

# Digital Media Technologies and the Reconfiguration of Journalistic Authority in Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines how digital media technologies are reconfiguring journalistic authority in Nigeria. It investigates the influence of digital media technologies on journalism practice, assesses their impact on journalistic authority, and explores how they have transformed the traditional gatekeeping role of journalists. The study is anchored on Media Dependency Theory, which explains how audience reliance on media systems shapes perceptions of credibility and influence. A desk review (documentary research) method was adopted, using published journal articles, books, theses, and policy documents related to digital journalism in Nigeria. The study found that digital media technologies have significantly accelerated journalism practice through real-time reporting and platform-based distribution, but this speed-driven environment has weakened verification processes and editorial depth. It also found that journalistic authority is increasingly decentralised, as credibility is now shared between journalists, audiences, influencers, and algorithmic systems rather than being concentrated in newsrooms. Finally, the study revealed that the traditional gatekeeping role of journalists has been disrupted by participatory media, algorithmic curation, and artificial intelligence systems that influence what news is seen and shared. The study concludes that while digital media technologies have expanded access to information and audience participation, they have also destabilised professional journalism by weakening institutional authority and redistributing control over news production and circulation. It recommends stronger editorial verification systems, algorithm-aware journalism training, and improved media literacy programmes to support credible journalism in Nigeria's digital environment.

**Keywords:** Algorithmic influence, Digital journalism, Gatekeeping, Journalistic authority, Media dependency.

## INTRODUCTION

Digital media technologies have changed journalism in many parts of the world. In Nigeria, these technologies continue to reshape the way journalists work, how audiences consume news, and how information spreads across society. In the past, traditional media organisations such as newspapers, radio stations, and television stations controlled the flow of information. Journalists served as gatekeepers because they decided what information reached the public and how such information was presented. News production followed professional routines that involved editing, verification, fact-checking, and editorial supervision before publication. However, the rise of digital media technologies such as smartphones, social media platforms, online news websites, blogs, podcasts, livestreaming applications, and artificial intelligence tools has weakened this traditional structure. Today, many people no longer depend entirely on professional journalists for information because digital technologies allow citizens to create, publish, and distribute news instantly to large audiences. Bosah (2018) explains that digital media technologies have brought major changes to news production and journalistic practices in Nigeria by making communication faster, more interactive, and more accessible to ordinary people. These developments have created a new media environment where journalists now compete with bloggers, influencers, and citizen reporters for public attention and credibility.

The increasing use of digital technologies has also changed the relationship between journalists and audiences in Nigeria. In the traditional media era, communication mainly moved in one direction. Journalists produced

news, while audiences consumed it with limited opportunities for feedback or participation. Digital media technologies have changed this pattern by creating interactive communication spaces where audiences can respond to news immediately through comments, reposts, likes, reactions, and online discussions. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X have become important channels for news distribution and public engagement. Through these platforms, citizens actively contribute to public debates, challenge news reports, share personal opinions, and even break news stories before traditional media organisations report them. Adamu (2021) notes that digital technologies have transformed journalism in Nigeria by encouraging audience participation, real-time reporting, multimedia storytelling, and faster dissemination of information. These changes have reduced the exclusive authority that journalists once had over information production because audiences now participate directly in shaping public communication. As a result, journalism in Nigeria has become more open, interactive, and competitive than before.

Furthermore, digital media technologies have forced many Nigerian media organisations to adjust their operations in order to survive within the rapidly changing communication environment. Newspaper companies, radio stations, and television networks now depend heavily on digital platforms to reach audiences who increasingly consume news online instead of through traditional channels. Newsrooms now publish breaking stories on websites and social media platforms immediately after events occur because audiences expect constant updates and instant access to information. Omenugha (2019) explains that disruptive technologies have created serious challenges for the Nigerian newspaper industry because audiences now prefer digital content that is faster, more visual, and easier to access through mobile devices. This shift has affected the traditional authority of journalists because speed often becomes more important than careful verification in online news competition. In many situations, journalists face pressure to publish stories quickly in order to attract online traffic and remain relevant within the digital information space. Consequently, digital technologies have changed not only how journalism operates in Nigeria but also how audiences perceive the credibility and reliability of journalists and media organisations.

