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PRESS FREEDOM, GOOD GOVERNANCE, AND CHALLENGES OF MEDIA REGULATIONS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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Abstract

Press Freedom is one of the established indices through which advanced and emerging democracies are measured. It is a concept that propels the performance of journalists, through which the media perform their watchdog role in fostering good governance and democratic advancement. However, the digital landscape, which broke the monopoly of content creation and promotes free market place of ideas, has come with emerging challenges, such as fake news, misinformation, disinformation, and cyberbullying. These have brought about calls for the regulation of online activities by content creators-cum-citizen journalists in Nigeria. This study, therefore, sought journalists' perception of the propriety to regulate digital landscape in the midst of the new challenges being thrown up. Driven by Technological Determinism Theory, the study used survey method to generate data from 125 journalists in Oyo state, South West Nigeria, both mainstream and online. The study revealed that the level of media freedom in the state was moderate. Respondents agreed that challenges associated with digital era affected journalists in the discharge of their duties. They were extremely concerned about the unchecked spread of misinformation on online platforms, and therefore, the majority of them agreed that government needed to regulate the activities of content creators and citizen journalists online in order to guard against information disorder.

Keywords: Journalists; Online Media; Mainstream Media; Press Freedom; Regulation

Introduction

Press Freedom is an institutional framework that aids the fourth estate of the realm to function efficiently as it should. Okoye (2007) noted that Press Freedom is an essential ingredient of democratic culture, which suggests that the extent of democracy-cum-good governance enjoyed by citizens of a country is the direct offshoot of the level of freedom of press. Alabi (2002, as cited in Okoye, 2007) held that press freedom means that press should be allowed to publish without prior restraint. Wilson and Gapsiso (2019) traced the evolution of press freedom to more than 2400 years ago, dating back to the ancient times of the Greek Athenian, with the widely used international definitions of freedom of expression derived from the resolution of Article 19 of The Universal Declaration on Human Rights, 1948 (UDHR), which underscores everyone's right to freedom of opinion and expression without any interference. Such right also includes seeking, receiving, and imparting information and ideas through any media and across all frontiers. Although the Universal Declaration is not officially binding on all nations of the world, its provisions and principles have been domesticated through constitutional provisions and conventions at international, regional, and national levels (International Press Institute [IPI], 2025).

Enjoying this freedom holds that media should accept and fulfil certain obligations to the society, and that through professional standards, of informativeness, truth accuracy, objectivity and balance, these obligations can be met (Anaeto et al., 2008). The 21st Century has seen the development of technological innovations that enable both traditional media and other communicators who are armed with smart phones and other devices to be creators as well as consumers of messages (Macharia, 2023). But the new media appears to have come with different experiences, making its control somewhat difficult, compared to the mainstream media (Rabiu, 2023). Tutwane (2023) contended that some people argue that to impose sanctions as in the case of other infractions is to criminalise freedom of expression and freedom of the press. Unfortunately, self-regulation through the instrumentality of professional bodies has not yielded any fruitful result. Blake (2023) equally painted the picture of ineffectual twins of improved media literacy and fact-checking to address the growing menace, largely due to high level illiteracy, domineering and rapid flow that prohibits mass users from going through the tedious effort of fact-checking. Dissecting the motivations for this problem, Bako (2023) identified unbridled quest for

political power, the deregulation of the broadcast media space, and the proliferation of Information Communication Technology with the Internet, which at any rate, promotes pluralism of ideas.

In the face of this reality and modern societal threat, self-regulation has over the years been advocated. However, Bako (2023) hinted that man is deviant by nature and people will always break rules irrespective of the situation. Bako (2023) further argued that had everyone remained a conformist, there would not have been any need for policemen or law courts. This freedom is however being confronted with various abuses, such as disinformation, misinformation, fake news and cyberbullying, which ignited the calls for regulation (Blake, 2023; Tutwane, 2023).

However, the problem of media regulation in the digital era is a herculean one (Gbenga et al., 2022; Rabiu, 2023), while the infinite bandwidth of digital media is making it absolutely porous (Ghosh, 2021). Therefore, apart from members of the public, the very first set of people that suffer the consequences of infractions perpetrated by faceless users of digital platforms appear to be professional journalists. This study, therefore, aimed to seek the perception of journalists in Oyo state, on press freedom and challenges of media regulations in the digital age. To achieve the objectives of this study, the following research questions were asked and answered:

i. To what extent do journalists enjoy freedom in the discharge of their duties?
ii. Do challenges associated with digital era affect journalists in the discharge of their duties?
iii. What are the dispositions of journalists to lack of regulation of the online media and the implications?
iv. Would journalists support government regulation of the digital media operations?

