



Research Article

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Received: 19 April 2024 / Accepted: 23 June 2024 / Published: 8 July 2024

## Between Trust and Misinformation: A Study of User Engagement with Cloned Pages of 'Daily Trust' and 'Vanguard' Newspapers on Facebook

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36941/mjss-2024-0034>

### Abstract

This study explores the interaction between users and content on the 'Daily Trust Hausa' and 'Vanguard Hausa' cloned pages of the authentic 'Daily Trust' and 'Vanguard' newspapers on Facebook, with a focus on the prevalence of fake news and its implications for media trust. Using a survey methodology with a sample of 400 respondents selected purposively from the postgraduate student population across four public universities in the north-west of Nigeria, namely Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Zaria, Bayero University, Kano (BUK) and Usman Dan Fodio University, Sokoto (UDUS), the research examines the frequency of visits, encounters with posts and the users' ability to discern fake news. The findings reveal a high engagement with these pages, yet a significant concern over the authenticity of news articles, leading to a cautious and sceptical approach towards online news sources. The implications of these results are profound, suggesting a need for enhanced content moderation, fact-checking measures and media literacy campaigns, particularly within the Nigerian digital media landscape. The study underscores the importance of journalistic integrity and collaborative efforts to combat misinformation, which is crucial for maintaining public discourse integrity and fostering informed citizenship globally.

**Keywords:** media trust, fake news, user engagement, content authenticity, media literacy, online news consumption

## 1. Introduction

The media landscape has changed dramatically in the past few decades, with the advent of new technologies and platforms that have transformed the production, distribution and consumption of news. These changes have posed significant challenges and opportunities for the journalism industry, as well as for the audiences and the society at large. This paper examines the challenges and opportunities of online journalism in Nigeria, focusing on the issues of cloned pages, fake news and public trust.

Cloned pages are social media pages that imitate legitimate online newspaper pages, but are created by malicious actors for various purposes such as phishing, fraud, propaganda, or sabotage (Nieman Foundation, 2023). Fake news are false, misleading, or inaccurate news stories that are spread online (BBC News, 2023). Both cloned pages and fake news can undermine the credibility and quality of online journalism, as well as the public opinion, the democratic process and the social cohesion. For instance, cloned pages and fake news can erode the trust in the media, influence the political behaviour and polarise the society (Springer, 2022). Moreover, cloned pages and fake news can also affect the health, security and economy of the nation, as they can spread misinformation, rumours and panic about various issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Boko Haram insurgency, or the oil price crisis.

Public trust in news media has declined in many parts of the world, as audiences prefer Internet as their source of news (Zaryan, 2017; Swift, 2016; Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos & Nielsen, 2019). Internet is also an important source of knowledge for students in higher education, who are exposed to fake news (Paskin, 2018). Fake news has a long history and has been used to describe different phenomena such as political satire, news parody, propaganda and misleading advertising (Tandoc, Lim & Ling, 2017; Nnabulfe & Dikmen, 2020; Pennycook, Epstein, Mosleh, Arechar, Eckles & Rand, 2019; Soll, 2017; Nair, 2017). However, the term has become more pronounced and a major focus of public debate and academic study worldwide, especially after the 2016 US presidential election and the 2016 Brexit referendum, which were both influenced by fake news campaigns (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

This paper aims to explore the trends and developments of online journalism in Nigeria, using a descriptive quantitative data analysis approach. The paper also discusses the implications, limitations and contributions of the research for the field of journalism studies, media studies and Nigerian studies. The paper is organised as follows: the first section reviews the literature on online journalism, cloned pages, fake news and public trust; the second section describes the research methodology and data collection; the third section presents and analyses the results; and the fourth section concludes the paper and offers some recommendations.

