



Media Coverage of Covid-19 and Readers' Perception of Credibility of Fake News

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Abstract: Fake news is not new, nevertheless, new communication technologies have allowed for new ways to produce, distribute, and consume fake news which makes it harder to differentiate what information to trust and it is especially evident in this period of COVID-19. This study investigates the online media coverage of COVID-19 and Readers' Perceptions of source credibility of fake news. The objectives of the study are: to find out the level of infiltration of COVID-19 fake news vide the Nigerian online news space and to ascertain how this has affected the credibility of Nigerian online Newspapers by its readers. The study employed the Source Credibility theory, and the Theory of Rumor Transmission. The study method was a survey method with an administration of four hundred copies of the questionnaire. 383 questionnaires were collected and found useable for analysis, representing 96.14% of the administered instrument, and ideal enough for the generalization of the study's findings to a large population. This study therefore recommended that journalists should strictly adhere to the essentials of news reportage and dissemination which are accuracy and truthfulness to maintain quality in the media while paying paramount attention to media and information literacy and new fact-checking services.

Keywords: COVID-19; Online newspapers; Perception; Credibility; Fake News

I. Introduction

As news reading on social media becomes more and more popular, fake news becomes a major issue concerning the public and government (Wang et al, 2018). It is now evident that though there is no total erosion of the traditional media, there is, however, a digitalization of it which has brought the social media into spotlight. The advent of the social media has today subjected the average 21st century reader to getting his news through online newspapers and online sources. Fake news is identified as a phenomenon in which news or narratives have been produced to intentionally deceive or mislead a targeted audience. Fake news has overtime evolved through plenty of forms: word of mouth, printed material, radio, TV and film, digital media. (Aondover et al., 2025). Social media have proved to be an effective distribution channels for false information. Not disregarding the tremendous technological shift in the media space from traditional to what we now call the new media, this shift has also opened the media space for all sorts of misinformation and disinformation. Fake news is not novel however, it is now worrisome because of social media popularity which permits interaction and diffusion of new ideas.

False information dressed as news has created serious concerns in many countries (Aondover et al., 2022). Some researchers have called it information pollution, media manipulation (Warwick & Lewis, 2017), or information warfare (Airaoje et al., 2024). The emergence of the novel coronavirus in December of 2019 has quickly led to a global pandemic claiming hundreds of thousands of deaths worldwide already. The most worrisome in recent months is the circulation of false content in this period of the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak. This recent outbreak of the world's viral disease, the COVID-19

Pandemic, has greatly illuminated the influence these misinformation and fake news has had on the credibility of the Nigerian online media.

Misinformation about COVID-19 has proliferated widely on social media, ranging from peddling of fake “cures”, such as gargling with lemon or salt water to injecting yourself with bleach (World Health Organization, 2020), to false conspiracy theories that the virus was bioengineered in a lab in Wuhan, or that the 5G cellular network is causing or exacerbating symptoms of COVID-19. The Corona Virus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic has not only caused significant challenges for health systems all over the globe but also fueled the surge of numerous rumors, hoaxes, and misinformation, regarding the etiology, outcomes, prevention, and cure of the disease. Such spread of misinformation is masking healthy behaviors and promoting erroneous practices that increase the spread of the virus and ultimately result in poor physical and mental outcomes among individuals (Airaoje et al., 2023). While fake news is a global problem, it is especially so in Nigeria – where false information on social media can quickly end up on legitimate news website. Majority of the Nigerian reading population stay on the online/social media platform where like-mindedness thrives and this has led to a plethora of unverified sources spreading fake news and misinformation. From an objective lens, the media which supposedly tells “the gospel truth” have left a lot confused on what the truth is now, thus damaging its credibility as well as its “truth telling” nature. This “truth telling” nature of the media has greatly diminished causing this to not only affect the media itself but also the audience that pay attention to the media. It would not be too much to say that the majority lack confidence in the online media today.

We now live in a digital world, surrounded by a deluge of information and with this came the fast rising threat of “Fake news” which has dominated the media space like a malignant tumor slowly dwindling the accuracy of the Nigerian online newspapers. The Nigerian Online Newspapers are too much of an integral part of the social fabric for it to suffer such incompetence and erosion as a result of “Fake news”. This study intends to analyze these problems and proffer the necessary solutions. It also appeals to communications scholars and practitioners alike as well as to the general public because what affects the media being an important fabric of the society ultimately affects us all.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to ascertain the influence of fake news on readers’ perception on the credibility of Nigerian online newspapers, using coverage of the COVID-19 as a study. The specific objectives however are:

1. To examine the extent to which credibility of the Nigerian online newspapers have been affected vide the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. To determine how frequently fake news through the online newspapers are reported in the country.
3. To examine if readers have full assurance in the COVID-19 pandemic news disseminated by the Nigerian Online Newspapers.
4. To find out the effect of Fake news on the target audience (the Nigerian citizens).
5. To discover the perception of the readers on the credibility of news reportage of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigerian Online newspapers.

II. Review of Literatures

2.1 Fake News: Origin and Progression through different Eras

Fake news is nothing new. The origins of fake news date back to before the printing press. Rumor and false stories have probably been around as long as humans have lived in groups where power matters. Until the printing press was invented, news was usually transferred from person to person via word of mouth. The ability to have an impact on what people know is an asset that has been prized for many centuries (Airaoje et al., 2024).

Pre-Printing Press Era: Forms of writing inscribed on materials like stone, clay, and papyrus appeared several thousand years ago. The information in these writings was usually limited to the leaders of the group (emperors, pharaohs, Incas, religious and military leaders, and so on). Controlling information gave some people power over others and has probably contributed to the creation of most of the hierarchical cultures we know today. Knowledge is power. Those controlling knowledge, information, and the means to disseminate information became group leaders, with privileges that others in the group did not have. In many early state societies, remnants of the perks of leadership remain—pyramids, castles, lavish household goods, and more. Some of the information that has survived, carved in stone or baked on tablets or drawn in pictograms, extolled the wonder and power of the leaders. Often these messages were reminders to the common people that the leader controlled their lives.

Others were created to insure that an individual leader would be remembered for his great prowess, his success in battle, or his great leadership skills. Without means to verify the claims, it's hard to know whether the information was true or fake news. In the sixth century AD, Procopius of Caesarea (500–ca. 554 AD), the principal historian of Byzantium, used fake news to smear the Emperor Justinian. While Procopius supported Justinian during his lifetime, after the emperor's death Procopius released a treatise called *Secret History* that discredited the emperor and his wife. As the emperor was dead, there could be no retaliation, questioning, or investigations. Since the new emperor did not favor Justinian, it is possible the author had a motivation to distance himself from Justinian's court, using the stories (often wild and unverifiable) to do so.

Post-Printing Press Era: The invention of the printing press and the concurrent spread of literacy made it possible to spread information more widely. Those who were literate could easily use that ability to manipulate information to those who were not literate. As more people became literate, it became more difficult to mislead by misrepresenting what was written. As literacy rates increased, it eventually became economically feasible to print and sell information. This made the ability to write convincingly and authoritatively on a topic a powerful skill. Leaders have always sought to have talented writers in their employ and to control what information was produced. Printed information became available in different formats and from different sources. Books, newspapers, broadsides, and cartoons were often created by writers who had a monetary incentive. Some were paid by a publisher to provide real news (Aliough et al., 2023).

Others, it seems, were paid to write information for the benefit of their employer. In 1522, Italian author and satirist Pietro Aretino wrote wicked sonnets, pamphlets, and plays. He self-published his correspondence with the nobility of Italy, using their letters to blackmail former friends and patrons. If those individuals failed to provide the money he required, their indiscretions became public. He took the Roman style of *pasquino*—anonymous lampooning—to a new level of satire and parody. While his writings were satirical (not unlike

today's Saturday Night Live satire), they planted the seeds of doubt in the minds of their readers about the people in power in Italy and helped to shape the complex political reality of the time. Aretino's pasquinos were followed by a French variety of fake news known as the canard. The French word "canard" can be used to mean an unfounded rumor or story. Canards were rife during the seventeenth century in France. One canard reported that a monster, captured in Chile, was being shipped to France. This report included an engraving of a dragon-like creature.

