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EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS ON MEDIA LITERACY AND NEWS CONSUMPTION PATTERNS: A CASE STUDY IN NIGERIA

Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between sociodemographic factors and media literacy in Nigeria, focusing on news consumption behaviours. With a sample of 104 Nigerian citizens, the research adopts quantitative technique and sociological survey method to explore the role of variables such as age, education, socioeconomic status, and geographic location in shaping media literacy. The findings reveal significant disparities in media literacy levels, particularly in how different sociodemographic groups engage with digital and traditional news platforms. Younger participants and those with higher educational backgrounds demonstrated higher media literacy, while those with limited access to technology struggled with critical news assessment. This study contributes to understanding media consumption patterns in Nigeria and provides valuable insights for policy interventions to improve media literacy across diverse populations.

Keywords: media literacy, Nigeria, media consumption patterns, sociodemographic factors

JEL: Z13, D83, O55

1. Introduction

Media literacy and news consumption are becoming increasingly important globally, and Nigeria offers a particularly interesting case to delve into this phenomenon (Emmanuel et al., 2022). Migrants, domestic workers, and international students constitute a significant part of Nigeria's economy, infusing diverse perspectives and

narratives into their host nations, though not without the challenges associated with supplementing traditional channels of news consumption with arguably unconventional sources and influences on social media (Nyam, 2021). Social media, in particular, play a larger role in shaping public opinion; a larger share of respondents say social media “will give ordinary people more power than the media will” than two years previously (Osakpolor, 2020). Meanwhile, sociodemographic factors such as wealth, geography, and social class often influence participation in social and public life and exposure to information that can divert this engagement (Olaniyan, Akpojivi, 2020).

Alongside these dynamics, Nigeria offers a unique set of survey findings and other research owing to one of the world’s most fragmented media markets and widespread low literacy rates (Oyewobi et al., 2021). Low print readership and rates of formal education query the potential to correctly engage with the digital version of media in a news market currently playing catch-up compared to the rest of the world. For all the above insights, however, the following questions remain unanswered: Are these patterns driven by the same or rather by different factors in these diverging regions? Finally, do rates of digital news consumption in Sub-Saharan Africa’s largest media market correlate with non-media news consumption and literacy numbers, providing further evidence of habits present elsewhere in a manner that can inform regional audiences and practitioners? To help answer these questions, this study will first delve into what existing research has to say about news media consumption and sociodemographic characteristics. This integration of references provides a structured context for the study’s focus on media literacy and news consumption in Nigeria while grounding it with relevant literature.

1.1. Background and Rationale

Before Western-style journalism was introduced, Africans were already noted for their proverbs and storytelling, and their interaction was based on that. Some traditional norms and artefacts helped in ensuring credibility and accuracy. People valued and sought out credible stories, and credibility affected the trust people had in the story (Jensen, 2022). Interestingly, long before journalism became a profession, newspapers originating in Nigeria were forthright in telling African stories. However, with the arrival of the British in Nigeria for trade, journalism gradually evolved to accommodate European traditions (Mattoni, 2017). Virtually all the national newspapers in circulation originated in Nigeria during the pre-independence era. Their editorial objective was largely a vehicle of the nationalism of the time, dedicated to overthrowing colonialism and establishing a free and independent Nigeria (Chung, Zeng, 2020). Not only were these publications opposed to colonialism, but the interests of the Nigerian people were their prime concern.

The phenomenon of individuals and groups using digital networks to circulate disinformation is widely studied as “fake news.” Interestingly, despite over fifty

years of interest in individuals and the media, little empirical work has been done in Nigeria to examine the effects of these factors on cognition and rationale (Mattoni, 2017). Instead, the literature suggests that few studies have focused on the quality of news media, adherence to professionalism, and objectivity, helping journalists validate what makes newsworthy content. In all of this, the effects of these factors on news consumption and habits are rarely highlighted in the literature (Chung, Zeng, 2020).

