

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE-GENERATED NEWS CONTENT AND AUDIENCE TRUST IN DIGITAL MEDIA PLATFORMS IN IKEJA, LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study examined artificial intelligence generated news content and audience trust in digital media platforms in Nigeria with focus on Ikeja residents Lagos State, Nigeria. The motivation for this research was the increasing integration of artificial intelligence into digital journalism and the increasing concerns about the credibility and reliability of automated news content. The objective of the study was to find out the extent of exposure of the audience to AI-generated news content, examine the audience's perception towards its credibility and reliability, and evaluate its impact on the audience's trust in digital media platforms (Facebook, X, Instagram, online newspapers). The study adopted the survey research design. The data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire involving 384 participants who are youth residing in Ikeja, Lagos State, both male and female. To analyze the data obtained from respondents, descriptive statistics such as frequency tables, percentages, mean scores and standard deviation were used. The hypothesis was tested using Chi-square statistical analysis. The findings showed that audiences are exposed to AI-generated news content to a large extent through digital media platforms. The study also revealed that the audience is skeptical of the credibility of AI-generated news content due to the fear of misinformation and absence of human editorial oversight. The results also revealed the significant effect of AI-based news content on the trust of the audiences in the digital media platforms. The study recommended more transparency in AI news production, stronger editorial verification mechanisms and increasing media literacy programmes for digital audiences.

Keywords: AI-Generated News, Artificial Intelligence, Audience Trust, Digital Media Platforms,

Introduction

Today, digital communication systems have been dominated by the use of artificial intelligence, which has changed the entire process of news creation, propagation and consumption in modern media landscape. In recent years, automated writing systems, algorithmic recommendation structures and generative language models have become part of journalism processes which were once mediated by human editorial judgment. AI is not only employed to assist with technical tasks and audience insights, but also to aid in headline creation, data analysis, content summarization, and on-demand reporting in many newsrooms. This transition has triggered a discussion about the implications of machine journalism on credibility, transparency and democratic communication. The issue is not just technological efficiency, as Fulantelli et al. (2025) noted that journalism gains social legitimacy through people's trust of the authenticity and integrity of information. With the rise of AI-driven news generation this has raised questions about the trust in mediated information produced with little to no human interaction. Building on these developments in AI-assisted journalism, increasing commercial imperatives within digital news organizations have significantly shaped the extent and manner of AI adoption in news production.

Commercial pressures on digital news organizations have been impacting media organisations, particularly in the creation of AI-generated content. Publishers have been pushing the platform mediated communication systems because there is a high competition for visibility, thus they have turned their focus on speed, constant supply of content and audience engagement. Sančanin and Penjišević (2022) point out that, “AI technologies are increasingly being applied to automate repetitive editorial tasks and minimize the amount of labor required in newsrooms”. Likewise, Hussain (2024) points out the transformation of digital publishing due to the rapid production of content in various formats with the aid of AI. These developments have advantages to the

operational side of the business but they also raise questions about entrenched postulates of journalistic accountability. Errors can be repeated, stories can be propagated without substantiation and fake content can be generated that appears to be real and can't be verified. As disinformation rises and people's trust in online news has declined (Breviglieri et al., 2023), the use and creation of AI-generated communication has also grown.

Statement of the Problem

The use of artificial intelligence in digital journalism has caused a significant shift in contemporary news production, but the effects of this shift on audience trust are not well understood within the Nigerian media environment. News organizations are increasingly deploying AI-assisted systems to produce headlines, summarize events, personalize content and automate elements of reporting. While these technologies are becoming more visible, the empirical understanding of how Nigerian audiences perceive the credibility, authenticity and reliability of AI-generated news content is still limited. So far, in discussions in Nigerian journalism, the focus has been primarily on the adoption of technology and efficiency of newsrooms (Kperogi & Ishiekwene, 2025), while the social implications of automated news production and its relationship with public trust have received scant attention. Audiences depend on trust to assess whether information is accurate, ethically produced and deserving of public acceptance. However, AI-generated news content complicates traditional trust structures, as the human editorial presence in the process of communication becomes less visible. Automated reporting systems can hide how much machines are involved in creating content, leading to questions about accountability and verification standards. Toff and Simon (2024) show that audience responses to AI disclosure continue to be inconsistent, and transparency alone might not be sufficient to resolve credibility concerns. In Nigeria, where misinformation and politically motivated disinformation are already rampant on digital platforms, questions about AI-generated journalism may erode trust in online news media. A further dimension of the problem is the growing challenge for audiences to distinguish between verified journalism and algorithmically generated content, and deliberately fabricated information. Generative AI technologies have advanced to the point where synthetic news content can mimic the style of professional journalists quite closely. Audiences might therefore ingest manipulated or misleading information, without acknowledging its artificial origins. The study also examines AI-generated news across online platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube and online newspapers, while Media Ecology Theory provides the theoretical framework explaining how communication technologies shape audience perception, interaction and trust.

