

Influence of Social Media on News Consumption and Credibility in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study analysed the influence of social media on news consumption and credibility, with reference to Lagos State. The study sought to assess the net benefits of social media as a source of information in Nigeria by determining the credibility of news obtained on various social media platforms in the country, and analyzing the challenges caused by social media through misinformation and fake news. Source Credibility Theory was employed in the study. A well-structured questionnaire served as instrument for data collection. The study made use of simple percentages and frequency statistics to analyse the data collected. Results from the analysis show that there is misinformation on social media platforms. Results show that Facebook is the greatest source of misinformation, followed by WhatsApp, and TikTok. Results show that social media misinformation is strongest by age, followed by education, income, and occupation. This implies that younger generations are most susceptible to social media misinformation, while those with lower education are also susceptible to misinformation from social media platforms. Therefore, not every user of social media can militate against social media misinformation. Based on these findings, this study recommends some measures of social media regulation. Verified accounts should be granted permission across social media platforms as source of information and news to users of social media. Also, the study recommends that social media users must ensure that they verify information and news received on social media before making use of such information.

Keywords

Credibility; Influence; News consumption; Nigeria and Social media



I. Introduction

News plays an important aspect of human societies. It is a source of information or report on expected future, recent, or past events. News can be found in various forms and media, such as newspapers, magazines, radio, television, online platforms, social networks, podcasts, and newsletters (Ahmed & Aondover, 2022). The public consume various news contents by accessing, selecting, and engaging with them via different channels and devices. News consumption borders on global, national, or regional issues, while others may focus on local, community, or personal matters depending on personal choice. Some news stories may aim to inform, educate, or entertain the audience, while others may seek to persuade, influence, or mobilize them. Some news stories may report facts and events objectively, while others may offer opinions, interpretations, or perspectives on them. The information obtained from news help to aid decision making across businesses, organizations, and institutions. It is important that news consumed is credible, such that the information obtained

from various news sources are believable, trustworthy, and reliable. News credibility is important for both news producers and news consumers, as it affects the reputation, influence, and impact of the news content. Lack of news credibility is a serious problem, which could adversely affect households, businesses, organizations, and institutions. This underlines the importance of credible news as a tool for driving progress and prosperity across human societies.

One of the most notable propagators of news in recent times is social media; which is a product of technological advancement through which communication is conducted via the internet (Aondover et al., 2023). Social media was originally developed with the goal of serving as a digital medium for connecting friends, colleagues, and family. Its advent of social media owes to the advancements in technology notably with the creation of the internet, a global computer network which set the stage for social interactions to happen. In 1973, Woolley David and Doug Brown developed the first online chat system known as the Talkomatic which was originally designed to enhance social interactions among PLATO users (a computer-based learning system developed at the University of Illinois in 1960 for academic purpose).

Afterwards, Andrew Weinreich designed the SixDegrees.com in 1997 which was a social media platform that permitted users to create a profile page, as well as create a list of family members, friends, acquaintances, and external contacts to the site where messages were shared among users of the platform. Following the emergence of Sixdegrees.com, AOL Instant Messenger, MSN Messenger, and Yahoo Messenger were setup in 1997, 1999, and 1999 respectively. At the dawn of the twenty first century, further advances in technology were observed which includes the mobile phones, microchip personal computers, and the World Wide Web. This promoted the creation of several social media gained platforms, such as Friendster, Myspace, Skype, Facebook, YouTube, Reddit, Twitter, WhatsApp, Pinterest, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitch, Wechat, Tinder, TikTok, and Clubhouse (Aondover et al. 2022).

Across the globe, Nigeria ranks highest on social media use (see Figure 1.1); which shows that many Nigerians strongly require social media to communicate. Social media is increasingly becoming a source of news to many Nigerians, as there are increases in the access to internet, as well as the availability of advance phones/computers. For instance, the #BrinkBackOurGirls was a 2014 campaign that opposed the Boko Haram activities in North Eastern region of Nigeria. The campaign was started off the Twitter social media platform in April 2014 which raised massive attention nationwide and thus emphasizing the power of social media as a means to news in Nigeria. Also, the 2020 EndSars protest demonstrates the extent to which social media increasingly serves a source of news to Nigerians, particularly across younger generations; as youths all over the nation embarked on a 3week protest, which constitutes one of the largest protests in Nigeria in the twenty first century (Idris & Msughter, 2022). Also, the recent 2023 general elections in Nigeria were popularized with the aid of multiple social media platforms, which signal that social media is not just the future for the global news industry, but also in Nigeria.

