

## Level of Acceptance of News Stories on Social Media Platforms Among Youth in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the level of acceptance of news stories on social media platforms among youth in Nigeria following the assumption that the proliferation of news stories on social media promotes the circulation of both factual and fake news. The sample consisted of 600 youth; however, 583 validly participated in the study. The participants were equitably selected in six States in Nigeria that represented the six geo-political zones of the country. The multi-stage sampling technique was employed to evenly select the youth from the major cities/towns in the States. Data generated were analysed and presented through descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS version 20 software. Results show that the youth accepted entertainment news stories more than any other type of news stories on social media platforms. The majority of the youth considered Twitter as the most acceptable social media platform for receiving news stories in Nigeria. Findings also revealed that despite their love to read news stories on social media platforms, the youth's level of acceptance of it was low. Furthermore, the age and gender of the youth were found to directly influence their level of acceptance of news stories on social media platforms. The study concluded that the multi-dimensional inter-play that characterised the low level of acceptance of news stories on social media platforms among the youth in Nigeria does not portend ominous signs.

**Keywords:** *Acceptance, mainstream media, news stories, social media platforms, youth.*

### INTRODUCTION

News stories are the most important information about virtually all spheres of life including politics, socials, culture, lifestyles, economic affairs, and public affairs. These news stories mean different things to different people. Some may see news as any new information or story, while others may see it as timely reports which capture the interest of a reasonable number of persons. This notwithstanding, news stories are inexhaustible.

Nowadays, news stories can be obtained through mainstream media/ conventional/ traditional media like television or radio stations, newspaper or magazine organisations etc or shared through online platforms-social media tools like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Blogs etc. It took quite some time for news agencies to take on publishing their news stories online. According to Halbrooks (2019), most people already had access to the Internet during the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001, yet the television was the only medium that provided the horrendous video of the attack. However, today, the audience receives all types of news stories they want online through a wide range of social media platforms and websites. In fact, social media can now be considered as formidable instruments in disseminating information, known for breaking news stories very fast.

Finin (2005) argues that social media are tools used for communication that have Web 2.0 attributes: participation, collaboration, knowledge sharing, user-empowerment tools available on the web. For Khan and Bhatti (2012), the term social media covers a large range of websites that enable people to interact with other visitors. Studies (Lee & Ma, 2012; Schifferes, Newman, Thurman, Corney, Goker & Martin, 2014) have suggested that the

number of news shared on social media platforms keeps increasing, is dynamic and has become a phenomenon, especially as many people now participate in the production and dissemination of news in the virtual world global. The unique platform offers many benefits for users seeking news incidentally or not. Fundamentally, the simplicity of getting news through social media is priceless. Buchanan (2016) opines that the accessibility of social media across devices makes them easy to use on the go and one of the most convenient ways to read news stories. Also, news stories on social media are completely new and timely. No wonder, Alami and Kotamjani (2019) noted that the big difference between social media and other news media is their number of audience. While other news media have a limited audience, social media provides for an unlimited audience.

This notwithstanding, even though there are several benefits derived from the use of social media for news there is a tendency that social media may promote the spread of fake news. Social media has led to the proliferation of fake news (Heekeren, 2020; Boczkowski 2016; Tandoc, Lim, & Ling 2018; Waisbord, 2018; Shu, Mahudeswaran, Wang, Lee, & Liu, 2018). This can have some detrimental effects on individuals and society. For instance, during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in Nigeria, fake news was disseminated on various social media platforms stating that 200ml of Hydroxychloroquine is the treatment for the virus. The effect was many Nigerians were admitted to hospitals for poisoning amidst the pandemic. Furthermore, news on social media may be abridged. The news may not report the entire stories since most news stories online are summarised leaving news consumers with half-truths.

Negative effects of news stories on social media are also dependent on the level at which individuals accept such stories. The level of acceptance of a particular news story is influenced by various factors including the demographics of social media users. Notably, Rampersad and Althiyabi (2020) have found that age has a very significant impact on the acceptance of fake news on social media. Does it mean that a particular age group is more likely to accept news stories on social media more than the other? Some studies (Olise, 2018; Rampersad & Althiyabi, 2020) have found that individuals of different age categories use their social media for solving their needs like sourcing for news stories at different degrees. For example, the Pew Research Center found that 68% of individuals in the United States (US) use Facebook and out of this percentage, 44% receive news through the platform (Shearer & Gottfried, 2017). Shearer and Gottfried (2017) also found that in 2017, two-thirds of individuals in the US receive news through social media. In Nigeria, 24 million people, that is, 12% of the Nigerian population were active on social media and received news mainly through WhatsApp and Facebook (BBC News, 2019). However, there is hardly any empirical evidence that a given age group accepts news stories on social media more than the other, nor are there any studies that provide data on the level of acceptance of news stories on social media.