This study investigates the challenges and opportunities of online journalism in Nigeria, focusing on the issues of cloned pages, fake news and public trust. Cloned pages are social media pages that imitate legitimate online newspaper pages, but are created by malicious actors for various purposes (Nieman Foundation, 2023). Fake news are false, misleading, or inaccurate news stories that are spread online (BBC News, 2023b). Both cloned pages and fake news can have negative effects on the public opinion, the democratic process and the social cohesion (Springer, 2022). Public trust in news media has declined in many parts of the world, as audiences prefer Internet as their source of news (Zaryan, 2017; Swift, 2016; Newman et al., 2019). Internet is also an important source of knowledge for students in higher education, who are exposed to fake news (Paskin, 2018). This paper aims to explore the awareness and knowledge of postgraduate students at universities in north-west of Nigeria about cloned and authentic Facebook pages of Daily Trust and Vanguard online newspapers, and their exposure to fake news in the cloned pages.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 *Comparative Analysis of Information Consumption and Fake News Awareness among Journalism Students*

Tejedor, Portalés-Oliva, Carniel-Bugsand and Cervi (2021) found that journalism students in Spain preferred online media over social media, but had difficulties in distinguishing truthful from false information, especially political fake news. They used mixed methods, including surveys and focus groups, to explore the students' perceptions and experiences of fake news during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Majerczak and Strzelecki (2022) explored the factors that influenced information verification behaviour in an age of fake news in Poland. They used a structural equation modelling approach to analyse the survey data. They found that fake news awareness and the intention to share information had the strongest positive effects on information verification behaviour. They also confirmed that most of the fake news on the Internet was political in nature.

Stewart (2019) investigated how college students in the US perceived and identified fake news on social media. He used focus groups to gain insights into the students' decision-making processes and criteria. He found that the students trusted social media more than mainstream media, and that their trust depended on various factors such as the source, the website and the verification options. He also found that the students expressed distrust in politicians, media and journalists.

### 2.2 *Comparative Study of Social and Traditional Media Organisations' Strategies in Fake News Governance*

Leinders (2021) compared the fake news governance strategies of Twitter and The Washington Post, using qualitative methods and secondary data. He found that Twitter relied more on technology and had more policies and procedures than The Washington Post, which relied more on human judgment. He also supported the findings of Mavridis (2018) on the methods and techniques of identifying and countering fake news. He argued that Twitter's governance of fake news was more proactive and preventive, while The Washington Post's governance of fake news was more reactive and corrective. He also suggested that both organisations could learn from each other and improve their governance of fake news.

Ridder (2020) conducted an online survey on the trust in online and offline news media and the perceptions of fake news among younger and older people. He found that younger people trusted news websites more than older people, but had more problems in perceiving fake news. He also contradicted the findings of Arandas, Ling and Chiang (2021) on the credibility of traditional and new media. He explained that younger people trusted news websites more because they were more familiar and comfortable with online media, while older people trusted newspapers more because they were more loyal and conservative with offline media. He also claimed that younger people had more difficulties in perceiving fake news because they were more exposed and vulnerable to online misinformation, while older people had more experience and skills in verifying news sources.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a theoretical framework that integrates trust in media and media credibility, as defined by Johnson and Kaye (1998), Kohring and Matthes (2007), Meyer (1988), Li and Wang (2021), and Tsfaty and Cappella (2003). These concepts are related and interdependent, as they influence the evaluation and the level of trust in media. Trust in media refers to the extent to which the public perceives the media as trustworthy, reliable and authoritative sources of information. Media credibility refers to the quality and accuracy of the information provided by the media, as well as the professionalism and ethics of the media practitioners. This study aims to explore how these concepts

are affected by the presence and awareness of fake news and cloned pages among postgraduate students in Nigeria.

### 3.1 *Trust in Media Theories*

Trust in media is a complex and multidimensional concept that has been studied from various perspectives and disciplines such as communication, sociology, psychology and political science (Kohring & Matthes, 2007; McQuail, 2013; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Some of the prominent theories and models that explain trust in media are briefly discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

First, the source credibility theory posits that the credibility of a source depends on two main factors: expertise and trustworthiness (Hovland, Janis & Kelley, 1953; Li & Wang, 2021). Expertise refers to the source's knowledge and competence on the topic, while trustworthiness refers to the source's honesty and goodwill. The theory suggests that the more expert and trustworthy a source is perceived to be, the more persuasive and influential it is on the audience.

