Media Bias and Information Literacy among Nigerians: The Role of Social Media Algorithms in Nigeria's Information Landscape

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria's information landscape has changed rapidly as social media platforms increasingly mediate how citizens access, interpret, and share news. While traditional media bias in Nigeria has been widely documented, less attention has been paid to how algorithmic systems on platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and YouTube shape public knowledge, amplify misinformation, and influence civic reasoning. This paper examines the intersection of media bias and information literacy in Nigeria, focusing on the role of social media algorithms in shaping visibility, engagement, and credibility within the digital public sphere. Drawing on conceptual literature on media bias, information literacy, and algorithmic governance, alongside qualitative analysis of documented Nigerian cases—including election misinformation, public health crises, and ethno-religious tensions—the study argues that algorithmic curation exacerbates existing structural biases while creating new forms of "algorithmic bias" that disproportionately affect low-literacy and highly vulnerable populations. The paper further demonstrates that limited algorithmic literacy among Nigerians increases susceptibility to misinformation and polarising content. It concludes by proposing a multi-level framework to strengthen information literacy, improve algorithmic transparency, and foster a fairer and more trustworthy Nigerian information ecosystem.

Keywords: Algorithmic bias, Civic engagement, Information literacy, Media bias, Misinformation, Social media

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's information landscape has transformed significantly over the past decade as digital technologies and mobile connectivity have become central to daily life. With 122.5 million internet users at the beginning of 2023 and a largely young population (DataReporter, 2023), the country now has a vibrant digital sphere where news consumption, political debate, and social interaction increasingly take place online. However, this rapid growth has also heightened longstanding concerns about media bias, misinformation, and uneven information literacy. Traditional media still face issues of ownership influence, political patronage, and declining public trust. As audiences shift online, social media platforms, though more accessible, have not necessarily become more reliable. Their algorithmic systems now influence what many Nigerians encounter, believe, and share.

These algorithmically curated information flows introduce new complexities to Nigeria's media environment. Global platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and YouTube are designed to maximise engagement, often promoting emotionally charged or sensational content. Tufekci (2015) succinctly captures this dynamic, noting that algorithms "shape the flow of information and attention" in ways that remain largely invisible to users (p. 206). In a context marked by political polarisation, ethnic tensions, economic hardship, and widespread distrust of institutions, algorithmic amplification can distort public debate and deepen social divisions.

Misinformation has become one of the most evident consequences of this shift. Denniss and Lindberg (2025) describe misinformation as "a major threat to society and public health" (p. xx), emphasising that social media's global reach enables harmful narratives to spread rapidly and erode trust in institutions. Nigeria's experience during elections, public health crises, and episodes of insecurity shows how quickly falsehoods can gain ground when algorithms favour content that provokes strong emotional responses. High social media usage, coupled

with varying levels of information literacy, creates fertile ground for the dissemination of misleading or fabricated stories.

Efforts to improve information literacy in Nigeria remain inconsistent. Although universities and civil society organisations have begun to incorporate media and information literacy (MIL) into their programmes, research indicates that many Nigerians—particularly young people—lack the skills to critically assess digital content. Aduloju (2020) found that while students recognise the importance of MIL, their competencies vary significantly, shaping how they interpret and share information. This gap between perceived importance and practical skill underscores the need for more comprehensive, context-specific interventions. Another challenge is the limited public understanding of how algorithms influence online visibility. Noble (2018) shows that algorithmic systems can reproduce and amplify social inequalities, arguing that search and recommendation tools often "reinforce harmful biases" (p. 4). In Nigeria, where digital literacy remains uneven, many users interpret algorithmically boosted content as organically popular or inherently credible. This misunderstanding can reinforce existing prejudices, deepen polarisation, and create echo chambers where misinformation flourishes.

Media bias in Nigeria predates the digital age. Political loyalties, ownership structures, and economic pressures have long shaped traditional media. Uche (1989) notes that "ownership and control of the press in Nigeria have always been closely tied to political power" (p. 112), a pattern that continues to undermine editorial independence. Oso (2012) similarly states that the Nigerian media have historically been "a battleground for political and ideological contestation" (p. 45). However, the shift to digital platforms has introduced new forms of bias that are less obvious yet potentially more influential. Algorithmic bias—shaped by the design choices of global technology firms—interacts with Nigeria's social and political context in ways that can marginalise certain voices while amplifying others.

