

Perceived Credibility of Social Media Verified Accounts' Feature of Facebook amongst Nigerian Academics

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Abstract

Credibility of Social Media (SM) presence has today, become a most sought-after feature by millions of SM users globally including Facebook (FB) for several reasons including: to help curb the problem of fake accounts bedevilling credibility of the SM platforms. This empirical study sought answers to these social misnomers from within the context of the Academic Staff of The Federal Polytechnic Bida. The frameworks supporting the discourse are; Source Credibility theory by Hovland, Janis, and Kelly (1963); and, Uses and Gratifications theory of the media by Kalz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974). Survey methodology was employed with Questionnaire as instrument. In line with the research objectives, this study found that; many Nigerians know about the 'perceived' use of the SM Verified account feature of FB; only a few Nigerians truly know that the SM Verified feature of FB is a vital feature for searching for credible/genuine information/content on Facebook; slightly above average number of surveyed Nigerians think that the SM Verified feature of FB “is good for Facebook account/source trustworthiness/believability.” A crucial recommendation among others include: creating awareness on the actual usefulness of this SM Verification tools for credibility of SM platforms like Facebook.

Keywords: Perceived credibility, Social media, Verified accounts' feature, Facebook 'blue badge', Nigerian Academics

Introduction

Facebook, in its two decades of existence has become the favourite social media and a source for 'news' and information to billions of people globally. A study by Nor Afizan Zakaria & Fariza Hanis Abdul Razak

(2018) found that: "...some interviewee[s] opinionated that Facebook is being recognized as "identity card" in both the cyberspace and the reality and it has become a necessity for Facebook fans." (*The Effect of Facebook...*, 2018, p. 41). According to *Statista*, a reputable German company which specializes in market and consumer data, in the history of the development of all social media platforms globally, Facebook is the first "to surpass one billion registered accounts and currently sits at more than 2.9 billion monthly active users." (*What is the most popular social...*, 2023, para 1). In an earlier published data, the *Statista* website shows that: "as of July 2022, there were nearly 37 million Facebook users in Nigeria, accounting for 16.8 percent of the population." (*Nigeria: Facebook users...*, 2022). Unfortunately however, newsmakers, social media influencers, journalists, and unsuspecting Nigerians generally, have many a times, cried foul of impersonation of their real online identity as opposed to fake profile accounts sometimes created by imposters for mischief and fraudulent purposes. A Reuters report in March 2021, shows that in the previous year alone, Facebook took action on more than a billion fake accounts:

It took down 1.3 billion fake accounts between October and December and that it had over 35,000 people working on tackling misinformation on its platform. The company also removed more than 12 million pieces of content about COVID-19 and vaccines that global health experts flagged as misinformation,... (Reuters: Facebook says took down..., para 1-2).

In an article by Tony Payne titled: *WARNING: Facebook scams from Nigeria*, first published on June 10, 2011, which the American writer updated on November 8, 2020, the author had observed that numerous fake accounts being used for scamming unsuspecting Americans on Facebook are mostly "from Africa, mainly Nigeria, and we all know the scams that come out of that country by now, or if not we ought to!" (para 3). Apparently unfortunate, a global problem is now being ascribed to the exclusive reserve of the African continent, with Nigeria in the focus of this bad publicity and reputational damage.

Here in Nigeria, parody accounts opened in the names public figures is rampant. For instance, those of First Lady of Lagos state, Dr. Ibijoke Sanwo-Olu, were discovered in the year [2020](#) as reported by *Vanguard Newspaper* of April 9, [2020](#). Interestingly, she did not operate any personal Facebook account as that time according to her Public Affairs Assistant Director, Mrs. Olubukonla Nwonah, as quoted in the news report: “Please be informed that the First Lady of Lagos State, Dr (Mrs.) Ibijoke Sanwo-Olu does not operate or maintain by personal account on Facebook.” (*Vanguard*, 2020, para 4). This shows that the cankerworm of fake accounts affects even individuals not on social media, especially public figures. According to the *PM News* of February, 17th, February, [2014](#), a report stated that “...a certain dubious individual, whose real identity has not yet been determined, has created a Facebook account purported to belong to the Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Lt. Gen. K.T.J. Minimah. (para. 3). “The likely intention of this dubious individual could be to embarrass the COAS and/or defraud unsuspecting members of the public. (para 4). In a fact-check by *PUNCH* of 13th February [2022](#), it was reported that ASUU National President, Prof. Emmanuel Osodeke “...had confirmed to The PUNCH that the union has no Twitter account.” (ASUU Twitter account' declaring indefinite strike fake!, para 5).

Perhaps, it is because social media users and non-users keep falling victim of fake accounts that, credibility of social media presence is being sought-after by many. For instance, in a *Forbes.com* news report of October 18th, 2022, an associate director at the *Alberti Center for Bullying Abuse Prevention* Buffalo University, Dr. Stephanie S. Fredrick, was quoted to have stated that: “...having a verified account could be beneficial for school districts in a lot of ways,” (Forbes, para 10). In September 2022, a Nigerian journalism Professor based in Atlanta, Farooq Kperogi via his website: *farooqkperogi.com* [also shared via his verified Facebook and Twitter...] advised the academic union via to create official social media accounts and have them verified:

I hope the next step would be for ASUU to set up social media handles and have them verified so that it can communicate in real time with the public, especially young Nigerians, who're eager to get their side of the story in this battle for the soul of Nigerian universities.

