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MEDIA MISINFORMATION AND POLITICAL STABILITY: A STUDY OF NIGER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined **media misinformation and political stability in Nigeria: A study of Niger State.** The research explores how misinformation spreads through various media platforms and its impact on social cohesion, trust in political institutions, and political stability. The research adopted descriptive survey research design and the target population of the study was 1200 comprising of media professionals, academicians, political analysts, and the general public across the three zones of Niger State. A sample size of 200 respondents were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation and demographics. The instrument used in data collection was structured questionnaire titled: Media Misinformation and Political Stability Questionnaire (MMPSQ). The instrument was validated by experts in Department of Political Science, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai. Reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach's alpha which yielded a coefficient of 0.88. Mean (X), standard deviation (SD) were utilized to answer the research questions, while inferential statistics, t-test was utilized in testing the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The study found that media misinformation contributes to political instability by fostering mistrust, inciting violence, and distorting democratic engagement in Niger State, Nigeria. The study therefore, recommends enhanced media literacy, regulatory frameworks, and responsible journalism as essential measures to mitigate misinformation and promote political stability in Niger State and Nigeria in general.

Keywords: Media, Misinformation, Political Stability, Niger State, Nigeria.

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Introduction

In the digital age, the media plays a pivotal role in shaping public opinion and influencing political narratives. In Nigeria, where democracy is still consolidating, media platforms have become essential for disseminating information and mobilizing citizens. But the growing trend of misinformation poses significant threats to political stability and national cohesion (Adekunle & Olatunji, 2023). With the rise of social media and other digital communication channels, false narratives can spread rapidly, influencing public perception and inciting unrest. The 2019 general elections in Nigeria exemplified how misinformation could shape electoral behavior and undermine confidence in democratic institutions. Fabricated stories and manipulated videos were widely shared, often with the intent to discredit political opponents or inflame ethnic and religious tensions (Okoro & Odoemelam, 2022). These developments reflect a broader global trend but have particularly dangerous implications in a diverse and politically sensitive country like Nigeria. Misinformation has not only been used as a political weapon but also contributes to insecurity and public confusion. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, false information about the virus and the government's response hindered public compliance and eroded trust in health authorities (Adebayo et al., 2022). This scenario further highlights the dangers of unchecked misinformation in the media space. Political stability requires accurate information dissemination, responsible journalism, and credible communication from both media and government institutions. When media misinformation goes unchallenged, it fosters cynicism, polarization, and sometimes violent confrontations, which can derail governance and development efforts (Nwachukwu & Abang, 2023). The Nigerian government has attempted to regulate media content through various legislation, including the Cybercrimes Act and proposed social media bills. However, these efforts have been criticized for threatening press freedom and potentially being used to stifle dissent (Olumide & Adeyemi, 2022). The balance between combating misinformation and upholding free speech remains a delicate challenge. This study seeks to investigate media misinformation and political stability in Niger State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

In an ideal democratic society, the media serves as a credible watchdog, providing accurate, balanced, and timely information to the public. It plays a vital role in shaping informed citizenry, promoting transparency, holding leaders accountable, and supporting political stability. Ideally, media institutions should uphold professional ethics, verify facts before dissemination, and contribute to national cohesion by preventing the spread of divisive or inflammatory content. But the media, especially with the rise of digital and social media platforms, has become increasingly saturated with misinformation and

disinformation. Politically motivated falsehoods, conspiracy theories, ethnic and religious propaganda, and unverified news are frequently circulated to manipulate public opinion, discredit political opponents, and provoke unrest. During elections, for instance, misinformation has been deployed to mislead voters, distort electoral outcomes, and incite violence, thereby undermining public trust in democratic institutions and threatening political stability. Despite existing regulatory efforts, misinformation continues to flourish due to poor media literacy, weak enforcement mechanisms, political interference, and limited accountability for content shared online. This research therefore, seeks to examine media misinformation and political stability in Niger State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

This study has three objectives and corresponding research questions and research hypotheses. The first is:

1. To examine the sources of media misinformation in Niger State, Nigeria.
2. To assess the impact of misinformation on political stability and public trust in Niger State, Nigeria.
3. To determine strategies for curbing misinformation and promoting political stability in Niger State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What are the sources of media misinformation in Niger State, Nigeria?
2. What is the impact of misinformation on political stability and public trust in Niger State, Nigeria?
3. What are the strategies for curbing misinformation and promoting political stability in Niger State, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

H_{O1}: There is no significant difference between the mean response of male and female respondents on the sources of media misinformation in Niger State, Nigeria

H_{O2}: There is no significant difference between the mean response of male and female respondents on the impact of misinformation on political stability and public trust in Niger State, Nigeria.