There is no evidence of the link between sociodemographic factors and media literacy in Nigeria using nationally representative non-student or general public samples (Bolarinwa et al., 2020). It is also essential to understand how the highest level of completed education and socio-economic status, such as job status, income, and assets, can influence some forms of media literacy. Finally, it is imperative to understand how possessing and using technology can impact media literacy (Ade-segun et al., 2020). These indicators are central to developing targeted, practical training and interventions in Nigeria. Specifically, the overall role of demographic status markers in media literacy has been recommended. Drawing on a known body of evidence, it was argued that young people are often characterized by factors such as having a non-university education and being digital natives, meaning they have made extensive use of digital and online technologies. Therefore, a range of characteristics and habits become philosophical markers of the modern media literate personality, even though such traits are not as consistent across the entire young population as sometimes claimed. Moreover, older people also share these characteristics. Hence, in this chapter, we aimed to explore the influence of two demographic factors on media literacy. This discussion emphasises the need to examine sociodemographic influences on media literacy, particularly in the context of education and socio-economic status, as key to understanding media consumption behaviours in Nigeria.

2. Literature Review

Using both theoretical and empirical work, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing debate surrounding the social shaping and consequences of media literacy variance across different demographic groups (Chan-Olmsted, Wang, 2022). This paragraph connects sociodemographic factors to media consumption behaviors, media literacy disparities, and theoretical frameworks, with references that ground the discussion in contemporary media research. Several variables influence media use by individuals. News and entertainment consumption trends vary according to demographics, such as age, gender, and education, among other sociodemographic factors (Chauhan, Shah, 2020). Alongside media use trends, there are disparities in media literacy and levels of critical engagement with news (Van et al., 2021). A number of theoretical frameworks exist for conceptualizing media literacy, each

situated across several knowledge domains with implications for sociology, media policy, media psychology, and educational literature (Hruska, Maresova, 2020). Studies from multiple perspectives examine news consumption behavior, investigating which news topics draw interest, what news media people select, and when and where they engage with news providers (Chan-Olmsted, Wang, 2022).

Sociodemographic Factors and Media Literacy

Media literacy has been found to be closely linked to various sociodemographic factors, including education, age, income, and geographic location. Geography, particularly the divide between urban and rural areas, plays a crucial role in media consumption habits. Urban populations are more likely to engage with a variety of media platforms and are generally more exposed to diverse news sources. In contrast, rural populations often have less access to the internet and digital news platforms, limiting their ability to verify information. This disparity suggests a need for tailored media literacy programs that address the unique challenges faced by rural communities. Feng et al. (2019) found that people who lived in cities, were younger, female, well-educated, and well-paid were more likely to use social media. Similarly, Melki et al. (2021) found that higher education, reliance on government information, and media literacy training have significantly helped reduce social media misinformation in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The ability to critically assess and verify information is especially important in today's media landscape, where fake news and misinformation are rampant. Several studies indicate that individuals with higher education levels tend to have better media literacy skills, as they are more adept at evaluating news source credibility. Pop and Ene (2019) found that individuals with higher education levels were more likely to identify fake news and less likely to spread it. This suggests that education plays a key role in fostering critical media literacy skills.

Conversely, individuals from lower-income backgrounds often lack access to the necessary resources and tools to verify the information they encounter online, leaving them more vulnerable to misinformation. Amponsah and Okyere (2023) found that individuals with higher income levels tend to verify news more frequently, likely due to better access to education and technology. Ikram and Hameedur Rahman (2023) support this view, finding that students who receive media training in schools exhibit higher media literacy than those who do not. However, they also emphasize that many academic programs fail to highlight the critical thinking skills necessary for media literacy, which limits students' abilities to engage effectively with media content.

Moreover, critical thinking is crucial for understanding media literacy and navigating interpersonal interactions on social media (Polanco-Levicán, Salvo-Garrido, 2022). Anyanwu (2022) highlights that Nigerian students' lack of media literacy skills poses a significant risk in their social media usage, as they often ignore the

consequences of their actions. Meanwhile, recent U.S. projects aimed at enhancing news media literacy have shown progress, although the contributing factors are still being investigated, and media changes continue to impact outcomes (Mcwhorter, 2019).

Traditionally, research has often adopted a ‘top-down’ approach, focusing primarily on news content as the main object of study. However, more recently, research has shifted to a bottom-up approach, combining audience-oriented and media content analyses to explore the interplay between journalists’ cultural backgrounds, editorial logic, audience interpretations, and the media repertoires that dictate audience expectations and preferences (Hruska, Maresova, 2020). This research’s most compelling conceptual pathway is based on the empirical association of unequal news literacy and socialization between members of different social and demographic groups within the same society (Van et al., 2021).