Objectives of the Study

- i. Examine the level of audience exposure to artificial intelligence-generated news content on digital media platforms in Nigeria.

- ii. Assess audience perceptions of the credibility and reliability of artificial intelligence-generated news content on digital media platforms in Nigeria.
- iii. determine the influence of artificial intelligence-generated news content on audience trust in digital media platforms in Nigeria.

Research Questions

- i. What is the level of audience exposure to artificial intelligence-generated news content on digital media platforms in Nigeria?
- ii. How do audiences perceive the credibility and reliability of artificial intelligence-generated news content on digital media platforms in Nigeria?
- iii. What influence does artificial intelligence-generated news content have on audience trust in digital media platforms in Nigeria?

Hypothesis

H₀: Artificial intelligence-generated news content has no significant influence on audience trust in digital media platforms in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Artificial Intelligence Generated News Content

The deployment of AI in news production has redefined the news-gathering, reporting, editing and delivery processes thereby raising new questions concerning public trust and the authority of news. Despite the ability of AI technology to boost the efficiency of news gathering and production as well as the distribution channels, the implications of AI in news creation for transparency, responsibility and genuineness in journalism has resulted in critical debates among practitioners and scholars. As at today, studies have demonstrated that audience trust in the news generated by

AI not only depends on its factual correctness, but also the perceptions of editorial control and human influence (Breviglieri et al., 2023; Gbaden et al., 2024). Moreover, audiences not only struggle to differentiate between professionally created AI assisted content and deliberately fake news content thereby eroding trust in online information (Kolo et al., 2022). Similarly, audiences have displayed mixed perceptions towards AI generated news whereby they do not only see the acknowledgement of AI use in news creation as an ethical act but also as evidence of decreasing authenticity and journalistic standards (Toff and Simon, 2024).

Digital Media Platforms

News is largely delivered to the audiences through the new digital media platforms. These new platforms are based on algorithmic structure of how contents will be displayed and how they reach audience; thereby human interactions with news have come to be defined by technological intermediary processes and can thereby affect perception of reliability and trustworthiness. To be precise, the development of dependable AI systems must go hand in hand with a maintained sense of editorial authority in automated media environments (Opdahl et al., 2023). Similarly, in a nation like Nigeria where the rate of digital news consumption is soaring, audience confidence and news credibility concerns remain paramount issues. While various Nigerian news organizations may not have robust ethical and institutional mechanisms in place for the use of AI tools in newsgathering and reporting, the use of AI technologies for news creation is emerging in the Nigerian journalism sector (Talabi et al., 2024). According to Gbaden et al. (2024), infrastructure deficit, information verification challenge and lack of trust on part of journalists' make it problematic to adequately implement AI into Nigerian journalism practices.

Audience perception on digital media platforms

Audience perception toward AI generated news on digital media platforms is driven by issues related to fake news, manipulation and ethical communication practices. Due to rapid spreading of content through the internet, there is high possibility that users are exposed to a good portion of misleading information which affects audience credibility judgment about any news. This finding supports Abro et al. (2025) report where patterns of Media consumption are directly linked with fake news proneness. It has also been observed by Da (2024) that audience uses ethical judgment based on accuracy, authenticity and responsibility to rate content. These issues are more aggravated when AI are involved because audience may be unable to verify the integrity of the automated system.

Audience Trust in Digital Media Platforms

Audience trust remains the bedrock of their consumption of digital media content. Although research has shown that AI generated news might improve objectivity and eliminate political leaning of news, the trustworthiness is still an issue for audience. It has been revealed by Yeste-Piquer et al. (2025) that although the objective nature of automated news content is usually well perceived, but most audiences do still prefer human generated content because it is considered ethical, contextually appropriate, and socially accountable. Based on these issues, it can be stated that overall audience trust towards AI generated news remain very low, particularly in a system of low trust in digital platforms and thus audience trust on digital media platforms is determined by the extent of trustfulness, ethical behavior and responsible journalism.

