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Building Resilience against Disinformation: Media Literacy and Digital Hygiene Interventions for Nigerian Youth

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ABSTRACT

Digital media evidently aided the growing rate of disinformation in the society today, which poses a significant threat, particularly among youths who majorly interacts through the media space, and this menace hampers public trust, civic engagement, and democratic participation. This research study evaluates the level of media literacy and cyber hygiene among Nigerian youth, examining their ability to decipher, analyze and resist false information. Data was combined from a structured online survey of 308 youth-respondents, three group discussions and six oral interviews comprising of educators, media personnel, and youth leaders using a mixed-method approach. The result shows a high rate of dependence on social media for information sharing (86.1% usage daily), with limited awareness of disinformation as 58.3% are unfamiliar with the term, and insufficient level of formal training in media literacy recording 34.3%. Findings from the qualitative insights revealed thoughtful concerns such as political manipulations, peer pressure, and content monetization which grows the normalization of spreading unverified contents for the sake of engagements in digital spaces. Irrespective of these shortcomings, an encouraging number of respondents (79.6%) expressed a strong desire to participate in media literacy training programs and digital hygiene campaigns. This research further speaks on the urgent need for youth centered interventions that blends education, digital policy and civic engagement to enhance resilience and ability to combat against disinformation among Nigerian youth.

INTRODUCTION

In an era defined by rapid digital transformation and the democratization of information access, the proliferation of disinformation poses a significant threat to democratic governance, public trust, and societal well-being (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). The rise of social media platforms and mobile internet technologies has reshaped how individuals particularly youth, consume, interact with, and disseminate information. While these platforms have empowered young people with unprecedented access to knowledge and civic engagement, they have also exposed them to manipulative, misleading, and harmful content that exploits gaps in critical media literacy and digital hygiene practices (Guess *et al.*, 2020).

Disinformation, which differs from misinformation in its deliberate intent to mislead, has long played a role in Nigerian society. As journalist Sola Odunfa (2009) observed, the “Nigerian rumor mill” is a powerful, creative, and invisible force that often permeates conventional media. In recent years, however, the rapid growth of internet access and mobile technology has dramatically increased the speed and reach of disinformation. By 2019, over 125 million Nigerians were online, with 27 million active on social media at the start of 2020 (Hassan & Hitchen, 2020). This digital expansion has made it increasingly difficult to filter credible information from falsehoods, especially as content circulates quickly across platforms and formats, including memes, videos, and voice notes. Social media now serves not only as a content source for conventional media but also influences

public dialogue. Unfortunately, when disinformation shapes these conversations, it risks broadcasting rumors to a wider audience under the guise of trusted journalism (Hassan & Hitchen, 2020).

In Nigeria, where over 70% of the population is under the age of 30 (National Population Commission (NPC), 2020) and internet penetration continues to grow rapidly, the youth demographic is especially vulnerable to disinformation. From politically motivated fake news and health misinformation to religious propaganda and digitally altered content, Nigerian youth are frequently targeted by disinformation campaigns that can incite violence, erode democratic participation, and reinforce harmful stereotypes (Uwalaka & Ndinojuo, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic, the EndSARS movement, and recent electoral cycles have all underscored the far-reaching consequences of unchecked disinformation in digital spaces (BBC News, 2020; Centre for Democracy and Development [CDD], 2023).

Building resilience against disinformation requires more than fact-checking or content moderation. It demands a proactive and comprehensive strategy rooted in media literacy, the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media in various forms and digital hygiene, which includes safe, responsible, and informed online practices such as verifying sources, protecting digital identities, and managing privacy settings (CyberPeace Foundation, 2021). These tools empower young people to become critical consumers of information, recognize manipulative content, and engage constructively in digital environments.

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Despite increasing recognition of the problem, there remains a notable gap in targeted interventions that combine media literacy education and digital hygiene awareness for Nigerian youth. While some efforts exist within civil society, media advocacy groups, and policy circles, they often lack sustainability, youth-centered delivery models, and local contextual relevance (Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2020).

