

***Digital Factchecking: Beyond the Human Gates to Digital Fortifications Against
Misinformation in the Newsrooms***

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Abstract: Misinformation has become a common news pollutant and a vicious malady that many news professionals and media scholars have become wary of in this digital age. Beyond its likelihood to destroy the validity of any information, it has also been noted to damage the credibility and integrity of any media house found culpable of disseminating misinformation and other information misnomers. This work tried to synthesize existing research to develop its conceptual framework. The gatekeeping theory guided this. The review adopted more of the exploratory and systematic techniques to provide logical discussions under relevant headings. Studies and related works on social media misinformation, disinformation, malinformation, fake news, information disorder fact checking, digital fact checking, and gate keeping were carefully identified primarily through online data base, using Google search, research gates, and works on other academic repositories like Scopus and Google Scholar. Since this work relied on secondary data in explaining how digital fact-checkers can limit the erosion of adulterated news materials and other information pollutants in the media space, to ensure trust, credibility and highly effective digital gatekeeping process in today's media production, ample evidences were provided on the need for a hybrid newsroom operation in order to effectively combat misinformation and other disorders.

Keywords: Disinformation, Fact checking, Gate keeping, Misinformation, Online News.

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تَدْقِيقُ الْحَقَائِقِ الرَّقْمِيِّ: تَحْصِينُ صُرُورِيٍّ لِحِرَاسَةِ النُّبُوءَةِ ضِدَّ الْمَعْلُومَاتِ الْمُضَلَّلَةِ فِي عُرْفِ الْأَخْبَارِ

التقليدية

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ملخص: أَصْبَحَتِ الْمَعْلُومَاتُ الْمُضَلَّلَةُ مُلَوَّنًا إِخْبَارِيًّا شَائِعًا وَمَرَضًا حَبِيبًا بَاتَ الْعَدِيدُ مِنْ مُهْنِيِّ الصَّحَافَةِ وَبَاحِثِي الْأَعْلَامِ يَحْذَرُونَ مِنْهُ فِي هَذَا الْعَصْرِ الرَّقْمِيِّ. وَبَعِيدًا عَنِ احْتِمَالِ تَدْمِيرِهَا لِصِحَّةِ أَيِّ مَعْلُومَةٍ، فَقَدْ لُوْحِظَ أَيْضًا أَنَّهَا تُضِرُّ بِمُضَدَّقِيَّةِ وَنَزَاهَةِ أَيِّ مُؤَسَّسَةٍ إِعْلَامِيَّةٍ تَنْبُثُ إِدَانَتَهَا بِنَشْرِ مَعْلُومَاتٍ مُضَلَّلَةٍ أَوْ غَيْرِهَا مِنْ الْمُضْطَّلِحَاتِ الْإِخْبَارِيَّةِ الْمَعْلُومَةِ. حَاوَلَ هَذَا الْعَمَلُ تَرْكِيبَ الْأَبْحَاطِ الْقَائِمَةِ لِتَطْوِيرِ إِطَارِهِ الْمَفَاهِيمِي، وَقَدْ اسْتَرْسَدَ فِي ذَلِكَ بِنَظَرِيَّةِ "حِرَاسَةِ النُّبُوءَةِ". وَاعْتَمَدَتِ الْمُرَاجَعَةُ أَكْثَرَ عَلَى التَّقْيِيَّاتِ الْإِسْتِكْشَافِيَّةِ وَالْمُنْهَجِيَّةِ لِتَقْدِيمِ مُنَاقَشَاتٍ مُنْطَقِيَّةٍ ضِمْنَ عَنَاوِينَ دَاتِ صِلَةٍ. كَمَا تَمَّ تَحْدِيدُ الدِّرَاسَاتِ وَالْأَعْمَالِ دَاتِ الصِّلَةِ بِمَوْضُوعَاتِ الْمَعْلُومَاتِ الْمُضَلَّلَةِ عَلَى وَسَائِلِ التَّوَاصُلِ الْإِجْتِمَاعِيِّ، وَالْمَعْلُومَاتِ الرَّائِفَةِ، وَالْمَعْلُومَاتِ الصَّارَةِ، وَالْأَخْبَارِ الرَّائِفَةِ، وَاخْتِلَالِ النِّظَامِ الْمَعْلُومَاتِيِّ، وَتَدْقِيقِ الْحَقَائِقِ، وَالتَّدْقِيقِ الرَّقْمِيِّ لِلْحَقَائِقِ، وَحِرَاسَةِ النُّبُوءَةِ؛ وَذَلِكَ بِعِنَايَةٍ فَائِقَةٍ عَبْرَ قَوَاعِدِ الْبَيِّنَاتِ عَلَى الْإِنْتَرْنِتِ بِشَكْلِ أُسَاسِيٍّ، بِمَا فِي ذَلِكَ بَحْثُ "جُوجِل" (Google)، وَمَوَاقِعُ الْأَبْحَاطِ (ResearchGate)، وَالْأَعْمَالُ الْمُنْشُورَةُ فِي الْمُسْتَوْدَعَاتِ الْأَكَادِيمِيَّةِ الْأُخْرَى مِثْلَ "سَكُوبُوس" (Scopus) وَ"جُوجِلْ سَكُولَار" (Google Scholar). وَنَظَرًا لِاعْتِمَادِ هَذَا الْعَمَلِ عَلَى الْبَيِّنَاتِ التَّانُوِيَّةِ فِي شَرْحِ كَيْفِيَّةِ حَدِّ مُدَقِّقِي الْحَقَائِقِ الرَّقْمِيِّينَ مِنْ تَأْكُلِ الْمَوَادِّ الْإِخْبَارِيَّةِ الْمَعْشُوشَةِ وَغَيْرِهَا مِنْ مَلَوَّنَاتِ الْمَعْلُومَاتِ فِي الْفَضَاءِ الْإِعْلَامِيِّ؛ وَصَمَانًا لِلتَّقَةِ وَالْمُضَدَّقِيَّةِ وَعَمَلِيَّةِ حِرَاسَةِ نُّبُوءَةٍ رَقْمِيَّةٍ عَالِيَةِ الْفَعَالِيَّةِ فِي الْإِنْتِاجِ الْإِعْلَامِيِّ الْيَوْمِ، فَقَدْ تَمَّ تَقْدِيمُ أُدْلَةٍ وَافِرَةٍ عَلَى الْحَاجَةِ إِلَى تَشْغِيلِ عُرْفِ أَخْبَارِ "هَجِيَّة" مِنْ أَجْلِ مُكَافَحَةِ الْمَعْلُومَاتِ الْمُضَلَّلَةِ وَالْإِضْطِرَابَاتِ الْأُخْرَى بِمَا يَلْزَمُ مِنَ الْفَعَالِيَّةِ.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الْمَعْلُومَاتِ الرَّائِفَةِ، تَدْقِيقِ الْحَقَائِقِ، حِرَاسَةِ النُّبُوءَةِ، الْمَعْلُومَاتِ الْمُضَلَّلَةِ، الْأَخْبَارُ عَبْرَ الْإِنْتَرْنِتِ.

