

BESPEAKING “TRUST” IN A POST-TRUTH JOURNALISM ERA

Oyakemeagbegha Musah Ph.D

musahoo@fuotuo.ke.edu.ng

08076479573/08105908832

<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-8659-9959>

Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria

Abstract

The emergence of varieties of information and communication technologies has birthed an avalanche of unregulated news sources in today's information-society. An associated untoward consequence on journalism is that the pristine principle of trustworthiness in news and information gathering and dissemination has been practically overturned. This has extensively vitiated the crucial essence of journalism to society hence, the paper decries dishonest reportage occasioned by undiscerning reliance on new-found news gathering procedures and technologies having a distractive effect on professional journalism. It argues that the gamut of mainstream media cannot but take practical steps to uphold its time-honoured watchdogging role in society and emphasizes the values of truth and credibility as precursors of trust, the conventional journalism practitioner must earn from society. The paper holds that only in so doing, would practitioners be able to regain for journalism, its pride of place as society's authentic information wellspring. Data supporting this position were obtained through desk research methodology.

Words: Post-truth, Journalism, Truth, Credibility, Trust

Introduction

What we call information alludes to the content of all well-meaning interactive interchanges or communication of facts among individuals. In this work, it relates to verifiable and thus reliable factual data about the real world or events of the real world that people exchange or make known to others. It is the central driving force of the information-society status our world has assumed. This assumption per se is based on the fact that much of modern societal life depends largely on the production, handling and application of information and on the operations of complex networks of communication (McQuail, 2010). It could be said that information is at the center of today's fast-paced world being key to decision making. It has become a much-sought-after commodity in the world and on that score, supplied in avalanches to the extent that the information seeker is faced with the challenge of what out of the plethora of information to use in a particular context without fear of possible misapplication. This raises the question of information quality and trustworthiness in our daily interactions. While information quality refers to the fitness of information for use in a given situation, information trustworthiness defines the perceived likelihood that a piece of information will preserve a user's trust in it and relates among other factors, to characteristics such as the competence and predictability of the information source (Nurse, Rahman, Chris Goldsmith and Lambert, 2011).

Journalism is a source-driven process (Berkowitz, 2011) because at the core of the journalism enterprise is the information source on whom the journalist depends not only

for relevant information but as authenticator of that piece of information through attribution (Carlson, 2009). Traditionally, the sources of information for the news reporter are: documents (officially accessed or leaked), individuals (in possession of information by designation, as eye witness of an event or as participants) and his personal observations. The news organization has reporters as its sources while the masses have the traditional news outlets (newspaper house, television station, radio station) and the internet which has a myriad of information sources in turn, as their sources of presumably credible information.

Audience members seek information for various reasons including knowledge acquisition, empowerment, entertainment etc. in their daily lives. They have innate capacity to determine which information is credible and therefore useful and the other that is not credible, which has to be ignored or discarded (Mehrabi, Hasian and Alli, 2009). Consequently, the reporter's task goes beyond mere reportage of the issue, to the level of instilling confidence in the information user that he has at his disposal the right information in the right proportion and at the right time. This can make for good information quality and trustworthiness in the estimation of the information user. To get it right, the news sources at the coalface, the individual reporter and the professionals in the news outlets must be astutely dutiful because they were sources at different levels of the news gathering and transmission process as noted above.

The professional journalist that knows his onions is expected to be firm in allegiance to various sections of the community to be able to ply his trade without hitches. He should know what he ought to do in differing situation concerning those in the news. Knowing what he owes them and how to meet his responsibilities to those that matter to his professional life, make him or the news outlet he represents stand out in the crowd. That sense of duty that drives him must be supported by faithfulness in the discharge of his obligation given that he owes loyalty to the public whose information needs he has to meet. He also has his sources to be loyal to, lest his reports be bereft of the element of credibility if at all he would have something to report. He equally owes his subjects truthful representation to gain the support of the audience (Lorenz & Vivian, 2005). All of this have to be reflected in his works to make for credibility that translates to trustworthiness in a piece of news, a particular source or news organization.