In recent years, the development of artificial intelligence and automated digital systems has further transformed journalism practice in Nigeria. Artificial intelligence technologies now assist journalists in content creation, data analysis, automated reporting, audience tracking, and news distribution. Some news organisations use algorithms to recommend stories to audiences based on their online behaviour and preferences. Omale, Oyesomi, Ekhareaf, Bamigbolayin-Afolabi, and Gana (2026) explain that artificial intelligence is gradually redefining journalistic processes in Nigeria by changing newsroom routines and introducing automated systems into media operations. These technologies continue to reshape the professional role of journalists because machines can now perform some tasks that were previously handled by human reporters and editors. While digital technologies may improve efficiency and speed in journalism, they also raise important concerns about professional ethics, editorial control, and the future relevance of journalists within the digital communication environment. Many people now question whether traditional journalistic authority can survive in a media system where algorithms, influencers, and citizen content creators increasingly shape public opinion and information flow.

In addition, digital media technologies have created opportunities for citizens and social groups to challenge dominant narratives and participate more actively in public communication. Social media platforms now serve as spaces for activism, political mobilisation, and counter-hegemonic communication in Nigeria. During political campaigns, protests, and national debates, citizens often use digital platforms to express opinions, share information, and challenge mainstream media reports. Olaniyan and Akpojivi (2021) argue that social media has transformed communication in Nigeria by empowering ordinary citizens to participate in public discourse and challenge traditional power structures. This development has weakened the exclusive influence that journalists and established media institutions once exercised over national conversations. At the same time, it has created serious challenges related to misinformation, fake news, propaganda, and online manipulation because information can spread rapidly without professional verification. Amakoh (2019) explains that Nigerian newsrooms now struggle to maintain journalistic authority in the post-truth era where emotions, personal opinions, and viral content often receive more public attention than verified facts. This situation continues to affect public trust in journalism and raises concerns about the future credibility of professional media institutions in Nigeria.

Moreover, the changing digital environment has generated debates about media freedom, regulation, and the political economy of journalism in Nigeria. Digital platforms have expanded freedom of expression by allowing more people to communicate publicly without depending on traditional media organisations. However, the same environment has also created new forms of control, surveillance, and economic pressure that affect journalism practice. Obun-Andy and Jolaoso (2025) explain that the political economy of Nigeria's digital media environment influences media freedom, ownership patterns, and journalistic independence in important ways. Many journalists and media organisations now depend on online traffic, advertising revenue, and platform algorithms for survival, which may influence editorial decisions and content production. At the same time, government agencies and regulatory bodies continue to develop policies aimed at controlling digital communication and online media activities. Apejoye, Dewan, and Simpson (2025) observe that Nigerian journalism currently faces several digital-age challenges, including misinformation, online harassment, declining newsroom resources, and increasing pressure to adapt to changing audience behaviour. Similarly, Inobemhe and Ossai (2026) explain that media regulation in Nigeria's digital age remains complex because technological innovations continue to change the communication landscape faster than regulatory systems can respond. These developments show that digital media technologies are not only changing journalism practice in Nigeria but are also reconfiguring the authority, identity, and influence of journalists within society. Against this background, this study examines how digital media technologies are reconfiguring journalistic authority in Nigeria.

### Statement of the Problem

The expansion of digital media technologies in Nigeria has weakened the traditional authority of professional journalists and changed the way news and information are produced, distributed, and consumed. In the past, journalists and established media organisations controlled the flow of information through professional gatekeeping, verification, and editorial processes. However, the rise of social media platforms, blogs, online news sites, citizen journalism, and artificial intelligence technologies now allows virtually anyone to create and spread information instantly without professional supervision. As a result, journalists no longer serve as the only trusted sources of public information, while fake news, misinformation, and unverified reports continue to spread rapidly across digital platforms. This situation has affected public trust in journalism, reduced the credibility of traditional media institutions, and challenged the professional legitimacy of journalists in Nigeria. Although previous studies such as Bosah (2018), Adamu (2021), Omenugha (2019), and Omale et al. (2026) have examined digital transformation in Nigerian journalism, most focus mainly on newsroom practices and technological change rather than on how digital media technologies are specifically reconfiguring journalistic authority. Consequently, there is still limited understanding of how digital technologies are affecting the authority, credibility, and gatekeeping role of journalists within Nigeria's evolving media environment. It is against this background that this study seeks to examine the reconfiguration of journalistic authority in Nigeria in the age of digital media technologies.

### Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Examine the influence of digital media technologies on journalism practice in Nigeria.
2. Assess how digital media technologies affect journalistic authority in Nigeria.
3. Ascertain how digital media technologies have changed the traditional gatekeeping role of journalists in Nigeria.

### Conceptual Review

#### Digital Media Technologies

Digital media technologies refer to the tools, platforms, and systems that enable the creation, distribution, and interaction of information through digital channels. These include social media platforms, online news websites, mobile applications, artificial intelligence tools, podcasts, blogs, and algorithm-driven content systems. In the

context of journalism, digital media technologies have significantly changed how news is gathered, produced, and shared with audiences. Ibe and Nwafor (2024) define digital media technologies as interconnected digital systems that enable real-time communication, multimedia storytelling, and interactive audience participation in the production and circulation of news content. They explain that these technologies have reduced the dependence on traditional newsroom structures by allowing journalists to publish news directly through digital platforms while also enabling audiences to respond instantly through comments, shares, and reactions.

Similarly, Okonkwo (2025) describes digital media technologies as disruptive communication tools that reshape the operations of journalism by speeding up news production and removing many of the traditional barriers to publication. According to him, these technologies have created a hybrid media environment where professional journalists, citizen reporters, and algorithmic systems all contribute to the flow of information. He further explains that this shift has changed newsroom routines in Nigeria, as journalists are now required to work under pressure to publish quickly while also adapting content for digital audiences who demand constant updates and interactive engagement.

In a more critical view, Eze and Chukwuma (2026) argue that digital media technologies have not only improved communication efficiency but have also introduced serious challenges to journalistic professionalism. They note that the speed and openness of digital platforms have increased the spread of misinformation and reduced the control journalists have over verifying and shaping news narratives. They further explain that algorithm-driven visibility on social media platforms often determines what news reaches the public, thereby shifting influence away from journalists toward technology platforms and online audiences. This development, according to them, has contributed to the gradual reconfiguration of journalistic authority in contemporary Nigerian media practice.

### **Journalistic Authority**

Journalistic authority refers to the recognised power, credibility, and legitimacy that journalists and media institutions have in deciding what counts as news and how it is presented to the public. It is built on trust, professional standards, verification processes, and institutional reputation. In traditional journalism, this authority allowed journalists to act as gatekeepers who filtered information before it reached the audience. Nnaji (2023) defines journalistic authority as the institutional and professional credibility that enables journalists to shape public understanding through verified, balanced, and ethically produced news content. He explains that this authority depends heavily on public trust in the media and the ability of journalists to maintain accuracy and objectivity in reporting.

Similarly, Umeh (2025) describes journalistic authority as the social recognition given to journalists as credible interpreters of events and issues in society. He argues that this authority is strengthened when journalists adhere to professional ethics such as fact-checking, fairness, and accountability. However, he also notes that in the digital age, this authority is increasingly challenged by the rise of alternative information sources, including social media influencers and citizen journalists who operate outside traditional editorial structures.

In a more recent analysis, Arogundade (2026) explains that journalistic authority is undergoing a major transformation due to the influence of digital media technologies. He argues that authority is no longer concentrated in newsrooms but is now distributed across digital networks where audiences also play active roles in shaping news meaning and credibility. He further notes that the increasing reliance on social media algorithms and audience engagement metrics has weakened the traditional gatekeeping role of journalists, making journalistic authority more fluid, contested, and unstable in Nigeria's digital communication environment.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Digitalisation of Journalism and Media Practice in Nigeria**

The digitalisation of journalism in Nigeria has not simply improved media practice; it has fundamentally destabilised the institutional foundations that once gave journalism authority and public legitimacy. While Campbell (2024) acknowledges that digital media has expanded participation and reduced traditional gatekeeping barriers, he also implies a deeper structural problem: the erosion of journalism as a bounded

professional system. In practice, what emerges is not a balanced “democratisation” of news production, but a highly uneven field where visibility is shaped more by platform algorithms and viral dynamics than by editorial judgement. This weakens journalism’s epistemic authority, because credibility is no longer anchored primarily in verification processes but in circulation metrics such as shares, trends, and engagement. Agbo and Chukwuma (2017) reinforce this concern by arguing that the watchdog role of journalism has been diluted as information sourcing becomes decentralised. However, a more critical reading suggests that decentralisation itself is not the only problem; rather, it is the absence of a strong institutional mechanism for validating this dispersed information flow that creates authority collapse within Nigerian journalism.

