



## Perceived Credibility of Online News Media Among Lagos State Local Government Workers

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** The rise of online news media has transformed how information is produced, distributed, and consumed, raising concerns about news credibility in the digital age. While previous studies have focused largely on youths, limited attention has been given to grassroots public-sector workers.

**Objective:** This study therefore examines the perceived credibility of online news media among Lagos State local government workers, with specific attention to their preferred platforms and credibility assessments.

**Method:** Guided by Source Credibility and Media Credibility theories, the study adopted a quantitative approach of survey. Using multistage sampling, two local government areas were selected from each of the three senatorial districts (Eti-Osa, Lagos Mainland, Kosofe, Ikorodu, Alimosho and Ikeja) making six local government areas while 400 workers were sampled for the survey. Data were collected using the Online News Credibility Questionnaire. Of the 400 copies of questionnaires, 316 were returned and analysed using descriptive statistics.

**Results:** Findings show that respondents expressed relatively high trust in online radio/podcasts (76.9%), online television (73.4%), and online newspapers (66.5%), but significantly lower trust in social media sources like Facebook (38.2%), WhatsApp (31.6%), and X (23.3%). Key determinants of credibility include institutional reputation (78.5%), affiliation with established traditional media (74.7%), cross-platform corroboration (67.7%), writer credibility (58.5%), and personal experience (56.7%). Major challenges encountered include overwhelming news volume (61.4%), inadequate funds for data subscriptions (59.2%), and the difficulty of filtering misinformation (49.4%).

**Conclusion:** The study concludes that online news organisations must enhance transparency, maintain editorial integrity, and strengthen brand credibility to sustain audience trust.

**Unique Contribution:** This study has contributed and expanded the knowledge in the area of credibility of online news media among government workers at the grassroots. It has confirmed that government workers are exposed to fake news and are able to discern the fake news through multiple confirmations.

**Key Recommendation:** The study recommends that there should be transparency, editorial integrity and a strong brand reputation to maintain high level of credibility among audience.

**Keywords:** Credibility, Assessment, Media Literacy, Online News Media



## **INTRODUCTION**

The Internet has become integrated into our lives as an important, if not essential tool for information and communication. The large quantity of information available online combined with heavy reliance on the Internet by information seekers raise concern about the credibility and quality of online information (Agboola et al, 2016; Nwafor et al., 2020). The credibility of online news media has become a critical issue in the digital age, characterised by the rapid spread of information and the prevalence of misinformation. With the rise of social media platforms and the ease of publishing content online, differentiating reliable source from unreliable source has become increasingly challenging (Tandoc, Lim, & Ling, 2018; Nwosu et al., 2018). With the rise of online platforms, social media, and news aggregators, the traditional role of established news organisations as sole purveyors of news has been challenged. This digital revolution has raised concerns about the credibility and reliability of information. With the abundance of misinformation and fake news circulating online, there is a need to understand the impact misinformation and fake news will have on the audience's perception of media credibility (Yariv, 2017; Nwafor, 2012).

Creeber and Martin (2009) and Bennett (2003), have asserted that the new media have transformed people from being passive and at the receiving end of one-way Mass Communication, to becoming producers and transmitters of information. With this phenomenon, the Internet and the new media have assumed great importance and popularity in society as people are free to create their own news, comment on issues and get the other side of a story (Aligwe & Nwafor 2016; Rosenstein, 2005). And just as the social media platforms are seen as sources of news, the level to which people place credibility in them becomes an issue of concern and research. The emergence of online news media also has had both positive and negative impacts on media credibility. Online news media has made it easier for journalists to quickly and accurately report breaking news stories, share information with a wider audience, and provide a platform for diverse voices to be heard. Online news media has also allowed for more in-depth reporting and investigation, as journalists can access a wealth of information online and connect with sources more easily (Flanagin & Metzger, 2001).

The concept of media credibility is related to the more general concept of trust. If one views media credibility as audience trust applied to the news media, then one needs to better understand the concept of trust (Yariv, 2017; Nsude & Nwafor, 2016). Coleman (1990, p. 98) defines trust as an interaction between a trustor and a trustee: "If the trustee is trustworthy, the person who places trust is better off than if trust were not placed, whereas if the trustee is not trustworthy, the trustor is worse off than if trust were not placed". Fukuyama (1995), portrays trust as a secular and modern set of norms, and details its consequences for the creation of flourishing societies and economies. Secular norms, such as professional norms, are encompassed by the definition of trust, which helps us understand that trust in news media involves perceptions regarding the professionalism of journalists. Cappella (2002) reviews the decline in social media trust and ties it to the decline in participation in social life in the United States. He argues that mistrust spreads in a mimetic manner in society, and that the media do not create mistrust, nor do they create the events upon which mistrust is based, but they do