Scholars and practitioners have begun exploring how media literacy can serve as a defence against misinformation and digital manipulation. Tsegyu and Ogoshi (2016) emphasise the importance of critical media engagement for democratic participation, while Anyaoku, Anunobi, and Eze (2015) highlight librarians' role in equipping students with information literacy tools to navigate complex digital environments. Despite these efforts, significant gaps remain. Much of the existing literature addresses media literacy in broad terms, without fully engaging with the specific challenges posed by algorithmic systems. Similarly, while misinformation in Nigeria has been widely studied, fewer works examine how social media algorithms shape the country's information flows or how Nigerians interpret algorithmically curated content. This paper addresses these gaps by analysing media bias, information literacy, and algorithmic governance within Nigeria's evolving digital ecosystem.

Ultimately, the stakes are high. As Nigeria faces political instability, economic uncertainty, and social fragmentation, the integrity of its information environment is vital to democratic resilience. A more informed and algorithmically aware citizenry is crucial for tackling misinformation, reducing polarisation, and strengthening the digital public sphere. This paper suggests that addressing media bias and enhancing information literacy—especially regarding social media algorithms—are key steps towards creating a fairer and more trustworthy Nigerian information landscape. Therefore, these measures underscore the importance of a multisectoral approach to improving information literacy across education, media, and civil society.

Historical Evolution of Nigeria's Media Environment

Nigeria's media system has roots in a long tradition of anti-colonial activism, political mobilisation, and ideological struggle. According to Omu (1978), early print outlets such as Iwe Irohin (1859) and later nationalist newspapers such as the West African Pilot (1937) played a key role in shaping political awareness and in creating a proto-public sphere. Omu's historical analysis shows that newspapers from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries served as "organs of political mobilisation" (p. 3) and as tools for challenging colonial authority (Omu, 1978). More recent research confirms that these early newspapers linked literacy, Christian missionary work, and nationalist activism, thereby embedding political advocacy at the core of Nigerian journalism (Oso, 2012).

This political lineage continues to shape the modern media landscape. Oso (2012) argues that "Nigerian media have historically been a battleground for political and ideological contestation, reflecting the interests of dominant elites" (p. 45). The political economy of media ownership reinforces this pattern. Uche (1989) notes that "ownership and control of the press in Nigeria have always been closely tied to political power" (p. 112), a dynamic that continues to influence editorial independence and news framing. Contemporary studies of media ownership confirm that proprietors' political and economic interests remain key drivers of editorial direction, often limiting journalistic independence (Apuke, 2016). Similarly, Olorunyomi (2015) observes that "the Nigerian media system is deeply embedded in patronage networks that shape news framing and agenda-setting" (p. 73), echoing broader African scholarship on media capture and elite influence (Nyamnjoh, 2005).

Periods of authoritarian rule further entrenched these structural patterns. Olukotun (2002) documents how military regimes used censorship, proscription, and intimidation to suppress dissenting media, thereby creating a culture of resistance and strengthening fragile business models and informal alliances between journalists and political actors. This history complicates standard assumptions about the press as an independent watchdog and instead emphasises the media as a space of negotiation among state power, market forces, and civic actors.

Broadcast media—especially radio—remain central to Nigeria's communication ecology because of linguistic diversity, affordability, and wide rural reach. Adesoji (2010) emphasises that "radio remains the most potent medium for shaping public opinion in rural and peri-urban Nigeria" (p. 89), a finding consistent with earlier analyses of radio's role in national integration and political mobilisation (Uche, 1989). Contemporary studies show that radio continues to influence electoral behaviour, civic education, and the circulation of ethno-religious narratives (Jatula, 2020). These enduring structural features—elite-driven ownership, patronage networks, uneven access, and the dominance of radio—form the historical backdrop against which Nigeria's digital media ecosystem has emerged.

Digital Penetration and the Rise of Social Media

Nigeria's digital transformation accelerated after the liberalisation of the telecommunications sector in 2001, which opened the market to private operators and triggered an unprecedented expansion of mobile connectivity. By early 2023, Nigeria had 122.5 million internet users, with an internet penetration rate of 55.4% (Datar portal, 2023). This growth has largely been driven by mobile broadband adoption, with young Nigerians forming the most active segment of social media users. The country's demographic profile—where more than 60% of the population is under 25—has further fuelled the rapid uptake of digital platforms for news, entertainment, and civic engagement.

