

Media Stakeholders' Perspectives on Social Media Platforms as Boosters of Yellow Journalism and Fake News Propagation in Delta State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper explored the perspectives of media stakeholders on the role of social media platforms in spreading fake news and propagating yellow journalism in Delta State, Nigeria. These are believed to be perpetuated through citizen journalism. The objectives were to ascertain if social media are prone to spreading fake news and promoting yellow journalism; investigate if citizen journalism exacerbate the spread of fake news and yellow journalism, and determine if the spread of fake news and yellow journalism negatively impact journalism practice. The study was based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory. It employed a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. The population of the study of 1,100 was made up of journalists from media houses across Delta State, and senior mass communication/media studies and journalism lecturers from six universities in Delta State. The study revealed that social media platforms influence the propagation of yellow journalism and fake news in the State. Furthermore, it was discovered that citizen journalism encourages the spread of fake news and yellow journalism because most its “practitioners” are not groomed in the ethics of journalism. This study concluded that the unprofessional activities of non-initiates into journalism has been having negative impacts on the profession. Recommendations include collaborative efforts among media practitioners, social media companies, and policymakers to promote responsible journalism and media consumption practices in the digital age. Also, media outlets should focus on improving the quality of content shared to mitigate the effects of negative media content.

Keywords: boosters, citizen journalism, fake news, yellow journalism,

Introduction

The advent of the Internet, which has led to the introduction of social media platforms, has revolutionised journalism practice, presenting both new challenges and opportunities for the dissemination of news and information. In the digital age, the proliferation of online platforms has significantly transformed the way news is produced, consumed, and shared.

The traditional role of journalism in democratic societies is to provide citizens with reliable, accurate, and unbiased information (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). However, the rise of social media platforms has disrupted traditional journalism norms and posed new challenges for news organisations. Social media platforms offer individuals the ability to create, curate, and share news content, blurring the boundaries between traditional media outlets and individual users (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). As a result, the power dynamics in news production have shifted, with ordinary citizens now actively participating in the creation and dissemination of news.

Yellow journalism, with its roots dating back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, represents a historical precursor to the contemporary challenges faced by journalism in the social media era (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). Yellow journalism is characterised by sensationalism, exaggeration, and biased reporting. It often prioritises attracting readership and generating profit over journalistic integrity and factual accuracy. While yellow journalism was prevalent in the era of printed newspapers, its modern-day manifestations are heavily influenced by the digital landscape and the pursuit of viral content on social media platforms.

Citizen journalism, facilitated by social media platforms, has emerged as a significant force in the news ecosystem (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Through the use of smartphones and social media applications, individuals can capture and share news events in real-time, bypassing traditional gatekeepers. Citizen journalism has the potential to democratise the news production process, provide alternative perspectives, and hold powerful institutions accountable. However, it also raises concerns about the lack of professional training, journalistic standards, and verification processes among citizen journalists.

The proliferation of fake news, misinformation, and disinformation on social media platforms has become a pervasive issue in the social media era (Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2020). Guanah (2018), who defines fake news as any falsehood that is intentionally and deliberately being presented as a correct and truthful news report, asserts that one of the issues that social media have thrown up in the international communication scene recently is that of “fake news” perpetuation (p.23). Fake news refers to intentionally false or misleading information presented as factual news. The virality and algorithmic amplification capabilities of social media platforms have made it easier for fake news to spread rapidly and reach a wide audience. The consequences of fake news extend beyond the erosion of public trust in journalism, as it can have significant societal and political implications, including the manipulation of public opinion and the polarisation of society.

This paper aims to critically analyse the entwinement of yellow journalism, citizen journalism, and fake news in social media era. The study sought to provide insights into the challenges and opportunities posed by these phenomena, and sought to shed light on the implications for journalism practice, media ethics, and the public's trust in news sources. Additionally, this analysis will contribute to the understanding of media ethics, the need for responsible journalism, and the importance of fostering public trust in news.

The growing unethical activities in journalism practice is giving professionals concern, especially, the advent of the Internet which has further given people the freedom to freely express themselves, but dysfunctionally exacerbate misnomers like yellow journalism

and the spread of fake news. Most of the perpetrators of this unethical acts hide under citizen journalism, hence the decision to embark on this study which ex-rays, and sought the perspectives of media stakeholders like practicing journalists and communication scholars in South-South Nigeria.

The rapid growth of social media plethora platforms have introduced a multitude of challenges to journalism practice in the modern day. For instance, the influence of yellow journalism is amplified by social media platforms, where click bait headlines and sensationalised content are prioritised to attract audience attention. This trend raises concerns about the erosion of journalistic integrity and the public's ability to discern reliable information from sensationalised narratives (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014).