In Nigeria, the impact of disinformation extends beyond public discourse to threaten national security. Disinformation on social media has aggravated pre-existing ethnic and religious divisions, fueling tensions that can lead to violence. For instance, in 2019, a video misinterpreted as showing Hausa farmers poisoning beans circulated online, stoking ethnic suspicion and fear between the Hausa and Igbo communities (Hassan & Hitchen, 2020). Similar dynamics played out in Kogi State, where online falsehoods exacerbated political tensions ahead of the gubernatorial election. Extremist groups such as Boko Haram, Islamic State West Africa Province, and the Indigenous People of Biafra have also exploited social media to disseminate propaganda and recruit followers. The Nigerian government's absence from these online spaces, coupled with its suppression of critical media voices has left a vacuum that further empowers such groups (Hassan & Hitchen, 2020).

This study investigates the current state of media literacy and digital hygiene practices among Nigerian youth, identifies their exposure and vulnerability to disinformation, and proposes tailored interventions aimed at building long-term resilience. By exploring the intersection of education, technology, and youth empowerment, the research contributes to ongoing discourse on combating disinformation in developing contexts and offers evidence-based solutions for fostering a more informed and digitally secure youth population.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing Disinformation

Disinformation, distinct from misinformation, refers to false information deliberately created and disseminated to mislead or manipulate an audience (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Its rise has been facilitated by digital technologies that allow for rapid, wide-scale information sharing with limited verification mechanisms. In contexts like Nigeria, where political polarization and weak media regulation prevail, disinformation thrives, often spreading through platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter (Uwalaka & Ndinojuo, 2021). The consequences range from public panic and distrust to violence and democratic erosion, especially during elections and public health crises (CDD, 2023).

In recent years, Nigeria has witnessed an alarming surge in both misinformation and disinformation, driven largely by the country's increasing access to the internet and mobile technologies. While misinformation refers to the unintentional spread of false information, disinformation denotes the deliberate dissemination of misleading or

false content. The latter, in particular, has had significant implications for Nigeria's socio-political and security landscape.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), and WhatsApp have become major vectors for disinformation. The rise in digital connectivity has enabled content both true and false to spread rapidly, reaching millions within seconds. According to Hassan and Hitchen (2020), over 125 million Nigerians were online by the end of 2019, and at the start of 2020, the country had approximately 27 million active social media users. This increase has contributed to a volatile information environment where verifying facts is increasingly difficult. Disinformation now appears in multiple formats including memes, videos, voice notes, and manipulated images, often tailored to exploit local tensions and biases.

Historically, the circulation of rumors and unverified information has been part of Nigerian life, but social media has amplified this phenomenon to unprecedented levels. Journalist Sola Odunfa (2009) famously described the "Nigerian rumor mill" as a robust, invisible force that operates beyond economic or governmental control and often finds its way into mainstream media. This reality continues today, as even traditional media houses occasionally reproduce social media content without adequate fact-checking (Hassan & Hitchen, 2020).

The implications are profound. Disinformation has been shown to inflame ethnic, religious, and political tensions. For example, in 2019, a video falsely claiming that Hausa farmers were poisoning food bound for the southeast circulated widely on WhatsApp and Facebook. This narrative exploited long-standing animosity between ethnic groups, increasing the risk of communal conflict (Hassan & Hitchen, 2020). Similarly, disinformation played a role in aggravating pre-election tensions in Kogi State, where fabricated stories targeted various ethnic groups in the lead-up to the gubernatorial elections. Recent studies published by E-Palli have further pinpointed on the powerful influence of social media on political participation and public discourse in Nigeria. Okon *et al.* (2025) analyzed the role of platforms like Twitter and WhatsApp in shaping electoral behavior and spreading disinformation during the 2023 general elections. Similarly, Benaiah and Osuntoki (2024) examined the Obidient Movement, highlighting how youth-driven digital activism contributed to political mobilization. These findings reinforce the urgency of equipping young people with media literacy and digital hygiene skills to navigate Nigeria's evolving information ecosystem.