transmit and circulate stories of mistrust in a way that maximises their selection and retention by the audience. Evaluating local government workers' perception of online news media is crucial since they are the closest level of governance to the people. The increasing reliance on online news media necessitates understanding local government workers' perception of its credibility. Also, studying local government workers' perception of online news media helps identify strategies to mitigate misinformation spread.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The rapid expansion of online news media has transformed traditional patterns of information dissemination and consumption, raising widespread concerns about the credibility of news circulating in the digital sphere. With the increasing proliferation of online platforms and social media, audiences now encounter an overwhelming volume of information, making it progressively difficult to distinguish factual and trustworthy news from misinformation, disinformation, and outright fake news. This growing challenge has stimulated extensive scholarly interest, particularly regarding how different population groups perceive and evaluate the credibility of online news. Existing studies such as those by Oyero (2013), Igben and Oronupo (2022), Oladokun et al. (2022), and Osong and Egbe (2020) have primarily focused on youths and undergraduate students, examining online news credibility across several Nigerian tertiary institutions including Covenant University, Delta State University, Kogi State University, and the University of Calabar respectively. This research trajectory is largely influenced by the assumption that young people are the most active users of digital technologies and consequently the most exposed to online news content.

However, this narrow demographic focus has resulted in a significant gap in knowledge. Other important social groups particularly the working-class population at the grassroots level, such as local government employees have received limited scholarly attention. Yet, this group plays a crucial role in community administration and decision-making and is increasingly reliant on digital media for news, information, and work-related updates. This study therefore sought to address this gap by investigating the perceptions of online news credibility among Lagos State local government workers. Specifically, it examines the types of platforms they use, their assessments of credibility, the factors informing these perceptions, and the challenges they encounter in accessing and evaluating online news.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The study is anchored on the following research questions:

1. What are the major platforms through which Lagos State local government workers access online news?
2. How do Lagos State local government workers perceive the credibility of online news?
3. What factors influence the perception of online news credibility among Lagos State local government workers?
4. What are the challenges encountered by Lagos State local government workers in consuming online news?



## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Source Credibility Theory**

Source Credibility Theory originates from Aristotle's concept of *ethos*, which he identified as the most powerful means of persuasion, emphasizing the communicator's character, trustworthiness, and goodwill. Modern scholars such as Hovland and Weiss (1951) later expanded this idea, demonstrating that people are more easily persuaded by sources they perceive as credible. Their studies confirmed that credible sources produce greater attitude change than non-credible ones. Subsequent scholars, including McCroskey and Middlebrook, also affirmed that receivers are more likely to accept messages from communicators they view as knowledgeable, morally upright, and trustworthy. The theory commonly highlights two major determinants of credibility; expertise and trustworthiness with some scholars adding goodwill as a third dimension. These elements are not inherent traits but perceptions that can be shaped through communication strategies, message design, and audience adaptation. Anaeto and Anaeto further classify source credibility into three models: the factor model (how receivers judge credibility), the functional model (how credibility meets receivers' needs), and the constructivist model (how receivers process source information). In all cases, credibility influences whether audiences accept, trust, or act on information. In contemporary media environments, especially advertising, politics, and online communication, credibility significantly shapes how messages are received. Celebrities, politicians, and public figures often leverage perceived credibility to influence public opinion, demonstrating how communicator characteristics affect message acceptance.

Applying Source Credibility Theory to online news consumption among Lagos State local government workers helps explain why some digital platforms are trusted more than others. With the proliferation of online news sources ranging from reputable media outlets to unregulated social media accounts workers rely on indicators such as institutional reputation, authorship, and content consistency to judge credibility. Their perceptions determine whether they believe, share, or dismiss online news, thereby influencing public understanding, workplace decision-making, and civic engagement.

### **Media Credibility Theory**

Media credibility refers to the perceived believability and trustworthiness of media content, extending beyond the mere verification of facts (West, 1994). Although rooted in Hovland's early research on source credibility, media credibility studies have evolved to focus more on media practices such as objectivity, fairness, accuracy, and lack of bias—than on individual communicators. Research consistently shows that media credibility, alongside message and audience characteristics, is central to effective communication.