*(ASUU's New Rapid Response Team Heeds My
Advice, 2022, para 8)*

As this research would later show, up to date, news reports indicate that many Nigerians continue to fall victim of fake accounts on Facebook and on other platforms. We can confirm this because we did a Google Search and it turned up a multitude of reports on faked Facebook accounts of many high profile personalities.

In its attempt to curb this challenge of source authenticity, Facebook rolled out its verified blue badge - a feature which according to the social media giant "means Facebook has confirmed that the Page or Profile is the authentic presence of the public figure or brand it represents." (Meta Help Centre, para. 3, 2022). Yet, most Facebook users, including journalists, have continued to fall victim of unverified social media 'news' and information from cloned accounts of Facebook users especially public figures, politicians, celebrities, businesses and organizations including news media outlets etc. This is evident as Scholars such as Tom Trewinnard and Fergus Bell (2018), pointed out that even the journalism profession, which prides itself as the 'profession of verification' is not safe from the many dangers of fake accounts. According to them, "[some] newsrooms have damaged their reputation by sharing or republishing misleading information, photos or videos or information from fake persons." (p. 99).

These problems amongst many others therefore, prompted us to embark on finding out if a significant number of Facebook users in Nigeria, are even aware of the Facebook verified badge as an indicator of veracity or otherwise of a Facebook profile or page. Also, to know whether Nigerians make use of the Facebook verified badge. And, if they do, what is their perception about the Facebook verified badge in terms of source credibility or authenticity? That is, whether or not a verified Facebook account seems more credible genuine, trustworthy, believable – to other Facebook users than unverified or yet –to-be-verified accounts on Facebook. From the foregoing, it is safe to state that, Nigerians need to be encouraged to have their Social media accounts verified. This is because extensive readings in the course of our research show that doing

so will reduce the effect of fake accounts on Facebook and other platforms.

The requirements and steps for getting verified are shown in a later part of this research. According Brand Buzz, "in many industries, getting verified on social media is worthwhile and a big deal." (*Times Bulletin*, n.d, para 1). Just last December - [2022](#), Indian Government made it mandatory for all social media platforms to verify all Indians' accounts on social media.

With regard to steps to address the potential damage due to fake accounts, it is informed that Section 66D of the IT Act penalises cheating by impersonating by means of any communication device or computer resource and the same is punishable with imprisonment of up to three years and a fine up to Rs one lakh. As the act is a cognizable offence, state police departments take preventive and penal action as per law in respect of the same. (EconomicTimes –[ETGovernment.com](#), [2022](#), para 5).

Above action by the Indian government obviously further proves the significant need for Social media accounts verification. Consequently, this is why this paper contributed to the emergent scholarship on users (sources) perceived credibility from the aspect of the Social media verified accounts' feature of Facebook. And this is done within the context of Facebook users of the Academic Staff of The Federal Polytechnic Bida. Our choice of Academic Staff is justified in that, we are learned individuals and thus; we are expected to be well informed and updated in knowledge on virtually 'everything'.

Research Objectives

1. To find out if Academic Staff, from within the context of The Federal Polytechnic Bida are aware of the use of Social media verified accounts' feature of Facebook – the “blue badge” – as a means to identify genuineness/credibility (i.e authenticity believability or trustworthiness) of Facebook users' Profile accounts, especially public figures, journalists, celebrities etc, as well as identifying genuine/credible Pages of organizations and

businesses, respectively.

2. To know the perception of Academic Staff of The Federal Polytechnic Bida, on the Facebook verified “blue badge” as a means to identify genuineness/credibility of Facebook users' Profile accounts and Pages of organizations and businesses, respectively.
3. To investigate whether Facebook users amongst the Academic Staff do deliberately opt for only verified accounts for genuine/credible information when doubting information shared on Facebook by an unverified Facebook user.

Research Questions

1. Are the Academic Staff, from within the context of The Federal Polytechnic Bida aware of the use of Social media verified accounts' feature of Facebook – the “blue badge” – as a means to identify genuineness/credibility (i.e authenticity believability or trustworthiness) of Facebook users' Profile accounts, especially public figures, journalists, celebrities etc, as well as identifying genuine/credible Pages of organizations and businesses, respectively?
2. What is the perception of Academic Staff of The Federal Polytechnic Bida, on the Facebook verified “blue badge” as a means to identify genuineness/credibility of Facebook users' Profile accounts and Pages of organizations and businesses, respectively?
3. Do Facebook users amongst the Academic Staff deliberately opt for only verified accounts for genuine/credible information when doubting information shared on Facebook by an unverified Facebook user?

