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Published in the USA
Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie)
Issued since 2005.
ISSN 1994-4160
E-ISSN 1994-4195
2024. 20(4): 579-603

DOI: 10.13187/me.2024.4.579

<https://me.cherkasgu.press>



Exposing Cloned Newspaper Pages on Social Media: the Role of User Awareness and Knowledge, and a Framework for Addressing Identity Theft

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Abstract

The digital age has transformed how people consume news and interact with media content, but it has also given rise to the widespread dissemination of misinformation and cloned media content on social media platforms. This paper reviews the existing literature to develop a conceptual framework, the Online Newspaper Cloning and Identity Theft Framework (ONCITF), aimed at enhancing user awareness and knowledge of fake news and cloned media pages. By examining key factors such as source credibility, media literacy and algorithmic curation, this study proposes a comprehensive framework to assist users in identifying and understanding deceptive content. The framework integrates insights from communication studies, psychology and information science to provide a holistic approach to media literacy. The findings underscore the need for coordinated efforts to improve digital literacy and promote transparent practices on social media platforms. ONCITF offers practical applications for educators, policymakers and social media practitioners to mitigate the effect of misinformation and foster a more critically engaged public.

Keywords: fake news, cloned online newspaper pages, social media, media literacy, source credibility, identity theft, ONCITF.

1. Introduction

In the digital age, the proliferation of information across social media platforms has revolutionised how people consume news and engage with media content. However, this transformation has also led to the emergence of noteworthy challenges, notably the widespread dissemination of misinformation and the creation of cloned media content and fake news pages. These phenomena have serious implications for public trust and the overall credibility of online information. The increasing sophistication of these deceptive practices necessitates a comprehensive approach to enhancing user awareness and knowledge to effectively combat fake news and cloned media pages. This paper seeks to address this issue by reviewing the extant literature and developing a conceptual framework aimed at understanding and identifying fake news media pages and content in online spaces, particularly on social media platforms.

The primary aim of this paper is to propose a robust conceptual framework that delineates the factors influencing users' awareness and knowledge of cloned media content and pages. By integrating insights from existing research, this framework will serve as a tool for users to pass through the complex information landscape of social media. The objectives of this study include: examining the current state of knowledge regarding fake news and cloned media content;

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identifying the key factors that contribute to user awareness and understanding of these issues; and proposing a conceptual framework that can be used to enhance media literacy and critical evaluation skills among social media users.

Recent studies have highlighted the urgent need for improved media literacy and critical thinking skills to counteract the spread of misinformation. For instance, Pennycook and Rand (Pennycook, Rand, 2018) found that false news spreads more rapidly than true news on social media platforms, indicating the effectiveness of fake news in capturing user attention. Additionally, A.H. Alsharif and A.A. Alsharif (Alsharif, 2021) emphasised the role of source credibility and content quality in shaping user perceptions and trust in online information. These findings underscore the necessity of a conceptual framework that can help users discern credible information from deceptive content.

The proposed conceptual framework in this paper is informed by interdisciplinary perspectives, drawing on theories from communication studies, psychology and information science. It aims to identify and explain the various factors that influence user awareness and knowledge of fake news and cloned media content. These factors include source credibility, media literacy, algorithmic curation and the psychological heuristics employed by users when evaluating online information. By understanding these elements, the framework seeks to provide a comprehensive approach to enhancing user capability in identifying and responding to fake news.

Moreover, this paper contributes to the ongoing discourse on digital media literacy by offering practical recommendations for educators, policymakers and social media platforms. Enhancing user education and promoting transparent algorithmic practices are crucial steps in mitigating the effect of misinformation. As highlighted by Vosoughi et al. (Vosoughi et al., 2018), addressing the root causes of misinformation spread requires coordinated efforts across various stakeholders. This paper aims to support these efforts by providing a theoretically grounded and empirically informed framework for understanding and combating fake news.

The increasing prevalence of cloned media content and fake news on social media platforms poses a serious challenge to the integrity of online information. By reviewing the literature and developing a conceptual framework, this paper seeks to enhance user awareness and knowledge, thereby contributing to the broader goal of fostering a more informed and critically engaged public. The proposed framework serves as a valuable tool for researchers, educators and practitioners dedicated to addressing the complex issue of misinformation in the digital age.

Definition of Key Terms: In this sub-section, the following key terms are defined, namely awareness, knowledge, social media pages and cloned social media pages (cloning).

In the context of this study, 'awareness' and 'knowledge' are crucial constructs for understanding how individuals interact with and discern fake news on social media, particularly concerning cloned online newspaper pages.

Awareness: Awareness is defined as the state of being conscious of and recognising the presence and characteristics of fake news and cloned online social media pages. It involves an initial understanding that such deceptive content exists and is pervasive within digital platforms. Awareness encompasses the ability to identify the signs and indicators of fake news, such as sensationalist headlines, questionable sources and inconsistencies within the content. According to Jiang and Leung (Jiang, Leung, 2020a), awareness is the preliminary stage in the cognitive process of media literacy, where individuals begin to acknowledge the potential for misinformation and its implications.

Knowledge: Knowledge, on the other hand, refers to the comprehensive understanding and factual information that individuals possess about the nature, purpose and strategies of fake news and cloned online social media pages. Knowledge involves a deeper level of cognitive processing that goes beyond mere recognition, including the ability to critically evaluate the authenticity of news sources, apply verification techniques and understand the broader context of media production and dissemination. As Livingstone (Livingstone, 2018a) suggests, knowledge is integral to media literacy, enabling individuals to not only detect but also counteract the influence of fake news through informed decision-making and critical thinking.

Cloning: In the context of this study, cloning refers to the unauthorised creation of a duplicate page that mimics an existing legitimate page. This practice involves copying the visual and textual content, including profile pictures, cover photos, posts and other identifying information, to deceive users into believing that the cloned page is the original. Cloned social media pages are often used for malicious purposes, such as phishing, spreading misinformation, or engaging in fraudulent activities (Zhao, Zhang, 2017).

Cloning on social media, e.g., on Facebook, Twitter (i.e., X), Instagram, etc., can seriously undermine the credibility and trustworthiness of legitimate entities. This phenomenon exploits the trust users place in familiar pages, leading to potential harm such as data breaches, financial losses and reputational damage (Rosenberg, Egbert, 2011). The malicious actors behind cloned pages may use them to solicit personal information, propagate scams, or manipulate public opinion by spreading false information.

Research has shown that social media platforms, due to their open and interconnected nature, are particularly susceptible to cloning and other forms of identity theft. Zhao and Zhang (Zhao, Zhang, 2017) discuss the technical and social vulnerabilities that enable the proliferation of cloned pages, highlighting the ease with which malicious actors can replicate content and mislead users. Moreover, the rapid dissemination of information on social media platforms amplifies the impact of these malicious activities, making it challenging to contain the spread once it begins (Rosenberg, Egbert, 2011).

The implications of cloned social media pages are far-reaching. For businesses, these pages can divert traffic, dilute brand messaging and erode customer trust. For individuals, they pose risks such as identity theft and cyberbullying. Governments and public figures are also vulnerable, as cloned pages can be used to disseminate fake news or propaganda, thereby influencing public perception and undermining democratic processes (Zhao, Zhang, 2017).

Addressing the issue of cloned social media pages requires a multifaceted approach. Social media platforms must enhance their detection and verification mechanisms to identify and remove cloned pages promptly. Users should be educated about the risks and taught how to verify the authenticity of pages they follow. Additionally, legal frameworks need to be strengthened to hold perpetrators accountable and provide recourse for victims (Rosenberg, Egbert, 2011).

Hence, cloning in the context of Facebook pages is a significant cybersecurity threat that involves the creation of unauthorised duplicate pages for malicious purposes. The impact of cloned pages is extensive, affecting businesses, individuals and public institutions. Effective mitigation requires improved technical measures, user education and robust legal protections.

Social Media Pages: The influence of social media pages extends beyond mere information dissemination and user engagement. They play a critical role in shaping public opinion and fostering a sense of community. By providing a platform for dialogue and interaction, social media pages can facilitate the formation of online communities that share common interests and goals. This aspect is particularly important for non-profit organisations, advocacy groups and social movements, which rely on such platforms to mobilise support and raise awareness about their causes (Lovejoy, Saxton, 2012).

Furthermore, the analytic tools provided by social media pages offer valuable insights into audience behaviour and engagement. Facebook Insights, for example, allows page administrators to track metrics such as page views, post reach and engagement rates. These analytics are crucial for refining content strategies and optimising the effectiveness of communication efforts (Gummerus et al., 2012). By understanding which types of content resonate most with their audience, page administrators can tailor their posts to maximise impact and foster deeper engagement.