Freedom of Press

As noted by the International Press Institute (IPI, 2025) and the United Nations (UN, 2023), the concept of press freedom guarantees journalists' safety and protection against interference from government, in addition to giving every person the right to freedom of opinion and expression. The UN (2023) explained that media freedom and access is among the wider development objectives of empowering the people. This process, the UN (2023) held, has a multi-dimensional social and political process that helps people to gain control over their own lives.

Okoye (2007) and IPI (2025) highlighted different international treaties that provided legal frameworks for the freedom of press. Specifically, Okoye (2007) posited that the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 59 (1) of December 14, 1946 states that freedom of information is a fundamental human right, and it is the central point of all freedom. Also, IPI (2025) reaffirmed the significance of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 to the right to freedom of opinion and expression without any hindrance.

Other sources that legally removed encumbrances on the part of press freedom captured by IPI (2025) and Okoye (2007), include Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of December 10, 1966. Article 9 of African Charter on Human and People's Right equally provided legal support for press freedom. In Nigeria, the grand norm is the 1999 Constitution (as amended), and it equally provides thus in section 22: "the press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all-time be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in Chapter two and uphold the responsibility and accountability of government to the people."

Again, section 39 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) further states as follows: "Every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interferences." As highlighted earlier, freedom of the press is an age-long phenomenon, dating back to even the advent of Libertarian Theory of the Press, which guarantees the right of individuals and advocates absence of any form of restraint. In this situation, the understanding is that if the press must function efficiently, to hold people in power accountable, then it must be free (Asemah et al., 2017).

The current reality enhanced by the advancement in Information Communication Technology (ICT) and the ubiquitous nature of the Internet, which promotes digital media, may have come with a lot of challenges, especially in rising up to challenges of societal peace (Raji, & Abdulkadir-Imam, 2018). Rabiu (2023) explained that the social media are the most recent of the mass media which have consolidated all other mass media using computer networks. The digital era by the advocates of free press may however present more challenges than envisaged, despite the benefits that come with it. Gbenga et al. (2022) argued that not minding the numerous social media advantages, problems around regulation and how it affects people's rights to freedom of expression remain sensitive. Social media usage and the risks it brings to others continue to appear to be major concerns. There is a thin line between exercising one's right to free speech and abusing it. People

have also questioned how social media and the associated freedom of expression could incite violence, propagate hatred, and breach the privacy of others (Biyere, 2019 as cited in Gbenga et al., 2022).

Media Regulation in Nigeria

Due to the far-reaching implications and impacts of media in society, Okoye (2007) noted there are two main forms of regulations on the practice of media profession – self-regulation and external regulation. Okoye, further contended that the principle of self-regulation lies with job ethics, which is self-enforced ethical mechanism articulated by members of the profession. While outside regulatory frameworks are those articulated and imposed by outsiders, among such are legal regulations imposed by the larger society with formal institutions for their enactment and enforcement.

Oxford Bibliographies online (2017) stated that media regulation is the framework through which range of specific, often legally binding, tools are applied to media systems and institutions to achieve established policy goals, such as pluralism, diversity, competition, and freedom. Accordingly, Oxford Bibliographies online (2017) explained that regulation can be "positive" or "negative" to promote particular objectives or to block "undesirable" content. Media regulation has traditionally been sector-specific i.e., different rules have been imposed on the print and electronic media. However, with the development of digital technologies, such as the Internet, sector-specific is increasingly being superseded by converged forms of regulation. Similarly, Oxford Bibliographies online (2017) further stated that media regulation is the application of legal and extra-legal, as well as national and international, instruments to media systems in almost common ways. In Nigeria, the 1999 Constitution (as amended), section 39 (1) provides constitutional guideline for freedom of expression on one hand, but sub-section (2) takes it over on another hand, as it provides that establishment of radio and Television stations is only possible with Presidential permit.

Digital Media Regulation in Nigeria

Jaiyeola (2022) contended that new media has served different purposes, such as provision of information, opinion even though in an unregulated way. Again, it has equally served as a means to spread information when other channels have failed, with reference to experience in North

Africa, during the Arab Spring, as well as in Nigeria during EndSARS protests. However, Ghosh (2021) offered a different perspective to the digital regulation issue. This is because social media is fundamentally different from traditional media and so traditional approaches to regulation have largely fallen short. There are a few key dimensions worth considering.

