Perceived Influence of Credibility on Use of and Dependency on Social Networking Sites for News among UNILORIN Students

Social & Digital Media Discourse
2020, Vol.1(1), 65-80

URL: http://sdmd.net.ng/
SDMD

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Abstract
News, as one of the most cardinal roles of journalism and media organisation, has faced increasing low patronage since the triumph of neoliberal capitalist system which led to commercialisation of media and commodification of news. The emergence of social and digital media platforms is, however, changing narratives about news consumption, particularly among the youths. While the digital media platforms rekindled the interest of the young audience, these alternative sources lack the gatekeeping qualities unique to the mainstream media and give room for doubts on the credibility of information sourced therein. This study, therefore, examined the influence of perceived credibility on the use of and dependency on social network sites for news among the young audience (N=381) from the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) and media system dependency theoretical lens. Findings revealed that, youth sampled use Social Networking Sites (SNSs) to source information and news on celebrity, educational, sport, political matters and investment issues. They also affirmed the centrality of the news on SNSs to their decision making about important issues Additionally, it was found that perceived credibility was a significant predictor of use and dependency on news on social networking sites. This study signals the need to leverage on youth's consumption of news on the social media to enhance certain practical and policy improvements on news dissemination in today's digitalised media environment.

Keywords: News, Dependency theory, uses and gratifications, credibility, social networking sites, youths

Introduction

News has functioned as one of the most fundamental roles of the media for centuries. Besides fulfilling the Lasswellian role of providing important intelligence and connecting people of similar interests who have been temporo-spatially dispersed, the news also enhances cognitive complexity of the members of the audience thus offering them informational resources to function as engaged citizens (Baran & Davis, 2012; McQuail, 2010). Through straight news reportage and investigative pieces, the news help in fulfilling the watchdog role and entrenching the Fourth Estate status of the media (Benkler, 2011; Debatin, 2016). This news disseminating role of the media has, however, ebbed since the triumph of neo-liberal capitalist political economy that accentuated commercialization of the media and commodification of news (Asogwa & Asemah, 2012; Jackson, 2009). The concentration of the news on the elite with little, if any, attention on the public interest resulted in credibility gap and, by extension, citizens' disinterest in public affairs (Collin, 2015; Hildebrand, 2018). The attending democratic malaise and political apathy emerging from this development precipitated youth's engagement in the alternative public sphere offered by digital platforms (Mustapha, Omar & Atoloye, 2019; Mustapha & Omar, 2020).

The arrival of Internet-enabled digital and social media platforms resuscitated hopes about the possibility of the public returning to the public sphere. The belief that the new media platforms

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facilitate democratization of information has resulted into exploration of the mechanisms facilitating the changing news consumption particularly among the youth (Benkler, 2007; Groshek, 2010). However, the new media platforms suffer linguistic and professional touches that venerated news product in the mainstream media (Allcott & Matthew, 2017; Anderson & Huntington, 2017; Spence & Quinn, 2008). Despite the absence of gatekeeping that guaranteed professionalism on the digital media platforms, the youth still found them compatible given their lifestyles that are characterized by mobility, ubiquity or co-creational orientations (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein & Matassi, 2017; Casero-Ripollés, 2012). Hence, there has been bourgeoning interests in explication of how and why the young audience consume news on the social media (Cortesi & Gasser, 2015; Gil de Zúñiga, Jung & Valenzuela, 2012; Reuters Institute, n.d).

Although the new public sphere engendered by these new news and information platforms is alluring, there are polarity of opinions on the plausibility of the feature of SNSs (Agbawe, 2018; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009; Kishore & Parihar, 2014). While advocates of SNSs have argued that they prove to be open sources of news, free of falsification of facts or editorial bias and hegemony that characterize the old media and which provide the audience with multiple components with the realities (Moody, 2011; Stroud, Scacco, Muddiman & Curry, 2015), others have argued that SNSs help to spread lies and rumours due to little consideration for the elements of credibility of such news (Ibrahim & Adamu, 2016; Pate, Gambo & Ibrahim, 2019; Safori et al., 2016; Vergeer, 2018).