Truth

Truth essentially means the state of being true or what actually is. It denotes fidelity to the facts about a situation. The unvarnished account for instance, of an incident that remains constant is the truth. It is the quality of being the case and nothing else. Truth is unconditional. It is devoid of the slightest touch of doubt. If the accounts of two reporters about same incident differ, it is either both or one of them is unaware of the truth and called something true, that is not (Flemming, 2007). This is so because, it is impossible to have two different truths to one issue.

Truth is fact-based and facts are things that could be perceived and verified by the senses. To this end, truth must conform to reality. Truth is true whether you believe it or not. It is something actual, not contrived and does not relate to opinion. It is the barefaced fact that is true because it is always factually correct. Truth is basic to journalism in the light of the social functions media performs in society. Such functions that require truthfulness to be effective in execution include: provision of information about events and condition in

society and the world, explaining, interpreting and commenting on the meaning of events and information and provision of support for established authority and norms. Others are consensus building, forging and maintaining commonality of values etc. (McQuail, 2009).

A piece of information is useful for any of these functions only when it consists of objective or verifiable claims that produce or confirm it as the truth. Only then it could be used for individual and collective decision making about prevailing situation. It is therefore the responsibility of the journalist to not just collect but also analyze and verify newsworthy information, assemble findings into a stable story and truthfully write and deliver stories with the readers' perspective in mind (Kovach and Rosentiel, 2022).

The centrality of truth to journalism is accentuated by the assertion that journalism revolves around trying to obtain the best attainable version of truth in news reportage (Carl Bernstein in Omoshue and Okpako, 2018). Similarly, during the world press freedom day anniversary, on May 3, 2010 Irina Bokova (Director General of UNESCO) remarked that no matter where participants of the occasion are from, they should note that the transmission of knowledge and truth are essential missions for those who strive for freedom of expression and the right to information. (Bokova, in UNESCO 2011).

Truth is accorded its pride of place in journalism in the remark that there can be no higher law in journalism than tell the truth and to shame the devil (Lipman in Fleming, 2007) and that the historic claims for freedom of communication strongly related to the value of truth in information (McQuail, 2009). The society of professional journalist (SPJ) holds that the duty of the journalist is to serve the truth and it is the constitutional duty of the journalist to assiduously seek the truth as part of the public's right to know the truth (Lorenz and Vivian, 2005). Truth is so significant in journalism that it cannot be deemphasized lest deceptive journalism characterized by untrustworthy reports is encouraged and society will come under the scourge of attendant inimical consequences.

It is obvious that when media reports are untruthful, society gets misled because the mass media are upheld as the watchdog of society and the singular source of authentic information. A news medium is not only reputable but also dependable or reliable when the audience finds out that its news sources are consistently truthful (Udoudo, 2018). That explains why in the codes of ethics of almost all professional communication organizations, truth is identified as an imperative in news and information gathering and dissemination to make for certitude and inspire believability in the news.

Credibility

It refers to the quality or power of inspiring belief (Merriam Webster Dictionary). Once something exhibits the quality of credibility it has heightened truth value and infuses confidence in its possessor that it is what it should be. If news/information is adjudged credible, that means it is truthful hence acceptable for use in decision making because credibility is a factor used to determine the acceptability of information for use (Wathen & Nurkel, 2002). Believability or credibility in this study is associated with the confidence one has about a piece of information. It is influenced by truthfulness. It is the judgment made by a perceiver or message recipient concerning the plausibility of a communicator (O'keete, 1990). This definition refers to the individual as a communicator and is considered restrictive because other authorities hold that the definition of credibility should include institutions as well as persons as communicators (Gass & Seiter, 2007).

Thus we have source credibility, media credibility and message credibility as integral to information transmission and consumption ultimately.

Source Credibility

It connects with the positive characteristics that influence the receiver's acceptance of a message emanating from a particular source (Ohanian, 1990). Put differently, it refers to the degree to which information or news from a source is perceived by a journalist/reporter as accurate, fair, unbiased and trustworthy (Yoon, 2005). The factor of credibility is considered even at the point a reporter recognizes an individual as his news or information source. The reporter usually contacts a handful of individuals from whom he gathers information. He uses his evaluative criteria to determine whose contribution meets his expectations of news-worthy information and regularly goes back to them as credible news sources. Thus, it follows that a person's chances of becoming a news source and having a public voice depends on the extent to which he/she is adjudged credible by the journalist/reporter (Detjen, Fred, Li & Yeonshin, 2000). Source credibility depends on source truthfulness resulting in message accuracy, source expertise and message representativeness as well as source bias or absence of bias and personal perspective (Weintraub & Austin, 1994).