Ghosh (2021) recognised that traditional cable news (and to a lesser extent, other conventional news media) are defined by limited bandwidth. In view of their limited bandwidth, the traditional media have limited influence on a much larger audience compared to social media platforms, which appeal to much narrower audiences (Solmone, 2018, as cited in Santas & Inobemhe, 2021). While examining challenges standing against the regulation of social media, Solmone, 2018 (as cited in Santas & Inobemhe, 2021) held that the nature of the Internet transcends geographical borders, thus making its usage a limitless service across the globe. Secondly, of great concern to Ghosh (2021) is the process of content creation, in which the digital era has eliminated the chain of commands applicable in the traditional media.

Given this position, it therefore appears that there are clear-cut differences between the preparatory and transmission procedures of digital and traditional media content. Unlike traditional media audiences, who have control over their exposure to media content, the same cannot be said of social media users, who are faced with information overload due to algorithmic configurations. Jaiyeola (2022) added that regulating the various social media platforms has been a major attempt globally, with various initiatives from governments, but civil societies and human rights organisations are bothered about the various attempts. One of the notable attempts to regulate social media as captured by Osuigwe (2018, cited in Gbenga et al., 2022) was the Anti-Social Media Act, also known as the Frivolous Petitions Bill, which was sponsored in the Nigerian Senate in 2015. It went on to the second reading before it was abandoned.

Onanuga (2023) said in 2015, Nigeria passed a Cybercrime (Prohibition, Prevention, etc. Act), with several provisions, such as cyber stalking. This may be relied upon to checkmate the excesses of digital media users, who flouted the rules of engagement. Similarly, Jaiyeola (2022) noted that in June 2022, the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), a Federal Government agency with a mandate to develop, regulate, and advise on information technology, released a 'Code of Practice for Interactive Computer Service Platforms/Internet Intermediaries.' The document made it mandatory for all Interactive Computer Service Platforms/Internet

Intermediaries to abide by the Nigerian laws and not deploy or modify their platforms in any way that will undermine or interfere with the application and/or enforcement of the laws.

The draft concludes that any platform and/or internet intermediary that is responsible for the violation of the regulation may be liable to disciplinary measures under civil service rules, prosecution and conviction for violation of NITDA Act 2007 (NITDA, n.d.). Elsewhere, following discussions and months of advocacy and campaigning from civil society, negotiators from the European Parliament, the Digital Services Act (DSA) was proposed by the European Commission on 15 December 2020, to upgrade rules governing digital services in the EU. The DSA includes new rules that will require Big Tech platforms – including Facebook and Instagram (owned by Meta), and YouTube (owned by Google) – to assess and manage systemic risks posed by their services, such as advocacy of hatred and the spread of disinformation.

According to Amnesty International (2022), Claudia Prettner, Legal and Policy Adviser at Amnesty Tech, while reacting to DSA, described it as a move towards an online world that better respects human rights by effectively putting the brakes on Big Tech's unchecked power. After three years of intense negotiations, the EU Digital Services Act finally arrived. On 5th July, 2022, the European Parliament approved the final text of the future EU content moderation rule book. The DSA has been labelled by some as a "gold standard" for content and platform governance in the EU. The Digital Services Act is the new EU law that aims to limit the spread of illegal content online (Pirkova, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on the basic assumptions of Technological Determinism theory. The theory was traced to Thorstein Veblen, who was an American Sociologist and economist, but the first major radical view of the theory was credited to Karl Marx, whose theoretical framework established that changes in technology can influence human social relations (Asemah et al., 2017). Anaeto et al. (2008) called this a technologically deterministic approach, which situates technology as a value-free and politically neutral asset, usable in every social and historical context.

Jan et al. (2020) linked the advancement in the propositions of the theory to Marshal McLuhan in 1964. According to this theory, the technology of mass media not only shapes attitudes and behaviour of people, but also brings a revolution in the mode of operation of a social system. The

theory further proposes that functioning of a social fabric change accordingly with the emergence of every new technology. According to McLuhan (1964), advancement in technologies of mass communication ensure cultural diffusion in a society, which in turn, helps change human behaviour. Jan et al. (2020) added that McLuhan used his famous quote "we shape our tools, and they in turn shape us" to contextualize the theory. Therefore, technology has the capacity to transform any environment, and when situated within the context of communication, media technology can be viewed from the lenses of a channel and a message at the same time (Anaeto et al., 2008).