The contentions over forthrightness or otherwise of news on the social and digital media platforms trumps up the consideration of perceived credibility as important predictor of social media use for news and dependency on social media for news among the young people popularly called the netizens or digital natives (Kishore & Parihar, 2014; Verma, 2014). The concept of credible news, which entails accuracy, completeness, efficiency, impartiality and balance in reporting, is a major topic of discussion in an era of challenged journalistic practice occasioned by exponential information dissemination avenues (Popoola, 2014). The question of credibility of news published online cannot be avoided with the heavy influx of uncontrolled information entering the public sphere daily and the possibility for news to be influenced by various factors such as individual bias, evil intention, distortion, deletion and others (Safori et al., 2016). Additionally, the problem of fake news has become a serious epidemic plaguing the society, given the increasing rate of SNSs use among global citizens, including Nigerians (e.g Danladi, 2013; Enobakhare & Orem, 2013; Ezeah, Asogwa & Edogor, 2013; Idakwo, 2011). This study, therefore, intends to contribute to ongoing dialogue on the problematics and consequences of news consumption on the digital cum social media platforms through exploration of the predictive power of perceived credibility on use of and dependency on SNSs for news among the youths, with a view to significantly contribute to practical and policy dimensions of managing the ticklish news platforms of today.

Literature Review

Media dependency and uses & gratifications

Media System Dependency Theory (MSDT), developed from a context outlined in 1976 by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur, sought to explain the media effects from interactions among audience, media and the societal system (Baran & Davis, 2012; DeFleur, 2010; Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009). According to this theory, a media dependency relationship is one "in which the satisfaction of needs or the attainment of goals by individuals is contingent upon the resources of the other party" (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur 1976, p. 6). It submits further that, individuals bank on media information in order to reach their goals. The media become the main sources of information for the citizens in conflicts situation within the social system, either owing to natural disasters, or due to human decisions and actions (Hindman, 2004; Lin, Xu, & Dam, 2020).

This strong relationship generated at certain instances between the media and the public has been explicated from the theory of media system dependency (Ball-Rokeach and Defleur, 1976; Muniz, 2020), which was created half-way between the study of media effects and the uses and gratifications approaches (Mehrad & Yousefi, 2018). In development of media dependency theory, DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1989) pointed

out that the relationships among the actors can necessitate the creation of dependency both at macro level, as is found in the relationship between the media system and political system, and at the micro level, where the effects of the media system are presented at an individual level (Baran & Davis, 2010; DeFleur, 2010). On this level, people are exposed to information contents to satisfy certain psychological needs and make subsequent decisions (Hindman, 2004; Lin & Lagoe, 2013; Lin, Xu & Dam, 2020).

According to Lin (2008), two of the basic propositions put forward by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur are (1) the larger a medium's capacity is to serve as a centre of the unique information-delivery services to the audience, the greater the audience dependency is on that medium; and (2) the higher the instability of a society is (e.g., in situations of social change and conflict), the stronger the dependency on the media that audience members tend to develop and, therefore, the greater the potential effects of the media on audience. Hence, "in an industrialized and information-based society, individuals tend to develop a dependency on the media to satisfy a variety of needs in their life" (Lin, 2008, p.181).

However, in addition to demographics and media attributes, factors such as assessment of needs fulfillment, appropriateness, social norms, and peer evaluations are important in determining the nature of media use (Flanagin & Metzger 2000). According to Ruggierro (2000, p.9). Rubin and Windahl, augmented the dependency model to include the gratifications sought by the audience as an interactive component with media dependency. These scholars argued that, dependency on a medium or a message results when individuals either intentionally seek out information or ritualistically use specific communication media channels or messages.

These attractions and interactions of the audiences to different media led to the advancement of the Uses and Gratifications (U & G) Theory. At the birth of the uses and gratifications approach, Katz, Gurevitch and Haas (1973, p. 116) identified five basic needs that audiences sought from the media, namely, "cognitive needs (e.g., acquiring information, knowledge, and understanding); affective needs (e.g., emotion, pleasure, feelings); personal integrative needs (e.g., credibility, stability, and status); social integrative needs (e.g., interacting with family and friends); and tension release needs (e.g., escape and diversion)". The underlying issue stated by Katz and his colleagues was the need to focus less on what the media do to people and more on what people do with their media. Hence, the theory assumes that audience members are goal oriented and actively choose the media to gratify their needs.