Second, the media system dependency theory proposes that the degree of trust in media is influenced by the extent to which the audience depends on the media for their information needs and gratifications (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). The theory argues that the more dependent the audience is on the media, the more likely they are to trust the media, as they perceive the media as essential and beneficial for their survival and well-being.

Third, the social capital theory asserts that trust in media is related to the level of social capital in a society, which is the network of norms, values and relationships that facilitate cooperation and collective action (Putnam, 2000). The theory contends that the higher the social capital in a society, the higher the trust in media, as the media are seen as part of the social fabric and as a reflection of the public interest.

Fourth, the uses and gratifications theory. The uses and gratifications theory is a communication theory that focuses on how people use the media and other forms of communication to fulfill their interpersonal needs and wants (Rubin, 2002). The uses and gratifications theory believes that mass media audience chooses which types of media they will expose themselves to, based on certain gratifications or some sense of personal satisfaction that they expect to receive from the respective media. The theory emphasises that trust in media is determined by the motivations and expectations of the audience, as well as the satisfaction and gratification they receive from the media (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974). The theory maintains that the more the media meet the audience's needs and wants, the more the audience trust the media, as they perceive the media as relevant and rewarding.

The theory was first introduced and advanced by Katz (1959) when he advocated that the field of Mass Communication research should change its line of thought from "How the Media Affect People" to "What do People do with the Media". Katz et al., 1974 cited in Popoola (2010) characterised a more comprehensive view of the uses and gratification. The social and psychological origins of needs, which generate expectations of the mass media or other sources, which lead to differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in need gratification and other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones (p. 250).

### 3.2 *Media Credibility Frameworks*

Media credibility is another complex and multidimensional concept that has been examined from various angles and approaches such as journalism, information science and human-computer interaction (Flanagin & Metzger, 2008; Li & Wang, 2021). Some of the influential frameworks and models that explain media credibility are briefly discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

First, the multi-dimensional model of media credibility identifies four main dimensions of media credibility: believability, accuracy, fairness and completeness (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986). Believability refers to the extent to which the media present the information in a convincing and

coherent manner, accuracy refers to the extent to which the media provide the information that is factual and correct, fairness refers to the extent to which the media cover the information in a balanced and impartial way, and completeness refers to the extent to which the media include all the relevant and important aspects of the information (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Li & Wang, 2021).

Second, the dual-processing model of media credibility distinguishes between two types of processing that the audience use to evaluate media credibility: heuristic and systematic (Sundar, 2008). Heuristic processing involves the use of simple cues and shortcuts such as the source, the medium, or the appearance of the information, to judge the credibility of the media. Systematic processing involves the use of more elaborate and effortful reasoning such as the evidence, the logic, or the consistency of the information, to assess the credibility of the media (Li & Wang, 2021; Sundar, 2008).

Third, the social media credibility framework adapts and extends the existing models of media credibility to the context of social media, which are online platforms that enable users to create and share content and interact with each other (Li & Wang, 2021; Metzger & Flanagin, 2013; Singh & Singh, 2022). The framework proposes that the credibility of social media depends on three main factors: the content, the source and the medium. The content refers to the quality and accuracy of the information provided by the social media, the source refers to the reputation and trustworthiness of the user who created or shared the information, and the medium refers to the features and functions of the social media platform that facilitate or hinder the verification and validation of the information (Lee & Kim, 2023; Metzger & Flanagin, 2013).

### 3.3 *Relevance of the Theories to the Current Study*

This study uses the theoretical framework of trust in media and media credibility to examine and understand the awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages among postgraduate students in north-west of Nigeria. The study also aims to offer some practical suggestions and implications for improving the students' awareness and knowledge and increasing the quality and credibility of online journalism in Nigeria. The theoretical framework can assist in achieving these goals by:

- Clarifying and operationalising the main terms and variables of the study such as trust in media, media credibility, awareness, knowledge and cloned online newspaper pages.
- Determining and assessing the aspects and indicators of trust in media and media credibility such as expertise, trustworthiness, dependency, social capital, uses and gratifications, believability, accuracy, fairness, completeness, heuristic processing, systematic processing, content, source and medium.
- Analysing and testing the links and impacts of trust in media and media credibility on the students' awareness and knowledge, as well as the factors that influence or mediate these links and impacts such as the media, the curriculum, the peers and the personal interest.
- Applying and using the theoretical and empirical knowledge and evidence from the literature on trust in media and media credibility to the Nigerian context, as well as the specific context of the postgraduate students, who could be the future journalists, media experts and opinion leaders.