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Introduction

Media is considered the “mirror” of modern society. The media shapes our lives. Today, the media plays a vital role as the purveyor of information. This function is exemplified by dedicating the various channels, from television, radio, newspapers, to new media platforms as viable sources where people can get diverse streams of information daily. Paul and Rai (2021) opine that media possess the exclusive power to select issues and events in the world, decide what constitutes news, filter and frame issues, contextualise the problem, and set the agenda.

Given this lofty function, media sets agenda, and offers authentic and timely facts and opinions about various events and occurrences to their various audience as objective and balanced as possible, to remove biases and prejudice from such reports. The agenda-setting paradigm confers this responsibility on the media to influence the public awareness of issues as opposed to any predetermined knowledge they might have held previously (Fadeji et al., 2025). That is, the media present different realities to the members of the public in various channels and get people to think about them in the way they have been presented (Yaroson & Asemah in Asemah, 2016).

Meanwhile, the information role of the media has also assigned a unique responsibility to the media which is the “gatekeeping” role. This function has directly vested the media with the role of determining what should be made known to the public and what should not in other words, the media is then seen as being in control of messages and information that are circulated in the society. They determine access to news and information (Asemah, 2016). Kovach and Rosentiel in the American Press Institute (2018) opine that the purpose of journalism is not only defined by technology, by journalists, or the techniques they employ; rather, it is defined by something more basic which is the functionality of news in the lives of people. Information is the core element that drives the digital society and the key to how the digital society adds value and redistributes power (Park, 2017).

One of the key responsibilities of the media is to systematically process, collect, choose, and refine information or ideas before sharing them with the public. The usual means of sharing this information are through all the accessible channels of communication (Akpan & Oloke 2017). In the views of Ekhareafu in Olaniyi (2020), he submits that the power of journalism in modern society lies in its capacity to transform society or even debase it, depending on how it is used (Olaniyi,2020).