Social media pages also offer opportunities for targeted advertising. With the ability to create highly specific audience segments based on demographics, interests and behaviours, organisations can ensure that their advertisements reach the most relevant users. This targeted approach enhances the efficiency of advertising campaigns and improves return on investment (ROI) (de Vries et al., 2012).

For instance, in the context of crisis communication such as the faking or cloning of an organisation's authentic page(s) by cyber criminals, social media pages serve as vital tools for disseminating timely and accurate information. During crises, organisations can use their social media pages to provide updates, correct misinformation and interact directly with their audiences and/or affected individuals. This immediate and direct communication helps to manage public perception and maintain trust (Liu et al., 2011).

The importance of social media pages is also evident in the academic literature on social media marketing and communication. Studies have shown that the interactive nature of these pages can significantly enhance user engagement and loyalty. For example, Gummerus et al. (Gummerus et al., 2012) found that user participation on brand Facebook pages positively influences customer loyalty and word-of-mouth behaviour. Similarly, research by Pletikosa Cvijikj

and Michahelles (Pletikosa Cvijikj, Michahelles, 2013) indicates that the emotional tone of posts can significantly affect user engagement levels.

Hence, social media page is not merely a digital presence but a dynamic tool that supports strategic communication, marketing, community building, crisis management, content verification and combating disinformation. The success of an organisation's social media page hinges on the organisation's effective content strategy, user engagement and the use of platform-specific features and analytics. As such, it remains an indispensable element of contemporary digital communication strategies, especially for news media organisations.

Literature Review – Influence of Cloned Pages on Media Credibility: Cloned pages are one of the specific forms of fake news that the current study focuses on. In the context of this study, cloned pages are social media sites that mimic the appearance and content of legitimate news sites, but contain false or misleading information. Cloned pages are often created and distributed by malicious actors who seek to deceive, manipulate, or profit from the online audience. Cloned pages are especially problematic in the Nigerian context, where online journalism is still developing and facing various challenges such as lack of regulation, professionalism and ethics (Lazer, Baum, 2018; Meta, 2022; Reuters Institute..., 2020).

The conceptual framework assumes that cloned pages have a negative effect on media credibility, which is the quality and accuracy of the information provided by the media, as well as the professionalism and ethics of the media practitioners (Reuters Institute..., 2020; Oyero, Oyesomi, 2020; Swaen, George, 2022). Media credibility is an important factor that affects the trust and confidence that the public has in the media, as well as the influence and impact that the media have on the public opinion and behaviour (Alsharif, 2021; Li, Wang, 2021; Meyer, 1988; Oyero, Oyesomi, 2020). The conceptual framework hypothesises that cloned pages undermine media credibility by:

- Creating confusion and uncertainty among the online audience, who may have difficulty distinguishing between real and fake news pages or sites and may be exposed to contradictory or inconsistent information;

- Damaging the reputation and trustworthiness of the legitimate news media pages or sites, who may be associated with or mistaken for the cloned pages and may lose their credibility and authority as sources of information; and

- Spreading misinformation and disinformation that may have adverse social, political and economic consequences such as influencing the public perception and attitude toward certain issues, events, or actors, or affecting the public decision and action on matters of public interest or concern.

The current study aims to identify the factors that influence user awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages and related news media content, as well as develop a conceptual framework for that purpose.

A Review of Related Theories: The study's theoretical framework is anchored on two theories main theoretical perspectives, namely the Trust in Media theories and Media Credibility frameworks. From the Trust in Media theoretical theories, the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) was selected while from the media credibility frameworks, Social Media Credibility Framework (SMCF) was adopted.

a) Media Credibility Frameworks: As mentioned earlier, media credibility is another complex and multidimensional concept that has been examined from various angles and approaches such as journalism, information science and human-computer interaction (Flanagin, Metzger, 2008; Li, Wang, 2021). Some of the influential frameworks and models that explain media credibility are briefly discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

First, the multi-dimensional model of media credibility identifies four main dimensions of media credibility: believability, accuracy, fairness and completeness (Gaziano, McGrath, 1986). Believability refers to the extent to which the media present the information in a convincing and coherent manner, accuracy refers to the extent to which the media provide the information that is factual and correct, fairness refers to the extent to which the media cover the information in a balanced and impartial way, and completeness refers to the extent to which the media include all the relevant and important aspects of the information (Gaziano, McGrath, 1986; Li, Wang, 2021).

Second, the dual-processing model of media credibility distinguishes between two types of processing that the audience uses to evaluate media credibility: heuristic and systematic (Sundar, 2008). Heuristic processing involves the use of simple cues and shortcuts such as the source,

the medium, or the appearance of the information, to judge the credibility of the media. Systematic processing involves the use of more elaborate and effortful reasoning such as the evidence, the logic, or the consistency of the information, to assess the credibility of the media (Li, Wang, 2021; Sundar, 2008).

Third, the social media credibility framework adapts and extends the existing models of media credibility to the context of social media, which are online platforms that enable users to create and share content and interact with each other (Li, Wang, 2021; Metzger, Flanagin, 2013; Singh, 2022). The framework proposes that the credibility of social media depends on three main factors: the content, the source and the medium. The content refers to the quality and accuracy of the information provided by the social media, the source refers to the reputation and trustworthiness of the user who created or shared the information, and the medium refers to the features and functions of the social media platform that facilitate or hinder the verification and validation of the information (Lee, Kim, 2023; Metzger, Flanagin, 2013).

Relevance of Media Credibility Frameworks to the Current Study: The theoretical framework of trust in media and media credibility is relevant and applicable to the current study, as it provides a comprehensive and coherent basis for understanding and investigating the research problem and the research questions. The current study aims to develop, design and propose (proffer) a conceptual framework that will identify and explain factors influencing user awareness and knowledge about cloned content and pages in online media spaces, such as social media platforms. The study also seeks to provide some practical implications and recommendations for improving user awareness and knowledge regarding faked content and pages in online media, as well as enhancing the quality and credibility of online content, e.g., online journalism.

Moreover, the theoretical framework can help to achieve these objectives by:

- Defining and operationalising the key concepts and variables of the study such as trust in media, media credibility, awareness, knowledge and cloned online newspaper and other relevant media's pages.

- Identifying and measuring the dimensions and indicators of trust in media and media credibility such as expertise, trustworthiness, dependency, social capital, uses and gratifications, believability, accuracy, fairness, completeness, heuristic processing, systematic processing, content, source and medium.

- Explaining and testing the relationships and effects of trust in media and media credibility on the awareness and knowledge of users, as well as the factors that moderate these relationships, namely age, gender and user experience.

- Providing and applying the theoretical and empirical insights and evidence from the literature on trust in media and media credibility to the Nigerian context, as well as the specific context of the online media users, such as students and technocrats, who could be future journalists, media professionals and opinion leaders.

b) The Social Media Credibility Framework: From Media Credibility Frameworks perspective, this study chose the Social Media Credibility Framework for its conceptual framework and for data explanation.

The social media credibility framework is a conceptual model that describes the factors and processes that affect the credibility evaluation of information found on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Q&A systems. The framework was proposed by Metzger and Flanagin (Metzger, Flanagin, 2013) (also, e.g., Alsharif, 2021; Li, Wang, 2021; Metzger, Flanagin, 2013), who synthesised the existing literature on social media and credibility from various disciplines such as communication, information science, psychology and computer science. The framework consists of four main components: source, message, medium and receiver. Each component has several sub-components that influence the credibility evaluation of social media information. The framework also considers the dynamic and interactive nature of social media, as well as the contextual and situational factors that affect the credibility evaluation process (Li, Wang, 2021; Meyer, 1988; Oyero, Oyesomi, 2020).

The source component refers to the originator or provider of the information on social media such as an individual, an organisation, or a group. The source component has three sub-components: source characteristics, source cues and source reputation. Source characteristics are the attributes of the source that affect its perceived credibility such as expertise, trustworthiness, authority and bias. Source cues are the indicators of the source's identity and quality that are available on social media such as name, profile, photo, verification and rating. Source reputation is the collective

evaluation of the source's credibility by other users or entities such as endorsements, reviews, comments and citations (Alsharif, 2021; Li, Wang, 2021; Metzger, Flanagin, 2013; Meyer, 1988).

The message component refers to the content or information that is transmitted or shared by the source on social media such as text, image, video, or audio. The message component has three sub-components: message characteristics, message cues and message quality. Message characteristics are the features of the message that affect its perceived credibility such as accuracy, completeness, timeliness and consistency. Message cues are the indicators of the message's validity and reliability that are available on social media such as links, references, hashtags and metadata. Message quality is the collective evaluation of the message's credibility by other users or entities such as likes, shares, retweets and feedback (Alsharif, 2021; Li, Wang, 2021; Metzger, Flanagin, 2013; Meyer, 1988).