The key concepts of this theory can therefore be summarized that media technology shapes how individuals in a society feels, and thinks; it determines how society operates as it migrates from one era to another, to the extent that the four periods of human history were determined by technologies – from tribal to literate, to the print and now electronic, which is being improved upon to digital. The nexus between the theory and the study is therefore obvious, given the way the Internet, which is the infrastructural facility that propels the idea of new media is changing the mode of journalism, its power and even the nature of relationship that exists between consumers and producers of media content, especially in the digital era.

Empirical Review

In a conceptual study, conducted by Gbenga et al., (2022), the difficulties and results of social media regulation in Nigeria, were examined. However, the study agreed that freedom of expression is a core area of the fundamental human rights, to that extent if people do not have access to the right to free expression; it is regarded as a failing of the democratic ethos. The authors of the paper equally observed that democracy cannot be regarded as being in operation, once people's right to communicate at will is being suppressed by any possible means. The study draws the conclusion that regulating social media is becoming a more difficult task because doing so implies stifling free expression, which could hinder the advancement of democratic principles, among which free speech is the most important.

Santas and Inobemhe (2021), in another paper that examined social media regulation in a democratic Nigeria, alongside its challenges and implications, held that any attempted regulation of social media has a lot of implications. The paper adopted a library research method to gather its

data, which were thematically discussed and held that regulatory framework on social media, which is an aspect of digital media, stands as a deficient on the part of the nation's democracy.

Also, a study conducted by Abdullateef (2021), surveyed students in the University of Abuja, to examine their perception of the various government attempts to regulate the social media through the National Assembly. The study found that despite respondents' awareness of the possible demerits of an unregulated social media, the majority of them (54%) kicked against the idea of social media regulation, while a substantial (46%) supported the move on the provision that it is not politicised.

Methodology

This study was quantitatively designed, using questionnaire as a tool for data collection. The population of the study was estimated at 200 by the Oyo State Council of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Iyaganku GRA, Ibadan, the state capital. A sample size of 132 was arrived at using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table (with ±5% margin of error). However, the study was only able to survey 125 practising journalists (including Print, Broadcast, and Online) out of the 132-sample size. Additionally, the data collection instrument was designed through Google Form. The respondents were drawn from all the 20 different accredited chapels in the state, which include journalists from 19 mainstream chapels and an online chapel.

The researchers sent an online link of the Google Form to the various WhatsApp platforms of registered journalists in Oyo state, which include Oyo NUJ Platform, Oyo Media Stakeholders, Colleagues Hangout, and Dembablovers**.** The instrument was also sent privately to the WhatsApp numbers of many of the journalists with an instruction that each journalist was limited to one entry. The rationale for this method was because the respondents are 'always on the move', given the nature of their job. So, it was difficult meeting them at a particular location for physical administration. They were advised to fill or ignore, depending on their availability and disposition to the subject matter. Subsequently, the data gathered from the online survey were analysed using Descriptive Statistics from the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 21.0).

Findings

The data collected were from 125 respondents out of the 132-sample size. Impliedly, out of the initial intended 132 respondents, 125 eventually participated in the online survey, thus representing 94.7 % of the response rate used for the analysis.

Table 1. *Response Rate*

	Correctly filled and returned	Not returned	Total
Number	**125**	**07**	**132**
Percentage	**94.7%**	**5.3%**	**100.0%**

Source: study survey

Table 2. *Demographic data*

Variable		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	79	63.2
	Female	46	36.8
	Total	**125**	**100.0**
Marital Status	Single	22	17.6
	On Date	6	4.8
	Married	95	76.0
	Prefer not to say	2	1.6
	Total	**125**	**100.0**
Qualification	Diploma	1	0.8
	ND	3	2.4
	Degree	64	51.2
	HND	36	28.8
	Other	21	16.8
	Total	**125**	**100.0**
Media organization	Newspaper	12	9.6
	Magazine	1	0.8
	Radio	33	26.4
	Television	50	40.0
	Online	29	23.2
	Total	**125**	**100.0**
Status	Reporter	43	34.4
	Editor	27	21.6
	Correspondent	21	16.8
	Content creator	14	11.2
	Other	20	16.0
	Total	**125**	**100.0**

Source: Study Survey

Table 2 shows that out of the 125 respondents, 63.2% (N=79) of them were male, while 36.8% (N=46) were female. The table shows that 51.2% (N=64) of the respondents were degree holders, 28.8% (N=36), HND holders; 2.4% (N=3), ND holders; 0.8% (N=1), Diploma holders; and 16.8% (N=21) were holding other certificates. Item four in the table shows that 40.0% (N=50) of the respondents belonged to the Television; 26.4% (N=33), Radio; 23.2% (N=29) online media; 9.6% (N=12), newspaper; and 0.8% (N=1) magazine media organizations. This implies that the majority of the respondents belong to the broadcast media.