During the French Revolution the face of Marie Antoinette was superimposed onto the dragon. The revised image was used to disparage the queen. The resulting surge in unpopularity for the queen may have contributed to her harsh treatment during the revolution. Jonathan Swift complained about political fake news in 1710 in his essay "The Art of Political Lying." He spoke about the damage that lies can do, whether ascribed to a particular author or anonymous: "Falsehood flies, and truth comes limping after it, so that when men come to be undeceived, it is too late; the jest is over, and the tale hath had its effect."⁵ Swift's descriptions of fake news in politics in 1710 are remarkably similar to those of writers of the twenty-first century. American writer Edgar Allan Poe in 1844 wrote a hoax newspaper article claiming that a balloonist had crossed the Atlantic in a hot air balloon in only threedays.⁶ His attention to scientific details and the plausibility of the idea caused many people to believe the account until reporters failed to find the balloon or the balloonist. The story was retracted four days after publication. Poe is credited with writing at least six stories that turned out to be fake news (Hile et al., 2022).

Mass Media Era: Father Ronald Arbuthnott Knox did a fake news broadcast in January 1926 called "Broadcasting the Barricades" on BBC radio.⁸ During this broadcast Knox implied that London was being attacked by Communists, Parliament was under siege, and the Savoy Hotel and Big Ben had been blown up. Those who tuned in late did not hear the disclaimer that the broadcast was a spoof and not an actual news broadcast. This dramatic presentation, coming only a few months after the General Strike in England, caused a minor panic until the story could be explained. This fake news report was famously followed by Orson Welles's War of the Worlds broadcast in 1938. The War of the Worlds was published as a book in 1898, but those who did not read science fiction were unfamiliar with the story (Kurfi et al., 2021). The presentation of the story as a radio broadcast again caused a minor panic, this time in the United States, as there were few clues to indicate that reports of a Martian invasion were fictional.

While this broadcast was not meant to be fake news, those who missed the introduction didn't know that. On November 3, 1948, the Chicago Daily Tribune editors were so certain of the outcome of the previous day's presidential election that they published the paper with a headline stating, "Dewey Defeats Truman." An iconic picture shows President Truman holding up the newspaper with the erroneous headline. The caption for the picture quotes Truman as saying, "That ain't the way I heard it."¹⁰ The paper, of course, retracted the statement and reprinted the paper with the correct news later in the day. This incident is one reason that journalists at reputable news outlets are required to verify information a number of times before publication. It is easy to see that fake news has existed for a long time. From the few examples described above, the effects of fake news have ranged widely, from amusement to death. Some authors of fake news probably had benign motivations for producing it. Others appear to have intended to harm individuals, families, or governments. The intended and unintended consequences of fake news of the pre-internet era were profound and far

reaching for the time. As the means of spreading fake news increased, the consequences became increasingly serious.

Internet Era: In the late twentieth century, the internet provided new means for disseminating fake news on a vastly increased scale. When the internet was made publicly available, it was possible for anyone who had a computer to access it. At the same time, innovations in computers made them affordable to the average person. Making information available on the internet became a new way to promote products as well as make information available to everyone almost instantly. Scholars have conceptualized fake news in many ways, but with almost the same meaning. McGonagle in Msughter and Phillips (2020) described fake news as a deliberately fabricated information that is circulated to misinform and deceive individuals into accepting lies or uncertain verifiable facts. Based on this definition, there is a divergence between the creation and dissemination of fake contents on social media platforms. By implication, fake news sharing may be unintentional, but its creation could be highly intentional (Msughter et al., 2022). This view is related to the issue of COVID-19, where people may reshare false content with the intention of helping. Recent research disclosed that people shared misinformation related to the Ebola virus with the aim of proffering solution as well as warning others.

Since the sharing of information has become easy on social media, people turn to this platform to update family members, acquaintances and others on essential issues that potentially affect their lives. The more people share news, the more likely they share fake news if they are not vigilant of the content. According to Pulido et al. (2020), an obvious act of false information dissemination has been reported in the field of health. The spread of falsified health news could jeopardize the safety of people, suggesting that people could be lured into taking some false precautionary measure that leads to severe health damage (Pulido et al., 2020).

2.2 Fake News and the Covid-19

Research into the proliferation of false news is emerging in the age of COVID-19 pandemic. Some studies have attempted to realise the connection between social media and misinformation in this era of the pandemic (Hou et al., 2020; Huynh, 2020). Recent research has shown that in recent months, the most notable fake news sharing that is deleterious to the health has been on COVID-19 pandemic (Msughter et al., 2023). This supports a growing view that false content concerning COVID-19 has become more pronounced in social media. It has also been observed that many people now seek information online that they perceive to be helpful, leading to a wide range of fake news consumption and sharing. Pennycook et al. in Msughter et al., (2023) observed that since the COVID-19 emerged, there has been fake news proliferated online, which suggest preventive cures and tips on how to cope with the virus.

Similarly, Lampos et al. in Namadi and Aonover (2020) found that the flurry of fabricated information on the pandemic has made many to believe that they could get cured using salty water, drinking bleach, and eating oregano. The authors also concluded that many believed the Chinese government had created the virus. While others have also been made to understand that the US government created the virus to undermine the Chinese government. This fake news proliferated not only create hate on the Chinese race but also put the health of people at risk as well as undermine the efforts of government in implementing preventive measures. Similar research conducted by Hou et al. in Obada et al., (2024) discovered that the more people make use of social media to obtain COVID-19 information, the more risk perception regarding the virus.

Correspondingly, Huynh (2020) found that citizens of Vietnam believed that the information on fake news related to COVID-19 is more than the official information announced by the government. Frenkelet al. in Obada et al., (2021) also found that in Taiwan, numerous posts on social media suggest that the country has witnessed a considerable number of infections, which was later found to be false. The same survey found that there was circulated fake news suggesting that the virus has infected the Taiwan President. Similar research conducted in the US found that many people disseminated false information related to the virus because they failed to reason appropriately if a content is true or not before sharing (Pennycook et al., 2020). In the context of Nigeria, which is the focus of this study, a growing number of false information about COVID-19 have been shown to flood social media (Alpert, 2020). Hassan (2020) remarked that the motivation for this fake news proliferation could be to gain online followership. For instance, there was a tweet suggesting that the Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari was sick and probably had contracted the virus. Within some hours, the tweet generated 3,300 likes and was reshared more than 2,000 times.

In other cases, sensationalist annotations by so-called “health experts” have been widely distributed. Hassan (2020) found that on March 23, 2020, an audio clip was released on WhatsApp by an alleged WHO worker, forecasting that about 45 million Nigerians would die due to the pandemic. Consistent with this finding, Sahu et al. (2020) found that some so-called experts in Nigeria are attempting to proffer false cure such as sitting in the sun and having constant sex. Others have alleged that the virus cannot harm Africans (Obada et al., 2021). None of these claims is medically proven, but they have been continuously spread among social media users in Nigeria and the world at large.

Despite the effect of false information sharing on COVID-19, empirical research on the factors that lead to fake news is less well studied. Most of the recent studies on COVID-19 has been opinion, commentary, laboratory experiment and exploratory research. Moreover, more studies have focused on understanding the virus, documenting comprehensive reports on the virus, media reports on the virus, and tackling the virus (Usman et al., 2022). Aside from investigating these areas, it should be noted that the dissemination of false news on the virus is deleterious to the human health as many individuals are now following false precautionary measures shared online (Hou et al., 2020). Generally, empirical investigation related to fake news sharing is lacking as most previous works do not have a theoretical framework or model that empirically increases our knowledge of fake news dissemination conduct on social media, either deliberately or inadvertently.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The study employed Source Credibility Theory. As the name implies, “source credibility” simply explains that a message believability is dependent on the credibility status of the sender in the minds and eyes of the receiver. The source credibility theory is an Aristotelian concept which has its root in a book titled “The Rhetoric” where Aristotle explains the three categories of Persuasion- Ethos, Logos and Pathos. Aristotle states that the “Ethos” is the most important as it plays the important role of influencing the audience thoughts and beliefs. The Source credibility theory was propounded by Hovland, Janis and Kelly (1963) and they stated that people or receivers are more likely to be persuaded when the source presents itself as credible.