In addition, recent global events have proven that people want news stories immediately. The popularity of social media platforms as sources of news stories offers this immediacy (Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2019). Moreover, news stories on social media platforms keep increasing at an alarming rate and most times are timely. Studies (Thorsen & Jackson, 2018; Didiugwu, Elijah & Apeh, 2018) found that social media platforms are the major sources and channels for online news. Despite this recognised fact, far less is known as to whether these news stories on social media platforms are accepted among social media users. Also, how these news stories have been accepted is not ascertained.

Studies (Olise, 2018; Rampersad & Althiyabi, 2020) have discovered that individuals of different age categories use social media to receive and exchange news stories. For instance, Clark (2018) found that the majority of individuals who use social media for news are those between the ages of 18 and 24. However, none of these studies attempted to determine the level of acceptance of news stories on social media among different or a particular age group.

Many other studies (Ezeah, Asogwa & Edogor, 2013; Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2019) only considered the types of social media used as news sources. Facebook and WhatsApp have also been found in some studies (Ahad & Lim, 2014; Ernest-Ehibudu & Tusiima 2017; BBC News, 2019) to be the leading social media platforms that youth use to receive news in Nigeria. However, various other studies (Didiugwu et al., 2018; Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2019; Rampersad & Althiyabi, 2020) have discovered that using social media for news would likely cause a reaction. This reaction could lead to the acceptance or rejection of the news stories on social media platforms. Again, youth are often regarded as vulnerable in any given society and may be prone to misinformation. It has, therefore, become necessary to empirically investigate the level of acceptance of news stories on social media platforms among youth in Nigeria.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Social Media Platforms and News Stories*

Social media tool is a platform where users are both consumers and producers of online content which enables them to interact, share, and collaborate over the web. These include Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Blogs, Micro-blogging, YouTube, Twitter, Wikis, Mash-Up, Digg, Delicious Second Life, Flickr, Picasa, among others.

These social media platforms are used among other things to gather; receive and exchange news stories. Social media have enhanced the practice of citizen journalism. According to Luo and Harrison (2019), citizen journalism is the practice by which people use the Internet and social media platforms to publish their stories. The work of a citizen journalist entails the use of the Internet, smartphones, social media platforms etc by concerned citizens usually referred to as citizen journalists as well as professional journalists to circulate information and news stories online (Olise & Tebekaemi, 2014). Since social media allows everyone everywhere to participate in news production and publishing (Meadows, 2013) it has become the most readily available news channel in our globalised world (Salman & Salleh, 2020).

Most times, social media users post and exchange news in the form of videos, photos, or information of news happening where journalists cannot be present. These are posted on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, etc. as further expatiated:

- a. *Facebook*: This is an example of social media that enables users to create an account, a friend list and interact, share, and collaborate with friends on the platform. Facebook has been found to be the most used social media for news consumption (Newman, Dutton & Blank, 2012; Shearer & Gottfried, 2017). There is a dramatic use of Facebook for news, both among the audience and journalists. For instance, Newman, Dutton and Blank (2012) found that as of March 2011, news outlets websites and journalists usually relied on Facebook for 7.5% of their visits.

b. *Twitter*: is a micro-blogging site that depends on messaging service. It allows the user to send messages to friends and family quickly and easily. Twitter only asks one question, what are you doing? If an answer is 140 characters or less, thousands of people can see the answer immediately (Marion & Omotayo, 2011). Although Facebook is the most used social media for news stories production and distribution, many scholars and media study have centred on Twitter because of the openness of its platform, which has allowed easy access to data for analysis. In a study conducted by Newman, Dutton and Blank (2012) in the United Kingdom, it was found that 73% of links sent through Twitter were news already aired by conventional media. The researchers used over five million tweets in the first 100 days of the new Coalition government of 2010 in the UK and calculated a mix of frequency and reach to come up with a measure of influence. Twitter hashtags are now the trend and have become widely adopted among conventional news output. This helps to provide short updates on a given story as well as enabling more regular and constant contact with media audiences in the entire world (Newman, Dutton & Blank, 2012).

c. *Blogs*: This is another example of social media. It is a web page periodically updated that features a specific category of information, written in informal language and is managed by individuals or groups of people. They are new forms of publication (Maness, 2006). Rehman and Shafiquee (2011) considered blogs as easy forms of online publishing whereby users can make comments. Blogs are websites that maintain an on-going chronicle of information dating from the late 1990s (Cyde, 2004; Bansode & Pujar, 2008). With blogs, gate-keeping has become gate-watching (Bruns, 2005). Professional and citizen journalists and commentators watch the gates of newsworthy organisations whose information is relevant to their specific interests. These 'journalists' gather and report the information as soon as it is released to publish news stories and elicit comments from readers. Some mainstream journalists may follow up by getting more information from authentic sources and spokespersons to enrich their news reports. Other social media that promote the spread of news stories include YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, etc. Now that social media news stories are spreading, one should be concerned about the acceptance of these news stories on social media.