African digital spaces are increasingly recognised as complex, hybrid communication environments. Wasserman (2020) describes African digital publics as "spaces of negotiation where legacy media, citizen voices, and platform logics intersect" (p. 7), emphasising that digital communication on the continent cannot be understood outside its social, political, and technological entanglements. Similarly, Mutsvairo and Bebawi (2019) argue that African digital ecosystems blend "traditional journalistic norms with participatory and algorithmic cultures" (p. 4), producing fluid information flows that challenge older media hierarchies. In Nigeria, this hybridity is evident in the interplay among established media houses, online influencers, diaspora networks, and user-generated content circulating across platforms.

Social media has become central to political communication in Nigeria. Hassan (2023) observes that during the 2023 general elections, social media platforms served as primary arenas for political persuasion, misinformation, and counter-narratives, reflecting their growing influence on electoral behaviour and public opinion. Aduloju (2021) similarly notes that young Nigerians increasingly bypass traditional media due to distrust, relying instead on platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok for political updates and commentary. This shift has altered the rhythm of political communication, enabling real-time mobilisation, rapid diffusion of messages, and the emergence of new digital opinion leaders.

The rise of short-form video platforms—TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts—has further transformed how information is consumed. These platforms rely heavily on algorithmic recommendation systems that prioritise engagement, novelty, and emotional intensity. As Gillespie (2014) explains, recommendation

algorithms "shape what users come to know, value, and believe" (p. 168), making them powerful actors in the circulation of political and social narratives. In Nigeria, short-form videos now influence public discourse in ways traditional media cannot match, particularly among young people who prefer visually engaging, mobile-friendly content.

This digital shift has also blurred the boundaries between professional journalism and everyday content creation. African social media platforms increasingly function as alternative or counterpublic spheres in which citizens challenge dominant narratives and negotiate political meaning (Bosch, 2017). In Nigeria, this has enabled marginalised voices to gain visibility, but it has also created fertile ground for misinformation, sensationalism, and polarisation—especially when algorithmic systems amplify emotionally charged content.

Together, these developments demonstrate how Nigeria's digital penetration and social media use have transformed the country's information ecosystem. The convergence of mobile connectivity, youth engagement, and algorithmically tailored platforms has created a dynamic yet unpredictable communication environment—one in which opportunities for civic participation coexist with heightened risks of misinformation and media manipulation.

Misinformation, Disinformation, and Public Trust

Nigeria's information ecosystem is highly vulnerable to misinformation and disinformation, driven by structural factors such as low media literacy, political polarisation, economic instability, and weak regulatory oversight. These vulnerabilities mirror global trends. As noted earlier, false information poses a serious threat to society. Denniss & Lindberg (2025) argue that negative narratives spread more rapidly on digital media, influencing behaviour and eroding institutional trust. Their observations align with the Nigerian reality, where social media has become a major, though often untrustworthy, source of information.

A clear example is the rapid spread of misinformation across WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, and other platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic. Apuke and Omar (2021) found that "misinformation on COVID-19 spread faster than corrective information" (p. 6), largely because sensational or emotionally charged content generated higher engagement and was more readily shared. Their study of Nigerian social media users shows how platform affordances and information abundance enabled false claims to outpace verified health guidance. This aligns with broader research showing that social media affordances—speed, virality, and low barriers to participation—foster misinformation during crises.

The role of algorithms in the spread of misleading content is increasingly recognised in global research. According to Gillespie (2014), algorithmic curation can spotlight sensational or polarising content, thereby shaping what users learn, value, and believe. Noble (2018) similarly shows that algorithmic systems often "reinforce harmful biases" (p. 4). This raises concerns about how platform logics interact with existing social tensions. In countries like Nigeria, where digital literacy remains uneven, many users interpret algorithmically promoted content as inherently credible or widely accepted, making them more susceptible to manipulation.

This has already eroded public trust in institutions. The Reuters Institute Digital News Report (2022) ranks Nigeria among the countries with the lowest levels of trust in news globally, with many citizens sceptical of both the government and mainstream media. This distrust drives audiences towards alternative information sources—religious leaders, influencers, peer networks, and closed messaging groups—where misinformation often circulates unchecked. These dynamics reflect what Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) describe as the "information disorder" environment, where misinformation thrives when "trust in institutions is weak, and information ecosystems are fragmented" (p. 25). Nigeria exemplifies this pattern through political actors, opportunistic influencers, and coordinated networks that have exploited social media to spread falsehoods during elections, public health emergencies, and episodes of insecurity.