Academics studies on source credibility began in the 19th century when the United States of American government sought to use propaganda to influence public opinion in

support of the World war II. Psychologist Carl Hovland and his colleagues worked on this at the War Department during the War years of 1939-1945 and then continued experimental studies on source credibility at Yale University in the post years of the 1950s. (Pate et al., 2020). The expression “source credibility” is commonly used to describe the communicator’s positive attributes that affect the recipient’s acceptance of a message, according to Ohanian (1990). The effectiveness of a communication has been commonly agreed by Schramm, Siebert and Peterson (1949) to depend, to a considerable extent, upon who delivers it. Hovland et al. had by 1953 affirmed that this deliverer would be believed if he/she is the source of the communication, not just a carrier/medium. They severally tested and confirmed that the source is more credible if he or she is well known, recognized and respected; better celebrated, such as stars and celebrities.

Hovland et al., (1953) later partitioned source credibility into Expertise and Trustworthiness, where expertise is the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions and consists of knowledge, special experience and skills (Shank, 2004) and expertise of the source relate to the product that he/she is endorsing. According to Hovland et al., (1953) trustworthiness is the degree of confidence in the communicator’s intent to communicate the assertions he/she considers most valid and consists of honesty, integrity and believability. Recent research conducted by psychologists demonstrate that a source which is distinguished as highly credible is likely to be more persuasive than low credibility sources. Information from a credible source can influence beliefs, opinion, attitudes and/or behavior internalization, which occurs when receivers accept a source influence in terms of their personal attitudes and value structures. Critics like Erdogan (1999) point out that source credibility is a vital factor in the celebrity selection process, as celebrity has been proved to have direct and significant effect on attitude and behavioral intentions.

2.4 Theory of Rumor Transmission

Rumor may be defined as an unconfirmed message passed from one person to another in face-to-face interaction that refers to an object, person, or situation rather than to an idea or theory. The American Sociologist H. Taylor Buckner (1965) notes that whether a rumor is truthful or untruthful is unimportant in studying rumor transmission (Msughter et al., 2023). The essential features of a rumor are that it is unconfirmed at the time of transmission, and that it is passed from one person to another. Buckner’s theoretical framework for rumor transmission is that individual is in one of the three orientations, situations, “sets” vis-à-vis a rumor: a critical set, he/she is capable of using “critical ability” to separate the true from the false in rumors. If an uncritical set is adopted, the person is unable to use “critical ability” to test the truth of the rumor. In the transmission set – usually found in laboratory experiments – the individual’s “critical ability” is considered to be irrelevant. Thus, in Buckner’s theory of rumor transmission, whether rumors become more or less accurate as they are passed on depends on the individual’s “set” and on the structure of the situation in which the rumors originate and spreads subsequently.

2.5 Empirical Review

Ugwanyi (2017) in his study entitled: Influence of Fake News on Public Perception of Nigeria’s Newspapers concluded that those who because of fake news are cautiously optimistic about the credibility of online newspapers were found to be slightly higher than those who have allowed incidence of fake news make them suspect reports on online newspapers as not credible. This means that fake news still poses a threat to the perception Nigerians have of reputable online newspapers. Credibility accorded the online newspaper is therefore threatened as Thiel (1998) wrote that “A recent study conducted by Georgetown

graduate student Josephine Ferrigno found that while 80 percent of 60 random newspaper readers surveyed found The New York Times to be credible, slightly less than half found The New York Times Online (which contains the same articles as the newspaper) to be credible.”

Sanusi et al., (2015, p.16) in their study entitled: ‘Changing roles in the Nigerian media industry: A study of multimedia journalism’ concluded that "the emergence of internet and its associated applications have redefined the practice of journalism. No longer are the traditional journalists the sole purveyor of information, it now has to work with the audience as they jointly scan the environment for information of interest." This may be the reason why fake news has crept into the media and this makes it more of a pressing issue to curb fake news.

From the empirical review above, these past researches did examine the presence of fake news in the media however, Sanusi et al., (2015, p.16) work did not review the public's perception neither was its focus on Nigerian online Newspapers. Ugwanyi U.S (2017) on the other hand did do these reviews but focused majorly on popular newspapers.

This study fill the gap by being the first to examine the Influence of Fake news on readers perception of the credibility of the entirety Nigerian newspapers using Covid-19 coverage as a study.

III. Research Methods

This study adopted the use of survey method to gather the required data. Kernilger (1973) defined survey research as a study on large and small population by selecting samples chosen from the desired population and to discover relative incidence, distribution and interactions. Survey is considered a rationale for this study because, it is important in sampling information from the population about their perception, opinion, attitude and behavior towards a particular subject and has the ability of its findings being generalized and quantified. This study investigates the influence of readers’ perception on the credibility of Nigerian online newspapers which makes the survey method the most appropriate for investigating the questions posed in this course of this study. The population of the study consist of 317,614 Ikeja residents in Lagos State (City Population, 2006 census). Purposive sampling was used to select the respondents. To accurately get the required selected sample size, the Taro Yamane formula using a 97% confidence level (Saxena, 2015) will be used.

$$n = \frac{N}{(1+N(e)^2)}$$

N- Population of study

K- Constant 1

e- Degree of error expected

n- sample size

$$n = \frac{N}{(1+N(e)^2)}$$

$$n = \frac{317,614}{(1+317,614(0.05)^2)}$$

$$n = \frac{317,614}{(1+317,614(0.0025))}$$

$$n = \frac{317,614}{(1+794.035)}$$

$$n = \frac{317,614}{795.035}$$

$$n = 399.4968$$

$$n = 400 \text{ (Approximate)}$$

The result shows that the study size of this study is 400.

IV. Results and Discussion

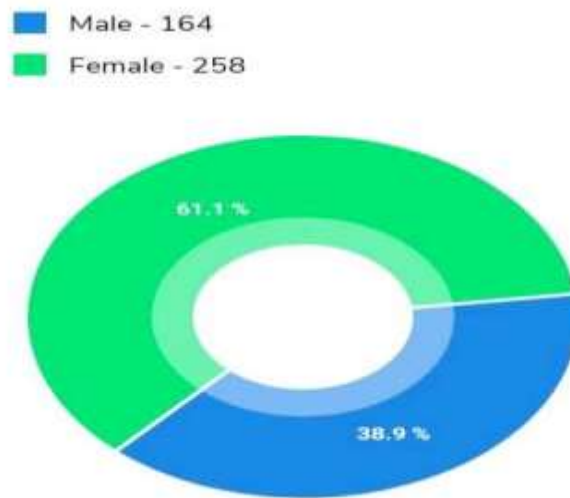


Figure 1. Gender

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Figure 1 shows that 61.1% of the respondents for this study were female while 38.9% were male. This infers that mostly females participated in the study

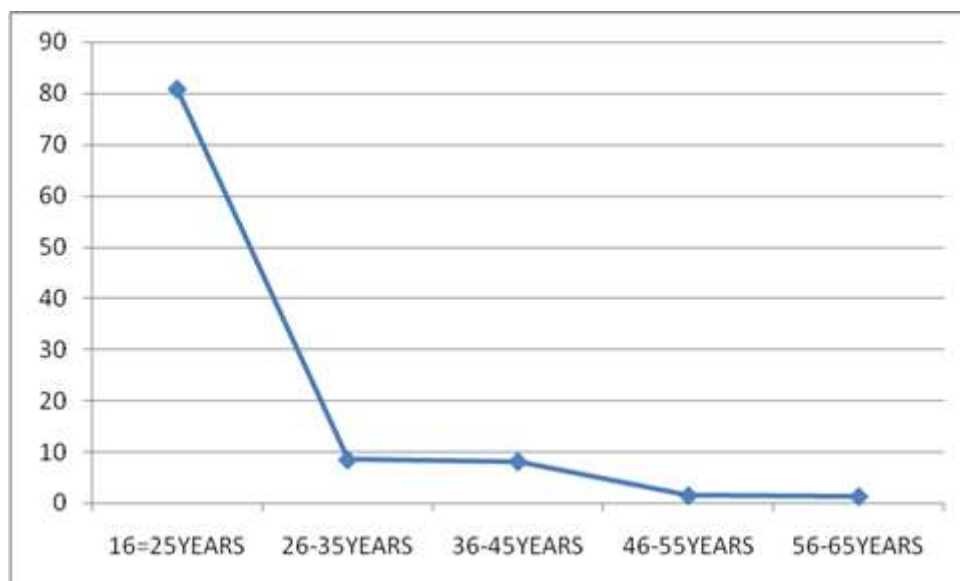


Figure 2. Age

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Fig 2 indicates that respondents age were classified into five groups: 16-25years, 26-35years, 36-45years, 46-55years and 56-76years.80.79% of the respondents fall under 16-25years, 8.41% fall under 26-35years, 8.04% were between 36and 55years,1.41% were between 46 and 55years and 1.22% were between 56- 65years. Majority of the respondents were between16 and 25 years. This age bracket consists of very active internet users.

