

Online Anonymity and Contents Credibility: Challenges and Opportunity

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Abstract

This study explores online anonymity and the perceived credibility of online contents with a focus on the challenges and opportunities particularly in this digital communication era. The paper is anchored on Source Credibility Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory. A cross-sectional quantitative research method was employed while the data collection instrument was structured questionnaire using to elicit responses from 317 respondents who were simple randomly selected from Mass Communication Department of Osun State Polytechnic, Iree. The study found that majority of the respondents nearly 80% often encounter anonymous contents, while, substantial number of the respondents over 73% disagree that anonymity increase trust. Equally, 52.7% of the respondents maintain that anonymous contents is less credible than content with known authors or sources. Correspondently, Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient further stressed a negative correlation ($r_s = -0.9788$); revealing that as anonymity increases, the online credibility decreases too. The study, therefore, recommended that integrating verified anonymity tools, promoting digital literacy, encouraging proper source citation, and guiding the strategic use of anonymity for sensitive discourse not only in Nigeria but globally.

Keywords: Online, Anonymity, Credibility, Source credibility, Social media.

Introduction

Before this 21st century, access to information is usually through known sources such as newspaper, magazine, radio and television outlet, hence, any misinformation, disinformation and related issues; can be quickly verified, clarified, while, the source can be held responsible and accountable for any information that emanated from them, no wonder the newspaper often come with the *imprint*. However, in this century, information has taken new dimension because information can come from both known sources and unknown sources, from identified and unidentified sources changing the way people consume information.

Again, today, there is information overload due to the user generated contents facilitated by social media, blog and other digital platforms. The internet enables access to information and allows people from every part of the people. According to Kalita (2021), information overload is presenting an enormous amount of irrelevant data to the users that leave them information overload is providing the user with vast amounts of information that doesn't help them and leaves them confused and unable to make a decision. It is when the information input exceeds the processing capacity. In addition to the extreme supply of information, the anonymity of online content, makes it more difficult for users to discern credibility or intent. Wisdom Library (2025) describes that anonymous writing, otherwise known as Ghostwriting, Pseudonymous writing, it involves literary creations where the author's identity remains undisclosed, fostering diverse interpretations and encouraging readers to engage more deeply with the text rather than focusing on the author's background or intentions. The concept of anonymity has long been of interest to social psychologists and other social scientists.

Social psychologists and other social scientists have been interested in the notion of anonymity for some time. Anonymity has been traditionally thought of as the inability of others to identify an

individual or to identify oneself (Christopherson, 2007). When it is appropriate, anonymity can facilitate openness in communicative expression but presents challenges in respect of assessing the trustworthiness of the information because one cannot identify the source of the information and therefore, hold that individual accountable. This leads directly to source credibility. Source credibility or media credibility or "trust in media," is the perceived truthfulness and integrity perceived in the media or the media source of the information (Yariv, 2011).

If the source is considered credible, audience are likely to trust its message and verse versa. However, one of the essential fundamentals the draw a line between professional source and non-professional ones is the credibility of the source. Due to the significant of source credibility, the concept is one of the most studied and research concepts in media sphere (Umeogu, 2022).

Meanwhile, if a source of information is hidden in the course of news reporting, as in the case on digital platforms today; the credibility of the contents because questionable and influence audience perception and acceptance of the message. Thus, online anonymous in today's digital age means concealing or not revealing one's true identity or personal information while engaging in communication (posting or reporting) on the internet Sardá, et al., 2019).

This aligns with the position of Source Credibility Theory, which stressed that the audience perceives a source of communication to be credible as a result of the credible nature in the processes of communication from such source (Akanja, 2023). The theory emphasized that "a receiver judges certain information based on believability of the source. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines online anonymity and the perceived credibility of online

contents with a focus on the challenges and opportunities particularly in this digital communication era.

Statement of the Problem

The rapid growth of online anonymity tools and platforms has brought about free expression and privacy but equally eroded trust in digital content. While anonymity energizes marginalized voices and protects users from harassment, it also enables the unchecked spread of controversy, disinformation, and malicious content. Existing solutions to verify credibility such as identity verification systems or centralized moderation often compromise anonymity or fail to address systemic biases in algorithmic content. Moreover, current research lacks different lens that encourages behavioral psychology (to understand user motivations), algorithmic governance (to design fair moderation systems), and decentralized technologies (to preserve privacy while verifying content).

