

## PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE CREDIBILITY OF SELECT ONLINE NEWSPAPERS AMONG RESIDENTS OF ABUJA AND LAGOS

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### Abstract

The study evaluated Public Perception of the credibility of select online newspapers among residents of Abuja and Lagos. The study was anchored on perception and media richness theories. A survey research method was also employed for which questionnaire was used to gather data from respondents. A total of 400 copies of the questionnaire were administered and 372 copies were presented and analysed using the frequency percentage tables. The findings of the study revealed that factors that enhance public perception of select online newspapers credibility among residents of Abuja and Lagos are their established reputation for professional journalism, editorial standards, transparency in reporting, ease of access to news, multimedia attributes as well as balanced reportage. Further finding showed that residents of Abuja and Lagos have moderate trust in select online newspapers (*Daily Trust, Leadership, Punch, and Vanguard*). The study concludes that the level of public exposure to select online newspapers among residents of Abuja and Lagos is high.

**Keywords:** Online Newspapers, News Credibility, Public Perception, Communication, Nigeria

### Introduction

In the past, print media readers relied on newspaper hardcopies for their information, education, and entertainment needs (Hanson, 2024). This is to affirm that media in general, have the role of informing, educating, and entertaining the people. While broadcast media make use of visual-audio signals to relate with their audience, newspaper adopts texts with descriptive and in-depth analysis to capture the attention and interest of their readers, while delivering messages. Notable among other features that technology brought into the media sector is immediacy and interactivity, that is, radio and TV had more immediacy and interactivity in terms of relating with their audience compared to newspaper (Ashong & Henry, 2017).

But with the invention of the Internet in the 1990s, newspaper owners adopted online version to meet with the immediacy and interactivity demands from active readers, who sometimes, are not patient to read voluminous stories

(McNamara, 2021). Today, we have newspapers with online presence. For example, we have *Daily Trust, ThisDay, Vanguard, Leadership, Punch, The Sun, The Nation* online newspapers on Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and on their various websites. They, timely, update their online readers of their news stories, immediately as events unfold. In fact, these newspapers have created podcasts channels and also deliver their contents in videos. However, readers may have different opinions regarding what they read, listen, or watch from online newspapers compared to what they read from other news sources (Abati, 2016).

Before the invention of internet and other online spaces, people exchanged information in person, face-to-face, and at a distance using other technologies. They used smoke signals, fire beacons, drums, the heliograph, semaphore, maritime flags, and recently complex telecommunication networks (Abati, 2016). Today, people

receive messages from family, friends, co-workers, and acquaintances via online contacts. Presently, the internet has given new life to contagion models, because it makes it possible for all kinds of messages, including those transmitted from the mass media megaphone, to be carried far and wide through direct personal contacts, reaching an enormous number of people via online technologies (Abdulateef, 2021).

The transformation brought about by the internet in the mass media is enormous. One of those areas is the print media industry, especially newspaper organisations. The internet has completely changed the face of the printing industry and newspapers may have taken the lead. Today, people do not have to wait for 24 hours for newspapers to update them of happenings around the world, as newspapers now have 'breaking news' which was an exclusive of the broadcast industry. People do not have to wait until the vendor(s) deliver the newsprint before knowing what is happening in the dailies (Ashong & Henry, 2017).

The online readers can have access to any information from anywhere in the world-at any time they want. Conversely, the advertiser can gain access to the most dispersed readership through new media and in new ways. The upshot of all these is that for the first time in years, newspapers face serious challenges and competition in their core business (Rodman, 2010 in Asemah & Gambo, 2016).

Today, online newspapers are common features. Many (if not all) national newspapers in Nigeria now offer electronic versions through the internet in addition to their traditional hardcopies, while some newspapers offer only online versions (McNamara, 2021). In Nigeria, public engagement with online newspapers has surged, particularly among younger demographics, such as students, who access digital content for academic purposes, including assignments, research, and presentations. The affordability of accessing online newspapers with minimal

data (Edegoh et al., 2015) has further accelerated this trend, enabling readers to complement or even replace hardcopy purchases with digital versions. This shift is particularly pronounced in urban centres like Abuja and Lagos, where Internet penetration is high, and media consumption is dynamic.