Also, the rise of citizen journalism, facilitated by social media platforms, has disrupted the traditional news production process. Individuals now have the ability to capture and share news events in real-time, challenging the monopoly of professional journalists and news organisations (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). While citizen journalism offers the potential for increased transparency and diverse perspectives, it also raises concerns about the lack of professional training, verification processes, and adherence to journalistic ethics (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

Likewise, fake news has become a pervasive problem in social media era, as misinformation and disinformation can be easily disseminated through social media platforms (Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2020). The algorithmic amplification and virality of false information pose significant challenges to journalism practice and public trust in news sources. Fake news do not only undermine the credibility of journalism, but also contributes to societal polarisation and the manipulation of public opinion (Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2020).

The entwinement of yellow journalism, citizen journalism, and fake news in social media era raises critical questions regarding journalistic ethics, the role of media organisations, and the responsibility of social media platforms in facilitating the spread of accurate information. To address these challenges, it is essential to analyse the implications for journalism practice, media literacy, and the public's trust in news sources so as to provide insights into how journalism can adapt and thrive in the evolving digital landscape

Objectives of the study

The study has the following objectives. They are to:

- i. ascertain if social media are prone to spreading fake news and yellow journalism
- ii. investigate if citizen journalism exacerbate the spread of fake news and yellow journalism
- iii. determine if the spread of fake news and yellow journalism negatively impact journalism practice in Delta State, Nigeria

Yellow Journalism in Social Media Era

Yellow journalism, characterised by sensationalism, exaggeration, and biased reporting, has a historical legacy that continues to influence contemporary journalism practices (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). The digital age, with the proliferation of social media platforms, has provided a fertile ground for the resurgence of yellow journalism. Researchers have explored the impact of sensationalised and clickbait content on social media platforms, highlighting the challenges posed to journalistic integrity and the public's ability to discern reliable information from sensationalised narratives (Gin, 2018).

Yellow journalism has significant impacts on journalism practice, influencing the way news is produced, consumed, and perceived. These impacts can be observed in various aspects of journalism practice.

1. **Sensationalism and Clickbait:** Yellow journalism prioritises sensationalism, exaggeration, and attention-grabbing headlines to attract readership (Smith & Johnson, 2019). This focus on sensational content can lead to the prioritisation of entertainment value over accuracy and objectivity. News outlets may resort to clickbait tactics, where headlines and content are designed to generate clicks and web traffic rather than providing reliable and informative news.
2. **Erosion of Credibility:** The prevalence of yellow journalism can erode the credibility of news sources and undermine public trust in journalism as a whole. When news outlets prioritise sensationalism and prioritise profit-driven motives over factual reporting, it can lead to skepticism among audiences (Smith & Johnson, 2019). The erosion of trust in news sources can have far-reaching implications for the functioning of democratic societies and the public's ability to make informed decisions.
3. **Influence on News Agenda:** Yellow journalism can influence the news agenda by diverting attention from important issues and focusing on sensationalised or trivial stories. The pursuit of high ratings and increased readership can result in a disproportionate emphasis on sensational topics, leading to a neglect of substantive news coverage (Smith & Johnson, 2019). This can distort public perceptions of what is truly significant and undermine the role of journalism in informing the public about critical issues.
4. **Impact on Public Discourse:** Yellow journalism can contribute to the spread of misinformation, disinformation, and the shaping of public opinion. The exaggerated claims, sensational narratives, and lack of rigorous fact-checking associated with yellow journalism can mislead audiences and influence their beliefs and attitudes (Lewandowsky, Ecker, & Cook, 2012). This distortion of information can have serious consequences for public discourse, political decision-making, and societal well-being.
5. **Ethical Concerns:** Yellow journalism raises ethical concerns regarding accuracy, fairness, and responsible reporting. The practice often involves the manipulation of facts, selective reporting, and the exploitation of emotional triggers to engage readers (Smith & Johnson, 2019). Such practices can violate journalistic ethics and professional standards, compromising the integrity of journalism as a whole.

Fake News and Journalism

The pervasive spread of fake news, fueled by social media platforms, has become a significant concern for journalism practice and public trust in news sources (Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2020). Scholars have examined the definition, characteristics, and dissemination mechanisms of fake news, highlighting its potential to manipulate public opinion, contribute to societal polarisation, and undermine democratic processes (Lewandowsky *et al.*, 2012; Pennycook & Rand, 2019). Research has also focused on the role of social media algorithms in amplifying and facilitating the spread of false information, emphasising the need for algorithmic transparency and responsible platform governance (Guess, Gu, Kropotov, & Yarochkin, 2020; Tufekci, 2018).