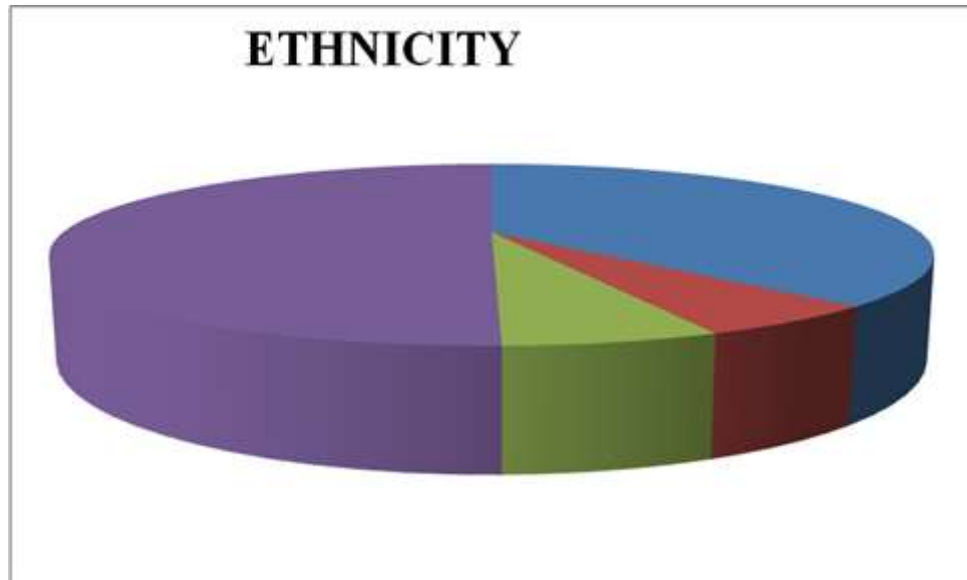


Figure 3. Ethnicity
Source: Field Survey, 2021

Figure 3 presents the ethnic affiliations of the respondents. 67.34% of the respondents were Yoruba, 13.00% represents other various ethnic groupings, 17.97 % were Ibo and 1.18% were Hausa. Majority of the respondents were Yoruba and this could be because the study was conducted among the Yoruba speaking tribe of the country.

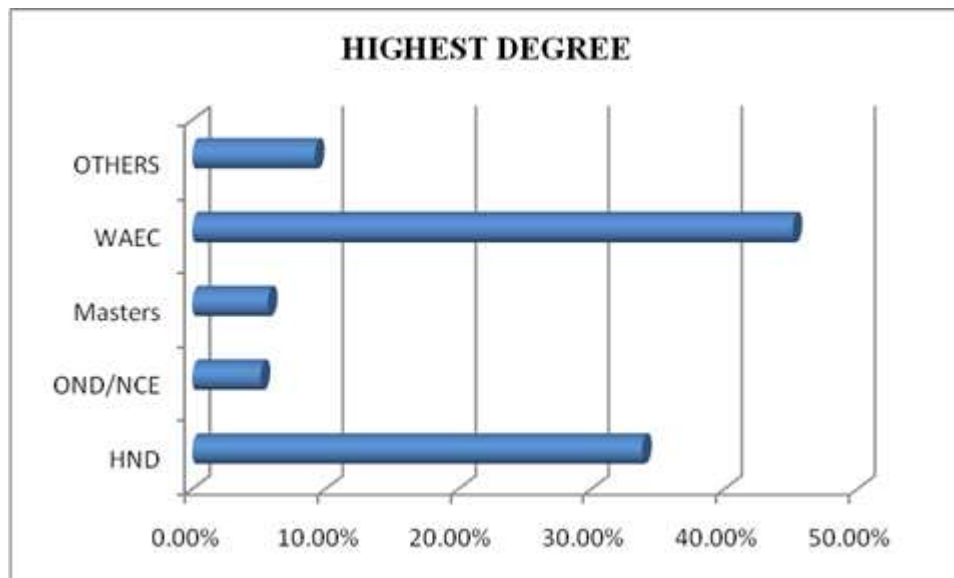


Figure 4. Highest Degree
Source: Field Survey, 2021

Figure 4 presents respondents' educational qualifications, 45.15% of the respondents possess WAEC certificates, 5.98% possess Masters degrees in various fields, 5.67% possess OND/NCE, 33.82% possess HND while 9.21% possess various other certificates. From the data analyzed, it could be inferred that majority of the respondents possess WAEC. Hence, it can be concluded that all the respondents were literate enough to answer the research questions.

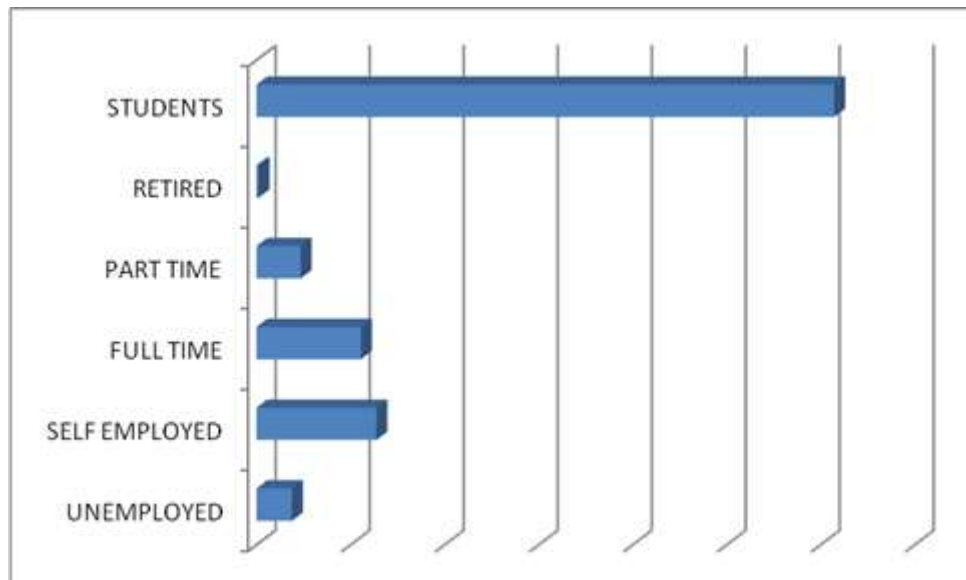


Figure 5. Employment Status
Source: FIELD SURVEY, 2021

Figure 5 presents employment information of the respondents. 61.48% of the respondents, 4.63% were unemployed, 12.76% were self-employed, 15.13% were in full-time employment, 4.73% were in part-time employment and 0.23% were retired. From the analysis done, majority of the respondents were students.

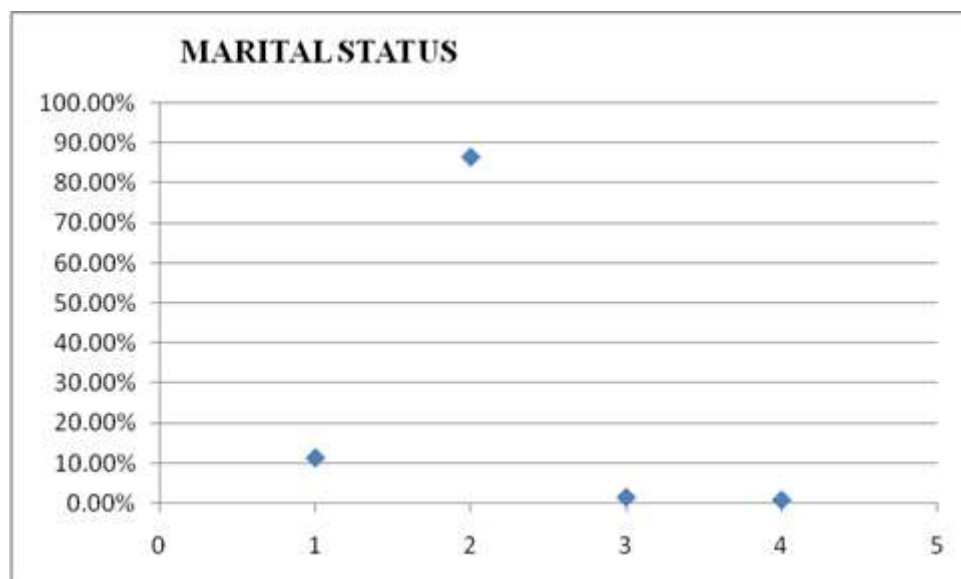


Figure 6. Marital Status
Source: Field Survey, 2021

Figure 6 presents that marital status of respondents, 86.76% of the respondents were single, 11.58% were married. 1.41% were divorced and 0.70% were co-habiting. From the analysis carried out, it was revealed that majority of the respondents were unmarried. This could be due to age as most of them are between age 16 and 25years and most of them are just graduating from the universities or just gaining employments.