In this respect, U & G research has focused on six major topical areas viz.; linking the media-use motives with media attitudes and behaviours, relating motivations across media forms, investigating the different social and psychological circumstances of media use, evaluating the similarities or variance between gratifications sought (GS) and gratifications obtained (GO), exploring whether differences in backgrounds affect behaviour and attributes and lastly, reflection on the methods, reliability and validity of measuring motivation (Dunne, Lawlor & Rowley, 2010, citing Rubin, 2002).

Despite criticisms and methodological limitations experienced in the past, this theory has retained contemporary research significance. The emergence of SNSs have contributed to the research significance of the U & G theory. Consequently, scholars have advanced series of Uses and Gratifications models which take the unique features of different media platforms into consideration (Dhaha & Igale, 2014; Dunne, Lawlor & Rowley, 2010; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010), thus confirming the empirical value of the theory.

Credibility and use of social networking sites for news

According to DeFleur and Dennis (2002), news is recent knowledge gathered, processed and disseminated through a medium to a significant number of people. However, accuracy, objectivity and credibility are some of the news attributes considered cardinal prior news dissemination. According to Hovland, Jannis and Kelley (1953), credibility is the believability of a source based on the perceptions of trustworthiness and expertise of the information source. Metzger and Flanagin (2013) also noted that the abundance of information online and the lack of proper

authentication by experts has resulted in most online information being out of date, incomplete or inaccurate. While the traditional media have the gatekeepers, in form of newspaper editors and television news directors, who evaluate the authenticity of news sources, the internet that houses the SNSs has none (Oyero, 2013).

The use of SNSs as sources of obtaining information has become widely recognized by people of all ages and geographical boundaries, particularly the youth. This is largely due to their relative ease of use, interactive features and immediacy in disseminating news updates. McQuail (2010, p. 39) differentiates the social media from the traditional mass media stating that "traditional mass communication was essentially one-directional, while the new forms of communication are essentially interactive." The interactive feature of these network sites potentiates their fame and acceptance among users predominantly youth. According to Edogor, Jonah and Ojoh (2015, p.139), traditional media have since promoted leading control in media content production and distribution while social media's emergence democratised the whole process, thus, empowering virtually every person to participate in public communication process. In the use of SNSs for news, Rosenberry and Vicker (2009) maintained that the source platform must be trustworthy to the receiver of the information. Therefore, trustworthiness of the source is linked to its believability. Corroborating this, McQuail (2010) said that some trust is required for a news source to be effective, and people do not pay attention to media sources that they do not trust for accurate and believable information dissemination.

The rise of social networking sites among reputable news outlet is both an opportunity and a threat (Anderson, Bell & Shirky, 2012; Broersma & Peters, 2013). The network logic of social media sites erodes the information monopolies of news companies even more than relatively static publishing platforms such as websites and blogs do (Broersma & Graham, 2015). The advantage of a fusion of traditional media and SNSs is the distribution of news on these sites, hence attracting news consumers to these platforms. For instance, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram now produce a large part of the traffic to news outlets' homepages (Pew Center, 2014).

On the other side of the arguments, scholars have discussed the issue of credibility on SNSs. Severin and Tankard (2010) explain that the credibility of social networks is unsteady because many web pages combine information and advertising in ways different from what was obtainable on the traditional media. The user-generated content operation of social networks gives room for circulation of personal opinions and enhances the use of SNSs for news among the youth (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung & Valenzuela, 2012; Reuters Institute, n.d). According to Metzger et al., "the credibility of the channel/medium of communication influences the selective involvement of the audience with the medium." (cited by Kang, 2010, p.3). In view of the relationship between perceived credibility and use of news media platforms, it is predicted that:
H1: Perceived credibility is associated with using SNSs for news by UNILORIN Students

Credibility and dependency on SNSs for news

SNSs are relied upon for immediate news updates and constant feedback. Hence, having confidence in the media is a function of bias-free perceptions of the media (Mustapha & Wok, 2015). Scholars and media professionals have then considered credibility as one of the essential attributes the Fourth Estate of the Realm emblematic of being a responsible societal watchdog (Choi, Yang & Chang, 2009). Meyer, Marchionni and Thorson (2010) conceptualise media credibility as a multi-dimensional construct, usually explicated and instantiated by believability of a message (article), source (media professionals or media organisations), or medium (newspaper, website, radio station, etc.).