However, as technology evolves, media practitioners align themselves with the trending technology to effectively perform their roles in society (Pavlik, 2014). New technologies have ushered in the proliferation and prevalence of online media platforms in almost every facet of human lives, and these have made the consumption of news and information extremely convenient for the users of such technology (Reuters Institute 2025; Aondover et al. 2024; Wilding et al. 2018).

In the views of Shearer and Matsa, (2018); Nami et al. (2019), the acceptance of online news consumption has grown because a considerable number of individuals across the world depend on these platforms for news. This assertion is in line with Talabi (2011) who said that the internet has made the world smaller for media practitioners to explore. New technologies have changed journalism practice across the world. Traditionally, processing and enabling dissemination of news was subjected to the professional gatekeepers. Before the advent of the new media, professional journalists through gatekeeping, ensured that only credible items that could improve the society and make the people better citizens were released as news. This routine has been altered by the advent of new technologies allowing the Internet to facilitate fast-paced information sharing, which could reduce the effectiveness of the gatekeeping process (Salonen et al. 2022); and as a result, this may allow adulterated news content to permeate and corrupt online news information, (Guanah, et al. 2019).

The gatekeeping arrangement is a filtering process that applies to traditional news reporting and distribution; without it, there could be a

floodgate of several news pollutants, with misinformation being identified as one of the critical news pollutants that we are currently dealing with in this digital age (Michael, 2023). According to Tekoniemi et al. (2022), the democratisation of knowledge through online platforms has sadly led to the spread of misinformation and deception. In the digital age, misinformation can spread quickly via social media and other online methods (Perez-Escobar et al. 2021).

This could be the reason that Lewandowsky et al. (2012) assert that, though, the media are by definition seeking to inform the public, it is notable that they are particularly prone to spreading misinformation for systemic reasons that are worthy of analysis and exposure. He further opines, about new media, that the Internet has made possible significant provision and access to the unquantifiable volume of information of any sort, thereby contributing to the spread of misinformation. He further argued that the growing use of social networks may foster the quick and wide dissemination of misinformation. Schankiya (2018) supports that as more and more false information lands in front of us, it is becoming more difficult to identify something as inaccurate.

Scholars have made major contributions to this emerging subject by investigating the intricate role of digital communication technologies in constructing the multifarious terrain of misinformation and disinformation (Marres, 2018; Napoli, 2019; Tufekci, 2018; Zeng & Brennen, 2023). In view of this, misinformation has been conceived variously as “a claim that contradicts or distorts common understanding of verifiable facts” (Guess & Lyons, 2020, p.10). Meanwhile, Born and Edginton (2017) sees it as an unintentionally circulated inaccurate information. In same instance, Southwell et al. (2017) explains misinformation as "claims that do not enjoy universal or near-universal consensus as being true at a particular moment in time on the basis of evidence" (p. 369).

On a deeper level, misinformation provides a solid ground for other news aberrations and unwanted materials to be hatched and grow into major information pollutants. Thinking along this line, Inobembhs et al. (2020)

conclude that this phenomenon poses a dangerous threat to credible news in this digital age. To decrease the surging tide of misinformation in the digital space, and by extension, to reduce how misinformation affects the sanctity of the gatekeeping efforts in the online news platforms, the study of Ikulajolu and Aribisala (2021) affirm that deploying fact-checking tools in the newsrooms can curb the menace. In like manner, Cotter et al. (2022); Mena (2020); Mena et al. (2020) agree that fact-checking can truly improve news contents.

Exploring the Gatekeeping theory in digital media contexts

This work is guided by the gatekeeping theory was propounded by Kurt Lewing in and was subsequently popularised by David White in the 1950. The idea of gatekeeping has been conceptualised as a theoretical phenomenon and as a journalistic responsibility (Perreault 2022). On one hand, it provides an ideological direction and solid framework for media practice and how information is controlled by those who make the news. It analyses the processes involved in filtering information and refining the news through designated procedures to remove unwanted materials (Gabunia & Drew, 2023).

To Chin-Fook and Simmonds (2011) citing Shoemaker (2009) it explains the flow of information from the media managers to the audience, in which the trained journalists act as mediators and sift what finally gets to the public in form of news, either in broadcast materials, print or any other media at all. The gatekeepers act as mediators, in the sense that they determine the information or materials to be circulated to the public sphere. Meaning that these individuals use their professional discretions and training to judge every information and construct that makes the news. A process Perreault (2022) noted as determining what to include or exclude public information.