The issue of fake news is so important that Nigeria's President, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, who was the All Progressives Congress (APC) presidential candidate in the last elections, accused his arch-rival and People's Democratic Party (PDP) presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar, and his party of cloning the websites of two newspapers to spread fake news in the Hausa language against his own aspiration. He said the PDP and its social media hirelings

were spreading fake news by impersonating and parodying famous newspapers and websites to fool naive Nigerians. According to Najablitznews (2023), Tinubu's media aids said "Many parody social media accounts such as 'Vanguard Hausa', and 'DailyTrust Hausa' have been created and are also being used to circulate fake news on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp and other digital platforms" (p.2).

Fake news has had significant impacts on journalism practice, affecting the way news is produced, consumed, and perceived. These impacts can be observed in various aspects of journalism practice.

1. **Erosion of Trust and Credibility:** The proliferation of fake news has eroded public trust in journalism and mainstream news sources. Fake news stories, intentionally designed to deceive or mislead, undermine the credibility of legitimate journalism (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018). As a result, audiences may become skeptical of news reports and find it challenging to distinguish between factual information and false narratives.
2. **Disruption of the News Ecosystem:** Fake news disrupts the traditional news ecosystem by injecting misinformation into the public sphere. It competes with genuine news stories for attention and can distort public understanding of important issues (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). The presence of fake news undermines the role of journalism as a reliable source of information and hampers the functioning of democratic processes.
3. **Polarisation and Filter Bubbles:** Fake news contributes to the formation of filter bubbles and echo chambers, where individuals are exposed to information that aligns with their preexisting beliefs and biases. This can lead to increased polarisation and a lack of common understanding or shared facts (Lewandowsky *et al.*, 2012). The spread of fake news reinforces existing narratives and can hinder constructive dialogue and informed decision-making.
4. **Challenges for Fact-Checking and Verification:** Fake news poses challenges for fact-checking and verification processes within journalism practice. The rapid spread of false information through social media platforms and online channels makes it difficult for journalists to effectively debunk misinformation in real-time (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). The need to counteract fake news requires additional resources and efforts from journalists to verify and contextualize information.
5. **Ethical Dilemmas:** The presence of fake news raises ethical dilemmas for journalists. They must navigate the balance between reporting accurate information and avoiding the unintentional amplification of false narratives. Journalists also face challenges in addressing fake news without further perpetuating its spread or providing undue legitimacy to false claims (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).
6. **Need for Media Literacy:** The prevalence of fake news highlights the importance of media literacy education. Journalists and news organisations are increasingly involved in initiatives to promote media literacy skills among audiences. Media literacy helps individuals critically evaluate information sources, discern reliable news from falsehoods, and understand the motivations behind the creation and dissemination of fake news.

Conceptualisation of Citizenship Journalism

Although some see citizen journalism as conceptually associated with new media, arguing that it originates with the new media. However, the accidental capturing of the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963 by Abraham Zapruder, a Russian-American clothing manufacturer, can be rightly categorised as citizen journalism, and this event took place before the advent of the Internet. There are sure other incidents in the past that can be

said to be citizen journalism activities; for instance, there are literature that supported letters-to-editor, photographs taken by citizens, but published via regular conventional editorialise process, columns and posted cartoons, all amounts to citizen participation in journalism and citizens participation in mass media functions. Citizen journalism can also be defined it in terms of ancient Egyptian, Chinese or Roman citizens listening to writings read from scrolls. Citizen participation in journalism is only a part of citizen journalism -but part of old 'regular journalism.'

Nonetheless, citizen Journalism, as it is called today, emerged with web 2.0 -off shoot of Internet, with its multiple social platforms, as well as the development of new and affordable technological devices as tools of access. "Etiologically", is the term gives practical resonance to this emergence. Self-publishing is the hall mark of citizen journalism. The fact remains that citizen participation and citizen Journalism have been in existence before the emergence of the Internet, and indeed Web 2.0, but have been amplified by these new media, as is the case with other communication/interactive activities.

Digital Media and Rise of Citizen Journalism

Communication is very important in the society, just as communicating vital information for the benefits of citizens is also vital. Mass media are saddled with this inevitable function, as they have the ability to report events, and through such reportage shape how the audience experience the world. They provide varied contents through different means like, radio, television (TV), Internet, and Films. Technological transformations (digital media) are enhancing and helping the media to convey their messages to large audience.

According to Ochonogor and Ikpegbu (2019), digital media have become increasingly used to report on events that might otherwise stay unknown or hidden. They say digital media have increased its use to report on underdevelopment issues that would otherwise go unnoticed or disguised. They say digital media can reveal many underdevelopment issues that conventional media cannot, especially in areas with limited access. With digital media, anyone may report such events with audio, photos, and video. This is citizen journalism.