#### *Acceptance of Different Types of News Stories on Social Media Platforms*

News stories have been defined by Okwechime (2006) as new or fresh information or reports of recent events. News must also be topical, up-to-date, important, unusual, current and significant. It is an impersonal, objective, factual and accurate report of an event to inform, educate and/or entertain the audience of the medium. Nwanne (2016) adds that news stories may be seen as a fair and accurate account, in the mass media of the important facts of a timely happening of interest, or impact, to a large chunk of the audience. Nwanne (2016) says that the view of the news stories must come through the media on which social media is an example. Whatever happens to prominent individuals becomes news. Notably, there are different types of news stories. These cut across sports news, breaking news stories, political news stories, entertainment news, health-related news stories, crime stories, and education news stories. These stories are all found on social media.

Social media have been found to produce timely news stories. The role of social media is highly significant for breaking news. Specifically, Martin (2018) notes that social media has become the main source of news online with more than 2.4 billion Internet users, nearly 64.5 per cent receiving breaking news from Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat, and Instagram

instead of mainstream media/conventional media. Could it mean that such breaking news on social media platforms is believed and accepted? Acceptance is used to connote a multidimensional attitude which leads to the gratification individual users derive. It consists of an effective as well as a rational-cognitive (e.g., perceived usefulness) component and is an antecedent of the intention to buy and to use a system (Adell, Varhelyi & Nilsson, 2014). It is a known fact that a majority of youths use the Internet and social media like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp etc for connecting with friends, family, colleagues etc (Olise & Makka, 2013). However, there is an obvious generational usage of social media which portrays a transition from using social media just to connect with friends and relatives to sharing and receiving breaking news. Youth are commonly seen as vulnerable in society, living a fast-track lifestyle, are technology savvy and desire news stories to be timely and prompt (Kane, 2019).

News stories on social media are known to be timely. Although, the rhetoric of acceptability has not been discussed in many studies. Park (2015) argues that youth are more prone to accept and react more to negative news on politics on Twitter than any other news or social media platform. Whatever the case, news stories on social media are likely to improve in reputability and trustworthiness. Yet, concerns have been expressed with regards to the unclear personal and professional use of social media and the likelihood of getting a wrong mixture, especially among youths regardless of their age and gender. According to the American Press Institute (2015), adults aged 18 - 34 spend more time on mobile devices as they scroll through social media platforms. News is woven into the way this age group connects to the world. Everyone with the right gadget and Internet connection automatically becomes a citizen journalist and thus posts news without verification. In the process, youth may be exposed to a variety of news, including fake news.

Invariably, social media have 'broken' breaking news (Howard, 2018). Howard further explains that more efforts have been put into making news stories faster and trendier, than fulfilling journalistic responsibility to readers which are helping readers understand their world. The lack of propensity of many social media users/readers/audiences affects their verification of news shared on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other social media platforms. Inadvertently, many social media audiences accept potentially false and fake news (Okoro & Emmanuel, 2018; Apuke & Omar, 2020).

In developing countries like Nigeria, news on social media spreads like wildfire, which, most times, is difficult to curtail and correct. Given this, Wilson and Umar (2019) argue that Nigerians do not only accept news, especially politics, but also contribute to sharing the news with their friends, family, and colleagues. Thus, Wilson and Umar recommend that awareness should be created to enlighten those who use social media to avoid the spreading of unverified information. This recommendation is timely and necessary considering the discovery made by Oyero (2013) in his study that found that over 70% of Nigerian youth use news stories emanating from social media platforms despite their low believability of such news stories. The low believability may be attributed to the credibility issues usually associated with social media platforms as well as the news stories that they spread most times. This is what, to a large extent, contributed to the issue of fake news. Concerns over fake news on social media keep increasing as there has been a significant increase in the spread of fake news on social media (Syam & Nurrahmi, 2020).

### *Theoretical Constructs*

This study was anchored on the tenets of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) of Davis, Bagozzi and Warshaw (1989) and Roger's Diffusion of Innovations theory (1995). Both theories helped to explain why and how people accept news stories on social media. The main goal of the Technology Acceptance theory (TAM) is to provide explanations on factors responsible for social media acceptance among users as well as their behavioural patterns in this regard. The theory consists of two angles which are Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEU). Perceived Usefulness is defined as the potential user's subjective likelihood that the use of a certain system (e.g: single platform E-payment System) will improve his/her action and Perceived Ease of Use refers to the degree to which the potential user expects the target system to be effortless (Lai, 2017).

Diffusion of innovations theory, on the other hand, is a theory that helped explain how and at what rate news stories are spread through social media as well as the factors that may be responsible for youths' level of acceptance of news stories on social media. Baran and Davis (2020) observe that diffusion of innovation theory has four main elements that Rogers hinged the tenet of the theory on.