Media credibility theory examines how audiences judge the reliability, accuracy, and objectivity of news content and the institutions that produce it. As media consumption shifts across traditional and digital platforms, the theory has gained renewed importance due to declining public trust and widespread skepticism. Credibility is typically assessed through source expertise and trustworthiness, message quality, and the perceived credibility of the medium delivering the news (Metzger et al., 2003).



Contemporary digital environments pose significant challenges to media credibility. Social media platforms amplify misinformation through engagement-driven algorithms, while personalised news feeds create echo chambers that reinforce existing beliefs and weaken shared public knowledge (Tandoc et al., 2018). Trust in traditional media has also declined amid concerns about bias and sensationalism, as reflected in recent Gallup surveys. Enhancing media credibility requires transparency, prompt correction of errors, rigorous fact-checking, and improved media literacy to help audiences critically evaluate information. Emerging technologies such as AI and blockchain may support content verification but also raise ethical concerns.

This theory is relevant to the present study because it provides a framework for understanding how Lagos State local government workers evaluate online news sources. In a digital era marked by misinformation and rapid technological change, understanding the factors that shape media trust is essential for interpreting their perceptions of online news credibility.

### **EMPIRICAL REVIEW**

A number of studies have examined online news credibility, particularly among young people and undergraduate students in Nigeria. Oyero (2013) investigated the believability of social media news among 300 undergraduates, noting that youths rely heavily on social networks because of their interactivity, immediacy, and convenience. However, the study found low levels of trust in social media content, prompting the recommendation that users verify information before accepting or sharing it. Expanding this line of inquiry, Aondover, Igwe, Akin-Odukoya, and Ridwan (2023) explored social media news credibility and misinformation in Lagos State. Their findings showed that Facebook is perceived as the leading source of misinformation, followed by WhatsApp and TikTok. Demographic patterns revealed that younger, less educated individuals are more vulnerable to misinformation. The authors recommended stronger social media regulation and urged users to verify news before dissemination.

Similarly, Igben and Oronupo (2022) studied news credibility and its impact on the corporate image of broadcast media among Delta State University students. Anchored on source credibility and perception theories, the study found that government-owned broadcast stations suffer low public trust compared with private stations due to perceived lower news credibility. The authors recommended increased promotion of accurate and credible news to improve public perception.

In another study, Edogor, Jonah, and Ojo (2015) examined Nigerian users' evaluation of social media credibility using a multistage sample of 300 respondents. Their findings revealed that social media is generally perceived as credible, with Facebook rated the most credible platform. The study recommended caution in consuming unverified content and urged media practitioners to educate users on appropriate social media usage.

Oladokun et al. (2022) assessed the influence of social media on political news credibility among undergraduates in Kogi State. Their findings confirmed high levels of political news consumption via social media, especially Twitter, followed by Facebook, blogs, Instagram, YouTube, and Yahoo News. Credibility perceptions varied across the state's senatorial districts,



leading the authors to recommend that traditional media improve their social media strategies to remain relevant among youths.

In the South-West, Nigeria, Adeniyi and Onyechi (2021) explored young adults' perception of social media credibility and online political participation in Ibadan. Surveying 289 respondents and engaging 40 in focus group discussions, their study revealed that although respondents considered online news credible, they still viewed traditional media as more trustworthy.

In the South-South, Osong and Egbe (2020) explored social media credibility among students and lecturers in Cross River State, using Technological Determinism as a theoretical frame. Their findings showed that social media is widely patronized and considered an efficient news source, enhancing medium credibility. They recommended continued use of social media platforms for news gathering.

Outside of Nigeria, in Malaysia, Davood, Musa, and Muhamad (2013) assessed the credibility of internet and television news among 270 non-academic university workers. Their findings showed that television was perceived as more credible than the internet. The study also established a positive correlation between media credibility and time spent consuming a medium, supporting the notion that greater exposure enhances perceived credibility.

On a global scale, the 2025 *Digital News Report* by the Reuters Institute summarised by *Premium Times* found Nigeria to be the country with the highest trust in the media (68%), followed closely by Finland (67%). In contrast, Hungary and Greece recorded the lowest trust levels (22%). The report noted that 40% of global audiences now avoid news, often due to negative emotional impacts, information overload, and conflict-driven coverage. Younger audiences increasingly find news difficult to understand, while AI-generated content heightens concerns about authenticity.

Despite high trust levels, the report highlighted ongoing threats to press freedom in Nigeria, including frequent assaults and arrests of journalists, particularly during events such as the 2024 #EndBadGovernance protests, where the Committee to Protect Journalists documented 56 such incidents. Organizations like the Nigerian Guild of Editors and SERAP have since called for international intervention.

