices involve appending explicit labels such as "False," "Manipulated Media," or "AI-Generated" to debunked content on social platforms. Fact-checking reports increasingly include transparency disclaimers which detail the verification processes used in their investigations. Some broadcasters use their on-air programs to show which content they believe has been manipulated (Ajakaiye, 2024).

The Mitigation efforts aim to develop capacity through the Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development training workshops which teach journalists to detect deepfake technology while supporting media literacy initiatives. The organization advocates for regulatory standards and platform partnership yet their actual implementation shows little progress (Global Investigative Journalism Network 2025).

DISCUSSION

The research results on perceptions of credibility of AI generated news content reveal that Nigerian audiences show strong skepticism, as mean scores on all three items fall below the neutral point of 3.0 on the 5 point Likert scale. The item on suspected AI content appearing believable shows a mean value of 2.98, the item on confirmed AI generated news showing accurate and trustworthy information displays a mean value of 2.74, and the item on synthetic content increasing authenticity confidence shows a mean value of 2.35. The results showed low mean values because they confirmed that people did not believe the credibility of AI-generated content. The results show that experimental studies around the world, which test people with deepfake content, show lower credibility ratings because synthetic media creates realistic appearances that people do not fully trust, and those people show credibility doubts about the message even when complete deception does not occur (Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020).

In the Nigerian setting, this doubt fits Reuters Institute data showing high concern about telling real from fake news online (Newman et al., 2025). However, the findings add to earlier African surveys by showing stronger rejection when AI involvement is confirmed compared to mere suspicion. This highly suggests that disclosures or fact checking labels may heighten distrust in high disinformation settings, pointing to a possible backfire effect rather than trust restoration. The research provides new evidence about Nigerian digital audiences which demonstrate their active devaluation of synthetic content while their adaptive skepticism leads them to question material instead of believing it. The research shows that local communities require credibility assessment models which better match their specific needs than existing Western models.

The survey results demonstrate that public trust in journalism has experienced moderate decline because all survey items received scores that exceeded the neutral value of 3.0. The item on exposure decreasing overall trust in Nigerian news outlets has a mean of 3.68, the item on greater

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skepticism toward journalism as a profession has a mean of 3.36, and the item on reduced confidence in media reliability, especially social media, has a mean of 3.50. The means show that people moderately believe AI produced material decreases their trust in content. The results support the international finding that deepfake technology leads to widespread public skepticism, which extends from particular material to institutional credibility (Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020), and they correspond with Reuters Institute findings of reduced trust in Nigeria, where disinformation threats damage institutional trust despite high nominal trust in some online samples (Newman et al., 2025).

Compared to studies focused on elections, these results support Ekpang et al. (2023), who showed deepfakes shaping views during the 2023 elections and adding to post election distrust. Yet this study offers new proof of a direct link: exposure to synthetic content drives skepticism toward journalism overall, beyond election periods. While some global work points to resilience from media literacy, the moderate means here suggest limited protection in Nigeria high dependency digital setting, which aligns with Media System Dependency Theory (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). The findings point out a key aspect: social media acts as the main channel that increases trust erosion, calling for specific steps to restore confidence in journalism within developing digital news spaces.

Findings on media organizational responses and mitigation strategies show Nigerian media organizations depend on partnerships with fact checkers, basic verification tools, emerging AI detectors, labeling practices, and capacity building workshops, though use stays uneven and limited by resources. These approaches match global patterns, like coalition verification and transparency labels, and back suggestions for joint detection systems (Global Investigative Journalism Network, 2025). The findings support Ajakaiye (2024), who pointed out strong reliance on fact checking coalitions in the 2023 elections, and build on Gwadi et al. (2024) by showing real use of tools like MyAIFactChecker and Dubawa chatbot in daily work. Still, ongoing manual methods and training focused on urban areas go against hopes for fast tech adoption in African journalism, instead showing a shift stage with financial and structural limits. This study brings out fresh details on platform issues, especially WhatsApp encryption that blocks active steps, which broader African studies often miss. While it agrees with pushes for journalist training and policy calls, the small scale and reactive style of efforts show Nigerian media actions fall short of AI threats, marking a clear difference between goals and results that needs ongoing funding and policy backing to improve results.

CONCLUSION

The news media audience in Ebonyi State still have strong belief in the authenticity and credibility of the media news content despite the increasing existence of AI generated news story in the nation's media landscape.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Nigerian media organizations need to implement advanced AI detection systems which require all contents to undergo verification procedures as their primary method to detect synthetic contents.

2. The Nigerian Fact-Checkers Coalition together with independent fact-checking organizations should expand their media literacy initiatives across the entire country to help people learn how to identify news contents that artificial intelligence systems have produced.
3. Journalism training institutions and professional associations should establish deepfake detection and ethical AI usage as fundamental subjects to teach journalists for sustainable capacity development.

Ethical clearance
Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

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Conflict of Interest
The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions
Dr. Simon Ugochukwu Nwankwo conceived the study and handled the introductory aspect of the paper, the literature review. Dr. Agatha Orji-Egwu handled the design, collated the data and handled data presentation. Whereas, Mr Jeremiah Igwurube did the analysis, interpretation and the rest of the work. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final draft, and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

Data availability statement.
The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

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