Literature

The Facebook verified badge is the ticked blue circle which appears next to a user account or page on Facebook. According to Facebook Help Centre, “It means Facebook has confirmed that the Page or profile is the authentic presence of the public figure or global brand it represents.” (*About Verified Pages and Profiles*, 2021). This checkmark feature of "verification is a way for people to know that the notable accounts they

are following or searching for are exactly who they say they are. It is a way for people to know which accounts are authentic and notable." (Meta, 2021, para 2). Therefore, this should serve as a means of [perceived] credibility of users (sources) on the platform. Unfortunately however, even the verified badge is now being faked according to a 2022 article on the website of *The Cyberexpress*, "...fraudsters who offer to verify their accounts on Twitter and Instagram in exchange for a price." (*The verification badge scam*, [2023](#), para 1). Therefore, it is paramount for Facebook users to be aware of how to get verified via the official medium – Facebook. Users seeking verification feature are expected to meet up with the certain requirements according to the Facebook Help Centre. The requirements are as follows:

- a. **Authentic:** Represent a real person, registered business or entity.
- b. **Unique:** Be the only presence of this person or business. Only one Page or profile per person or business may be verified, with exceptions for language-specific Pages and profiles. We don't verify general interest Pages and profiles (example: Puppy Memes).
- c. **Complete:** Have an about section, Page or profile photo and recent activity, including at least one post.
- d. **Notable:** Represent a well-known, often searched person, brand or entity. We review Pages and profiles that are featured in multiple news sources, and we don't consider paid or promotional content as sources for review. (Requirements to apply for a verified badge, [2023](#), para 3). **See Appendix A: for the steps (form) to getting verified on Facebook**

Beside Facebook, many other social media platforms have embraced some sort of “verification” as a means of authenticating the real identity of their users. "Twitter, Instagram, Google+, Sina Weibo and other social networks uses an icon to indicate the verified account, following a pattern using the mark sign or a letter V for verified." (Alexandre Pinheiro et al, 2017, p. [129](#)). However, having a verified account is not enough for complete security of online presence. For instance, the Facebook *Help Centre* page further advised users to seek additional protection aside having a verified Page or Profile. "We encourage admins of verified Pages and profiles to use two-factor authentication." (*Request*

a *verified badge*..., [2023](#), para 1).

History of Social media verified accounts feature has, according to Wikipedia (2022) been traced to Twitter when the company was criticized in 2009 by Kanye West and Sued by Tony La Russa in reaction to “unauthorized accounts run by impersonators” (*History [of Twitter verification]*, para 1). This scandal, according to Biz Stone (2009) is what prompted Twitter to launch its “Verified Accounts” system. According to the Wikipedia article, later in 2016 Twitter pronounced that it could only “grant verified status to an account” (2022, para 2) on the condition that such account is in the interest of the public. Since its inception, the “*blue tick*” feature of verification has undergone series of modification in policy. For instance, at a time Twitter was practically involved in “reaching out to celebrities and other notable [personalities] to confirm their identities in order to” have their accounts verified. (Wikipedia, 2022, para 2). Upon acquisition of the company by Elon Musk in October, 2022, Twitter started to under more drastic changes such as paid subscription. This subscription version is now being tested by *Meta* for Facebook and Instagram in two countries – Australia and New Zealand according to Mark Zuckerberg (2023) in announcement via a Facebook post on his personal FB account:

This new feature is about increasing authenticity and security across our services. Meta Verified starts at [\\$11.99](#) / month on web or [\\$14.99](#) / month on iOS. We'll be rolling out in Australia and New Zealand this week and more countries soon. (Zuckerberg, Good morning and new product announcement:.. February, 2023).

According to the February 19, 2023 post by the Facebook owner, the *Meta Verified* is “a subscription service that lets you verify your account with a government ID, get a blue badge, get extra impersonation protection against accounts claiming to be you, and get direct access to customer support.” (Zuckerberg, 2023). A further on Facebook Help Centre shows that the minimum requirements for the alternative eligibility for verification via the *Meta* paid option are as follows:

- i. Be a public or private profile, associated with your full name, that aligns with our name standards and a profile picture that includes

- your face and matches your government-issued ID.
- ii. Your account must meet minimum activity requirements, such as prior posting history. Have two-factor authentication enabled.
- iii. The account has to meet our Terms of Service and Community Standards.

The *About Meta Verified* page on Facebook clearly states that only users who are not less than 18 years of age are eligible for *Meta Verified*, and "once you've successfully completed the verification process on Facebook, you will receive access to *Meta Verified* benefits." (*Meta Verified eligibility on Facebook*, [2023](#), para [3-5](#)). Benefits of *Meta Verified* subscriptions include; A verified badge; Access to account support for most common issues; Active impersonation monitoring for accounts; More visibility for *Meta Verified* subscribers across Facebook, such as in search, other people's comments and in-feed recommendations; Exclusive stickers in your Facebook stories and reels; [100](#) Stars per month to send to your favourite creators.

Whether this new alternative procedures paid subscriptions for getting verified on Facebook and Twitter, poses any setback to attempts towards addressing the many problems of source authenticity is another question for further research. Hence, as media researchers, we think that this is a critical gap for future researches in order to unearth possible loopholes, judging by how the nature man is towards criminal tendencies.