This gap hinders pathways to resolution in balancing trustworthiness with anonymity and framing innovation in creating trustworthy digital ecosystems. This study is especially significant among Osun State Polytechnic students, where there is rapid increase in digital communications among young people particularly in tertiary institutions which raises unique challenges when determining the authenticity of sources and maintaining healthy discussions when engaged in assignments, seminar or thesis. Osun State Polytechnic, Iree was chosen as a focus not only due to proximity, but, as it represents a vibrant cross-section of young digital users who are engaged in academia and technology and are more active online, yet frequently underrepresented in media literacy research than their counterparts at universities or in secondary schools. By examining polytechnic students in Osun State, this study sought to identify context-specific challenges and provide actionable adjustments that may be used to influence the implementation of educational and digital policy

interventions. The objectives of this study emerged from the need to explore perceptions of credibility influenced by anonymity and identify means of establishing trust continuously in digital environments in this particular educational landscape.

Research Objectives

- i. To examine the extent to which online anonymity affect the perceived credibility of contents among students of Osun State Polytechnics.
- ii. To determine the opportunities presented by online anonymity in enhancing contents credibility among students of Osun State Polytechnics.
- iii. To identify challenges pose by online anonymity to contents credibility among students of Osun State Polytechnics.

Research Questions

- i. To what extent does online anonymity affect the perceived credibility of contents among students of Osun State Polytechnics?
- ii. What opportunities does online anonymity present for enhancing contents credibility among students of Osun State Polytechnics?
- iii. What challenges does online anonymity pose to contents credibility among students of Osun State Polytechnics?

Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant relationship between online anonymity and the perceived credibility of user-generated content.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between online anonymity and the perceived credibility of user-generated content.

Significant of the Study

The study of online anonymity and content credibility holds profound importance in the digital age, where information spreads rapidly, and

trust in media is constantly being reevaluated. While previous research has largely focused on the negative implications of anonymity, such as misinformation, cyberbullying, and lack of accountability. Traditionally, anonymity has been associated with deception and misinformation. However, this study proposes that anonymity can, paradoxically, be a tool for trust-building when strategically implemented. By allowing whistleblowers, activists, and marginalized voices to share information without fear of persecution, anonymity can enhance content credibility in specific contexts. Investigating this balance presents an underexplored perspective that contributes to media ethics and policy.

With the rise of government surveillance, corporate data tracking, and content moderation laws, anonymity has become an essential countermeasure for free expression. This study examines how journalists, activists, and citizens in oppressive regimes utilize anonymity not to spread falsehoods but to ensure the authenticity of their messages while evading political or corporate suppression. This angle remains underexplored in discussions on media credibility.

As the internet transitions toward decentralized platforms, where students' identity are often masked through blockchain technology, the study explores how this affects content credibility. Unlike traditional social media, where anonymity often leads to misinformation, media space offers unique governance structures (such as Decentralized Autonomous Organizations - DAOs) that can regulate credibility without requiring identity disclosure.

Ultimately, this study will give helpful insights for media professionals, policies-makers, and tech industry technologists, will serve as a foundation for future researchers and students who will study media credibility, anonymity, and ethics in the digital age.

Literature Review

Overview of Online Anonymity and Content Credibility

Online anonymity is when individuals communicate digitally, without revealing their true identity. Thus, online anonymity as the inability to establish who previously sent a message, and express identity as fluid in their explanations (Eklund et al., 2022). In the another view, it is a state in which individuals' acts, or communications are online and their identities cannot usually be established and are not easily inferred (Moyakine, 2016). Similarly, anonymity is seen as a means where unidentified individual's identity cannot be known (in some aspects) even after the individuals interact (Christie and Dill, 2016).

On the other hand, content credibility relates to the individual's perception of how reputable and reliable the information presented online is. Credibility is again a multi-faceted concept and includes accuracy, trustworthiness, and believability (Metzger and Flanagin, 2013). Also, credibility is the degree to which users believe the information is true, accurate, and presented without bias. Credibility can take many forms; communication is presumed credible when the message is seen without external influences (Tseng and Fogg, 1999).