As a matter of responsibility, the gatekeeping function is reserved for media gatekeepers (i.e., journalists and editors) who have the authority to control the gate by deciding the content sent to the media audience. The

role involves making daily decisions on what comes in and goes out of the gate of information. Gatekeepers have authority over those on the other side of the gate, both those seeking information (audiences) and those seeking to inform (Deluliis, 2015; Craig, 2017)

In line with this, Hardin (2005), expresses these views;

Gatekeeping, the decision-making process editors use to choose stories, is a basic and powerful force because it is essentially the way sports editors shape readers' integrated views of social reality. Gatekeeping is affected by a number of factors, including values, organizational norms and routines, personal beliefs and experiences, and ideology. ... Audiences may also influence gatekeeping, although scholars debate how or to what degree (p. 65).

Gatekeeping role in the media industry is highly sensitive, professionally tasking and ethically vital to keep the pace, and keep out unsavoury items or materials from making their way into the news. It is with this mindset that Gabunia and Drew (2023) reenact the views of Shoemaker and Vos (2009) which sees the gate keeping function as a critical filtration that has to do with carefully examining heavy volumes of information and trimming it down into usable bits of messages for media audience to make sense of their daily lives and events around them.

Lee (2025) identified the traditional gatekeeper in the conventional newsrooms as the journalists and editors who devote their skills and employ various techniques to decide what information to publish, broadcast or circulate to the audience. The idea here is using their professional judgement to shape public understanding and present safe, relevant credible and reliable information that is devoid of any irregularities (Erzikova, 2018). The media professionals have the responsibility of verifying the accuracy of any information to ensure news stories adhere strictly to the journalistic standards, and upholding ethical codes and fairness in the reportage.

Ijeh (2023), says news media attempt to select events to allow past their gates based on a number of factors, including newsworthiness, as part of their gatekeeping duties. This is now required because the amount of information that field reporters in media outlets generate in news form and media contents frequently surpasses the amount of airtime space allotted to reach the public. Editors and other senior staff members participating in news flow regulation are typically forced to select from among the available news items those that will be presented to the audience, with or without some kind of treatment, depending on specific conditions. Taking a cue from Mauer (2016), he states that gatekeepers are very important in order to sustain the society and for the social system to function properly and maintain the right balance, to ensure these media professionals show commitment towards a genuine, fair, and balanced reporting to align with public interest rather than private interests. The author further advocates that gatekeepers must publish good ideas and discredit bad ones.

Amorphous Gates in the Social Media Space: The Need for Reinforcement

The whole idea of what the traditional gatekeeping represents has been called into question by digital media and technological advancements. The new reality and the antecedent ‘information-overload,’ and how fast any kind of information can be published without much constraint, which greatly stifles the capabilities of human gates. Meaning that the role of gatekeepers, and the speed and flow of information in the current age may overwhelm the human gates. So, where the traditional control and human gates are failing, there is need to regain control of online information flow through a deliberate synergy sophisticated automation and conventional journalistic techniques (Simmonds, 2011). The internet comes with various multimedia formats, ranging from hypertextual, interactive, and multimodal features which are very unique for digital media (Finnemann, 2011). Consequently, this has affected the volume of information exchange on the internet; both in the ways people access information and the way information flows.

The rise of social media has promoted an explosion of disinformation that is cheap and easy to produce, disseminate internationally, and test on multiple audiences. The problem can be conceptualized as an assemblage of social media platforms, actors, and big data (Woolley & Howard, 2016). Its proliferation on social media has developed from a socio-technical mix of platform design, algorithms, human factors, political and commercial incentives. Just as journalism encompasses social actors, technological actants, as well as work-practice activities and audiences, so too does fake news production and distribution (Lewis & Westlund 2015).

Tangcharoensathien et al. (2020), express their fear about the amount of information available on the internet and the ocean of false contents that media consumer and many information seekers navigate through on regular basis. The researchers also established that fake news and its related by-products are likely to be share 70% of the time more than credible information. This fear is going nowhere just yet. The reason is that, the social media space is not gated, it permits all manner of contents, publishers, and now many people can mimic roles of media professionals, and with the projection of Datarepotal (2025) that as at July 2025, there are about 5.65 billion internet users globally, which represents 68.7% of the world publication, the worry that majority of internet users who Adjin-Tetty and Amenaghawon (2024) claim to not know about factchecking or confirm stories before reposting or sharing will grow even higher and further deepening the issues of global disinformation.

Giving that a considerable number of individuals across the world depend on online media as their means of getting news (Shearer & Matsu, 2018; Nami & Mitchell, 2019), and thus letting such news affect their opinions and actions, directly and indirectly; thus, checking the veracity of such news becomes an important task.