The Role of Influencers and Digital Opinion Leaders

Influencer culture has become a defining feature of Nigeria's digital information landscape. Across platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube, influencers, bloggers, comedians, lifestyle curators, and micro-celebrities now serve as key intermediaries through which young Nigerians access news,

interpret events, and form opinions. This shift reflects broader changes in digital publics across Africa. Nigerian social media influencers increasingly shape public opinion by blending entertainment, personal branding, and political messaging. Research shows that their persuasive power derives less from journalistic ability and more from perceived authenticity, relatability, and emotional connection with followers (Nwabuokei, 2025). Abidin (2018) further shows how online actors strategically construct identities and narratives that mobilise public sentiment and challenge mainstream media frames.

This form of influence is powerful largely because it is informal. Influencers often assume hybrid roles—acting as entertainers, commentators, activists, and marketers simultaneously. Olaojo's (2020) study of Nigerian Twitter influencers found that personality traits, perceived credibility, and social capital strongly shape how followers interpret and trust their messages. In this way, influencers serve as digital opinion leaders whose endorsements, critiques, and interpretations can mobilise large audiences within minutes. However, this influence brings complications. Economic insecurity and the monetisation of visibility have fuelled sensationalism, selective truth-telling, and undisclosed political advertising. Abidin (2018) explains that influencers work within "attention economies where visibility is monetised, incentivising sensationalism over accuracy" (p. 14). In Nigeria, where many influencers rely on brand partnerships, sponsored posts, and political patronage, the pressure to maintain high engagement continues to fuel the spread of unverified or emotionally charged content.

These dynamics were especially clear during the #EndSARS protests in 2020. Influencers played a dual role—mobilising youth activism, amplifying protest messages, and providing real-time updates—while also inadvertently spreading unverified claims amid moments of uncertainty. Uwalaka, Amadi, and Enyindah (2024) show how Nigerian influencers have been strategically used in political influence operations, noting that some operate as paid "Data Boys" who promote political narratives, rehabilitate public images, or attack opponents. Their study highlights how political actors covertly exploit influencer networks to shape public discourse. At the same time, influencers have broadened the public sphere by giving visibility to marginalised voices and alternative narratives. As noted earlier, African social media spaces, according to Abidin (2018), are parallel public domains where ordinary people and micro-celebrities question mainstream media narratives and express themselves in novel ways. As observed, influencers in Nigeria have become central to youth political engagement, cultural production, and social commentary, often shaping the tone and direction of national conversations. In other words, influencers can unintentionally (or deliberately) spread misinformation, deepen polarisation, or distort public understanding.

Algorithmic Visibility and the Reshaping of Public Discourse

Algorithmic systems are increasingly central to the circulation of information in Nigeria's digital environment. By determining which content is prioritised, suppressed, or ignored, algorithms shape the contours of public discourse and influence which voices gain visibility. Gillespie (2014) captures this power succinctly, describing algorithms as "gatekeepers of public discourse" that structure attention and define what users come to see as relevant or important (p. 168). In countries where social media platforms are primary information channels for millions of young people, algorithmic curation plays a decisive role in shaping political conversations, cultural trends, and public sentiment.

The speed and scale at which misinformation spreads on algorithmically curated platforms have been documented globally. Ahmmad, Rahman, and Al-Zaman (2024), in a systematic review of misinformation on X (formerly Twitter), found that "misinformation spreads rapidly when amplified by engagement-driven algorithms" (p. 5). Their findings reflect patterns observed in Nigeria during moments of crisis. Episodes of communal violence, for example, often trigger the circulation of emotionally charged videos and images that go viral long before fact-checking organisations can intervene. The virality of such content is not accidental; it is a product of algorithmic systems that reward engagement, novelty, and emotional intensity.

Algorithmic amplification also has implications for representation and visibility. Caram (2023) argues that African voices are often underrepresented or misrepresented in global digital spaces due to platform biases and moderation gaps, and that structural inequalities are reproduced in digital environments through uneven visibility and selective amplification. In Nigeria, these dynamics disproportionately affect minority ethnic groups, rural

populations, and women, whose perspectives are often overshadowed by urban, elite, or male-dominated narratives. The result is a digital public sphere that mirrors—and sometimes intensifies—offline inequalities.