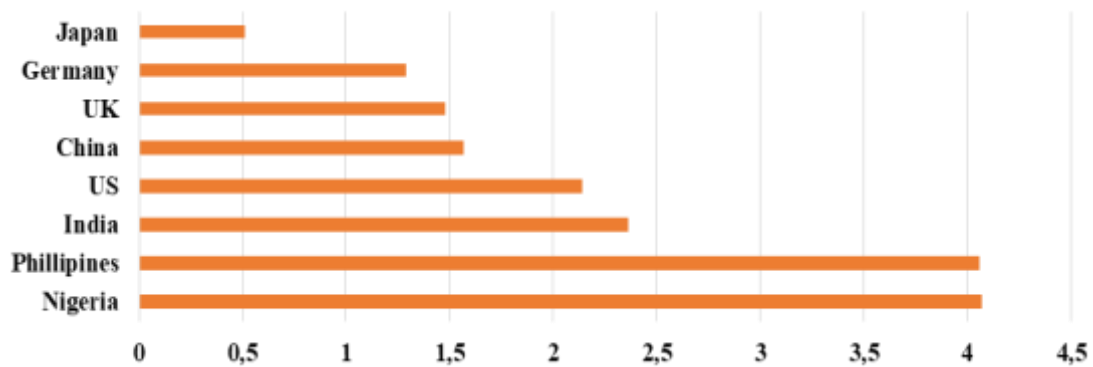


Figure 1. Least time spent on social media

Source: Author's computation from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/04/social-media-internet-connectivity/>

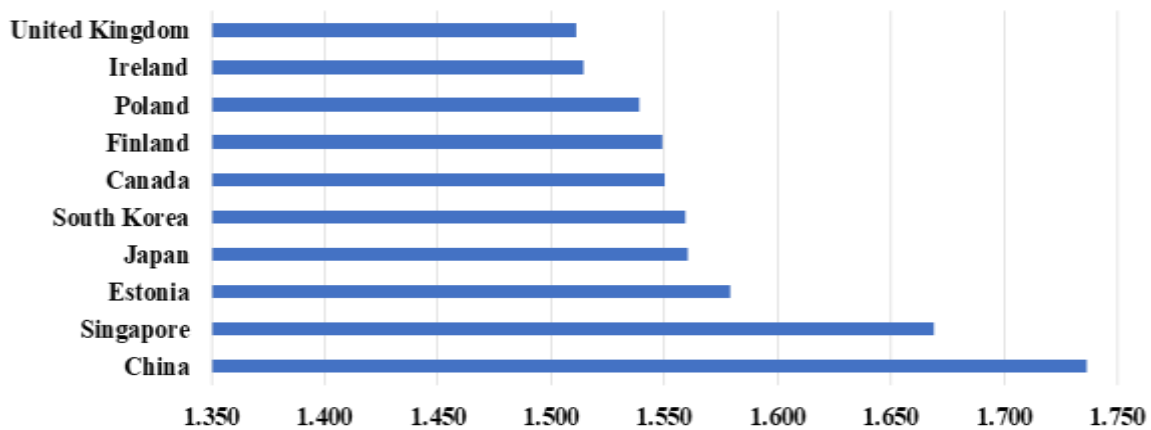


Figure 2. PISA Score 2018

Source: Author's computation from <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/pisa-scores-by-country>

Multiple data and studies in the literature show that social media is an important tool for news consumption; not only in Nigeria but across the globe. However, social media is susceptible to several shortcomings that question its use to propagate information. Notably, news accessed from many social media platforms like Facebook accounts, Instagram accounts, WhatsApp accounts, and Twitter handles, are inaccurate and not verified; thereby exposing consumers to wrong and harmful information about events and situations (Usman et al. 2022). For instance, there were lots of misinformation about the COVID-19 pandemic via several social media platforms. More so, Twitter was used to propagate Bitcoin scam. Social media users can post and spread any information they want, without checking the accuracy, validity, or reliability of the sources (Kurfi et al., 2021).