## 4. **Material and Methods**

### 4.1 *Research Design*

This study employs a descriptive survey design to achieve its research objectives, focusing on investigating the awareness and knowledge of cloned Facebook pages of 'Daily Trust' and 'Vanguard' online newspapers among postgraduate students in universities within the north-west region of Nigeria. The study collects data from primary respondents, comprising postgraduate students,

regarding their awareness of cloned pages, followed by data collection from secondary respondents such as editors-in-chief and heads of ICT departments at ‘Daily Trust’ and ‘Vanguard,’ regarding measures employed to mitigate fake news associated with their social media platforms. The survey method is essential for its efficiency in investigation of problems in realistic settings, cost effectiveness in generating reasonable amount of data and for overcoming time and space that is not hindered by geographic boundaries (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006).

#### 4.2 Population of the Study

The target population for the quantitative aspect consists of postgraduate students across universities in the north-west region of Nigeria, encompassing seven states: Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara. Each of the seven states has at least one federal university, one state university and one or more private universities, with Kano State having the highest number of private universities and Kaduna State having the highest number of federal universities in the region.

Furthermore, specifically postgraduate students at universities were selected because they are presumed to possess a greater degree of media and digital literacy given that they may have been exposed to knowledge and media use skills and experiences because of their higher levels of formal education and access to modern learning material, facilities and institutions. In addition, these students are regarded as some of the most active users of the Internet and social media (to be precise, Facebook) who, consequently could be exposed to fake news content (Paskin, 2018) more often than non-postgraduate students. Specifically, however, the study focuses on postgraduate students at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) in Zaria, Bayero University Kano (BUK) and Usman Dan Fodio University Sokoto (UDUS). The total population of postgraduate students across these universities is 12,460 as shown in Table 1, below:

**Table 1:** Population size for each university

S/N	University	Postgraduate Student Population
1	Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria	5,605
2	Bayero University, Kano (BUK)	4,915
3	Usman Dan Fodio University, Sokoto (UDUS)	1,940
Total		12,460

**Notes:** This table shows the number of respondents that represent the population of the study.

#### 4.3 Sampling and Sample Size

The study employed purposive sampling to select 400 respondents from the postgraduate student population across ABU, BUK and UDUS. The sample size ensures representation across universities and is determined using the proportional allocation method. According to Cochran’s (1977) and Krejcie and Morgan’s (1970) guidelines, a sample size of 400 is appropriate for this study, facilitating adequate representation and statistical analysis. The sample size for each university is determined proportionately, ensuring representation based on the size of the student population.

Thus, the sample size of this study was approximately 375 according to the Krejcie and Morgan’s (1970) and 384 according to Cochran’s (1977) technique. To have adequate sample size that could be analysed using factor analysis as recommended by Hair, et al. (2010, 2006), the sample size was rounded up to 400 (see Table 2). In obtaining the sample size from the three universities, the researcher applied the method of proportional allocation. This method according to Wimmer and Domminick (2006, p. 96) includes “strata with sizes based on their proportion in the population”. This method was selected because it will ensure representation within the stratum of the population.

**Table 2:** Sample size for each university

S/N	University	Postgraduate Student Population	Percentage	Sample Size
1	Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria	5,605	45.00	180
2	Bayero University, Kano (BUK)	4,915	39.00	158
3	Usman Dan Fodio University, Sokoto (UDUS)	1,940	16.00	62
Total		12,460	100	400

**Notes:** This table shows the new number of respondents that represent the population of the study.

In getting the 400 respondents as the sample from the three universities, the research employed the services of three research assistants; one from each state, together with whom he worked to get the required instruments filled.