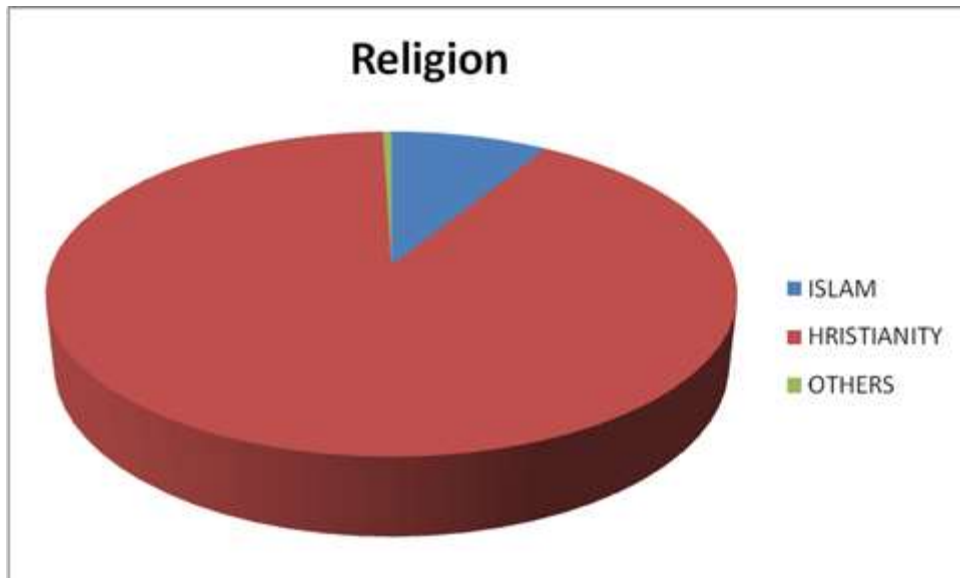


Figure 7. Religion
Source: Field Survey, 2021

Figure 7 presents information on the religion of the respondents. 90.78% were Christians, 8,74% practice Islam and 0.47% practice other types of religion. From the data analysis, majority of the respondents were Christians.

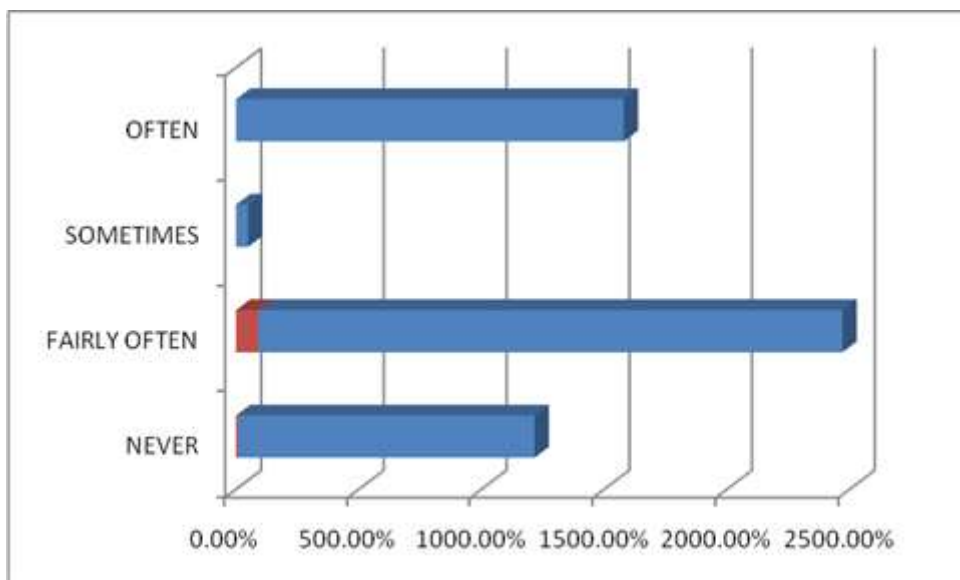


Figure 8. Readership of Nigerian Online Newspapers by respondents
Source: Field Survey, 2021

Figure 8 presents respondents' views on do you read online newspapers? 12.06% of the respondents said NEVER, 23.80% said they read online newspaper fairly often, 48.69%

said sometimes, 15.45% said often. From the data analysis, majority of the respondents read online newspapers sometimes.

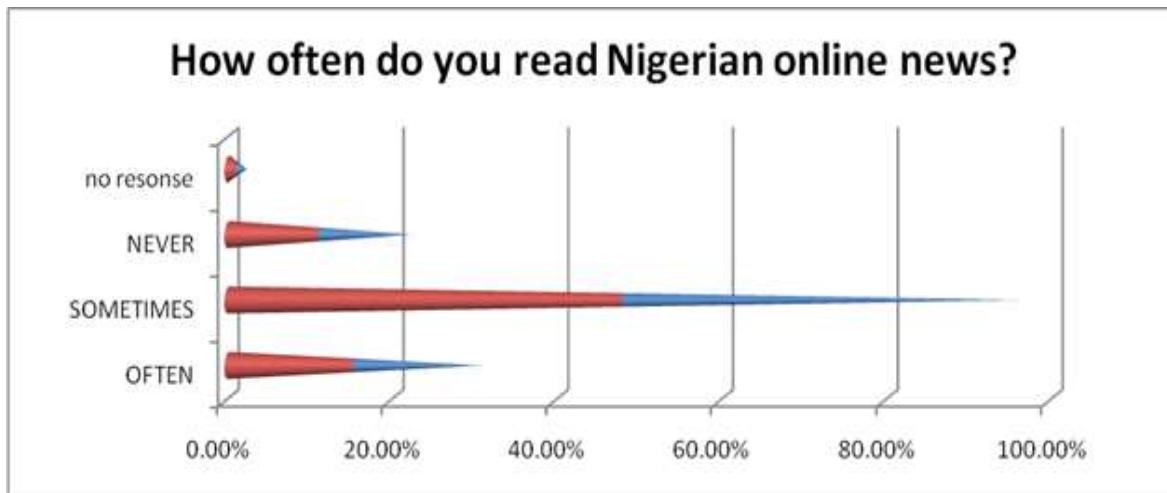


Figure 9. How often respondents read Nigerian Online Newspapers
Source: Field Survey, 2021

Figure 9 presents respondent's views on *How often do you read Nigerian online newspapers?* Data analysis shows that 47.99% of the respondents sometimes read Nigerian online newspapers. 24.58% said they often read Nigerian online newspapers and 11.11% said they fairly often do and 5.32% said they never did. From the analysis, it is clear that majority of the respondents sometimes read Nigerian online newspapers.