Many social media platforms do not require identity verification of users; which makes has encouraged dead threats by unscrupulous accounts targeted at fellow users and celebrities. Unlike social media, the traditional print media requires verification, filtering,

regulation, and validation of information before making them public for public consumption which helps to minimize the harmful and wrong contents of news. In recent times, advance technologies such as artificial intelligence are used via social media platforms to manipulate and influence user data, preferences, and behaviors. It is no wonder why several national governments such as are regulating or banning numerous social media platforms, as these restrictions are aimed at militating against the ills of social media (Msughter et al. 2021). These suggest that social media may not serve as the best medium for propagating news despite its exceeding growing popularity across the globe.

1.1 Problem Statement

Based on the foregoing, social media poses some challenges and benefits as a news source. This study seeks to assess the net benefits of social media as a source of information in Nigeria by assessing the credibility of news obtained on various social media platforms in the country, and also ascertaining the population demographics in the country that most exposes to the risks of incredible information from social media platforms. Studies in Nigerian literature find that social media distorts information on issues which creates a wrong perception about them (Maikaba & Msughter, 2019). Therefore, social media encourages misinformation and inaccurate news, which are harmful to business and national growths.

Hence, as a nation, as a family, and as a society it is necessary to maximize the benefits from social media while minimizing its harmful effects. However, after thorough search from journals in the literature it was found that there are no studies which examined social media platforms that pose the greatest threats to credible news in Nigeria, and there are no studies which examined the population demographics that are most susceptible to incredible information from social media platforms. Determining the most harmful social media platforms and the most susceptible group of population at risk of wrong information would help increase the net benefits from social media to Nigeria and Nigerians (Mojaye & Aondover, 2022).

In 2020, Twitter was used to foster one of the greatest threats to Nigeria's unity. While EndSARS was the original noble intention aimed at stopping Police brutality, some cruel citizens and persons exploited Twitter to spread hate and violence. Hence, the Nigerian government had to ban Twitter in June 2021, but was later unbanned in January 2022. While many liberalists and opponents of government termed such ban as oppressive and thus violates freedom of speech in the country, there are opinions that support such action on the premise that it was necessary to address the harmful information that abound on various social media platforms to aid national progress (Maradun et al., 2021).

Already, the Chinese government regulates social media and has banned access to some perceived unproductive platforms. This has helped the country become one of the best performing economies while students in China are one of the best Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) performers across the globe. Therefore, China benefits from its social media regulation. It is pertinent to state that government must take measures for the sake of national interests. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate which of the social media platforms pose as threats to credible news in Nigeria, whether social media is used for news consumption, and assess the population demographics that are most susceptible to the dangers of inaccurate and harmful information from social media.

1.2 Research Questions

This study is guided by three research questions which are stated as follows:

1. What are the social media platforms used for news in Lagos State?
2. What are the social media platforms that do not provide credible news?
3. What are the population demographics of Lagos State that are susceptible to the harmful effects of non-credible news from social media platforms?

II. Review of Literatures

2.1 Empirical Review

Several empirical studies have been conducted to determine the influence of social media on news consumption and credibility. Levy (2021) conducted a large field experiment in which he randomly offered participants subscriptions to conservative or liberal news outlets on Facebook. The study collected data on the causal chain of media effects, such as exposure to news on Facebook, visits to online news sites, and sharing of posts, as well as changes in political opinions and attitudes. Regression analysis to estimate the effects of social media news exposure, and found that exposure to counter-attitudinal news decreased negative attitudes toward the opposing political party, but did not affect political opinions. The study also found that Facebook's algorithm was less likely to supply individuals with posts from counter-attitudinal outlets, conditional on individuals subscribing to them. The study concluded that social media algorithms may limit exposure to counter-attitudinal news and thus increase polarization.

Also, Matsa and Walker (2021) conducted a survey of U.S. adults in July-August 2021, asking respondents about their use of social media for news and their news preferences. The study used descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations to analyze the data, and found that about half of U.S. adults said they got news from social media often or sometimes, with a 5 percentage point decline compared with 2020. The study also found that Facebook outpaced all other social media sites as a regular news source, followed by YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram. The study also reported that some social media sites were more "newsy" than others, meaning that a higher proportion of their users got news there regularly. The study also noted that there were significant demographic differences between the regular news consumers of different social media sites.