Table 3. *Perception of press freedom*

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Very Limited	13	10.4
Limited	28	22.4
Moderate	47	37.6
Substantial	26	20.8
Very Substantial	11	8.8
Total	**125**	**100.0**

Source: study survey, 2023

The conclusion brought out in Table 3, shows that 37.6% (N=47) of the respondents perceived the level of press freedom in Oyo state to be moderate, 20.8% (N=26) perceived it as substantial, while 22.4% (N=28) of the respondents believed press freedom was limited, with 8.8% (N=11) considering it to be very substantial, and 10.4% (N=13) seeing it as very limited. What can be deduced from the above result is that the majority of the respondents perceived press freedom as moderate.

Table 4. *Level of influence on editorial decision*

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Not at all	10	8.0
Slightly	25	20.0
Moderately	39	31.2
Very	46	36.8
Completely	5	4.0
Total	**125**	**100.0**

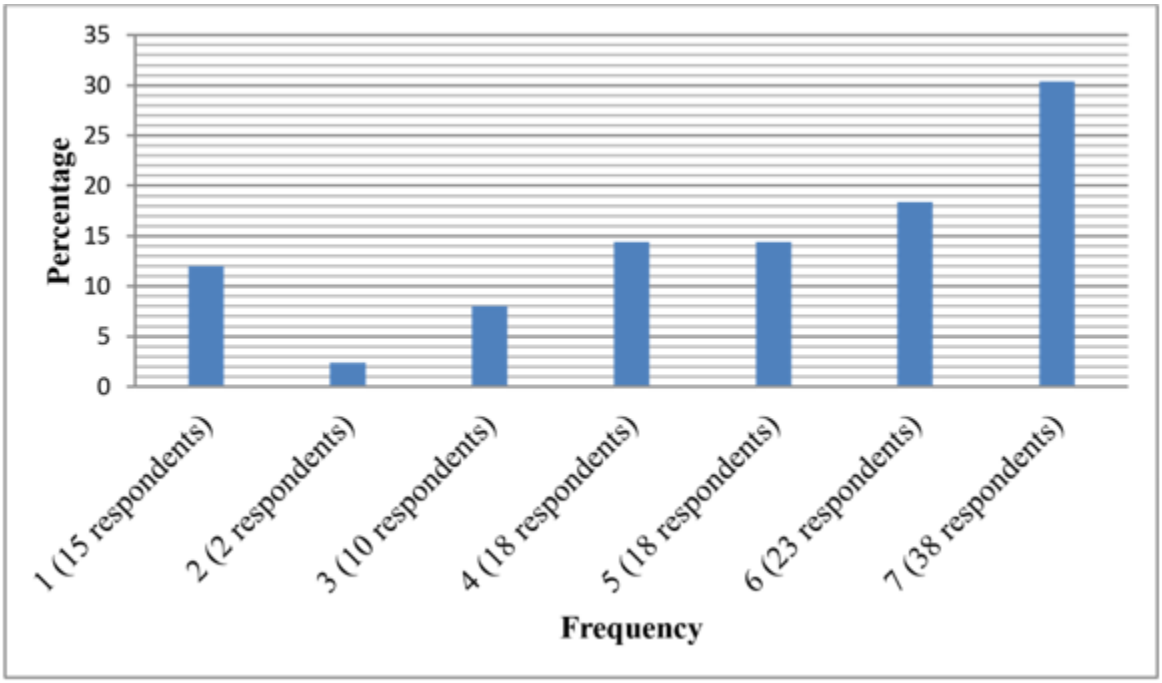
Source: study survey

From Table 4, it shows that 36.8% (N=46) of the respondents perceived that their editorial decision was being very influenced by external pressures, 31.2% (N=39) moderately believed it, 20.0% (N=25) slightly believed it, 8.0% (N=10) did not believe that the editorial decision was being influenced by external factors, while the least of the respondents 4.0% (N=5) completely believed that the editorial decision was being influenced by external pressure.