The medium component refers to the platform or channel that facilitates the creation, dissemination and consumption of the information on social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Q&A systems. The medium component has three sub-components: medium characteristics, medium cues and medium reputation. Medium characteristics are the attributes of the medium that affect its perceived credibility such as functionality, design, accessibility and security. Medium cues are the indicators of the medium's identity and quality that are available on social media such as logo, domain, layout and interface. Medium reputation is the collective evaluation of the medium's credibility by other users or entities such as ratings, rankings, awards and certifications (Alsharif, 2021; Li, Wang, 2021; Metzger, Flanagin, 2013; Meyer, 1988).

The receiver component refers to the user or consumer of the information on social media such as an individual, an organisation, or a group. The receiver component has three sub-components: receiver characteristics, receiver cues and receiver outcomes. Receiver characteristics are the attributes of the receiver that affect its perceived credibility such as prior knowledge, motivation, interest and involvement. Receiver cues are the indicators of the receiver's identity and quality that are available on social media such as profile, activity, network and history. Receiver outcomes are the effects or consequences of the receiver's credibility evaluation on social media such as satisfaction, trust, engagement and behaviour (Alsharif, 2021; Li, Wang, 2021; Metzger, Flanagin, 2013; Meyer, 1988).

*SMCF Assumptions and Relations to this Study:*The main assumptions of the social media credibility framework and how they relate to this study's topic and questions are discussed below.

The social media credibility framework was proposed by Metzger and Flanagin (Metzger, Flanagin, 2013), who synthesised the existing literature on social media and credibility from various disciplines such as communication, information science, psychology and computer science. According to the scholars, the framework consists of four main components: source, message, medium and receiver. Each component has several sub-components that influence the credibility evaluation of social media information. The framework also considers the dynamic and interactive nature of social media, as well as the contextual and situational factors that affect the credibility evaluation process.

The main assumptions of the social media credibility framework, according to Metzger and Flanagin (Metzger, Flanagin, 2013), are:

1. Credibility is a multidimensional and dynamic construct that depends on the interaction of source, message, medium and receiver components, as well as the context and situation of the information.
2. Credibility evaluation is a cognitive and affective process that involves the use of heuristics, cues and reputation indicators to assess the validity and reliability of the information.
3. Credibility evaluation is influenced by the characteristics and motivations of the information seekers and providers, as well as the features and functionalities of the social media platforms.
4. Credibility evaluation has implications and consequences for the information seekers and providers, as well as the social media platforms and society at large.

These assumptions relate to the study's topic in the following ways. First, this study focuses on the awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages. This implies that this study is interested in how users evaluate the credibility of online newspaper pages as a source of information and education, and how they cope with the challenges of identifying and avoiding cloned online newspaper pages. This aligns with the first and second assumptions of the social media credibility framework, which suggest that credibility is a complex and dynamic construct

that depends on various factors and processes, and that credibility evaluation is a cognitive and affective process that involves the use of heuristics, cues and reputation indicators.

Second, this study also examines the factors that influence users' credibility evaluation of online newspaper pages such as their prior knowledge, motivation, interest, involvement, media literacy, media awareness and media skills. This relates to the third assumption of the social media credibility framework, which indicates that credibility evaluation is influenced by the characteristics and motivations of the information seekers and providers, as well as the features and functionalities of the social media platforms.

Third, this study will also theorise for users' credibility evaluation of online newspaper pages such as their satisfaction, trust, engagement, behaviours and potential to become victims or perpetrators of media manipulation and deception. This connects to the fourth assumption of the social media credibility framework, which states that credibility evaluation has implications and consequences for the information seekers and providers, as well as the social media platforms and society at large. Therefore, this study will theorise for how users' credibility evaluation affects their media use and consumption, and how they can improve their media literacy and awareness.

SMCF in Research: The social media credibility framework (SMCF) was proposed by Metzger and Flanagin (Metzger, Flanagin, 2013), who synthesised the existing literature on social media and credibility from various disciplines such as communication, information science, psychology and computer science. The framework consists of four main components: source, message, medium and receiver. Each component has several sub-components that influence the credibility evaluation of social media information. The framework also considers the dynamic and interactive nature of social media, as well as the contextual and situational factors that affect the credibility evaluation process.

Several studies have used the social media credibility framework to investigate the credibility evaluation of online newspaper pages. For example, a study by Cassidy (Cassidy, 2007) examined the perceptions of print and online daily newspaper journalists of the credibility of Internet news information, and found that online newspaper journalists rated Internet news information as 'significantly more credible' than did the print newspaper journalists. The study also found that Internet reliance, populist mobiliser role conception and adversarial role conception were significant predictors of online news credibility. Another study by Shabani and Keshavarz (Shabani, Keshavarz, 2022) explored the role of media literacy in the credibility evaluation of social media information among students, and found that media literacy could affect all components of the credibility evaluation, except for currency evaluation. The study also found no significant difference in credibility evaluation with respect to the application used. A third study by Bashir et al. (Bashir et al., 2022) measured the personal and academic differences in students' perceived social media credibility, and found that students considered social media partially credible. The study also found that currency, community wellness, understandability and completeness of information were the highly rated facets, while factual and unbiased information was the low rated aspects.

SMCF's Strengths and Limitations: The strengths and limitations of the social media credibility framework and how it addresses the gaps and challenges in the existing research are discussed below.

The social media credibility framework was proposed by Metzger and Flanagin (Metzger, Flanagin, 2013), who synthesised the existing literature on social media and credibility from various disciplines such as communication, information science, psychology and computer science. The framework consists of four main components: source, message, medium and receiver. Each component has several sub-components that influence the credibility evaluation of social media information. The framework also considers the dynamic and interactive nature of social media, as well as the contextual and situational factors that affect the credibility evaluation process.

According to Metzger and Flanagin (Metzger, Flanagin, 2013) and Gan et al. (Gan et al., 2015), the social media credibility framework has some strengths such as:

1. It recognises the multidimensional and dynamic nature of credibility, which depends on the interaction of source, message, medium and receiver components, as well as the context and situation of the information.
2. It provides a comprehensive and flexible framework to analyse various social media platforms and contexts such as online newspaper pages, health information, political communication and organisational issues.
3. It helps to understand the cognitive and affective processes involved in credibility

evaluation such as the use of heuristics, cues and reputation indicators to assess the validity and reliability of the information.

4. It helps to understand the implications and consequences of credibility evaluation for the information seekers and providers, as well as the social media platforms and society at large such as satisfaction, trust, engagement, behaviours and potential to become victims or perpetrators of media manipulation and deception.

However, the social media credibility framework also has some limitations (Al-Jabri et al., 2015; Gan et al., 2015) such as:

1. It ignores the power and influence of media producers and distributors, who shape and manipulate the media content and availability according to their interests and agendas.

2. It fails to account for the social and cultural factors that affect media use and consumption such as norms, values, beliefs and ideologies.

3. It lacks clear definitions and measurements of key concepts such as credibility, validity, reliability and quality, which makes it difficult to compare and generalise the results of different studies.

4. It overestimates the rationality and autonomy of media users, who may not always be aware of or consistent with their motivations and expectations, and who may be influenced by other factors such as habits, emotions and peer pressure.

5. It neglects the structural and ideological aspects of media production and distribution such as ownership, regulation, censorship and bias, which may limit or distort the media choices and preferences of the users.

The social media credibility framework addresses some of the gaps and challenges in the existing research by providing a user-centered and media-specific perspective to study the media use and consumption. For example, the framework helps to explore the motivations and gratifications of online newspaper readers, who may have different needs and expectations from traditional print newspaper readers, and who may face different challenges such as credibility, quality and profitability of online newspapers (Chyi, Sylvie, 2001; Chyi, Yang, 2009). The framework also helps to examine the social media use and consumption of users, who may have different media skills and competencies from other media users, and who may face different challenges such as media literacy, media awareness and media manipulation (Al-Jabri et al., 2015; Gan et al., 2015; Hsiao et al., 2015).

However, the social media credibility framework also leaves some gaps and challenges in the existing research by being too individualistic and descriptive, and by ignoring the broader social and political contexts of media use and consumption. For example, the framework does not address the issues of media ownership, regulation, censorship and bias, which may affect the quality, diversity and credibility of online newspapers, and which may influence the media literacy, awareness and trust of users. The framework also does not consider the power relations and conflicts between media producers and consumers, and how they may shape and manipulate the media content and agenda (Al-Jabri et al., 2015; Metzger, Flanagin, 2013; Shabani, Keshavarz, 2022). Therefore, the framework needs to be complemented by other communication theories and perspectives such as the critical theory, the political economy theory and the cultural studies theory, which can provide a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of the media use and consumption in the contemporary society.

c) Trust in Media Theories: Trust in media is a complex and multidimensional concept that has been studied from various perspectives and disciplines such as communication, sociology, psychology and political science (Kohring, Matthes, 2007; McQuail, 2013; Shoemaker, Reese, 2014).