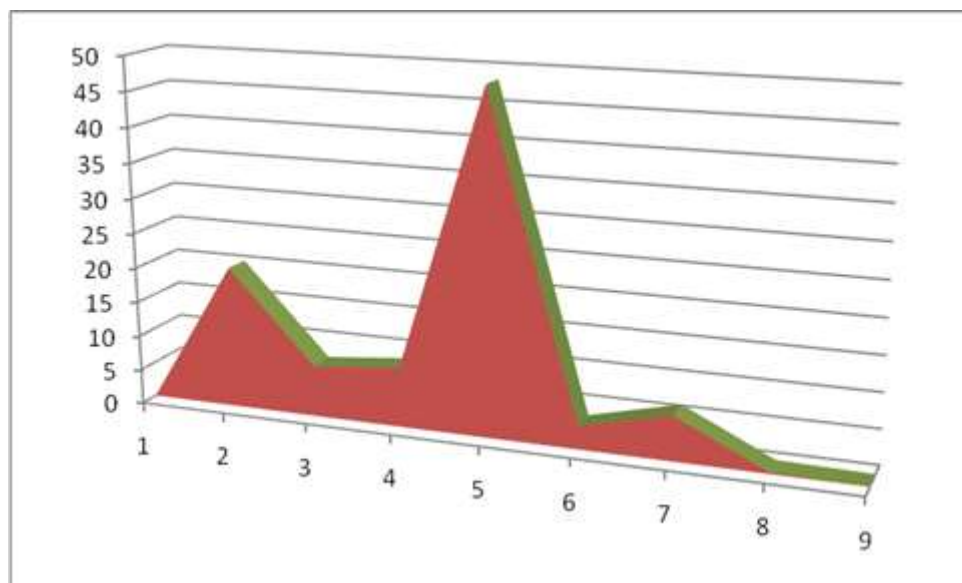


Figure 10. Source from which respondents first heard about the Corona-virus
Source: Field Survey, 2021

Figure 10 presents information on the source from which respondent first hear about corona viru. 7.90% of the respondents said family relations was the source from which they first head about corona virus. 8.04% of the respondents said they first hear about Corona virus from friend, 11.11% of them said from online newspapers, 3.78% said from radio, 21.04% said from television and 47.99% said from the social media. The data analysis

indicates that social media was the major source from which most of the respondents first heard about corona virus.

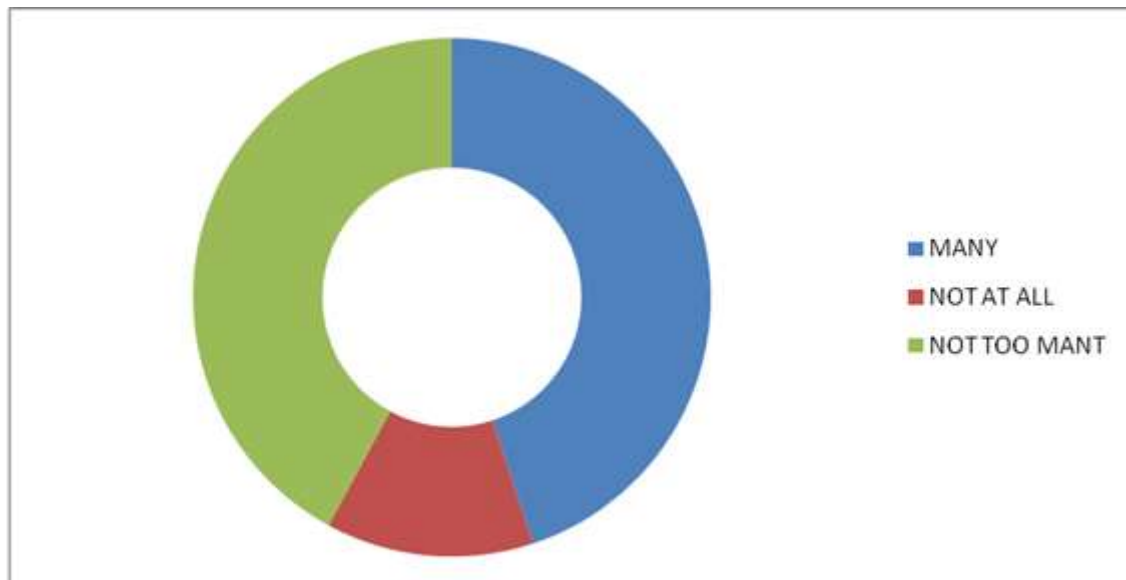


Figure 11. How much of Covid-19 news respondents received from Nigerian Online Newspaper
Source: Field Survey, 2021

Figure 11 presents information on how much of covid-19 pandemic news do you receive from Nigerian online newspaper, 44.91% of the respondent said they receive many of the covid-19 pandemic news from the Nigerian online news platform. 12.98% and 42.08% said not too many. From the analyzed data, majority of the respondents received not too many of the covid-19 news from Nigerian online newspapers.

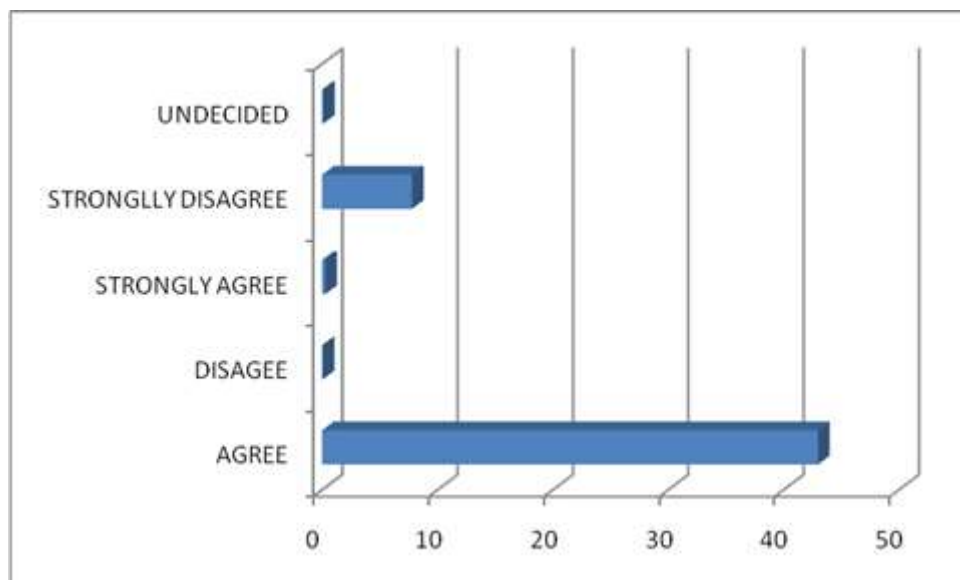


Figure 12. Respondents views on whether they agree to Fake news infiltrating the Nigerian media space.
Source: Field survey, 2021

Figure 12 presents respondents' views on *do you agree to fake news infiltrating the Nigerian news space*. 43.98% of the respondents agreed that fake news infiltrates the Nigerian news space. 29.73% of them strongly agree to the item, 7.32% disagree with the item, 7.56% strongly disagree with the item and 11.34% were undecided about the item. From the analysis, it is clear that majority of the respondents agree to the variable that fake news infiltrating the Nigerian news space.

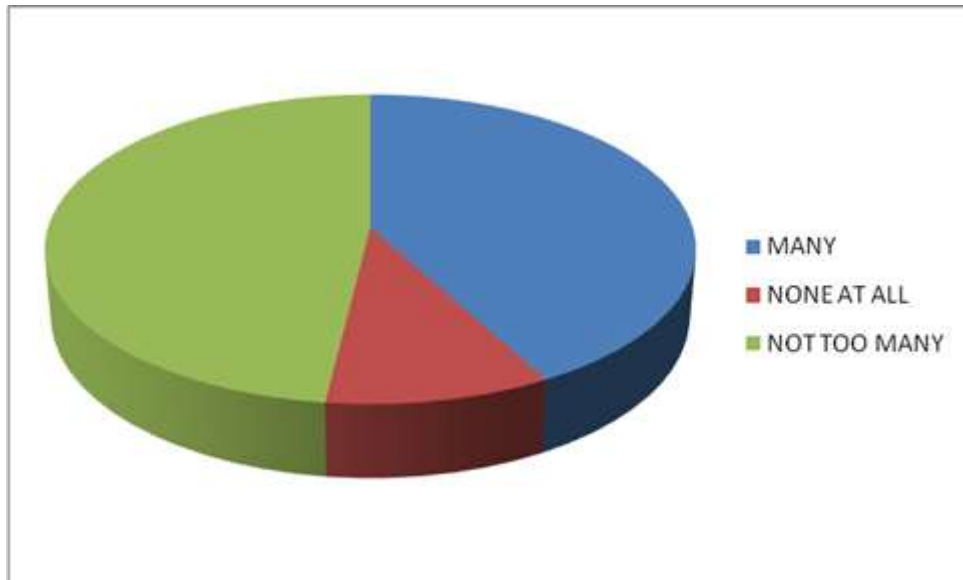


Figure 13. How much of fake news respondents have encountered in the Nigerian online newspapers?