Citizen journalism, enabled by social media platforms, has significantly altered the dynamics of news production and consumption (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Scholars have examined the motivations, practices, and challenges faced by citizen journalists. They have explored the potential of citizen journalism to enhance transparency, offer diverse perspectives, and address gaps in traditional news coverage (Hermida, Fletcher, Korell, & Logan, 2012). However, concerns have also been raised regarding the lack of professional training, verification processes, and adherence to journalistic ethics among citizen journalists (Bruns, 2017). Researchers have emphasised the importance of collaboration and interaction between citizen journalists and professional journalists in ensuring accurate and ethical reporting (Gant & Klyueva, 2018).

Impacts of Citizen Journalism on Journalism Practice

Citizen journalism has had profound impacts on journalism practice, transforming the way news is gathered, reported, and consumed. These impacts can be observed in several key areas of journalism practice.

1. **Diversification of News Sources:** Citizen journalism has contributed to a diversification of news sources by allowing individuals who are not professional journalists to participate in the news-making process. This influx of diverse perspectives and alternative voices enriches the media landscape and provides a broader range of viewpoints on societal issues (Hermida *et al.*, 2012).
2. **Increased News Coverage:** Citizen journalists often cover local events, niche topics, and community issues that may receive limited attention from mainstream media

- outlets. They act as "eyes on the ground" and can report on stories that might otherwise go unnoticed or underreported. This leads to increased news coverage and a more comprehensive understanding of events and issues (Hermida *et al.*, 2012).
3. **Real-Time Reporting:** Citizen journalists have the ability to report news in real-time, particularly in situations of crisis, disasters, or social movements. Through social media platforms and mobile devices, they can share information, images, and videos instantly, providing timely updates and a firsthand perspective on unfolding events (Hermida *et al.*, 2012).
 4. **Engagement and Interactivity:** Citizen journalism facilitates greater engagement and interactivity between journalists and their audiences. Through comments, social media interactions, and direct contributions, citizen journalists can establish a more direct and immediate connection with their readers or viewers. This engagement fosters a sense of community, participation, and collaboration in the news-making process (Hermida *et al.*, 2012).
 5. **Accountability and Transparency:** Citizen journalism can act as a form of accountability for traditional news organisations. By exposing issues, uncovering stories, and providing alternative perspectives, citizen journalists contribute to holding power structures accountable and promoting transparency in journalism (Gant & Klyueva, 2018). They can serve as watchdogs, challenging the narratives presented by mainstream media.
 6. **Challenges to Professional Journalism:** The rise of citizen journalism has also posed challenges to professional journalists and traditional news organisations. It has necessitated a reevaluation of roles and responsibilities, as well as a reassessment of the gatekeeping function traditionally held by professional journalists. This has prompted a shift towards collaboration and partnerships between citizen and professional journalists to leverage the strengths of both approaches (Gant & Klyueva, 2018).

Media Ethics and Trust in the Digital Age

The entwinement of yellow journalism, citizen journalism, and fake news raises critical questions regarding media ethics and the public's trust in news sources. Scholars have emphasized the importance of upholding journalistic values, such as accuracy, fairness, and transparency, in the face of evolving digital practices (Wardle, 2017). They have explored strategies for fact-checking, verification, and responsible reporting in the context of the social media era (Roozenbeek & van der Linden, 2019; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Additionally, studies have examined the factors influencing media trust, including the role of source credibility, media literacy, and platform reputation (Edgerly *et al.*, 2020; Lee & Ma, 2012).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Agenda-Setting Theory. The theory posits that the media have the power to influence the salience and importance of issues in the public's mind by highlighting certain topics and downplaying others (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In the context of journalism practice in social media era, the Agenda-Setting Theory is relevant as it helps us understand how yellow journalism, citizen journalism, and fake news shape the public agenda and influence public perceptions of important issues. Researchers have applied the Agenda-Setting Theory to examine the influence of media coverage on public opinion and issue prioritisation (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; McCombs, Llamas, López-Escobar, & Rey, 2014).

In the case of yellow journalism, sensationalised and exaggerated reporting can influence what news stories gain attention and dominate public discourse, potentially

diverting attention from more pressing societal issues. Citizen journalism, on the other hand, allows individuals to set their own agenda by sharing news events that may be overlooked by traditional media outlets, challenging the gatekeeping function of traditional journalism (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Finally, the spread of fake news through social media platforms can impact the public agenda by shaping perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes on various topics (Pennycook & Rand, 2019).