Lee and Hong (2016) examined the effects of two fundamental social media elements (i.e., empowerment and socialization) on consumers' responses toward consumption episodes that consist of complementary online and complemented offline activities. The study used surveys, experiments, and structural equation modeling to collect and analyze the data, and showed that social media empowerment positively influenced consumers' satisfaction and behavioral intentions in both experiential and informative contexts, while social media socialization had a positive effect only in experiential contexts. The study also found that social media empowerment and socialization interacted to enhance consumers' responses in experiential contexts, but not in informative contexts. These results indicate that social media serves as a complementary consumption channel that enhances consumers' experiences and outcomes.

Fletcher and Nielsen (2018) conducted a comparative analysis to determine why people are incidentally exposed to news on social media. The authors used survey data from 12 countries, and asked the respondents about their incidental exposure to news on social media, meaning that they came across news while doing other things online. The study used

descriptive statistics and multivariate regression analysis to analyze the data. Results from the analysis showed that incidental exposure to news on social media was widespread, but varied across countries and platforms. The study also found that incidental exposure was associated with lower levels of interest in news, lower levels of knowledge about current affairs, and lower levels of trust in news. The study argued that incidental exposure to news on social media may not be as beneficial for democratic citizenship as some have hoped.

Gil de Zúñiga et al., (2017) conducted a two-wave panel survey of U.S. adults in 2012 and 2013, asking them about their perception that news finds them on social media, implying that they do not need to actively seek news because they will encounter it online. The study relied on structural equation modeling to analyze the data, and showed that the news-finds-me perception had a negative effect on news seeking and a positive effect on social media use for news. The study also found that social media use for news had a positive effect on political knowledge and political participation. The study concluded that the news-finds-me perception may have both positive and negative implications for communication and democracy.

Valenzuela et al., (2014) carried out a quasi-experimental study of social media use and protest behavior using propensity score matching using Facebook, Twitter, and youth engagement among Chilean youth. The study used propensity score matching to create comparable groups of social media users and non-users, and used survey data and logistic regression analysis to test the effects of social media use on protest behavior. The study found that Facebook use had a positive effect on protest behavior, while Twitter use had no effect. The study also found that the effects of Facebook use were mediated by political discussion and political efficacy. Based on the foregoing, the study showed that Facebook use may foster civic engagement among youth by facilitating political communication and empowerment.

Tandoc et al., (2018) conducted a systematic review of scholarly definitions of “fake news” in academic literature, using a typology of six dimensions: (1) the nature of the news content, (2) the degree of falsity, (3) the motivation of the news producer, (4) the dissemination process, (5) the effects of the news, and (6) the solutions to the problem. The study used content analysis and descriptive statistics to analyze the data, and found that most definitions focused on the nature of the news content and the degree of falsity, while fewer definitions addressed the other dimensions. The study also found that there was a lack of consensus and clarity among scholars on how to define “fake news”. They recommended that future research should adopt a more comprehensive and nuanced approach to defining and studying “fake news”.

Guess et al., (2019) assessed the prevalence and predictors of fake news dissemination on Facebook. The study was based on fake news dissemination on Facebook during the 2016 U.S. presidential election, while using a combination of survey data, web browsing history, and Facebook profile data. The study used descriptive statistics and regression analysis to measure the prevalence and predictors of fake news dissemination. Results obtained reveal that fake news dissemination was relatively rare, with only 8.5% of survey respondents sharing at least one fake news article. They also found that sharing fake news was strongly associated with older age, conservative ideology, and pro-Trump preferences. The study argued that fake news dissemination was not a widespread phenomenon, but rather a behavior of a small and politically motivated segment of the population.