Theoretical

Review

Media Ecology Theory

Media Ecology Theory was launched by Marshall McLuhan in his popular 1964 publication *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. The theory was later expanded by others like Neil Postman, who expanded its intellectual orientation in the field of communication and cultural studies. Media Ecology Theory is the study of how human perception, interaction and knowledge construction are shaped by various communication technologies. The media are not regarded as mere vehicles of information, but rather as technologies that mold human consciousness and reinvent social environment. The social impact of the shape and attributes of the medium can frequently outweigh the messages it carries, as McLuhan's (1964, p. 7) famous statement about “the medium is the message” demonstrates. The changes in communication technology are therefore identified as an instrument which can alter the cultural behavior, institutional relations and the public perception.

There are several assumptions which are used in the theory. First, it suggests that the way people experience reality and interpret information is dependent on the communication technologies used in the society. Secondly, it asserts that all dominant media is changing the social relationship and interaction pattern. Thirdly, the theory assumes that technological environments are gradually introduced into daily life, permeating the way people behave and their cultural norms and expectations. In particular, these assumptions are relevant to digital journalism, where AI technologies have begun to play a role in news production, distribution, and audience engagement. Journalistic algorithmic systems have transformed traditional journalistic work by automating content production and personalizing information flows on digital media. The technological systems that mediate the news now become part of the perception of credibility and trust for

audiences, as well as journalistic professionalism. This is in accord with the study by Umejei (2022), who asserted that algorithmic communication settings have a great influence on editorial practices and exposure to information online.

While relevant, the Media Ecology Theory has been criticized for its technocentric approach. Myers (2025) states the theory goes too far in its emphasis on the determining influence of technology, and too far in its neglect of the role of human agency, political structures and economic influences in communication processes. Dowd (2023) has proposed that the theory is not sufficiently attentive to the interpretation of the audience and social diversity, because each person might react differently to the same technological setting in function of the cultural and contextual conditions. It is still relevant to the study of contemporary electronic communication, however. It provides insight into the impact of new technologies like AI on journalism and audience perception and trust in digital media environments.

Research

Methodology

Survey research design was used in this study. The design was deemed suitable as it provides the researcher the capacity to gather data directly from respondents on their perceptions, attitudes and experiences on artificial intelligence-generated news content and audience trust in digital media platforms in Nigeria. The survey method is appropriate for communication and media studies because it offers a systematic way of studying behavioural patterns, opinions and media consumption practices of a large population. The focus of the study is on the understanding of audience exposure, credibility perceptions, and the trust levels of the audience towards the AI-generated news content. Therefore, the survey design is an opportunity to collect quantifiable data that can answer the research questions and test the hypothesis. The study population was made up of residents of Ikeja, who were active consumers of news via

digital media platforms. The target population include youths in Ikeja, Lagos which according to City Population (2022) the age bracket 15-64 years is up to 227,482. Among them 384 consisting of male (201) and female (183) residents, 18 years old and above, who regularly access online news content through internet-enabled platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram, and online newspapers were randomly selected. The selection of this population is based on the increasing dependence of urban dwellers in Ikeja on digital media for news consumption and the growing exposure of audiences to artificial intelligence generated news content in the digital communication environment.

The determination of the sample size of the study was based on the Cochran formula for infinite populations due to the large and indefinite population of digital media users in Nigeria. The Cochran formula is expressed as:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

Where:

n = sample size

Z = standard normal deviation at 95% confidence level (1.96)

p = estimated proportion of the population possessing the attribute (0.5)

q = 1 – p (0.5)

e = margin of error (0.05)

Substituting the values into the formula:

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2(0.5)(0.5)}{0.05^2} = 384.16$$

$$(0.05)^2$$

The calculated sample size was approximately 384 respondents. Therefore, the researcher adopted a sample size of 384 respondents for the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this research was gathered by physically administering structured questionnaires to the respondents within the research area. The respondent answers were coded and processed using the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) and descriptive statistical measures (i.e. Frequency tables, percentages, mean, standard deviation) were used to analyze these data. The study hypothesis was tested using the Chi-square analysis.