By employing the Agenda-Setting Theory, this paper examined how yellow journalism, citizen journalism, and fake news influence the public agenda in social media era. It explored the extent to which these phenomena shape public discourse, perceptions, and the prioritisation of issues. Further, the study analysed the role of social media platforms as agenda-setters, and their impact on media trust, public opinion, and the democratic process.

Empirical Review

This empirical review provides an overview of relevant empirical studies conducted on journalism practice in the social media era, specifically focusing on the entwinement of yellow journalism, citizen journalism, and fake news. The review highlights key findings, methodologies, and contributions of these studies, shedding light on the empirical landscape surrounding these phenomena.

In a quantitative study by Smith and Johnson (2019), a content analysis of online news articles was conducted to examine the prevalence of yellow journalism practices in the social media era. The researchers identified sensationalistic language, clickbait headlines, and exaggerated claims as common characteristics of yellow journalism. The findings revealed that yellow journalism techniques were prevalent across various news outlets and had the potential to mislead audiences.

To understand the motivations and practices of citizen journalists, Hermida *et al.* (2012) conducted a qualitative study using in-depth interviews with active citizen journalists. The findings highlighted the diverse motivations of citizen journalists, including a desire for participatory democracy, sharing marginalized voices, and filling gaps in traditional news coverage. The study also revealed that citizen journalists utilized social media platforms as tools for dissemination and engagement, highlighting their role in shaping news narratives.

Lewandowsky *et al.* (2012) conducted an experimental study to examine the spread and impact of fake news on social media platforms. Participants were exposed to fabricated news stories and subsequently tested for changes in their beliefs and attitudes. The study found that exposure to fake news led to a significant influence on participants' perceptions, demonstrating the potential harm of false information in shaping public opinion.

A quantitative study by Jones, Fletcher, and Nielsen (2018) investigated the relationship between media trust and the influence of fake news. Survey data from a large sample of participants were analysed to examine the extent to which media trust influenced individuals' susceptibility to fake news. The findings revealed that individuals with higher levels of media trust were less likely to be influenced by fake news, highlighting the importance of media literacy and critical evaluation skills in mitigating the impact of false information.

To understand the effectiveness of fact-checking practices and debunking strategies, Vosoughi *et al.* (2018) conducted a large-scale analysis of the spread of false information on social media. The study analysed the dissemination patterns of true and false news stories and found that false news spread significantly faster and reached more people than true news. The research emphasised the need for proactive fact-checking efforts and debunking strategies to counter the rapid spread of misinformation.

Methods

A mixed methods research approach was employed. This approach combined qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a holistic understanding of the phenomena under investigation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection for the quantitative method while Question guide was used as instrument for the qualitative method. By employing a mixed method approach, this research methodology aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of journalism practice in social media era, and the entwinement of yellow journalism, citizen journalism, and fake news. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods allowed for triangulation of data, strengthening the validity and reliability of the findings.

The population of the study of 1,100 was made up of 368 journalists from media houses across Delta State (TV- 123, Radio- 123, and Newspaper- 122), and 732 mass communication/media studies and journalism lecturers and students from six universities in Delta State (122 from each university). The sample size of the study of 285 was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table. The researcher determined the required responding sample size, standard error, relative standard error, and a confidence interval (95% or 99%) for a proportion estimate, using only one of these criteria as an input. The estimated variance proportion was 0.5 (5%), the confidence interval was 0.05 (5%).

The sample size was made up of ninety three (93) journalists randomly selected from television houses (31), radio houses (31), newspaper houses (31) across Delta State, and one hundred and ninety two (192) media studies and journalism/mass communication lecturers and students from Delta State University, Abraka (32), Western Delta University, Oghara (32), Delta State University of Science and Technology, Ozoro (32), University of Delta, Agbor (32), Edwin Clark University, Kiagbodo (32), and Dennis Osadebay University, Asaba (32).