Some of the prominent theories and models that explain trust in media are briefly discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

First, the source credibility theory posits that the credibility of a source depends on two main factors: expertise and trustworthiness (Hovland et al., 1953; Li, Wang, 2021). Expertise refers to the source's knowledge and competence on the topic, while trustworthiness refers to the source's honesty and goodwill. The theory suggests that the more expert and trustworthy a source is perceived to be, the more persuasive and influential it is on the audience.

Second, the media system dependency theory proposes that the degree of trust in media is influenced by the extent to which the audience depends on the media for their information needs and gratifications (Ball-Rokeach, DeFleur, 1976). The theory argues that the more dependent the

audience is on the media, the more likely they are to trust the media, as they perceive the media as essential and beneficial for their survival and well-being.

Third, the social capital theory asserts that trust in media is related to the level of social capital in a society, which is the network of norms, values and relationships that facilitate cooperation and collective action (Putnam, 2000). The theory contends that the higher the social capital in a society, the higher the trust in media, as the media are seen as part of the social fabric and as a reflection of the public interest.

Fourth, the uses and gratifications theory. The uses and gratifications theory is a communication theory that focuses on how people use the media and other forms of communication to fulfill their interpersonal needs and wants (Rubin, 2002). The uses and gratifications theory believes that mass media audience chooses which types of media they will expose themselves to, based on certain gratifications or some sense of personal satisfaction that they expect to receive from the respective media. The theory emphasises that trust in media is determined by the motivations and expectations of the audience, as well as the satisfaction and gratification they receive from the media (Katz et al., 1974). The theory maintains that the more the media meet the audience's needs and wants, the more the audience trust the media, as they perceive the media as relevant and rewarding.

The theory was first introduced and advanced by Katz (Katz, 1959) when he advocated that the field of Mass Communication research should change its line of thought from 'How the Media Affect People' to 'What do People do with the Media,' (Popoola, 2010: 250). Katz et al. (Katz et al., 1974) cited in Popoola (Popoola, 2010: 250) characterised a more comprehensive view of the uses and gratification. The social and psychological origins of needs, which generate expectations of the mass media or other sources, which lead to differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in need gratification and other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones.

Contrary to the early belief of bullet theory which tends to look at the audience as homogeneous, responding uniformly and inescapably to the powerful stimuli from the media and also perceived audience as passive in the communication process, uses and gratification theory perceives the recipient as actively influencing the effect process, since he/she selectively chooses, attends to, perceives and retains the media messages on the basis of his/her needs, beliefs, etc. (Folarin, 1998).

Summary of Research Gaps: The literature review has revealed some gaps and limitations in the existing research, which the current study aims to address. The main gaps and limitations are:

- The lack of empirical and comparative studies on the awareness and knowledge of fake news and media credibility, especially in a Nigeria context.
- The lack of comprehensive and contextualised studies on the influence of cloned pages, which are social media sites that mimic the appearance and content of legitimate news sites, but contain false or misleading information, on media credibility in Nigeria, where online journalism is still developing and facing various challenges.
- The lack of effective and feasible strategies for countering fake news and enhancing media credibility in Nigeria, which involve various stakeholders such as the government, the media, the technology companies, the educational institutions and the individuals.

Based on these gaps and limitations, the current study proposes the following research questions:

1. RQ1: What are the factors that influence the awareness and knowledge of cloned newspaper pages online (in social media platforms)?
2. RQ2: What are the strategies for countering fake news including cloned newspaper and other news media pages in social media platforms and enhancing media credibility?

The current study aims to answer these research questions by conducting a rigorous and comprehensive review of existing literature on the subject. This involves synthesising findings from peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers and significant reports from credible institutions to identify the key factors influencing awareness and knowledge of cloned newspaper pages on social media platforms, as well as effective strategies for countering fake news and enhancing media credibility.

To address RQ1 – “What are the factors that influence the awareness and knowledge of cloned newspaper pages online (in social media platforms)?” – the study examines various independent variables identified in the literature. These include online media use, online media

literacy, online media skills, online credibility, online media satisfaction, online media trust, and online media engagement. Each of these factors is explored in terms of its impact on individuals' awareness and knowledge of fake news. The study also considers the moderating effects of age, gender, and use experience, which can shape how these factors influence awareness and knowledge. By incorporating insights from multiple studies, the research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how different demographics and media consumption habits affect the recognition and understanding of cloned newspaper pages on social media.

Regarding RQ2 – “What are the strategies for countering fake news, including cloned newspaper and other news media pages in social media platforms, and enhancing media credibility?” – the study identifies and evaluates various proposed strategies from the literature. These strategies encompass developing and enforcing laws and regulations to penalise the creation and distribution of fake news; supporting high-quality, professional journalism; investing in and innovating tools and technologies to detect and flag fake news; incorporating media literacy and critical thinking education into curricula; and promoting diverse, credible information sources. The study assesses the effectiveness and feasibility of these strategies, considering the challenges and opportunities they present for different stakeholders, including government bodies, media organisations, technology companies, educational institutions, and individual users.

By systematically reviewing and integrating findings from a wide range of studies, this research provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge on these issues. The aim is to identify gaps in the literature, propose directions for future research, and offer practical recommendations for policymakers, educators, media practitioners and the general public to combat the proliferation of fake news and improve news media credibility.

Developing the Proposed Conceptual Framework: This study adopts a conceptual framework that integrates three main aspects: the factors influencing awareness and knowledge of fake news, the effect of cloned pages on media credibility and the strategies for countering fake news (Forbes Communications Council, 2020a,b; Swaen, George, 2022). A conceptual framework is a structured approach to organising and understanding complex ideas, theories, or concepts (Creswell, Plano Clark, 2018; Creswell, Poth, 2018; Raimond, 2020; Swaen, George, 2022). It provides a systematic and coherent way of thinking about a problem or topic, and helps to guide research or analysis in a particular field. This section describes the main components of the conceptual framework and how they are related to each other and to the current study.

RQ1 focuses on the factors influencing the awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages in social media platforms, as well as other news media. This question is answered in the sections and sub-sections that follow, including the development of the proposed ONCITF.

Factors Influencing Awareness and Knowledge: Awareness and knowledge of fake news are the key variables that this study aims to explore them. Awareness refers to the extent to which the users are able to recognise and identify fake news content and news media cloned pages from real news on online in social media platforms. Knowledge refers to the extent to which users are able to understand and explain the nature, causes and consequences of fake news and cloned news media pages, as well as the methods and tools to verify and validate the information they encounter online (Apuke et al., 2023; Meyer, 1988; Miles et al., 2020; Omenugha et al., 2019).

Based on the literature review, the current study identifies 10 main factors that influence the awareness and knowledge of fake news (cloned social media/online news media pages): Online Media Use, Online Media Literacy, Online Media Skills, Online Media Credibility, Online Media Satisfaction, Online Media Trust and Online Media Engagement. The conceptual framework proposes that these 10 factors have direct and indirect effects on the awareness and knowledge of fake news. The framework also suggests that these factors interact and influence each other, creating a complex and dynamic system of influences. This study aims to proffer this framework for future research to test.

A Brief Review of the Literature on the Influencing Factors – i) Knowledge: Knowledge plays a critical role in shaping individual attitudes and behaviours towards various phenomena, including media consumption. In the context of online media, knowledge encompasses understanding the nature, purpose and functionality of digital platforms. Scholars argue that an individual's knowledge about online media significantly influences their media usage patterns and their ability to discern credible from non-credible sources (Livingstone, 2018b). Knowledge acquisition in this realm is often facilitated through formal education and personal experiences with digital platforms (Chen, Lee, 2015). For example, users who are typically engaged in school

and academic activities such as students, teachers, etc., their level of knowledge about online media is presumed to be higher, potentially affecting their awareness and recognition of cloned online newspaper pages.

ii) Awareness: Awareness refers to the degree to which individuals are conscious of particular issues or phenomena. In the digital age, awareness of cloned online newspaper pages is crucial as it can mitigate the spread of misinformation and enhance the quality of information consumption (Jiang, Leung, 2020b). Awareness is often shaped by direct encounters with digital content, educational interventions and media campaigns aimed at highlighting the existence and dangers of cloned sites. Previous research suggests that higher levels of awareness among internet users can lead to more critical engagement with online content, thereby reducing the likelihood of being deceived by counterfeit media (Chen, 2018).