The varying quality of online information and mistrust of the mainstream media have led audiences to seek substitutes in online news sources (Tsfati, 2010). Prior studies have argued that when individual users rely more on a specific medium for information, they consider it to be more credible than other media **(**Flanagin & Metzger, 2000; Kiousis, 2001). Findings from previous studies indicate that traditional media, such as newspapers and television, are the most credible sources of news (Nah & Chung, 2012) however, "new findings from comparative studies of traditional and new media appear to be

disproving the hypothesis of traditional media's superiority" (Mustapha & Wok, 2015, p.131). For example, Johnson and Kaye's (2010) study on credibility of online news sources and their traditional counterparts revealed both increasing and declining credibility of online news platforms between 1996 and 2004.

This search for information, either via the media or interpersonal relations, as expressed in face to face conversation or that generated by the social media, usually results in greater individual dependency on the media system (Tai & Sun, 2007). Nevertheless, the level of dependency is not the same for different people, nor is it established in the search for information itself (Mehrad & Yousefi, 2018). Thus, greater dependency can be obtained by increasing the levels of selective exposure to contents, programmes, and media to obtain information about a health crisis for instance (Lin & Lagoe, 2013). According to Li and Suh (2015), interactivity strengthens message credibility on social media platforms. Based on the theses of Media System Dependency Theory and media credibility model that envisage dependency on news sources offering dependable information, particularly in unstable society that information abundance has created in today's world (DeFleur, 2010; Lin, 2008). Hence, we hypothesised that:

H2: Perceived credibility is associated with dependency on SNSs for news by UNILORIN Students

Methodology

Using a cross-sectional research design, this study gathered data from students of University of Ilorin between February and March, 2018 with a population of 44,919. Based on Krejcie & Morgan's (1970) table for selecting sample size, 381 students were proportionately selected. Using systematic random sampling technique, the study collected data on respondents' demographic variables, patterns of social networking sites use, constructs such as content categories exposed to, perceived credibility of social networking sites and dependency on social network sites for news measured using differential number of items for each constructs on a five-point Likert scale. Using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 25.0, data collected were cleaned and analysed using means, standard deviations, correlations and hierarchical regression.

Results

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The age of respondents in this study range between 16 and 30 years (M=24.4 SD=5.12). When the age was recoded into categories, respondents between 21 and 25 years oldg constitute the majority of the students in the study as they accounted for (58.7%) of the total respondents. The male respondents in this study were 199 which amounts to 52.2% of the entire population in the study while the females accounted for 182 (47.8%).

Table 1: Reliability of items

Constructs	N	No. of items	Cronbach Alpha
Perceived Credibility- Facebook	371	4	0.907
Perceived Credibility- Instagram	379	4	0.826
Perceived Credibility-Twitter	379	4	0.868
Perceived Credibility- WhatsApp	376	4	0.816
Perceived Credibility- YouTube	375	4	0.782
Dependency on SNSs for News	369	5	0.777
Use of SNSs for News	375	5	0.746

Scaled items used in measuring were found to be reliable, all attaining above .70 Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. (Perceived Credibility of SNSs: Facebook α=.907; Instagram α=.826; Twitter α=.868; WhatsApp α=.816; YouTube α=.782; dependency on SNS for news α=.777 and using SNSs for news .746 (see Field, 2009; Phallant, 2007).