H_{O3}: There is no significant difference between the mean response of male and female respondents on the strategies for curbing misinformation and promoting political stability in Niger State, Nigeria.

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Media

The term "media" refers to the various channels of communication through which information, entertainment, education, and promotional messages are disseminated to the public. These channels include traditional formats such as newspapers, radio, and television, as well as digital formats like websites, social media platforms, and mobile applications (Wardle & Derakhshan (2017). Media serve as the primary means through which individuals and institutions communicate, inform, and influence public opinion and behavior (Hilary & Dumebi, 2021). In Nigeria, traditional media such as radio and television coexist with new media, including social networks, blogs, and online news portals.

Media Misinformation

Media misinformation refers to the spread of false, misleading, or inaccurate information through media channels, whether intentionally (disinformation) or unintentionally (misinformation). This includes fake news, manipulated images or videos, and unverified claims. According to Wardle and Derakhshan (2017), misinformation undermines public discourse, fosters distrust, and destabilizes societies, especially during political transitions or crises. Misinformation is the term used to describe inaccurate reporting that results from errors; nonetheless, it does not imply deceit. Misinformation, on the other side, describes the purposeful spread of erroneous information in an effort to mislead others (Hilary & Dumebi, 2021). Misinformation is operationally defined as any information or content that is factually incorrect or inaccurate, disseminated through various communication channels, including but not limited to traditional media, social media platforms, and interpersonal communication (Campan et al., 2017).

Political Stability

Political stability refers to the resilience and continuity of a government's institutions, policies, and leadership in the absence of significant internal conflict or violent upheaval. It implies a predictable political environment where governments function effectively, uphold the rule of law, and provide essential services without the constant threat of disruption (World Bank, 2024). Political stability is essential for fostering public trust in governmental processes and ensuring societal order. It is characterised by peaceful transitions of power, rule of law, and citizen trust in institutions. Political stability is crucial for economic growth, national unity, and democratic development (Fukuyama, 2017).

Impact of Media Misinformation and Political Stability in Nigeria

Media misinformation has become a critical issue in Nigeria, significantly influencing political discourse and stability. The rise of social media and online platforms has facilitated the rapid spread of fake news, often with serious consequences. The Nigerian media landscape has been overwhelmed by unverified information, particularly during

politically sensitive periods (Onigbinde & Oloyede, 2024). This misinformation undermines public confidence in legitimate news sources and contributes to political confusion and unrest. One of the most notable examples was during the 2020 #EndSARS protests, where fake news played a major role in shaping public perception and response. As documented by Adegbite and Ilori (2018), several unverified claims circulated, alleging violence and destruction by protesters. These narratives not only escalated tensions between the public and security forces but also provided justification for state-sanctioned violence, such as the controversial Lekki Toll Gate incident. This shows how misinformation can provoke state overreach and deteriorate political trust. Elections in Nigeria have also been marred by misinformation campaigns aimed at discrediting opponents and manipulating voter behavior. The Center for Democracy and Development (2024) identified five tactics used to spread misinformation during the 2019 general elections, including the use of deepfakes, fake opinion polls, and doctored campaign materials. These strategies not only erode democratic values but also contribute to voter apathy and post-election violence, thereby threatening political stability (Onigbinde & Oloyede, 2024).

Misinformation also affects national cohesion by inflaming ethnic and religious tensions. Ugwuanyi (2017) argues that fake news is often tailored to exploit Nigeria's deep-seated ethno-religious divides, leading to communal distrust and conflict. This has been evident in the dissemination of false reports during public health crises like COVID-19, where communities acted on misleading information, further complicating government responses (Abiodun, 2023). The economic impact of misinformation is also significant. Disinformation about economic policies, such as false claims about currency devaluation or fuel price hikes, has led to panic buying, market instability, and disruptions in business operations. These economic disturbances further strain the government's capacity to maintain political stability and public confidence (Onigbinde & Oloyede, 2024).