Moreover, extremist groups such as Boko Haram and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) have leveraged digital platforms to spread propaganda, recruit members, and coordinate activities. These actors often use fake accounts or bots to amplify their messages, filling the void left by largely inactive government agencies in online counter-information efforts (Hassan & Hitchen, 2020). The lack of robust institutional responses to online falsehoods

not only worsens the spread of disinformation but also deepens public distrust in formal sources of information. In sum, the current state of false information in Nigeria is deeply embedded in the socio-political fabric of the nation, amplified by technology and weakened institutional oversight. The convergence of online and offline rumor channels has created a complex, fast-moving environment in which truth struggles to prevail.

The Vulnerability of Youth in the Digital Era

Young people are at the forefront of digital consumption but are also highly susceptible to online manipulation. Nigerian youth, who constitute the largest internet-using demographic, often lack adequate critical thinking skills or structured exposure to media literacy education (Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2020). Youth are highly vulnerable in the digital era due to factors like cyberbullying, exposure to harmful content, and interactions with strangers online. These risks can negatively impact their mental health and well-being. Additionally, vulnerable children may be more exposed to online risks and experience greater emotional harm. Understanding these vulnerabilities and implementing protective measures is crucial for safeguarding youth in the digital world. According to Afolabi (2021), the combination of high digital engagement and low media discernment makes youth a soft target for disinformation campaigns. This vulnerability is amplified by algorithmic content delivery systems that reinforce echo chambers and confirmation bias (Pariser, 2011).

Studies shows that young people tend to face the most risks in the digital environment (Mitchell *et al.*, 2003; Sasson & Mesch, 2014). While they show more use and exposure to the Internet and social media, they are sometimes unaware of many digital dangers due to their inexperience and lack of knowledge regarding the situations they may encounter (Blais & Weber, 2006), which ultimately translates into greater vulnerability. Online risks can take on many forms including threats to data privacy, online gossip and rumours, online harassment such as cyber stalking, and exposure to inappropriate and unwanted content (Boyd & Ellison, 2007)).

Media Literacy: A Critical Countermeasure

Media literacy is defined as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media messages across multiple formats (Livingstone, 2004). It promotes critical engagement with content and challenges the passive consumption of information. Research by Hobbs (2010) emphasizes that media literacy education fosters resilience by equipping individuals with the skills to detect manipulation, bias, and propaganda. In Nigeria, however, media literacy is not systematically integrated into educational curricula or youth empowerment programs, limiting its reach and impact (Ajibola, 2022).

Theoretical approaches such as Inoculation Theory suggest that media literacy acts like a “vaccine” against disinformation, exposing individuals to weakened versions of false information alongside refutations helps them resist

persuasion in real scenarios (McGuire, 1961; van der Linden *et al.*, 2017). This supports the development of cognitive immunity among young people and has been proven effective in experimental studies across various contexts.

Understanding Digital Hygiene and Responsible Online Behavior

In the contemporary digital age, where technology permeates nearly every aspect of daily life, the concept of digital hygiene has emerged as an essential component of responsible digital citizenship. Just as personal hygiene is fundamental to physical well-being, digital hygiene refers to the practices and habits individuals adopt to ensure that their online activities are safe, secure, and respectful (CyberPeace Foundation, 2021). It encompasses a range of proactive behaviors that protect users from online threats and enhance their digital interactions.

Digital hygiene practices include, but are not limited to, strong password management, regular software updates, safe browsing, cautious sharing of personal information, data backup, and verification of online content before dissemination. These habits form the foundation for digital resilience, equipping users, especially youth with the tools to avoid falling victim to cyber threats such as phishing, identity theft, disinformation, and cyberbullying (UNESCO, 2020). As young people increasingly rely on digital platforms for social interaction, education, and information, their digital footprint becomes more pronounced, raising the stakes for practicing responsible online behavior.

