APPRAISAL OF FACT-CHECKING TOOLS IN COUNTERING FAKE NEWS IN NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS

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Abstract

This research study is an appraisal of fact-checking tools in countering fake news in Nigerian Newspapers evaluated the adoption and effectiveness of fact-checking tools in tackling the spread of fake news in Nigeria. In supporting this position paper, the researchers sourced information from books, journals, library archives, and other library research by reviewing literature and empirical studies on fact-checking and fake news. The study was further anchored on the social responsibility theory of the press and the diffusion of innovation theory. While the first theory holds that journalists should be the watchdog of society in disseminating news in the society but should do that with all sense of responsibility, the second theory speaks to the adoption of innovation, in this case, fact-checking to tackle fake news. Findings revealed that fake news has extremely negative effects as it affects societal values while promoting the acceptability of odd or foreign values. However, the adoption of fact-checking across newsrooms is relatively slow in Nigeria compared to the adoption level in the United States and Asia. The low adoption is because most newspapers have not made it a routine publication but seasonal, especially during elections or when a famous public official makes a claim. From the findings of the study, this research concluded that there is an imperative for fact-checking to curb the prevalence of fake news. While newspaper publishers in Nigeria are beginning to adopt fact-checking in their newsrooms, the practice is still low compared to its adoption level in the United States and Asian countries. It was thus recommended among others, that media houses should collaborate more with independent fact-checking organisations to increase fact-checked reports.

Keywords: Fake news, fact-checking, journalism, social media, misinformation

Introduction

The advancement in mass media technology has continually resulted in the growth of information dissemination worldwide. Dittmar and Seabold (2019) note that the success of the mass media is widely attributed to the invention of the printing machine by Johannes Guttenberg in 1447. This first movable type printing press enterprise established in Mainz, Germany by Gutenberg and his business partners was shielded from the public but soon, the technology diffused to cities across Europe as it was adopted by firms. Since then, the mass media, especially starting with newspapers, have helped create social awareness and also provided people with an easy way of living life. Although the era of newspapers thrived, the speed at which technology grew brought about significant advances in the Internet which enabled more access to information while simultaneously liberalizing the business of mass media. People who have access to the internet and social media platforms may no longer be termed as just consumers of news as they also have access to create stories and publish news. With such enormous power comes abuse and so, fake

news, which is unverified and probably untrue, and non-factual (nearly fictitious) reports now pervade the media space with a lot of misinformation on key issues in society.

As access to mobile media devices and social media platforms becomes prevalent, more conventional newspaper readers are turning to social media platforms. This has, however, posed some challenges to the sustainability of the traditional newspaper business as well as the factuality in information dissemination (Taner, 2016). One of these observed challenges is the emergence of competition in news sources thereby creating the problem of publishing fake news by mostly media persons with little to no training.

There have been global efforts to counter this trend of misinformation and disinformation generally referred to as fake news. According to Wardle (2018), misinformation is "information that is false, but not intended to cause harm' while disinformation is false information that is deliberately created or disseminated with the express purpose of causing harm. To navigate these challenges, Jacob (2020) observes that some newspaper publishers innovatively integrate the use of fact-checking as a tool to combat fake news and give newspaper readers renewed confidence in the media. Most conventional media platforms and investigation-oriented online media are adopting the 'Fact-checking' strategy to dissect fake news and re-inform readers and audio-visual audiences about the subject matter. Fact-checking has grown in relevance and has spread around the world following the global surge in 'fake news'. Towards this, the research work takes the position that although there is increasing adoption of the fact-checking tool in the West and Asian countries to battle fake news and sustain the dissemination of credible information to the

readers, the adoption level of the fact-checking tool in Nigeria is rather slow. This paper further justifies this position by reviewing scores of literature on fact-checking and providing pieces of empirical evidence to support this stance.