Source: field survey, 2021

Figure 13 presents respondents' views on *how much of fake news is in the Nigerian online* 47.99% of the respondents said *not too many*, 9.81% of the respondents said *none at all* and 42.01% said *many*. From data analysis done, majority of the respondents said they have not encountered too many fake news from the Nigerian online newspapers.

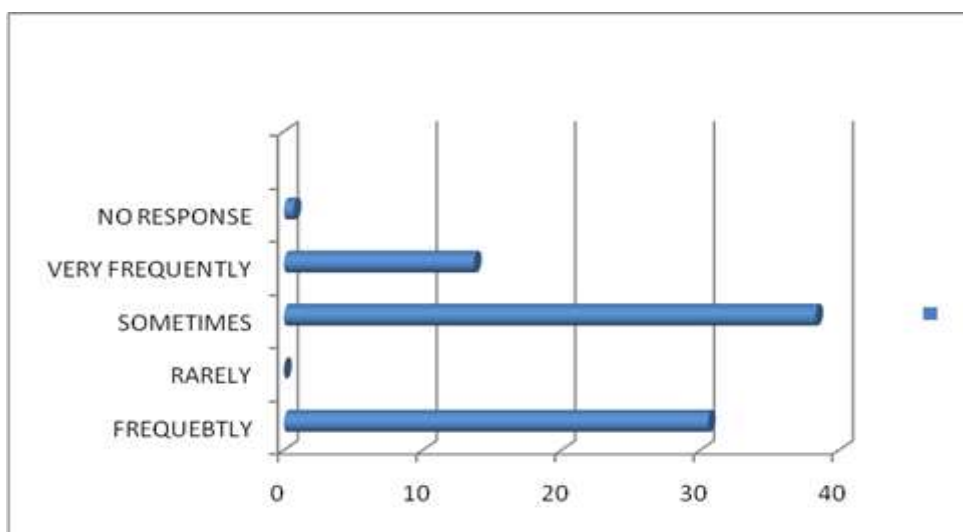


Figure 14. How much of fake news respondents encountered in the Nigerian online newspapers in regard to covid-19?

Source: Field survey, 2021

Figure 14 presents respondents' views on how much of fake news have you encountered in the Nigerian online newspapers in regard to covid-19 pandemic? 30.56% of the respondents said that they frequently encountered fake news on the Nigerian online newspapers in regard to covid-19 pandemic, 16.78% said they rarely do, 39.21% of the respondents said they sometimes do, 13.68% said they frequently do and 0.69% of them gave no responses. From the data analysis, it could be inferred that majority of the respondents said they sometimes encounter fake news from the Nigerian online newspapers.

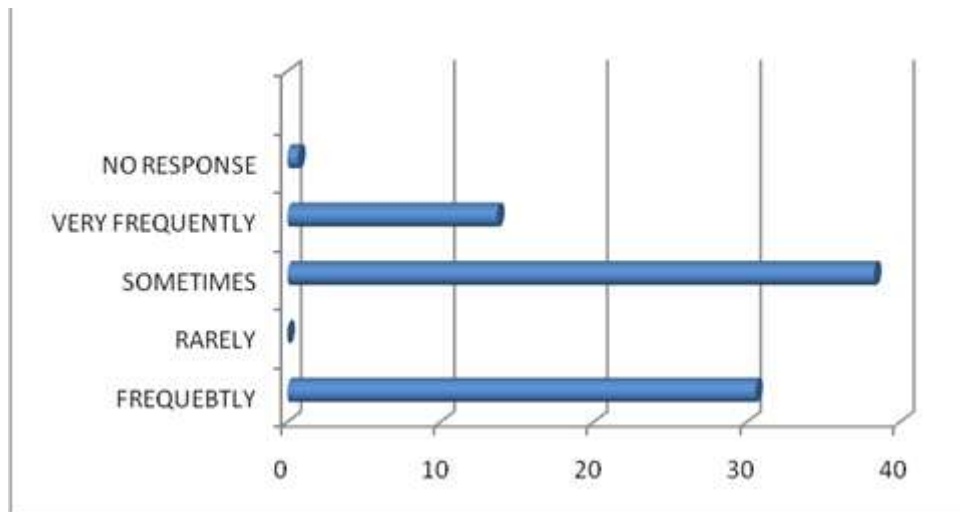


Figure 15. Respondents frequent encounter of Fake news from the Nigerian Online Newspapers
Source: Field survey, 2021

Figure 15 presents respondents' views *how frequently have you encountered general fake news from Nigeria online newspaper*, 30.73% said they frequently encounter general fake newspaper from the Nigerian online newspaper, 24.92% said they rarely do, 33.33% said they sometimes encounter fake news from the Nigerian online newspaper and 11.23% said very frequently. From the analyzed data, majority of the respondents said they sometimes encounter general fake news from the Nigerian online newspapers.

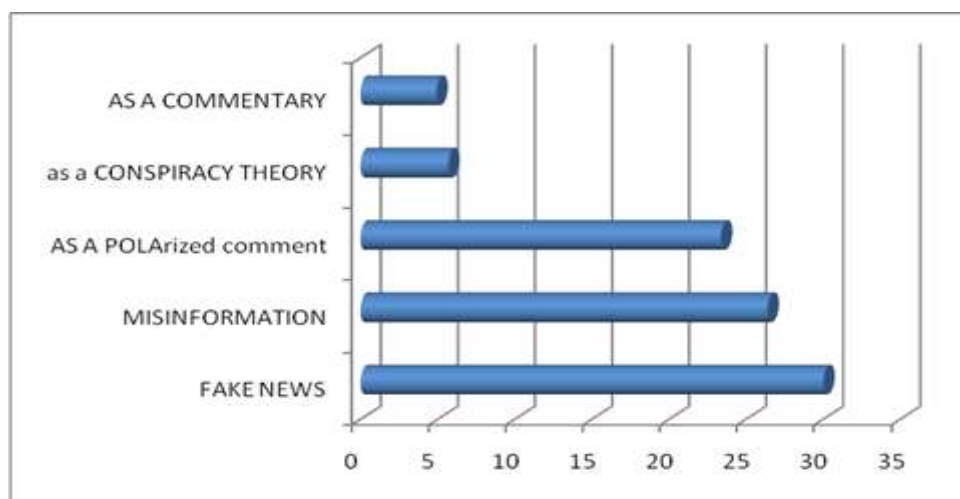


Figure 16. Forms in which respondents encountered fake news
Source: Field survey, 2021

Figure 16 presents respondents' views on *what form did you encounter fake news*. 36.40% of the respondents said they encounter fake news as misinformation, 5.67% said they encounter fake news as a polarized content, 30.02% said as fake news, 23.88% said they experience conspiracy theory, and 4.02% of them experience it in form of commentary. From the foregoing, it can be inferred that majority of the respondents' experience fake news in from Nigerian online newspapers.

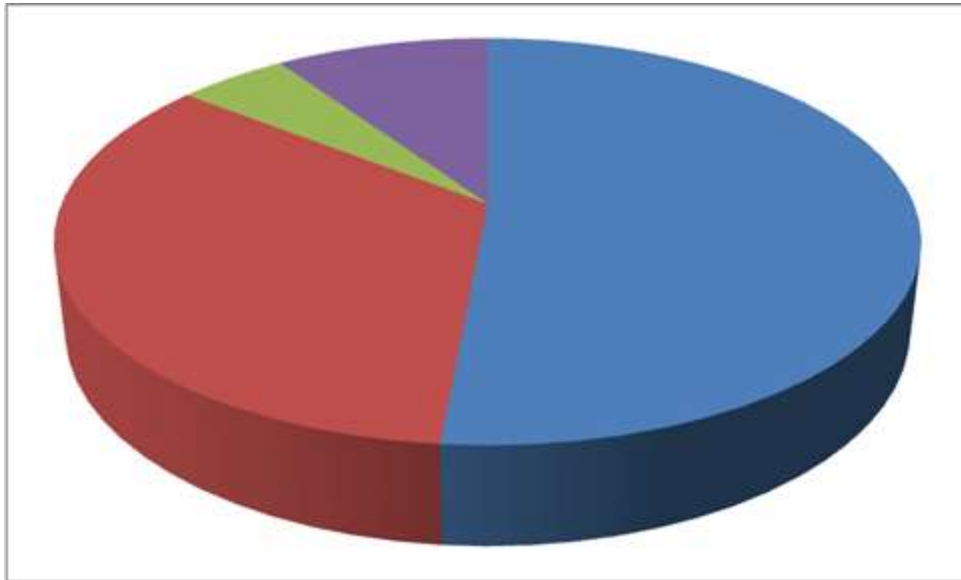


Figure 17. Respondents views on the credibility of Nigerian Online newspapers
Source: Field survey, 2021

Figure 17 presents views on *how credible do you deem the Nigerians newspaper to be* 51.38% said a little credible, 34.09% said *credible*, 4.9% of them said *not credible at all* and 9.51% said *very credible*. From the data analyzed, it can be inferred that majority of the respondents said they deemed Nigerian online news to be *a little credible*.