## 5. Results and Discussion

### 5.1 Results

This section presents and discusses the results obtained from the demographic data of the respondents and the study's main objective. Data collection occurred concurrently across the three selected universities using a Google Form (online questionnaire) from February 3rd to 17th, 2024. Out of the 400 questionnaires distributed, 372 were successfully retrieved and analysed. None of the retrieved questionnaires were rejected during data cleansing, resulting in a response rate of 93%, which is considered high and satisfactory for online surveys (Sax, Gilmartin & Bryant, 2003).

### 5.2 Results of Respondents' Demographic Data

The demographic information of the respondents is summarised in Table 3 below:

**Table 3:** Demographic Information of the Respondents (n = 372)

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	248	66.7
Female	124	33.3
<b>Age</b>		
20-30	83	22.3
31-40	148	39.8
41-50	109	29.3
51 and above	32	8.6
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	82	22
Married	284	76.3
Divorced	6	1.6
<b>University</b>		
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria	160	43
Bayero University, Kano	155	41.7
Usman Danfodiyo University, Sokoto	57	15.3
<b>Programme of Study</b>		
Postgraduate Diploma	76	20.4

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Professional Masters	62	16.7
Academic Masters	126	33.9
M.Phil.	17	4.6
PhD	91	24.5
Total	372	100.0

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

The majority of respondents were male (66.7%), reflecting the gender composition of postgraduate students in the selected universities and the prevalent trend of male dominance in Nigerian higher education. The most common age group was 31-40 (39.8%), followed by 41-50 (29.3%) and 20-30 (22.3%), indicating a relatively young and productive demographic consistent with the average age of Nigerian postgraduate students. Most respondents were married (76.3%), suggesting family responsibilities that may impact academic performance. Respondents were fairly distributed among the three universities, with ABU having the highest representation (43%), followed by BUK (41.7%) and UDUS (15.3%), reflecting university size and popularity. Academic masters (33.9%) was the most common programme of study, followed by PhD (24.5%) and postgraduate diploma (20.4%), indicating a focus on advanced academic degrees emphasising independent research.

### 5.3 Results of the Main Objectives

To assess the level of awareness of the Daily Trust Hausa and Vanguard Hausa Facebook pages among Postgraduate students at universities in North-West of Nigeria.

The data collected from the three selected universities via an online questionnaire revealed significant findings regarding the respondents' awareness of the Daily Trust Hausa and Vanguard Hausa Facebook pages. As shown in Table 4 below, the majority of respondents possessed a Facebook account (97.5%), used it frequently (69.7%) and spent an average of 1-2 hours per day on the platform (30.1%), indicating their familiarity and regular usage of Facebook as a news source. Moreover, a majority of respondents reported reading online newspapers (93.8%) and following newspaper pages on Facebook (88.7%), indicating a high interest in online news consumption and exposure to various online news sources, authentic and cloned alike.

While most respondents were aware of general phenomena like popular newspapers having multiple Facebook pages (58.6%) and the existence of Daily Trust Hausa and Vanguard Hausa Facebook pages (72%), their specific awareness of features like the numerousness of these pages (44.6%), significant follower counts (51.4%), lack of authenticity (28.7%) and absence of official Hausa versions (23.9%) was lower. This suggests a general awareness of cloned online newspaper pages but a lack of specific understanding of the features and characteristics of the Daily Trust Hausa and Vanguard Hausa Facebook pages, highlighting the need for more targeted awareness campaigns and education on this issue.

**Table 4:** Results of the main objective of the study (n = 372)

S/N	Survey Items	5-Point Likert-Type Scales				
		1 Strongly agree	2 Agree	3 No Idea	4 Disagree	5 Strongly disagree
1	I have a Facebook account	268 (72.0%)	95 (25.5%)	2 (0.5%)	4 (1.1%)	3 (0.8%)
	5-Point Likert-Type Scale	Over 6 years	5-6 years	3-4 years	1-2 years	Less than a year
2	I have had my Facebook account for:	279 (75.0%)	47 (12.6%)	30 (8.1%)	8 (2.2%)	8 (2.2%)
	5-Point Likert-Type Scale	Always	Often	Sometimes	Occasionally	Rarely
3	I use Facebook:	136 (36.6%)	123 (33.1%)	63 (16.9%)	26 (7.0%)	24 (6.5%)