Regarding verification practices, audiences now rely on multiple sources including social media, traditional outlets, and AI tools reflecting a flattening trust hierarchy. While low trust can empower alternative voices, it also weakens the information foundation necessary for democratic societies. The report concludes that publishers must embrace transparency and demonstrate value through accuracy, impartiality, and original reporting, even as these principles become increasingly contested in polarised environments.

Collectively, these studies highlight widespread reliance on social media for news among youths, mixed perceptions of credibility, concerns about misinformation, and the need for verification and improved media literacy. However, they also underscore a significant research gap: limited attention to other demographic groups, particularly grassroots workers such as local government employees an area this present study seeks to address.



## METHODOLOGY

The study employed a quantitative research approach using the descriptive survey method. Six local government areas in Lagos State, two from each of the three senatorial districts, were randomly selected. These include Kosofe and Ikorodu (Lagos East), Alimosho and Ikeja (Lagos West), and Eti-Osa and Lagos Mainland (Lagos Central). From the total population of 20,712 local government workers in Lagos State (Lagos Bureau of Statistics), a sample of 400 respondents was selected through convenience sampling, with 67 staff drawn from each of the six participating local government areas.

Data were gathered using the Online News Awareness and Usage Questionnaire. The researcher, assisted by a trained fieldworker, personally visited the selected local government councils to administer the instrument. The collected data was analysed using simple percentages with SPSS version 23.

To ensure the reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted using 10% of the questionnaire (40 copies) administered to respondents in Yaba and Somolu Local Government Areas, which were not part of the main study but share similar characteristics with the selected LGAs. Twenty respondents participated in each location. Feedback from the initial administration informed revisions to the questionnaire. Two weeks later, the same instrument was re-administered to the same respondents for a test-retest reliability check. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, which produced a coefficient of 0.73, an acceptable level indicating good internal consistency.

## RESULT

### SECTION A: Demography of Lagos State Local Government Workers

**Table 1 Demographic List of respondents**

Age (Years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
20-29	46	14.6
30-39	62	19.6
40-49	131	41.5
50-59	75	23.7
60	2	6
<b>TOTAL</b>	316	100
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	64	20.3
Married	227	71.8
Divorced/Separated	16	5.1
Widowed	9	2.8
<b>TOTAL</b>	316	100



<b>Educational qualification</b>		
Primary school	17	5.4
Secondary School	30	9.5
ND/NCE	57	16.0
Professional Certificate	36	11.4
First Degree	132	41.8
PGD/Masters	40	12.7
PhD	4	1.3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>316</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Work Experience</b>		
<5 years	50	15.8
6-10 years	74	23.4
11 years+	192	60.8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>316</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	125	39.6
Female	191	60.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>316</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Religion</b>		
Christianity	192	60.8
Islam	109	34.5
Traditional	7	2.2
None	8	2.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>316</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Field Survey Report, 2025

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the 316 Lagos State Local Government workers which reveals a predominantly mature and experienced workforce. Most respondents fall within the 40–49 years age bracket, followed by those aged 50–59, indicating a largely middle-aged employee population with substantial service years, as over 60% have worked for more than 11 years. The marital status distribution shows a majority of married workers, which aligns with the age composition of the sample. Educationally, the workforce is relatively well qualified, with first-degree holders constituting the largest proportion, supported by notable representations of ND/NCE and postgraduate-degree holders, while only a minority possess primary or secondary education. Gender distribution indicates a female-dominated workforce, with women accounting for over 60% of respondents. Religious affiliation reflects the pluralistic character of Lagos State, with Christianity being the most represented faith, followed by Islam. Overall, the demographic composition suggests a stable, experienced, and fairly educated workforce, though one that may be characterized by limited youth representation and a gradually aging employee population.



**RQ1: Major platforms through which the workers access the news?**

**Table 2: Platforms for online news consumption**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage %
<b>Major platforms through which online news are being consumed</b>		
News aggregator apps like Google news, Yahoo news etc	116	36.7
Social media like facebook, Instagram, Twitter	237	75
Online news websites like premium Times, Punch Online, The Guardian Online etc	99	31.3
Online streaming of news like YouTube	249	78.8
<b>Types of News consumed online</b>		
Sport News	113	35.8
Entertainment News	202	63.9
Health News	151	47.8
Foreign news	108	34.2
Business news	137	43.4

**Source:** Field Survey Report, 2025

Table 2 shows the main platforms Lagos State local government workers use to access online news and the types of content they prefer. Online streaming services especially YouTube are the most popular, used by 78.8% of respondents. This highlights a growing shift toward visual, on-demand news, which is particularly appealing to younger, tech-savvy audiences who prefer quick video updates over long articles.