However, the unregulated nature of the internet that produces fake news especially social media platforms where much of this content is shared, raises significant concerns about the credibility of online news. Unlike traditional print media, which operates within established editorial frameworks, online platforms often lack rigorous oversight, leading to risks of misinformation, unverified reporting, or biased content (Abdulateef, 2021). This has fostered widespread scepticism among readers regarding the reliability of online newspaper content.

The issue of public perception of the credibility of online newspapers remains a pressing area of inquiry, particularly in cosmopolitan cities like Abuja and Lagos, where digital media consumption is deeply entrenched. It is to this end, this study seeks to examine how residents of the above cities perceive the credibility of select online newspapers.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Internet can be regarded as one of the greatest communication inventions of modern times, largely because of its convergence power, which has brought traditional media into a common digital space. In Nigeria, newspapers now exist both in print and online versions, similar to international outlets such as *The London Times* and *The New York Times*. Despite these advantages, many Nigerians remain sceptical about reading newspapers online, owing to perceptions that the internet is an unregulated space where faceless individuals can publish unchecked content (Omenugha & Oji, 2022).

Concerns about the credibility of online news are not unique to Nigeria.

Numerous scholars questioned the trustworthiness of digital journalism (Online News Association, 2002). Traditional print newspapers are often considered more credible because of their editorial oversight, gatekeeping functions, and established journalistic standards (Okoro & Diri, 2016; Edeani & Eze, 2020). Conversely, proponents argue that online newspapers are equally credible and even more relevant today due to their accessibility, affordability, interactivity, and constant updates (Ojebuyi & Folarin, 2018).

Empirical evidence supports this duality. Ojebuyi and Folarin (2018) found that Nigerian online news consumers prioritize convenience and timeliness, with credibility still important but secondary. Similarly, Asemah et al. (2013) noted that interactivity and ease of access contribute to the popularity of online newspapers, especially among urban youths. Nevertheless, this growth has been accompanied by widespread scepticism. Apuke and Omar (2020) observe that the absence of robust gatekeeping and the ease of manipulating digital content have made verifying the authenticity of online news increasingly difficult. Even genuine online newspapers risk duplication or distortion, raising doubts among readers.

Against this backdrop, the study investigates the factors shaping readers' patronage and perceptions of online newspapers amongst residents of Abuja and Lagos (Nigeria). Specifically, it seeks to examine how audiences perceive the credibility, authenticity, and trustworthiness of online newspapers compared to their hardcopy counterparts, and whether they consider them capable of standing as unbiased, verifiable news sources.

## Research Questions

Arising from the objectives, these research questions are formulated:

1. What is the level of public exposure to select online newspapers (*Daily Trust*,

*Leadership*, *Punch* and *Vanguard* newspapers) among residents of Abuja and Lagos?

2. What is the level of trust residents of Abuja and Lagos have on select online newspapers?
3. What are the reasons motivating residents of Abuja and Lagos to patronise select online newspapers?
4. What are the factors that enhance public perception of select online newspapers credibility among residents of Abuja and Lagos?

## Conceptual Clarifications Online Newspapers

An online newspaper refers to a digital version of the traditional print newspaper, published and disseminated through the Internet (Apuke & Omar, 2020). It delivers journalistic content including news, features, editorials, and advertisements via websites, mobile applications, and social media platforms. Unlike print editions, online newspapers provide immediacy, interactivity, and multimedia integration, enabling real-time updates and user engagement (Ashong & Henry, 2017). They are accessible across geographical boundaries at minimal or no cost, making them attractive to readers seeking convenience and timeliness (Hassan, Latiff, & Atek, 2015). Online newspapers also embody media convergence, where text, audio, video, and hyperlinks coexist to enhance information delivery and user experience (Sajjad, 2016). However, while they expand access and participation, concerns persist about content credibility and the absence of traditional gatekeeping mechanisms. Thus, online newspapers can be understood as dynamic, technology-driven platforms redefining how audiences consume and interact with news.