Unfortunately, research shows that many Nigerian youth lack a structured understanding of essential digital hygiene practices. Chukwu and Edewor (2022) found that despite high levels of internet usage, many young Nigerians are unfamiliar with fundamental safety measures such as URL validation, use of fact-checking tools, or adjusting privacy settings on social media platforms. This gap in digital literacy significantly increases their susceptibility to online harms, including misinformation, scams, manipulation, and reputational damage.

Beyond technical hygiene, there is also the growing importance of online etiquette, often referred to as netiquette. This refers to the set of behavioral norms governing respectful and meaningful interaction in digital spaces. As our lives become increasingly mediated through screens, the quality of our digital communication holds greater weight. Respectful dialogue, tone management, source citation, and context-aware communication are all critical elements of netiquette that contribute to a healthier online ecosystem (Digital Citizenship Institute, 2020). Youth who lack awareness of these norms may inadvertently engage in cyberbullying, spread disinformation, or miscommunicate in ways that escalate conflict.

The significance of both digital hygiene and etiquette extends into combating disinformation. Individuals who consistently apply safe digital practices such as verifying sources, avoiding clickbait, using encrypted platforms, and not forwarding unverified messages are far less likely

to become vectors of false information. Similarly, users who practice good netiquette are more mindful of the impact of their digital actions, including the spread of misleading content.

As recommended by several digital literacy advocates, strengthening youth capacity in these areas requires not only technical training but also value-based education on digital responsibility, empathy, and civic behavior online. Effective interventions should therefore integrate cybersecurity literacy with social and emotional learning, ensuring that Nigerian youth are not just digitally active, but also digitally responsible and ethically grounded (UNESCO, 2021).

Understanding digital hygiene in its full scope, including its technical and behavioral dimensions is vital for reducing the vulnerability of young people to online threats, including disinformation. Strengthening awareness and practice in this domain forms a core pillar of any effort to build resilience among Nigerian youth in an increasingly complex and participatory digital society.

Existing Interventions, Regulatory Gaps, and Challenges

Several initiatives have emerged in Nigeria aimed at combating the spread of disinformation, particularly from civil society organizations, media advocacy groups, and international partners. Platforms such as Dubawa, Africa Check, and the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) have spearheaded campaigns focused on fact-checking, media literacy, and awareness creation. These efforts have yielded positive impacts in promoting public discourse around digital misinformation. However, they often remain urban-centered, donor-driven, and short-lived, making it difficult to achieve nationwide scale or sustainability (Yekeen, 2022). Youth in rural and underserved regions who are often more vulnerable to disinformation due to limited access to verified sources and digital education remain largely excluded from these interventions.

Moreover, a critical gap persists in the fragmented implementation of media literacy and digital hygiene programs. Most initiatives tend to address media literacy and digital hygiene as separate entities, rather than integrating them into a holistic, youth-centered framework that builds long-term resilience. This division reduces the effectiveness of interventions, as disinformation resilience demands both critical media engagement skills and practical digital safety behaviors. The absence of coordinated national programming also means there is no standardized curriculum or policy guiding such efforts.

In terms of regulatory responses, Nigeria has yet to develop an effective model that balances the need to curb disinformation with the protection of citizens' rights to freedom of expression, as guaranteed under Section 39 of the 1999 Constitution. Regulatory approaches in the country fall under three broad categories: state regulation, independent oversight, and platform self-regulation, each with its own limitations. State-led regulation has often

raised concerns about the suppression of dissenting voices and overreach. For example, the controversial Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulation Bill, still under consideration by the Senate, proposes sweeping powers that would enable the federal government to shut down social media platforms or the internet entirely on grounds of national security. Critics argue that such powers could be abused to silence political opposition or civic activism, undermining democratic engagement (Paradigm Initiative, 2021).

Independent regulatory bodies, while theoretically neutral, often face allegations of bias or political influence, similar to challenges faced by institutions like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Even a theoretically autonomous social media regulatory body, if composed of actors from the Nigeria Communications Commission, civil society, academia, and the judiciary would struggle to gain the full trust of citizens in Nigeria's highly polarized political environment.