Table 3 and 4 above answered research question one (1), which states that: **To what extent do journalists enjoy freedom in the discharge of their duties?**

From table 3, those who perceived the level of press freedom in Oyo state as moderate, substantial and very substantial stood at 67.2% while a deeper look at the data in table 4 shows that those who believed that their editorial decision was not being influenced by any external factor, slightly being influenced or moderately being influenced were in the majority. It can therefore be concluded that the level of press freedom being enjoyed in the state is moderate.

Fig. 1. *Impact of the digital news dissemination on reporter's accuracy in reporting*



Source: Study survey

Fig.1 demonstrated how the respondents rated the impact of the rapid pace of digital news dissemination on their ability to ensure accuracy in reporting. On a scale of seven (7), 30.4% (N=38) of the respondents strongly agreed that digital news dissemination ensured their accuracy in reporting while the remaining respondents went for Agree, 18.4% (N=23); Somewhat Agree, 14.4% (N=18); Neutral, 14.4% (N=18); Somewhat Disagree, 8.0% (N=10); Disagree, 2.4% (N=3);

and Strongly Disagree, 12.0% (N=15). This shows that the majority of the respondents were aided by the digital technology in the discharge of their duties.

Table 5. *Effect of social media on source verification*

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Not applicable	7	5.6
No significant change	18	14.4
Somewhat changed my approach	51	40.8
Significantly changed my approach	49	39.2
Total	**125**	**100.0**

Source: study survey

Table 5 demonstrated that 40.8% (N=51) of the respondents agreed that the rise of social media had somewhat changed their approach to source verification while 39.2% (N=49) believed that it had significantly changed their approach. Again, 14.4% (N=18) agreed that the rise of social media had not changed their approach while 5.6% (N=7) were not sure if the rise of social media affected their approach to source verification or not.

The result drawn from these survey findings shows that the majority of the respondents believed that the rise of social media had somewhat changed their approach to source verification.

Table 6. *Comparison between social media platforms and traditional news outlets in dissemination of news*

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Much less reliable and accurate	42	33.6
Slightly less reliable and accurate	37	29.6
About the same	12	9.6
Slightly more reliable and accurate	24	19.2
Much more reliable and accurate	10	8.0
Total	**125**	**100.0**

Source: study survey

The survey findings in table 6 revealed that 33.6% (N=42) perceived the reliability and accuracy of social media platforms in the dissemination of news compared to traditional news outlets as much less reliable and accurate; 29.6% (N=37) perceived it as slightly less reliable and accurate; 19.2% (N=24) saw it as slightly more reliable and accurate; while 8.0% (N=10) of the respondents perceived it as much more reliable and accurate. Therefore, table 5 and 6 answered research

question two (2), which states that: **Do challenges associated with digital era affect journalists in the discharge of their duties?**

Given the fast nature and peculiarities of the social media platforms, journalists have had a lot more to contend with in the way they check their sources of news, lest they run into the trap of fake news**.** Further, based on the outcome of table 6, it can be concluded that the majority of the respondents perceived the reliability and accuracy of social media platforms in the dissemination of news as addition to the burden of accuracy and journalistic reliability. It does mean that journalists in Oyo state believe that challenges associated with digital era affect journalists in the discharge of their duties.

Table 7. *Challenges associated with lack of regulation of online media*

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	8	6.4
Disagree	5	4.0
Neutral	5	4.0
Agree	35	28.0
Strongly Agree	72	57.6
Total	**125**	**100.0**

Source: study survey

Finding from table 7 shows that 57.6% (N=72) of the respondents strongly agreed that the lack of regulations for online media posed a significant challenge to maintain journalistic standards while 28.0% (N=35) others also agreed to the notion.

Table 8. *Online media platform's transparent mechanism for fact-checking and content moderation*