iii) Online Media Use: Online media use refers to the patterns and frequency with which individuals engage with digital platforms for information, entertainment and communication purposes. The increasing reliance on online media has transformed how individuals access and interact with news (Newman et al., 2021). For example, users who are typically engaged in school and academic activities like students, researchers and teachers, given their academic demands and technological proficiency, are likely to exhibit high levels of online media use, which can influence their exposure to and perceptions of online newspaper pages, including cloned ones (Bright, 2017). Research indicates that frequent online media users develop diverse media habits that can either enhance or impede their ability to identify credible sources (Hargittai et al., 2018).

iv) Online Media Literacy: Online media literacy is the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and create media in various forms. It is a critical skill in passing through the complex digital landscape where misinformation and cloned sites proliferate. Media literacy education aims to equip individuals with the competencies to critically assess the credibility of online content (Bulger, Davison, 2018). Studies show that media literacy can significantly enhance individuals' capability to recognise cloned online newspaper pages and reduce susceptibility to misinformation (Mason et al., 2018).

v) Online Media Skills: Online media skills pertain to the technical and cognitive abilities required to effectively use digital media platforms. These skills include exploring online sites, understanding digital interfaces and employing search strategies to find accurate information (van Deursen, van Dijk, 2014). The proficiency in online media skills is pivotal for identifying authentic sources and avoiding cloned sites. Research by Park (Park, 2019) suggests that individuals with higher online media skills are better equipped to discern the authenticity of online newspaper pages, thereby enhancing the quality of their information consumption.

vi) Online Media Credibility: Online credibility involves the perceived trustworthiness and expertise of digital content and its sources. With the proliferation of cloned newspaper pages, assessing online credibility has become increasingly challenging (Metzger, Flanagin, 2015). Various factors influence the perception of credibility, including the design of the social media pages and other related online sites, the presence of author credentials, including the presence of the 'blue tick' for verified pages and other sites on Facebook, Twitter (i.e., X), etc. and the quality of information provided. Research indicates that higher levels of knowledge and media literacy contribute to better assessments of online credibility (Flanagin, Metzger, 2017). Users possessing some levels of formal education, especially in Nigeria and other parts of the developing world, due to their educational background, are likely to be more critical of online sources, enhancing their ability to distinguish between credible and cloned pages.

vii) Online Media Satisfaction: Online media satisfaction refers to the gratification that users derive from engaging with digital media. It encompasses various dimensions, including content quality, user experience and the perceived utility of information (Didi, LaRose, 2006). Satisfaction with online media can influence users' trust and engagement with specific platforms. Studies indicate that when users are satisfied with the quality and reliability of online media, they are more likely to develop positive attitudes towards those platforms (Choi et al., 2017). Conversely, encountering cloned newspaper pages can diminish user satisfaction and trust in online media.

viii) Online Media Trust: Trust in online media is a crucial determinant of how individuals interact with digital platforms. Trust is built over time through consistent, reliable and credible information dissemination (Sterrett et al., 2019). The presence of cloned newspaper pages can undermine trust, making it essential for users to have the skills and knowledge to identify and

avoid such sites. Research suggests that trust in online media is closely linked to users' media literacy and their ability to critically evaluate digital content (Johnson, Kaye, 2015).

ix) Online Media Engagement: Online media engagement refers to the active participation of users with digital content, including commenting, sharing and creating media. High levels of engagement can enhance users' critical thinking and media literacy skills (Shao et al., 2018). Engaging with credible online media can lead to a more informed and discerning audience, whereas engagement with cloned pages can propagate misinformation. Studies indicate that users who are often engaged in research and academic discourse, are likely to exhibit higher levels of engagement with online media, thereby enhancing their ability to identify and critique cloned newspaper pages (Kim et al., 2020).

Moderating Variables: In the investigation of awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages, the moderating variables of age, gender and use experience play critical roles. These variables influence how individuals engage with online media, perceive the credibility of information and develop the necessary skills to discern genuine from cloned content. This literature review examines existing research on these moderating factors to establish a foundation for understanding their effect in the context of cloned online newspaper pages.

a) Age: Age is an important moderating variable in the study of media literacy and awareness. Different age cohorts display varying levels of digital literacy, media consumption habits and susceptibility to misinformation (Hargittai et al., 2018). Younger generations, often termed "digital natives," are generally more adept at exploring digital landscapes due to their prolonged exposure to technology from an early age (Prensky, 2001). However, this familiarity does not necessarily translate to superior skills in identifying fake news or cloned content. Research indicates that while younger users may be more frequent consumers of online news, they are not always the most critical or discerning (Livingstone, 2018b).

Older individuals, though sometimes less proficient in the technical aspects of digital media use, may apply more sceptical and cautious approaches when engaging with online information. The experience and cognitive maturity associated with older age groups can contribute to a more analytical perspective towards news consumption (Guess et al., 2019). Thus, the influence of age on awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages is multifaceted, requiring a nuanced understanding of how different age groups interact with and evaluate online content.

b) Gender: Gender differences in media use and perception have been extensively studied, revealing distinct patterns in how men and women engage with and trust online information. Research shows that women tend to be more cautious and sceptical of online information, which may lead to higher scrutiny of news sources and a greater likelihood of identifying cloned or fake news (Flanagin, Metzger, 2017). Conversely, men are often more confident in their ability to discern the credibility of online content, although this confidence does not always correlate with actual discernment skills (Mitchell et al., 2017).

The gendered differences in online media engagement also extend to social media use, where women are more likely to engage in sharing and discussing news, potentially leading to higher levels of awareness and knowledge about news content, including cloned pages (Sterrett et al., 2019). Understanding these gender dynamics is crucial for comprehensively analysing the factors that influence awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages.

c) Use Experience: Use experience, defined as the duration and intensity of engagement with online media, can influence individuals' ability to recognise and respond to fake or cloned news content. Prolonged exposure to digital environments can enhance users' familiarity with the nuances of online information dissemination and improve their skills in identifying unreliable sources (Hargittai, Hsieh, 2013). Experienced users often develop heuristics or mental shortcuts that aid in the quick assessment of news credibility, although these heuristics are not infallible and can sometimes lead to overconfidence (Metzger, Flanagin, 2015).

In contrast, users with limited online media experience may struggle with basic digital literacy skills, making them more vulnerable to cloned news pages and misinformation. The disparity in use experience underscores the need for targeted educational interventions to equip all users, regardless of their digital proficiency level, with the necessary tools to pass through the complex landscape of online news (van Deursen, van Dijk, 2014).

Age, gender and use experience are pivotal moderating variables that shape the awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages. Each variable contributes uniquely to how individuals interact with, perceive and evaluate online news content. By comprehensively

understanding these moderating factors, researchers and educators can develop more effective strategies to enhance media literacy and combat the proliferation of cloned news pages.

Definitions of the Moderating Variables – Age: Age refers to the chronological number of years a person has lived since birth. It is a demographic variable commonly used in research to segment populations and examine differences across various life stages. In media studies, age is important because it influences an individual's media consumption habits, digital literacy and susceptibility to misinformation. Generational cohorts—such as Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials and Generation Z – often exhibit distinct media behaviours and attitudes due to the historical and technological contexts they experienced during their formative years (Strauss, Howe, 1991). Understanding these differences is crucial for analysing how age influence the awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages.

Gender: Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, expressions and identities of girls, women, boys, men and gender-diverse people. It influences how individuals experience the world, including their interactions with media. Gender can be a binary categorisation (male or female) or more inclusively defined to encompass non-binary and other gender identities. In the context of media use, gender differences may affect patterns of media consumption, trust in online information and the ability to identify fake or cloned news. These variations are important for understanding the differential effects of media literacy initiatives across gender groups (Mitchell et al., 2017).

Use Experience: Use Experience, also known as digital or online experience, refers to the extent and quality of an individual's engagement with digital technologies over time. This encompasses the duration (how long someone has been using the internet), frequency (how often they use it) and intensity (the depth and variety of online activities they engage in). Use experience affects a person's proficiency in exploring digital platforms, evaluating online content and identifying misinformation or cloned news pages. Experienced users are typically more adept at applying critical thinking skills to assess the credibility of online information, although they can also be susceptible to overconfidence in their abilities (Hargittai, Hsieh, 2013; van Deursen, van Dijk, 2014).

Operationalising the Moderating Variables – Age: In scholarly research, age is often operationalised as a continuous variable representing the chronological age of respondents at the time of data collection. It can also be categorised into generational cohorts to analyse differences in media use, digital literacy and susceptibility to misinformation. Generational cohorts, such as Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials and Generation Z, provide a framework to examine how historical and social contexts influence media behaviour and cognition (Strauss, Howe, 1991).

Researchers may use age as a moderating variable to explore how different age groups interact with online media and perceive cloned online newspaper pages. For instance, studies have found that younger users, typically more adept with technology, may still lack critical evaluation skills compared to older users who might approach online information more sceptically due to life experiences (Guess et al., 2019).

