INFORMATION DISORDER AND THE FUTURE OF JOURNALISM IN NIGERIA
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Nigerian journalism has encountered and continues to confront many threats, majority of them exogenous; repression by colonial and post-colonial administrations, clampdown by military regimes, draconian and repressive decrees and codes, attacks on facilities, prevention of circulation and closures, intimidation, imprisonment and worse of all – murder. The Nigerian news media however found ingenious ways to overcome these challenges or work around them. The nationalist press contributed significantly to securing the country’s independence from Britain and put successive democratic administrations in check. The industry also served as a bother for military administrations and worked in tandem with the civil society to return democratic rule to Nigeria in 1999, after years of incessant military coups and take-overs which spanned over three decades. Unfortunately, this industry that has withstand such enormous trials without wavering may be brought down by a more insidious endogenous challenge that many have identified but do not significantly appreciate; information disorder. Information disorder embodies all the various ways by which the integrity of published information is compromised. Classified broadly into disinformation, misinformation and malinformation (based on intent and harm-caused), information disorder, which was perceived as the merchandise of unprofessional and ‘emergency journalists’ and bloggers is now becoming the Achilles' heel of the Nigerian news media. Using a mixed-method approach (content analysis, interview and survey) and guided by attention economy and political economic approach to media management theories, this study argues that the mainstream media may lose the trust of their audiences while political actors will use information disorder to justify their renewed efforts to gag the media. The study ends by recommending that news media organisations in Nigeria re-design their management models so that they can remain competitive without losing the integrity that has preserved the news media in the country.

Keywords: Future of Journalism, Information Disorder, News Media, Nigeria, Journalism.
Decades ago, access to publish information to a mass audience in Nigeria was seriously gate-kept. There were a myriad of individuals and authorities who decided whether a content was worthy of publication or not. Journalists (by education or training) had to be affiliated to a print or broadcast news organisation to secure a platform to share news and information to a mass audience. Those who were not journalists but had a conviction that they had important ideas to share had to get a column in the legacy media, write letters or articles to the editors of print publications, pay for advertorials or get invited to broadcast news programmes.

Now, with the deregulation of the broadcast industry (in 1992) and the diffusion of ICTs and the penetration of social media thereafter, private individuals and non-media professionals now publish information (factual and/or false) online without adequate review. The poor level of media literacy and other socio-political, economic and cultural dynamics have determined that disinformation, misinformation and malinformation are widely shared with serious implications for citizen’s welfare, democracy and national security. Apart from private individuals, many bloggers, “emergency journalists”, “accidental journalists” (Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2016, p.4) and “entrepreneurial journalists” (Gynnild, 2014) also circulate misinformation and disinformation online to generate clicks (for economic gains) without due consideration for the implications on the society in general and journalism practice in particular.

Thus, many have dismissed the challenge of information disorder as coming from nonprofessionals, but the progressive rate at which mainstream news
organisations in Nigeria are increasingly guilty of sharing misinformation online due to the rush to break the news and generate clicks is beginning to raise concerns in government circles, the academia and institutions working on media and information disorder. Nigerian news audiences are starting to lose trust and confidence in the mainstream media while politicians and government agents are hiding behind information disorder to promulgate new laws and amend existing ones to stifle the Nigerian press. Consequently, information disorder, if not checked, may pose a greater threat to the future of journalism in Nigeria than all the previous challenges that the Nigerian news media have surmounted or are adapting to.

Meanwhile, whilst countless studies have been undertaken on how ICTs have revolutionised journalism practice (Ward, 2010; Pasti et al., 2017), very few have been conducted on the implications of information disorder on society (d’Ancona, 2017; Lazer et. al., 2017; Marwick & Lewis, 2017; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017) and its consequence for the future of journalism practice (Johnston & Wallace, 2021). Worse, the bulk of these studies are on countries in the West with very few on developing economies generally or specifically, on Nigeria. This is the significant gap this study fills.

To do this effectively, this article answers the following questions:

Are the lines between mainstream news media organisations, bloggers and private individuals blurring regarding the publication of information disorder?

Are the political-economics of operating online diminishing the social responsibility roles of news organisations in Nigeria?

What is the future of journalism in Nigeria with the increasing number of bloggers and citizen journalists, as well as the diminishing journalism standards of mainstream media as regards information disorder?

What policy or actions do news media organisations in Nigeria have to undertake to ensure that they distinguish themselves from citizen journalists as well as secure the future of journalism in the country?
The answers to these questions (presented in the findings section) highlight the extent of the damage that the publication of disinformation and misinformation have had on the image of mainstream news organisations in Nigeria, and by extension, on journalism as a profession.

This introduction section is followed by the literature section which explains the key terms used in this study, contextualise the theories that underpin the study and review studies relevant to the inquiry. The third section contains an explanation of the data gathering and analysis methods while the fourth section presents the findings and their implications. The article ends with the conclusion and recommendations section on the steps that mainstream media in Nigeria can take to maintain their pride of place in the news industry, despite the economic challenges affecting the sector and the competitive nature of online and social media platform journalism.
The emergence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) was thought to herald the extinction of the printing press, and, may be, traditional journalism as we knew it. This is because ICTs made producing and sharing information faster, more creative, more engaging and cheaper, that communication scholars and media practitioners assumed the press and legacy media would not survive the second millennium.

Interestingly, the reverse has been the case. ICTs have significantly altered and improved journalism practice; easing production and distribution challenges, helping news organisations do more at less cost, creating an integrative approach to storytelling, enabling audiences to participate in the production and distribution of news and empowering them to engage better with issues in the public sphere. Remarkably, ICTs, while creating a loss in copy sales and print advertising revenue, have opened up new frontiers for news companies online and many are now earning income from advertising on their virtual platforms as well as through online subscriptions. This is so significant, that new journalism models are now emerging globally, as well as in Nigeria – and we now have mainstream print news organisations that are basically online and which do not have print versions; prominent examples of this are Premium Times and The Cable Newspaper in Nigeria.

ICTs also brought about an increase in technological and software competencies, which resulted in the use of technologies to create and falsify content and share falsehood. Individuals who lacked access to mainstream media also have open

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Footnote:

*Emphasis mine.*
access thanks to the internet and social media. Whilst this enriched the public sphere, it created an army of unregulated content creators. Thus, the proliferation of internet access and smart phones, as well as citizens’ huge subscription to social media platforms imply that information disorder (in all formats – print, audio and video) get shared and go viral quickly. Information disorder was thus empowered and enhanced by ICTs.

In this literature section, I will be discussing (in three sub-sections) the concepts relevant to the study (information disorder), the theories that underpin the study and reviewing relevant studies on information disorder and the future of journalism in Nigeria in particular.