This study heavily draws from these elements. The first is the innovation of the new idea, which this study considered as the level of acceptance of news stories on social media platforms; the second, communication channels (social media); the third, time (Internet age) and finally a social system (youth in Nigeria).

Adoption and acceptance of News stories on social media adoption is a complex, continuous and social process. There are individual and cognitive constructs that determine the level of acceptance of news stories on social media.

### METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. This design enabled the researcher to equitably determine the level of acceptance of news stories on social media among youth, by focusing on a representative few rather than the entire population of youth in Nigeria. The population of this study was 45,876,027. This figure, which constituted the population of this study, was derived from the estimated population of youth in Nigeria according to United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (2013). The sample of this constituted 600 youth/participants, selected based on Wimmer and Dominick (2011) online sample size calculator with a 95% confidence level and 4.0% margin of error. A self-designed questionnaire was the research instrument used for this study. Cronbach's Alpha formula on Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 software was used to ascertain the internal consistency of the instrument and a reliability coefficient of 0.84 was yielded.

The multi-stage sampling technique was employed in selecting those who participated in this study. Therefore, six (6) states representing the 6 geo-political zones in Nigeria formed the first sampling frame for this study. The states selected were Adamawa, Anambra, Benue, Edo, Kaduna and Lagos. The second sampling frame was the selection of the major cities/towns in each of the selected states where the participants reside in Nigeria. Thereafter, every 3rd street in each of the selected cities/towns was selected. In each of the streets, copies of the questionnaire were administered to the youths' residing/found in every 5th house in the selected streets. The 600 copies of the questionnaire were evenly administered with the help of six research assistants in the six selected states in Nigeria.

Thus, 100 copies of the questionnaire were successfully administered to the participants in the major cities/towns in each of the selected states. Mobile phone calls were made to some other participants to collect information directly from them. Only youth who claimed to have social media accounts participated in this study. However, out of the 600 copies of the questionnaire administered in this study, only 583 copies were considered valid and usable, which translates to a 97.2% response rate. Data collected were analysed using frequency counts, cross-tabulations, simple percentage, mean scores, multiple regression analysis and Pearson Chi-Square. Meanwhile, a test for the normality of data was done using the kurtosis value. This kurtosis value helped to screen data used for the study so as to ensure that they were normally distributed. The kurtosis value has to be <7 to be considered acceptable. (West, Finch & Curran, 1995). In this study, data were normally distributed since the kurtosis value of all items was within the range of -7 and 7. As for the mean score calculation, 3.00 was used as the criterion mean for this study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Socio-demographic Variables of Respondents

| Variables                    |             | Frequency | Per cent |
|------------------------------|-------------|-----------|----------|
| <b>Age in Years</b>          | 18-23years  | 64        | 11.0     |
|                              | 24-29 years | 200       | 34.3     |
|                              | 30-35 years | 319       | 54.7     |
| <b>Gender of Respondents</b> | Male        | 318       | 54.5     |
|                              | Female      | 265       | 45.5     |

Table 1 shows that the majority of the respondents were within the age bracket of 30-35 years (54.7%). This means that the youth surveyed were relatively mature and experienced. It can also be seen from Table 1 that there were more male respondents (54.5%) than females (45.5%). It could be implied that more male youth participated in this study than females.

Table 2: Types of News Stories on Social Media Platforms Youth in Nigeria Accept (n=583)

| Types of News Stories        | Strongly Agree | Agree       | Disagree    | Strongly Disagree | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|------------------------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|------|----------------|
| Political News Stories       | 208 (36.7%)    | 320 (54.9%) | 55 (9.4%)   | -                 | 3.26 | .619           |
| Religious News Stories       | 27 (4.6%)      | 373 (64.0%) | 105 (18.0%) | 78 (13.4%)        | 2.60 | .776           |
| News Stories on Health       | 268 (46.0%)    | 252 (43.2%) | 37 (6.3%)   | 26 (4.5%)         | 3.31 | .780           |
| Entertainment News Stories   | 314 (53.9%)    | 214 (36.7%) | 28 (4.8%)   | 27 (4.6%)         | 3.40 | .784           |
| News Stories on Lifestyles   | 216 (37.0%)    | 266 (45.6%) | 76 (13.0%)  | 25 (4.3%)         | 3.15 | .806           |
| News Stories on Arts/Culture | 49 (8.4%)      | 354 (60.7%) | 180 (30.9%) | -                 | 2.78 | .586           |

In this part of the study, respondents were expected to indicate the type of news stories they usually accept on social media. Most respondents either strongly agree (53.9%) or agree (36.7%) that they accept entertainment news stories. The item yielded a mean score of ( $\bar{x}$  = 3.40) and a standard deviation of .784 and is thus considered significant. Using the mean scores, other types of news stories the participants accept on social media were political news stories ( $\bar{x}$  = 3.26, Std. = .619), news stories on health ( $\bar{x}$  = 3.31, Std. = .780) and news stories on lifestyles ( $\bar{x}$  = 3.15, Std. = .806). The news stories rejected were religious ( $\bar{x}$  = 2.60, Std. = .776) and News Stories on Arts/Culture ( $\bar{x}$  = 2.78, Std. = .586).