2.1. Conceptual Frameworks

The Nexus between Social Media Use, Uses and Gratifications Theory, and Media Literacy

One framework that aligns well with this research is the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which posits that media audiences actively select media sources that best meet their specific needs, such as social interaction, entertainment, and information seeking (Blumler, Katz, 1974). In the context of social media, these motivations play a key role in driving user engagement, as platforms provide a variety of content options to satisfy different user needs (Whiting, Williams, 2013). Research by Cheung and Lee (2010) and Gan et al. (2017) also supports this, demonstrating that Uses and Gratification Theory helps explain why individuals are motivated to engage with certain media platforms, especially in the digital age. Additionally, Cheung et al. (2011) argue that social factors, such as a sense of belonging and social identity, further determine why users engage with social media, reinforcing the idea that users’ personal motivations shape their media behaviors.

Moreover, habitual behaviors and social norms are integral to sustaining continuous social media use. Studies by Limayem et al. (2007) and Cheung and Lee (2010) show that both habit and subjective norms significantly influence users’ intentions to persist in using social media platforms. These findings underscore that long-term social media engagement is not solely driven by users’ initial needs but also by repetitive behaviors and the social expectations within their communities.

Sociodemographic factors such as age, education, and income – play a crucial role in influencing how individuals engage with media, particularly social media. For example, younger users often experience information overload due to the rapid flow of content on social media platforms, making it challenging for them to filter

and critically assess information (Ikram, Hameedur Rahman, 2023). Conversely, individuals with higher levels of education are generally more adept at evaluating the credibility of the information they encounter. Pop and Ene (2019) found that individuals with more education are more likely to identify fake news and less likely to spread it, highlighting education as a key determinant of media literacy.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory provides a useful theoretical foundation for this study, as it helps explain how sociodemographic factors, such as age, education, and income, affect social media engagement. These factors, in turn, impact individuals' media literacy and their ability to discern credible information from misinformation in the digital landscape. Egede and Chuks-Nwosu (2013) support this by noting that user dependency on media platforms is influenced by the extent to which these platforms meet the audience's needs, emphasizing the active role audiences play in media selection.

Furthermore, this theory serves as a basis for exploring whether users' media literacy skills are hindered by their social media use. For instance, the information overload experienced by younger users due to rapid technological advancements often makes it difficult for them to make informed decisions when navigating digital spaces (Polanco-Levicán, Salvo-Garrido, 2022). Despite the challenges posed by this information overload, few studies have specifically examined news media literacy among social media users, particularly in regions like Nigeria (Ikram, Hameedur Rahman, 2023).

Thus, by linking Uses and Gratifications Theory with sociodemographic influences, this framework facilitates a deeper understanding of how different factors drive social media use and how these variables influence media literacy and news consumption behaviors.

3. Methodological design

This study uses a quantitative approach and sociological survey method to investigate news media literacy and users' reliance on social media news in Nigeria, focusing on older users, as previous research has mainly focused on younger news consumers.

3.1. Research Hypotheses

Users' Perceived Benefits of Social Media: It is hypothesized that users' perceived benefits of social media, including social interaction, information seeking, entertainment, social connectedness opportunities, and ease of use, significantly influence their reliance on news found on these platforms. This hypothesis is grounded in the understanding that social media serves multiple functions beyond information

dissemination; it fosters community, engagement, and connectivity among users, which can affect how they consume news content.

Influence of Sociodemographic Characteristics: This hypothesis posits that sociodemographic characteristics such as age, sex, education level, socioeconomic status, social media usage patterns and frequency, geographic location, and motivation for using social media significantly influence users' media literacy abilities. By examining these variables, this research seeks to uncover how different demographic backgrounds and experiences shape individuals' capacities to navigate, evaluate, and engage with media content critically, particularly in the context of news consumption.

3.2. Research method and instrument

Sampling size and technique

The study sample consisted of 111 educated Nigerian citizens aged 18–70, all of whom were active social media users residing in urban, suburban, and rural areas. In this study, “older users” refers to respondents aged 50 and above. The age range of the respondents varied from 18 to 70, with both younger and older participants included in the analysis to explore how different age groups interact with and rely on social media for news. This classification ensures a balanced examination of media usage across all age groups.