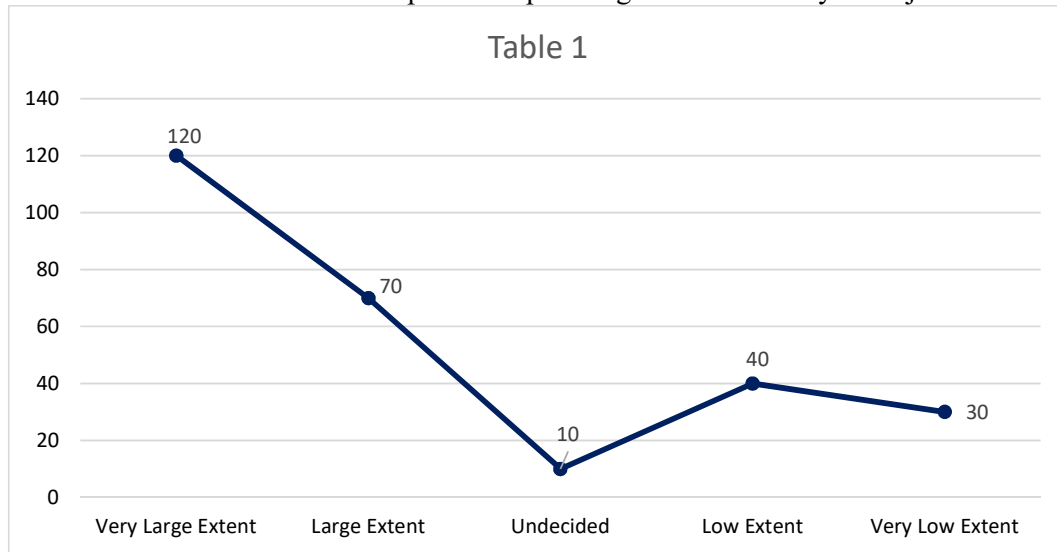
280 copies of a structured questionnaire were administered to gather quantitative data on the respondents' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours related to yellow journalism, citizen journalism, and fake news. The questionnaire was designed to measure variables such as media trust, media literacy, and reliance on social media as a news source. Out of the copies of the questionnaire administered to respondents, only 270 copies were returned for analysis. The data collected through the questionnaire were analysed and interpreted using a frequency distribution table, basic statistical percentages, and respondent descriptions. Tables were created solely for the sake of explanation and comprehension. The results were presented in percentages and lines.

5 respondents were selected for in-depth interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the selected journalists (one each from a radio station, television station, and a newspaper house) and University lecturers (one from a State University, and the other from a Private University) to gain insights into their perspectives, experiences, and challenges regarding yellow journalism, citizen journalism, and fake news. These interviews provided rich qualitative data, allowing for a deeper understanding of the issues at hand, and capturing nuanced viewpoints (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and key insights.

The quantitative analysis provided a broader understanding of the prevalence and impact of these phenomena on the public while the qualitative analysis provided insights into the nature of these phenomena and their impact on journalism practice.

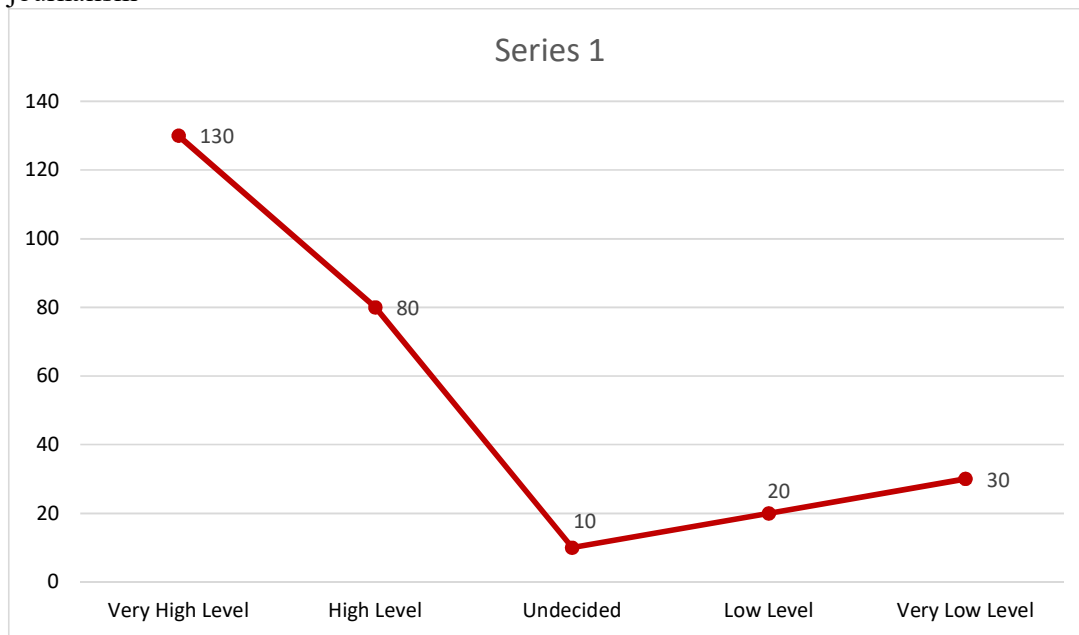
Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Extent social media are prone to spreading fake news and yellow journalism.