The human gates may have become very porous and seemingly helpless in the digital age, because the dissemination, flow, access and distribution of online news cannot be subject to the control of a few individuals or authorities. One reason for this is because news has become greatly

decentralised and the information age comes with unrestricted access to an overwhelming volumes information from countless sources, individuals and other data generated by non-human source -to include algorithms and generative AIs (Don & Kenzie, 2025). Human editors may have potentially lost control of the gate, and there is a drastic call for an immediate shift from the traditional gatekeeping process, to normalization of an automated method to regain control of selecting accurate information, combat fake news and disinformation and deploying tools that can prioritise faster information access and dissemination, while operating within strict journalistic codes with clearer understanding of news values (Beverly boy, 2025).

Digital Fact-Checking: Concepts, Practices, and Tools

There have been several attempts to control misinformation in our society, for instance, Facebook recently introduced tools that help users to flag articles that they deem as fake (Tschitschek et al. 2018). These tools generate crowd signals that could be used to train classifiers to flag disinformation and fake news. Many fake news detectors rely on users' responses because they hold valuable information about the credibility of the news (Qian et al. 2018). Castillo et al. (2021) pointed out that users' responses to news articles hold valuable information that helps to understand the properties of the content itself. Also, users' stances and sentiments could assist in detecting disinformation (Qian et al. 2018). But there is more to be done, especially, in stemming the tide of disinformation from the source, or a complementary effort to provide holistic gatekeeping in the online news publication.

Fact-checking is a procedure for authenticating the accuracy of information. In journalism, this happens internally before publication as well as externally via articles appraising the accuracy of publicly available information (Graves & Amazeen, 2019). According to Anipah (2020), fact-checking (in the context of information disorder) is the process of determining the truthfulness and accuracy of official, published information such as politicians' statements and news reports. Also,

publishing fact-checked information has been shown generally to have a positive effect in terms of correcting inaccurate information (Himma-Kadakas & Ojamets, 2022). Adhikari (2021) cited by Oliver (2022) claims that fact-checking has developed into a profession and a field of its own and it is the process by which someone verifies whether a piece of information is true or not and whether the piece of information is backed by verifiable facts or not.

To make clear, the whole idea of fact checking explains a process, procedure, effort, technique, tools and system put in place to verify information. By extension, this idea tries to capture the responsibility of the media to reinforce the traditional gatekeeping and deploy necessary tools to standardise and authenticate news stories. This involves sorting contents and ensuring photos, videos, and other elements within a news story are genuine and credible. Beyond just being able to verify stories, media professionals must fact check for speculations and other irregularities (MISA, nd; Dziak, 2022).

Hagie and Botos (2021) said fact-checking serves as a safeguard against the erosion of trust in journalism and also contributes to a more discerning and sceptical audience, capable of navigating the complexities of the digital information landscape (PérezEscolar et al. 2021). As equally highlighted by Hall et al. (2021), the media serves as a “gatekeeper” of information, and fact-checking acts as a gatekeeper’s gatekeeper, ensuring that the information disseminated is accurate and reliable.

Media practitioners are aware that there are two phases of fact-checking; the one done as an internal function of journalism that refers to internal processes followed to verify facts before publication (Graves & Amazeen, 2019), and the one done to verify facts that appear in the public domain. Fact-checking become a separate basic function of journalists due to the diverse effects of new media technologies on the professional gatekeeping function of the media men argued van Wyk (2024) as professional media function is skewing towards the fingers of the citizens.

Fact-checking stemmed from the proliferation of false information and the failure of the conventional gatekeeping process in online media space. (Amazeen, 2019). In the past two decades, fact-checking has grown from an in-house media function to dedicated fact-checking organizations and digital tools that can be deployed in the new journalism to counter false and inaccurate claims made in public; hence, it is part of the information landscape in which journalists work (Brandtzaeg et. al, 2018). While research has shown that fact-checking started and has tremendously grown in the global North, and very recently in Africa and elsewhere in the global South (Cheruiyot & Ferrer-Conill, 2018).

In the face of the limited capabilities of desk editors to curb the menace of information disorders and the erosion of credible information in the online space, there is need for new technological assistance for fact-checking media functions, hence the emergency of fact-checking tools. Currently, there are many independent fact-checkers services available to journalists to help them combat the ever-growing fake news sources and contents and the onslaughts of mischievous individual who make it their mission to corrode credible stories. Grabmeier, (2021); Portal and Wood (2021) state that the major aim of fact-checking tools is to combat false beliefs and facts in communication and ensure the public right to the right information is guaranteed.