Moreover, these participants were chosen based on their varying income and employment statuses to ensure a diverse sample. The survey method was chosen for data collection due to its flexibility and cost-effectiveness, with online questionnaires offering several advantages over traditional methods. According to Nayak, Narayan (2019), computer-administered surveys help reduce social desirability bias, improve response times, and enhance data entry efficiency. Sophisticated branching was also employed to minimize errors, reduce processing costs, and ensure standardization and respondent anonymity.

A Linear Snowball sampling technique was employed to recruit participants who use social media for news consumption. This sampling method allowed for the selection of participants who fit the study's inclusion criteria, including their sociodemographic characteristics. Additionally, the sampling technique was employed to recruit participants, with their characteristics carefully verified before distributing the questionnaire links. Thacker (2019) emphasizes that research should consider not just geographic location, but also predefined characteristics relevant to the study objectives. This approach ensured the inclusion of eligible respondents while maintaining consistency with the study's objectives.

Furthermore, this study focused on social interaction and information seeking as the primary benefits of social media use in relation to news reliance. These benefits have been consistently identified in previous research as key drivers of social

media engagement (Whiting, Williams, 2013). Passive media consumption, such as entertainment, is generally not linked to critical engagement with news or media literacy (Papacharissi, Rubin, 2000). Similarly, Tewksbury and Althaus (2000) suggest that although entertainment media attracts large audiences, it does not significantly contribute to increased knowledge or media literacy, as news consumption demands more active engagement. Entertainment and other benefits were excluded, as they are typically associated with passive content consumption, such as watching videos, rather than active engagement with news. Social interaction and information seeking, however, directly relate to users' motivations for staying informed and verifying news credibility, making them more relevant to the study's focus.

3.3. Computing procedure

A pilot test was conducted with non-English speakers to identify clarity and relevance issues in an online questionnaire, with necessary changes based on participant feedback. The questionnaire was administered from April 5th to May 7th 2024, but access was closed due to time constraints. 111 responses were extracted via Google forms. After data cleaning, the number of respondents was reduced to 104 with exclusions based on incomplete or inconsistent responses. The sample included a balanced representation of genders, age groups, and education levels, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of how these factors influence media literacy.

The data was analyzed using Jamovi software, an open-source tool, for descriptive and hypothesis testing. Percentages were used for descriptive analysis, and chi-square tests were used for hypothesis testing. Results were presented using charts, bar plots, and graphs for clarity and interpretation, ensuring a rigorous analysis and meaningful insights.

3.4. Limitations of the study

Limitations of this study include the small sample size, recruitment of respondents based on specific criteria, and reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce response biases and limit the depth of understanding regarding participants' media literacy skills. Additionally, the exclusion of individuals under 18 years of age may further limit the generalizability of the findings on media literacy in Nigeria. Another constraint was the omission of uneducated Nigerians due to the difficulty in reaching them via online questionnaire and the validity of their computer literacy skills to navigate it. However, a broad analysis of the study necessitates a mixed sample of literate and uneducated participants.

Ethical considerations

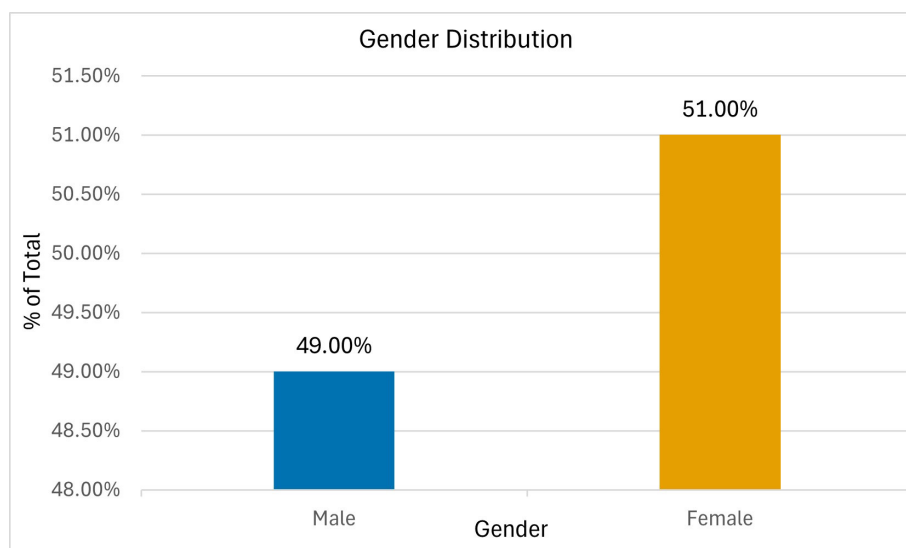
Respondents voluntarily participated in the study, individuals under 18 years old were not included. Questionnaire for respondents was verified by my thesis supervisor. Respondents were informed that the research was purely for academic purpose and their responses were completely anonymous.