## News Credibility

News credibility refers to the degree to which audiences perceive news content as trustworthy, accurate, and impartial, forming a cornerstone of journalism that fosters public trust and engagement

(Akinbobola & Ukonu, 2022). In the digital era, the proliferation of online platforms has complicated this concept, with challenges such as misinformation, lack of regulation, and perceived editorial biases undermining confidence in news media. In Nigeria, particularly in urban hubs like Abuja and Lagos, credibility significantly influences public interaction with online newspapers, shaping their role in informing democratic processes (Akinbobola & Ukonu, 2022). Credibility encompasses three key dimensions: source credibility (the reputation of the news outlet or journalist), message credibility (the accuracy and fairness of the content), and medium credibility; the reliability of the delivery platform, such as online or print (Ibrahim & Musa, 2023).

### **Public Perception**

Public perception refers to the views, opinions and reactions people hold or have toward an action, event, or news from the media. In other words, public perception could simply mean the judgement people give for receiving media messages. And this judgement may be positive (good) or negative (bad), which depends on the cognitive or psychological predisposition of the people. For instance, if readers expect newspapers to report stories that appeal to their emotions, but are factual, non-bias, objective and accurate, they (readers) tend to express positive perception of the media or medium that reported such and vice versa (Osuigwe, 2019).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on Media Richness Theory.

### **Media Richness Theory**

This theory was propounded by Daft and Lengel in 1984, evaluates communication media based on their capacity to effectively convey information. The theory ranks media along a continuum from “lean” to “rich.” Richer media such as face-to-face interaction, transmit multiple cues, allow rapid feedback, create personal connection, and use natural language.

Leaner media, such as emails or memos, are more suitable for routine communication (Folarin, 2005).

Flanagin and Metzger (2001) emphasised that the choice of medium depends on features such as speed of feedback, variety of channels, personness, and richness of language. Rich media are more effective for handling equivocal or ambiguous issues, while leaner media suffice for simple, unambiguous tasks (Obijiofor and Hanusch, 2013).

This theory is relevant because online newspapers, which integrate text, images, audio, video, and interactive features, approximate richer media. Their ability to process multiple cues and provide immediacy explains their appeal compared to print. Media Richness Theory therefore helps to explain audience preference, showing why Nigerian readers increasingly gravitate toward online platforms for clarity, timeliness, and engagement.

### **Review of Empirical Studies**

Mercy (2020) conducted a study on “Reader’s perception of online newspaper and its effect on conventional newspaper.” The study examined readers’ perception of online newspapers and its effect on conventional newspaper and the impact/effect of online newspaper on the patronage of conventional newspaper. The discovery showed that there is significant relationship between readers’ perception and motivation of online news on patronage on conventional newspaper, there is significant difference between the preference of contents among conventional print newspaper and online newspaper and lastly that there is no significant effect of online newspaper on the conventional newspaper.

Ndifreke (2019) studied residents’ perception of the credibility of select online newspapers. The study investigated Uyo residents’ perception of the credibility of select online newspapers (Punch and Vanguard). The study adopted the survey method. The population of the study was 427,436 in which a sample size of 400 was

drawn using the Taro Yamene's formula. It adopted questionnaire as instrument for data collection. The study found out that Uyo residents perceived Punch and Vanguard online newspapers to be credible and do not have doubts about what they read on these papers online. It also found out that the residents believe that the newspapers are objective in their reportage of any issues of public concern as all stories represent balanced sides of events.

Similarly, Sylvester (2017) in his work on "influence of fake news on public perception of Nigeria's online Newspapers investigated the increasing cases of fake news in the blogosphere among online publication in Enugu metropolis, which seem likely to detract from the credibility which many place on popular online newspapers. Findings from the study reveal that most Nigerians see reports on popular online news platforms as credible and that there is difference between information on online newspapers and those circulated through social media.

Cassidy (2017) studied online news credibility: an examination of the perceptions of newspaper journalists to examine print and online daily newspaper journalists' perceptions of the credibility of Internet news information, as well as the influence of several factors; most notably, professional role conceptions on those perceptions. The results of a survey of U.S. journalists (N = 655) show that Internet news information was viewed as moderately credible overall and that online newspaper journalists rated Internet news information as significantly more credible than did print newspaper journalists.

On their part, Perić et al., (2017) carried out a research on public perception of the print and electronic newspapers and magazines editions: Case of Serbia. The findings revealed that online newspapers and magazines in Serbia have relatively lower credibility compared to their hardcopies. It also found out that there is little control and regulation of online

content in the country, therefore, making the internet an all-comer affair.