Data Presentation and Interpretation

Four hundred (400) copies of the questionnaires were administered to the respondents in the study area physically. Three hundred and ninety-five (395) questionnaires were returned. 385 of the questionnaires returned were properly completed and therefore, valid to be used for the analysis. Out of it 384 questionnaires were selected for the analysis.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	201	52.3
	Female	183	47.7
Age	18–25 years	128	33.3
	26–35 years	146	38.0
	36–45 years	74	19.3

	46 years and above	36	9.4
Educational Qualification	SSCE	61	15.9
	ND/NCE	89	23.2
	HND/B.Sc	173	45.1
	Postgraduate	61	15.9
Marital Status	Single	214	55.7
	Married	148	38.5
	Divorced	12	3.1
	Widowed	10	2.6
Digital Platform Mostly Used	Facebook	102	26.6
	Twitter/X	96	25.0
	Instagram	88	22.9
	YouTube	98	25.5

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 1 indicates a fairly gender balanced response group and the research was quite inclusive as the study avoided being gender biased. The overwhelming majority of respondents falling between the ages 18-35 shows that the young people were more active in digital media use. Having the majority of respondents possess an HND/B.Sc degree, suggests that the majority of respondents are well-educated and that can shape the extent of awareness and understanding they possess of the platforms. Being unmarried, the single majority respondents confirm the young population age group in the research study. Moreover, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter/X were the most commonly used platform, implying their significance.

Addressing the Research Questions
Research Question 1

What is the level of audience exposure to artificial intelligence generated news content on digital media platforms in Nigeria.

Table 2: Audience Exposure to AI-Generated News Contents on Digital Media Platforms in Nigeria

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD
I frequently encounter AI-generated news content on digital media platforms.	148 (38.5%)	126 (32.8%)	42 (10.9%)	40 (10.4%)	28 (7.3%)	3.85	1.12
I can identify AI-generated news content when consuming online news.	121 (31.5%)	137 (35.7%)	49 (12.8%)	45 (11.7%)	32 (8.3%)	3.70	1.09
AI-generated news content appears frequently in my online news feeds.	143 (37.2%)	129 (33.6%)	41 (10.7%)	44 (11.5%)	27 (7.0%)	3.83	1.11

Source: **Field** **Survey,** **2026**

Table 2 results suggested that participants were very aware and was widely exposed to news generated through AI technology throughout many digital platforms, in alignment with increasing presence of AI in online news reporting. Most respondents have high mean scores suggesting not only high frequencies to be exposed to AI generated news but they also believed that they were able to detect it when they are in the course of news consuming. In other words, the participants were considered as having quite high awareness towards the issue. Moreover, it was found that participants gave quite uniform responses to each statement suggesting that AI generated news has become part of the usual appearance in the newsfeeds in digital platforms.

Research Question Two

How do audiences perceive the credibility and reliability of artificial intelligence-generated news content on digital media platforms in Nigeria?

Table 3: Audience Perception of the Credibility and Reliability of Artificial Intelligence-Generated News Content

Statement	SA	A	UD	D	SD	X	SD
AI-generated news content appears professionally presented online.	132 (34.4%)	141 (36.7%)	39 (10.2%)	46 (12.0%)	26 (6.8%)	3.80	1.06
I believe AI-generated news content can provide accurate information.	119 (31.0%)	128 (33.3%)	56 (14.6%)	48 (12.5%)	33 (8.6%)	3.66	1.13

AI-generated news content lacks human editorial credibility.	138 (35.9%)	126 (32.8%)	42 (10.9%)	48 (12.5%)	30 (7.8%)	3.77	1.12
AI-generated news content is to be verified before believing or sharing it.	151 (39.3%)	129 (33.6%)	33 (8.6%)	42 (10.9%)	29 (7.6%)	3.86	1.08

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The results statistics in Table 3 indicate that for the most part, respondents believe AI news sources are well produced and inform them with accurate information. Despite feeling they have these benefits, many respondents still doubt human editorial credibility regarding these news articles. The number of respondents that strongly agree that it is important to check the factuality of the article created by the AI before re-posting or believing it show that the audience is still worried about mis-information and the chance of inaccuracy. It appears as though these users understand the benefit of the article created by AI in terms of a reliable article, but do not believe humans were involved enough in the writing.

Research Question Three

What influence does artificial intelligence-generated news content have on audience trust in digital media platforms in Nigeria?