Beyond structural fragmentation, digitalisation has also altered newsroom power relations in ways that reduce journalistic autonomy and deepen dependency on technological systems. Obot (2023) observes that digitisation has expanded participation in broadcasting and increased Nigeria’s integration into global media flows, yet this integration comes with a subtle but significant loss of editorial sovereignty. Media organisations are now compelled to conform to platform logics dictated by social media companies and search engine algorithms, which determine content visibility and audience reach. This means that journalistic authority is increasingly outsourced to technological infrastructures that privilege speed and engagement over deliberation and accuracy. Okamgba, Nwaorisara, and Nzan-Ayang (2025) further show that ICT integration in broadcasting enhances efficiency, but this efficiency is achieved at the cost of reduced editorial depth. Critically, this shift suggests that Nigerian journalism is not merely evolving technologically; it is being structurally reconfigured into a system where editorial judgement is subordinated to technological imperatives, thereby weakening the profession’s epistemic independence.

A further critical issue lies in the changing nature of journalistic legitimacy in a digital environment where audiences no longer recognise traditional institutions as primary arbiters of truth. Campbell (2024) suggests that digital journalism in Nigeria requires decolonising strategies to strengthen local voices, but this also exposes a paradox: the more inclusive the media space becomes, the more difficult it is to maintain a shared standard of authority. When every participant becomes a potential publisher, journalism loses its distinctiveness as a profession defined by verification and accountability. Agbo and Chukwuma (2017) indirectly highlight this tension by showing that increased information access does not automatically translate into improved information quality. In fact, the Nigerian digital media environment demonstrates that participation without strong epistemic regulation can produce informational disorder, where authority is constantly contested and never stabilised.

### **Fake News, Misinformation, and Media Credibility in Digital Spaces**

The proliferation of fake news and misinformation in Nigeria’s digital environment represents not only a technological challenge but a profound epistemological crisis for journalism. Omoera and Uwalaka (2023) describe fake news as a disruptive force, but the deeper issue lies in how digital platforms restructure the conditions under which truth is recognised. In traditional journalism, verification was institutional, slow, and hierarchical; in digital spaces, truth becomes immediate, contested, and often subordinate to emotional resonance. Campbell (2024) emphasises that digital openness allows diverse participation, yet this openness also creates a system where false information can achieve equal or greater visibility than verified reporting. Critically, this does not merely weaken journalism’s authority, it redefines authority itself as something that is no longer earned through process but performed through virality.

Agbo and Chukwuma (2017) argue that the watchdog function of the press is undermined by the multiplicity of new media sources, but a deeper concern is that journalism is now forced into a reactive position rather than a gatekeeping one. Journalists often respond to narratives already circulating online, rather than setting the agenda through verified reporting. This inversion of informational authority weakens journalism’s epistemic leadership in society. Obia (2023) adds another layer of complexity by highlighting regulatory attempts to control misinformation, yet such interventions often produce unintended consequences, including suspicion towards official information channels and concerns about censorship. From a critical standpoint, regulation does not resolve the credibility crisis; instead, it reveals the fragility of journalistic authority in a system where legitimacy is constantly negotiated between state power, platform governance, and public opinion.

More critically, misinformation does not only circulate externally but infiltrates journalistic production itself, reshaping newsroom practices under pressure. Campbell (2024) notes that speed-driven digital journalism increases the risk of inaccurate reporting, but the deeper structural issue is that newsrooms are now embedded in the same attention economy that sustains misinformation. This means journalists operate under identical visibility pressures as non-professional actors, thereby reducing the symbolic distance between verified journalism and unverified content. Nasidi, Hassan, Mustapha, and Ahmad (2025) highlight the fragmentation of indigenous voices in digital spaces, yet this fragmentation also contributes to epistemic overload, where audiences lack the capacity or motivation to differentiate credible journalism from misinformation. Consequently, media credibility becomes conditional and unstable, shaped more by trust networks and digital popularity than by institutional authority or professional verification.