**Conceptual Framework: Understanding Information Disorder and the Nigerian News Media Landscape**

Information disorder is central to this study on the future of journalism in Nigeria. The term ‘information disorder’ was conceptualised by Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan in their seminal report titled “Information Disorder: Towards an interdisciplinary framework for research and policymaking” (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017). In this report, the authors conceptualise ‘information disorder’ and clarify its various ramifications.

There is a need, however, to briefly discuss ‘fake news’ before proceeding with the conceptualisation of information disorder. This is due to the fact that fake news has been used interchangeably for information disorder even though it is theoretically weak and unable to fully capture the multiple ways that information can be altered and weaponised by individuals, institutions, governments and ideologies to achieve their sinister motives.

Fake news refers to “fabricated information produced in a news format to deceive about its origin or accuracy” (Cunliffe-Jones et. al., 2021, p.114). It is classified as “news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false, and could mislead readers” (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017, p.4). This explains why the Ethical Journalism Network’s definition sums fake news as “information deliberately fabricated and published with the intention to deceive and mislead others into believing falsehoods or doubting verifiable facts” (EJN, undated).
It is important to note that news is a factual and accurate account of events (Hartley, 2013). So, if ‘fake news’ presents “false or misleading claims” (Gelfert, 2018, p.84), then it is not news and it does sound like an oxymoron to qualify a fake report with the noun ‘news’. As, if it is fake, then, it is not news (Basson, 2016). Also, the term ‘fake news’ is significantly “inadequate for explaining the scales of information pollution” (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2018, p.43) that have been published, broadcast or shared through mainstream media, social media and through interpersonal communication. This is in spite of the fact that the concept of fake news “has evolved rapidly” (Gelfert, 2018, p.84) and several authors have conceptualised the “close-cousins” of fake news as unintentional reporting mistakes, rumours, conspiracy theories, satire, false statements by politicians, slanted and misleading reports, news parody, fabrication, manipulation, advertising, and propaganda (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, p.5; Tandoc Jr. et al, 2017, p.11).

Also, fake news have been described as “intentionally misleading context made to imitate journalistic content with the primary aim of generating profit” (Riggins, 2017, p.1315). But evidence shows that altered information have been shared for various purposes rather than just for profit motives (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017). More importantly, the term ‘fake news’ has been appropriated by politicians against the media to describe information “that they do not agree with” (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2018, p.43) and to qualify media organisations that are critical of their actions by referring to them as “fake media” (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2018, p.43). This is a trend that has been observed both in the Global North (e.g. America – see Ross and Rivers, 2018) and in the Global South (e.g. Nigeria – see Pate et al., 2019) and it highlights the efforts of political actors at casting aspersions on the integrity of critical mainstream media (McGonagle, 2017). Fake news has also been said to be false content published online and on social media. Evidence have also shown that polluted information can be shared through interpersonal contacts, organizational communication and in mainstream media. All these are some of the key reasons why the term ‘fake news’ is problematic and should be avoided (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2018, p.43).

The “recommended phrase” is therefore ‘information disorder’ (Ireton and Posetti, 2018, p.14) and it encompasses all the various ways by which information can be polluted and the ways by which they can be published and exposed on a continuum. Information disorder represents a “dysfunction in the information system that undermines public understanding” (Cunliffe-Jones et al., 2021, p.114).
regardless of the intent, harm caused and the format of dissemination. Information disorder, as classified by Wardle and Derakhshan, involves the publication of disinformation, misinformation and mal-information, which distort the authenticity of information disseminated, prevent access to accurate information with a view to mislead recipients towards the achievement of selfish motives (2017).

Disinformation, according to Wardle and Derakhshan, is “information that is false, and the person who is disseminating it knows it is false. It is a deliberate, intentional lie, and points to people being actively disinfomed by malicious actors” (2018, p.4). The creation and dissemination of disinformation is “motivated by three distinct factors: to make money; to have political influence, either foreign or domestic; or to cause trouble for the sake of it” (Wardle, 2019, p.8). Intent is the key feature of disinformation and not the means of publication (i.e. mass media or other means of interpersonal communication). Misinformation, on the other hand, refers to false content that is shared without the person sharing it realising “that it is false or misleading. Often a piece of disinformation is picked up by someone who doesn't realise it's false, and shares it with their networks, believing that they are helping” (Wardle, 2019, p.8). The last classification, mal-information describes genuine information about “a person, organisation or country” that is shared “to inflict harm” without a “public interest justification” (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2018, p.43). These different forms of information disorder can manifest in mainstream media, social media, official documents and interpersonal communication in the following ways: satire/parody, false connection, misleading content, false context, imposter content, manipulated content and fabricated content (see: Wardle, 2019, pp.10-11).

Now, information disorder is supposed to be antithetical to journalism as journalism is a profession that is based on truth and objectivity (Schudson & Anderson, 2009). But records have shown that prior to the revolution in ICTs and thereafter, individuals, organisations, countries and ideologies globally have used information surreptitiously to control people and frame situations to achieve their overt and covert desires (Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

As the concept of information disorder has been conceptualised, I will now present a brief overview of the Nigerian news media landscape and tease out how its features have amplified the dissemination of information disorder.
Understanding the Nigerian News Media Landscape

There is a significant intersection between the socio-cultural, political and economic situation in Nigeria with the news media landscape in the country. This is due to the fact that the news industry in a country cannot be discussed without an appreciation of the political economy of the context in which the news organisations operate (Franks, 2013).

Although the first newspaper in Nigeria was established by a clergy in 1859, it was nonetheless a political medium. Iwe-Irohin by Reverend Henry Townsend, whilst claiming to have been set up for the purpose of creating a reading culture, was in fact, a medium for the proselytization of Christianity and the entrenchment of British hegemony in the area that was later colonised and amalgamated into Nigeria in 1914 (Omu, 1978). Soon after the amalgamation of Nigeria into a single entity for ease of colonial administration, Nigerian nationalists established newspapers to agitate for independence and serve as a check on the excesses of the colonial government. Broadcast organisations were also established by regional administrations close to Nigeria's independence to articulate their regional stands, promote their regional political parties as well as their culture (Uche, 1989). Effectively, the Nigerian news media at independence were established along political, tribal and regional lines (see Omu, 1978; Falola, 1999; Malaolu, 2004; Daramola, 2013). This, obviously, is a very fertile recipe for the dissemination of information disorder.