On the other hand, self-regulation by platforms and users, such as community flagging or algorithmic moderation, has proven insufficient to control the spread of false information. These approaches often lack the contextual understanding required to moderate content in multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and politically sensitive societies like Nigeria (UNESCO, 2020).

More viable approaches may include the judicious application of existing laws, such as relevant sections of the 2015 Cybercrimes Act, the Criminal Code, and the enforcement of the 2019 Nigeria Data Protection Regulation (NDPR), rather than introducing sweeping new legislation that risks violating civil liberties.

In summary, Nigeria's response to disinformation suffers from fragmented interventions, overreaching policy proposals, and limited trust in regulatory actors. These gaps highlight the urgent need for integrated, sustainable, and inclusive strategies, ones that combine youth empowerment, curriculum-based digital education, localized awareness campaigns, and balanced regulatory frameworks that respect human rights and promote digital citizenship.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

A mixed-methods approach was employed in this research, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative insights that was drawn from group discussions and oral interviews. The design provided a more general understanding of Nigerian youths' exposure to disinformation, their media literacy levels, digital hygiene practices and perceived solutions to counter misinformation. The combination of structured responses and open-ended insights ensured both breadth and depth in the analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Population and Sampling

The research focused on Nigerian youth aged 18 to 35 years. A total of 308 volunteered participants completed

the structured online survey distributed via social media and email. The sampling method for the survey was non-probabilistic and convenience-based, targeting digitally active youth across different regions.

On the qualitative phase, three focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with youth groups with representatives from the East, South, and Central regions, while six oral interviews were conducted with teachers, digital literacy advocates, journalists, and youth development workers. These participants were selected based on their relevance and involvement in media or youth-focused spaces.

Data Collection Methods

- The quantitative survey was conducted using a Google Forms questionnaire comprising multiple-choice, Likert-scale, and open-ended items.
- The qualitative data were collected using semi-structured guides during FGDs and interviews. Discussions focused on personal experiences with disinformation, media consumption habits, reactions to false content, and suggestions for solutions. Sessions were recorded (with consent), transcribed, and coded for analysis.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) to identify patterns in awareness, behavior, and perceptions. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) method, allowing recurring themes and narratives to emerge around youth digital practices and challenges in identifying misinformation.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed about the study’s purpose and voluntarily consented to participate. Anonymity and confidentiality were thoroughly maintained throughout. No personally identifying information was collected, and ethical principles guiding human-centered research were followed (Israel & Hay, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Here presents the findings from the survey conducted to evaluate Nigerian youths’ media literacy levels, digital hygiene practices, and exposure to disinformation. A total of 308 responses were analyzed, and the results are organized into five thematic areas: demographics, media consumption habits, disinformation awareness, media literacy and digital hygiene practices, and perceptions of impact and intervention.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Out of 308 respondents: 48.1% were aged between 26–35 years, 32.4% were 18–25, while 13% were under 18. In terms of gender, 53.7% identified as male, 44.4% as female, and 1.9% preferred not to say.

A majority (57.4%) were from the Eastern region, followed by Western (14.8%), Southern (11.1%), Northern (10.2%), and Central (6.5%) Nigeria.

Regarding education, 62% had an undergraduate degree, while 34.3% held postgraduate qualifications.

Table 1: Summary of Respondents' Demographics

Demographic Variable	Categories
Age Group	18–25 (32.4%)
	26–35 (48.1%)
Region	Under 18 (13%)
	Eastern (57.4%)
	Western (14.8%)
	Southern (11.1%)
	Northern (10.2%)
Education Level	Central (6.5%)
	Undergraduate (62%)
	Postgraduate (34.3%)

Media Consumption Habits

86.1% of respondents use social media daily, with only 9.3% using it occasionally.

When asked about sources of information:

- 79.6% cited social media,
- 31.5% used TV/radio,
- 27.8% relied on news websites/blogs,
- 21.3% on family and friends,
- Only 1.9% mentioned newspapers.

These results obviously suggest a heavy dependence on digital platforms, especially social media, for information access among Nigerian youth of the age bracket of 18-35 years.