4. Findings and Analysis

Descriptive Analysis

The data collected for this study provides a comprehensive overview of participants' demographics, social media usage patterns, and other variables, which contribute to understanding media literacy and social media reliance. Descriptive statistics are used to illustrate the distribution of responses across various categories.

Gender Distribution



Graph 1. Gender distribution of respondents

Source: Author's own analysis based on data visualized using Microsoft Excel.

A slight predominance of females was observed in older age groups. This balance is essential for analyzing how gender may influence social media habits and media literacy.

Geographic Location

The majority of respondents reside in urban areas, representing 60% of the sample, while 25% live in rural areas, and 15% in suburban areas. This urban predominance is indicative of the increased availability of internet access in cities, which likely contributes to higher social media engagement. Including rural and suburban respondents is critical for comparing how geographic location impacts social media usage patterns and access to information.

Employment Status

A diverse range of employment statuses is present in the dataset, with 65% of respondents employed, followed by 20% unemployed, and 15% identifying as students or others. This distribution allows for an understanding of how employment status may influence technology access, social media habits, and digital reliance for news consumption.

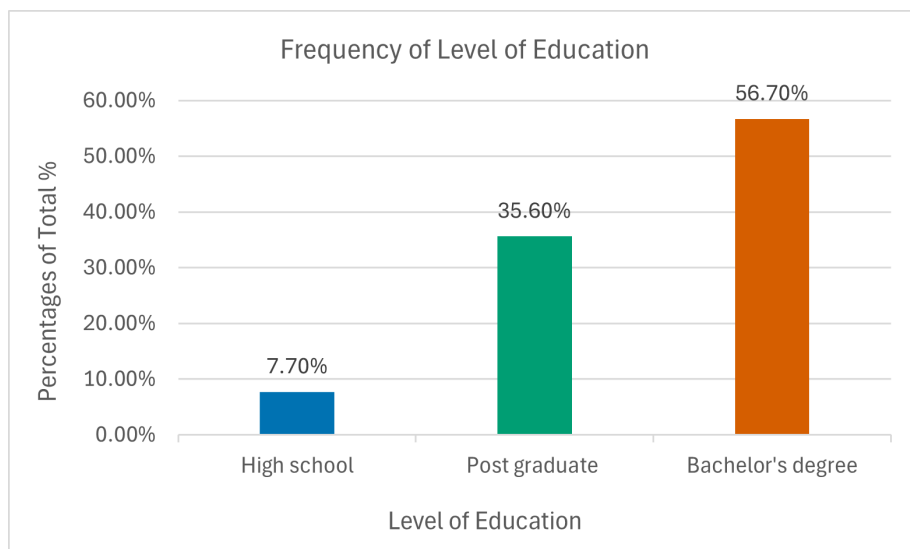
Income Levels

Respondents were categorized into four income groups. The middle-income group accounts for the highest percentage, with 40% of participants, followed by 30% in the lower-income group, 20% in the upper-middle-income group, and 10% in the high-income group. This is relevant as income levels may determine access to digital resources and the ability to engage with various media platforms.

Social Media Usage

Facebook and WhatsApp emerged as the most popular platforms, with 70% of respondents using Facebook, and 65% using WhatsApp either individually or in combination with other platforms. This indicates a strong reliance on these platforms for social interaction, information seeking, and media consumption, highlighting their central role in the digital lives of the respondents.

Education Levels



Graph 2. Frequencies of Level of Education showing the distribution of respondents across education levels

Source: Author's own analysis using Microsoft Excel.

Moreover, the distribution of respondents' education levels reveals that the majority have a Bachelor's degree. Overall, the descriptive statistics have offered valuable insights into the dataset, highlighting the percentage distribution across various categories.