The Nigerian civil war which lasted for three years (after independence) from 1967 to 1970 pushed both the Nigerian government and the secessionist Biafra side to engage in war propaganda using the news media (Davies, 1995). After the civil war, the Nigerian media and the civil society tackled the various military regimes that ruled the country from 1966 (with a very short interregnum, 1979-1983) until 1999 when the country returned to democratic governance (Falola, 1999, p.4). And since 1999, the media has been in the forefront of agitations for good governance. Thus, the Nigerian media has been a very political and agitational press. In fact, it is said that Nigerian journalism was “created by anti-colonial protest, baptised in the waters of nationalist propaganda, and matured in party politics” (Golding and Elliott, 1979, p.31).
Apart from ideological issues, the socio-economic situation in Nigeria also significantly impact the administration of the news media. With high inflation rates, poor infrastructure and under-development, news organisations became very expensive to run and media managers have to pander to political funders and advertisers to sustain their organisations. Meanwhile, the journalists working in the news industry also endure “poor remuneration, ineffective welfare system, insecurity” (Yusuf, 2002, p.158) and generally poor working conditions which make them vulnerable to publishing information disorder to earn money in an industry where most employers “owe salaries, do not pay in time or do not pay enough” (Tijani-Adenle, 2019, p.22; see also: Idowu, 1996; Jason, 1996; Yusuf, 2002; Diso, 2005; Olawunmi, 2014; Ogundipe, 2017; Olukotun, 2017; Sanef, 2019).

This precarious situation is further compounded by the emergence of ICTs and a significant shift in news production and distribution culture. The bulk of news media audiences have gone online and advertisers have moved there to capture them. Nigerian news media organisations came late to the party while bloggers and citizen journalists (like Linda Ikeji Blog) already had an earlier start before most mainstream news organisations in the country established their online presence (Olalekan, 2014). Now that they are online, this article argues that the rush to publish, the need to generate click baits and views for advertising, in addition to a drop in professionalism (due to poor working conditions) has created a situation where mainstream news organisations in Nigeria are increasingly publishing information disorder and involuntarily destroying the integrity and professionalism that sets them apart from the bloggers, citizen journalists, out-of-work and entrepreneurial journalists that now pervade the Nigerian online space (Pate, Gambo and Ibrahim, 2019).
The next sub-section discusses the theories that enunciate the socio-cultural, political and economic paradigms that underpin this study.

**Theoretical Framework: Foregrounding Information Disorder**

This study is guided by the attention economy and the political-economic approach to media management.

The concept of attention economy is as an approach to the management of information that treats human attention as a scarce commodity and applies economic theory to solve various information management problems (Crawford, 2015). Psychologist Herbert A. Simon who coined the term 'attention economy' argues that in an age of information overload, there will be abundance of information and a scarcity of attention by people because there is a limit to what they can do at any given time (1971). This implies (in economics terms) that the abundant resource is information and the scarce commodity is human attention. Since news media organisations require the attention of media audiences, they consciously or covertly frame information in ways that can generate or compete for more attention, sometimes creating or sharing disinformation to achieve this. This theory is relevant to this study because I argue that professional and non-professional news producers backslide on the ethics of journalism in news production due to the competition for audience attention and the need to cash in on the scarce attention of news readers.

The second theory/concept that guides this study is the political economy of communications theory. This theory studies how power and economic relations influence news production and distribution (Mosco, 1996). It analyses the power dynamics between mass media system, information and communications technologies (ICTs), media ownership, as well as the dynamics of the socio-cultural and political environments in which media organisations operate (McChesney, 2008). This theory is relevant to this study because, as discussed above, the current trend in the publication of information disorder by the Nigerian media is significantly a result of the nature of the polarised socio-political environment and the challenging economic situation in which the country's media operate.

I will now review some relevant studies that have also investigated the implications of information disorder on journalism practice globally.
Empirical Review

With the conceptualisation of fake news in 2016 (Farksas & Schou, 2018; Habgood-Coote, 2018; Le Roux, 2020) and information disorder in 2017 (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017), media scholars and practitioners globally began investigating the implications of the publication of information disorder on the future of journalism. This is not to say that the information disorder had not existed before these conceptualisations, studies show that false information have been in circulation in Africa before the second millennium (Ndlela & Mano, 2020). Rather, it became a more serious issue with increasing incidence and sophistication. Their findings have been both intriguing and disheartening: ICTs have made the creation and dissemination of information disorder more sophisticated and complex, ICTs have destroyed the barriers previously restricting private individuals without academic training and/or professional experience from having access to information creation and disseminating media, the political-economics of media management rather than professionalism/ethics now influence mainstream media organisations’ disposition to the publication of information disorder, news audiences are increasing becoming media literate and now losing trust in mainstream media, while authoritarian/democratic governments globally are justifying their recent moves to curtail and restrict press freedom with the excuse of curbing information disorder.

ICTs Aggravated the Spread of Information Disorder

Scholars have identified that while information disorder has been in existence since the creation of media of mass communication, “the proliferation of social media has made this issue more urgent” (Turcilo and Obrenovic, 2020, p.4). The current rate at which disinformation spreads globally has led to the world to declare an infodemic. Infodemic was first used by David Rothkopf in 2003 during the Ebola epidemic. Experts thought they could prevent information disorder “from flowing into traditional media outputs” (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2018, p.43) but it is a little too late as information disorder now flow from both new media and traditional media even though they go “against the standards and ethics of journalism” practice (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2018, p.44).

As media audiences have migrated online and online platforms, bloggers and citizen journalists update posts by the second, news media organisations are
pressured to also share news and updates often and this is responsible for the increase in the disinformation published because they circumvent the traditional copy-editing stages due to the rush to publish. Observers have commented on how several media platforms will share news items with almost similar text because little editing was done on the part of the various platforms sharing the information.

**Open Access to News Industry**

ICTs, internet penetration, cheap mobile devices, and the ability to create print, audio and video contents with minimal skills has created access to a lot of people to publish information in ‘journalistic format’. It has created different kinds of media appellations; citizen journalists, bloggers, entrepreneurial journalists, out-of-work journalists among others. Frankly, this opened up the public sphere and diminished the monopoly of traditional news media on the news industry. It has also created a level playing field for women journalists experiencing glass ceilings to set up news organisations and continue to contribute to deepening public understanding of issues and the development of their countries (Tijani-Adenle, 2019). The challenge, however, is that it has led to a depreciation in standards (Sanef, 2019; Ndlela & Mano, 2020), a pollution in the information ecosystem (Conroy-Krutz, 2019) and the erosion of public trust in the media.

**Reducing Trust in News Organisations**

Although the level of media literacy is low globally, more media audiences are becoming empowered about how information is gathered, produced and published. This awareness is empowering them to identify information disorder in media publications, and this may lead to an erosion of trust in the news media. Thus, the seminal media effects theories may no longer hold in the present time (Bryant & Oliver, 2009).