Strategies for Minimizing Media Misinformation in Nigeria

The spread of media misinformation in Nigeria has reached alarming levels, posing serious threats to political stability, public safety, and democratic processes. A multifaceted strategy is required to address this challenge. One of the most effective approaches is strengthening media literacy among the populace. As Okoro and Olley (2022) argue, equipping citizens with the skills to critically evaluate the credibility of information, especially on social media, is fundamental in reducing the spread of fake news. Media literacy education can be integrated into school curricula and public enlightenment campaigns to foster a more discerning and informed citizenry.

Another important strategy is the institutionalization of robust fact-checking systems. According to Adebayo and Musa (2024), fact-checking organizations such as Dubawa and Africa Check have played crucial roles in debunking viral falsehoods, especially during

electoral periods and national emergencies. The expansion of such initiatives, with adequate funding and partnerships with mainstream media, can help verify information before it gains traction. Encouraging media houses to adopt in-house fact-checking desks will also enhance credibility and accuracy in reporting. Legislative and regulatory measures also have a role to play, though they must be carefully crafted to avoid infringing on press freedom. As noted by Eze and Ibrahim (2022), Nigeria's attempt to regulate social media through the proposed Social Media Bill met public resistance due to fears of censorship. Instead, the authors suggest adopting legal frameworks that penalize willful dissemination of false information, while protecting journalists and whistleblowers. Balanced regulation, with input from media stakeholders and civil society, can ensure accountability without stifling free expression.

Collaboration with technology platforms is essential in addressing misinformation online. Social media giants like Facebook and Twitter have begun flagging or removing false content globally, and these efforts must be localized. Akinola and Ezeanya (2023) recommend partnerships between Nigerian authorities and digital platforms to tailor content moderation policies that reflect the country's socio-political context. Such collaborations can help prevent the amplification of harmful narratives, particularly during elections and crises. The promotion of ethical journalism is fundamental to combating misinformation. Journalists must be trained in digital verification techniques, responsible reporting, and adherence to professional codes of conduct. As highlighted by Mohammed and Taiwo (2024), media organizations should invest in regular staff training and self-regulation mechanisms to uphold standards. Strengthening the role of the Nigerian Press Council and other professional bodies in enforcing ethical practices can further reinforce trust in the media and curb the misinformation epidemic.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Agenda-Setting Theory developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972. The theory suggests that while the media may not directly tell people what to think, it strongly influences what people focus on. By choosing which stories to report, how often to show them, and in what way, the media shapes public attention and opinion (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In Nigeria, where political discussions are often tense and sensitive, the media plays a major role in shaping political views and reactions. The theory posits that the media decides which topics are important in society. When false or misleading information (misinformation) is regularly shown in the media, it can confuse the public and increase political tensions. As Okoro and Nwafor (2021) point out, some Nigerian media platforms have become biased, spreading unverified stories that influence how people vote or how much they trust the government. This can lead to unrest, especially during elections or national crises. This theory is relevant to this study

because it helps in explaining how repeated misinformation can affect political stability. For example, during the 2019 general elections in Nigeria, fake news about politicians or ethnic groups led to violence and public anger (Akinwale & Ajayi, 2022). This theory also helps in understanding how misinformation can make people focus on harmful or divisive issues, which can damage national peace and unity. Agenda-Setting Theory further helps us see misinformation as not just a media problem, but also a threat to good governance and peace in Nigeria.

Empirical Review

Okoro and Nwafor (2021) examined fake news and political instability in Nigeria, using the 2019 general elections as a case study. The population of the study comprised registered voters and media consumers across Nigeria. A sample of 400 respondents was drawn from the six geopolitical zones using structured questionnaires and interview guides as instruments. Their findings revealed that fake news significantly contributed to public confusion, heightened ethnic tensions, and voter apathy during the elections. The study concluded that misinformation has become a manipulative tool in the hands of political actors and interest groups. The study recommended that media monitoring should be intensified by regulatory agencies, while media literacy campaigns and pre-publication fact-checking practices should be adopted by journalists to curb the spread of fake news. Akinwale and Ajayi (2022) investigated media misinformation and democratic development in Nigeria. The study targeted media practitioners and political analysts in Lagos and Abuja, with a purposive sample of 60 participants comprising 40 journalists and 20 political experts. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and interview. The findings indicated that the circulation of unverified political content and sensational headlines undermines democratic development, erodes public trust in electoral institutions, and incites unrest during election periods. The study concluded that unchecked media misinformation weakens the credibility of Nigeria's democracy and called for the establishment of fact-checking units in media houses. They further recommended government support for independent media regulators and the enforcement of sanctions on media organisations that propagate fake news. Udeze and Chukwuma (2023) explored digital media, misinformation, and political polarisation in Nigeria using content analysis and an online survey design. The population of the study comprised social media users aged 18 to 50 across Southeast Nigeria. A sample of 300 respondents was drawn from Enugu, Anambra, and Imo States, and data were gathered through online questionnaires as well as an analysis of 100 political Facebook posts. The study found that social media platforms especially Facebook and WhatsApp were primary channels through which political misinformation spread. The analysed content was found to exaggerate ethnic and religious divides, further fuelling political polarisation. The