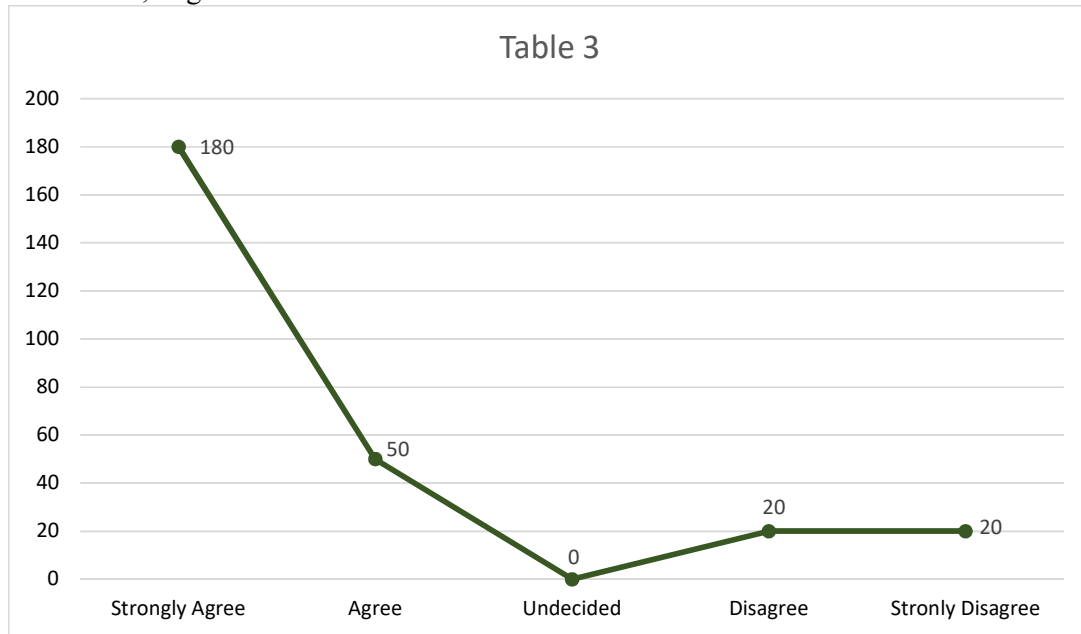
The implication of the data in Table 1 is that the respondents believe strongly that social media are prone to spreading fake news and yellow journalism.

Table 2: Level at which citizen journalism exacerbate the spread of fake news and yellow journalism



From the Table 2, it can be deduced that citizen journalism exacerbate the spread of fake news and yellow journalism.

Table 3: Spread of fake news and yellow journalism negatively impact journalism practice in Delta State, Nigeria.



The data above imply that, through citizen journalism, the spread of fake news and yellow journalism negatively impact journalism practice in Delta State, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The first finding of this study was that social media are prone to spreading fake news and yellow journalism. This finding aligns with the outcomes of previous studies carried out by scholars like Gu, Kropotov, and Yarochkin (2017) who found that social media have redefined the structure, dimensions, and complexity of news, making it difficult for people to distinguish between fake news and true news.

Another study that corroborates this finding is that of Alexandra (2016) which highlights the role of social media in the spread of fake news and yellow journalism, which can have serious consequences on society. Also, Sheridan (2020) adumbrates that fake news and yellow journalism are not new phenomena, but social media have made it easier for them to spread rapidly. Social media platforms have become a breeding ground for fake news and yellow journalism because they allow anyone to publish content without any editorial oversight. This has led to the spread of misinformation, which can have serious consequences on society.

Machete and Turpin (2020) note that social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (now X) create a breeding ground for the dissemination of fake news, and that any person who is in possession of a device that can connect to the internet is potentially a consumer or distributor of fake news. Fox (2018) asserts that falsehoods spread like wildfire on social media, getting quicker and longer-lasting pickup than the truth. He concludes that human behaviour contributes more to the differential spread of falsity and truth than automated robots do.

An in-depth interview with one of the staff at Nigerian Television Authority, Asaba, Nigeria, states that since anyone can use his or her phone to capture events in their environment, and share such through social media without proper “gatekeeping,” there are tendencies for fake news and yellow journalism to be perpetrated. They added by saying that,

“Yellow journalism, fake news and citizen journalism are intertwined considering the fact that they have some traits and features in common. Most of what you find on social media are anarchic and disturbing.”

This study also revealed that citizen journalism exacerbates the spread of fake news and yellow journalism. Nwabueze (2021) confirms that fake news incidents from social media world have been largely perpetrated by the so-called citizen journalists. Dalila (2022) argues that citizen journalism has deviated from the right media track, and that fake news has diluted citizen journalism, stunting and distorting the role of citizen journalist in conveying the facts.