Interrelation between Online Anonymity and Content Credibility

Exploring the connection between online anonymity and content credibility is another topic with complex relationships. While anonymity can increase the perceived credibility of content, at the same time it can decrease what people believe to be credible. Using anonymity to express honest opinions without fear or consequences can increase the authenticity of content (Eklund et al., 2022), but because there was no identifiable source, it can cause doubt or uncertainty and make individuals less trusting of that information (Pan, Hou, & Wang, 2023). For example, in Nigeria, anonymity has allowed for both anonymous blogs and social media accounts to not always provide credible information about societal issues, but at the same time could

also document and expose misinformation being propagated through anonymity.

Challenges and Opportunities of Online Anonymity

Online anonymity generates many challenges that undermine the credibility of content. One of the biggest issues is the ease at which misinformation can be disseminated. The lack of attribution to a name permits people to create unfounded material without accountability, signage, or mark of truth, which facilitates fake news (Shao et al., 2017) and the quick spread of it everywhere (including Nigeria)—a place where anonymous sources have been known to promulgate rumors that incite unnecessary violence and unrest.

Another issue is that anonymity creates room for cyberbullying, namely the online disinhibition effect (Suler, 2004) - where virtual disinhibition has been theorized to explain toxic behavior online (Nicole & Roberta, 2022). Anonymity allows some individuals to behave fully as themselves, or to unleash abusers or aggressors that they would otherwise not engage with in public or with an avatar of their real selves. Both of these factors contribute to the erosion of the reputation of credible online participants who may be unwilling to engage with their audience in direct discussion of online topics when others have behaved in socially unacceptable ways.

Anonymity allows for trust to erode within a user base. Anonymous sources can cause audiences to feel ambivalence, skepticism, and distrust of the content being presented (Eklund et al., 2022) — and when the dominant news environment is perpetually anonymous (176 media reported on the question of misery in July 2020 in Nigeria), who can know what to trust, anymore? In Nigeria, the omnipresence of anonymous news content has produced a general sense of doubt in almost any content online — so it is left to credible news content to become corroborated to build any traction.

Furthermore, anonymity allows individuals to promote extremist ideologies without revealing their identities, facilitating the spread of radical content (Moyakine, 2016). This can lead to the proliferation of biased or false information, further challenging content credibility. However, despite its challenges, online anonymity offers several opportunities that can enhance content credibility. Anonymity empowers individuals to expose wrongdoing without fear of retaliation. Whistleblowers can provide critical information that brings hidden issues to light, enhancing the credibility of content (Eklund et al., 2022).

For instance, in Nigeria, anonymous sources have been instrumental in uncovering corruption and human rights abuses. Anonymity also safeguards individuals' privacy, encouraging participation from those who might otherwise refrain due to concerns about personal exposure. This can lead to a more diverse range of perspectives in content, enriching the information presented (Christie & Dill, 2016).

Furthermore, anonymity fosters freedom of expression, allowing individuals to share opinions and information without fear of judgment or persecution. This can lead to the uncovering of stories that might otherwise remain untold, thereby enhancing the depth and credibility of content (Moyakine, 2016). Anonymity encourages open discourse by allowing individuals to discuss sensitive topics without revealing their identities. This can lead to more honest and comprehensive discussions, contributing to a more informed public and enhancing content credibility (Eklund et al., 2022).

Review of Empirical Studies

There are lots of empirical studies related to the study at hand; few studies were reviewed for the purpose of this paper. One of the relevant empirical studies was conducted by Young, et. al (2021). The study examines how computer-mediated communication influences

whistleblower credibility. The study investigates the effect of two-way anonymous communication on whistleblower credibility perceptions. The researchers conducted an online experiment to assess the simulated whistleblower communications by way of simulated communication scenarios as data collection instrument. The Investigators recruited for the study. Statistical comparison of credibility perceptions was used. The analysis suggests that the use of two-way anonymous communication had no substantial effect on perceived credibility. According to Young et al (2021), it was concluded that the whistleblower's credibility can be maintained through two-way anonymous channels. Nonetheless, the study urged two-way anonymous reporting systems should be instituted.