Table 2: Use of SNSs for News

Use of SNSs	Level of Agreement*(%)						
(N=381)	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
To access political news	2.40	18.1	19.9	43.6	14.4	3.50	1.03
To access celebrity news	1.0	9.4	11.0	56.4	19.7	3.86	0.88
To access sport news	6.6	11.3	19.2	42.5	18.9	3.57	1.12
To access investment news	1.6	25.5	14.4	38.1	18.9	3.48	1.12
To access educative news	4.7	4.2	20.2	49.6	19.7	3.77	0.98
Total						3.64	1.02

*Scale: 1= Strongly Disagree (1-20%), 2= Disagree (21-40%), 3= Neutral (41-60%), 4= Agree (61-80%), 5= Strongly Agree (81-100%)

Table 2 shows that respondents, on the aggregate, use SNSs for news (M=3.64, SD=1.02). Specifically, respondents are high on using SNSs to access celebrity news (M=3.86, SD=0.88); access educative news (M=3.77, SD=0.98); access sport news (M=3.57, SD=1.12) and access political news (M=3.50, SD=1.03). These uses fit Uses and Gratifications' cognitive, affective and relaxation needs (see for example, Quan-Hasse & Young, 2010; Lin, Hsu, Chen & Fang, 2017).

Differential perceived credibility of SNSs, as presented in Table 3, revealed towering agreement on superior credibility of Twitter (M=3.71, SD=0.88). This is followed by YouTube (M=3.51, SD=0.95); Instagram (M=3.44, SD=0.94) and WhatsApp (M=3.24, SD=1.02). Facebook is, however, moderately credible source of news (M=2.78, SD=1.18). Perceived credibility of these SNSs based on different dimensions (completeness of news, accuracy of news, balance of the news and trustworthiness of the news) are also presented in the table.

Table 3: Perceived Credibility of SNSs

Credibility Categories	Level of Agreement (%)						
	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
Facebook							
I find news on Facebook to be complete	11.0	41.2	24.4	12.3	10.5	2.70	1.15
I find news on Facebook to be balanced	12.6	34.1	14.2	30.7	7.92	0.87	1.21
I find news on Facebook to be accurate	11.8	37.8	21.8	17.8	10.2	0.77	1.18
I find news on Facebook to be trustworthy	15.0	28.9	25.5	19.7	8.42	0.77	1.19
Total						2.78	1.18
Instagram							
I find news on Facebook to be complete	1.8	22.3	31.0	37.8	6.63	0.25	0.94
I find news on Instagram to be balanced	1.6	13.4	25.5	52.5	6.63	0.49	0.87
I find news on Instagram to be accurate	0.8	15.2	19.7	53.3	10.5	3.58	0.90
I find news on Instagram to be trustworthy	6.6	12.6	20.7	48.3	11.3	3.45	1.06
Total						3.44	0.94
Twitter							
I find news on Facebook to be complete	3.1	14.2	27.3	34.9	19.9	3.55	1.06
I find news on Twitter to be balanced	1.6	7.6	26.5	45.1	18.6	3.72	0.91
I find news on Twitter to be accurate	1.6	9.2	20.7	44.9	23.2	3.79	0.96
I find news on Twitter to be trustworthy	3.4	7.1	17.8	49.3	21.8	3.79	0.98
Total						3.71	0.88
WhatsApp							
I find news on Facebook to be complete	4.2	31.8	21.5	31.0	11.0	3.13	1.11
I find news on WhatsApp to be balanced	0.8	18.9	23.9	47.5	7.6	3.43	0.91
I find news on WhatsApp to be accurate	4.5	17.3	28.6	39.9	9.2	3.32	1.01
I find news on WhatsApp to be trustworthy	6.3	29.9	19.4	36.0	7.9	3.09	1.05
Total						3.24	1.02
YouTube							
I find news on Facebook to be complete	4.2	23.4	24.4	38.1	9.4	3.25	1.05
I find news on YouTube to be balanced	1.8	10.2	27.8	45.9	13.7	3.60	0.91
I find news on YouTube to be accurate	1.6	10.5	25.5	49.6	11.3	3.59	0.88
I find news on YouTube to be trustworthy	3.4	10.2	22.3	49.6	13.9	3.61	0.97
Total						3.51	0.95

*Scale: 1= Strongly disagree (0-20), 2= Disagree (21-40), 3= Slightly agree (41-60), 4= Agree (61-80), 5= Strongly Agree (81-100)

Table 4: Dependency on SNSs for News

Dependency on SNSs	Level of Agreement*(%)						
(N=381)	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
SNSs are important news sites to me	2.40	18.1	19.9	43.6	14.4	3.50	1.03
SNSs satisfy my news demand always	1.0	9.4	11.0	56.4	19.7	3.86	0.88
I turn to SNSs for news most times	6.6	11.3	19.2	42.5	18.9	3.57	1.12
SNSs keep me informed of important issues	1.6	25.5	14.4	38.1	18.9	3.48	1.12
News on SNSs help make important decision	4.7	4.2	20.2	49.6	19.7	3.77	0.98
Total						3.64	1.02