Haruna (2018) carried out a study on online newspaper reading habits among university students in Nigeria. Postgraduate thesis submitted to the Department of Mass Communication, Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria. The analysed result showed that the Vanguard, Daily Trust, Punch, Daily Sun, and The Nation are the top five favourite newspapers the students read online. The study also found 47.00% of the research respondents read online newspapers daily.

### **Research Methodology**

The study adopted a survey research design. This was chosen for its suitability in examining people's opinions on issues of public interest and its efficiency in sampling large populations. The population comprised 19,052,029 residents of Lagos and Abuja, according to the 2022 estimate of the National Population Commission. To ensure adequate representation and minimize bias, the stratified random sampling technique was employed to group respondents into strata, while purposive sampling was used to select key participants. Using Taro Yamane's 1963 formula, a sample size of 372 respondents was determined and surveyed across Lagos and Abuja.

The main instrument of data collection was a structured questionnaire designed on a five-point Likert scale. It comprised two sections: Section A focused on demographic information, while Section B captured thematic issues relevant to the study. The validity and reliability of the instrument were ensured through expert review by the study supervisor, Prof. K. S. Akpede, whose inputs enhanced its accuracy and clarity. In addition, a pilot test was conducted with 10 respondents from Abuja Municipal Area Council to confirm that the instrument was comprehensible, relevant, and capable of yielding reliable data.

Primary data were collected through the questionnaire, while secondary data came from books, newspapers, internet sources, and unpublished materials. This combination provided a systematic and comprehensive base of information. Data

analysis involved the use of tables, descriptive statistics, statistical testing, and thematic interpretation, thereby ensuring both quantitative rigor and qualitative depth in addressing the research objectives.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

| S/N | Variable                         | Category       | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|-----|----------------------------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|
| 1.  | <b>Gender</b>                    | Male           | 209           | 56.2           |
|     |                                  | Female         | 163           | 43.8           |
|     |                                  | <b>Total</b>   | <b>372</b>    | <b>100.0</b>   |
| 2.  | <b>Age</b>                       | Under 25 years | 290           | 77.9           |
|     |                                  | 36–45 years    | 73            | 19.6           |
|     |                                  | Above 45 years | 9             | 2.4            |
|     |                                  | <b>Total</b>   | <b>372</b>    | <b>100.0</b>   |
| 3.  | <b>Educational Qualification</b> | Primary        | 4             | 1              |
|     |                                  | Secondary      | 8             | 2              |
|     |                                  | Tertiary       | 360           | 97             |
|     |                                  | <b>Total</b>   | <b>372</b>    | <b>100.0</b>   |
| 4.  | <b>Occupation</b>                | Civil Servant  | 65            | 18             |
|     |                                  | Trader         | 101           | 27             |
|     |                                  | Student        | 191           | 51             |
|     |                                  | Farmer         | 15            | 4.0            |
|     |                                  | <b>Total</b>   | <b>372</b>    | <b>100.0</b>   |

**Source: Field Survey, 2025**

Table 1 shows the demographic data of respondents from in Abuja and Lagos state. The sample is slightly male-dominated, with males constituting 56.2% of respondents compared to 43.8% females. Also, the respondents' pool is heavily skewed toward younger individuals, with 77.9% under 25 years, indicating a youth-dominated sample. This age distribution aligns with the study's urban focus (Abuja and Lagos), where younger populations are likely more engaged with digital platforms due to higher internet access and tech-savviness.