Again, Lina, Emma, and Magnus (2021) examine a non-binary perspective on online anonymity: systems bridging the macro and micro level. Internet anonymity is controversial. Some people think it's an important freedom that needs to be protected. Others are pushing for increased identification to protect groups at risk of exploitation. The discussion illustrates that we see online anonymity in stark terms; either, you are anonymous, or you are not. But while anonymity is a complex process, played out on different levels and defined by various actors. Although this has been shown in studies, a theoretical synthesis is lacking. This essay provides perspective on anonymity online by comparing two critical cases, online auctions and online gaming, Lina, Emma, and Magnus (2021) corroborate results from a 4-year interdisciplinary project with researchers from sociology, economics, and computer and system sciences. Lina, Emma, and Magnus (2021) argue that one should talk about anonymities in plural form, as online anonymity is not a state but a relational process Lina, Emma, and Magnus (2021) identify conceptual model, which unpacks online anonymity as interdependent macro structures – legal, commercial, and technological – and micro/meso facets – factual, social group, and physical – to be used in future research.

Similarly, Rains (2007) experimental study examined the effect of anonymity on source credibility and influence perceptions in CMC group communication: A test of two competing hypotheses. Rains explores how anonymity influences how we view source credibility and influence within groups. The research method adopted was experimental design with participants of computer-mediated group discussion. The theories of social identity and deindividuation were used. The method of data collection was surveys evaluating perceptions after discussion. The participants in controlled group settings were adopted. The data analysis consisted of a statistical analysis comparing anonymous and identified conditions. The study found that anonymity makes sources seem less credible and influential. Rains (2007) suggests the influence of anonymity should be kept in mind when concerning the design of group communication.

A similar study of Cheng et al. (2015) is related to this present study. Study examines antisocial tendencies in online communities. The study analyzed user behavior in online forums. User activity logs from online communities were used as a data collection instrument. Users from three large online communities were sampled. Statistical study of posting behaviour and community response the paper suggests requiring monitoring instruments to detect and rectify antisocial behaviour.

Shao et al. (2017) studied how social bots help to spread low-credibility contents during the US presidential election 2016. The study did not make any mention of the theoretical framework and studied Twitter data including 14 million messages that spread 400,000 articles. We collected data from tweets and user metadata in order to conduct statistical analyses that will uncover evidence of how social bots amplify low-credibility content. Researchers concluded that bots play a big role in spreading misinformation online. Accordingly, they proposed the adoption of measures to identify and restrict bot actions on social media to reduce misinformation (Shao et al., 2017).

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on Source Credibility Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory. In current era media environment, where anonymity and content credibility are dominant issues, Source Credibility Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory are useful theories to provide understanding on how individuals interact with media messages and ultimately determine the message's credibility.

First, the Source Credibility Theory, proposed by Carl I Hovland, in collaboration with Irving Janis and Harold Kelley in 1953, is one theory that is generative in this domain. Source Credibility Theory, developed from research at Yale University, during and after World War II, with a focus on persuasive communication, is built on the premise that persuasive messages are enhanced by the credibility of the party delivering them. In other words, individuals would be more easily persuaded by a message if the communicator was deemed credible (Asemah, et. al., 2017).

The theory rests on the principle that the credibility source of information influences its reception (Whittler 1991). Credibility consists of a number of several dimensions such as such as trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness. Trustworthiness refers to whether audiences perceive the media to be reliable. Expertise refers to whether audiences believe the media is capable of doing so. Online media platforms, especially those that aggregate user-generated content, pose a special challenge to traditional frameworks of credibility as they lack an institutional source and users might be anonymous. In a digital environment, we typically trust content based more on the authority or reputation of the source than the institution providing web elements.

In other words, the Media Credibility Theory would be useful in the context of Online Anonymity and Content Credibility. It is more

difficult to gauge the credibility of information in the age of the internet. When content is made available in the name of an anonymous or unknown source, the audience often struggles to separate the facts from the opinions and misinformation. This theory helps us understand how people might use factors like the number of followers and the site's reputation to decide whom to believe. This also shows that people often only trust things they can see in real life or things they can recognize. As a matter of fact, the confluence of media credibility, fake news, misinformation and distorted reports is in fact one of the most challenging issues in contemporary society.