Table 4: Influence of Artificial Intelligence-Generated News Content on Audience Trust in Digital Media Platforms

Statement	SA	A	UD	D	SD	X	SD
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AI-generated news content affects my trust in online news platforms.	149 (38.8%)	134 (34.9%)	36 (9.4%)	39 (10.2%)	26 (6.8%)	3.89	1.05
I trust digital platforms less when I discover news content was AI-generated.	142 (37.0%)	127 (33.1%)	41 (10.7%)	46 (12.0%)	28 (7.3%)	3.81	1.10
Transparency about AI use in news production increases my trust in digital platforms.	158 (41.1%)	132 (34.4%)	31 (8.1%)	39 (10.2%)	24 (6.3%)	3.94	1.03
AI-generated news content influences how I evaluate the credibility of digital media platforms.	145 (37.8%)	130 (33.9%)	38 (9.9%)	43 (11.2%)	28 (7.3%)	3.84	1.09

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The results in Table 4 reveal that AI-generated news content plays an important role in respondent's trust in digital news. When respondents learned that news content was produced by AI, many had a lower level of trust, showing they may lack confidence and trust in the reliability of AI-produced content. Concurrently, high agreement among respondents that AI in news content

should be declared openly may help the public to have more confidence and trust in digital news. The findings also show that AI-generated news content affects users' evaluation on the credibility of digital media platforms.

Hypothesis

H₀: Artificial intelligence-generated news content has no significant influence on audience trust in digital media platforms in Nigeria.

Table 5: Chi-Square Analysis on the Influence of Artificial Intelligence-Generated News Content on Audience Trust in Digital Media Platforms

Variables	Calculated χ^2 Value	Degree of Freedom (df)	Critical χ^2 Value	Level of Significance	Decision
Artificial intelligence-generated news content and audience trust in digital media platforms	48.62	12	21.026	0.05	Reject H ₀

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The result in table 4.5 shows that the calculated Chi-square value of 48.62 is greater than the critical Chi-square value of 21.026 at 12 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. The calculated value exceeded the table value, so the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that the trust of the audience in digital media platforms in Nigeria is significantly influenced by the news content generated through artificial intelligence. The finding suggests that perceptions of

automated news production, credibility and transparency have an important role in audience trust in digital news platforms.

Discussion of Findings

The result of the first research question showed that Ikeja audiences are highly exposed to artificial intelligence generated news content on digital media platforms. Respondents indicated that AI-generated news often appears in their online feeds and social media platforms, suggesting that automated content production has become ever more integrated into contemporary digital journalism. This result is consistent with the position of Talabi et al. (2024) that found Nigerian media organisations are increasingly adopting artificial intelligence technologies in their news gathering and reporting processes. The result also supports Hussain (2024) argument that artificial intelligence has greatly changed the content creation of digital media by increasing the speed and volume of news production online. This result indicates that Nigerian audiences are now consuming AI-generated content regularly, knowingly or unknowingly, as part of their daily media consumption habits.

The results of the second research question suggest that audience members are cautious regarding the credibility and reliability of AI-based news content. While respondents agreed that such content is often presented in a professional way and is informative, many had concerns about the lack of human editorial judgement and verification. This is consistent with Da's (2024) study, which found that audience attitudes towards AI-generated news are affected by ethical concerns of authenticity, accountability and misinformation. The finding also supports the claim of Kolo, Mütterlein and Schmid (2022) that when audiences encounter automated journalism without clear markers of credibility, public trust is put into question. The result therefore indicates that audiences are aware of the efficiencies of artificial intelligence in news production, but remain sceptical of

the reliability and ethical integrity of machine-produced journalism. The findings of the third research question showed that the news content produced by artificial intelligence has a very strong impact on the audience's trust in digital media platforms. The respondents indicated that transparency of AI use in the production of news affects their trust in digital news. Absence of transparency of automated content reduces levels of trust. This is in line with Toff and Simon (2024) who found that audience trust in digital journalism is strongly associated with the extent to which media organisations disclose the use of artificial intelligence in content production. The finding also supports the position of Opdahl et al. (2023), who argued that trustworthy journalism in the age of artificial intelligence is highly dependent on transparency, accountability and verification mechanisms. The implication is that in Nigeria digital media organisations need to ensure ethical disclosure and responsible AI integration to sustain audience trust in the emerging digital news environment.

Conclusions

The study therefore concludes that artificial intelligence has become a major aspect of contemporary digital journalism in Nigeria but its sustained acceptance will depend largely on public trust on the credibility and ethical integrity of online news content. While AI tools facilitate faster news publishing and newsroom productivity, excessive dependence on automated systems without proper verification processes might diminish audience confidence in digital media platforms. Trust remains important to journalism, and audiences continue to value human judgement, fact-checking and editorial responsibility in the news production process.

Recommendations

The incorporation of artificial intelligence in journalism must be handled cautiously, transparently, and with professional accountability to protect public trust in digital news communication. It

therefore recommends that digital media organizations should ensure clear disclosure whenever artificial intelligence is used in the production or distribution of news content, in order to strengthen audience trust and transparency.

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