Social media platforms follow closely at 75%. Sites like Facebook, Instagram, and X have become major spaces for quick updates and public conversation, suggesting that these workers are highly active in digital social environments where news is shared, debated, and interpreted instantly.

News aggregator apps, such as Google News and Yahoo News, are used by 36.7% of respondents significantly less than streaming or social platforms. Although less interactive, these apps still serve users who prefer curated, topic-specific updates. Traditional online news websites like Premium Times, The Punch, and The Guardian Online attract 31.3% of respondents, showing that some workers still value established news sources, even if they may seem slower or more cumbersome than social media.

When it comes to content types, entertainment news leads at 63.9%, suggesting a strong interest in celebrity culture and lifestyle content, often used for relaxation during breaks. Health news (47.8%) and business news (43.4%) also rank high, reflecting concerns about well-being and financial issues. Sports news is consumed by 35.8%, consistent with



Nigeria’s strong sports culture, particularly football. Lastly, foreign news (34.2%) attracts moderate interest, showing that while international events matter, workers are more focused on entertainment and locally relevant updates.

**RQ 2: How do Lagos State local government workers perceive the credibility of online news?**

Table 3: Perception of Lagos State local government workers towards online news credibility

Variables	Frequency	Percentage %
<b>Encountering of fake news online</b>		
Yes	246	77.8
No	70	22.2
<b>Frequency at which they encounter fake news</b>		
Never	46	14.6
Rarely	91	28.8
Often	115	36.4
Very Often	64	20.3
<b>Which online news were the fake news encountered</b>		
Facebook	168	53.2
Phoenix	28	8.8
Opera Mini	22	7
Instagram	8	2.5
WhatsApp	7	2.2
Google News	3	0.95
X (Twitter)	4	1.27
TikTok	1	0.3
YouTube	2	0.6
Others	73	23.1
<b>Cross checking of news online</b>		
Yes	204	64.6
No	112	35.4
Total	316	100

**Source:** Field Survey Report, 2025

The perception of Lagos State Local Government workers towards online news credibility reveals a high exposure to fake news, with 77.8% of respondents reporting having encountered misinformation online. The frequency of such encounters varies, with 36.4% encountering fake news often, 28.8% rarely, 20.3% very often, and 14.6% never, indicating that online misinformation is a common experience among the workforce. Facebook was identified as the primary platform for fake news (53.2%), followed by Phoenix (8.8%) and Opera Mini (7%), while smaller proportions reported encountering fake news on



Instagram, WhatsApp, Google News, X (Twitter), TikTok, YouTube, and other platforms (23.1%). Despite widespread exposure, a majority of respondents (64.6%) reported cross-checking information online, reflecting a moderate level of media literacy and a critical approach to verifying news content.

**Table 4: Perception of credibility of online news media among Lagos State local government workers.**

Perception on online news media	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Undecided %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Total %
I trust stories from online newspapers	16.8	49.7	14.2	12.3	7.0	100
I trust stories from online radio/podcast	22.8	54.1	11.7	7.9	3.5	100
I trust stories on online television	25.0	48.4	14.6	8.9	3.2	100
I trust stories on Facebook and WhatsApp	6.6	31.6	24.7	20.6	16.5	100
I trust stories on X (twitter)	11.7	14.6	19.6	40.2	13.9	100
Traditional radio, TV and newspapers are more credible than online news	39.9	36.7	6.6	9.5	7.3	100
Online news platforms are more credible than traditional radio, TV and newspapers.	9.2	28.8	15.8	24.7	21.5	100
Online news is the same as offline news	7.3	28.5	15.8	29.4	19.0	100
Most online news are lies and unreliable	10.1	29.1	15.5	25.3	19.9	100
Online news are very reliable	11.7	37.0	20.6	20.6	10.1	100
Headlines of online news are very misleading and exaggerated	14.2	39.6	11.7	21.5	13.0	100
Most online news are false	16.1	32.3	12.0	25.9	13.6	100
Most online news are true	10.4	50.3	15.2	15.5	8.5	100

**Source:** Field Survey Report, 2025

Table 3 presents respondents' perceptions of the credibility of various online news media platforms and the relative reliability of online versus traditional news sources. The data indicates a nuanced view of online news credibility among Lagos State local government workers.