On the other hand, in an open-ended item in the questionnaire, respondents were also asked to pinpoint one particular type of news story on social media platforms in Nigeria that they do not accept. Figure 1 illustrates their responses.

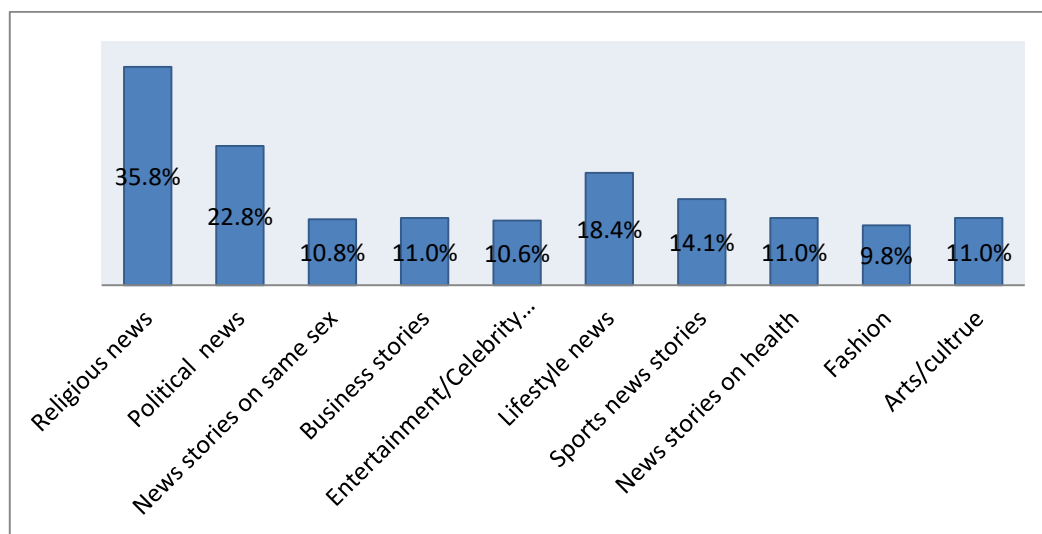


Figure 1: Bar Chart Showing the Types of News Stories on Social Media Platforms Respondents do NOT Accept

It can be seen in Figure 1 that 35.8% of the 583 respondents claimed that they do not accept religious news stories on social media platforms.

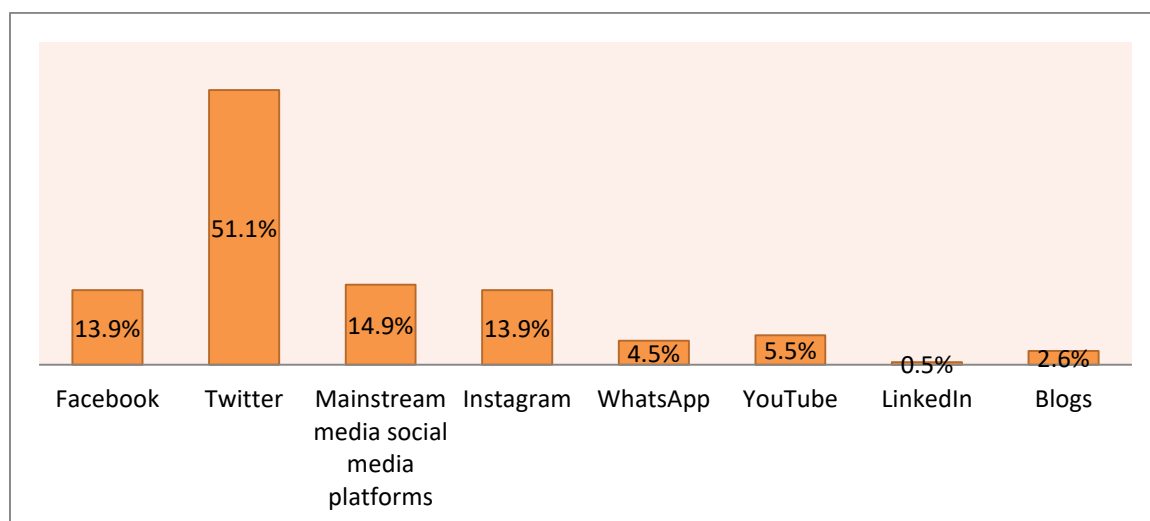


Figure 2: Bar chart showing Most Acceptable Social Media Platforms that youth in Nigeria Receive News



Most of the respondents (51.1%) consider Twitter as the most acceptable social media platform to receive news stories as portrayed in Figure 2. LinkedIn (0.5%) and blogs (2.6%) were the least acceptable social media platforms that youth receive news stories from.