Literature Review
The study has some important concepts that include newspaper publishing, fact-checking, and fake news. These concepts are reviewed in this study. This review becomes important to provide an explanation of their meanings in the context they are used in this study towards establishing a position on the adoption of fact-checking in the Nigerian media space.

Newspaper Publishing
Newspaper as a mass medium has been defined by several scholars with a convergence point that it is a source of societal information. Baran (2009, p.3) defines a newspaper to be "an unbound printed publication issued at regular intervals which presents information in words, often supplemented with pictures". This definition encompasses the entire content of the newspaper and the newspaper production elements. According to Okunna and Omenugha (2012), a newspaper is an unbound printed publication issued at regular intervals which presents information in words, often supplemented with pictures. Corroborating this, Nwodu (2006) notes that a newspaper is a printed unbound paper that contains news about current political, economic, socio-cultural, educational, environmental, scientific-cum-technological, and sundry affairs as well as other relevant sales information.

Traditional newspaper publishing gradually advanced beyond the conventional sphere as Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is becoming much more sophisticated. The positive consequences of Internet technology notwithstanding,

negative developments, such as misinformation, disinformation and fake news, are equally trending, and have become topics of public concern within the journalism landscape in Nigeria.

What is Fake News?
Fake news or false information is news, stories or hoaxes created to misinform or deceive readers. Several scholars have put up definitions of what fake news is. Lewandowsky, Ecker and Cook (2017) define fake news as any information that is initially presented as true but later found to be false. More so, Lewandowsky, Ecker and Cook (2017) note that such information can be actively disseminated with the intent to mislead. Santas, & Francis (2020) are of the opinion that most people who spread fake news usually have an ulterior motive or wants to achieve a negative aim or purpose. According to Allcott and Gentzkow (2017, p.231), fake news is "news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false, and could mislead readers." Further explaining this concept is the definition advanced by Gelfert (2018, p.90), stating that fake news is a "deliberate presentation of (typically) false or misleading claims as news, where the claims are misleading by design" (intentional). Across the world, misinformation is gradually eating into the digital environment as its carriers often use web technologies to drive traffic, thereby amplifying the effect. And one of the effect is the astronomical volume of fake information on the public space Inobemhe, Ugber Lucky & Santas, 2020). The Internet has made information more accessible to people, but within this same realm are avalanches of misinformation. Butler-Adam (2017) found a word for misinformation which he refers to as 'post-truth'. With the proliferation of user-generated platforms, the seemingly omnipotent power of media-generated platforms is now contestable. This is breeding new challenges for media management and among those challenges are misinformation and fake news.

The Concept of Fact-checking
Numerous scholars have put up definitions of fact-checking. Among them are Stencel (2015), Mantzarlis (2016), Stencel and Griffin (2018) and Graves and Amazeen (2019) are among the numerous scholars arguing the definition of fact-checking. They posit that fact-checking is about verifying facts or information that have been reported towards accrediting such pieces of information or discrediting them completely. This then helps the consumers of such information to have a grasp of the real idea and make inferred judgements. Mantzarlis (2018) states that "fact-checking" can mean two different things in journalism; one is to 'fact-check' or proof-read contents and claims made by reporters in their copies by copywriters and proof-readers before such copies are published while the other is to verify and debunk claims that have already been reported and in the public domain. Although the former has been existing within the newsroom since the early 20th century and fact checkers were employed by newsrooms to proofread and verify factual claims made by reporters in their articles but then in the 21st century, these sections were fused completely into copywriting/proofing. However, the prevalence of the latter is within the last decade due to the avalanche and pervasive nature of information that have pervaded public domain especially the internet (Santas & Asemah, 2021).

Review of Related Studies
Some studies have exemplified the prevalence of fake news and the place of fact-checking to address these issues.