5-Point Likert-Type Scale		Over 6 years	5-6 years	3-4 years	1-2 years	Less than a year
4	On average, I spend some times per day using Facebook.	42 (11.3%)	50 (13.4%)	83 (22.3%)	112 (30.1%)	85 (22.8%)
5-Point Likert-Type Scale		Strongly agree	Agree	No Idea	Disagree	Strongly disagree
5	I read online newspapers.	153 (41.1%)	196 (52.7%)	5 (1.3%)	14 (3.8%)	4 (1.1%)
6	I follow newspaper pages on Facebook.	152 (40.9%)	178 (47.8%)	11 (3.0%)	26 (7.0%)	5 (1.3%)
5-Point Likert-Type Scale		Extremely Aware	Moderately Aware	Somewhat Aware / Sometimes	Slightly Aware	Not Aware at All
7	Most popular newspapers have multiple Facebook pages with their names.	102 (27.4%)	116 (31.2%)	61 (16.4%)	63 (16.9%)	30 (8.1%)
8	Only one Facebook page of every popular newspaper is authentic.	110 (29.6%)	109 (29.3%)	69 (18.5%)	50 (13.4%)	34 (9.1%)
9	I am aware of the existence of the Daily Trust Hausa and Vanguard Hausa Facebook pages.	157 (42.2%)	111 (29.8%)	37 (9.9%)	35 (9.4%)	32 (8.6%)
10	Daily Trust Hausa and Vanguard Hausa Facebook pages are numerous on Facebook.	69 (18.5%)	97 (26.1%)	70 (18.8%)	72 (19.4%)	64 (17.2%)
11	Daily Trust Hausa and Vanguard Hausa Facebook pages have a significant number of followers.	88 (23.7%)	103 (27.7%)	73 (19.6%)	70 (18.8%)	38 (10.2%)
12	Daily Trust Hausa and Vanguard Hausa Facebook pages are not official pages of 'Daily Trust' and 'Vanguard' online newspapers.	41 (11.0%)	66 (17.7%)	34 (9.1%)	74 (19.9%)	157 (42.2%)
13	'Daily Trust' and 'Vanguard' online newspapers do not have a Hausa version of their Facebook papers	38 (10.2%)	51 (13.7%)	33 (8.9%)	69 (18.5%)	181 (48.7%)

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

## 6. Discussion

The demographic data collected from the respondents of the study provides valuable insights into the characteristics of the sample population, shedding light on the composition and diversity within the cohort. Analysing the results from Table 3 reveals several key trends and patterns that warrant discussion. With regards to gender distribution, it is evident that the majority of respondents were male, comprising 66.7% of the sample. This observation is consistent with broader trends observed in Nigerian higher education, where males tend to dominate in postgraduate programmes. This phenomenon mirrors the gender disparities often seen in academia globally, highlighting potential areas for further research and interventions aimed at promoting gender equity in education.

The age distribution of the respondents provides interesting insights into the demographic profile of postgraduate students. The most prevalent age group was 31-40, accounting for 39.8% of the sample, followed by the 41-50 age group at 29.3%. These findings suggest that the majority of respondents fall within the mid-career stage, potentially indicating a cohort of individuals who have embarked on postgraduate studies to advance their careers or acquire specialised knowledge and skills. Additionally, the presence of respondents aged 51 and above (8.6%) underscores the importance of lifelong learning and the pursuit of education beyond traditional age boundaries.

Marital status reveals that a significant proportion of respondents were married, constituting 76.3% of the sample. This finding highlights the intersection between academic pursuits and family responsibilities, indicating that a substantial number of postgraduate students are balancing their studies with spousal and parental roles. Understanding the unique challenges faced by married students in managing their academic and personal lives is crucial for developing supportive policies and resources within academic institutions.