Table 3: Respondents' Demographic Variables and Most Acceptable Social Media Platforms that they Receive News Stories from

| Social Media                            | Overall | Male | Female | Age (18 – 23 years ) | Age (24 – 29 years ) | Age (30-35 years) |
|---|---------|------|--------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Facebook                                | 81      | 25   | 56     | 4                    | 16                   | 61                |
| Mainstream media social media platforms | 87      | 41   | 46     | 0                    | 35                   | 52                |
| Twitter                                 | 298     | 180  | 118    | 60                   | 77                   | 161               |
| Instagram                               | 81      | 26   | 55     | 0                    | 55                   | 26                |
| WhatsApp                                | 26      | 20   | 6      | 0                    | 4                    | 22                |
| YouTube                                 | 32      | 26   | 6      | 0                    | 31                   | 1                 |
| LinkedIn                                | 3       | 3    | 0      | 0                    | 2                    | 1                 |
| Blogs                                   | 15      | 9    | 7      | 0                    | 0                    | 15                |

Having ascertained the most acceptable social media platforms youth in Nigeria receive news stories, which the participants revealed was Twitter as portrayed in Figure 2, it became imperative to cross-tabulate respondents' demographics (age and gender) and the social media types they receive news stories from. Overall, Twitter was also the social media platform accepted by the youth across the different age range as well as their gender. However, more females accepted Facebook, mainstream media social media platforms and Instagram than males. Nevertheless, more male respondents considered Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube, Blogs and LinkedIn as the most acceptable social media platform for news stories than females did. In fact, out of the 3 respondents that chose LinkedIn as the most acceptable social media platform for news stories, none was female.

Table 4: Level of Acceptance of News Stories on Social Media Platforms among Youth in Nigeria (n=583).

| Level of Acceptance  | Strongly Agree | Agree       | Disagree    | Strongly Disagree | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|------|----------------|
| You usually believe news stories on social media platforms   | 28 (4.8%)      | 239 (41.0%) | 159 (27.3%) | 157 (26.9%)       | 2.24 | .904           |
| You like to read more news stories on social media platforms | 294 (50.4%)    | 213 (36.5%) | 76 (13.0%)  | 0                 | 3.37 | .704           |
| You consider news stories on social media platforms true     | 27 (4.6%)      | 244 (41.9%) | 211 (36.2%) | 101 (17.3%)       | 2.34 | .815           |
| News stories on social media platforms are satisfying to you | 24 (4.1%)      | 323 (55.4%) | 183 (31.4%) | 53 (9.1%)         | 2.55 | .716           |
| You are addicted to news stories on social media platforms   | 116 (19.9%)    | 126(21.6%)  | 209(35.8%)  | 132(22.6%)        | 2.39 | 1.044          |

|   |            |             |             |           |      |      |
|---|------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|------|------|
| You usually share/<br>recommend news<br>stories on social media<br>platforms to friends/<br>colleagues/ family<br>members | 76 (13.0%) | 376 (64.5%) | 106 (18.2%) | 25 (4.3%) | 2.86 | .682 |
| You consider news<br>stories on social media<br>platforms as fake news  | 25(4.3%)   | 214(36.7%)  | 290(49.7%)  | 54(9.3%)  | 2.36 | .709 |

To test the acceptance level of news stories on social media among the youth, they were asked to rate items that reflected their acceptance of news stories on social media platforms as shown in Table 4. Data on the Table highlighted the following: the youth usually did not believe news stories on social media platforms ( $\bar{x}$ =2.24, Std.=.904) neither did they find news stories on social media platforms satisfying nor did they consider news stories on social media platforms as true ( $\bar{x}$ =2.34, Std.=.815). Furthermore, the items “You consider news stories on social media platforms as fake news” ( $\bar{x}$ =2.36, Std. =.709) and “You are addicted to news stories on social media platforms” ( $\bar{x}$ =2.39, Std. =1.044) were also rejected having a mean score below the 3.00 criterion means for this study. This means that youth did not consider news stories as fake nor were they addicted to them. Nonetheless, the respondents said they like to read more news stories on social media platforms ( $\bar{x}$ =3.37, Std. =.704). Since only one of the items which reflected the acceptance of news stories on social media fell above the criterion mean of this study and with an aggregate mean of 2.58, it can be deduced that the level of acceptance of news stories on social media among youth was low.