**Table 2: What is the level of public exposure to select online newspapers among residents of Abuja and Lagos?**

**Tips:** SD = Strongly Disagree D = Disagree N = Neutral A = Agree SA = Strongly Agree

| Variables   | SD          | D           | N           | A            | SA           | Total         |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| 1. Do you frequently read news articles from select online newspapers ( <i>Daily Trust, Leadership, Punch and Vanguard</i> ).   | 51<br>(14%) | 60<br>(16%) | 79<br>(21%) | 84<br>(23%)  | 98<br>(26%)  | 372<br>(100%) |
| 2. You can attest to the fact that you actively engage with, read, share, and or comment on news articles from select online newspapers each time you are exposed to their content? | 87<br>(23%) | 58<br>(16%) | 29<br>(8%)  | 102<br>(27%) | 96<br>(26%)  | 372<br>(100%) |
| 3. Do you have high level of access to select online newspapers because you are digitally literate?   | 61<br>(16%) | 40<br>(11%) | 57<br>(15%) | 99<br>(27%)  | 115<br>(31%) | 372<br>(100%) |
| 4. The portability, affordability, accessibility and immediacy factor of the select online newspapers have encouraged you to frequently patronise and consume their news material.  | 73<br>(20%) | 41<br>(11%) | 53<br>(14%) | 85<br>(23%)  | 120<br>(32%) | 372<br>(100%) |
| 5. Based on your personal observation, your colleagues and or acquaintances patronise select online newspapers more than traditional hardcopy version.                              | 65<br>(17%) | 36<br>(10%) | 41<br>(11%) | 98<br>(26%)  | 132<br>(35%) | 372<br>(100%) |

**Source: Field Survey, 2025**

The findings from Table 2 indicate that the level of public exposure to select online newspapers among residents of Abuja and Lagos is high as the above table shows that majority

of Abuja and Lagos residents frequently read, actively engage with, and prefer select online newspapers (*Daily Trust, Leadership, Punch, and Vanguard*).

**Table 3: What is the level of trust residents of Abuja and Lagos have on select online newspapers?**

**Tips:** SD = Strongly Disagree D = Disagree N = Neutral A = Agree SA = Strongly Agree

| Variables   | SD          | D           | N           | A           | SA           | Total         |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|---------------|
| 1. Do you believe that select online newspapers ( <i>Daily Trust, Leadership, Punch and Vanguard</i> ) consistently provide accurate, reliable and fact-checked information in their reportage. | 68<br>(18%) | 39<br>(10%) | 66<br>(18%) | 97<br>(26%) | 102<br>(27%) | 372<br>(100%) |
| 2. Do you feel that your level of trust on select online newspapers have increased because you are provided with opportunity to seamlessly fact-check information online.                       | 76<br>(20%) | 52<br>(14%) | 71<br>(19%) | 83<br>(22%) | 90<br>(24%)  | 372<br>(100%) |
| 3. Do you believe that the content of select online newspapers does not engage in fake news reporting.  | 69<br>(19%) | 64<br>(17%) | 50<br>(13%) | 76<br>(20%) | 113<br>(30%) | 372<br>(100%) |
| 4. Do you trust online newspapers to the point that you can make informed decisions based on the news contents of the online newspapers.  | 77<br>(21%) | 51<br>(14%) | 68<br>(18%) | 94<br>(25%) | 82<br>(20%)  | 372<br>(100%) |
| 5. News content from select online newspapers are credible and trustworthy to the extent that you can recommend it to friends.  | 68<br>(18%) | 72<br>(19%) | 95<br>(26%) | 61<br>(16%) | 76<br>(20%)  | 372<br>(100%) |

**Source: Field Survey, 2025**



Findings from the above show that residents of Abuja and Lagos have moderate trust in select online newspapers (Daily Trust, Leadership, Punch, and Vanguard).

**Table 4: What are the reasons motivating residents of Abuja and Lagos to patronise select online newspapers?**

**Tips:** SD = Strongly Disagree D = Disagree N = Neutral A = Agree SA = Strongly Agree

| Variables   | SD          | D           | N           | A            | SA           | Total         |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| 1. Your motivation for patronising select online newspapers stems from the fact that their news content is durable and can be stored on digital devices for extended periods, making them ideal for record keeping and future reference; unlike hardcopy newspapers, which are prone to wear and deterioration over time. | 33<br>(9%)  | 71<br>(19%) | 54<br>(15%) | 82<br>(22%)  | 132<br>(35%) | 372<br>(100%) |
| 2. Your preference for select online newspapers is motivated by the fact that accessing their content is cost-effective and time-saving, unlike hardcopy versions which often involve additional expenses and delays.   | 65<br>(17%) | 30<br>(8%)  | 79<br>(21%) | 111<br>(30%) | 87<br>(23%)  | 372<br>(100%) |
| 3. Your preference for select online newspapers is influenced by their ability to deliver timely and up-to-date news reports on events and developments in your city as they unfold, keeping you well-informed with minimal delay.  | 56<br>(15%) | 32<br>(9%)  | 63<br>(17%) | 96<br>(26%)  | 125<br>(34%) | 372<br>(100%) |