researchers concluded that misinformation significantly contributes to social division and undermines civic trust. Based on their findings, they recommended the inclusion of digital media education in school curricula and the promotion of digital literacy among Nigerian youth to encourage critical engagement online. Ibrahim and Musa (2020) examined the impact of online misinformation on electoral violence in Northern Nigeria. The study focused on residents of Kaduna and Kano States, with a purposive sample of 200 respondents selected from two senatorial districts. The researchers collected data through focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. Their findings showed that false and provocative messages shared online before and after elections incited tensions and contributed to violent protests in the region. Inflammatory narratives targeting ethnic and religious groups were particularly effective in mobilising youth for violence. The study concluded that online misinformation has a direct and dangerous link to electoral violence and political instability. The study recommended a collaborative approach involving media stakeholders, community leaders, and security agencies to monitor and respond swiftly to misinformation during electoral seasons.

Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design to collect and analyse data on public perceptions of media misinformation and its effects on political stability in Niger State Nigeria. The population of the study was 1200 comprising of media professionals, academicians, political analysts, and the general public across the three zones of Niger State. A sample size of 200 respondents were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation and demographics. The instrument used in data collection was structured questionnaire titled: Challenges of Media Misinformation and Political Stability Questionnaire (CMMPSQ). The instrument was validated by experts in Department of Political Science, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai. Reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach's alpha which yielded a coefficient of 0.88. Mean (X), standard deviation (SD) were utilized to answer the research questions, while inferential statistics, t-test was utilized in testing the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Result and Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1: What are the sources of media misinformation in Niger State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Responses on the sources of media misinformation in Niger State, Nigeria

S/N	Impact	Mean	St. Dev.	Remarks
1	Social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp) are major sources of misinformation.	3.66	0.85	Accepted

S/N	Impact	Mean	St. Dev.	Remarks
2	Traditional media outlets (e.g., radio, newspapers) occasionally spread false or biased information.	2.66	0.54	Accepted
3	Politicians and political parties are sources of media misinformation during election periods.	2.77	0.59	Accepted
4	Misinformation in Niger State is often spread by individuals seeking attention or influence.	3.25	0.78	Accepted
5	Low media literacy among the public contributes to the spread of misinformation.	2.66	0.54	Accepted
6	Misinformation is sometimes spread deliberately by interest groups to create confusion.	3.12	0.62	Accepted
7	Government agencies are not transparent enough, which leads to speculation and misinformation.	3.25	0.78	Accepted
	Cluster Mean	3.05	0.67	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 which focused on the sources of media misinformation in Niger State, Nigeria indicates that all the 7 items recorded mean score above the cut-off mean score of 2.50. The table also recorded cluster mean of 3.05 and standard deviation of 0.67. The table further indicates all the respondent shared the same opinion on the sources of media misinformation in Niger State, Nigeria. The interpretation above indicates that Social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp) are major sources of misinformation, traditional media outlets (e.g., radio, newspapers) occasionally spread false or biased information, politicians and political parties are sources of media misinformation during election periods, misinformation in Niger State is often spread by individuals seeking attention or influence, low media literacy among the public contributes to the spread of misinformation, misinformation is sometimes spread deliberately by interest groups to create confusion, Government agencies are not transparent enough, which leads to speculation and misinformation.