International scholarship reinforces these concerns. For instance, Noble (2018) shows that search engines "reproduce and amplify existing social inequalities" (p. 9), demonstrating that algorithmic systems are not neutral but reflect the values, assumptions, and biases embedded in their design. Although Noble's analysis focuses on the United States, her insights are highly relevant to Nigeria's multiethnic context, where algorithmic bias can shape public beliefs about identity, belonging, and legitimacy. By privileging certain voices and narratives while marginalising others, algorithms influence not only what information circulates but also whose experiences and perspectives are recognised, thereby showing that algorithmic visibility reshapes public discourse in Nigeria.

Media Bias in Nigeria

Media bias in Nigeria results from a complex interplay of historical legacies, political patronage, economic pressures, and the growing influence of algorithmic systems. These factors determine which information is visible, how it is presented, and how it circulates in the public sphere. To understand media bias in Nigeria, it is essential to examine both structural bias, which stems from ownership patterns and journalistic routines, and algorithmic bias, which arises from the design of digital platforms that now mediate public communication.

Structural Media Bias in Nigeria

1a. Ownership and Political Influence

Media ownership in Nigeria has long been linked to political power (Uche, 1989), a pattern that continues to shape editorial decisions today. Many leading newspapers and broadcast stations, such as The Nation, AIT, Channels, and Daily Trust, are owned or influenced by political figures or business elites with strong partisan ties. This influence is particularly evident during election periods. Oso (2012) argues that the Nigerian media have historically acted as "a battleground for political and ideological contestation" (p. 45). Similarly, Akinfeleye (2015) found that newspapers often "frame political actors in ways that align with the ideological positions of their owners" (p. 67). For example:

- During the 2015 elections, *The Nation* consistently framed Muhammadu Buhari as a reformer, while *AIT* aired the controversial "The Real Buhari" documentary portraying him negatively.
- In the 2023 elections, several newspapers gave disproportionate positive coverage to candidates aligned with their owners or proprietors, reinforcing partisan divides.

These patterns illustrate how ownership structures shape news framing and public perception.

1b. Ethno-Religious and Regional Bias

Nigeria's ethno-religious diversity also influences media portrayals. Adesoji (2010) contends that "media narratives often reflect the ethno-religious identities of their owners and audiences" (p. 89). This bias becomes particularly evident during crises. Examples include the:

- Coverage of communal violence in Plateau State: Some outlets emphasised Christian victimhood, while others foregrounded Fulani or Muslim grievances.
- Reporting on Kaduna conflicts: Southern-based media often framed events as religious persecution, while Northern outlets highlighted political or economic triggers.
- Herdsmen–farmer clashes: Media framing often aligned with regional identities, shaping public sentiment and sometimes escalating tensions.

These divergent framings demonstrate how ethno-religious bias influences public understanding of conflict.

1c. Economic Pressures and Commercial Bias

Economic pressures further distort media content. Declining advertising revenue, digital competition, and economic instability have pushed many Nigerian media organisations towards sensationalism, sponsored content, and political patronage. Olorunyomi (2015) notes that "the commercialisation of news has blurred the line between editorial content and paid political messaging" (p. 73). This is evident in the following:

- "Advertorials" disguised as news, especially during elections.
- Clickbait headlines designed to maximise traffic rather than inform.
- Paid influencer partnerships that shape online narratives without disclosure.

McChesney (2013) argues that commercial media systems worldwide tend to "prioritise profit over public service" (p. 56), a trend that is exacerbated in Nigeria by economic instability and weak regulatory oversight.

Algorithmic Bias: The New Layer of Distortion

While structural media bias has long shaped Nigeria's information landscape, the rise of social media platforms has introduced a new, less visible form of bias: algorithmic bias. Unlike traditional editorial decisions, algorithmic curation is automated, opaque, and driven by engagement metrics rather than journalistic principles.

2a. How Algorithms Shape Visibility

Algorithms determine which content users see by predicting engagement. Gillespie (2014) describes algorithms as gatekeepers of public discourse, shaping attention and influencing users' perceptions of importance. For instance:

- During the 2020 #EndSARS protests, videos of police brutality went viral within minutes, while official statements struggled to gain traction.
- During the 2023 elections, emotionally charged posts—claims of rigging, ethnic slurs, and conspiracy theories—were algorithmically amplified, often overshadowing verified information from INEC or reputable journalists.