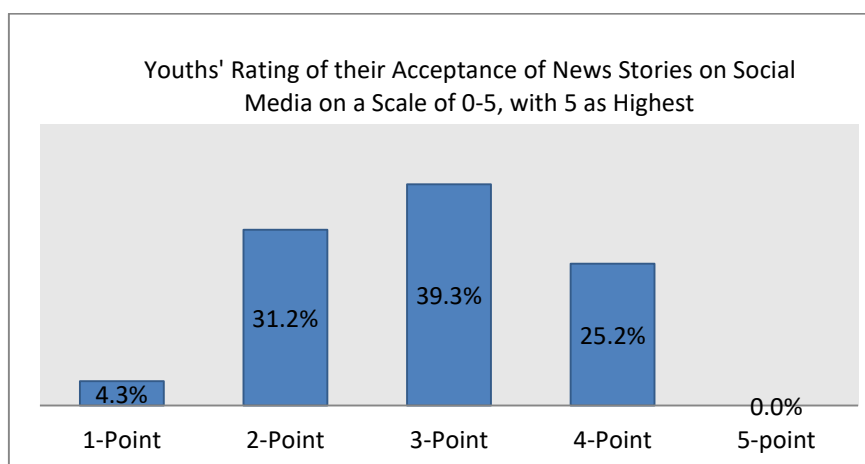


Figure 3: Bar Chart showing Youths' Ratings of how much they Accept News Stories on Social Media Platforms

Figure 3 reveals that most participants rated how much they accept news stories on social media platforms in Nigeria on a scale of 3-point. None of the participants rated their acceptance of news stories on social media platforms on the highest scale, of which was 5-point. Moreover, with an average mean score of 2.85, it can be implied that youth ratings of how much they accept news stories on social media platforms were relatively low. More so, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) in which this study was anchored on stipulates that

the perceived ease of use and usefulness of technology like social media, determines the extent of the users' acceptance. Therefore, the extent to which youth in Nigeria consider social media news as credible influences their level of acceptance of news stories on social media. Inadvertently, youths' level of acceptance of social media is a product of their perceived usefulness of social media as newsworthy media.

*Testing of Hypotheses*

H<sub>0</sub>1: The age of youth will not directly influence their level of acceptance of news stories on social media platforms in Nigeria.

Table 6: Influence of the Age of youth on the level of Acceptance of News Stories on Social Media Platforms

| ANOVA Model | Sum of Squares | df      | Mean Square | R Square | F     | Sig.  | Sum of Squares |
|-------------|----------------|---------|-------------|----------|-------|-------|----------------|
| 1           | Regression     | 4.822   | 1           | 4.822    | 0.012 | 6.803 | .009           |
|             | Residual       | 411.786 | 581         | .709     |       |       |                |
|             | Total          | 416.607 | 582         |          |       |       |                |

*P is significant at 0.05*

Multiple regression was carried out to check if the age of youth will not directly influence their level of acceptance of new stories on social media platforms in Nigeria. The Durbin-Watson test was used to ensure an independence of observations (.105). Findings statistically revealed that age significantly influences the youths' level of acceptance of news stories on social media platforms,  $F(1,581) = 6.803, p = .009, R^2 = 0.012$ . The null hypothesis was therefore rejected, which implied that the age of youth will directly influence their level of acceptance of news stories on social media platforms. The technology acceptance theory presents a strong basis for explaining the social media acceptance level among the youth regardless of their age. Similarly, a youth's general evaluation of social media represents a major element for his/her level of acceptance of news stories on the platform.

H<sub>0</sub>2: The gender of youth will not directly influence their level of acceptance of news stories on social media platforms in Nigeria

Table 7: Influence of the gender of youth on the Level of Acceptance of News Stories on Social Media Platforms

|                              |        | Rate news stories on social media platforms on a scale of 0–5 with 5 as the highest |             |                           |              |
|------------------------------|--------|---|-------------|---------------------------|--------------|
|                              |        | 1   | 2           | 3                         | 4            |
| <b>Gender of Respondents</b> | Male   | 25<br>7.9%  | 99<br>31.1% | 74<br>23.3%               | 120<br>37.7% |
|                              | Female | 0<br>0.0%   | 83<br>31.3% | 155<br>58.5%              | 27<br>10.2%  |
|                              |        | <b>Pearson Chi-Square=109.985</b>   |             | <b>df= 3 p value=.000</b> |              |

A chi-square test was run to ascertain whether the gender of youths will not directly influence their acceptance of news stories on social media platforms. Data in Table 7 shows that the relations between the variables were significant,  $\chi^2(3, N=583) = 109.985, p = .000$ . Female youth (58.5%) are more likely than male youths (23.3%) to accept news stories on

social media. Thus, the null hypothesis, “gender of youth will not directly influence their level of acceptance of news stories on social media platforms in Nigeria” was rejected. The implication of this is that the gender of youth will directly influence their level of acceptance of news stories on social media platforms. This finding somewhat contradicts with the results of Rampersad and Althiyabi (2020), which showed that age and not gender or education influence the acceptance of news stories on social media platforms.