*Scale: 1= Strongly disagree (0-20), 2= Disagree (21-40), 3= Slightly agree (41-60), 4= Agree (61-80), 5= Strongly Agree (81-100)

Overall, Table 4 shows that respondents in this study agreed to be dependent on the SNSs for news (M=3.64, SD=1.02). Specifically, the agreed that SNSs satisfy their news demands (M=3.86, SD=0.88) and help them make important decision (M=3.77, SD=0.98). Additionally, they agreed on turning to SNSs for news most of the time (M=3.57, SD=1.12), consider SNSs as important news sites (M=3.50, SD=1.03) and get informed of important issues (M=3.48, SD=1.12).

Two hypotheses advanced in this study in respect of perceived credibility of SNSs as predictor of using the sites for news and depending on the platforms for news were tested using hierarchical regression models. Prior to the regression analysis, a zero-order correlation of the key constructs in the study was conducted to establish linearity and rule out multicollinearity as required in multivariate analysis (Pallant, 2007). Table 5 presents the results of inter-item correlations. The results of inter-item correlations show that no item is inordinately correlated to another item. Therefore, the data do not break the collinearity prerequisite. The significant relationship between the constructs also show the data have in-built linear relationship, which is a vital precondition for predicting significant variance in the dependent variable. Table 5: Inter-item correlations

Table 5: Inter-item Correlations

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Credibility-Facebook	1						
2 Credibility-Instagram	.262**	1					
3 Credibility-Twitter	.134**	.489**	1				
4 Credibility-WhatsApp	.315**	.389**	.242**	1			
5 Credibility-YouTube	.022^{ns}	.322**	.424**	.493**	1		
6 News Use	.117*	.111*	.315**	.015^{ns}	.102*	1	
7 News Dependency	-.355**	.052^{ns}	.169**	.033^{ns}	.275**	.167**	1

^{ns}=not significant, *<.05 **<.001

H1: Perceived credibility is associated with using SNSs for news by UNILORIN Student

Table 6: Regression Model Predicting Influence of Perceived Credibility on SNSs Use for News

Models	B (SE)	β	t	P
Model 1: Control Variables				
Age	.203 (.066)	.159	3.082	.002
Gender (Male=0, Female=1)	-.240 (.060)	-.208	-4.027	.001
Constant	3.845 (.110)	-	30.058	.001
R^2=.078, Adjusted R^2=.073, F=15.024, p=.001				
Model 2: Independent Variables				
Age	.195(.067)	.153	2.918	.001
Gender (Male=0, Female=1)	-.239(.060)	-.207	-3.972	.001
Perceived Credibility- Facebook	.009(.032)	.016	.294	.769
Perceived credibility- Instagram	-.014(.046)	-.019	-.304	.762
Perceived credibility- Twitter	.207(.042)	.296	4.948	.001
Perceived credibility- WhatsApp	-.069(.004)	-.009	-1.586	.114
Perceived Credibility-YouTube	.193(.065)	.218	4.033	.001
Constant	3.151(.194)	-	16.211	.001
R^2=.170, Adjusted R^2=.153, $R^2\Delta$=.092, F=10.204, p=.001				

Dependent Variable: News Use

The results of hierarchical regression examining predictive effect of perceived credibility of SNSs on the use of the platforms for news show that Model 1, controlling for demographic variables, predicted 7.8% variance (R^2=.078, p=.001) in SNSs use for news, with age as a positive predictor (β=.159, t=3.082, p=.002) while gender is negatively associated with using SNSs for news (β=-.208, t=-4.027, p=.001). When perceived credibility of SNSs were introduced in Model 2, variance in the use of SNSs for news increased to 17.0% (R^2=.170, p=.001). While the demographic variables retained their patterns of effects only Twitter (β=.296, t=4.948, p=.001) and YouTube (β=.218, t=4.033, p=.001) showed significant association between perceived credibility of SNSs and the use of the sites for news by the young audience sampled in this study. Based on these results, hypothesis 1 of this study is partially upheld.