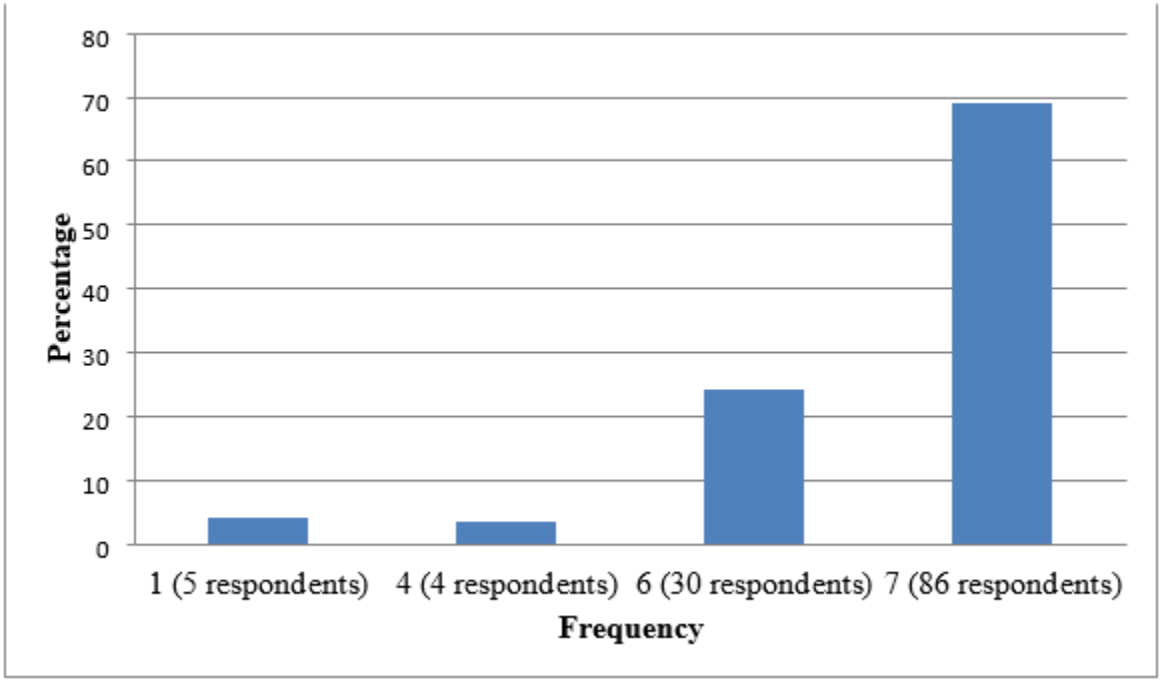
Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Not very important	2	1.6
Neutral	4	3.2
Important	20	16.0
Very important	99	79.2
Total	125	100.0

Source: study survey

The conclusion in table 8 above shows that absolute majority 79.2% (N=99) of the respondents believed that it was very important for online media platforms to have transparent mechanisms for

fact-checking and content moderation while 16.0% (N=20) believed that it was important for them to have it.

Fig. 2. *Level of respondents' concern about the unchecked spread of misinformation on online platforms*



Source: study survey

Fig. 2 shows the respondents' level of concern about the unchecked spread of misinformation on online platforms, with the majority (N=86 representing 68.8%) indicating that they were extremely concerned about the phenomenon.

Therefore, tables 7 and 8 with figure 2 above provided answers to research question three (3), which states that: **What are the dispositions of journalists to lack of regulation of the online media and the implications?**

In the media operation and efficiency in Nigeria, the print and broadcast media have regulatory bodies that monitor their operations in order to maintain decency and curb libel or slander in society. But the new media (through its various online platforms) does not have regulatory body yet to look and monitor its affairs. Therefore, journalists in Oyo state were concerned about online media porosity and they strongly agreed that the lack of regulations for online media poses a significant challenge to the maintenance of journalistic standards. Based on the outcome of table 8, the implication of the above result is that the majority of the respondents held that it was very

important for online media platforms to have transparent mechanisms for fact-checking and content moderation.

Table 9. *Level of agreement on government regulation of the activities of content creators and citizen journalists online*

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	6	4.8
Disagree	1	.8
Neutral	5	4.0
Agree	40	32.0
Strongly Agree	73	58.4
Total	**125**	**100.0**

Source: study survey

The result of the study in table 9 revealed that 58.4% (N=73) of the respondents strongly agreed that government needs to regulate the activities of content creators and citizen journalists online, and 32.8% (N=40) of the respondents also agreed. Only 4.8% strongly disagreed to this notion.

Table 10. *Government regulation of digital media operation*

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	2	1.6
Disagree	6	4.8
Neutral	11	8.8
Agree	57	45.6
Strongly Agree	49	39.2
Total	**125**	**100.0**

Source: study survey

Table 10 was designed to indicate the respondents' feedback about if government regulation of digital media operations could help to ensure responsible journalism and protect press freedom. To this end, 45.6% (N=57) of the respondents agreed and 39.2% (N=49) of the respondents strongly agreed. But 4.8% (N=6) of the respondents disagreed, 1.6% (N=2) strongly disagreed, while 8.8% (N=11) were neutral.