The onus is on the field journalist to determine who is a honest source among available sources to deal with. To evaluate sources, the reporter must get answers to the following questions:

- Who is the source of this information? This suggest that the reporter must know his source in person.
- What would the source know? In what capacity is the source able to possess the piece of information? Is it by training, job title etc. or how informed is he in the subject matter.
- When did the source get this knowledge? This refers to the factor of currency as a news value. How recent is this information? Have things not changed since he got his information? Of course the reporter should be able to identify and avoid stale information.
- Does it fill in the gap in the audience information needs? What is the past reliability of the source? The reporter must find out if he is a reputable source.
- What is his motive for providing this information? Is he doing so for public interest or to serve a personal purpose? What if anything, does he stand to gain from giving this information out (Kruger, 2016). Source credibility is important because people attach believability to a piece of information not so much on the content as in the source (O'keefe, 1990). If the sources is not adjudged credible by news consumers the news outlet will suffer loss of patronage.

Message Credibility

The message is the substance of the communication process. It is the essence of the communication action and bears the intent of the source which is encoded in a form understandable by the receiver (Musah, 2020). In the mass communication process the message is it that comes as news. It embodies what the people need to know to be able to appreciate the goings-on in their society and get a sense of direction in everyday life. Message credibility refers to the news consumer's appreciation of the verity of news

content. It reflects the news consumer's judgment of the believability of the news. Message credibility relates to the quality of news that makes the news consumer believe its content as relevant and for that reason, useful to him. In this study, it is an evaluation of news in terms of, but not limited to accurate and objective presentation of facts with fairness and without bias (Tsang, 2021).

Message/News credibility could be enhanced by the factor of attribution which requires that, anytime an issue reported does not come from the direct observation of the reporter, its source or origin must be indicated. Otherwise the opinion stands as the reporter's and that amounts to editorializing or plagiarizing (Lorenz & Vivian, 2005). Lack of attribution denigrate the entire report and presents it as falsehood in the percipient news consumers estimation. The presence of attribution in the message speaks to its credibility. In essence, message credibility could be attained when facts and figures in the message are accurately presented, there is fair and balanced treatment for actors and all sides of the news. The above, coupled with eschewal of bias and making pertinent attributions are a measure of how believable a piece of news appears to the audience.

Other elements that strengthen news credibility include the use of actualities and soundbites that help to re-enact the scene of an incident in the broadcast media.

Medium/media credibility

Mass media are those communication media with capacity to reach an indiscriminate mass of individuals cutting across geographical, demographic, cultural etc. backgrounds and limitations. They include newspapers, radio, TV and books. These and some internet-based media form the mainstay of the concept of mass communication.

Media credibility is conceptualized as audience perception of news channel believability differentiable from source and message credibility (Bucy, 2003). It focuses on the medium through which the message is delivered as a key predictor of news credibility. It is based on how a particular channel meets consumers' information needs with the right information quality and that spells the character of a particular channel to the masses. Source and message credibility are integral to media credibility given that the characteristics of a particular communication channel is the product of interaction of source, message and audience (Bucy, 2003).

The message is all that the masses receive from the news channel. The audience member expects to perceive from the message the expertise and trustworthiness of the source and good quality of message concerning plausibility and internal consistency. Added to these two is the factor of receiver's characteristics regarding cultural background and previous knowledge of the channel (Vilcekova, 20015) that are part of their evaluative criteria. In view of this position a news medium could be adjudged credible when facts in the news content are verifiable for factual accuracy and the news is objectively presented without bias. That could be achieved only when the source at the scene, the reporter and the in-house editor are able to live up to their obligations in the news production process. Medium or news channel credibility connects to perceived believability of media content beyond any point of contestation (Bucy, 2003). It reflects the objective presentation of accurate facts with fair treatment of all sides to the news and avoidance of bias. Source, message and receiver interact coequally in the assessment of media credibility (Vilcekova, (2015).