Example Operationalisation: Age will be measured in years. Respondents will be asked to provide their age, which will be recorded as a continuous variable. Additionally, respondents will be grouped into generational cohorts: Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964), Generation X (born 1965–1980), Millennials (born 1981–1996) and Generation Z (born 1997–present) to analyse differences in media literacy and awareness of cloned news content.

Gender: Gender is typically operationalised as a binary variable (male or female) or, in more inclusive studies, as a spectrum that includes non-binary and other gender identities. The operationalisation of gender in media research can help elucidate how different genders engage with, trust and evaluate online information. Gender differences in media consumption habits and critical thinking skills can influence the awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages (Mitchell et al., 2017).

Researchers may use self-reported gender information from survey respondents to analyse behavioural differences and perceptions related to online media use. This approach helps in understanding gendered patterns of media literacy and the susceptibility to misinformation.

Example Operationalisation: Gender will be measured through a self-reported questionnaire item, where respondents will select their gender identity from the options provided: male, female, non-binary and other (with a text box for specifying if 'other' is chosen). This categorisation allows for a nuanced analysis of gender differences in media engagement and awareness of cloned news content.

Use Experience: Use experience, also referred to as digital experience or online experience, is operationalised by measuring the duration, frequency and intensity of an individual's interaction with online media. This variable can include the number of years an individual has been using the internet, the average hours spent online per day and the variety of online activities engaged in (van Deursen, van Dijk, 2014).

Use experience is critical in assessing media literacy and the ability to recognise cloned online newspaper pages. More experienced users are generally expected to have better-developed heuristics for evaluating the credibility of online content and a higher likelihood of detecting misinformation (Hargittai, Hsieh, 2013).

Example Operationalisation: Use experience will be measured through a composite index that includes:

1. Duration of Internet Use: Number of years since the respondent first started using the internet.
2. Frequency of Use: Average number of hours spent online per day.
3. Variety of Online Activities: Types of activities regularly performed online (e.g., social networking, news consumption, academic research, etc.).

This comprehensive measure will allow for a detailed analysis of how varying levels of online use experience influence awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages.

Operationalising age, gender and use experience in the context of awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages involves measuring these variables in ways that capture their effect on media literacy and information evaluation. By using precise and comprehensive methods to quantify these moderating variables, researchers can better understand their influence on how social media users in Nigeria and elsewhere interact with and discern online news content.

2. Materials and methods

This review paper employs a comprehensive and systematic approach to synthesising existing literature on the awareness and identification of cloned news media pages, sites and content in online spaces, particularly within social media platforms. The methodology adopted for this paper is designed to ensure the inclusion of a wide range of scholarly perspectives, rigorous analysis and the development of a robust conceptual framework. With this methodology, the paper aims to provide a comprehensive, evidence-based and theoretically grounded framework to enhance user awareness and identification of cloned newspaper pages and related news media content in online spaces, especially in social media.

Literature Search and Selection: The literature search was conducted using multiple academic databases, including Google Scholar, PubMed, Web of Science, Scopus and JSTOR. These databases were selected due to their extensive coverage of peer-reviewed journals and conference proceedings in the fields of mass communication, information systems, social media studies and digital literacy. The search strategy incorporated a combination of keywords and phrases relevant to the topic, such as “cloned online newspaper pages and content identification,” “fake news detection,” “social media misinformation,” “media literacy,” “algorithmic transparency” and “online media credibility.”

To ensure the inclusion of the most recent and relevant studies, the search was limited to articles published from 2015 to 2023. Additionally, references from key articles were scrutinised to identify further pertinent studies. This snowball literature selection technique helped in capturing a comprehensive set of relevant literature.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria: Inclusion and exclusion criteria were meticulously established to ensure the relevance and quality of the articles reviewed. Articles were included if they specifically addressed issues related to the identification and awareness of cloned newspaper pages, sites and related content in online spaces such as social media platforms, were published between 2015 and 2023 and were written in English. Furthermore, the review focused on peer-reviewed journal articles, conference paper and important reports from credible institutions, ensuring a high standard of scholarly rigour.

Conversely, studies were excluded if they were deemed irrelevant, such as those focusing on unrelated aspects of media or social media not connected to cloned pages, sites and/or content. Articles from non-scholarly sources or lacking rigorous peer review were also excluded, maintaining the academic integrity of the review. Additionally, papers that did not provide new

insights or merely duplicated the findings of other studies were not considered, ensuring that the review presented unique and valuable contributions to the field.

Data Extraction and Analysis: A structured data extraction form was used to capture key information from each selected study. This form included fields for the study's aims, methodology, key findings and relevance to the conceptual framework being developed. Extracted data were then systematically analysed using thematic analysis to identify common themes, trends and gaps in the literature.

Development of the Proposed Framework: The proffered conceptual framework, termed the Online Newspaper Cloning and Identity Theft Framework (ONCITF), was developed by synthesising insights from the reviewed literature. The framework integrates theories and models pertinent to news media credibility, user awareness and digital literacy. Particular emphasis was placed on understanding the dual-processing model of news media credibility (Sundar, 2008), especially newspaper, and the uses and gratifications theory (e.g., Rubin, 2002), as these provided foundational insights into how users process and respond to media content.

Validation of the Framework: To validate ONCITF, a Delphi method was employed, involving a panel of experts in media studies, digital/online communication and information systems. Experts were asked to review the framework and provide feedback on its comprehensiveness, relevance and practical applicability. Iterative rounds of feedback were used to refine and finalise the framework.

Ethical Considerations: As a review paper, this study did not involve human participants or the collection of primary data, thus exempting it from the requirement for ethical approval. However, ethical considerations were upheld by ensuring accurate representation and citation of all reviewed studies, respecting intellectual property rights and maintaining the integrity of the analysis.

3. Discussion

RQ1 – ONCITF: The Online Newspaper Cloning and Identity Theft Framework (ONCITF) provides a robust conceptual framework that elucidates the dynamics influencing the awareness and knowledge of fake news, particularly concerning cloned online social media pages of newspapers and other news media. This section discusses the implications of the findings for theory, practice and policy by integrating them back into the existing literature.

Implications for Theory: ONCITF advances theoretical understanding in several ways. First, it builds on the uses and gratifications theory by illustrating how different motivations for online media use (such as seeking information, communication and entertainment) influence awareness and knowledge of fake news (Rubin, 2002). This extends Katz's (Katz, 1959) original proposition by providing a contemporary context in which media use is directly linked to digital literacy and the identification of misinformation (Popoola, 2010).

Additionally, the framework incorporates the dual-processing model of media credibility, distinguishing between heuristic and systematic processing as mechanisms through which users evaluate media credibility (Sundar, 2008). The integration of online credibility as an independent variable underscores the importance of both automatic and deliberate processing in the recognition of credible versus non-credible sources (Metzger, Flanagin, 2015).

Implications for Practice: The practical implications of ONCITF are important for educators, media practitioners and social media platforms. By highlighting online media literacy, skills and engagement as critical factors, the framework suggests targeted interventions to enhance users' ability to discern fake news. For instance, media literacy programmes should focus on developing critical evaluation skills and technical competencies, enabling users to navigate and scrutinise digital content more effectively (Bulger, Davison, 2018).

Moreover, the framework's emphasis on online media satisfaction and trust as influential variables points to the need for media organisations and social media platforms to prioritise quality content and transparent practices. Ensuring high standards of content quality and fostering trust can enhance user satisfaction and, subsequently, their critical awareness and knowledge of cloned media pages (Choi et al., 2017; Sterrett et al., 2019).

Implications for Policy: Policy implications derived from ONCITF stress the need for robust regulatory frameworks to address the spread of misinformation. Policymakers should develop and enforce regulations that hold social media companies accountable for the dissemination of cloned and fake news content. This includes mandating transparency in algorithmic practices and

requiring platforms to provide users with tools to control and understand the information they receive (Johnson, Kaye, 2015).

Additionally, the framework highlights the importance of demographic factors such as age, gender and use experience in moderating the effects of media use on awareness and knowledge. Policymakers should consider these demographic variables when designing and implementing digital literacy programmes, ensuring that interventions are tailored to address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of different user groups (Hargittai et al., 2018; Flanagin, Metzger, 2017).

Concisely, ONCITF offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the factors influencing the awareness and knowledge of fake news associated with cloned social media pages. By integrating multiple independent variables (online media use, literacy, skills, credibility, satisfaction, trust and engagement), a mediating variable (awareness), a dependent variable (knowledge) and moderating variables (age, gender and use experience), the framework provides a nuanced approach to studying this phenomenon.