Numerous news reports indicates Nigerians continue to fall victim of fake accounts

A Google Search in the course of this our research turned up a multitude of reports on faked Facebook accounts of many Nigerians, especially public figures. An investigation by *AFP Fact Check*, published on 18th May, [2020](#) shows that many "...accounts falsely purporting to belong to the [now former] Nigerian president's chief of staff Ibrahim Gambari have sprouted online since his appointment in May [2020](#). ...which the presidency has confirmed as being fake." (para 1). Erudite Scholar, Professor Wole Soyinka has "over 30 Facebook pages created and associated with his person." According a February 14, [2013](#) report by *Digital SENSE News* (para 5). In September [2014](#), while reacting to fake

accounts, the former Governor of Niger state, Dr. Mu'azu Babangida Aliyu, through his Chief Press Secretary, Mr. Israel Ebije lamented that those behind the fake accounts in the Chief Servants identity did so "...to drag his name and the position of his administration to ridicule." (*EagleOnline: Governor Aliyu raises alarm over fake...*, para 1). The EFCC Spokesman, Mr. Wilson Uwujaren, lamented in a statement in June [2021](#) that:

*There are several fake social media accounts supposedly belonging to the EFCC chairman and despite repeated disclaimer, the figures behind the identity theft are unrelenting. To foreclose further cloning of Bawa's Facebook account, the Commission is constrained to make public, the personal Facebook account of the EFCC chair. Bawa has one Facebook account which is, @AbdulRasheed Bawa. "Members of the public are enjoined to treat any other account supposedly belonging to the EFCC chairman as fake, and stop further dealings with such platforms." (*Vanguard News Nigeria, June 2021, para. 5-7*).*

While confessing to the Nigerian Police Force, a graduate of Computer Science, revealed in [2019](#) that he had faked Facebook accounts of Pastors including some General Overseers, and used it to defraud people. The youngster, according Premium9ja "posed as the General Overseers of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministry (MFM), Dr. Daniel Olukoya; Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Enoch Adeboye, and the Synagogue Church of All Nations (SCOAN), Temitope Balogun Joshua." (para 2). In Tony Payne's article: *WARNING: Facebook scams from Nigeria*, ([2011](#), updated November 8, [2020](#)) the American lamented that numerous fake accounts being used for scamming unsuspecting Americans on Facebook are mostly "from Africa, mainly Nigeria," (para 3). Writing further, he narrated that, "...fake profiles have been created on Facebook, pretending to be friends of mine, even using their photographs. Fortunately, some of us query these, or the real friend realises the problem and posts a warning to their friends, but sadly not all of us are as aware of scams as others." (para 9). Writing further, he narrated that, "...fake profiles have been created on Facebook,

pretending to be friends of mine, even using their photographs. Fortunately, some of us query these, or the real friend realises the problem and posts a warning to their friends, but sadly not all of us are aware of scams as others." (para 9).

Credibility of Facebook and other Social media platforms

Credibility of sources on social media channels have remained a phenomenal for many fields both professionally and business wise. In journalism practice for instance, "verification of source... ..is so important" (Trewinnard and Bell, [2018](#), p. 99) due to the fact that it is simply "good journalism." ([2018](#), p. 99). According to the authors, current technological advances have made it very easy "for ill-intentioned actors to create and share convincing and difficult to detect fakery." Unfortunately, even the Fourth Estate of the realm - Journalism - which prides herself as the 'profession of verification' and some "newsrooms have damaged their reputation by sharing or republishing misleading information, photos or videos or information from fake persons." (p. 99).

An interesting perception of 'the twisted reality' as observed by scholars is that: social media popularity is a measure of "assessing credibility of users and content in social media.", (Mohammad-Ali Abbas and Huan Liu, 2013, p. 4). Abbas and Liu also noted that ideally popularity and credibility "are used interchangeably." They cited the instance of numerous users trusting "a Twitter user who has many followers." (p. 4). This truism, as we have also observed in this research, actually applies to Facebook too, and several other platforms. And thus, formed a part of the major research objectives for this our work on Perceived Credibility of Social Media Verified Accounts' Feature of Facebook.

Surprisingly also, "neither Twitter nor other social media websites are able and want to verify all their users." (Abbas and Liu, p. 2) therefore just a fraction of the social media users "can be verified by the websites." (p. 2). For a fact, stated the Abbas and associate, most users actually want to "remain unknown," as such a reasonable population of social media users are not verified [and will continue to be unverified, as foreseen by this research]. Our agreement with this notion lies in that, during the

#EndSARS protest in Nigeria, many Nigerians freely identified with the struggle against police brutality. This, as observed by many advocates of freedom and scholars including Abbas and his colleague, is immeasurably advantageous. However, this also has its downsides and as also pointed out by Abbas and Liu, people do set up multiple accounts for purposes of posting "positive reviews in order to boost one product or negative reviews to downgrade another." (p. 2).