Regarding trust in specific online platforms, respondents reported the highest confidence in online newspapers (66.5% strongly agree or agree), online radio/podcasts (76.9%), and online television (73.4%), suggesting that professionally produced online news sources are perceived as relatively trustworthy. In contrast, social media platforms, particularly Facebook and WhatsApp, elicited lower trust, with only 38.2% expressing agreement, while X (Twitter) was trusted by just 26.3%. This indicates that respondents differentiate between formal online media outlets and user-generated content on social media, showing skepticism toward platforms prone to misinformation.

When comparing online news with traditional media, 76.6% agreed that traditional radio, TV, and newspapers are more credible, whereas only 38% agreed that online platforms are more credible than traditional media, reflecting a general preference for conventional media for reliability. Furthermore, perceptions of online news quality were mixed: while 61.7% considered most online news to be true (strongly agree/agree), 55.4% believed that most online news are lies or unreliable, and 53.8% felt that headlines are often misleading or exaggerated. This duality highlights a cautious approach among respondents, recognizing both the potential value and pitfalls of online news.

**RQ 3: What are the factors that determine the credibility of online news sources among the workers?**

**Table 5.: Factors that determine the credibility of online news media**

Factors that determine the credibility of online news media	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree %	Total F %
I believe online news if it comes from direct websites of a known media organization	30.7	47.8	10.4	6.3	4.7	100
I believe social media stories only when written by known individuals and organisations	16.1	42.4	18.0	13.3	10.1	100
I believe online stories only when earlier published by known media traditional organisations like Punch, Vanguard etc	30.1	42.7	11.7	9.2	6.3	100
I believe online stories based on my personal experience of the story	15.2	41.5	17.4	15.8	10.1	100
I believe online stories based on similar reports that were found true	20.9	46.8	14.9	10.8	6.6	100
The reputation of the news media platform affects the trust of the information presented	22.5	52.2	11.4	8.9	5.1	100

**Source:** Field Survey Report, 2025



Table 5 presents the factors that influence Lagos State local government workers’ perception of online news credibility. The findings indicate that respondents rely on several key criteria to assess the trustworthiness of online news. A significant majority of respondents (78.5% strongly agree/agree) reported that they trust online news when it originates from the direct websites of known media organizations, emphasizing the importance of source authority in credibility assessment. Similarly, 72.8% of respondents indicated that they trust online stories previously published by well-established traditional media outlets such as Punch and Vanguard, highlighting the enduring influence of reputable print media in shaping perceptions of online content. The reputation of the news platform itself also plays a crucial role, with 74.7% agreeing that the credibility of the information is influenced by the perceived reliability of the media outlet. This underscores that platform reputation remains a central determinant of trust in online news. Social media credibility appears more conditional, as 58.5% of respondents only trust stories shared by known individuals or organizations, indicating a cautious approach toward user-generated content. Personal experience and verification through corroborating reports are also important, with 56.7% trusting stories based on personal experience and 67.7% considering stories credible if similar reports were previously verified.

**RQ 4: What are the challenges encountered by Lagos State local government workers in consuming online news?**

**Table 6: Respondents view on technical challenges encountered in consumption of online news**

Challenges encountered in consumption of online news	Never%	Rarely%	Often%	Very often%	Total %
How frequently do you encounter internet connectivity issues while trying to access news online	6.6	27.5	42.7	23.1	100
How frequently do you encounter difficulties in navigating news platform or app online	14.2	39.6	37.0	9.2	100

**Source:** Field Survey Report, 2025

Table 5 highlights the main challenges Lagos State local government workers face when consuming online news. Although digital platforms offer quick and diverse access to information, many respondents still struggle with internet and usability issues that affect how efficiently they stay informed. The data shows that internet connectivity is the biggest challenge. About 42.7% of respondents often experience poor connectivity, and 23.1% face it very often. Only 6.6% say they never have internet problems. This means nearly two-thirds (65.8%) regularly deal with disruptions that slow down access to news, especially in areas with weak infrastructure or during peak hours. Such interruptions can delay important updates, reduce trust in online platforms, and even discourage users from verifying information across multiple



sources leaving them more vulnerable to rumors or unverified messages shared on apps like WhatsApp. Navigation issues on news websites and apps also pose a problem. While less severe than connectivity challenges, 37% of respondents often struggle to navigate platforms, and 9.2% struggle very often. Although 14.2% report no issues, almost half (46.2%) still find navigation difficult at least frequently. This limits smooth access to information and can make digital news consumption frustrating.