H2: Perceived credibility is associated with dependency on SNSs for news by UNILORIN Students

Table 6: Regression Model Predicting Influence of Perceived Credibility of SNSs on Dependency on SNSs for News

Models	B (SE)	β	t	P
Model 1				
Age	-.245 (.080)	-.163	-3.051	.001
Gender	.002 (.073)	.001	.024	.002
Constant	4.068 (.134)	-	30.422	.981
R^2=.027, Adjusted R^2=.021, F=4.794, p=.009				
Model 2				
Age	-.153(.076)	-.102	-2.016	.045
Gender	-.115(.069)	-.084	-1.672	.095
Perceived credibility- Facebook	.056(.049)	.068	1.157	.248
Perceived credibility- Instagram	.052(.052)	.059	1.000	.318
Perceived credibility- Twitter	.265(.036)	.392	7.401	.001
Perceived credibility- WhatsApp	-.008(.049)	-.009	-.160	.873
Perceived credibility- YouTube	.189(.055)	.203	3.433	.001
Constant	3.871(.229)	-	16.876	.001
R^2=.227, Adjusted R^2=.211, $R^2\Delta$=.200, F=14.501, p=.001				

Dependent Variable: News Dependency

Hypothesis 2 of this study explored the predictive influence of perceived credibility of SNSs on dependency of the site for news among the youth. Using hierarchical regression that controlled for the effects of demographic variables in Model 1, the results revealed negative impact of age (β=-.163, t=-3.051, p=.001) and positive impact of gender (β=-.001, t=-0.024, p=.002) with 2.7% variance ((R^2=.027, p=.001) in dependency on SNSs for news. In the Model 2, which explains a significant variance of 22.7% ((R^2=.227, p=.001) in dependency on SNSs for news, perceived credibility of Twitter (β=-.392, t=7.401, p=.001) and perceived credibility of YouTube (β=.203, t=3.433, p=.001) have positive contributions to dependency on the SNSs for news. The perceived credibility of other SNSs did not contribute positively to the dependency on the SNSs for news. These results partially affirm the hypothesis 2 of the study.

Discussion of Findings

This study provides plausible, though modest, evidence on the role that perceived credibility of SNSs plays in the use of the sites for sourcing news and dependency on the sites for news among young audience whose media diets have changed in tandem with the changing media landscape. Consistent with previous findings, this study establishes that young adults, today, favour the alternative public sphere facilitated by the social and digital media spaces that are not only allowing co-creational behaviours but exposing these digital natives to society's consensual information environment offered by the mainstream media. Specifically, the study found that the youth sampled in this study use SNSs to source information and news on celebrity, educational issues, sport, political matters and investment concerns. These uses fit into the Uses and Gratifications paradigm of instrumental and ritualistic appropriation of the media for cognitive, affective and arousal cum relaxation needs (Dhaha & Igale, 2014; Dunne, Lawlor & Rowley, 2010).

In addition to the establishment of the use of SNSs for news, results of this study revealed dependency relations as respondents believed that the SNSs satisfy their news demands making them to turn to the platforms for news most times. Importantly, the sampled youth affirmed the centrality of the news on SNSs in their decision making about key important issues and matters. This evidence bolstered the thesis of MSDT that predicts significant importance and effect of media that meet audience needs and gratifications (Lin, Xu & Dam, 2020; Muniz, 2020).

While different dimensions of perceived credibility play key roles in audience use of and dependency on SNSs for news, aggregate measures on perceived credibility of Twitter and YouTube offered robust contributions to the duo of use and dependency on the platforms. This is not surprising given the centrality of the two platforms to information sharing and distribution than other platforms that are geared primarily towards social networking, friendship exchange and personal gratifications via photo and video sharing. This situation aligns with previous findings supporting the notion of Twitter's journalistic potentials (Baruah, 2012; Bruns & Highfield, 2012; Vis, 2013).