Review of Related Works

In [2021](#), an experimental study on Facebook News Story Credibility, the researchers, Rune Karlsen & Toril Aalberg by building on an earlier study (which researchers such as Metzger et al. [2003](#); Fisher [2016](#)) classified into 3 main components: message credibility—trust in information; source credibility—trust in sender; and media credibility—trust in the medium, Karlsen & Aalberg were able to brought forth an even "more complex situation and suggest a more complex framework with five layers, distinguishing the “intermediary platform credibility” (e.g. Facebook) and “intermediary sender credibility” as well." It was observed that credibility of news story is connected to and somehow "dependent upon source and media credibility". (p. 4) Interestingly, they found that news received on Facebook is found "less credible." However, they concluded by clarifying that, this does not mean people "really distrust news they read on Facebook, at least not when the original news source is visible." (p. 14).

Another [2021](#) study by Jazlyn Elizabeth Dumas examined whether "consumers perceive verification as more directly associated with credibility or celebrity"(p. 3) and whether this is connected to brand trust by consumer as well as advertisement on social media. Unexpectedly, the outcome of the study has shown that verifying social media accounts did not have any "impact on user's perceptions of credibility, celebrity or trust." (Dumas, [2021](#), p. 3). Though, verifying an account as found by the researcher has a link on "user's perceptions of endorser attractiveness and beauty and verified endorsers were viewed as less attractive." ([2021](#), p. 3).

In 2019, an exploratory study by Mohamed A. Fadl Elhadidi, explored how Facebook users in Egypt assess Facebook credibility and how political and non-political factors determine credibility found that "both the use of political content of Facebook and reliance on it for political information" (Elhadidi, [2019](#), p. 1) have restricted determinants for certain classifications on Facebook credibility.

In their [2017](#) work on Facebook Verified Page, Pinheiro et al. convincingly demonstrated that the procedures for applying for verification feature on Facebook "is not transparent" (p. [135](#)) and that certain changes by Facebook also contributed to causing challenges for verifying pages by interested public figures. Having uncovered this problem, the authors further demonstrated a means of setting up Facebook page using what they referred to as "guidance of characteristics of audibility of information in social networks" to facilitate better chances for public figures to verify their Facebook pages. To make their study understandable by "both: academia and society" (p. [130](#)), the researchers used a methodology known as Design Science Research. As with all research works, an aspect of verification transparency that was not attempted by Pinheiro et al ([2017](#)) is Profile, the research focused solely on Page verification procedure on Facebook, thereby leaving a gap in knowledge about Profile verification procedure on Facebook.

In agreement the above literature, we bring news report by *Forbes.com* where the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) [in America] complained that despite the dire need for verification even by Educators, the process of getting verified on social media is challenging, sharing their ordeals, an American school educator lamented that their members on difficulties faced by school districts in getting "harmful and inaccurate posts taken down quickly and to get their official social media accounts verified," NSPRA Associate Director Mellissa Braham (Forbes, para 4).

In *Measuring User Credibility in Social Media*, Mohammad-Ali Abbas and Huan Liu, ([2013](#)) suggested a method for discovering organized "behavior in social media and assign a lower credibility weight to users

who are involved in the coordinated behavior" (p. 7). Doing so, the authors were successful in stopping proliferation of misinformation created by such users, part of researchers' aims include raising trust levels on social media information. Their suggested "CredRank" algorithm proved useful in detecting social media users with numerous accounts used for proliferation of [fake] posts. According to the authors, this method is also capable of "preventing the distribution of rumors, averting coordinated activities, and thwarting fake product reviews." (para 7). Abbas and Liu promised that their future works will enhance the Cred algorithm so as to fix two setbacks; stopping true diffusion of information; calculating similarity among all users' behaviors in real time. Although, the major shortcoming of duo's [2013](#) work is that it did not capture all known three aspects of information credibility; message credibility, source credibility and media credibility, For improved outcomes however, Abbas and his colleague pronounced to fix more gaps including: "...more features of sources, such as network and profile, to assess user credibility... [and therefore arriving at] a reliable model to assess source credibility in social media." (para 7).

We came across numerous related works including ones cited in previous researches but due to the fact that no research is conclusive, we summarily highlighted only the following few in addition to the above detailed reviews which we have painstakingly done. In [2017](#), Jia et al. worked on a homophily algorithm which identifies users of fake accounts. In [2016](#), Yushan et al. suggested some techniques involving machine learning, an entirely different model. Others are feature-based detection (Boshmaf et al. [2016](#); Wang et al. [2013](#); Viswanath et al. [2014](#)).

To our knowledge, there is no existing study conducted in Nigeria on the subject matter – perceived credibility of verified accounts on Facebook – and thus make this work a first on the subject. Since it is a given that no research can identify all gaps in knowledge on any subject nor be able to contribute to all identified gaps, we focused mainly on geographical gap, that is, the lack of an already existing study by local researchers on Nigerian Facebook users as regard the credibility of verified accounts features of Facebook; the awareness of its use; users' perception; and possible preference for verified accounts as alternative when searching

for genuine/authentic information source/s.