### **Artificial Intelligence and Technological Innovation in Journalism**

Artificial intelligence has introduced a new and more complex layer of transformation in Nigerian journalism, one that challenges not only practice but the very concept of journalistic judgement. Onebunne (2025) observes that journalists perceive AI as both an enabling and threatening force, yet the deeper concern is the gradual displacement of human editorial authority by algorithmic systems. AI tools do not simply assist journalism; they increasingly participate in defining what counts as relevant news through data-driven prioritisation and automated content selection. Campbell (2024) supports this by arguing that digital systems are never neutral, as they actively shape visibility and influence in the media environment. Critically, this raises the question of whether journalism can still claim epistemic authority when key aspects of news production are determined by non-human systems that operate on commercial or predictive logic rather than public interest values.

Okamgba, Nwaorisara, and Nzan-Ayang (2025) highlight that ICT integration has improved broadcasting efficiency, but this efficiency masks a deeper structural shift towards automation-driven journalism. News production is increasingly shaped by systems that optimise for speed, engagement, and scalability rather than deliberation and ethical reflection. This creates what can be described as “algorithmic dependency”, where journalists rely on technological systems not only for production but also for decision-making about newsworthiness. Jedlowski (2023) complicates this further by showing that technological innovation in Nigeria is deeply entangled with state power and institutional control, meaning that AI adoption does not occur in a neutral space. Instead, it is embedded within broader structures of surveillance, regulation, and political influence, which may further constrain journalistic independence under the guise of technological advancement.

A more critical concern is that artificial intelligence may redefine journalistic authority in ways that are not immediately visible but deeply consequential over time. Onebunne (2025) suggests that AI reduces human workload, but this efficiency may gradually erode the professional identity of journalists as decision-makers in news production. When algorithms determine content distribution and audience targeting, journalists risk becoming content managers rather than authoritative storytellers or gatekeepers of truth. Obia (2023) reinforces this concern by showing that digital governance structures already influence visibility and access in online spaces, meaning that journalistic authority is increasingly mediated by external systems beyond newsroom control. Campbell (2024) ultimately suggests that digital transformation requires critical reflection on power and control, and this becomes especially urgent in the age of AI, where authority is no longer solely human, but distributed across technological infrastructures that quietly reshape how truth is produced, validated, and consumed in Nigerian journalism.

### **Empirical Review**

Ibe and Nwafor (2024) conducted a study aimed at examining how digital media technologies influence real-time journalism practice and audience interaction in Nigeria. The study was anchored on the Media Convergence Theory, which explains how different communication platforms merge to shape modern news production and distribution. A survey research design was adopted, and data were collected from 320 journalists working in both print and online news organisations using structured questionnaires. The findings revealed that digital media technologies have significantly improved the speed of news production and increased audience participation through interactive features such as comments, shares, and live feedback. However, the study also found that this increased speed often reduces the level of verification and editorial control applied before publication. The

researchers concluded that while digital media enhances efficiency and audience engagement, it also places pressure on journalists to prioritise immediacy over accuracy. This study is relevant to the current research because it focuses on digital media technologies and journalism practice, but it differs as it does not specifically examine journalistic authority as a central outcome.

Okonkwo (2025) carried out a study that investigated the impact of disruptive digital technologies on newsroom operations and journalistic practice in Nigeria. The study was guided by Technological Determinism Theory, which explains how technology shapes human behaviour and organisational systems. A qualitative research design was employed, and data were gathered through in-depth interviews with journalists and media managers in selected Nigerian media organisations. The findings showed that digital technologies have transformed newsroom routines by introducing faster production cycles, digital editing tools, and online distribution systems. However, the study also revealed that journalists now work under intense pressure to produce content quickly for digital audiences, which often compromises depth and verification. Okonkwo concluded that digital technologies have restructured journalism practice in Nigeria by shifting control from traditional editorial processes to platform-driven production systems. The study relates to the current research in its focus on digital transformation, but it differs because it emphasises newsroom operations rather than the reconfiguration of journalistic authority.