Again, another suitable theory for this paper is the Uses and Gratifications Theory which was initially proposed by *Elihu Katz* and his colleagues in the 1970s (Asemah, et. al., 2017). Uses and gratifications theory originates as a response of uses theory in the context of behaviorist perspective regarding media consumption. According to this theory, media is not something that people 'use' but they 'choose'. Thus, the user actively chooses a media event followed by a choice on their use of media. According to this theory, media consumers are not passive recipients; they search for media content that suits their emotional, cognitive or social needs.

For instance, people might get anonymous on online media for various reasons. One reason could be to express themselves freely without judgement. Users can customize the consumption of media platforms such as forums, social media, blogs, and many more to achieve their individual objectives. The Uses and Gratifications Theory explains how people use different social media networks to gather information about their safety and security. As people go about the Internet in anonymous environments, they do not consume media for information-seeking purposes only. At the same time, they also address a variety of social and psychological desires such as self-affirmation, feeling respected by the community and affiliation with the like-minded group, and so on. It

strengthens the experience because people are free to act without the threat of judgement. The same thing that makes social media what it is, the “anonymity” of the people involved, complicates the credibility of what you see.

This theory shows why people might accept content and share it without checking how legitimate it is. People often care more about being satisfied or entertained than the accuracy of media content. For instance, some may see the 2022 Pride Parade as “woke.” They may prefer not to see the many unreleased videos and images that present an alternative view. In this way, they may start believing and sharing material from anonymous people if, for instance, it satisfies some need of theirs, despite its anonymous nature.

Thus, the Media Credibility Theory and the Uses and Gratifications Theory are required for the understanding of online anonymity and content credibility. Trust and expertise influence the perception of content while the motivations for media consumption by users influence interactivity with anonymous content on the web. As more and more news is delivered anonymously, conspiracy theories are doing what they do best – acting as a lens through which we can better understand the content. Researchers will assess how anonymity and individual motivations impact perceptions of credibility by utilizing the above theories.

Methodology

Research design/Method: A cross-sectional survey research method (quantitative research design) was adopted to enable researcher draw inference on variables under study. Lauren (2022) wrote that a cross-sectional study is a type of research method in which the researcher collects data from respondents at a single point in time.

The population of the study is students of Mass Communication Department, Osun State Polytechnic, Iree. In accordance with the records available at the HOD's office, the figure stood at 2200 as at 2024/2025 session. The choose of students of Mass Communication Department, Osun State Polytechnic, Iree is due to it proximity and effective access to the students' data. Thus, 338 respondents were selected. Pritha (2020) wrote that a sample size is a part of the population chosen for a survey or experiment through appropriate sampling technique. Sample size means a group of subjects that are selected from the general population and is considered a representative of the real population for that specific study. To arrive at the sample size for this study, Taro Yamane formula was used as explain below.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n = Sample size

N = Population of the study

e = Tolerable error (5%)

$$n = \frac{2200}{1 + \frac{2200(0.05)^2}{1}} \text{ i.e } 0.05 \times 0.05 = 0.0025$$

$$n = \frac{2200}{1 + \frac{2200(0.0025)}{1}} \text{ i.e } 2200 \times 0.0025 = 5.5$$

$$n = \frac{2200}{1 + 5.5} \text{ i.e } 1 + 5.5 = 6.5$$

$$n = \frac{2200}{6.5} \text{ i.e } 2200 \div 6.5 = 338$$

$$n = \frac{2200}{6.5}$$

$$\text{ i.e } 2200 \div 6.5 = 338$$

$$n = \mathbf{338}$$

Earlier, the quota sampling technique was first used to ensure fair distribution of the questionnaires across the academic levels which are 84 copies per each level. Then, a simple random sampling technique was used at each level to ensure that every student has equal chance of being selected. Questionnaire was used to collect data from the sample size of this study. Questionnaire was structured and designed in a way

that afforded the respondents to answer the research questions appropriately. This study adopted a quantitative data analysis in analyzing and presenting the data gathered. Therefore, descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) was used and the data were presented with the aid of tables, equally, inferential statistics Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient was used.