Table 11. *Respondents' agreement on government regulation if it focuses on ensuring data privacy and transparency*

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
No opinion	18	14.4
No, not more supportive	10	8.0
Yes, more supportive	97	77.6
Total	**125**	**100.0**

Source: study survey

Table 11 demonstrated that the overwhelming majority of the respondents representing 77.6% (N=97) agreed that they would be more supportive of government regulation if it focuses primarily on ensuring data privacy and transparency. Tables 9, 10, and 11 above answered the fourth research question, which states that: **Would journalists support government regulation of the digital media operations?**

From the findings in table 9, a large proportion of the respondents agreed that government needs to regulate the activities of content creators and citizen journalists online in order to guard against fake news, cyberbullying, unethical practices, etc. Data on table 10, also show that the majority of the respondents believed that the government regulation of digital media operations could help to ensure responsible journalism and protect press freedom. And responses in table 11 clearly show that the majority of the respondents agreed that they would be more supportive of government regulation if it focuses primarily on ensuring data privacy and transparency.

Discussion of Key Findings

The study was conducted to achieve four objectives, the first was to know the extent to which journalists enjoy freedom in the discharge of their duties in Oyo state; the second was to identify challenges associated with digital era and how such challenges affect journalists in the discharge of their duties. Also, the study was carried out to find out the dispositions of journalists to lack of regulation of the digital media and the implications, and lastly, to ascertain if journalists would support government regulation of the digital media operations.

Therefore, it was evident based on the findings in this study that the respondents believed that the level of press freedom in Oyo state is moderate, substantial, and very substantially moderate, which stands at 67.2%. A deeper look at the findings also revealed that the majority of the respondents believed that their editorial decision was not being influenced by any external factor, and at most slightly being influenced or moderately being influenced. It can be concluded that the level of press freedom being enjoyed in the state is moderate. This sits well with the submission

of a study carried out by Gbenga et al. (2022), which agreed that freedom of expression is a core area of the fundamental human rights.

Given the fast and ubiquitous nature of the social media platforms, journalists have had a lot more to contend with in the way they check their sources of news. Findings from this study, therefore, show that the majority of the respondents perceived the reliability and accuracy of social media platforms in the dissemination of news as addition to the burden of accuracy and journalistic reliability. This result fits into one of the assumptions of Technological Determinism Theory, as it states that technology of mass media not only shapes attitudes and behaviours of people, but also brings revolution in the mode of operation of a social system. The theory further proposes that functioning of a social fabric change accordingly with emergence of every new technology (Jan et al., 2020).

The traditional media have extant and robust monitoring or regulatory frameworks that maintain decency and standard operation. But the new media (through its various online channels) does not have regulatory body yet to look and monitor its affairs. Therefore, journalists in Oyo state were concerned about online media porosity and they strongly agreed that the lack of regulations for online media poses a significant challenge to the maintenance of journalistic ethos, as earlier stated. The result, however, contradicts the outcome of a study conducted by Santas and Inobemhe, (2021), which examined social media regulation in a democratic Nigeria, alongside its challenges. Its findings agreed that regulatory framework on social media, which is an aspect of digital media, stands as a deficient on the part of the nation's democracy.

From the outcome of the study, a large proportion of the respondents agreed that digital media needs to be regulated to moderate the activities of content creators and citizen journalists to guard against digital infractions, such as fake news, and cyber bullying, among others. However, this result coming from a group of journalists that usually see attempted digital regulation as ploy to gag media freedom negates the outcome of a study by Abdullateef (2021), which sought to understand the perception of social media users in Nigeria, on various government attempts to regulate social media. But, the majority of the respondents (54%) kicked against the idea of social media regulation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the foregoing key findings, it can be concluded that journalists in Oyo state enjoyed a relatively free environment to discharge their constitutionally assigned duties. However, with the many challenges associated with journalistic practice in the digital era, there is a need for a regulatory framework to bring about high level professionalism, especially among netizens and online content creators, as agreed by the respondents. It is against this backdrop that the study recommends that the Federal Government, through its relevant agencies, like the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), should come up with a regulatory framework for online media practice and social media use in Nigeria; and that such regulatory framework should have the inputs from the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), the Nigerian Press Council (NPC), the Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE) and representatives of the online community, to avoid any clause (s) that can undermine press freedom and freedom of expression in the country. Additionally, the Oyo State Government and its counterparts across Nigeria, should ensure strict enforcement of such regulation after its approval by the Federal Government or through a bill by the National Assembly and subsequent assent by the President.

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