4.1. Inferential Analysis

The Chi-square test (χ^2) provides valuable insights into observed variations and the groups responsible for them, making it a key tool in research analysis (McHugh, 2013). This section employs the χ^2 test of independence to examine relationships between variables in the study, focusing on how sociodemographic characteristics influence media literacy and reliance on social media news. The analysis aims to inform the study's hypotheses and enhance understanding of social media use, media literacy, and misinformation.

Hypothesis 1: There is no relationship between users' perceived benefits of social media (social connectedness and interaction, information seeking, entertainment) and their reliance on news found on the platforms.

Social Interaction and News Reliance: A χ^2 test revealed a statistically significant relationship between the need for social interaction and reliance on news from social media (χ^2 (16, $N = 103$) = 77.3, $p < .001$). The majority of respondents agreed that involvement in online groups and forums significantly influences their reliance on social media for news. Notably, females relied more on social media news due to their social interaction needs compared to males, while respondents from rural areas exhibited lower reliance on social media news compared to urban areas, with slightly higher reliance observed among females.

Age and News Reliance: The χ^2 test indicated a significant association between age and reliance on social media news (χ^2 (12, $N = 103$) = 27.0, $p = .008$). Specifically, individuals aged 41–50 demonstrated the highest reliance on social media for news, suggesting that age plays a critical role in news consumption patterns.

Income and News Reliance: A significant association was found between monthly income (₦100,000 to ₦200,000) and reliance on social media news, with middle-income individuals showing greater reliance. The highest reliance was noted among respondents in the income brackets ranging from ₦100,000 to ₦200,000, indicating that socioeconomic factors influence news consumption habits.

Information Seeking and News Reliance: Conversely, the χ^2 test results showed no significant association between reliance on social media news and the frequency of information-seeking behavior among respondents ($p = .084$), indicating weaker evidence against the null hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: Sociodemographic characteristics such as age, sex, education level, socioeconomic status, social media usage patterns and frequency, geographic location, and motivation for using social media do not significantly influence users' media literacy abilities.

Fact-Checking News: Urban residents demonstrated higher usage of various platforms for fact-checking news compared to rural residents. The most common reason for fact-checking news in both urban and suburban areas was to ensure the accuracy of information, followed by the desire to avoid the spread of misinformation.

Income and Fact-Checking: There was a significant association between monthly income and reasons for fact-checking news, with higher-income individuals more inclined to fact-check for information accuracy, suggesting that socioeconomic status influences media verification behaviors.

Employment Status and Fact-Checking: However, no significant association was found between employment status and reasons for fact-checking news ($\chi^2 = 17.1$, $p = .147$), indicating that the null hypothesis was not rejected in this case.

Education Level and News Verification: The χ^2 test indicated a significant association between the method used for verifying headlines and respondents' level of education ($\chi^2(30) = 44.4$, $p = .044$). Middle-aged and older individuals with higher education levels tended to use "previous news consumed" and "recent events in the country" as more frequent methods when verifying social media news.

Fake News Indicators: Respondents with higher education and higher monthly income were associated with more frequent encounters with fake news, characterized by spelling and grammatical errors and a lack of credible sources. Additionally, middle-income respondents reported more frequent encounters with biased language or tone. Notably, there was no significant association between gender and indicators of fake news ($\chi^2 = 17.1$, $p = .707$), nor between geographical location and indicators of fake news ($\chi^2 = 20.12$, $p = .439$).

Age and Media Literacy: The analysis found no significant association between age and media literacy ($p > .05$). However, education level significantly influenced respondents' perception of the news headline accuracy, with individuals possessing higher education levels perceiving headlines as accurate more frequently ($\chi^2 = 7.22$, $df = 3$, $p = .065$).

Misleading Headlines: Lastly, the χ^2 test revealed a significant association between respondents' level of education and their perception of misleading headlines. Individuals with higher education levels, particularly those holding postgraduate degrees, exhibited a higher tendency to perceive such headlines as misleading or fabricated.

4.2. Discussion

The findings from this study suggest that social interaction on social media influences reliance on social media news among participants in Nigeria. Notably, the data indicate that females tend to rely more on social media news due to social interaction needs. While these results align with prior research by Azzaakiyyah (2023), Brough et al. (2020), and Whiting and Williams (2013), it is essential to interpret these findings with caution due to the limited sample size and reliance on snowball sampling. As such, while these insights contribute to the understanding of social media's role in news consumption, they cannot be generalized across all populations in Nigeria.