Concerns Over Prevalence of Fake News in Newspapers

Gelfert *et al.* (2018) provide a historical perspective on fake news by referring to an instance of fake news in the early days of American media history. William Randolph Hearst, an American businessman, politician, and the publisher of the *New York Journal*, used his publication to encourage America to go to war with Spain in 1897, following the explosion of the *USS Maine* in the harbour of Havana, which Hearst's paper resolutely blamed on the Spanish. Competing papers, such as the *New York Evening News*, lamented the 'gross misrepresentation of the facts' and 'deliberate invention of tales calculated to excite the public'. Fake news has continually been in society with the purveyors anticipating various objectives per time. There are various channels for propagating fake news. According to Femi *et al.* (2022), Farkas and Schou (2020), Shao *et al.* (2017), Okoro and Emmanuel (2018) and Masharqa (2020), the largest percentage of fake news is propagated through social media or referred to as the digital media (Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Tik Tok, WhatsApp, videos, websites, emails, pages with high numbers of followers and pages of celebrities), although there are quite some in traditional media (newspapers, radio, television). This is explainable because of the unregulated nature of most social media platforms (Santas, Inobemhe, & Isah, 2022). Masharqa (2020) further states the times that fake news thrives in times of war or political division, the propaganda of political parties, marketing campaigns, disasters, economic recovery, and economic depression.

Several reasons have been attributed to the spread of fake news by the traditional print media. Apuke and Omar (2020) note that the triggers could range from the urge for self-fulfilment by being the first to share information to a high trust placed in newspapers. In furtherance of the justifications for fake news, several researchers (Qiu, Diego, Shirazi, Flammini and Fillipo, 2017; Celliers and Hattingh, 2020) identified the following reasons for the spread of fake news:

i. Decreased cognitive abilities of individuals.
ii. The poor quality of media content makes it more popular.
iii. The difficulty of controlling misleading news shared widely on social media handles of newspaper firms.
iv. The spread of fake news is also influenced by the so-called "Placebo effect," which involves thinking positively about fake news and treating it as if it were true.
v. Fuelling fear: Fake news spreads quickly when people become emotional and afraid.
vi. The "third person" influence, namely our tendency to believe that others are more likely to be influenced by the media than we are.

The Imperatives of Fact-checking in News Publishing

Fact-checking means an investigation to establish whether or not a statement is factually correct. It is also the process of verifying the factual accuracy of questioned reporting and statements. The effort to tackle the spread of fake news is what has given rise to fact-checking. This is the modern aspect of accountable journalism. Stencel (2015), Mantzarlis (2016), Stencel and Griffin (2018), and Graves and Amazeen (2019) are among the numerous scholars arguing the definition of fact-checking, positing that fact-checking is about verifying facts or information that have been reported towards accrediting such piece of information or discrediting them completely. This then helps the consumers of such information to have a grasp of the real idea

and make inferred judgement. Mantzarlis (2018) states that "fact-checking" can mean two different things in journalism; one is to 'fact check' or proof-read contents and claims made by reporters in their copies by copywriters and proof-readers before such copies are published while the other is to verify and debunk claims that have already been reported and in the public domain. And to Leonard, Meban and Young (2020), fact-checking is a form of critical, investigative inquiry. It includes a wide range of approaches and practices. Juneström (2021) defines fact-checking as a genuinely journalistic practice, promoting the ability to determine whether a piece of information is reliable or not and also engaging other professional groups. From all these, fact-checking serves clearly to verify the accuracy of a piece of information, information literacy aims to develop the ability to recognize whether it is trustworthy or not.

Fact-checking consists of publishing regular assessments about the validity of questionable claims made by a wide array of sources, including governments, politicians, institutions, news organisations, and social media users. It relies on models to identify whether a claim is true or false (Jiang and Wilson, 2018; Walter *et al.*, 2020) and enforces scientific methods and rigorous journalistic practices to assess whether the information is reliable (Graves, 2016). According to Duke Reporters' Lab, fact-checking experienced a significant expansion recently when the industry established a foothold in every continent (Stencel and Luther, 2021). Conceived as a response to the ongoing crisis in journalism (Graves, 2016; Graves and Konieczna, 2015) and the growing distrust in democratic institutions, particularly the government and mainstream media (Amazeen, 2020), political fact-checking evolved to take centrestage in the fight against misinformation (Graves and Mantzarlis,

2020) and the growing epistemic crisis manifested in reports about information disorders (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017).