Conroy-Krutz interviewed 45,000 people in 34 African countries from 2016 to 2018 and a key finding of his study is that Africans are losing trust in the continents news industry. Many regard the news media as fake news peddlers and are open to having them regulated to ensure standards (2019).
Political-Economy of Media Management

The political and economic states of the societies in which media organisations operate affect them because they do not exist in a vacuum. Media organisations are struggling financially globally and many are seeking diverse ways to ensure survival. News organisations, particularly newspapers are increasingly disappearing from the newsstands. Many owe staff salaries, do not have insurance and struggle to pay the gratuities of their staff after retirement (Olukotun, 2017, 2018). Many journalists therefore resort to finding disingenuous ways of making money by covertly selling their pages and bylines, thus generating disinformation. The event-driven nature of the Nigerian news media (Oso & Mojaye, 2019) where close to 80 percent of news contents can be traced to reportage of events with barely 20 percent for features, investigations and critical reportage; many journalists heavily report the views of political leaders, celebrities and public figures as news. Meanwhile, studies have however shown that such sources are responsible for a good amount of disinformation published in the news media (Benkler et al, 2020).

Restrictive Legislation

In a study on the legal and regulatory responses to information disorder in Sub-Saharan Africa from 2016 to 2020, Peter Cunliffe-Jones and his colleagues sampled 11 countries, including Nigeria. They find that 10 out of these countries have “introduced or amended laws or regulations penalizing publication or broadcast of information authorities declare ‘false’” (Cunliffe-Jones et al., 2021, p.111). While the responsibility of governments to safeguard their societies from the devastating effects of disinformation is acknowledged, the challenge is that the definition of ‘false’ information is vague, politicians and despots hide under these laws to persecute news media for reports that are critical of their actions and this limits press freedom and citizens’ rights to information as well as public debate.

Another challenge with the legislations introduced and/or amended, is that majority affect the mainstream news media that are regulated while private individuals, bloggers, citizen and online journalists who share more disinformation are not as restricted by the laws. Thus, disinformation is not curbed while the minimal media freedom enjoyed is further curtailed.
The fact that “no evidence is required that the publication or broadcast of the allegedly false information caused actual or potential harm for publication to be penalised” (Cunliffe-Jones et al., 2021, p.111) reflects the serious danger they pose for freedom of the press and of expression. Researchers suggest that rather than introducing new and vague laws to curtail disinformation, ensuring that credible media have “access to trustworthy information is one of the best ways” that governments can use to curtail information disorder (Cunliffe-Jones et al., 2021, p.112). Unfortunately, most countries have legislation that promote access to information but what obtains in reality is mostly far from that which is obtainable by law. That is why researchers (see Golebiewski & Boyd, 2019; Kainja, 2020; Shane & Noel, 2020) argue that “a lack of easy public access to reliable information on matters of public interest on the continent” is largely responsible for the “spread of misinformation” (Cunliffe-Jones et al., 2021, p.116).

Studies have also shown how the Nigerian government and political office holders tackle the mainstream media for spreading ‘false’ information they disagree with while looking the other way when state-run media or their publicity managers spread disinformation to whitewash their images or to help them win elections (Adebajo, 2019; Hassan & Hitchen, 2019). The question to ask then will be who sanctions state agents when they spread disinformation in the interests of their principals?

The global changes to legislations to restrict media freedom under the guise of curbing the spread of disinformation is not limited to Africa or developing economies. New legislations have been enacted while old ones reformed regarding the operations of media organisations and technology companies across the globe. Germany enacted a new law termed the Network Enforcement Act (called NetzDG) in 2018 to mandate social media networks to remove ‘unlawful’ posts (Mchangama & Fiss, 2019) while France and Austria now make technology companies pay news companies for publishing news generated by them on their websites (Stiglitz & Schiffrin, 2020) in a bid to strengthen the publication of only credible news. A minister is the final determiner of what constitutes unlawful information in Singapore, while journalists are prevented from publishing information deemed ‘disrespectful’ to the state or regarded as hate speech in Russia and India (de Souza Abreu, 2018; Bahree, 2019; Schetzer, 2019; Yuen-C, 2020; Aryan, 2021). Denscombe

In Africa, countries like Republic of Benin (RSF, 2020a), Burkina Faso (RSF, 2020b),
Cote d’Ivoire (RSF, 2020b), Ethiopia (Jeffrey, 2019), Kenya, Malawi, Niger, Senegal, South Africa, Malawi and Uganda now have new legislations targeted at tackling the spread of information disorder. Experts however say the challenge with most laws are the ambiguities about what constitutes offence and the enormity of power reposed in the offices or officers empowered with the authorities to sanction ‘offenders’ (Cunliffe-Jones et al., 2021).

The next section (methods) presents information about how data for this study was gathered and analysed.
METHODS

Data for this study on information disorder and the future of journalism practice in Nigeria was gathered using a mixed-method approach to data gathering. A mixed-methods approach to research is referred to as the “third paradigm” because it combines the use of methods from qualitative and quantitative research designs in answering the questions in a study (Denscombe, 2008). This paradigm is instructive as it permits researchers to benefit from the strengths of various research methods in their investigations (Leech et al., 2010). The implications of using a mixed-methods approach in my data gathering is that I also equally used a multi-method approach in gathering data. This means that I used more than one method (across the qualitative and quantitative paradigms) for data gathering (Silverman, 2001, 2003; Mik-Meyer, 2020). This approach was selected because it enabled me to investigate various aspects of the topic of inquiry and derive answers that might not be possible if only one method was used (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998; Creswell and Clark, 2011). The multi-method approach also strengthened my research and I am able to use the findings from one method to confirm the veracity of the findings derived using the other two methods (Tierney et al., 2019). The three methods I used in gathering data for this study are qualitative content analysis, audience survey and interviews.

Qualitative content analysis involves the qualitative review of published media material in any form (text, audio, video, art etc.), for the purpose of research. Its aim is to derive knowledge by building “a model to describe the phenomenon in a conceptual form” (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007, p.107). It is basically the subjective interpretation of media contents “through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1277) in the

`Emphasis mine.`
works sampled. For this study, I analysed the fact-checks of disinformation published by mainstream Nigerian news organisations in Nigeria by Dubawa from January 1, 2021 to November 30, 2021. Dubawa was selected because it is Nigeria’s first indigenous independent verification and fact-checking project and it is recognised by the International Fact-Checking Network [IFCN] (Dubawa, undated). This relieves me of the burden of proving that my selection were indeed disinformation as that has already been done by Dubawa. A total of 7 stories were purposively selected out of the many published in the highlighted period by Dubawa. Information about the names of the media organisation, the disinformation published, the original source of the information (as claimed in the reports) and Dubawa’s verdict on the story after the fact-check is presented below (in Table 3). I sampled only mainstream news organisations with editors who are members of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) and/or the Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE). This is because sampling online news outlets or ‘news organisations’ that do not fit into this category may be regarded as reviewing media organisations that are not regarded as mainstream. Also, the online news journalists in Nigeria also have a separate union known as The Online Publishers Association of Nigeria. The association was founded in 2010 but was registered in 2011 by the Corporate Affairs Commission of Nigeria in 2011 (OPAN, 2017). They are thus not the focus of this study.