**Table 7: Respondents’ view on challenges encountered in consumption of online news**

Challenges encountered in consumption of online news	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total (%)
Do you encounter difficulty in filtering fake news or misinformation online.	49.4	50.6	100
Do you face the challenge of being overwhelmed by the amount of news content online	61.4	38.6	100
Do you face the challenge of lack of money to get data to access the online news	59.2	40.8	100

**Source:** Field Survey Report, 2025

Table 7 shows the personal and non-technical challenges Lagos State local government workers face when consuming online news. Unlike earlier findings that focused on internet and platform issues, these results point to deeper cognitive, informational, and financial barriers that shape how workers engage with digital news. First, the data shows a near-even split in the ability to detect fake news: 49.4% struggle to distinguish real from false information, while 50.6% do not. This reveals a significant digital literacy gap. For public servants, difficulty identifying misinformation can affect workplace communication, influence opinions, and potentially shape decisions based on inaccurate content. Although some workers use verification strategies, many still lack the skills or confidence to check information effectively, highlighting the need for targeted fact-checking and digital literacy training. Information overload is another major issue. About 61.4% of respondents feel overwhelmed by the volume of online news. With constant updates across platforms, many struggle to separate important information from noise. This can lead to confusion, reduced attention or reliance on only a few familiar sources sometimes at the expense of accuracy or balanced viewpoints. Financial barriers also play a significant role. A large share of respondents (59.2%) say that the cost of mobile data affects their ability to access online news. Despite being public workers, many still limit their browsing to save data, avoid video news, or rely on free but potentially unreliable platforms. This shows that digital inclusion is not only about internet availability but also affordability, which directly influences the quality and diversity of information accessed.



## DISCUSSION

Research question one examined the major platforms through which Lagos State workers consume online news. Findings revealed online news consumption is dominated by online streaming platforms and social media, with YouTube and social media platforms being the most frequently used sources of news. This suggests a strong preference for visually engaging and easily accessible news formats among respondents. News aggregator apps and online news websites are less commonly used, indicating a shift away from traditional news websites toward more interactive and personalized platforms. Regarding the types of news consumed online, entertainment news is the most popular followed by health news and business news, while sports news and foreign news attract comparatively lower attention. This finding highlights a trend toward entertainment-focused and multimedia-driven online news consumption.

Research question two examined how Lagos State local government workers perceive the credibility of online news. The findings show that fake news is a major concern, with about 78% of respondents frequently encountering misinformation especially on platforms like Facebook, Phoenix, Opera Mini, and Instagram. Because of this, many workers rely on traditional media such as *The Guardian*, *The Punch*, radio, and TV to verify what they see online. Overall, respondents view traditional news outlets as more credible than online platforms, and they see social media as the least trustworthy. Many also believe online headlines are often misleading or exaggerated. Although it is encouraging that many workers try to verify information before believing or sharing it, a significant number still do not, pointing to the need for awareness campaigns and institutional policies that promote fact-checking and responsible digital habits. The findings also reveal a cautious, platform-specific trust pattern. Workers tend to trust structured online sources like online newspapers more than social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter/X. Their preference for traditional media suggests that legacy outlets are still seen as more reliable and professionally regulated.

These insights highlight the importance of improving digital literacy, strengthening regulations to curb misinformation, and providing public sector media training. Ensuring government workers can confidently identify credible sources is essential for informed decision-making and responsible engagement in today's digital information environment. This finding aligns with Majeekzat and Strzelecki's (2022) argument that the rise of social media as a dominant communication tool has fueled the rapid spread of fake news. Because anyone can create and share content online, misinformation has become not only widespread but also a serious threat to society. Del Vicario, Bessi, Zollo, Petroni, Scala, Caldarelli, Stanley & Quattrociocchi, (2016) further explain that while online platforms bring people together around shared interests and viewpoints, they also create fertile ground for the fast circulation of unverified rumors. In other words, unrestricted access to online media can unintentionally endanger societal well-being.

Similarly, scholars like Pennycook and Rand (2020) point out that although digital platforms offer many benefits, they have also become hotspots for misinformation, making it harder for the public to separate fact from fiction. Guess et al. (2019) also emphasize that misinformation and disinformation significantly undermine the credibility of online news. Because false information spreads so easily, trust in news sources weakens and public confidence declines. Napoli (2019)



adds that sensational headlines and clickbait common strategies used to attract attention further damage credibility when entertainment is prioritized over factual reporting. The literature reinforces how misinformation, sensationalism, and the open nature of social media contribute to declining trust in online news.