Theoretical Framework

The Source Credibility theory propounded by Hovland, Janis, and Kelly (1963) and the Uses and Gratification theory of the media propounded by Kalz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974), are used to support our discourse: Perceived Credibility of Social Media Verified Accounts' Features of Facebook amongst Nigerians. Source Credibility theory as explained by Bonachristus Umeogu (2012) is "a situation where message believability is dependent on the credibility status of the sender in the minds and eyes of the receivers." (p. 112). It stipulates that most likely, receivers are persuaded when a source is adjudged to be credible. In latter studies, Hovland (1963) and Weiss (1974) tested and found that sources have influence on persuasion. Apparently, justification lies in fact that many Facebook users, mostly those maintaining active and longer hours online presence, are either branding themselves (personality) or a branding a product/service or trying to woo people to their cause of action. Hence, the need to cherish their online passport or "Identity card" as quoted by Nor and Fariza (2018) that an interviewee had likened Facebook to.

More so, number of scholarship such as; Rune Karlsen & Toril Aalberg, 2021; Jazlyn Elizabeth Dumas, 2021; Mohamed A. Fadl Elhadidi, 2019; Mohammad-Ali Abbas and Huan Liu, 2013; and several others have established the relevance of believability between Sender of information and Reviewer. Credibility of information is linked to believability of source. Concluding the paper, Umeogu submitted that:

being perceived as credible should be strived for in the face of challenges and competitions. One has to package oneself so that what you present to others works to your advantage. I believe it is what we all need at one point or another to be seen as relevant. (2012, p. 115).

Uses and Gratifications theory (UGT) of the media is being placed here not just for a mentioning but because it is also of paramount support to an aspect of subject matter - the use of Social Media Verified Accounts' Features of Facebook by users - and this in itself is enough justification

for establishing that the UGT is also vital to this discourse. Namsu Park, Kerk F. Kee, and Sebastián Valenzuela (as cited in Wikipedia: Modern applications of uses and gratifications research, [2023](#)) found that "there were four needs for using Facebook groups, "socializing, entertainment, self-status seeking, and information." (*Friend-networking sites*, para 1).

According to Wikipedia ([2023](#)) UGT "is an approach to understanding why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs." (*Uses and Gratifications theory*, para 1). Historical development of UGT is on different accounts beginning from the [1940s](#). However, it was in the year [1944](#), according to Wikipedia ([2023](#)), that "researchers [like Herta Herzog-Massing] began to look into the earliest forms of uses and gratifications with their work classifying the reasons for why people chose specific types of media. (*Origin and History [of UGT], Stage 1: The basic premise dating back to the 1940s*, para 2). In recent years, a number of studies (as cited in Wikipedia: Modern applications of uses and gratifications research, [2023](#)) found that "Use of social media cures loneliness and satisfies a compulsion for addictive behaviors." (*Social media networks*, para 3). While there are works, according to Wikipedia ([2023](#)), on Uses and Gratifications of specific Facebook features such as "...photo sharing, listening to music..." (Modern applications of uses and gratifications research, [2023](#), para 1), our paper is specifically on "verified accounts' feature" of Facebook.

In 2010s, the most recent interest surrounding UGT is the link between the reason why media is used and the achieved gratification. UGT researchers are developing the theory to be more predictive and explanatory by connecting the needs, goals, benefits, and consequences of media consumption and use along with individual factors. Work in UGT was trailblazing because the research of Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch built on Herzog's research and caused a paradigm shift from how media influences people to how audiences use media, diminishing the dominance of the limited effects approach to mass media studies. (Wikipedia: Stage 3: Applications of UGT since 1980s, para 7).

Methodology

This Survey research employed questionnaire as instrument for collecting data from the field. Accidental sampling which according to Ezekiel S. Asemah (2017) is "also referred to as convenient, haphazard or available sampling" (p. 169) was used for this study. Explaining this method of sampling, Asemah (2017), states that "the researcher finds a place that is convenient for him and he stays there to distribute his questionnaire." (p. 169). It is accidental because the researchers handed copies of the questionnaire to any available Academic staff that was within reach. Total population of Academic staff of The Federal Polytechnic Bida is at nine hundred and eleven 911 as official figure obtained from the institution's records unit. Meyers (1973) table shows that a few hundred is enough as sample for a population that is less than a thousand. Hence, the research assistants distributed 200 copies of the drafted questionnaire. However, Academic were asked if they are on Facebook and only the 95 who said YES were given out the 200 copies printed. Returned copies were dully filled.

Findings and Discussions

Questionnaire instrument was employed for data collection. Collected data wer analyzed and presented below using text, table and percentages. However, it is only data that answered the three (3) drafted Research Questions (RQ) were tabulated, thus; Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3 viz-a-via RQ.1, RQ.2, and RQ.3 respectively.

Demographics of the Academic Staff: Q.1 to Q.4 were analyzed and discussed (without tables): Demographics of staff who responded to the Questionnaire fall into the following distributions respectively; 73 representing 77% of the Facebook users amongst Academic staff are male while only 22 (23%) are female. As for Age distribution, 27 (28%) are between the age range of 25-30 years; 19 (20%) are between 31-35 years; 27 (28%) are in the year range of 36-40; 20 (21%) are 41 years and above, while 3 respondents representing 3% are did not indicate their age range. In Marital status, 61 (64%) revealed that they are Married while 33 (35%) said they are still Single. Educational Qualifications of the Academic staff sampled shows that; 72 (76%) holds a Degree/Higher National Diploma (HND) certificate as their highest qualification; 19

(20%) said theirs is Masters Degree; and only 4 said their highest qualification is a PhD.