Eze and Chukwuma (2026) conducted a study aimed at examining the relationship between digital media technologies and journalistic professionalism in Nigeria's online media environment. The study was anchored on the Gatekeeping Theory, which explains how information is filtered and controlled before reaching the public. A mixed-method research design was adopted, combining survey data from 280 journalists with qualitative interviews from media experts. The findings revealed that algorithm-driven content distribution and social media visibility have significantly reduced the traditional gatekeeping role of journalists. The study also found that misinformation and user-generated content now compete strongly with professional news, thereby weakening public trust in journalism. The researchers concluded that digital media technologies have not only improved communication efficiency but have also contributed to the gradual reconfiguration of journalistic authority by shifting influence from journalists to digital platforms and audience networks. This study is relevant to the current research because it directly addresses the impact of digital media technologies, but it differs in scope as it focuses broadly on professionalism rather than journalistic authority within specific media contexts.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Media Dependency Theory**

This study is anchored on Media Dependency Theory, originally developed by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976), which explains that the more individuals depend on a particular media system to understand the world, the more that media system influences their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours. The theory assumes that in situations where alternative sources of information are limited or uncertain, audiences become more reliant on media for interpretation, guidance, and reality construction. In the context of digital journalism, this means that audiences depend heavily on digital platforms such as online news sites, social media feeds, and mobile news applications to access and interpret current events. This dependence increases the influence of digital media systems not only on what people know, but also on how they evaluate the credibility of journalists and news institutions.

McQuail (2020) extends this perspective by arguing that media dependency becomes stronger in digital environments because of constant connectivity, personalised content delivery, and algorithm-driven news selection. He explains that individuals are now continuously exposed to media messages through mobile devices, which makes it difficult to separate media influence from everyday life. In such a context, journalistic authority becomes increasingly dependent on how visible and accessible news content is within digital platforms, rather than solely on professional verification processes. This means that authority is no longer fully controlled by journalists, but is also shaped by platform systems and audience usage patterns.

Applied to this study, Media Dependency Theory provides a useful explanation of how digital media technologies are reconfiguring journalistic authority in Nigeria. It suggests that as audiences become more

dependent on digital platforms for news, journalists lose exclusive control over information interpretation and distribution. Instead of relying solely on traditional media institutions, audiences now depend on multiple digital sources, including social media influencers, blogs, and algorithm-curated news feeds. This reduces the centrality of journalists as sole interpreters of reality and weakens their institutional authority. As dependency on digital media increases, audience trust and attention become distributed across different platforms, making journalistic authority more competitive, unstable, and constantly negotiated within the Nigerian digital media environment.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a desk review (documentary research) method, which involves the systematic collection, evaluation, and analysis of existing literature, including journal articles, books, theses, and relevant policy documents on digital media technologies and journalistic authority in Nigeria. The choice of desk review is appropriate because the study focuses on understanding existing knowledge and theoretical discussions rather than generating primary data through fieldwork. It allows the researcher to critically examine published scholarly works and identify patterns, arguments, and gaps in the literature regarding how digital media technologies are reconfiguring journalism practice and authority in Nigeria. The method was carried out by sourcing relevant academic materials from reputable databases and institutional repositories, followed by careful selection of studies that directly relate to digital journalism, media credibility, artificial intelligence, misinformation, and journalistic authority. The selected literature was then systematically reviewed, compared, and synthesised to draw meaningful conclusions relevant to the objectives of the study. This approach ensures a comprehensive and balanced understanding of the subject matter while providing a strong theoretical and empirical foundation for the research without the constraints of time, cost, and accessibility associated with primary data collection.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study indicate that digital media technologies have fundamentally reshaped journalism practice in Nigeria by creating a fast, platform-driven news environment where immediacy often overrides verification and depth. Journalism is now shaped by continuous online circulation, audience feedback loops, and algorithmic visibility systems that determine what news gains attention. This supports Ibe and Nwafor (2024), who argue that digital technologies have transformed journalism into a real-time practice, but it also exposes a deeper structural concern: journalism is becoming increasingly reactive rather than proactive. From the perspective of Media Dependency Theory, this shift is significant because audiences now depend heavily on digital platforms for news interpretation, which increases the influence of media systems over public understanding. However, the study reveals that this dependency is no longer centred on journalists alone but distributed across platforms, influencers, and automated systems. Okonkwo (2025) reinforces this by showing that newsroom routines have become pressured by digital speed requirements, but critically, this speed-oriented system weakens the reflective and investigative function of journalism. Eze and Chukwuma (2026) further argue that this transformation undermines professionalism because verification processes are increasingly compressed, suggesting that digital dependency has not strengthened journalism but instead intensified its structural vulnerability.