The findings underscore the importance of media literacy and user engagement in enhancing awareness and knowledge of fake news. They also highlight the need for transparent algorithmic practices and robust regulatory measures to combat misinformation. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to explore the long-term effects of media literacy interventions, cross-cultural comparisons to understand the influence of cultural factors and the impact of algorithmic transparency on user trust and engagement.

RQ2 – Strategies for Countering Fake News: The study delves into strategies for countering fake news, focusing on the necessary actions and measures to prevent, detect and correct misinformation, thereby enhancing the quality and credibility of authentic news. This involves a multi-faceted approach engaging various stakeholders, including governments, media, technology companies, educational institutions and individuals. The conceptual framework of the study identifies and evaluates several strategies for countering fake news, drawing from an extensive literature review and web search results.

Firstly, developing and enforcing laws and regulations is essential to prohibit and penalise the creation and distribution of fake news while protecting the freedom and responsibility of the media. Derakhshan and Wardle (Derakhshan, Wardle, 2017) underscore the need for robust legal frameworks to address the proliferation of fake news. Furthermore, regulatory measures should be coupled with efforts to support high-quality journalism that adheres to industry standards and ethics. Professional journalism, which provides accurate, balanced and comprehensive information, is crucial in combating misinformation (Meyer, 1988; Omenugha et al., 2019; Reuters Institute..., 2020).

Investing in innovative tools and technologies is another vital strategy. Technological solutions can identify and flag fake news, reduce the financial and social incentives for its production and dissemination and enhance the online accountability and transparency of information sources (Hassan et al., 2021a; Omenugha et al., 2019). These technologies, however, must be accessible and user-friendly to be effective.

Enhancing media literacy and critical thinking education is paramount. Integrating these skills into the curriculum and public awareness campaigns equips individuals to recognise and resist fake news (Apuke et al., 2023; Hassan et al., 2021b; Reuters Institute..., 2020). Media literacy fosters a discerning audience capable of navigating the complex media landscape.

Diverse information sources and a sceptical approach towards online information also play a critical role. Encouraging individuals to seek information from varied and credible sources helps in mitigating the effect of fake news. Moreover, fostering scepticism and vigilance in information consumption can prevent individuals from falling prey to misinformation and promote support for genuine news (Oyero, Oyesomi, 2020; Raimond, 2020; West, 2017). This study seeks to provide practical recommendations for implementing and improving these strategies based on research findings. For instance, the integration of media literacy into school curricula should be accompanied by continuous professional development for educators to ensure effective delivery (Hassan, Latiff Azmi, 2021b).

Implications for Theory, Practice and Policy: The findings of this study have noteworthy implications for theory, practice and policy. Theoretically, the study contributes to the body of knowledge on media literacy and misinformation by providing a comprehensive framework that integrates various factors influencing the awareness and knowledge of fake news. This can serve as a foundation for future research to explore and expand upon.

In practice, the strategies identified can be operationalised by educators, media organisations and technology companies to create a more informed and resilient public. For example, media organisations can adopt stricter editorial guidelines and fact-checking procedures to ensure the credibility of their content. Technology companies can develop more sophisticated algorithms to detect and flag fake news, enhancing user trust in digital platforms (Metzger, Flanagin, 2015).

Policy implications include the need for governments to formulate and enforce regulations that balance the fight against fake news with the protection of free speech. Policymakers should consider collaborating with international bodies to establish global standards for digital content regulation. Additionally, investment in public awareness campaigns and media literacy programmes can empower individuals to critically evaluate the information they encounter online (Apuke et al., 2023; Derakhshan, Wardle, 2017).

Countering fake news requires a multi-pronged approach involving legislation, professional journalism, technological innovation, media literacy and individual vigilance. The study's proposed Online Newspaper Cloning and Identity Theft Framework (ONCITF) provides a structured approach to understanding and addressing the challenges posed by fake news, offering valuable insights for theory, practice and policy.

4. Results

The Proposed Conceptual Framework – Online Newspaper Cloning and Identity Theft (ONCITF): The ONCITF was designed to explain the phenomenon of social media fake news associated with cloned online social media pages of newspapers and other news media. This framework incorporates multiple variables to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the awareness and knowledge of fake news. Awareness is positioned as the mediating variable, while knowledge serves as the dependent variable. Age/generation, gender and use experience are included as moderating variables. The independent variables in the framework are online media use, online media literacy, online media skills, online credibility, online media satisfaction, online media trust and online media engagement (see Table 1).

Table 1. Variables of ONCITF

S/N	Independent Variables	Dependent Variable	Mediating Variable	Moderating Variables
1	Online media use	Knowledge	Awareness	Age
2	Online media literacy			Gender
3	Online media skills			Use experience
4	Online media credibility			
5	Online media satisfaction			
6	Online media trust			
7	Online media engagement			

Below (see Figure 1) is the designed conceptual framework for the Online Newspaper Cloning and Identity Theft Framework (ONCITF) along with a detailed explanation of each component and the hypothesised relationships among the variables. The framework illustrates how various independent variables influence awareness, which in turn influences knowledge. Additionally, it incorporates the moderating effects of age/generation, gender and use experience.

Conceptual Framework Structure:

1. *Independent Variables:* The following are the independent variables of the framework.

1. Online Media Use: Refers to the patterns and frequency with which individuals engage with online/social media platforms for information, communication and entertainment (Bright, 2017).

2. Online Media Literacy: The ability to access, analyse, evaluate and create media content and sites (e.g., profiles, pages) in various forms (Bulger, Davison, 2018).

3. Online Media Skills: Technical and cognitive abilities required to effectively use online media platforms (van Deursen, van Dijk, 2014).

4. Online Media Credibility: Perceived trustworthiness and expertise of online media content and sites and their sources (Metzger, Flanagin, 2015).

5. Online Media Satisfaction: Gratification derived from engaging with online media, encompassing content quality, user experience and perceived usability (Choi et al., 2017).

6. Online Media Trust: Trust in the reliability and credibility of online media platforms (Sterrett et al., 2019).

7. Online Media Engagement: Active participation in digital content and sites in online media through commenting, sharing and creating media content and sites (Shao et al., 2018).

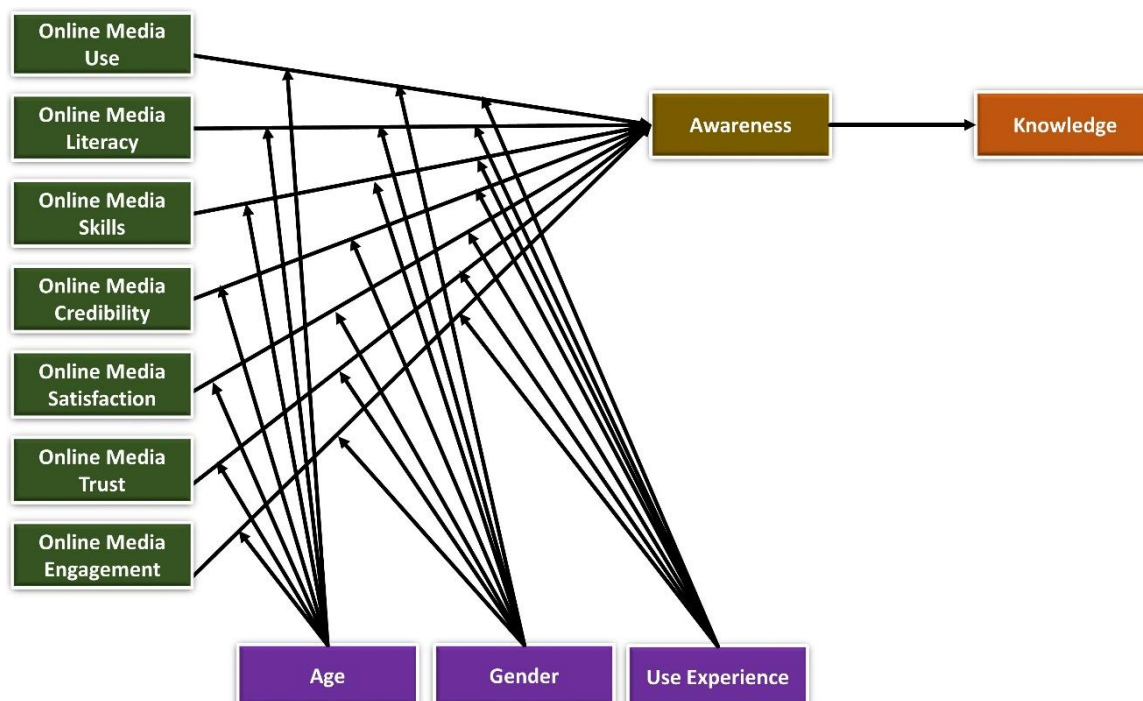


Fig. 1. A diagrammatic representation of ONCITF (Source: authors)

2. Mediating Variable

– Awareness: Consciousness and understanding of cloned online newspaper pages and related news media content and fake news. Awareness is influenced by the independent variables and, in turn, affects knowledge (Jiang, Leung, 2020b).