Review of Empirical Studies

Providing further strength for this paper, the researcher reviewed some empirical studies on fake news and fact-checking which are thus analysed. The rapid spread of fake news especially on Social Media Platforms (SMPs) is a source of concern so far. In their study, Talwar *et al.* (2020) brought a perspective on the sharing of fake news on social media platforms which they view as a global concern, with research offering little insight into the motives behind such sharing. Using a mixed-method approach to explore fake news sharing behaviour, the researchers surveyed 471 social media users in India and the study results suggested that the instantaneous sharing of news for creating awareness had a positive effect on sharing fake news due to lack of time and religiosity. However, authenticating news before sharing did not affect the sharing of fake news due to lack of time and religiosity. The study results also suggested that social media users who engage in active corrective action are unlikely to share fake news due to lack of time.

Olan *et al.* (2022) in a study on 'fake news on social media: The impact on society', made an expository about the attitude of people towards fake news and how such attitudes boost the spread of fake news. The research notes that Fake news (FN) on social media (SM) rose to prominence in 2016 during the United States of America presidential election, leading people to question science, true news (TN), and societal norms. The researchers analysed survey data from 356 respondents and stated that fake news is increasingly affecting societal values, changing opinions on critical issues and topics as well as redefining facts,

truths, and beliefs. The study's findings revealed that societies are split on differentiating true news from fake news; the results also show splits in societal values. The research further explains that people's interpretations of what is true news or fake news affect societal efforts to reduce the spread of fake news.

There have also been studies to show the strength of fact-checking in the battle against fake news by the mainstream print media – newspapers. Tsang *et al.* (2023) delved into the effectiveness of fact-checking to tackle fake news dissemination in Hong Kong. The work titled, 'An experimental study of the effectiveness of fact checks: interplay of evidence type, veracity and news agreement' stated that given the rapid growth in efforts on misinformation correction, the study aims to test how evidence type and veracity interact with news agreement on the effectiveness of fact-checking on how well a corrective message discount a false news information. The researchers employed an experimental research method and sampled 511 respondents in Hong Kong who were exposed to the same news article and then to a piece of corrective information debunking the news article with variation in the types of evidence (numerical vs narrative) and veracity (no verdict vs half false vs entirely false) in 2019. The findings show that among the participants who disagreed with the news article, numerical fact-checking was more effective than narrative fact-checking in discounting the news article.

Soo *et al.* (2023) examined the sources that fact-checking organisations and journalists use to counter misinformation or disinformation.

The researchers drew on a case study of reporting during the UK's 2019 General Election campaign by interviewing senior editors and journalists and conducted a systematic content analysis of 238 fact-checking stories produced by BBC's Reality and Channel 4's Full Fact, along with a fact-checking organisation, Full Fact. This was done to critically assess their editorial judgements about the selection of news and use of sources. The study revealed that fact-checking services at the BBC and Channel 4 were not closely integrated into their routine news production and that the independent fact-checker, Full Fact, questioned claims differently to broadcasters. They also found that the broadcast agenda of fact-checkers centred on party political agendas and drew on a narrow range of institutional sources to question claims.