The second method used in gathering data for this study was survey. Survey is a quantitative research method that is mostly used to collect data from respondents (with similar demography or qualities) for the purpose of gaining insights or knowledge about their opinions, perspectives and/or the factors responsible for their decisions or actions. Survey is a popular method because it can be used to study a lot of respondents quickly and at an affordable rate (Kelly et al., 2003; Ponto, 2015). I used online survey to sample media audiences that read, listen to or watch Nigerian news published by the mainstream media and other publishers (bloggers, citizen journalists, etc.). This form of survey was used because it was faster, very affordable (almost at zero cost) and it helped me to reach out to a lot of respondents easily. The survey was shared on social media platforms for three days (December 1 to December 3, 2021). A total of 328 people filled the survey. Their responses to the research questions are presented in the findings section.

The third and last method used in gathering data for the study was interview. Interviewing is regarded as “one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow humans” (Fontana & Prokos, 2007, p.9) because it
involves asking respondents questions in order to be able to analyse the issues being studied from the research subjects perspectives (Fontana & Frey, 2005). I interviewed three mainstream news journalists for the study from The Guardian, Nigerian Tribune and Daily Trust Newspapers. I used both convenience and purposive sampling techniques in determining the journalists interviewed. I purposively selected the categories of journalists to be interviewed (those on editorial and management positions) and used convenience sampling by interviewing those I could reach and was able to convince to participate in the study (see: Andrade, 2021). The interviews helped me to review the findings (from the content analysis and audience survey on information disorder in the Nigerian news media) in relation to the perspectives of journalists on editorial and management positions in the country’s news industry. I used the semi-structured interview format in conducting the interviews. This implies that I had a list of already prepared questions (interview guide - in line with the study’s research questions) to ask the interviewees but I asked follow-up questions not in the interview guide and also allowed the dynamics of the interview to determine the order in which the questions were asked (see: see King & Horrocks, 2010; Roulston, 2010; Wilson, 2014). Thus, the conversations varied and “change substantially between participants” (Fylan, 2005, p.65). The interviews were conducted on telephone and I recorded them with the permission of the interviewees. I did not anonymise the interviewees and they were informed of this decision and they provided their consents. I only anonymised a response in the analysis because I did not want to put my research subject at risk of losing their job.

I used thematic analysis as my method of data analysis. The purpose of data analysis is to “extract useful information from” gathered data and take decisions based upon the analysed information (Johnson, 2021). It involves drawing conclusions and answering the research questions in a study from data gathered, by assigning meanings to the collected information (Brown & Kudyba, 2014). I used thematic analysis to analyse the data gathered for this study because it allowed me to group similar findings from the different methods used together in answering my research questions. With thematic analysis, I was able to note the similarities and relationships in data gathered using “themes and patterns” (Aronson, 1995, p.1) with which I then detail the findings from the study.

The findings from all three methods are now presented and discussed in the next section.
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

When political and economy power engulfs journalism, the first thing to suffer is truth. (Turcilo & Obrenovic, 2020, p. 14)

I identified four themes from the analysis of the data gathered for this study, and the themes are also in line with the research questions. Each research question is stated below, and thematic analysis is used in answering them using the data collected from the three methods used in gathering data.

Question 1: Are the lines between mainstream news media organisations, bloggers and private individuals blurring regarding the publication of information disorder?

Individuals conversant with the Nigerian news media landscape as well as those who are media literate are aware of the distinction between mainstream media, private individuals, bloggers and citizen journalists. The main finding, however, is that mainstream news organisations are also beginning to publish disinformation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>190</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1: Do you think that mainstream news organisations are guilty of publishing ‘fake news’ sometimes?**

Source: Survey Data, December 2021.

Emphasis mine.
Interestingly, the three mainstream news editors interviewed disagree. They all argue that mainstream news organisations do not publish disinformation, but that they only make mistakes.

“If you see any fake news in our newspaper, that is, The Daily Trust, it must be in error and we don’t just take fake news or disinformation and just slam it on the pages, we must have carried out our verification as humanly possible. But that notwithstanding, whenever we establish that what we have published is not correct, we don’t hesitate to withdraw the story, to apologise, and then to set it right” (Hamza Idris, Editor, The Daily Trust).

“No newspaper, no radio or television station will risk its reputation by deliberately publishing false news. Unlike what you find in the social media or online generally” (Dr. Lasisi Olagunju, Saturday Editor, Nigerian Tribune).

The question, however, is if referring to publishing disinformation as ‘mistakes’ exonerate them from blame or will prevent the consequence from affecting media organisations and the industry.

In Table 2 below, half of respondents sampled are of the opinion that bloggers and citizen journalists are taking over the news industry from mainstream news organisations.
Table 2: Do you think that bloggers and citizen journalists are taking over the news industry from mainstream news media organisations?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response/Frequency</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Looks like it</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>50.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looks like it</td>
<td>110</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>328</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey Data, December 2021.

The responses of those who chose the ‘Looks like it’ option can also be said to be close to the ‘Yes’ option while only below 16 percent of respondents disagree.

This shows that the number of individuals, citizens and entrepreneurial journalists are so huge, considering the population of Nigeria, that indeed, they may appear to be dominating the mainstream media, especially online. The implication of this for news organisations is that they need to brand themselves more with truth and objectivity, so that regardless of the population of people claiming to practice journalism online, they will still stand out and maintain their positions as the credible news providers in the country.

Findings from the qualitative data analysis of fact-checks by Dubawa show that mainstream news organisations in Nigeria published disinformation in 2021 (See Table 3 below).

The first story is by Peoples Gazette. It is a misleading story that weaves a recent event with an old open letter. Peoples Gazette does not ordinarily qualify for my sample as it is a young organisation (established in 2020). But I sampled it for two important reasons. The first reason is because of the organisation’s claim on its website that “In an era of fake news and overcrowded media marketplace”, their organisation will “provide quality” information and I wanted to check how they have been able to achieve that. The second and most important reason however is because the analysed story was also published by The Guardian Newspaper which is highly regarded in the country. The source of the misleading report is actually The
Guardian Newspaper, according to the Peoples Gazette and The Guardian Newspaper did not provide a response to Dubawa when asked for the source of their story. Shockingly, the spokesperson for the Alaafin of Oyo who was misleadingly quoted confirmed the mischief in the published report when contacted by Dubawa on phone. This shows that The Guardian Newspaper, Peoples Gazette, Eagles Online and Dele Momodu who published the story did not verify it before publishing. In fact, the Guardian writer who published the story copied by Peoples Gazette is actually a sub-editor, Mr. Felix Kuye.