This is why Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral (2018) assert that false news spreads "farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth" (p. 1146), mainly because algorithms reward novelty and emotional impact.

2b. Filter Bubbles and Echo Chambers

Algorithms also create personalised information environments. Pariser (2011) warns that filter bubbles restrict our worldview and reinforce our biases. In Nigeria, where political and ethnic identities are prominent, filter bubbles can intensify polarisation. Examples include:

- Supporters of Peter Obi, Bola Tinubu, and Atiku Abubakar in 2023 often inhabited distinct digital ecosystems, each reinforced by algorithmic curation.
- Ethnic-based WhatsApp groups circulated tailored narratives that reinforced group identities and mistrust of others.
- Religious influencers created parallel digital spheres for Christian and Muslim youth, each with its own narratives about national events.

This fragmentation makes it difficult to establish shared facts or engage in constructive dialogue.

2c. Algorithmic Amplification of Influencers

As previously mentioned, influencers are central to Nigeria's digital public sphere, with algorithms enhancing their reach. Abidin (2018) observes that influencers operate within attention economies where visibility is monetised. Algorithms tend to favour influencers who create emotionally compelling content, regardless of its accuracy. For instance:

- During #EndSARS, influencers like Mr Macaroni and Rinu Oduala mobilised youth activism, but some unverified claims also spread rapidly through influencer networks.
- During the 2023 elections, political influencers ("Data Boys," "Obidients," "BATified" accounts) shaped narratives through coordinated posting amplified by platform algorithms.
- Health misinformation during COVID-19 often spread through lifestyle influencers who shared unverified remedies.

All these illustrate the double-edged nature of algorithmic amplification.

Information Literacy and Media & Information Literacy in Nigeria

Information literacy (IL) and media and information literacy (MIL) have become essential skills in modern societies, especially in environments where misinformation, political polarisation, and algorithmic curation influence public discourse. In Nigeria, IL is not just an educational issue; it is both a developmental challenge and a democratic requirement. The ability to find, evaluate, and use information critically shapes how citizens engage with a rapidly changing digital environment, take part in civic life, and resist manipulation.

Scholars have long emphasised the importance of IL for civic and democratic participation (Hobbs, 2010; Aduloju, 2019). Hobbs argues that information literacy equips citizens with "the habits of inquiry and critical thinking needed to make informed decisions" (2010, p. 18). In environments marked by information disorder, these skills are even more vital. Nigeria exemplifies this situation: high social media use, low institutional trust, and uneven digital literacy create ideal conditions for misinformation to spread.

The State of Information Literacy in Nigeria

Research consistently shows that IL levels in Nigeria vary across different demographic groups. According to Aduloju (2020), "The idea of media literacy to be taught as a course in Nigeria is still in its infancy and encounters many challenges, as in many other developing countries" (p. 100). A previous study by Aduloju shows that media literacy and related courses are offered at only select Nigerian universities, with coverage ranging from 0% to 2%. This suggests that media literacy or information literacy courses are either absent from curricula or not sufficiently taught at those universities (2019). Infrastructural gaps, educational inequalities, and limited access to digital resources drive these disparities.

Similarly, Ngozi (2024) observes that Nigerian undergraduates often struggle to evaluate credibility, distinguish fact from opinion, and understand the motivations behind online content. Furthermore, Aduloju (2019) found that although university students recognise the importance of MIL, their actual skills vary greatly, especially in assessing online sources and identifying misinformation. Their study showed that many students rely heavily on social media for news but lack the critical skills needed to verify content before sharing. This indicates that among young people, Nigeria's most active digital users, the situation remains inconsistent. Therefore, these gaps have significant implications for how information spreads within peer networks, particularly during crises or politically sensitive moments.

MIL Interventions and Institutional Efforts

Recent years have seen a rise in efforts to improve IL and MIL in Nigeria. Academic libraries, civil society organisations, and international partners have launched projects to develop digital skills. Paor and Heravi (2020) highlight the importance of librarians in equipping students with practical tools to navigate complex digital environments, noting that structured MIL programmes significantly enhance students' ability to spot fake news. Similarly, civil society organisations such as Dubawa, Africa Check, and the Centre for Journalism Innovation

and Development (CJID) have introduced fact-checking training, media literacy workshops, and community outreach programmes. These initiatives have been especially effective among youth, journalists, and educators (Dubawa & Press Release, 2023).