The findings in this study also suggests that a cumulative majority percentage of youth accept entertainment news stories more than any other type of news stories on social media platforms. The youth were also found to accept political news stories, news stories on health and news stories on lifestyles. However, most of the youth did not accept religious news stories and news stories on arts/culture on social media platforms. By this, it can be implied that the youth agreed that they indeed receive news stories on social media platforms, but they accept more entertainment news stories than any other type of news stories on social media platforms. The outcome of this result largely agrees with Didiugwu, Elijah and Apeh, (2018), who found that social media platforms were considered as dependable sources of news stories among users in Nigeria.

As for the most acceptable social media platform that youth receive news stories from, it was revealed by most of the youth that Twitter was the most acceptable social media platform. This reaffirms a study by Park (2015) which discovered that young people (youth) are more prone to react and accept news stories on Twitter than any other social media platforms. Moreover, this may also be because Twitter usually conspicuously verifies accounts especially that of public personalities with a blue badge in the interest of their large followers. Hence, news stories on Twitter may be considered authentic by youth or readers. However, in another perspective, this finding is somewhat not in consonance with Newman, Dutton and Blank, (2012) with Shearer and Gottfried (2017), in which results indicated that Facebook was the most used social media for news consumption. Meanwhile, LinkedIn and blogs were found to be the least acceptable social media platforms among the youth.

This finding could also be an indication that youth expect better quality news stories on other social media like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and other platforms least accepted by them in this study. This finding corroborates with Welbers and Opgenhaffen (2019), which found that presentation of news stories on social media platforms is important as it has the ability to encourage wide readership.

On the level of acceptance of news stories on social media, most of the youth usually did not believe news stories on social media platforms, neither did they find news stories on social media platforms satisfying or consider news stories on social media platforms as true. It was also discovered that the youth did not consider news stories on social media platforms as fake news, nor were they addicted to them. This means that even though youth did not usually believe all news stories on social media platforms, they also do not consider them as fake news. Findings also show that the level of acceptance of news stories on social media platforms among the youth was low as the items reflecting acceptance yielded an aggregate mean of 2.58 which was below the 3.00 criterion mean of this study.

The variance in these findings can largely be attributed to the different socio-geographical locations the different studies were conducted. Whatever the case may be, one thing is certain, that is, demographic variables play a major role in how news stories on social media platforms are accepted by those who are exposed to such news stories.

## CONCLUSION

This study has been able to establish an evidence-based investigation of the level of acceptance of news stories on social media platforms among youth in Nigeria. Statistical analysis revealed that the level of acceptance of news stories on social media platforms among the youth was low. It was also established that acceptance of news stories on social media platforms among the youth differs based on the type of news story and the particular social media platform. For instance, entertainment and political news stories were the news stories accepted among the youth, while Twitter was the most acceptable social media platform for them.

Similarly, this study offered wider implications on the level of acceptance of news stories on social media platforms in Nigeria and the world in general. For the youth, this study raises a thoughtful claim based on empirical evidence that their age and gender directly influences their level of acceptance of news stories on social media platforms in Nigeria. Based on empirical evidence, it is evident that the multi-dimensional inter-play that characterised the low level of acceptance of news stories on social media platforms among the youth in Nigeria is not suggestive of an ominous sign. Also, if all the news stories that circulate on social media platforms in Nigeria can be based on facts and verifiable claims; the level of acceptance of such news stories can be significantly increased among those exposed to such news stories irrespective of their age and gender. Nonetheless, the use of social media platforms for spreading news stories would certainly continue to evolve no matter the acceptance level of people towards such stories. As a way forward, the following recommendations were provided.

Mainstream media organisations in Nigeria need to create more social media platforms for their news stories especially in this era where virtually everyone sources news stories on social media platforms. This would help boost the ratings of such news stories and the social media platforms as well as positively promote the general image of the media organisation globally.

Social media users should be wary of how they spread unverified news stories online especially on Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Blogs, etc. This is because it is far better to spread factual news fast than to spread false news stories faster. The use of and reliance on Twitter is largely encouraged. This may be because Twitter conspicuously verifies the accounts especially those of public personalities with the blue badge in the interest of their large followers. This unique feature of Twitter is capable of discouraging imposters and those with ulterior motives of circulating fake and false news stories on social media platforms posing as another person.

Since the use of social media platforms for spreading and sharing news stories would continue to evolve globally whether people accept the news or not, there is a need for the regular sensitisation of users, especially youth in Nigeria. Therefore, government at all levels in Nigeria, governmental and non-governmental organisations and institutions of learning should come up with programmes that serve as sensitisation tools on how not to abuse and misuse the spreading and sharing of news stories on social media platforms.

## BIODATA

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