The Imperative of Trust in Journalism

The daily routine of a reporter or field journalist is such that he sources for news in his beat. He follows clues to the scene of events to get first-hand ideas of what to report. He observes and determines those aspects of the event that are newsworthy, get the facts thereof and compiles his report diligently. Apart from his physical presence at the scene, he obtains information from the wire services to compile foreign news. He interviews people and check public documents for information or fact-checks such documents against other information to ensure he has nothing but the truth to report. In so doing, he highlights the relevance of significant issues so the masses could understand how they are affected and be guided in their decisions. Again, the journalist catalogues and makes available what he knows the readers want and what they cannot anticipate but need (Kovach and Rosentiel, 2022). He does these and much more, bearing public interest in mind.

In all of this, there are those individuals who merely claim to be journalists and others that are professional journalists (Donald, 2008). Following such dispositions of these journalists in different news outlets that compete for the attention of the public, journalism has become less ethical for different reasons including the fear of being scooped and some underhand interests that must be protected or promoted. The result is that the journalism output is now replete with slapdash pieces creating a high degree of uncertainty that leaves the news consumer disenchanted.

The Nieman Reports state that journalism's first loyalty is to the citizens (Kovach and Rosentiel, 2021). Accordingly, the journalist cannot but bear the interest of the public at heart in the mass communication process. Like public relations practice, journalism to a large extent requires the goodwill of the public to be successful but does not require creation of favourable public image for a principal which entails some degree of bias. The basic tenets of journalism rather expects the practitioner to be detached from the issues in his report. He is expected to objectively report the truth and leave it at that so the news consumer can independently draw inferences and put the message to rewarding use. Individuals are able to evaluate the news content for adherence to journalism principles that make for credibility and invest their trust in sources, reporters or the news outlet that meets their expectations.

The Nigerian code of ethics for journalism has in its preambles that "Journalism entails a high degree of public trust and to earn and maintain this trust, it is morally imperative for every journalist and the various news media to observe the highest professional and ethical standards. Article 2 (1) of the same code stresses the people's right to know and emphasizes factual, accurate, balanced and fair reportage as the ultimate objective of good journalism and the basis for earning public trust and confidence.

Trust is a higher order concept that embodies credibility given that, perception of media credibility encapsulate the elements people use to evaluate their trust in the media (Stromback, Tsafte, Hoomgaraden, Damstra and Lingren, 2020). While credibility is reputation impacting one's ability to be believed, trust is confidence or reliance on some person or quality (English Wiktionary). That is to say, the person or object to be trusted must have reputation that makes him/it credible and therefore deserving trust. Regarding the reporter and the editor as news purveyors, we can expect some degree of credibility in their input being guided by professional ethics, though such confidence may not be wholesale. However, newsmakers, sources, government etc. are not under any professional obligation in the mass communication process to be truthful with the

information they make available to the reporter. Yet, the reporter under pressure of deadline and scoops, has to sift this information for factual accuracy and report the news piping hot.

The notion of trust in journalism context ideally speaks to the confidence audience members repose on editors and journalists to gather useful and correct information that they may use to orient themselves in the world (Knudson, Dahlberg and Iverson, 2021). It describes the relationship between one who gives trust and the other being trusted and represents the willingness of one to be vulnerable to the actions of the other based on the expectation that the trustee performs actions important to the trustor irrespective of the latter's ability to monitor or control the processes (Mayer, Davies and Schooman, 1995). Thus, trust in journalism could be seen as the predisposition of audience members to be susceptible to news content based on the expectation that the media will perform satisfactorily in news and information provision (Hanitzh, Van Dalen and Steindle, 2017). Who or what is trusted relates to that upon which confidence is reposed. It provides a ground for reliance and fulfilment of hope. It follows that trust in the media could be interpreted as the extent to which the media is believed by news consumers as authentic information sources with the principal focus being on the channel and mediums through which content is delivered (Finn & Gilde in fan, Liu, Pei, Wu and Zhu, 2021). It also relates to the assurance audience members have on the capacity of the media and media practitioners to honestly meet their information needs based on interactions and experiences that make media output believable. For a medium to be trusted its content could be consumed without necessarily waiting for some form of absolute proof (Hilgoss and Rich, 2008).