Figure 18. Fake News Have Influenced the Credibility of Nigerian Online Newspapers
Source: Field survey, 2021

Figure 18 presents the respondents views on *with regard to covid-19 to what extent do you think fake news have influenced the credibility of Nigerian online newspapers*, 49.40% said with regard to covid-19 fake news have influenced the credibility of the Nigeria online newspapers to a large extent, 44.68% it has influenced the credibility of the Nigerian online newspapers to a little extent and 5.91% said to no extent at all.

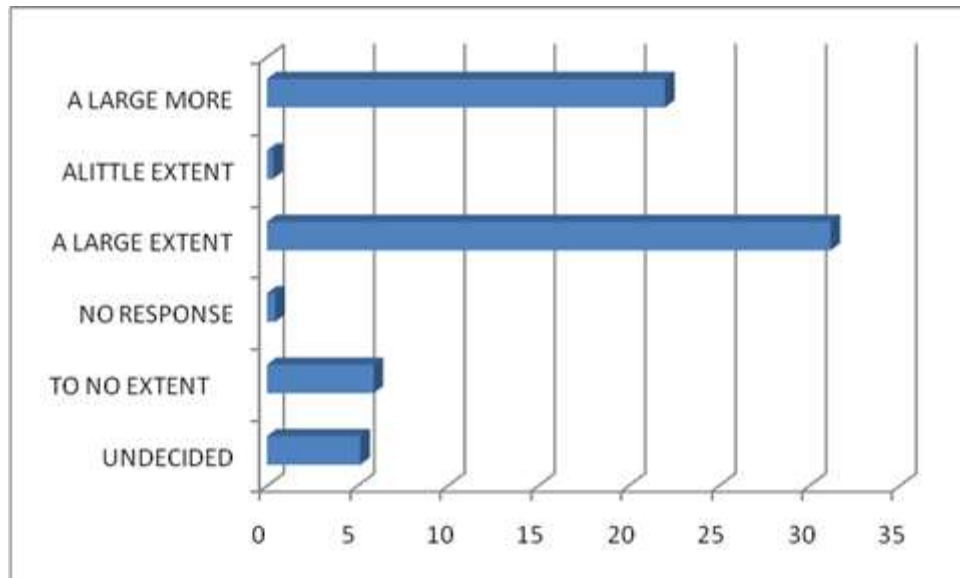


Figure 19. Extent at which respondents have confidence in covid-19 pandemic related news given by disseminated by Nigerian online newspapers
Source: Field survey, 2021

Figure 19 presents respondents' views on *the extent to which they have confidence in covid-19 pandemic related news given by Nigerian online newspapers*. 5.17% of the respondents were undecided in their views do you have confidence in covid-19 pandemic related news given by Nigerian online newspapers. 5.91% said to no extent, 0.47% gave no responses, 31.20% said to a large extent, 35.22% said to little extent and 22.03% said to a large more extent. Majority of the respondents said they have to a little extent confidence in the covid-19 pandemic news given by Nigerian online news.

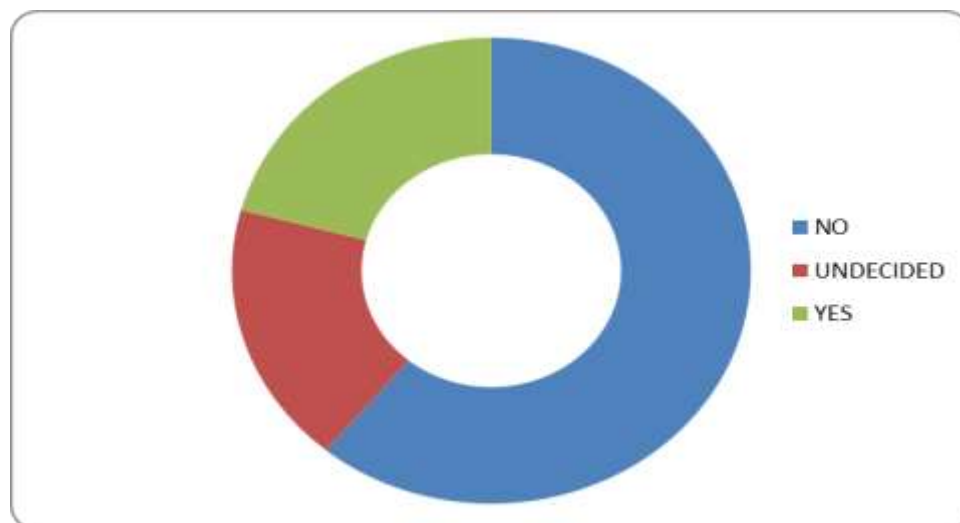


Figure 20. Respondents views on if the dissemination of fake news affected them
Source: Field survey, 2021

Figure 20 presents respondents' views on *has the dissemination of fake news about covid-19 affected you?* 60.99% of the respondents said No to has the dissemination of fake news about covid-19 affected you. 18.20% were *undecided* in views and 20.80% said Yes to the item. Based on the data analyzed, it is clear that majority of the respondents said No to has the dissemination of fake news about covid-19 affected you.

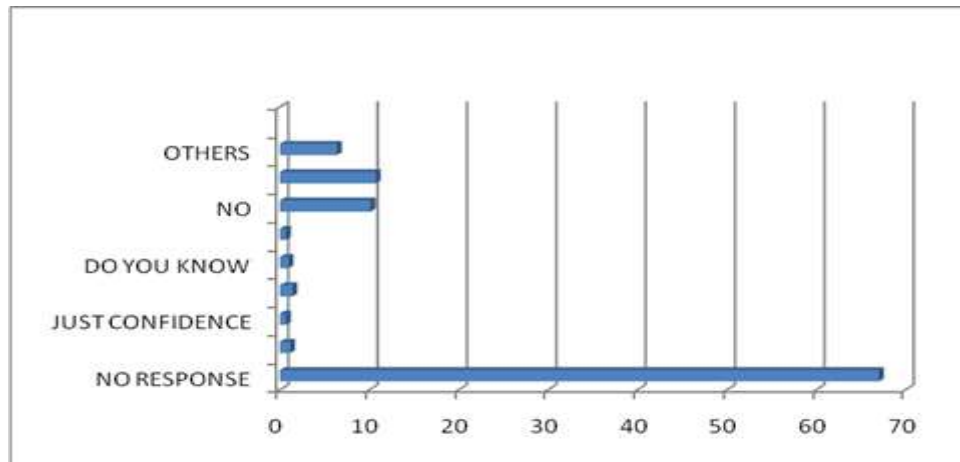


Figure 21. Respondents varied views on how fake news has affected them
Source: Field survey, 2021

Figure 21 presents respondents' views on if yes, how has fake news affected you, 67.07% of the respondents gave no responses, 1.18% said it has given them misinformation, 0.7% were just confused, 1.41% said they were afraid, 0.99% of them said they do not know, 0.7% of them said it distracted them, 10.74% said it caused inflation and 10.16% said it did not affect them and 6.4% gave various others effects of the covid-19 on them. From data analysis done, it could be inferred that majority of the respondents gave no responses.

V. Conclusion

From the entirety of this research, it is concluded that: Majority of the respondents first heard about corona virus from the social media rather than from other sources, this made them more susceptible to receiving false news and information which is very prevalent on the social media. Fake news has largely influenced the credibility of the Nigerian online newspapers and this has resulted in readers' having little confidence in Nigerian online newspapers. This study therefore recommended that journalists should strictly adhere to the essentials of news reportage and dissemination which are accuracy and truthfulness to maintain quality in the media while paying paramount attention to media and information literacy and new fact-checking services.

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