The distribution of respondents across different universities provides insights into institutional representation and popularity among postgraduate students. Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (ABU) emerged as the university with the highest representation, accounting for 43% of the sample, followed closely by Bayero University, Kano (BUK) at 41.7% and Usman Danfodiyo University, Sokoto (UDUS) at 15.3%. These figures reflect factors such as university size, reputation and programme offerings, which influence students' choices and enrolment patterns. Furthermore, analysing the

distribution of respondents by programme of study reveals preferences and priorities among postgraduate students. Academic master's programmes were the most common, comprising 33.9% of the sample, followed by PhD programmes at 24.5% and postgraduate diploma programmes at 20.4%. This distribution suggests a strong emphasis on advanced academic degrees focused on independent research and scholarly inquiry, reflecting the aspirations and career trajectories of the respondents.

Overall, the demographic data of the respondents provide valuable insights into the gender, age, marital status, university representation and programme preferences within the sample population. These findings offer a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics and composition of postgraduate students in Nigerian universities, laying the groundwork for further research and policy initiatives aimed at addressing the needs and challenges of this diverse and dynamic cohort.

The findings of the main objective of the study, which aimed to assess the level of awareness of the Daily Trust Hausa and Vanguard Hausa Facebook pages among postgraduate students at universities in the North-West of Nigeria, revealed several noteworthy insights. The data collected through an online questionnaire from three selected universities provided significant insights into the respondents' awareness and usage patterns concerning these online platforms.

According to the results presented in Table 4, a substantial majority of respondents reported possessing a Facebook account (97.5%), with a significant portion using it frequently (69.7%) and spending an average of 1-2 hours per day on the platform (30.1%). These findings align with existing literature highlighting the widespread adoption and usage of social media platforms, including Facebook, as primary sources of news consumption among Nigerian youths (Omotayo & Adedeji, 2020). The high prevalence of Facebook usage among the respondents underscores the platform's importance as a medium for accessing news and information.

Moreover, the survey revealed that a majority of respondents reported reading online newspapers (93.8%) and following newspaper pages on Facebook (88.7%). These findings are consistent with previous studies indicating a growing trend towards online news consumption among Nigerian youths, driven by the convenience and accessibility offered by digital platforms (Ojo, 2018). The high level of engagement with online newspapers and Facebook news pages among the respondents reflects their active participation in the digital news ecosystem. However, while most respondents demonstrated general awareness of phenomena such as popular newspapers having multiple Facebook pages (58.6%) and the existence of Daily Trust Hausa and Vanguard Hausa Facebook pages (72%), their specific awareness of features such as the numerousness of these pages (44.6%), significant follower counts (51.4%), lack of authenticity (28.7%) and absence of official Hausa versions (23.9%) was relatively lower. These findings suggest a gap in the respondents' understanding of the distinguishing features and characteristics of authentic versus cloned online newspaper pages.

This discrepancy between general awareness and specific knowledge highlights the need for targeted awareness campaigns and educational initiatives to enhance users' ability to discern between authentic and cloned online news sources. Prior research has emphasised the importance of media literacy and digital literacy programmes in empowering users to critically evaluate online information and navigate the complexities of the digital media landscape (Aluko & Adebayo, 2021). By equipping users with the necessary skills and knowledge such initiatives can help mitigate the spread of misinformation and promote a more informed and discerning online community.

The findings of the main objectives provide insights into respondents' awareness of Daily Trust Hausa and Vanguard Hausa Facebook pages, revealing both their general familiarity with online news platforms and specific gaps in understanding authenticity and characteristics. Integrating these findings with relevant literature emphasises the necessity of media literacy interventions for fostering a discerning digital media environment.

Implications for academia and digital media literacy initiatives abound. Firstly, the widespread Facebook usage underscores its pivotal role in news dissemination, particularly among younger demographics, necessitating ongoing research into social media dynamics. Secondly, the significant engagement with online newspapers and Facebook news pages highlights the active participation of

North-West Nigerian postgraduate students in the digital news ecosystem, urging media organisations to adapt content delivery strategies and uphold ethical standards to combat misinformation. Moreover, the gap between general awareness and specific knowledge emphasises the need for enhancing critical thinking and media literacy skills. Educational interventions can empower users to navigate the digital media landscape effectively, discerning between credible and unreliable sources. Targeted awareness campaigns are also vital to raise awareness about cloned online newspaper pages, mitigating the spread of false information and fostering a trustworthy online environment. These findings underscore the importance of continued research into media consumption patterns and digital media literacy, enabling stakeholders to promote an informed, discerning and resilient digital media ecosystem in Nigeria and beyond.