|  |             |              |             |             |             |               |
|--|-------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| 4. You patronise select online newspapers due to their ability to reach wide, large and heterogeneous audience with immediate feedback when compared to hardcopy newspapers. | 60<br>(16%) | 100<br>(27%) | 60<br>(16%) | 55<br>(15%) | 97<br>(26%) | 372<br>(100%) |
| 5. Your patronage of select online newspapers is because they offer diverse news content formats, such as audio-visuais, interactivity and infographics.                     | 46<br>(12%) | 87<br>(23%)  | 77<br>(21%) | 64<br>(17%) | 98<br>(26%) | 372<br>(100%) |

**Source: Field Survey, 2025**

The findings from the above table reveal that residents of Abuja and Lagos are motivated to patronize select online newspapers (Daily Trust, Leadership, Punch, and Vanguard) primarily due to the durability and storage potential of digital content, cost-effectiveness, time-saving access, timely news delivery, wider audience reach and diverse news content format (audio-visuais).

**Table 5: What are the factors that enhance public perception of select online newspapers credibility among residents of Abuja and Lagos?**

**Tips:** SD = Strongly Disagree D = Disagree N = Neutral A = Agree SA = Strongly Agree

| Variables   | SD          | D           | N           | A           | SA           | Total         |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|---------------|
| 1. Your enhanced perception of select online newspapers is because you perceive them as credible sources of news due to their established reputation for professional journalism and editorial standards. | 70<br>(19%) | 43<br>(12%) | 58<br>(16%) | 80<br>(22%) | 121<br>(33%) | 372<br>(100%) |
| 2. Balanced reportage is one of the factors that enhance your perception of select online newspapers' credibility.  | 90<br>(24%) | 43<br>(12%) | 56<br>(15%) | 86<br>(23%) | 97<br>(26%)  | 372<br>(100%) |

|   |             |             |             |              |              |               |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| 3. One of the factors that enhance public perception of select online newspapers is transparency in reporting which is crucial in Nigeria's complex socio-political landscape.                              | 57<br>(15%) | 33<br>(9%)  | 58<br>(16%) | 99<br>(27%)  | 125<br>(34%) | 372<br>(100%) |
| 4. Ease of accessing digital platforms and enhance quality of multimedia attributes are some of the factors that enhance public perception of select online newspapers credibility.                         | 52<br>(14%) | 58<br>(16%) | 22<br>(6%)  | 102<br>(27%) | 138<br>(37%) | 372<br>(100%) |
| 5. The ability of select online newspapers to tailor news stories in a dramatic fashion that aids believability, constitute factors that enhance public perception of select online newspapers credibility. | 84<br>(23%) | 74<br>(20%) | 56<br>(15%) | 78<br>(21%)  | 80<br>(22%)  | 372<br>(100%) |

**Source: Field Survey, 2025**

The findings from Table 5 indicate that factors that enhance public perception of select online newspapers credibility among residents of Abuja and Lagos are their established reputation for professional journalism, editorial standards, transparency in reporting, ease of access to news, multimedia attributes as well as balanced reportage.

### Discussion of Findings

Preliminary results reveal a predominantly highly educated demography consisting of 97% university graduates. The above demographics suggest a tech-savvy, digitally literate respondents likely driving high exposure (49% frequently read online newspapers) and preference for digital formats (61% online newspaper preference over hardcopy) due to accessibility, cost-effectiveness, and timeliness of online newspapers.

The findings from indicate high public exposure to select online newspapers (*Daily Trust*, *Leadership*, *Punch*, and *Vanguard*) among Abuja and Lagos residents, with 49% frequently reading these outlets, 53% actively engaging

through reading, sharing, or commenting, 58% attributing access to digital literacy, 55% citing portability, affordability, and immediacy as motivators, and 61% noting a preference for online over hardcopy formats. Ashong and Henry (2017) support this, noting that online newspapers' instant updates eliminate the 24-hour wait of hardcopies, appealing to tech-savvy youth.