Fact-checking in online journalism means the usage of modern digital tools to verify the authenticity of information. The tools include Google advanced search, website verification, image verification, video verification, geolocation, reverse image search, photo forensics, demonstrator, noise analysis, cheapfakes, and deepfakes. Others are Tinyeye, a video verifier, and Wikimapia (Silas, 2021; Busari, 2020). Newsrooms will find Klaxon, The International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) (website), AP fact-check, etc very useful (Public Media Alliance, 2025). In the view of Graves (2017), fact-checking has a five-step process to evaluate factual claims made by public figures, the concepts of verification and debunking have become increasingly important to consider (Mantzaris 2017). Verification includes seeking evidence for the

veracity of user-generated content (Wardle & Moy 2017); debunking involves the detection and revision of viral disinformation and “fake news” in the larger sense (Mantzaris 2017). The goal of fact-checking in online journalism is to provide clear and rigorously vetted information to consumers so that they can use the facts to make fully cognisant choices and other essential decisions (Leonard, et al. 2020).

Fact Checking Tools: An Efficient Technique to Deal with Disinformation

Media practitioners are aware that there are two phases of fact-checking; the one done as an internal function of journalism that refers to internal processes followed to verify facts before publication (Graves and Amazeen, 2019), and the one done to verify facts that appear in the public domain. Fact-checking becomes a separate basic function of journalists due to the diverse effects of new media technologies on the professional gatekeeping function of the media men as professional media function is skewing towards the fingers of the citizens (Mahl et al., 2024).

In support of this, Vos (2015, p.6) states that,

The public’s growing access to the internet and social media has escalated the challenges in the media environment with traditional journalists losing their dominance as gatekeepers in deciding what should be published as news, and information making it into the public domain irrespective of the media’s actions.

This means that today, there is an increment in misinformation and fake news, and internal fact-checking mechanisms through the editor’s verification are becoming limited.

There emerged the need for new technological assistance for fact-checking media functions, hence the emergency of fact-checking tools. Currently, there are many independent fact-checkers services available to journalists to help them combat the ever-growing fake news sources and contents and the onslaughts of the profession caused by incredible sources

and facts. Grabmeier, (2021); Wood and Porter (2021) state that the major aim of fact-checking tools is to combat false beliefs and facts in communication and ensure the public right to the right information is guaranteed.

Some of these tools include Google advanced search, website verification, image verification, video verification, geolocation, reverse image search, photo forensics, demonstrator, noise analysis, cheapfakes, and deepfakes. Others are Tinyeye, a video verifier, and Wikimapia (Silas, 2021; Busari, 2020). In the view of Graves (2017), fact-checking tools have a five-step process to evaluate factual claims made by public figures, the concepts of verification and debunking have become increasingly important to consider (Mantzaris 2017). Verification includes seeking evidence for the veracity of user-generated content (Wardle and Moy 2017); debunking involves the detection and revision of viral disinformation and “fake news” in the larger sense (Mantzaris 2017).

The goal of fact-checking tools in online journalism is to provide clear and rigorously vetted information to the media audience so that they can use the facts to make sound decisions and other essential choices. (Liu et al. 2023). These fact-checking tools have been helping the media play its roles. Annamaire (2017) said the need to provide a truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account of the day’s event in a context that gives them meaning; the need to understand that it “is no longer enough to report the fact truthfully”. It is now necessary to report the truth about the fact. The need to identify the source of a fact to enable members of the audience to judge its accuracy. The need for “a resolute policy of criticism of the press by the press. The tools made it known to media professionals that it is no longer enough to report the facts truthfully. It is now necessary to report the truth about the fact. Unlike legacy news reporting, fact-checking tools do not confuse general editing with accuracy. Instead, it deploys verification tools that check and verify factual statements and claims made in the public domain, to establish the truthfulness, correctness, or authenticity of the assertion based on verifiable facts (Wekesa et al, 2017).

The study conducted by Cheruiyot et al. (2018) focuses on the practice of factchecking by non-profits in Africa (including AfricaCheck, Code for Africa, and Open Up), using journalistic tools to render services traditionally shouldered by the mainstream media. The research which observes that literature on fact-checking in Africa is largely scarce recommends that “future studies may explore data-driven practices in African journalistic cultures and their implication for legacy news media as well as comparative approaches that contextualise practices in different journalistic contexts”.

Disinformation, Fake News, and Fact Checking in the Nigerian Newsrooms Disinformation has been described by McGonagle (2017, p. 203) as “information that has been deliberately fabricated and disseminated to deceive and mislead others into believing falsehoods or doubting verifiable facts; it is disinformation that is presented as, or is likely to be perceived as news.” The news plays an important part in democratic societies; however, disinformation poses a serious challenge to democratic societies as it misinforms people and significantly affects the deliberative process. Although the dissemination of disinformation was prevalent before the recent advancements in information and communications technologies (ICT), the revolution in ICT has simplified its access and spread across space and time (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017).