## 7. Conclusion

This study has illuminated the complex dynamics between user engagement and the proliferation of fake news on the cloned Facebook pages of 'Daily Trust Hausa' and 'Vanguard Hausa' online newspapers. The findings underscore a paradoxical relationship: while users frequently visit and engage with these pages (in addition to the genuine Facebook pages of the online newspapers, 'Daily Trust' and 'Vanguard' respectively), their trust is marred by the suspicion and actual presence of fake news. This dichotomy has fostered a heightened sense of caution and scepticism, reshaping user behaviour towards online news consumption.

The comprehensive analysis of both the respondents' demographics and the findings of the main objectives provides valuable insights into the digital media landscape and awareness levels among postgraduate students in North-West of Nigeria. The demographic data revealed a predominantly male and married respondent population, with a notable representation from Ahmadu Bello University, reflecting broader trends in Nigerian higher education. Regarding study's main objective, the study illuminated respondents' general familiarity with online news platforms, particularly Facebook, as a primary source of information. However, specific knowledge gaps regarding the authenticity and characteristics of Daily Trust Hausa and Vanguard Hausa Facebook pages were identified. These findings underscore the importance of targeted media literacy interventions to enhance users' critical thinking skills and promote a more discerning approach to online news consumption.

## 8. Recommendations

Based on these insights, several recommendations can be proposed:

- *Media Literacy Initiatives:* Collaborative efforts between educational institutions, media organisations and government agencies should prioritise media literacy programmes aimed at equipping individuals with the skills to critically evaluate online information and distinguish between credible and unreliable sources.
- *Awareness Campaigns:* Public awareness campaigns should be launched to educate users about the prevalence of cloned online newspaper pages and the potential risks associated with consuming content from these sources. These campaigns can leverage various channels, including social media, traditional media and educational workshops.
- *Ethical Reporting Practices:* Media organisations should uphold ethical standards and accuracy in their reporting, particularly in the digital space where misinformation can easily proliferate. Journalists and content creators should prioritise fact-checking and verification processes to ensure the integrity of their content.
- *Research and Monitoring:* Continued research into media consumption patterns and digital media literacy is essential for understanding evolving trends and addressing knowledge gaps. Longitudinal studies and monitoring mechanisms can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of interventions and inform evidence-based policy decisions.

- *Partnerships and Collaboration*: Stakeholders across academia, government, civil society and the private sector should collaborate to develop holistic approaches to digital media literacy and online safety. By leveraging diverse expertise and resources, stakeholders can amplify the impact of interventions and promote a more resilient digital media ecosystem.
- *Content Moderation*: Implement advanced algorithms and human oversight to enhance the detection and removal of fake news.
- *Journalistic Standards*: Encourage media outlets to adhere to stringent journalistic ethics, ensuring transparency and accountability in reporting.
- *Collaborative Efforts*: Foster partnerships between media organisations, technology firms and regulatory bodies to devise robust strategies against misinformation.

In essence, the findings underscore the need for concerted efforts to enhance media literacy, promote ethical reporting practices and raise awareness about the complexities of the digital media landscape. By empowering individuals with the knowledge and skills to navigate the digital world effectively, we can foster a more informed, discerning and resilient society.

## 9. Limitations and Future Research Direction

The study acknowledges several limitations:

- *Sample Representativeness*: The survey sample may not fully encapsulate the diversity of the Daily Trust Hausa and Vanguard Hausa Facebook pages' audience.
- *Self-Reported Data*: The reliance on self-reported data could introduce biases, affecting the accuracy of the findings.
- *Unmeasured Variables*: Factors such as demographic characteristics and personal beliefs, which could influence user perceptions, were not controlled for in this study.

Future research should aim to address these limitations by employing a more representative sample, using mixed-method approaches and considering a wider range of influencing factors.

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