The study also found that digital media technologies have significantly weakened journalistic authority by redistributing credibility across multiple digital actors and reducing the centrality of professional journalists as gatekeepers of truth. Journalistic authority, traditionally grounded in institutional trust and verification, is now constantly contested in an environment where audiences rely on influencers, citizen journalists, and algorithm-curated content. Nnaji (2023) explains that journalistic authority depends on public trust and professional credibility, but this trust is increasingly unstable in the digital age. Within the framework of Media Dependency Theory, this instability is linked to the fact that audiences now depend on multiple, competing media sources for meaning-making, rather than a single authoritative institution. Umeh (2025) supports this by noting that journalistic authority is now socially negotiated rather than institutionally guaranteed. However, a more critical interpretation shows that this negotiation is not equal; instead, algorithmic systems and platform governance structures heavily shape which voices gain visibility. Arogundade (2026) highlights this algorithmic influence, showing that authority is increasingly mediated by technological systems that prioritise engagement over

accuracy. This creates a condition where journalistic authority is not only weakened but structurally displaced by platform logic, reducing journalism's ability to function as the primary interpreter of social reality.

Finally, the findings reveal that digital media technologies have significantly disrupted the traditional gatekeeping role of journalists by decentralising information control and enabling widespread participation in news production. Journalists are no longer the sole controllers of news selection, framing, and dissemination, as audiences and digital systems now actively participate in these processes. From a Media Dependency Theory perspective, this reflects a shift in dependency structures, where audiences no longer rely exclusively on journalists but instead depend on a network of digital sources. Opeibi, Ademola-Adeoye, and Adedeji (2017) explain that digital discourse in Nigeria has expanded participatory communication, thereby weakening institutional control over information flow. However, this study shows that such decentralisation has created an epistemic imbalance, where information abundance does not necessarily translate into information reliability. Okon (2017) further notes that media regulation struggles to control this decentralised environment, highlighting the limits of institutional oversight in digital spaces. More critically, Aondover, Aondover, and Maiwada (2025) argue that artificial intelligence and algorithmic systems now influence content visibility and selection, meaning that gatekeeping is no longer entirely human-driven but technologically embedded. Adegoriolu (2026) adds that echo chambers and influencer-driven networks further bypass traditional journalistic filtering, reinforcing fragmented information ecosystems. The implication is that gatekeeping has not disappeared but has been redistributed across technological infrastructures, audience behaviour, and platform algorithms, leading to a weakened and contested form of journalistic control.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that digital media technologies have significantly reconfigured journalism practice, journalistic authority, and the traditional gatekeeping role of journalists in Nigeria. Journalism has shifted from a controlled institutional system to a highly decentralised digital environment where speed, algorithmic visibility, and audience participation now strongly influence news production and circulation. As a result, professional journalism no longer holds exclusive authority over information interpretation, as credibility is now shared across journalists, digital platforms, influencers, and automated systems. The study further concludes that while digitalisation has improved access to information and increased audience engagement, it has simultaneously weakened verification processes, destabilised journalistic authority, and reduced the effectiveness of traditional gatekeeping structures. Based on the findings, it is recommended that:

1. Media organisations in Nigeria should reinforce editorial standards by investing in stronger fact-checking units and digital verification tools.
2. Journalists should be trained to understand and strategically engage with platform algorithms without compromising professional ethics.
3. Government agencies, media organisations, and civil society groups should promote media literacy programmes to help audiences critically evaluate digital news content. This will reduce over-dependence on unverified sources and strengthen the public's ability to distinguish credible journalism from misinformation within a highly fragmented digital environment.

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