However, the rise of social media has promoted an explosion of disinformation that is cheap and easy to produce, disseminate internationally, and test on multiple audiences. The problem can be conceptualized as an assemblage of social media platforms, actors, and big data (Woolley and Howard 2016). Its proliferation on social media has developed from a socio-technical mix of platform design, algorithms, human factors, and political and commercial incentives. Producers and sharers of disinformation: “Fake news publishers” have economic or political motives, varying in tactics depending on their goals. Economically motivated publishers have much in common with the producers of clickbait: they earn money from pay-per-click advertising on their websites (Subramanian, 2017).

Disinformation becomes harmful only once it is received and consumed by social media users. Second, the technological actants and affordances of social media have blurred the line between audience and actor, so that media consumers can also become media distributors (Lewis & Westlund 2015). Disinformation online serves to divide and undermine the cohesion of liberal societies and democratic processes. As more people migrate their media consumption to online and social media, a failure to address the proliferation by adopting digital tools may spell doom for society.

Bakir and McStay (2018) situate the rise of “fake news” in the context of interconnected crises in journalism that have arrived with platformisation; the weakening of legacy news media, the accelerated round-the-clock news cycle, and disinformation being shared horizontally through user-generated content, the emotionalization of online media. The term fake news is “false, often sensational information disseminated under the guise of news reporting” (Collins Dictionary, 2017). According to the Ethical Journalism Network (EJN), fake news is information deliberately fabricated and published to deceive and mislead others into believing falsehood or doubtful messages (EJN, 2017).

Fake news is often over inflated and sensationalised story tuned to a degree that makes it insidiously attractive to the unsuspecting public. Fake news manifest through twisting contexts and realities and present such in a way that the information is not easily perceived to be mischievous (Ting and Song, 2017). As noted by Siapera (2018), three significant factors characterize the current brand of fake news. First, the ease by which people can create content; second, the distribution patterns across new and social media, and third, the political economy of the online domain which enables and incentivizes the creation of these forms of news.

However, Pate (2018) offers some recommendations to help individuals and newsrooms instantly identify and avoid being victims of fake news: (1) Check sources: individuals are encouraged to fall back on the most trusted news brands they can rely on for their news. (2) Fact-check from

multiple sources.3) Use verification tools.4) Check metadata. (5) Think before broadcasting/publishing. 6) Media literacy: increase the standard of education and media literacy particularly for young people to be highly critical of what to trust on conventional and social media platforms (7) Use fact-checking sites. (8) Individuals and newsrooms should institute a culture of fact-checking for stories and claims.

In South Africa, Bob Wekesa et al (2017) did a study on the uptake of fact-checking practices by the newsrooms and came up with several findings: One, it shows factchecking has gained some popularity in South African newsrooms; two, it shows that the South African media is mainly reliant on external sources for fact-checking, primarily Africa Check; three, despite the popularity of fact-checking practices in the media, South African newsrooms have not embraced fact-checking as a credible form of journalism like others in Europe and America.

The study also highlights some challenges facing the media in incorporating factchecking practices into their agenda. These include a lack of clarity on the part of the media about what exactly fact-checking is and how fact-checking can be considered a specific journalistic genre; and two, why some newsrooms are lacking the necessary resources already under strain in the newsroom. Against this background, the study recommends that the media needs to create in-house fact-checking content and processes, specific guidelines, and skills. It recommends that the media should set a fact-checking agenda on their own. The impact of fact-checking on legacy media shows that it reflects “a need to fill the gap left by resource-weakened newsrooms battling to roll up their sleeves and do the work of journalism well and accurately” (Bob Wekesa et al, 2017). This study thereby argues in favour of the need for the media of the 21st century to embrace and deploy fact-checking capacity-building skills and knowledge as veritable tools to meet its social responsibilities which should serve the good of society. Speaking in favour of the above, Anniemarie (2017) argues that: the theory’s tenets are more or less universal and that its functions still need to be fully implemented.