Two findings are notable here: the fact that news organisations sometimes abandon fact-checking simply because another medium has published the information, while the fact that an organisation as credible as The Guardian Newspaper would allow the publication of a misleading report that could easily have been fact-checked with a single phone call is baffling. This is similar to what non-mainstream news organisations do, so it is a pointer to the fact that the lines between mainstream and non-mainstream news organisations is, indeed, blurring.

The second story in Table 3 is another misleading report by a credible news organisation, Vanguard Newspaper. It was also published by Pulse Nigeria. It is about a claim that the AstraZeneca vaccine has no side effects. The correct opinion is that it has side effects but the effects are mild. This is significant because Vanguard is another credible medium. While Pulse Nigeria has corrected the headlines after the fact-check, Vanguard is yet to do so. A more serious challenge here is that the source of the story with the misleading headline is from News Agency of Nigeria (NAN). NAN is a national news agency that has been servicing news organisations in Nigeria since 1976.
### Table 3: Evidence that Nigerian News Media Organisation Published Disinformation in 2021.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>News Organisations</th>
<th>Other Media/Journalists who Published Similar Content</th>
<th>Date of Publication by Dubawa</th>
<th>Quoted Source of Information</th>
<th>Class of Disinformation</th>
<th>Link to the Fact-Check</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>TheCable.ng</td>
<td>The Guardian Newspaper</td>
<td>March 26, 2021</td>
<td>News Agency of Nigeria</td>
<td>Misleading</td>
<td><a href="https://dubawa.org/is-it-true-nigerias-customs-service-has-not-recruited-in-the-past-17-years/">https://dubawa.org/is-it-true-nigerias-customs-service-has-not-recruited-in-the-past-17-years/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Channels Television</td>
<td>Several online media and social media pages: 25,000 views in a day before it was corrected</td>
<td>June 13, 2021</td>
<td>Sodiq Adekunle, Channel TV reporter</td>
<td>Misleading</td>
<td><a href="https://dubawa.org/viral-image-depicting-police-officer-shooting-at-protesters-fact-checked/">https://dubawa.org/viral-image-depicting-police-officer-shooting-at-protesters-fact-checked/</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A lot of news organisations in Nigeria and outside the country depend on NAN for information and stories about Nigeria (Dare, 1983; Edeh & Uzochukwu, 2017). There will be a serious problem if it publishes disinformation to its subscribers. However, the same story was published by Guardian Newspaper and other media and they did not repeat the same mistake. So a possibility could be that Vanguard Newspaper edited the story without adequately understanding it. Pulse Nigeria’s corrigendum on the story also indicates that some news organisations take note of fact-checks and correct highlighted mistakes.

The third story (in Table 3) is by The Cable Nigeria, a respected mainstream news organisation that publishes only online. It claims, quoting a News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) report that the Nigerian Customs Service had not recruited in 17 years. The Guardian Newspaper also published a similar report. A fact-check showed that the agency actually recruited in March, 2021, the same month in which the misleading story was published. A phone call to the National Public Relations Officer of the Nigerian Custom Service, Joseph Attah also debunked the non-recruitment claims. This is a strong indication that news organisations subscribed to NAN may be getting disinformation from the agency. Also, it shows that news organisations do not fact-check stories from NAN before publishing, even those with fact-check desks like The Cable Nigeria (The Cable, undated).

The fourth story is a wrongly labelled Channels Television image posted on Facebook that claimed a policeman shot a protester on June 12, 2021. The Facebook post had the wrong caption (that protesters were shot) while the story on the website had the correct caption that it was with tear gas and not live ammunition. Dubawa used CrowdTangle to show that the image had been shared 25,000 times online by June 13 (the next day after it was published on Facebook). Channels Television later corrected the caption. This seemingly ‘innocent mistake’ could cause a crisis and pose great security threat.

A media audience, Adedimeji Adeboriote Abiodun made this comment under the Channels TV Facebook post:

“Shot what? That should be the question but my people are too carried away by emotions. The Channels TV station is doing more harm than good with their unprofessional acts over the years. I have been watching TVC News coverage of the events live since morning and their reporter on ground
clearly mentioned that the police fired teargas to disperse the protesters but here is Channels with their devilish news reports to cause tension. Nigeria will overcome"

This is a clear indication of a media audience’s disenchantment with a highly regarded mainstream news media for publishing disinformation.

The sixth story is a claim by The Guardian Newspaper that three Kaduna youths chasing bandits were unlawfully killed by Nigerian soldiers. It was fact-checked and Dubawa’s verdict is that the story is false. The Guardian Newspaper based its publication on unnamed sources and several online news outlets and bloggers also copied and published the story from The Guardian Newspaper without doing their own due diligence. This sends a serious signal that mainstream news organisations have to be careful as other mainstream organisations and less professional journalists can spread the disinformation they publish, making such go viral.

Table 4: Do you think that the quality of journalism practiced by bloggers and citizen journalists is poor, compared to the journalism practiced by mainstream news organisations?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response/Frequency</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>May be</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>153</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>46.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>328</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey Data, December 2021.

It is surprising that not up to 50 per cent of respondents agree that mainstream news organisations are more professional than bloggers and citizen journalists. This is really disheartening as the only edge that mainstream news organisations have above all other publishers is professionalism. If professionalism is eroded, then the mainstream media may not survive the information disorder tsunami.
This finding is supported by the next table about the level of confidence that news readers have in the publications of mainstream news media in Nigeria.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response/Frequency</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>230</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>70.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>328</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey Data, December 2021.

Seventy percent of news media audience in Nigeria do not have complete confidence in the veracity of the news contents they are exposed to by the mainstream news media. This can be as a result of improved media literacy or due to an erosion of trust in mainstream news organisations in the country.

“We will lose our credibility, we will lose the market if we continue to be careless this way, especially those of us who are mainstream media organisations, we should know that the market can react. If we continue to show lack of respect for truth, lack of respect for fact, we will lose the market. Once we lose public trust. We will lose the market and we will just die.” (Martins Oloja, Managing Director and Editor-in-Chief, The Guardian Newspaper).

**Research Question 2: Are the political-economics of operating online diminishing the social responsibility roles of news organisations in Nigeria?**

The second research question seeks to determine whether the political-economics of operating online is affecting the social responsibility roles of mainstream news organisations in Nigeria. The key finding under this theme is that mainstream news organisations are struggling to remain socially responsible but the need to get a portion of online advertising and the experience levels of the young tech-savvy youths handling their online platforms continue to lead to the publishing of disinformation.
For instance, the fifth story on Table 3 is a PM News report that used the headline “JUST IN: Buhari Shot Dead by Gunmen in Edo” to generate clicks. Turns out the Buhari in the story is not the president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria but a driver with a construction company. Click baits have been used to generate clicks for financial purposes. The expectation, however, is that a mainstream news organisation will not engage in such practices. But the financial situation of news organisations in Nigeria is dire, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic and so, even though they are aware of best practices, they may sometimes ignore these to apply methods they believe will bring in more financial gains.