Age also emerged as a factor influencing reliance on social media news, particularly among respondents aged 41–50. This finding is consistent with Larsson's (2017) work on age preferences for less demanding news interactions on platforms like Instagram. However, the small sample size limits the broader applicability of

this conclusion, highlighting the need for larger and more representative studies to validate these observations.

Interestingly, the study did not find a significant relationship between the frequency of information-seeking on social media and news reliance, suggesting that the act of seeking information may not directly translate into reliance on social media for news. Instead, the perceived social benefits derived from participation in online groups and forums correlated with a higher reliance on social media news. This finding indicates that motivations for social interaction may play a more critical role in influencing news reliance than information-seeking behaviors. Given the small sample size, this result should be interpreted as indicative rather than definitive.

Additionally, the findings indicate that income level may influence reliance on social media news, with middle-income individuals demonstrating a higher reliance. This observation aligns with Feng et al. (2019), which suggests that urban, younger, and higher-income individuals tend to be more active on social media. However, as this result is drawn from a limited sample, further investigation with larger and more diverse populations is necessary to determine the consistency of this pattern.

Regarding fact-checking behaviors, urban participants were found to use more platforms for fact-checking news compared to those from rural areas, a finding consistent with Feng et al. (2019). The study also shows that traditional media channels, such as newspaper websites, remain preferred sources for verifying news content. However, the small scale of this study necessitates further exploration to understand the broader applicability of these findings.

The study highlights that education level and income significantly influence how participants identify and assess fake news. Individuals with higher education levels were more likely to use criteria such as credible sources and spelling or grammatical errors to identify fake news, consistent with findings by Pop and Ene (2019). However, these conclusions are specific to this sample and cannot be generalized to the entire Nigerian population without further research.

Moreover, no significant associations were found between geographical location, age, and indicators of fake news, supporting the findings of Amponsah and Okyere (2023), who emphasized education's role in news validation. While Melki et al. (2021) similarly concluded that education and media literacy training can reduce belief in misinformation, the limited scope of this study means such conclusions should be considered preliminary.

Finally, it is important to reiterate the limitations of this study, as the sample size ($N = 104$) and use of snowball sampling limit the representativeness of the results. Although this study provides insights into how sociodemographic factors such as gender, age, education, and income level may influence reliance on social media news, these findings should be interpreted cautiously. Employment status and geographical location did not significantly impact participants' news consumption or

fact-checking behaviors, highlighting the need for further studies with larger, more diverse samples to fully understand these dynamics.

Overall, while the results indicate some interesting trends, they should be viewed as indicative rather than conclusive. Larger-scale studies employing representative samples are necessary to draw firmer conclusions about the role of sociodemographic factors in media consumption and media literacy in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This study examined how social media use and perceived benefits influence users' reliance on news, and how sociodemographic factors shape media consumption, fact-checking behaviors, and perceptions of fake news. The findings extend Uses and Gratifications Theory, demonstrating that age, income, and perceived social interaction impact news reliance, while education plays a crucial role in identifying fake news. This supports the theory's premise that media users are active participants seeking content that meets their needs. These findings underscore the need for tailored media literacy programs to address the specific needs of diverse sociodemographic groups, ensuring they can critically assess media content.

Limitations

This study's limitations include a small sample size and reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce bias. The cross-sectional design limits causal inference, and the study does not account for factors such as occupation, cultural background, and political affiliation. Additionally, the findings are context-specific and may not apply to countries with different socio-political conditions. Variability in access to technology and the internet also limits the generalizability of the results.

Future Research

Future research should use larger, more diverse samples and consider longitudinal designs to capture media literacy dynamics over time. Incorporating additional sociodemographic factors like occupation and political affiliation, and conducting cross-country comparisons, would provide a broader understanding of media literacy influences. Investigating the impact of technological access in rural versus urban areas would also reveal disparities in media consumption and literacy.

Recommendations

To enhance media literacy in Nigeria, tailored programs should focus on teaching users how to assess news sources and validate information. These initiatives should target lower-income groups with limited access to education and technology. Public awareness campaigns on social media can further promote critical thinking, while collaborations with social media platforms could amplify media literacy efforts. Consideration of cultural and regional factors is crucial, particularly in addressing the unique challenges of rural areas. By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can strengthen media literacy and better equip society to navigate the evolving challenges of misinformation in the digital age.

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