Research question three explored the factors that shape how Lagos State local government workers perceive the credibility of online news. The findings show that workers rely on a mix of institutional trust, personal experience, and past exposure to evaluate whether a story is believable. They place the most trust in news from established media websites, content verified by traditional media, and posts shared by reputable individuals. Consistency of previous reports and the reputation of the media outlet also strongly influence their judgments. Also, the workers appear cautious and selective rather than accepting online information at face value. For news platforms and public agencies aiming to communicate effectively with this group, maintaining strong editorial standards, building a trustworthy brand, and ensuring alignment between online content and reputable traditional sources are crucial. Understanding these credibility cues can help improve the reliability and impact of digital communication targeted at civil servants. This finding aligns with Chung et al 's assertion that traditional news sources have an established offline reputation, which can contribute to higher credibility perception among audiences, on the contrary the credibility of online news is sometimes questionable. This finding is evident in the statement of Agboola et al (2016: p 60) that:

In the past, substantial costs of information production and dissemination on a mass scale limited the number of sources to only those with enough power and capital to justify and sell an information product. In the digital environment, however, nearly anyone can be a writer, as authority is no longer a requirement for content provision on the internet or social media. This obviously raises issues of credibility, a problem that is exacerbated by the fact that many web sites operate without much supervision or editorial review. Unlike most traditional (i.e., print) publishing, information posted on the Web may not be subject to filtering through professional gatekeepers, and it often lacks traditional authority indicators such as author identity or established reputation there is nobody or organization saddled with the responsibility of regulating their activities. Additionally, there are no universal standards for posting information online, and digital information may be easily altered, copied, misrepresented, or created anonymously under false pretenses.

Research question four examined the challenges Lagos State local government workers face when consuming online news. The findings show that poor internet connectivity and difficulties navigating news platforms are major barriers. Although many workers rely on online news, unstable networks and confusing interfaces often slow down their access to information. These issues can delay important updates, affect their work efficiency, and increase the risk of relying on unverified sources when credible platforms fail to load or function properly. Overall, these



challenges significantly shape the quality and reliability of their digital news experience. As

Renjth (2017: p32) succinctly put it:

News Overload is a part of information overload. The news content produced by media organizations and other sources becomes profuse. Different news organizations are treating same news event differently. As a result, numerous versions of the same news would be produced. Nowadays internet, more specifically, social media is spreading the different versions of the news in no time. The audience has a profound role in disseminating these news items. They are choosing a version which supports their views and ideologies and sharing. The vested interest in a particular subject leads to misinterpretations. In fact, most of the time this manipulated information is shared through the internet. Thus, the real audience became confused. The vast amount of information prevents them from accessing the right information.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings, the study concludes that although online news has become an essential source of information for Lagos State local government workers, major barriers still limit its effectiveness. Connectivity problems, high data costs, and platform navigation difficulties reduce the reliability and speed of access. More importantly, frequent exposure to fake news especially on social media has significantly weakened trust in online platforms.

Workers tend to rely heavily on traditional media for verification, viewing it as more credible and professional than most online sources. Their assessment of online news credibility depends on media reputation, personal experience, cross-checking with established outlets, and the trustworthiness of those sharing the information. This shows that despite high engagement with digital media, skepticism remains strong, and digital literacy gaps persist. The study concludes that while digital platforms offer convenience and accessibility, their credibility is undermined by misinformation, sensationalism, and technical barriers. Strengthening digital literacy, improving access to reliable internet, and promoting credible online sources are critical steps in ensuring that government workers can make informed and accurate decisions in a rapidly evolving media landscape.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study recommends that:

1. There should be an enhanced digital literacy and fact-checking skills among the workers, this can be achieved by government institutions implementing regular training on identifying fake news and misinformation, verifying online sources and recognizing clickbait and misleading headlines. This will help workers confidently navigate digital information and reduce the spread of false content.



2. There should be an improved internet access and data affordability to support timely and efficient access to credible information. The government should strengthen internet infrastructure in local government offices, provide subsidized or pooled data plans for staff and increase the availability of office Wi-Fi. Reliable connectivity will improve information flow and reduce dependence on unverified sources.
3. Government agencies should promote the use of credible online news platforms to encourage workers to rely on reputable digital newspapers and broadcast outlets, cross-check information with trusted traditional media and avoid unfamiliar or unregulated platforms. Providing a curated list of credible sources can further support accurate information sharing.

### **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**

Adesanya Olufunke Oluseyi, Olayinka Sunday Alawode and Omolade Sanni conceived the study, including the design, Olufunke Adesanya collated the data, and she handled the analysis and interpretation, while she also the initial manuscript. 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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