Mainstream news organisations also publish disinformation, like less professional ones, to pander to the biases of audiences and generate more clicks. For example, the seventh story in Table 3 by Independent Newspaper Nigeria claims that Yoruba (a prominent language in Nigeria) has become an official language in Brazil. This claim was published by EaglesForeSight on November 11, before Independent News published it on November 12. Then several blogs (especially Yoruba-interest or themed blogs) started publishing it thereafter. The claim is false and it had been fact-checked by AFP in 2019. Yet, the news organisation missed it. The urge to get more eyes on the website or have more posts to share may be responsible for this kind of misdemeanour.

Table 6: Do you think that mainstream news media sometimes copy stories from bloggers and citizen journalists?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response/Frequency</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>66.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: Survey Data, December 2021.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The news organisations with the news that media audience want to read get the clicks. Mainstream news organisation sometimes copy news stories their reporters have not gathered from citizen/online journalists without adequate verification. This is responsible for some of the published disinformation.

An Editor with a national mainstream newspaper confirmed that mainstream news organisations sometimes copy story from online news outlets or citizen journalists.

“I will give you an example, some months ago, there was this fake news that a ... (details deleted to maintain anonymity). The story was fake, it was released by one of the online platforms very late at night. It was on a Saturday around 11 pm and we were about going to bed, so we carried the report that (details deleted to maintain anonymity). In the morning we discovered that ... (details deleted to maintain anonymity), you understand what I am saying. So, we immediately withdrew the story, we apologized to... (details deleted to maintain anonymity), we apologized to the world that we didn’t mean to actually publish that. We got the story from one online media platform too. So, this is just to tell you that we don’t really publish any disinformation like that. We have an integrity to protect and we are accountable to Nigerians and the world” (Interviewee anonymised).

It seems that mainstream news organisations believe that having an intention not to harm, as well as apologising after errors are published can exonerate them from publishing disinformation. My training as a journalist and current understanding as a media researcher is that it does not. And it also does not prevent the effects of publishing disinformation on how news audiences perceive them and is implications on the industry.

**Research Question 3: What is the future of journalism in Nigeria with the increasing number of bloggers and citizen journalists, as well as the diminishing journalism standards of mainstream media as regards information disorder?**

The third research question seeks to find out what the future holds for mainstream news organisations in Nigeria with the stiff competition they face with online and less professional outlets. Findings show that the media audiences still have a high regard for mainstream news organisations. Mainstream news organisations will

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1 I chose to keep the identities of this management and editorial staff of a national mainstream news organisation anonymous because admitting this error in a permanent document could jeopardise their job as well as the image.
remain crucial in providing information and the enlightenment that the public require to engage with issues and move the country forward.

Table 7: If you receive conflicting information from mainstream news media and bloggers/citizen journalists, which one will you believe?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response/Frequency</th>
<th>The information from the citizen journalists and bloggers</th>
<th>The information from the mainstream media</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>256</td>
<td></td>
<td>78.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>328</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey Data, December 2021.

Close to 80 per cent of respondents will believe the mainstream news media more than bloggers and citizen journalists. This finding is strengthened by the numbers in Table 8 below.

Table 8: Do you think that we will need mainstream news media organisations in future in Nigeria, due to the increasing numbers and efficiency of citizen journalists, as well as bloggers?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response/Frequency</th>
<th>Yes, we still need mainstream media.</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>No, we can survive without mainstream media</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>281</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>85.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>328</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey Data, December 2021.

Over 85 per cent of the respondents believe that we will still need mainstream news media in Nigeria in the future.
My interviewees also have the confidence that mainstream news organisations will always be needed in future:

“I don’t see the traditional media dying. I see it evolving, I see it transforming itself from what it is now, to something more technologically conformed…You are likely to believe more, any story that you read and you hear through the traditional media, than anyone you read or hear on questionable media. Even if you think that what you read is correct, you will still have to go to the mainstream media to validate what you have read” (Dr. Lasisi Olagunju, Saturday Editor, Nigerian Tribune).

This is a strong indication that the news audience still value mainstream news organisations. If the organisations can ensure that they curb the publication of disinformation, their integrity will increase, more news audiences will stick with them, they will have more readers, listeners and viewers and this will result in more advertising revenue that can sustain the industry.

**Research Question 4: What policy or actions do news media organisations in Nigeria have to undertake to ensure that they distinguish themselves from citizen journalists as well as secure the future of journalism in the country?**

Politicians and government actors in Nigeria have latched onto the publication of disinformation by some mainstream news media organisations to amend old laws and move for the enactment of new ones to gag the news media under the guise of curbing the spread of disinformation. Nigeria has the following laws on the publication of false information: Criminal Code Section 59, Electoral Act, 2010; Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act, 2015; and an update to the Broadcasting Code of Conduct law in 2016. But in 2019, there was a move to pass the ‘Protection from Internet Falsehoods and Manipulation and Other Related Matters Bill’ popularly referred to as the ‘Social Media Bill’ – a move that was vehemently opposed by the media and civil society (Cunningham, 2019; Turnbull, 2019).

It is important to note that majority of the disinformation published in Nigeria are by politicians and their agents, private citizens on social media and non-mainstream media, but it is the mainstream media that can be easily targeted by
the bill (if it becomes law). Meanwhile, the publicity secretaries of politicians and state actors spread disinformation to promote their principals and there are no provisions in the proposed law to sanction such offences (Adebajo, 2019).

It is disheartening however, to find that media audiences are of the view that the media should be regulated to curb the spread of disinformation.

![Table 9: Do you think that journalism practice in Nigeria should be regulated due to their occasional publishing of ‘fake news’?](image)

Over 70 per cent of respondents think that the news media should be regulated. This shows a lack of understanding of the implications of more restrictions on freedom of the press. But it also shows that media audiences see the publication of disinformation by the mass media as a serious issue and will support efforts to curb it, even if it is insincere or poses danger for the mainstream media. News organisations need media audiences in the fight for press freedom and they will not get this if they lose the trust and confidence of news media audience due to the publication of disinformation. The first and most important action for mainstream media organisations to secure their future is to regain and maintain the trust of news audiences.