However, these efforts remain fragmented as Taiwo (2024) believes that Nigeria lacks a coherent national strategy for media literacy, leaving many communities underserved. Rural populations, older adults, and individuals with limited formal education often have little exposure to MIL initiatives, despite being highly vulnerable to misinformation. Thus, there is a need to strengthen information literacy and integrate it into the curricula of schools in Nigeria.

Enhancing Information Literacy and Algorithmic Literacy in Nigeria

Enhancing information literacy in Nigeria requires a comprehensive, layered approach that addresses structural inequalities, educational gaps, algorithmic opacity, and the sociocultural factors shaping how Nigerians access and interpret information. Given the complexity of the country's information environment—characterised by traditional media bias, algorithmic amplification, digital inequality, and widespread misinformation—information literacy cannot be reduced to a technical skill. Instead, it must be recognised as a civic, cultural, and political skill vital to democratic participation and social unity.

A vital step in improving information literacy is to incorporate media and information literacy (MIL) into Nigeria's formal education system. At the primary and secondary levels, students need early exposure to key skills such as distinguishing fact from opinion, evaluating sources, recognising bias, understanding digital footprints, and identifying misinformation. UNESCO (2013) emphasises that children must be equipped with critical thinking skills from the earliest stages of education, yet most Nigerian schools lack structured MIL programmes. At the tertiary level, universities have begun integrating MIL into general studies curricula, but coverage remains inconsistent (Aduloju, 2019). As Paor and Heravi (2020) argue, librarians should play a crucial role in IL instruction because "students require guided interventions to develop evaluative competencies." However, educators themselves need training; Hobbs (2010) notes that teachers must be "competent media users and critical thinkers" (p. 22) to teach MIL effectively. Without properly equipping educators, classroom-level IL instruction will remain uneven.

Beyond formal education, community-based initiatives are essential for reaching populations that formal institutions do not effectively serve. Civil society organisations such as Dubawa, Africa Check, FactCheckHub, and AFP Fact Check have established MIL workshops for journalists, youth groups, religious leaders, and community associations (Dubawa & Press Release, 2023). These efforts are impactful but limited in scale. As Nwokedi and Onyekuru (2025) note, media literacy efforts must extend beyond formal institutions to reach communities where misinformation thrives. Religious institutions, which hold considerable influence in Nigeria, can also play a transformative role by integrating IL into sermons, youth programmes, and community outreach. Given Nigeria's linguistic diversity, IL programmes must be delivered in Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Pidgin, and minority languages. Dijk (2020) reminds us that digital inclusion must consider "linguistic and cultural accessibility" (p. 33). Without local-language IL, rural and low-literacy populations remain highly vulnerable to misinformation.

A crucial yet often neglected aspect of information literacy is algorithmic literacy, which entails understanding how algorithms curate content and shape online experiences. Nigerians must recognise that algorithms prioritise engagement, that viral content is not always credible, and that personalisation can create filter bubbles that reinforce existing biases. Bucher (2018) argues that "users must develop algorithmic imaginaries to conceptualise how algorithms influence their experiences" (p. 32). In Nigeria, where algorithmic amplification fuels misinformation and polarisation, this awareness is vital. Teaching about algorithmic bias is equally essential. Noble (2018) demonstrates that algorithms reproduce and amplify existing social inequalities, a reality evident in Nigeria through the under-representation of minority voices, the overexposure of urban elites, and the limited moderation of harmful content in local languages. Gagrčin, Naab and Grub (2026) add that African users often lack algorithmic agency, meaning they have little control over how platforms curate their information environments. Strengthening algorithmic literacy will empower Nigerians to question algorithmic authority and resist manipulation.

Fact-checking ecosystems also play a vital role in enhancing information literacy. Nigeria's fact-checking organisations have expanded considerably, but they still need more funding, regional offices, multilingual teams, and partnerships with local media. Denniss and Lindberg (2025) argue that combating misinformation requires "robust verification ecosystems that can respond rapidly to harmful content" (p. 4). Incorporating fact-checking into journalism education is equally essential. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014) emphasise that journalism's primary obligation is to the truth, yet many Nigerian journalism programmes lack verification modules. Strengthening editorial standards, ensuring transparency about ownership influence, and separating editorial content from commercial messaging are crucial steps in rebuilding public trust.