The findings from Table 3 indicate moderate trust in select online newspapers (*Daily Trust*, *Leadership*, *Punch*, and *Vanguard*) among Abuja and Lagos residents, with 46–50% agreeing that these outlets provide accurate, reliable, and fake-news-free content, enhanced by fact-checking opportunities. This is inline with

Gupta (2017) who highlights that verified online newspaper pages enhance perceived credibility, as seen in the 50% (20% A, 30% SA) who believe these outlets avoid fake news (Variable 3). Maku and Rasheed (2019) corroborate the decision-making trust (45% A + SA, Variable 4), suggesting that urban readers rely on online newspapers for actionable information due to their accessibility and digital literacy.

The findings from Table 4 show that residents of Abuja and Lagos are motivated to patronize select online newspapers (*Daily Trust, Leadership, Punch, and Vanguard*) due to the durability and storage potential of digital content (57% A + SA), cost-effectiveness and time-saving access (53% A + SA), timely news delivery (60% A + SA), wider audience reach with immediate feedback (41% A + SA), and diverse content formats like audio-visuals and infographics (43% A + SA). These results, based on a 372-respondent sample of predominantly young (77.9% under 25), educated (97% tertiary), and urban residents, reflect Nigeria's digital media landscape. In their study, Ojebuyi and Folarin (2018) support the preference for cost-effectiveness and timeliness, noting that urban Nigerian readers value these for online news consumption. This aligns with the 53% and 60% agreement in the current study under investigation. However improving responsiveness to reader feedback, as suggested by Ndubueze (2018), could enhance perceived usefulness and interactivity of online newspaper, further boosting patronage among diverse audience.

The findings from Table 5 reveal that residents of Abuja and Lagos perceive the credibility of select online newspapers (*Daily Trust, Leadership, Punch, and Vanguard*) was enhanced by their established reputation for professional journalism and editorial standards (55% A + SA), balanced reportage (49% A + SA), transparency in reporting (61% A + SA), ease of access and multimedia attributes

(64% A + SA), and dramatic storytelling that aids believability (43% A + SA). Gupta (2017) reinforces this, emphasizing that verified online newspaper pages bolster credibility perceptions, as seen in the 61% who value transparency. Ojebuyi and Folarin (2018) support the high regard for professional journalism, noting that Nigerian readers value online newspapers for their adherence to editorial standards.

## Conclusion

The study offers insightful evidence into the dynamics of public perception and engagement with select online newspapers *Daily Trust, Leadership, Punch, and Vanguard* among residents of Abuja and Lagos. The findings affirm that online news platforms are increasingly becoming the preferred medium for news consumption, largely due to their affordability, portability, immediacy, and alignment with users' digital literacy. These factors, coupled with the ease of access via mobile devices and the convenience of multimedia features, have significantly reshaped audience behaviour in favour of digital news formats. Moderate levels of trust in the select online newspapers suggest that while credibility is acknowledged especially through fact-checking mechanisms, transparency, and professional journalism there remains room for improvement in strengthening public confidence. Trust is a critical determinant of sustained engagement, and online newspapers must continually uphold editorial standards and strive for balanced, objective reporting.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

- i. In order to maintain and expand public engagement, select online newspapers should invest in user-friendly digital platforms and mobile applications that enhance accessibility and reading experience. Regular updates,

- personalized news feeds, and interactive features like comment sections and polls can deepen user involvement and encourage habitual readership.
- ii. Given the moderate level of trust, these online newspapers must strengthen their fact-checking processes and increase transparency around news sources. Establishing visible corrections policies, publishing editorial codes of ethics, and collaborating with credible fact-checking organizations will help boost reader confidence.
  - iii. News outlets should continue to leverage digital storage capabilities and cost-effectiveness by offering downloadable content and offline reading options. Additionally, they should diversify content formats to include short videos, infographics, podcasts, and summaries to cater to varying reader preferences and enhance information retention.
  - iv. To sustain and improve credibility, editorial teams should maintain strict adherence to professional journalism standards and train reporters in digital reporting ethics. Incorporating multimedia storytelling elements and ensuring balanced, inclusive reportage will further solidify public trust and credibility.
  - v. Media houses should conduct periodic audience research to understand shifting reader preferences, trust drivers, and content expectations. This feedback loop will enable them to adapt quickly and stay relevant in a fast-evolving digital media environment.

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