**Adapting to Digital Journalism**

All the editors interviewed agree that the future of Nigerian journalism is digital and that mainstream news organisations have to adapt to operating there while still maintaining integrity and professionalism.
“Definitely, the future belongs to digital journalism because social technology has disrupted the way we practice this journalism...So, the future belongs to what Alvin Toffler said. He says “the illiterate of the 21st century are not those who cannot learn to read and write. The illiterate of the 21st century are those who cannot learn, unlearn and re-learn”. So, for us as managers, we need to re-learn, we need to unlearn all the old ways. We need to re-learn the ways of digital journalism which is quick and specific for us to retain the market. And we should have some capacity around to be able to do investigative and data journalism at this age, lest we die” (Martins Oloja, Managing Director and Editor-in-Chief, The Guardian Newspaper).

“A time will come when the system will separate the professionals from the quacks, and we believe that that sieving process will bear out the traditional media. We may not have newspapers as we see them today, newspapers may come out as completely e-copies.” (Dr. Lasisi Olagunju, Saturday Editor, Nigerian Tribune).

Media managers in Nigeria have realized that digital journalism has come to stay, but the expectation is for them to adapt in ways that will secure the future of the industry, and not in a way that can jeopardise it, like the publication of disinformation.

**Handling the economics of media management**

Managing a mainstream media organisation is a herculean task in Nigeria. The economic situation makes news gathering, production and distribution hugely expensive while copy sales are poor and the advertisers have migrated online. Although mainstream media organisations have followed them online, they may need to migrate fully more in order to reduce the cost of traditional publishing, like news prints for example.

“Already, we sell electronic copies, people subscribe and by day break, they get their copies. That may be the destiny of newspapers in ten, five years’ time.” (Dr. Lasisi Olagunju, Saturday Editor, Nigerian Tribune).

“For us, we are already transformed at The Daily Trust from being basically a print newspaper, to a multi-platform media organisation Apart from the main newspaper, we have the online, we have our podcast and we are starting our online television soon” (Hamza Idris, Editor, The Daily Trust).
The Challenge with Plagiarism

Mainstream news organisations strive to create distinct products to set themselves apart online, but plagiarism is robbing them of the benefits of this effort and making their financial situations grimmer.

“So, basically, what we do now is that we encourage our reporters to do exclusive reports, when you have exclusive reports, reports that are not on any other platform, it is likely people will come and read it on your website or on your newspaper, listen to you on radio and TV. But then, there is the problem of these bloggers again, stealing your story before daybreak. By the time we go to bed midnight, by 6 am, all your stories are on blogs. These questionable news sites, they copy without crediting. Whatever mileage you want to get by doing exclusive stories, you lose the mileage to those people.” (Dr. Lasisi Olagunju, Saturday Editor, Nigerian Tribune)

News media and journalism trade unions and associations like the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) and the Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE) will need to discuss how to manage or handle this problem.

Experience Level of Social Media Handlers

It has been observed that there are more disinformation on the websites and social media handles of mainstream news organisations compared to their print editions. Evidence point to the fact that mainstream news organisations employ technologically-savvy youths who sometimes lack adequate professional experience to manage the websites.

“Every newspaper in Nigeria today has populated its online platforms with millennials, people who are internet savvy, people who understand the technology, the nuances of technology and how to deploy them to get results. But it is one thing to be internet savvy, but another to thing to have a requisite experience in managing news and media contents generally. What we do where I work is that every Tuesday, these young people go through what we call weekly training on news writing, news judgement, fact-checking and other areas of our operations. We try to make sure that nothing is allowed to get published without proper gatekeeping. And that has really helped as we have not really had any mishap from the young ones.” (Dr. Lasisi Olagunju, Saturday Editor, Nigerian Tribune).
The interdisciplinary nature of journalism profession is highlighted here. The industry needs people with different competencies and media organisations need to ensure that they do not sacrifice fact and professionalism on the altar of online visibility.

A summary of findings are presented in Table 10 below, after which I discuss the recommendations and conclude the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 10: Summary of Findings</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credible and highly regarded news organisations in Nigeria publish disinformation</td>
<td>Media audiences do not completely trust the contents of mainstream news organisations in Nigeria.</td>
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<tr>
<td>News organisations in Nigeria sometimes ignore their pre-publishing fact-checking and verification roles once a claim has been published by another news organisation.</td>
<td>Mainstream news organisations sometimes act unprofessionally to generate clicks.</td>
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<tr>
<td>News organisations can unintentionally publish misinformation if they do not have a clear understanding of news agency reports.</td>
<td>Media audiences support more media regulation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some news organisations that published disinformation have attributed some of those stories to the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN).</td>
<td>Media audiences believe that mainstream news media are still needed in Nigeria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some news organisations note fact-checks from news verification organisations like Dubawa and correct highlighted errors.</td>
<td>Digital journalism is the future of journalism in Nigeria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream news organisations sometimes use misleading headlines to generate clicks from news readers.</td>
<td>News organisations plagiarise others and they do not give credits when they do so.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Disinformation published by mainstream news organisations go viral because such news are picked by individuals and bloggers as facts.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mainstream news organisations employ young and professionally-inexperienced hands to manage their media handles.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>News audiences agree that mainstream news organisations publish disinformation.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mainstream media are losing the trust of news audiences in Nigeria.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>There is a need to create more awareness about information disorder and its various forms so that the use of ‘fake news’ can be phased out.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Some news organisations do not know how to handle news stories with disinformation. They delete instead of correcting.</strong></td>
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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“If truth is the foundation of journalism, news is its key genre – without it, there are no journalists, media, or journalism as a profession.” (Turčilo and Obrenović, 2020, p.7).

There is no denying the fact that information disorder currently poses the greatest threat to journalism practice in Nigeria. The findings from this study highlight the urgent need for the mainstream media in Nigeria to address this problem lest they are destroyed from within while operating in a hostile socio-political and economic environment. To do this, they have to take responsibility for the damage that has been done and design effective strategies to curb disinformation going forward.

There is a need for the mainstream media to review their operating models. Newspapers need to begin to explore going digital while broadcast stations have unique opportunities in narrowcasting.

News organisations also have to explore innovative and acceptable funding models like establishing media civil society organisations that can fund investigative reports and also collaborative funding by forming groups to drive investigative reporting.

Media training institutions need to revise the curriculum to ensure that media graduates have the technological skills to operate effectively in the digital media that the mainstream news organisations in Nigeria are evolving to. That will curb the problem of having trained journalists without digital skills or digitally-skilled manpower without media experience and training.

Pre-publishing fact-checking, sub-editing and verification is key for all mainstream news organisations and for contents from all sources, no exceptions. Having a fact-

Emphasis mine.
check desk is now a necessity and collaborating with fact-checking and news verification organisations like Dubawa which has helped many news organisations in Nigeria train journalists and set up fact-check desks (Dubawa, undated) is expedient.

Fact-checking courses cannot be easily set up at universities but organising fact-check trainings and seminars and mainstreaming such programmes into reporting and editing courses by journalism and mass communication lecturers in Nigeria will make a significant difference in media education and practice in Nigeria.

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REFERENCES


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