Apart from journalists taking up fact-checking roles, the number of fact-checking organisations is also increasing in Asian countries. Rahmawan, Hartanto and Garnesia (2022) in a study focusing on multi-case analysis on the development of fact-checking organisations in Indonesia, note the expansion of the network of fact-checking organisations in the country. With a multi-case study method, the researchers analysed the development of fact-checking practices carried out by six organisations in Indonesia that are already certified by the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN), namely: "Cek Fakta-Liputan 6", "Cek Fakta-Suara.com," "Tirto.id", "KOMPAS.com," "Tempo.co", and "MAFINDO". The study discovered that Indonesian fact-checking organisations have grown and have strengthened their presence nationally as well as engaged with various networks of global organisations leading the ongoing fight against hoaxes. However, Indonesian fact-checking organisations are still facing several challenges in standardizing fact-checking methodologies, measuring and evaluating the "impact" of their fact-checking activities, and related to managing fact-checking resources. The research work recommended the support of the day-to-day work of fact-checking organisations and media houses to confirm the importance of their role. This

recommendation is similar to the objective of this current study as it attempts to assess how effective these media organisations are using the tool to battle fake news as a means to elicit more adoption of the fact-checking tool in Nigeria.

There were also studies on factors that could affect the effectiveness of fact-checked reports in terms of their spread. Jiexun and Chang (2022) found that truthfulness rating is a significant factor: conclusive fact-checks (either *True* or *False*) get shared more. Furthermore, the source credibility and the time length of sharing also affect the spread of fact-checks over the internet. To counter the dissemination of misinformation is by no means an easy task as the authors called for an integrated strategy that combines efforts from multiple sides of the society. They advised that from the individual user side, users should be encouraged to follow a set of tenets that promote the truth and dismiss the lies. Promoting media literacy and educating the public on digital resilience can enhance awareness around source credibility and the detection of misinformation. Meanwhile, from the business side, rather than chasing high engagement rates and letting misinformation unhinged, social media platforms such as Facebook must take action to hinder the spread of misinformation by enforcing fact-checking standards and promoting the sharing of truthful information.

In Nigeria, there is still some lag in pushing fact-checking activities even when the process is being improved in the West and Asian countries often. Nasir *et al.* (2020) found that the explosion of social media allowed individuals to spread information without cost, with little investigation and fewer filters than before. This amplified the old problem of fake news, which has become a major concern nowadays due to the

negative impact it brings to the communities. To tackle the rise and spreading of fake news, automatic detection techniques have been researched building on artificial intelligence and machine learning. This work proposes a novel hybrid deep learning model that combines convolutional and recurrent neural networks for fake news classification.

While these techniques are highly in use in the United State, Chukwu (2021) in a study on fact-checking news items before publication and the media in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, examined the extent to which the media in Port Harcourt fact-check their news stories before publication and the challenges inherent in fact-checking. Using an interview schedule with journalists from 15 media houses, the researcher found that the media in Port Harcourt are not aware of independent fact-checkers, and have not utilised same to fact-check information or news items before dissemination to the public. The study then recommended that the media should strive to utilise independent fact-checkers to fact-check information before dissemination because this will stem incidences of fake news ravaging society.

Furthermore, there was a searchlight on the readers themselves, to determine if they also fact-check published information before they believe such or share it. Adjin-Tettey and Amenaghawon (2024) determined how often news readers (316 students in two universities in Nigeria and Ghana) fact-check the information they get. They found that most of the respondents held that social media are responsible for the spread of misinformation with a significant number of respondents also relying on social media to fact-check news and information. And rather than adopting standard fact-checking means, they rely on networks such as friends, colleagues, and family. The habit of checking for the authenticity of reports by readers is good, however, relying on networks of

friends rather than fact-checking platforms could be dangerous and help to promote fake news.

Adjin-Tettey and Amenaghawon (2024) also found that respondents refer to social media and Google as fact-checking platforms but this is not correct as Google is not a fact-checking platform, but only a reference search tool. The findings of this study further align with the position of this paper that fact-checking as a tool to verify news and promote the fight against fake news is still low in Nigeria. The findings also show the desire of news readers to be served authentic news and would want to take steps further to have that, which means that journalists who serve these news reports would have to as a matter of urgency increase the level of utilising fact-checking as a tool to combat fake news.