Implication of data: Revelation here shows that 4 out of 5 FB users are likely to be Male while only 1 out every 5 FB users may be Female. Young persons and middle aged men - invariably - the youths constitute the majority of Nigerians [active] on FB. The majority of FB users in Nigeria have the first degree (HND / Degree) as the highest academic qualification.

DATA FROM QUESTIONS Q.5 TO Q.8 ARE ANALYZED AND DISCUSSED (WITHOUT TABLES) BELOW:

Q.5 Respondents who said they have come across Facebook accounts or pages marked with the ticked blue circle (verified checkmark ✓) are 83 representing 87% while those who said they have not come across the Blue tick (✓) are just 12 in number (13%).

Implication of data: Above data simply means that almost every Nigerian on FB has seen the blue tick.

Q.6 Out of the 83 respondents (87%) who answered that they do come across the verified ✓ on Facebook platform, 15 (16%) revealed that they came across such accounts "Very frequently" while 33 (35%) said they "Frequently" came across it. Up to 40 respondents (42%) replied they only come across the verified ✓ "Occasionally". However, 7 (7%) did not indicate any option.

Implication of data: This implies that Nigerians do see accounts that are verified most of the time while on FB

Q.7 22 respondents representing (23%) confirmed that they do know what the blue tick ✓ means on such Facebook accounts while only 73 (77%) said they do not know what the blue tick means at all. Only 1 in 5 people know the meaning of the blue tick.

Implication of data: Therefore, a wide gap in knowledge of the

emergent feature that is useful for credibility of information being shared on FB.

Q.8 Out of the 22 respondents who confirmed that they know the meaning of the Facebook blue ✓; 36 (37%) said they got to know what the blue ✓ mean through "Information by Facebook" platform; 15 (16%) said it is "From News reports"; 13 (14%) said "From Friends"; 18 (19%) said they got to know what the blue tick mean "From other social media platforms." However, 13 respondents representing 14% did not say from where/how they got to know about the blue ✓.

Implication of data: This informs that more than 1/3rd of FB users first knew about the blue tick on FB platform.

Table 1: Q.9

Are the Academic Staff, from within the context of The Federal Polytechnic Bida aware of the use of Social media verified accounts' feature of Facebook the "blue badge" as a means to identify genuineness/credibility (i.e authenticity believability or trustworthiness) of Facebook users' Profile accounts, especially public figures, journalists, celebrities etc, as well as identifying genuine/credible Pages of organizations and businesses, respectively? RQ.1 is reflected in question number 9 in the drafted Questionnaire as pasted below:

Do you use Facebook ticked blue circle as a verification/confirmation of real/actual Social media presence or identifies of public figures, journalists, celebrities etc, as well as Facebook Pages of organizations and businesses?

Perceived Credibility of Social Media Verified Accounts' Feature of
Facebook amongst Nigerian Academics

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
YES	21	22%
NO	71	76%
NO RESPONSE (NIL)	3	3%
Total	95	100%

Source: Administered Questionnaire, April, 2023.

As table 1 show, the surveyed Facebook (FB) use

Respondents who revealed that they use the blue circle ✓ icon for verifying or confirming the real/actual identities or social media presence of public figures, Journalists, celebrities etc as well as ideal Facebook Pages of organization and businesses are 21 (22%) while 71 (76%) said that they do not need to use it for identifying public personalities. However, 3 (3%) did not indicate any response.

Implication of data: Despite having been aware of the usefulness and ease of use of this emergent verification tool, only about few people do use it for identifying public personalities while the majority do not bother to utilize the verified checkmark of FB.

Table 2: Q.10

What is the perception of Academic Staff of The Federal Polytechnic Bida, on the Facebook verified “blue badge” as a means to identify genuineness/credibility of Facebook users' Profile accounts and Pages of organizations and businesses, respectively? **RQ.2** is reflected in question number **10** in the drafted Questionnaire as pasted below:

If YES in Question 9, would you prefer to search for correct (real/actual) information via only verified accounts when in doubt about credibility or authenticity of a source or poster of such information shared on Facebook??

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
YES	4	19%
NO	7	33%
NO RESPONSE (NIL)	10	48%
Total	21	100%

Source: *Administered Questionnaire*, April, 2023.

Table 2 as shown above reveals that, of the 21 respondents who used the verified ✓ checkmark for identifying public personalities on Facebook, 4 (19%) said they go further to search for credible/authentic information on sources that give them doubtful information while 7 (33%) they do not go further to search for credible/authentic information using verified ✓ checkmark. However, 10 (48%) failed to respond.

Implication of data: Again, only a few, out of the meagre number of FB users who make use of the verified checkmark, do go the extra mile for cross-checking of information/content via verified accounts on FB.