Research Question 2: What is the impact of misinformation on political stability and public trust in Niger State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Responses on the impact of misinformation on political stability and public trust in Niger State, Nigeria

S/N	Impact	Mean	St. Dev.	Remarks
1	Misinformation undermines public trust in government institutions.	3.25	0.78	Accepted
2	Misinformation does not incite political violence and unrest in Niger State.	2.10	0.08	Rejected

S/N	Impact	Mean	St. Dev.	Remarks
3	False news about elections reduces voter turnout and participation.	3.77	0.91	Accepted
4	Misinformation damages the credibility of the media.	3.12	0.62	Accepted
5	Persistent misinformation creates ethnic and religious tensions.	3.25	0.78	Accepted
6	Public fear and panic are often caused by the spread of false political information.	3.12	0.62	Accepted
7	Misinformation disrupts peaceful coexistence and community trust.	3.66	0.85	Accepted
	Cluster Mean	3.18	0.66	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 2 which focused on the impact of misinformation on political stability and public trust in Niger State, Nigeria indicates that 6 items out of the the seven items recorded mean score above the cut-off mean score of 2.50. The table also recorded cluster mean of 3.18 and standard deviation of 0.66. The table further indicates that all the respondent shared the same opinion on the impact of misinformation on political stability and public trust in Niger State, Nigeria. The interpretation above indicates that misinformation undermines public trust in government institutions, misinformation does not incite political violence and unrest in Niger State, false news about elections reduces voter turnout and participation, misinformation damages the credibility of the media, persistent misinformation creates ethnic and religious tensions, public fear and panic are often caused by the spread of false political information, and misinformation disrupts peaceful coexistence and community trust.

Research Question 3: What are the strategies for curbing misinformation and promoting political stability in Niger State, Nigeria?

Table 3: Responses on the strategies for curbing misinformation and promoting political stability in Niger State, Nigeria

S/N	Impact	Mean	St. Dev.	Remarks
1	Media literacy programs should be implemented in schools and communities.	3.12	0.62	Accepted
2	Government should enforce stricter penalties for spreading false information.	2.66	0.54	Accepted
3	Social media companies should monitor and remove fake news more proactively.	2.77	0.59	Accepted

S/N	Impact	Mean	St. Dev.	Remarks
4	Citizens should be encouraged to verify news before sharing it.	3.12	0.62	Accepted
5	Political actors should be held accountable for sharing false information.	2.66	0.54	Accepted
6	Community leaders should help educate people about the dangers of misinformation.	3.66	0.85	Accepted
7	Training journalists on ethical reporting can help reduce misinformation.	2.66	0.54	Accepted
	Cluster Mean	2.95	0.61	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 3 which focused on the strategies for curbing misinformation and promoting political stability in Niger State, Nigeria indicates that all the seven items recorded mean score above the cut-off mean score of 2.50. The table also recorded cluster mean of 2.95 and standard deviation of 0.61. The table further indicates all the respondent shared the same opinion on the on the strategies for curbing misinformation and promoting political stability in Niger State. The interpretation above indicates that media literacy programs need to be implemented in schools and communities, government need to enforce stricter penalties for spreading false information, social media companies need to monitor and remove fake news more proactively, citizens should be encouraged to verify news before sharing it, political actors should be held accountable for sharing false information, community leaders should help educate people about the dangers of misinformation and training journalists on ethical reporting can help reduce misinformation.

H_{01}: There is no significant difference between the mean response of male and female respondents on the sources of media misinformation in Niger State, Nigeria

Table 4: Summary of t-test analysis on the sources of media misinformation in Niger State, Nigeria

Variables	No	Mean	SD	Df	t-cal	t-tab	l. sig	Remarks
Male	136	3.25	0.69					
Female	64	3.20	0.61	198	0.51	1.91	05	Not Sig.

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4 show that the calculated t-value of 0.51 at 198 degrees of freedom and at 0.05 level of significance is less than the critical value of 1.91. This shows that there is no significant difference in the mean response of male and female respondents on the sources of media misinformation in Niger State, Nigeria. Therefore, the null hypothesis

which states that there is no significant difference between the mean response of male and female respondents on the sources of media misinformation in Niger State, Nigeria was accepted.

H_{02}: There is no significant difference between the mean response of male and female respondents on the impact of misinformation on political stability and public trust in Niger State, Nigeria.

Table 5: Summary of t-test analysis on the impact of misinformation on political stability and public trust in Niger State, Nigeria.

Variables	No	Mean	SD	Df	t-cal	t-tab	l.sig	Remarks
Male	136	2.66	0.67					
Female	64	2.58	0.66	198	0.54	1.93	05	Not Sig.

Source: Field Survey, 2025hh

Table 5 show that the calculated t-value of 0.54 at 198 degrees of freedom and at 0.05 level of significance is less than the critical value of 1.93. This shows that there is no significant difference in the mean response of male and female respondents on the impact of misinformation on political stability and public trust in Niger State, Nigeria. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted.