Also, Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) examined the use of social media to spread fake news during the US 2016 election. The study used a combination of survey data, web browsing data, and fact-checking data. The study used descriptive statistics and regression

analysis to estimate the exposure, believability, and impact of fake news, and revealed that social media was an important but not dominant source of news, with 14% of Americans calling it their “most important” source. The study also found that fake news was heavily favored by pro-Trump voters, who were more likely to be exposed to and believe fake news stories.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study adopted Source Credibility Theory, which was developed by Carl Hovland and Walter Weiss in 1951. The theory emphasises that one of the variables that communication source has control over is the choice of source. To achieve effective communication the right source must be selected. Msugter (2023) affirmed that news or information from ‘a high-credibility source’ usually results in behavioural change unlike news that people regard as being from ‘a low-credibility source’. The theory presupposes that people tend to believe and act appropriately, if it could be established that a credible source produced the message (Msugter & Idris, 2023).

This underpins the power of the consumer to reject information (messages) that the sources could not verify or in which the source is a suspect (Msugter et al., 2022). The theory recognises the fact that every citizen is born free and has the right to generate acquire or disseminate information; it however sensitizes the attention of every information consumer to the fact that, the competence as well as the credibility of the source of the information must be considered before accepting, consuming and using or spreading such information. Source Credibility Theory supports the presumption that news consumers should evaluate the source of their information before accepting the ideas in the message consumed or spreading same on social media.

III. Research Methods

This study adopted the positivist approach of research design which informed the choice of survey method. According to the Lagos State Government (LASG) and National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Lagos State has a total population of 12,772,884 persons in 2020 and the study considered this population. The study employed Taro Yamane’s formula thus to arrive at the sample size:

The formula is:
$$S = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n = Sample size

N = Population Size

e = Error level

Since the population of this study is already known, the sample size is calculated thus;

$$n = \frac{12,772,884}{1 + 12,772,884(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{24,418,768}{1 + 24,418,768(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{24,418,768}{61046.9225}$$

n = 399.9

n = 399.

The sampling technique used was the simple random sampling whereby each individual or variable or subject had the equal chance and opportunity of being selected irrespective of his or her demographic differences. Both male and female of different age brackets ranging from eighteen (18) and above were selected. Data collected was analyzed using frequency tables, percentages, simple descriptive data analysis.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1. Gender of Respondent

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	204	53%
Female	179	47%
Total	383	100

Source: Author's compilation from field survey

Table 2. Age Categories of Respondents

Age Groups	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 18years	26	7%
18-24 years	75	20%
25-29 years	79	21%
30-34 years	82	22%
35-39 years	97	25%
40 years and above	22	6%
Total	381	100%

Source: Author's compilation from field survey

Table 3. Educational level of Respondents

Educational Qualifications	Frequency	Percentage
O' Levels	31	8%
OND	25	7%
HND	92	24%
BSc	162	42%
MSc	51	13%
PhD	0	0%
Others	22	6%
Total	383	100%

Source: Author's compilation from field survey

Table 1 highlights the gender of this study's respondents. The table shows that there were more male respondents (204) than there were female respondents (178). Table 2 shows that most of the respondents are between the ages of 35 and 39 years (98), while there were

fewest persons who are 40years and above (22). Sufficient number of the study’s respondents is between the ages of 30-34, 25-29, and 18-24; while a low percentage of the respondents are lower than 18years. The age categories indicate that the respondents are young generations who rely on social media platforms for news. Table 3 shows that most of respondents are Bachelor degree holders (162), followed by HND holders (92), Master degree holders (51), O’ levels (31), OND (25), and those with other academic qualifications.

Table 4. Social media platforms used for News

Social Media Platforms	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	66	17.2%
Instagram	60	15.7%
YouTube	58	15.1%
WhatsApp	52	13.6%
TikTok	51	13.3%
LinkedIn	51	13.3%
Twitter	45	11.7%
Others	0	0%
Total	383	100%

Source: Author’s compilation from field survey

Table 5. Frequent use of Social Media Platforms for News Consumption

Statistics	Values
Mean	7.88
Median	8
Mode	7
Standard Deviation	1.47

Source: Author’s compilation from field survey

Table 6. News consumed on Social Media Platforms

Sport News	67	17.5%
Entertainment News	69	18.0%
Health News	75	19.6%
Foreign News	84	21.9%
Business News	88	23.0%
Total	383	100%