Digital Fact-Checkers Versus Human Operations in the Newsroom: The Verdict

Dimension	Digital fact-checkers — key strengths	Human gatekeepers — key strengths	Key difference(s)	Verdict
Scale and Volume	High level of precision in analysing, and crosschecking multiple information in real time, including multimedia contents such as videos, picture and data in the online news (Guo, et al., 2022; Nakov et al., 2021).	Human assisted gates (media professionals) can reduce false claims to an extent but are hugely limited in terms of the scale and volume of information they can processes accurately. Multimedia content might be too technical for their human verification (Porter & Wood, 2021).	Digital fact checkers have automated process, while human gates are limited in certain ways	Considering the volume and amount of information digital fact checkers can verify at once, and the expertise of humans, hybrid gate keeping is advised (Guo, et al. 2022; Nakov et al. 2021; Portal & Wood, 2021)
Speed and Latency	Digital tools and AI can process information very fast (Morish 2023; Guo, 2022).	Human gates might be a bit slower and it could be very dangerous (Washington Post, 2025).	There are many fact checking tools for several functions and they perform incredible functions. Human experts do their best,	A blend of digital and human factcheckers is recommended (Morish, 2023 The Washington Post, 2025)

			but with certain limitations	
Accuracy on simple factual case	Some digital tools combine and speed accuracy to authenticate information (Ciampaglia et al., 2015; Ou, et al., 2025; Culpan, 2015)	Capability of performing multiple verifications, provide multi-layer authentications across news platforms (The Washington Post, 2025)	Machine maybe great, but humans are more accountable	Hybrid newsroom is advised claims (Culpan, 2015, Ou, et al. 2025, The Washington Post, 2025)
Context & nuance	Digital tools are weak in dealing with context, sarcasm, framing and other cues including informal codes (Quelle & Bovet, 2024).	Human gates can decipher even hidden context and subjective frames (Khodary, 2025)	Digital tools are not social smart and lack contextual reasoning	Humans can detect false narratives and contexts (Quelle & Bovet, 2024; Khodary, 2025)
Consistency & inter-rater agreement	Digital factcheckers have been found to be very consistent (Lee, et al., 2023).	Some media practitioners are very adept at their jobs (The Washington Post, 2025)	Digital factcheckers run on set computer rules and code to function, unlike human experts who grow through experience.	Blended newsroom is advised (Lee et al., 2023; The Washington Post)
Bias & trust	Digital tools have	Human gates are	Both digital	Hybrid

perceptions	been found to be trustworthy to an extent (Martel & Rand, 2023; Drolsbach et al., 2024; Allen et al., 2021; MIT Initiative on the Digital Economy, 2024; Drolsbach, et al., 2024)	found to be very reliable and credible, their work ethics carry a huge weight (Jia & Lee, 2024).	factcheckers and human gates have the same appeal.	newsroom is advised.
Cost & resource efficiency	Deploying digital tools/AIs seem to be cheaper than hiring experienced editors (Nakov, et al., 2021; Unver, 2023).	Hiring some ranks of media professionals are very expensive (The Washington Post, 2025)	Digital tool likely scales down cost, but human experts have higher fidelity.	Blended newsroom is advised.

From the above information it can be deduce that both digital fact checkers and human operations are needed in order for newsrooms to effectively combat and successfully quell the raging fire of disinformation. Digital fact checkers, bring on board speed, real-time verification, multi-layered reviews and authentication, combine with the established editorial experience of skilled journalists who are more accountable and proactive in complex cases. In order to survive the surge of information disorders in the digital space, a blended operation that encourage the combination of a super-hybrid newsroom is require at all levels.

Limitations to Effective Use of Digital Fact-Checking

Apart from the popular arguments concerning the use of automated fact checker and the need for human supervision. Scholars like Graves (2018),

contends that automated fact checkers make require the judgment and sensitivities of a good editor; whether that is contestable or not is left for future research. Kavtaradze (2024), also argued that the tools may not be transparent enough. His study further argue that the idea of ‘truth’ is very elusive, such that digital fact checkers may be deficient determining this. Other obvious limitations, especially as it affects the practice of journalism in the developing nations include:

- a. Lack of training: Training is very important if journalists and editors will either integrate or deploy automated fact checkers. As is it now, many journalists in Africa have not been properly exposed to the realities of digital tools that can enhance the news room.
- b. Lack of fund: Some of these tools require regular subscription, renewals, and compliant computers, which may require huge financial impact. Many news rooms in the developing nations are struggling and facing low patronage either from newspaper sales or online conversion.
- c. Low awareness: As important as the conversations about misinformation, fake news and information disorders are, some practitioners are yet to come to terms with the seriousness and severity of these phenomena. Thus, much awareness is required in providing adequate sensitisation of the issues and the available digital solutions.
- d. Attachment to Conservative Journalism: many older journalists and editors might be sceptical in embracing digital fact checkers, just because they trust their own judgement more.
- e. Lack of Policy and Institutional Framework: many countries have not established serious policy regarding the use of digital tools to effectively combat disinformation and other information disorder. Developing countries are lagging seriously in this wise.

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