In the effort to evaluate how improved education levels can promote fact-checking and the identification of fake news by readers, Nasir and Ciroma (2023) study was quite apt. It determined if students at colleges of education in northern Nigeria had developed the psychomotor skills required to recognize fake news (such as picture news, video news, and written social media/blog/website news). Using a quasi-experimental (one group only) design. With a sample size of 384 drawn from a population of 28,050 students across six randomly selected colleges of education situated in northern Nigeria for the academic year 2020–2022, the study found that the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) students in northern colleges lack the psychomotor capability to verify fake news either through a manual or automatic method. The study observed a lack of psychomotor capability in verifying fake news among NCE students in the selected colleges of education. This aligns with the position of this paper that not much work has been done to promote fact-checking in newspaper publishing and even in media literacy as the adoption level is low.

Theoretical Framework
This study is anchored on the Social Responsibility Theory and the Diffusion of Innovation Theory. The Social Responsibility Theory has the assumption that while the press should be free, it must nonetheless be responsible. Chukwu (2021) avers that the theory is an off-shoot of the Libertarian Theory propounded by F.S. Siebert, T.B. Peterson and W. Schramm. Historically, it owes its origin to the Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press in 1947, set up in the United States of America, to re-examine the concept of Press Freedom. The Commission's work became what is known as the Social Responsibility Theory. The central assumption and principle of Social Responsibility is that freedom carries obligation and the press, which enjoys a privileged position under the government (Constitution) is obliged to be responsible to the society. Leonard, Meban and Young (2020), Juneström (2021) and Gibson and Jacobson (2018) argue that there is a need to educate the people, government, and the media on the need to embrace fact-checking, and/or to fully fact-check information before dissemination.

The Diffusion of Innovation Theory is concerned with the 'adoption' of mass media messages which can come in the form of an idea, campaign, behaviour or technology. According to Baran and Davis (2012), the theory was pioneered in 1943 by Bryce Ryan and Neil Gross of Iowa State University this theory traces the process by which a new idea or practice is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system. In 1962, Everett. M. Rogers popularized the theory in his book, 'Diffusion of Innovations', postulating that 'diffusion' is the process by which an innovation is

communicated over time among the participants in a social system. According to him, over time, an idea or product gains momentum and diffuses (or spreads) through a specific population or social system. The result of this diffusion is that people, as part of a social system, adopt a new idea, behaviour, or product. In line with this subject matter, Leonard, Meban, and Young (2020), Juneström (2021) argue that there is a need to educate the people, government, and the media on the need to embrace fact-checking, and/or to fully fact-check information before dissemination. The innovation of identifying and puncturing fake news through the use of the fact-checking tool is novel and should be adopted fast enough to curb the menace of misinformation that is already causing heavy issues in society, especially as regards cyberbullying, defamation, and other misnomers.

Methodology
This study which is on the Assessment of fact-checking tool in combating fake news in Nigerian newspapers is qualitative and therefore takes on the conceptual review approach. It adopted the use of relevant literature and empirical studies in its discourse section. This required the gathering of qualitative data from online journals and sources, including books to discuss the analysis of key issues as well as make conclusions in a positional manner.

The Adoption Level of Fact-checking in Other Climes Versus in Nigeria
Just as the very foundation of the media, which is truth, is being questioned, journalists are beginning to see more threats to the credibility of their profession. Okoro and Emmanuel (2018) posit that to curb the onslaught of fake news in the post-truth era, media publishers and journalists globally are deploying 'more truth' as the best defense. One way in which they are doing this is by

news publishers employing journalists who are specially trained to fact-check news reports suspected to be fake. More mainstream journalists are getting more onsite and virtual tools to equip themselves to become 'Fact-checkers' in their respective beats and organisations. As Owoseye and Onyeji (2018) argue, facts place information in the right perspective and wither the potency and influence of lies. These authors cited the Dubawa project of Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism (PTCIJ). It means "to check" in the Hausa language and debuted in February 2018 as a reaction to the menace of misinformation and fake news in the country.