Of course, WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook were also found to be instrumental in daily news consumption habits of the young audience sampled in this study, these platforms were found less significantly consequential to SNSs' news use and dependency. This, perhaps, may be due to more emphasis on Twitter and YouTube as sites for sharing mainstream news, even by established media organisations. The institutionalised usage of Twitter and YouTube to extend news dissemination by media organisations (Hermida, 2010; Vis, 2013), as opposed to interpersonal news sharing on other platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook (Alsanie, 2015), is thus an important factor in using of and dependency on SNSs for news among young audience. These findings have serious practical and policy implications for ensuring consensual information environment that facilitates progress of the society.

It was hypothesized that perceived credibility is associated with using SNSs for news by UNILORIN Students, findings reveal a significant relationship between the constructs. This suggests connections between the credibility on SNSs (Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube) and students' use of these sites for news. These findings agree with that of Patwardhan and Yang (2003) which revealed that there is a connection between individual goals and dependency on Internet resources. This further lay emphasis on the media being an integral part of users' media environment.

It was also predicted that perceived credibility is associated with dependency on SNSs for news by UNILORIN Students using two dependent variables, news dependency and news use. Both hierarchical regression results partially upheld the hypothesis, affirming an association between credibility and dependency on SNSs for news. These results confirm audience's dependence on SNSs in their construction of social reality. It also reveals the influence of demographic variables such as age and gender on reliance on use of SNSs for information retrieval.

Conclusion

SNSs are a form of virtual community that have attracted lots of users worldwide, many of whom have integrated the uses of these sites into their daily routines (Dunne, Lawlor & Rowley, 2010). These users depend on SNSs for interaction with their cohorts and as sources for news. This relation tends to become more intense in moments when the population needs more guidance to make decisions, as it can occur with traditional political contexts such as electoral campaigns, but also situations of change and uncertainty, such as can happen during a war, a terrorist attack, a conflict situation or a health crisis (Lin, Xu & Dam, 2020; Mehrad & Yousefi, 2018). However, using the SNSs platforms for news is contingent upon several reasons such as ubiquity, mobility, interactivity and credibility (Anderson, Bell & Shirky, 2012; Severin & Tankard, 2010)

This study therefore measured the contributions of perceived credibility of SNSs on use of and dependency on platforms for news among the youth represented by University of Ilorin students. Through the theoretical lenses of media system dependency and uses and gratifications, the study explored differential news being accessed via the

SNSs and how the sites are central to news consumption of the youth in addition to the consequence of news sourced via the SNSs on taking important decisions. The results affirmed increasing importance of SNSs to news consumption that is more affectively driven and cognitively induced. This calls for news presentation orientation that fits into the lifestyle of the contemporary youth.

Contemporary media users are both consumers and producers of news thriving on the wheels of social media networks thus, bypassing the gatekeeping measures of the traditional media. This new stance in the media milieu has raised concerns among media scholars and stakeholders on the credibility of news users sourced in the virtual community. Built on the four dimensions of credibility construct used in this study, Facebook was deemed the least credible as respondents perceived the site to be indifferent to the completeness, balance, accuracy and trustworthiness compare to what is obtainable in other sites like Twitter, YouTube and WhatsApp. While Facebook is the most populated social networking site, particularly among the youth (Alsanie, 2015) its news sharing, and diffusion role is yet to be fully explored. This potential needs to be tapped by media organisations to create new news engagement relations with the youth's actors whose public affairs information consumption has ebbed significantly.

Although this study identifies significant association between demographic variables and news use cum dependency on SNSs, future studies can take into consideration a longitudinal design to possibly extend the modest variance explained by the independent variables used in this study. This inquiry could also benefit from multi-methodological designs, preferably mixed method, and sophisticated analytical rigour of the second-generation typologies like Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) and Partial Least Square (PLS). Additionally, variables like news engagement, news verification behaviour, digital media literacy and digital efficacy can be included in the model with a view to accounting for elaborate variance in SNSs' news use and dependency. This study has uncovered only a relatively minute amount of knowledge on a topic with boundless potentials. More studies should, therefore, be conducted using other research designs and a much larger and generalizable population to add more to existing wealth of knowledge on both dependency and U& G theories.

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How to cite: Mustapha, M. L. & Mustapha, L. K., (2020), Perceived Influence of Credibility on Use of and Dependency on Social Networking Sites for News among UNILORIN Students *Social and Digital Media Discourse*; *1*(1), 65-80.