Source: Author’s compilation from field survey

The tables above summarize the social media platforms used as source of news in Lagos State, how frequent the social media platforms are used as source of news, and types of news consumed on social media platforms. Table 4 shows that Facebook ranks the highest as source of news to residents of Lagos, followed by Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, TikTok, LinkedIn, Twitter, and others. Table 5 shows there is frequent dependence on social media platforms as source of news. Table 6 shows that sports news and entertainment news rank top two as type of news consumed on social media; while business news is least consumed on social media. These results indicate that there is addictive use of social media for less productive means. Yet, such large preference for social media platforms likes Facebook,

Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp as they are the most susceptible to harmful news (Apuke & Omar, 2020). This shows that while residents of Lagos State mostly consume news via social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp, these social media platforms are very harmful. Apuke and Omar (2020) found that social media platforms are used to spread cultural and ethnic hatred and intolerance, which threatens the peace and unity of Nigeria; thereby recommending government’s regulation of social media.

Table 7. Non-Credible News on Social Media Platforms

Social media platforms	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	119	31.07%
WhatsApp	91	23.76%
TikTok	55	14.36%
Twitter	52	13.58%
Instagram	40	10.44%
YouTube	17	4.44%
LinkedIn	9	2.35%
Others	0	0.00%
Total	383	100%

Source: Author’s compilation from field survey

Table 8. Perceived Factor that Check against Non-Credible News on Social Media Platforms

Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Source Valuation	107	27.94%
Media Literacy Level	96	25.07%
Verification Processes	92	24.02%
Misinformation	88	22.98%
Others	0	0.00%
Total	383	100%

Source: Author’s compilation from field survey

Table 9. Experience on Social media news misinformation

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	264	68.9%
No	119	31.1%
Total	383	1

Source: Author’s compilation from field survey

Tables 7 provide responses collected from the field survey on whether social media platforms provide credible news. In table 8, the respondents are unanimous (68.9%) that they have experienced some form of news misinformation. Results obtained from table 4.9 indicate that Facebook is the greatest source of misinformation, followed by WhatsApp, and TikTok, while LinkedIn is less susceptible to misinformation followed by YouTube. Results in table 9 show that source validation serves as the greatest perceived factor to mitigate against misinformation on social media platforms, followed by media literacy and verification of social media accounts. Therefore, verifying news source, being educated by the media against misinformation, and sourcing information via verified accounts help to

reduce news misinformation on social media platforms. Ogunlesi (2017) highlighted that the Nigerian political landscape is threatened by incessant spread of fake information via several social media platforms, and thus recommends the regulation of social media platforms so as to minimize the spread of false information.

Table 10. Population Demographic susceptible to Social Media Misinformation

Demographic	Frequency	Percentage
Age	167	43.6%
Education	163	42.6%
Income	37	9.7%
Occupation	16	4.2%

Source: Author’s compilation from field survey

Table 11. Awareness to Social Media Misinformation

Statistics	Value
Mean	4.01
Mode	5
Median	4
Standard Deviation	0.83

Source: Author’s compilation from field survey

Tables 10 summarize responses collected from the respondents on the population demographics of Lagos State that susceptible to misinformation from social media platforms. Table 11 shows that susceptibility to social media misinformation is strongest by age, followed by education, income, and occupation. This implies that younger generations are most susceptible to social media misinformation, while those with lower education are also susceptible to misinformation from social media platforms. However, majority of the respondents are aware about the misinformation from social media platforms. Guess et al., (2019) found that fake news played a critical role in the US 2016 Presidential election, which was minimized by censoring and banning social media accounts that spread misinformation

V. Conclusion

Based on the findings, this study concludes that there are numerous social media platforms for accessing news in Lagos State. The top five social media platforms for accessing news are Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, and TikTok. Yet, they are the top social media platforms where misinformation is spread. There is evidence that younger persons and less educated persons are the most susceptible to social media disinformation. Respondents are aware that there is large scale misinformation across social media platforms; hence, they try to verify news source, get educated by the media against misinformation, and source information via verified accounts in order to reduce social media misinformation, which serve as good alternatives to addressing fake and harmful news from social media platforms.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, this study provides the following recommendations:

1. Verified accounts should be granted permission across social media platforms as source of information and news to users of social media.
2. Users of social media platforms must ensure that they verify information and news received on social media before making use of such information.
3. National governments must be strict on policies that prohibit children and underage from using social media platforms.

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