According to a study by Price (2019), citizen journalism is a rapidly evolving process that allows for passive consumers to become active producers in a role known as ‘produsage.’ As a result, this influx of citizen journalism is escalating the spread and reach of fake news. Another study by Craigie-Williams, 2018 argues that:

The biggest challenge facing citizen journalism is that it isn’t subjected to the same meticulous scrutiny that a traditional piece of journalism would be, with traditional journalism it was relatively safe to assume that the information we were getting was the truth, with editors checking and re-checking for factual accuracy. The same rules don’t apply to digital or citizen journalism; there is no one out there monitoring, regulating and most importantly, fact checking. People are essentially free to publish what they want on social media even when what they publish isn’t true” (Grace Craigie-Williams, 2018, p.3).

A reporter with *The Pointer* newspaper, Asaba, agrees that citizen journalism exacerbates the spread of fake news and yellow journalism because most of its “practitioners” are not groomed in the ethics of journalism. This unprofessional activities of these non-initiates into journalism professional has been enhancing the propagation of fake news and yellow journalism.

Thirdly, this study found that the spread of fake news and yellow journalism negatively impact journalism practice in Delta State, Nigeria. The Centre for Information Technology and Society-CITS (2022) explains that one of the motivations for 1890s newspapers engaging in yellow journalism is the same as for fake news creators today: exaggerated news with shocking headlines gets attention and sells papers (or prompts mouse-clicks), promoting the sale of advertising. It argues that yellow journalism conflicts with the principles of journalistic integrity.

Although a Statista (2020) report found that around 70 percent of leading digital executives from around the world reported that concerns about fake news strengthens their own media platforms, and that the majority feel that worries about the distribution of unreliable information improves the quality of journalism, yet the negative impact of fake news and yellow journalism on professional journalism practice is enormous

EduBirdie (2021) reports that as fake news begins to appear in more and more places, serious media coverage is being undermined, and it is becoming more difficult for journalists to report on significant and relevant news stories. The term ‘fake news’ is also often used to steer away from legitimate news from an opposite political standpoint, this is also known as the ‘lying press’ (derogatory political term used for the printed press and the mass media at large, as a propaganda tactic to discredit the free press). Wasserman and Madrid-Morales (2020) emphasise that fake news do not only undermine the credibility of journalism, but also contributes to societal polarisation and the erosion of democratic processes.

According to Nwabueze (2021), social media and citizen journalism are plagued by unprofessionalism in information distribution. He claims that individuals copy and paste

anything that is trendy without checking its veracity. He calls this junk journalism at a dangerous level.

A lecturer at Edwin Clark University, Kiagbodo, supports the notion that fake news and yellow journalism, through the instrumentality of citizen journalism, are negatively affecting journalism practice in Delta State. He laments what he calls the ‘bastardisation’ of the profession by quacks who misinform the public uncensored. He advocates for a society that can foster a more informed public, uphold journalistic integrity, and promote a healthier information ecosystem.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study clearly shows that there is an entwinement of Yellow Journalism, Fake News, and Citizen Journalism through which they are being perpetrated mostly while people are expressing their fundamentally human rights to communicate freely via the online space. These trio tend to have become the albatross of professional journalism in Nigeria, as their activities are dents to the journalism profession. One reason for the perpetration of these anomalies is because most of the culprits are citizen journalists who never had journalism training where they would have been exposed to the ethics of the profession.

News on social media should be taken with the pinch of salt; it is likened to the public tap water that may be contaminated; therefore, its sources have to be verified before its consumption and sharing. The media stakeholders’ perspectives were shaped by the lack of quality control and regulation on social media sites, and the willingness of users to consume and spread false information. The stakeholders also reported that negative media content, including yellow journalism and fake news, had a significant effect on the audiences in terms of derailing significant conversations and influencing public opinion and sentiment. The study has the following recommendations:

- i. Social media platforms should play an active role in combating the spread of yellow journalism and fake news. Platforms should implement stricter content policies, ensure algorithmic transparency, and invest in robust fact-checking mechanisms. Collaborations with fact-checking organisations can help identify and label false information, thereby reducing its dissemination.
- ii. Collaboration and cooperation between citizen and professional journalists should be encouraged to bring about a more comprehensive news landscape. This is more so since citizen journalists often have unique perspectives and access to localised stories, while professional journalists bring experience, training, and editorial oversight. Collaboration can result in more accurate, diverse, and contextualised reporting.
- iii. Journalism institutions and professionals should uphold ethical standards, accuracy, and verification in their reporting. Responsible journalism practices should be prioritised to help build trust with the audience, and counter the proliferation of yellow journalism and fake news. Emphasising the importance of fact-checking, source verification, and balanced reporting is crucial.

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