In a 2022 report from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Hofseth (2016) notes that traditional media, in general, and journalists, in particular, must also take on a greater responsibility for online fact-checking. A study of US journalism indicated that professional motives within journalism, rather than a market demand, are the key driver of the growth in fact-checking seen in the last two or three years (Graves, Nyhan and Reifler, 2016).

Although fact-checking practice has been given prominence in Western and Asian countries, there is still a lag in its adoption level in Nigeria. Several studies, Farkas and Schou (2018), Jiexun and Chang (2022), Kim *et al.* (2022), Shao, Ciampaglia, and Flammini (2017) maintain that the press in the Asian continent has largely adopted external fact-checking techniques while collaborating with established fact-checking organisations to promote the verifications of information. There is also the trend of news publishers intensifying fact-checking activities only during the general elections period rather than making it a routine activity.
However, in Nigeria, the use of fact-checking is prevalent more in times of general

elections when media organisations and fact-checking platforms set up and commit more resources to fact-check political claims during elections; this was the case in the 2023 general elections. It has been observed that the level of fact-checking activities beyond elections was insignificant in Nigeria compared with those in the period of elections. The resultant effect is that journalists and independent fact-checkers completely narrow the view and sources of fake news to politicians and government officials, leaving out the vast private sector agencies, individuals, international agencies, and non-governmental organisations. This development portends a threat to other areas of the society as citizens can be easily deceive and misinform about government activities (Santas, Udende, & Inobemhe, 2022).

Riding on the back of this, Nigerian scholars - Owoseye and Onyeji (2018), and Okoro and Emmanuel (2018) posit that journalists in Nigeria who are now beginning to understand the dimension of fake news should go beyond reporting fake news and equally help members of the public to identify fake news and their outlets even as they continue to defend the truth at all times, by separating truth (fact) from lies, to inform readers as honestly as possible.

Strategies for Increasing Effectiveness of Fact-checking

Addressing fake news in the public domain is undoubtedly a noble cause, but it is also challenging. The sheer volume and speed in the production and distribution of online misinformation make it challenging for fact-checkers in newspaper publishing firms to keep up, studies have shown. A study on the verification platform Hoaxy suggested that the sharing of fake news typically outpaces the sharing of content that fact-checks the same news (Shao *et al.,* 2017). Various

online and traditional print media are also setting up desks to promote fact-checking in line with popular belief that constant amplification of truth and suppression of falsehood or misinformation can therefore reduce the lifespan of lies and misinformation within the virtual territory. This is what Lazer *et al.* (2018, p.9) described as "making truth louder." Journalists and information professionals should avoid repeating falsehoods by seeking information from credible sources. Media outlets should enhance and strengthen the bonds between them and their audiences by constantly being in touch, through verifiable information.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research work assesses fact-checking as a tool in combating fake news in Nigerian newspapers. This paper concludes that while newspaper publishers in Nigeria are beginning to adopt fact-checking in their newsrooms, the practice is still low compared to its adoption level in the United States and Asian countries. One of the reasons for this is that media owners often consider political comments and election periods as those with more consequences on society and so, only provide for such periods with only a few making it a routine news publishing activity. Arising from the conclusion of this study, the following five recommendations are hereby made:

1. Media houses and independent fact-checking organisations should tailor deliberate campaigns on fact-checking information and raising public awareness on how to verify news to promote the detection of fake news.
2. More collaboration between fact-checking organisations and media houses is key to increasing the publication of fact-checked reports.
3. Media houses can set up fact-checking desks and ensure that rather

than make such a seasonal activity, especially during political tempos, it should be a routine desk just like every other beat – energy, finance, defence etc.

4. More training of reporters and editors as well as investment in AI-based tools to promote the activities of fact-checking in media organisations.

5. The government at all levels can create funds and grants to support firms that want to promote fact-checking while integrating it into schools' curricula. Already the European Union (EU) has a fund to support fact-checking across all its member countries while promoting fact-checking and media literacy in schools' curricula.

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