Q.11 Again, 3 (75%) of those 4 respondents who said they went further to check the veracity of such doubtful information from accounts that are verified ✓ by Facebook, revealed that they get satisfactory information after the double cross-check from already verified accounts while the 4th respondent representing (25%) said he could not get satisfactory information.

Implication of data: A good side to FB users who go the extra mile is that despite only a few of them bother to cross-check, 3 out of 4 of these verified checkmark users do care to search for truth even as they had to add extra effort to achieve quality/trustable information/content.

Q.12 Facebook users who have answered that they have verified their accounts are only 36 (38%) while those who said they have not verified their accounts are up to 53 (56%).


Implication of data: It is good to know that some FB users have verified their FB accounts.

Q.13 On whether respondents would subscribe to Facebook accounts' verification or not, 73 (77%) said YES they would get their Facebook accounts verified while only 13 (14%) 9 Facebook users did not reply.

Implication of data: Almost everyone on FB would want to subscribe to the verified blue tick.

Table 3: Q.14

Do Facebook users amongst the Academic Staff deliberately opt for only verified accounts for genuine/credible information when doubting information shared on Facebook by an unverified Facebook user? **RQ.3** is reflected in question number **14** in the drafted Questionnaire as pasted below:

What is your opinion about the  verified checkmark as a means to identify genuineness/credibility of Facebook users' Profile accounts and Pages of organizations and businesses, respectively?

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
"It is good for Facebook account/source trustworthiness / —	49	51%
"It increases a Facebook account/source likeability or expertise - professional brand."	12	13%
"Indifferent"	13	14%
"... cannot say."	14	15%
[As for other reasons aside above stated]: "I don't see how it makes a difference, the account still function the same" [x2]; "I wish you success on your research work but I will like you to enlighten the public more about tick blue circle so that people can frequent see it and know what it means"; "It prompt me to search for the genuinely the information elsewhere"; "To show the real owner of Facebook"; "I see it as a medium to discover fake accounts and it has been very helpful"; "Facebook company to try as much as possible to overcome the hacking of one's account"; "I see it as a medium to discover fake accounts and it has been very helpful"; "Yes, it is very good for Facebook account to be verified as it will help in authenticity and credibility of information and the source of the information that is been posted online"; "Cause I am actually not a media member. Thank you".	7	7%
Total	21	100%

Source: Administered Questionnaire, April, 2023.

As shown in table 3 above, when asked to say their opinion on the verified checkmark as a viable means to identify credibility/genuineness of Facebook users' Profile accounts, and Pages of organization and businesses; 49 (51%) said "It is good for Facebook account/source trustworthiness/believability; 12 (13%) said "It increases a Facebook account/source likeability or expertise - professional brand." And while 13 (14%) said "Indifferent", that is, it makes no difference to them, 14 (15%) said they "... cannot say." As for other reasons aside above stated, 7 respondents representing (7%) gave statements such as; "I think they should make it more securable, because of scammer or internet fraudsters"; "I don't see how it makes a difference, the account still function the same" [x2]; "I wish you success on your research work but I will like you to enlighten the public more about tick blue circle so that people can frequent see it and know what it means"; "It prompt me to search for the genuinely the information elsewhere"; "To show the real owner of Facebook"; "I see it as a medium to discover fake accounts and it has been very helpful"; "Facebook company to try as much as possible to overcome the hacking of one's account"; "I see it as a medium to discover fake accounts and it has been very helpful"; "Yes, it is very good for Facebook account to be verified as it will help in authenticity and credibility of information and the source of the information that is been posted online"; "Cause I am actually not a media member. Thank you".

Implication of data: Apparently, reading through quotations above shows that only little is known by a few Nigerians on what the actual usefulness for the SM accounts' feature of Facebook is, and the degree of its ease of use. However, the collective understanding of Nigerians on FB concerning the verified checkmark is that the blue tick is useful for its source trustworthiness and believability of users on the Facebook platform.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that; Several Nigerians are aware of the credibility of verified accounts blue tick for its uses; Despite having been aware of the usefulness and ease of use of this emergent verification tool, only about few people do use it for identifying public personalities while the majority do not bother to utilize the verified checkmark of FB; Again,

only a few, out of the meagre number of FB users who make use of the verified checkmark, do go the extra mile for cross-checking of information/content via verified accounts on FB; Collective understanding of Nigerians on FB concerning the verified checkmark is that the blue tick is useful for its source trustworthiness and believability of users on the Facebook platform.

Recommendations

1. Through the National Orientation Agency, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) can (and should quickly) enlighten and educate masses through programmes via different media on Social media literacy.
2. The FGN should lobby relevant development partners to help with series of campaigns on Social media literacy, with emphasis on detection of fake information and fake accounts with emphasis on verification checkmarks.
3. Judging by the fact that much harm has been done by variants of information disorder, it is thought-wise for FGN to work towards formalizing education and enlightenment against information flaws by coming up with educational curriculum to capture these emergent new information technologies (as a course/subject) for at least Senior Secondary School Students (SSS) in Nigeria.

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