3. Dependent Variable:

– Knowledge: Understanding of the nature, purpose and functionality of online platforms, specifically related to identifying and mitigating cloned online newspaper pages and related news media content and fake news associated with cloned social media sites (Livingstone, 2018b).

4. Moderating Variables:

1. Age/Generation: Different age groups may have varying levels of digital literacy and media usage patterns, affecting their awareness and knowledge (Hargittai et al., 2018).

2. Gender: Gender differences can influence media consumption habits and susceptibility to cloned online newspaper pages and related news media content and fake news (Flanagin, Metzger, 2017).

3. Use Experience: The duration and intensity of media use experience can moderate the relationship between the independent variables and awareness (Johnson, Kaye, 2015).

Proposed Hypothesised Relationships: The following are the proposed hypotheses.

1. Online Media Use → Awareness → Knowledge: Increased online media use enhances exposure to diverse content, potentially increasing awareness of cloned online newspaper pages and related news media content and fake news, which subsequently improves knowledge (Bright, 2017).

2. Online Media Literacy → Awareness → Knowledge: Higher media literacy equips individuals with critical thinking skills to identify cloned online newspaper pages and related news media content and fake news, thereby increasing awareness and enhancing knowledge (Bulger, Davison, 2018).

3. Online Media Skills → Awareness → Knowledge: Proficiency in online media skills aids in exploring digital platforms effectively, increasing awareness and knowledge of cloned online

newspaper pages and related news media content and fake news (van Deursen, van Dijk, 2014).

4. Online Credibility → Awareness → Knowledge: Perception of online media credibility influences awareness of credible versus non-credible news and other media content sources, affecting knowledge (Metzger, Flanagin, 2015).

5. Online Media Satisfaction → Awareness → Knowledge: Satisfaction with media quality and reliability enhances engagement, increasing awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages and related news media content and fake news (Choi et al., 2017).

6. Online Media Trust → Awareness → Knowledge: Trust in online media fosters a critical assessment of information, heightening awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages and related news media content and fake news (Sterrett et al., 2019).

7. Online Media Engagement → Awareness → Knowledge: Active engagement with online content promotes critical evaluation, increasing awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages and related news media content and fake news (Shao et al., 2018).

8. Moderating Effects of Age/Generation, Gender and Use Experience: Age, gender and use experience moderate the strength and direction of the relationships between the independent variables and awareness, influencing knowledge (Hargittai et al., 2018; Flanagin, Metzger, 2017; Johnson, Kaye, 2015).

Age/Generation: Different age groups may show varying levels of awareness and knowledge based on their digital literacy and online/social media use habits (Hargittai et al., 2018).

– Gender: Gender differences can influence how individuals engage with online/social media and perceive cloned online newspaper pages and related news media content and fake news (Flanagin, Metzger, 2017).

– Use Experience: The amount of time and intensity of online/social media use experience can moderate the effect of independent variables on awareness and knowledge (Johnson, Kaye, 2015).

ONCITF provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the dynamics of social media fake news associated with cloned online social media pages of newspapers and other news media. By incorporating multiple independent variables, a mediating variable, a dependent variable and moderating variables, the framework offers a nuanced approach to studying how awareness and knowledge of fake news are shaped among different demographics.

RQ2: Strategies for Countering Fake News: RQ2 focuses on strategies for countering fake news. Countering fake news is the ultimate goal and implication of the current study. Countering fake news refers to the actions and measures that are taken to prevent, detect and correct fake news, as well as to enhance the quality and credibility of real news (Lazer, Baum, 2018; Stanford News Service, 2021; West, 2017; Singh, Singh, 2022). Countering fake news is a shared responsibility that involves various stakeholders such as the government, the media, the technology companies, the educational institutions and the individuals. The conceptual framework identifies and evaluates some of the possible strategies for countering fake news, based on the literature review and the web search results. Some of the strategies are:

1. Developing and enforcing laws and regulations that prohibit and penalise the creation and distribution of fake news and that protect and promote the freedom and responsibility of the media (Apuke et al., 2023; Derakhshan, Wardle, 2017; Forbes Communications Council, 2020a, b).

2. Providing and supporting high-quality and professional journalism that adheres to the standards and ethics of the media industry, and that provides accurate, balanced and comprehensive information to the public (Meyer, 1988; Omenugha et al., 2019; Reuters Institute..., 2020).

3. Investing and innovating in tools and technologies that can identify and flag fake news, reduce the financial and social incentives for those who produce and spread fake news, and improve the online accountability and transparency of the information sources (Hassan, Latiff Azmi, 2021a; Omenugha et al., 2019).

4. Incorporating and enhancing media literacy and critical thinking education in the curriculum and training of the all categories of users, especially students, as well as in the public awareness and engagement campaigns, to equip and empower the online audience to recognise and resist fake news (Apuke et al., 2023; Hassan, Latiff Azmi, 2021b; Reuters..., 2020).

5. Following and diversifying the sources and types of online information, and being sceptical and vigilant of the information that is encountered and shared online, to avoid falling prey to fake news and to support the real news (Oyero, Oyesomi, 2020; Raimond, 2020; West, 2017).

5. Conclusion

The proliferation of fake news and cloned newspaper and other news media pages, sites and content on social media poses a serious challenge to the credibility of online information and public trust. This study has developed and proffered ONCITF to enhance user awareness and knowledge, enabling them to better identify and respond to deceptive newspaper and other news media pages, sites and content online. By integrating insights from various disciplines, the framework provides a comprehensive tool for understanding the factors that influence user perceptions and behaviours regarding cloned news media pages, sites and content, which is also another type of fake news. This framework not only advances academic discourse but also offers practical solutions for improving media literacy, especially online media literacy and promoting transparent practices on social media platforms. The implementation of ONCITF can importantly contribute to a more informed and critically engaged public, ultimately helping to mitigate the adverse effects of misinformation.

Recommendations and Suggestions for Future Research: To address the pervasive issue of fake news and cloned news media sites and content on social media platforms, several key recommendations are proposed. Firstly, enhancing media literacy programmes is essential. Educational institutions and organisations should incorporate comprehensive media literacy training into their curricula, emphasising the development of critical evaluation skills and increasing awareness of cloned media content. This approach aims to equip individuals with the necessary tools to discern credible information from misinformation.

Secondly, promoting transparent algorithmic practices is crucial. Social media platforms must improve transparency regarding their content curation algorithms. By providing users with the tools to understand and control the information they receive, platforms can foster a more informed and empowered user base. This transparency is vital for helping users pass through the complexities of online information ecosystems.

Thirdly, there is a need to strengthen regulatory measures. Policymakers should develop and enforce robust regulations that hold social media companies accountable for the spread of misinformation and cloned content. These regulations should ensure that platforms take proactive steps to mitigate the dissemination of false information and protect the integrity of online discourse.

In terms of future research, several areas warrant further exploration. Longitudinal studies on the influence of media literacy interventions are necessary to understand their long-term effects on user behaviour and awareness of fake news. Such studies could provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of educational programmes over time.

Additionally, cross-cultural comparisons are important. Investigating how different cultural contexts influence the perception and spread of cloned news media sites and content can offer a more comprehensive understanding of the global nature of the problem. These comparative studies could reveal unique challenges and solutions pertinent to various regions.

Research into algorithmic transparency is also critical. Examining the impact of transparent algorithmic practices on user trust and engagement with social media platforms can inform the development of more user-centric and ethical algorithms. Understanding how transparency affects user interactions with platforms can guide improvements in content delivery and user experience.

Furthermore, user engagement with fact-checking mechanisms needs to be investigated. Studying the effectiveness of different fact-checking strategies and their impact on user behaviour could inform the creation of more effective countermeasures against misinformation. Insights from this research can help design better tools and practices for combating fake news.

Finally, it is important to research the psychological heuristics involved in information processing. Understanding the cognitive biases and heuristics that influence how users process information, can refine educational approaches and aid in the design of more intuitive tools for detecting fake news. This knowledge is crucial for developing interventions that resonate with users' cognitive processes and enhance their ability to identify false information.

By addressing these recommendations and exploring these research domains, we can better equip individuals and society to combat the challenges posed by fake news and cloned news media sites and content in the digital age.

6. Acknowledgements

We express our sincere gratitude to Professor Umar Faruk Jibril of the Department of Mass Communication, Bayero University, Kano for supervising the doctoral research from which this paper was extracted. We also want to thank the Management of Kano State Polytechnic, especially

the headship and members of academic staff at the Department of Mass Communication of the polytechnic. *Conflict of Interest*: We declare no conflict of interest.

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