Awareness and Exposure to Disinformation

58.3% of respondents reported being not familiar with the term “disinformation”, while only 13.9% were very familiar. A significant 63% encounter content they believe is false or misleading on a weekly basis, while 18.5% see such content daily.

Regarding susceptible platforms:

WhatsApp (71.3%), Facebook (66.7%), and Twitter (51.9%) were seen as the most vulnerable to disinformation.

Media Literacy and Digital Hygiene Practices

Only 34.3% reported having received any form of media literacy training.

Despite this, 70.4% believed they had the skills to identify false information, though just 7.4% felt “very confident” in doing so. On fact-checking:

55.6% fact-check content sometimes, while 25.9% always verify before sharing.

Privacy settings and platform use:

Only 20.4% regularly adjusted privacy settings to limit misinformation, and 44.4% rarely reported suspicious content. When asked if they would be interested in participating

in media literacy workshops, 79.6% said yes, indicating strong interest in capacity-building.

Perceptions of Impact and Interventions

91.6% agreed or strongly agreed that disinformation affects youth participation in democratic processes like elections and protests.

62% admitted to having made a decision based on information later found to be false.

When asked if Nigerian youth are aware of the dangers of disinformation:

51.9% said no, and 29.6% said somewhat.

On preferred solutions:

37% supported a combination of approaches, including media literacy training, platform regulations, fact-checking tools, and personal responsibility.

74.1% expressed willingness to join initiatives aimed at promoting digital hygiene and media literacy.

Open-Ended Insights

The open-ended responses revealed key challenges Nigerian youth face in combating disinformation:

- Low digital/media literacy
- Information overload
- Lack of access to trusted fact-checking tools
- Peer pressure and social media trends
- Economic and educational constraints
- Limited regulatory frameworks and media oversight

Many people also recommended media literacy education in schools, stricter social media regulations, and youth-driven fact-checking campaigns as sustainable countermeasures.

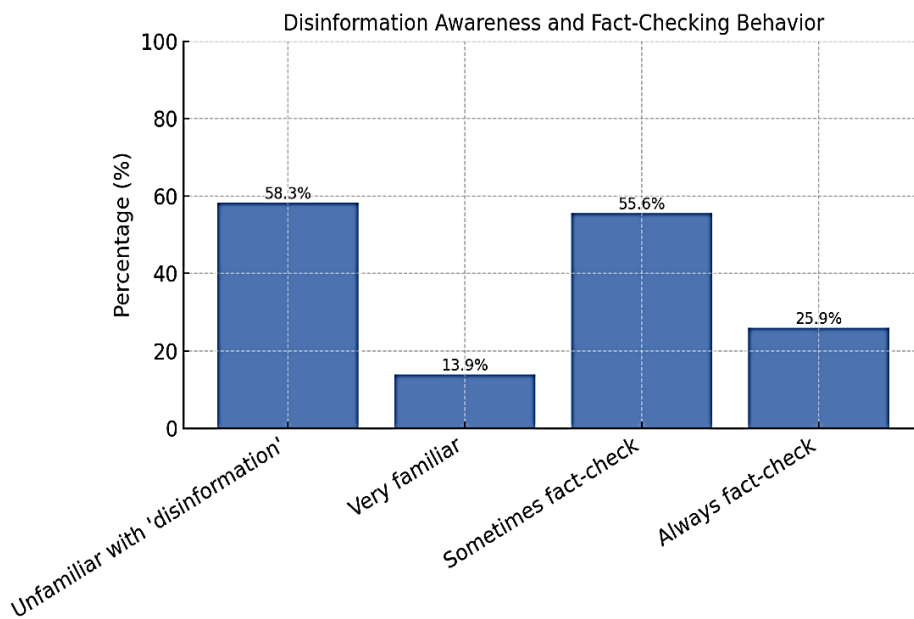


Figure 1: Respondents' awareness of the term "disinformation" and frequency of fact-checking behavior

Qualitative Insights from Group Discussions and Interviews

In addition to the survey, data from three group discussions and six oral interviews offered deeper context. Participants identified peer influence, lack of critical thinking education, blind trust in authority figures, and socioeconomic constraints as recurring barriers to countering disinformation. Several youths described disinformation as a "normal part of social media," highlighting the normalization of false content. Educators and media practitioners stressed the need for curriculum integration, mentorship, and regional workshops tailored to youth realities. These insights support and expand the trends observed in the quantitative data.