Trust is a psychological state in which he who gives it makes a low personal investment in monitoring the processes the trusted followed to produce results and is less scrupulous in the application of such results for desired purposes given that over time such results have met established reliability criteria that strengthen trustworthiness (Weintraub & Austine). It is built incrementally and unlike credibility that could be regained after an honest error, trust once betrayed is gone for good (Khorring, 2019). Trust in news occurs when consumers can develop confidence in the news as their sources of news consistently report the news accurately and honestly to the extent that the news consumer can implicitly use the information without any sort of fact-checking (Khorring, 2019).

The essence of trust in journalism is emphasized in the seminal work of Walter Williams who crafted the journalism creed in 1914. From the outset, the journalist to whom this creed matters is made to express commitment to journalism in the statement: "I believe in the profession of journalism". (Chapman. 1978). The word "believe" in this context suggests having faith in journalism, to esteem or hold in positive regard, the profession of journalism. It also suggests commitment that is to say, being trothed emotionally and intellectually to journalism. In effect, the journalist is expressing confidence or self-trust in his ability to perform in a profession he esteems and is committed to. The creed further, states, "I believe that the public journal is a public trust: that all connected with it are to the full measure of their responsibility, trustees of the public; that acceptance of a lesser service than the public service is betrayal of this trust" (Chapman, 1978). This provision expects the journalist to reflect in performance, the fact that he is entrusted with information peddling on behalf of the masses whose trust he must earn to make his mark. As a public trustee he must work to meet the expectations of the information needs in

society. To get it right, he must not communicate amiss but credibly, so the public can rely on him lest, he does a disservice to society when people over his (the journalist's) failures, eventually turn to debauched information sources that would produce untoward consequences.

Earning Trust in Journalism Practice

Trust in journalism develops when people know that they can consistently turn to a news source or news outlet for reliable information. It happens when people feel their lives and priorities are reflected in the news coverage and when they feel confident in the decisions, values and ethics that characterize the news room (Mayer & Wash, 2018). It has to do with consistency and predictability in following through the promise journalism holds for society. The journalist should be able to use reliable and informed sources to get factual data for his report. If he is consulting documents he should satisfy his conscience that he has got all that is truthful about the issue needed to compile his story and there is enough of objective proofs to support claims in the story. The end product of journalism efforts usually come as the daily news, analysis and commentaries as well as editorials for the audience. In an informed society, holes are picked at any point in the news production process that could make the news less believable if not utterly unbelievable. Hence, in an era of citizens-journalism, anybody can get the information but more than anything the acumen to validate available information before serving it, is the hallmark of trustworthy journalism.

The journalism creed has it that no one should write as a journalist what he will not say as a gentleman (Chapman, 1978). This declaration plays up the element of integrity which derives from truth by which audience members evaluate the credibility of news as a key driver for trust-building. Other criteria include bias, accuracy, fairness, balance, completeness, transparency, currency etc. (Lee, 2015; Lacy Fico & Simon, 1991; Media Insight Project, 2016). The journalist is expected to evaluate his performance based on, but not limited to these factors to authenticate his news and they occur at different stages in the news production process. For instance, before a piece of information is considered for news, the reporter assesses it for freshness to know if it has not lost appeal as news. He should ask himself: have the claims not been proven wrong or overtaken by events (currency). Does the piece of information meet the information needs of the audience (relevance). In what capacity is the source in possession of the information? Is he an informed source (authority) and how factual or verifiable in this information, by other sources (Accuracy) (Rutgers University library, 2022).

The news consumer also assesses the trustworthiness of news using factor such as transparency, accuracy, balance, fairness, completeness and deadline (Media insight project, 2016; American press institute, 2022). Other factors include consistency, diversity and accountability. Simply put consistency in this context connects with the level of firmness with which what is adjudged credible standard in news content is sustained. There is no gainsaying that if standards fluctuate credibility is questioned and trust gets lost. If in the estimation of the audience, a news outlet is credible in performance, deliberate effort is required to maintain that standard so the credibility audiences hold about it could translate to audience trust.

Diversity entails recognizing and understanding the uniqueness identifiable with individuals, groups, gender, religion, culture, ideologies etc. and reflecting same in news content. Diversity bespeaks inclusivity in coverage where every section of the society is

provided with information pertinent to their conditions (Bourgault, 2021). Source diversity is of the essence too. Repetitive use of same sources in the news by the day, suggest frustration or unimaginativeness and desperation in the news gathering efforts. It renders the reports pedestrian. Aside the suspicion of bias, monotony engenders boredom as such credibility-oriented news organizations should be reasonably dynamic with news sources because, news should contain different perspectives and voices to avail audience members of useful lines of thought not readily available to them (Bourgault, 2012).