H_{03}: There is no significant difference between the mean response of male and female respondents on the strategies for curbing misinformation and promoting political stability in Niger State, Nigeria.

Table 6: Summary of t-test analysis on the strategies for curbing misinformation and promoting political stability in Niger State, Nigeria

Variables	No	Mean	SD	Df	t-cal	t-tab	l.sig	Remarks
Male	136	3.66	0.67					
Female	64	3.58	0.62	198	0.54	1.93	05	Not Sig.

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 6 show that the calculated t-value of 0.54 at 198 degrees of freedom and at 0.05 level of significance is less than the critical value of 1.93. This shows that there is no significant difference in the mean response of male and female respondents on the strategies for curbing misinformation and promoting political stability in Niger State, Nigeria. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Discussion of Findings

The result of research question 1 which focused on the sources of media misinformation in Niger State, Nigeria indicates that Social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp,)

are major sources of misinformation, traditional media outlets (e.g., radio, newspapers) occasionally spread false or biased information, politicians and political parties are sources of media misinformation during election periods, misinformation in Niger State is often spread by individuals seeking attention or influence, low media literacy among the public contributes to the spread of misinformation, misinformation is sometimes spread deliberately by interest groups to create confusion, Government agencies are not transparent enough, which leads to speculation and misinformation.

This finding agrees with that of Shalgan and Obateru (2025) whose finding revealed that social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp were major conduits for spreading misinformation. The finding also supported that of Onigbinde and Oloyede (2024) who concluded that traditional media outlets in Nigeria occasionally disseminate biased or false information, contributing to public skepticism and the spread of misinformation.

The result of research question 2 also indicates that misinformation undermines public trust in government institutions, misinformation does not incite political violence and unrest in Niger State, false news about elections reduces voter turnout and participation, misinformation damages the credibility of the media, persistent misinformation creates ethnic and religious tensions, public fear and panic are often caused by the spread of false political information, and misinformation disrupts peaceful coexistence and community trust. This finding is in agreement with that of Adebayo and Musa (2024) who found out that the proliferation of fake news and cloned online pages significantly undermines public trust in media and governmental institutions in Nigeria. Their study emphasized the need for robust fact-checking mechanisms to restore credibility. The finding also corroborates with that of Centre for Democracy and Development (2024) who reported that disinformation campaigns during elections are designed to discourage voter participation and undermine public trust in the electoral process.

The result of research question 3 further indicates that media literacy programs need to be implemented in schools and communities, government need to enforce stricter penalties for spreading false information, social media companies need to monitor and remove fake news more proactively, citizens should be encouraged to verify news before sharing it, political actors should be held accountable for sharing false information, community leaders should help educate people about the dangers of misinformation and training journalists on ethical reporting can help reduce misinformation. This finding concur with that of Shalgan and Obateru (2025) who advocated for the integration of media literacy education in schools and communities to empower citizens with critical thinking skills necessary to discern and challenge misinformation. It also agrees with that of Eze and Ibrahim (2022) who reported the importance of balanced regulatory frameworks that penalize the deliberate spread of false information while safeguarding freedom of expression.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, this study concluded that the major sources of media misinformation are social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp, largely due to the ease of access, speed of dissemination, and lack of regulation. Traditional media outlets also contribute occasionally through biased or inaccurate reporting. The study also concluded that misinformation has profound consequences for political stability and public trust. Media misinformation undermines citizens' trust in government institutions, reduces electoral participation, and fuels ethnic and religious tensions.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings:

i. **The government, civil society organizations, and media institutions should collaborate to establish a comprehensive media literacy and public awareness campaign** aimed at educating citizens on identifying credible information sources, verifying news before sharing, and recognizing manipulation strategies used on social media, political platforms, and traditional media.

ii. **Stakeholders at state and community levels should strengthen communication transparency and trust-building initiatives**, including regular dissemination of verified information, prompt debunking of circulating falsehoods, and establishing community feedback channels. These measures will help restore confidence in government institutions, mitigate ethnic or religious tensions, and maintain peaceful coexistence despite the presence of misinformation.

iii. **The government, social media companies, and community leaders should jointly implement a multi-layered misinformation control framework,** which includes enforcing stricter penalties for deliberate false information, supporting proactive content monitoring by digital platforms, training journalists on ethical reporting, and promoting citizen participation in fact-checking practices.

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