Discussion

The research explored the intersection of disinformation exposure, media literacy, and digital hygiene among Nigerian youth using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The mixed-methods approach revealed

consistent themes regarding vulnerabilities, behavior patterns, and opportunities for intervention.

High Engagement, Low Awareness

The quantitative data revealed that although Nigerian youth are highly engaged online, with over 86% using social media daily, more than half (58.3%) were unfamiliar with the term "disinformation." Focus group participants echoed this, with some associating false content with only political propaganda or foreign news, unaware that disinformation includes everyday health hoaxes, religious misinformation, and manipulated images. This gap aligns with literature noting that frequent digital use does not always equate to informed engagement (Guess *et al.*, 2020).

Inconsistent Critical Skills and Training

While 70.4% of respondents believed they had the skills to identify false information, only 34.3% had ever received formal media literacy education. Interviewees suggested that this confidence is often overstated, particularly

among young people who mistake social media familiarity for analytical skill. One teacher shared, “They think they know how to spot fake news, but many can’t even check a source link or verify a video.” These qualitative insights reinforce the need for structured and accessible media literacy programs targeting youth, especially in schools and informal learning settings (Hobbs, 2010; Chukwu & Edewor, 2022).

Disinformation as a Social and Structural Issue

A striking 62% of survey participants admitted to having made decisions based on false information. FGDs expanded this point, with several youths confessing that viral messages on WhatsApp or tweets from popular influencers often shape their opinions on politics and health. Participants mentioned factors like information fatigue, peer pressure, and blind trust in religious or political leaders. These findings underscore the multidimensional nature of the disinformation problem, which cannot be solved by digital tools alone, it requires critical thinking, civic education, and trust-building in institutions (Uwalaka & Ndinojuo, 2021).

Youth Readiness for Intervention

Both quantitative and qualitative results suggest strong openness among youth to digital empowerment: 79.6% were interested in media literacy programs. 74.1% were willing to join related initiatives. Focus group participants expressed a desire to “be part of the solution” but lamented the lack of awareness campaigns, training opportunities, and culturally relevant resources. This confirms earlier arguments by van der Linden *et al.* (2017) that inoculation through education is key to building resilience, especially when youth are treated as active partners, not just passive consumers.

Systemic Barriers and Local Realities

Interviews with media professionals and educators revealed systemic issues, such as:

- Limited integration of media literacy into school curricula
- Weak digital policy enforcement
- Poor access to fact-checking tools in rural areas

Several youths cited “economic challenges,” “lack of mentorship,” and the “influence of monetized content creation” as obstacles. These findings support calls by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) and UNESCO (2020) for multi-sectoral collaboration among educators, tech companies, civil society, and government agencies to create sustained and contextual interventions.

CONCLUSION

The study aims to understand how Nigerian youths engage with digital media, especially in the face of increasing disinformation. Being it clear that today, young people are actively engaged online, especially on social media, significant lapses in their ability to critically assess online content and practice safe digital habits were revealed in the findings, as many still lack the critical thinking skills and

practical knowledge needed to identify and handle false or misleading information properly. A considerable number of respondents were unfamiliar with key digital hygiene concepts, and consistent fact-checking experiences were also lacking. The study, however, uncovered a strong willingness among the youths to learn and take part in programs that teach media literacy and responsible online behavior. It further suggests that involving young people directly in the design and delivery of media literacy programs could make them more engaging and effective. Even though the study had its limitations in terms of sampling and reach, it offers useful insights that can guide educators, policymakers, and media practitioners. With the right training and support, Nigerian youth can grow into informed, and responsible digital citizens who are better prepared to resist disinformation and help build a healthier media and information space.

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