Accountability is integral to journalism practice. It resonates with the notion of responsibility both of which are prerequisites for trust-building. Responsibility relates to the obligations media practitioners owe society. It is about social needs society expects journalists to respond to (Hodges, 1986). Providing information to individuals and groups on their distinct areas of social concern is one of such responsibilities (Newton, Hodges & Keith, 2004). Generally speaking, the journalist or media are responsible for surveillancing the society and bringing to the notice of its members what they need to know. Setting the agenda for public discuss and generating public opinion as well as monitoring state power or keeping state actors under watch. The notion of responsibility equally expects the journalist or media to carry out their duties responsibly so they do not intentionally or inadvertently destabilize society in their operations. Accountability considers how society might call the journalist to account for excesses in the performance of his responsibilities (McQuail, 2009). It means giving account, explaining or providing justification as the case may be, for his actions to whoever he owes allegiance. The journalist is accountable to his professional self, his editor, the court of justice, government and his readership, viewership or listenership. Being accountable in news gathering and reporting requires firm commitment to due diligence to avoid slips, acknowledging slips if any, and offering emendation in most cases by way of retraction. For instance, when a referent in his work justifiably feels discredited. These efforts in the estimation of the audience bestow on the news platform and its journalists the quality of honesty and fairness hence deserving of trust,.

Notwithstanding the factors treated above authorities (Mayer, 2018; Donald, 2008 and Mayer and Walsh, 2018) believe that the journalist should:

- Bear in mind that there has to be a balance between journalism and the business aspect. Journalism is a business. The journalist must be true to the people in this sense but allow the public service interest to guide his actions.
- Acknowledge that the relationship between journalism and the people it aims to serve is broken or not working properly. He must take responsibility and attempt to improve on it.
- Remember that in truth, not all journalism is ethical because of political and advertising concerns. He should correct instead of covering up errors and persuade his clientele to trust his journalism in action or works, not just in words.
- Recognize that there is no adequate public knowledge about how journalism works. Make clear, his mission and goal and be as much as possible ethical.
- Anticipate criticism and be proactive about addressing the misgivings of the audience. Engage the reader as the story is being formed.
- Invest in understanding what his community thinks about him so he can understand their criticisms, as well as misgivings and address them proactively.
- Should not allow technology distract him from being the watchdog he is.

Endeavour to be at the scene to gather the unvarnished first-hand information for his audience.

Post-Truth Journalism

The word "Post-truth" represents a prevalent situation in human interactions in which facts are viewed as irrelevant or less important than personal beliefs, opinions and emotional appeals influencing public opinion. (Dictionary.com). It was adjudged "word of the year" in 2016 by the Oxford dictionary which records it as an adjective relating to circumstances in which objective facts are less influential than emotional appeals in shaping public opinion (Keane, 2018).

An opinion is a personal view about an issue or a situation which embodies what its holder rightly or wrongly thinks as the case. Emotional appeals in communication refer to circumstances where the communicator focuses on or addresses the sentiments of the message receiver to generate emotional rather than rational responses. A belief is the confidence or conviction one has about the truth of some proposition. It does not rely on results from empirical exercises to hold a belief. It is a psychological state in which confidence is reposed without objective proof to authenticate what is being believed. Again, beliefs are mere internal feelings about the certainty of something. They contrast with truth which is objective or which relies on objective and verifiable facts. Since human interactions thrive on beliefs and opinions rather than facts, it follows that communication today is replete with untruths yet post-truth describes not just an increase in the frequency of falsehood in the public sphere but equally relates to a world in which truth is no longer an expectation hence the concept of post-truth journalism connects with the public burial of objective facts by an avalanche of media appeals to emotions and personal beliefs (Keane, 2018).

Though the media are expected to be the vanguard to project truthfulness in their reportage of all human interactions and communications, characteristics of media from about 2016 has accentuated the given that the media takes on the attributes of the society in which it operates. They have being overwhelmed by political and economic pressures to the extent that their obligation to be always truthful to the public can hardly hold today. Journalism has been highly politicized and its outcome is susceptible to a nomenclature comprising disinformation, misinformation, mal-information, alternative facts, fake news etc. Though all of these are features of untruthful journalism, the last of them is often used to represent all appearances of untruthfulness in journalism.