Policy and regulatory interventions are also essential. Nigeria lacks a comprehensive national MIL policy, despite UNESCO's (2013) recommendation that governments adopt national strategies to coordinate cross-sector efforts. A national MIL policy could standardise curricula, support teacher training, fund community programmes, and promote multilingual information literacy. Platform accountability is equally crucial. Couldry and Mejias (2019) argue that data colonialism requires "collective resistance and regulatory intervention" (p. 14). Nigeria could require platforms to publish transparency reports, mandate local-language moderation, and support independent audits of algorithmic systems. During elections, platforms should label political ads, restrict micro-targeting, collaborate with fact-checkers, and swiftly remove harmful misinformation.

Media institutions must strengthen their internal capabilities. Journalists require training in digital verification, data journalism, algorithmic literacy, and ethical reporting. Nwokedi and Onyekuru (2025) emphasise that content creators must be equipped with critical skills to navigate digital misinformation. Improving editorial standards, implementing transparency policies, and collaborating with fact-checkers can help restore public trust in traditional media. Public awareness campaigns can reach large audiences quickly. Radio, television, and billboards can disseminate IL messages, especially in rural areas where radio remains the most accessible medium. Social media campaigns—particularly short-form videos on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube—can effectively engage young people. These campaigns can promote fact-checking, algorithmic literacy, and critical thinking.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Nigeria's information landscape is undergoing rapid and far-reaching transformation. Traditional media structures, digital technologies, and algorithmic systems now intersect to shape how citizens access, interpret, and circulate information. This convergence has created a dynamic yet fragile information environment in which structural media bias, digital inequality, and algorithmic amplification combine to shape public knowledge and civic behaviour. In a context marked by political polarisation, economic uncertainty, and low institutional trust, these forces have significant implications for democratic participation and social cohesion. Nigerian citizens are actively engaging with this evolving ecosystem, yet many lack the essential skills to navigate it effectively. Gaps in media and information literacy and limited awareness of how algorithms curate content leave people vulnerable to misinformation, manipulation, and polarising narratives. Therefore, enhancing information literacy is not only an educational priority but also a national necessity tied to democratic resilience and the health of the public sphere.

To achieve this, a coordinated, multisectoral approach is essential. First and foremost, formal education must include media and information literacy at all levels to ensure students develop critical thinking skills early on. Teachers, librarians, and educators require ongoing training to deliver high-quality instruction. Beyond schools, community-based programmes are vital for reaching populations outside formal education, especially in rural areas, low-literacy communities, and linguistically diverse regions. Civil society organisations, religious institutions, and local leaders can play transformative roles in fostering critical engagement with information. This can also be ensured by working with local organisations and community leaders.

Furthermore, policymakers should establish fair rules that promote transparency in algorithm design without limiting freedom of speech. Since citizens need to understand how digital platforms prioritise content, how personalisation shapes their information environment, and how algorithmic systems can reinforce existing biases, media and information literacy, together with algorithmic literacy, must become a key part of national IL

efforts by extending them across all levels of education. This knowledge will better equip users to question digital infrastructures, spot manipulation, evaluate online content, and make better-informed decisions online.

Information ecosystems will also be strengthened by promoting independent fact-checking projects and supporting public service media, both of which can help ensure that shared information is accurate and reliable. More broadly, journalists and media institutions must collaborate to promote verification, transparency, and ethical reporting. Media houses, in particular, should adopt stronger editorial standards, disclose ownership influences, and clearly separate news from sponsored content to rebuild public trust. Policy and regulatory measures are also essential.

In addition, social media firms such as Google and Meta Platforms ought to invest in localised moderation and improve algorithmic accountability by implementing community feedback mechanisms and collaborating with local experts to ensure their algorithms reflect diverse perspectives and needs. Similarly, digital platforms must be held accountable for algorithmic harms, particularly in local-language moderation, transparency, and data governance. For instance, during elections and crises, platforms should collaborate closely with fact-checkers and local institutions to curb the spread of harmful content.

Lastly, reducing internet costs and improving accessibility can help close the digital divide and promote more equitable engagement in Nigeria's digital information environment, particularly by enabling marginalised communities to access vital information and participate in online discussions. Taken together, these measures can help Nigeria build a more informed, critically literate, and algorithmically conscious citizenry, which is essential for combating misinformation, reducing polarisation, and promoting active civic engagement.

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