Disinformation simply put, is an intentional lie. It is the purposive spread of deliberately created information that is false or not true. The source of such information knows that what he has is false but goes ahead to present it as the truth. Misinformation is false news too, but in this case, the disseminator or misinformer is not aware of the falsity of what he has. He disseminates it, erroneously believing in it as the truth. Mal-information is based on reality but the information disseminator does that with a maleficent mindset. He lets out such information with the intention to harm the referent in the information. Alternative fact relates to a situation where facts are given interpretation different from what they actually represent, to suit the speaker or writer's motives. It is seen as alternative interpretation of facts to align with one's political or ideological leanings (Wichital State University Libraries, n.d.).

Journalistic lies that characterize post-truthism in the practice include: photojournalists who tamper with the scene of news events before shooting, annotating documents as news sources, photo-cropping to emphasize a particular news angle, forging or embellishing quotes. Others are source fabrication, fact fabrication and situation inventing the totality of which is christened deceptive journalism. Source fabrication is about the most common form of deceptive journalism (Lasorsa and Dai, 2007). It involves authenticating a news item by attributing it to non-existent sources. In 2014, Pediep Ramsear of *Truow*, one of the leading newspapers in Netherlands was identified with fabrication of sources for his news items. An in-house investigation revealed that of the 1011 articles he wrote during his stint at *Trouw*, 126 were questionable hence withdrawn. This discovery tainted the newspapers solid reputation, built over the years (Govaet, Lagerwef and Klemm, 2019). Before then, in 1981 Janet Cooke of the *Washington Post* bagged a Pulitzer Prize for feature writing offered by “Jimmy's World”. It was discovered that the celebrated story of an 8-year-old heroin addict was invented. Thus Cooke as a reporter lost credibility and in turn put the *Post's* credibility in harm's way (Lorenz & Vivian, 2005).

On February, 2020, the guardian newspaper in Nigeria reported “ThisDay suspends editors over US visa report”. The account that followed was that two of ThisDay's editors were suspended over an invented story that made the February 4th issue of the paper in 2020. According to the initial report, Bishop Oyedepo (a Nigerian frontline cleric) was denied US visa at the US Consulate in Lagos. The consulate refuted the story in a tweet and ThisDay tendered apologies over this unfounded story and suspended the liable journalists for not following established checks before publishing. Such situations undermine trust in the journalism profession which is expected to be ethical, honest, accurate and transparent and goes ahead to betray in one day, the reader/listener/viewers' trust which was incrementally earned over the years. Such underhand practices that characterize journalism birthed the concept of post-truth journalism that must be curbed journalism must maintain its revered place in society.

Conclusion

Today, journalism struggles to retain its pride of place in society on account of the slapdash works of practitioners. The field suffers a proliferation of hands that hardly know or have decided to throw overboard the pristine tenets guiding journalism practice that makes it worthwhile. A lot of the practice is digital and almost everybody in our information-society that can handle social media does journalism with or without the required professional skills thereby occasioning a fall in journalism standards and the trust the profession deserves.

In truth, journalism is the only means of keeping ignorance at bay being the only instrument for current information sharing. It provides information the people need to live on. It is the only known information source sworn to upholding the truth in all circumstances. It helps citizens to participate in governance and makes possible the freedom people have, to express their thoughts as it provides opportunity for articulation and generation of public opinion. Above all, it is recognized as the last resort in the people's quest for truthful information.

It therefore follows that journalism cannot be any less truthful than the truth it has vowed to supply society so the trust the people have in it could be sustained. Unfortunately, the

mainstream media which stood as the bastion of truth is getting infested by the tendencies characterizing post-truth journalism. Online sources rule the roost with a plethora of unverified information available at a click and the ever-waiting news and information consumers get the information that is later disproved or confuted. The recurrence of such situations occasioned by social media handlers has left the information seeker with nowhere to invest his trust for authentic information. This situation requires the mainstream media to introvert and withdraw from the wave of intemperate activities characterizing post-truth journalism by making for trustworthiness in the practice at all cost,

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