Data Presentation, Results and Findings

This section dwells on the analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaire, out of which 317 were correctly filled which is 93.8%. The analysis thus based on 317 copies of questionnaire that were correctly filled and retrieved. However, frequency and percentage method and Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient are used while the data are presented with the aid of tables.

Data analysis

Table 1: This measures the extent to which anonymity influences trust in online content among participants

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	15	4.73%
Agree	20	6.31%
Neutral	50	15.77%
Disagree	110	34.70%
Strongly Disagree	122	38.49%
Total Responses	317	100%

Source: Field Survey 2025

Analysis: The table reveals that the majority of the respondents (73.19%) disagrees or strongly disagrees that the increased anonymity of the online content increases their trust. Only a low percentage

(11.04%) agrees while 15.77% are neutral, signaling general support for anonymous credibility.

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Neutral	50	15.77%
Disagree	110	34.70%
Strongly Disagree	122	38.49%
Total Responses	317	100%

Table 2: Respondents indicated varying levels of agreement on the challenge of verifying the accuracy of anonymous content

Strongly Agree	112	35.33
Agree	120	37.85
Neutral	45	14.20
Disagree	22	6.94
Strongly Disagree	18	5.68

Source: Field Survey 2025

Analysis: Table 2 reveals that a significant majority (73.18%) of respondents agreed that verifying anonymous content is challenging. Only 12.62% disagreed, while 14.20% remained neutral. This suggests that most individuals find it difficult to assess the credibility of information lacking author attribution, highlighting concerns over trust and reliability in anonymous sources.

Table 3: Respondents' views indicate that online anonymity encourages freedom of expression

Strongly Agree	157	49.53
Agree	120	37.85
Neutral	25	7.89
Disagree	10	3.15
Strongly Disagree	5	1.58

Source: Field Survey 2025

Analysis: Table 3 reveals that 87.38% of respondents agree that online anonymity promotes freedom of expression. A minimal 4.73% disagree, while 7.89% remain neutral, indicating strong support for anonymity as a means of open and uninhibited self-expression online.

Table 4: Agreement level on the extent to which respondents believe anonymous content creators are more likely to share unbiased opinions

Strongly Agree	10	3.15
Agree	12	3.79
Neutral	35	11.04
Disagree	115	36.28
Strongly Disagree	145	45.74

Source: Field Survey 2025

Analysis: A combined 82.02% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree, suggesting a strong perception that anonymity promotes objectivity. Only 6.94% agree, while 11.04% remain neutral.

Table 5: Agreement level on whether lack of accountability is a major issue with anonymous online content

Strongly Agree	110	34.70
Agree	100	31.55
Neutral	55	17.35
Disagree	30	9.46
Strongly Disagree	22	6.94

Source: Field Survey 2025

Analysis: Table 5 shows that 66.25% of respondents (34.7% strongly agree, 31.55% agree) consider lack of accountability a significant problem in anonymous online content. Only 16.4% disagree, while 17.35% remain neutral, indicating broad concern over accountability in anonymous digital communication.

Table 6: Responses on whether respondents believe anonymous content is less credible than content with a known author

Strongly Agree	87	27.44
Agree	80	25.24
Neutral	80	25.24
Disagree	40	12.62
Strongly Disagree	30	9.46

Source: Field Survey 2025

Analysis: The table reveals that 52.68% of respondents believe anonymous content is less credible than content with a known author, while 25.24% are neutral. Only 22.08% disagree, suggesting a majority view that author identification enhances content credibility.

Discussion of Findings

The findings reveal a complex but insightful perception of anonymity in online content. Table 1 shows that most respondents (73.19%) do not trust content more simply because it is anonymous, highlighting skepticism toward anonymous sources. This skepticism is reinforced in Table 2, where 73.18% agree that verifying anonymous content is difficult, indicating concerns about authenticity and reliability. Despite these concerns, Table 3 shows overwhelming support (87.38%) for anonymity as a promoter of freedom of expression, suggesting that while anonymity can compromise trust, it enables honest discourse. However, as shown in Table 4, 82.02% disagree that anonymous content is more unbiased, challenging the notion that anonymity eliminates personal or political agendas. Table 5 emphasizes that lack of accountability is a major issue, with 66.25% of respondents in agreement. Lastly, Table 6 reveals that 52.68% view anonymous content as less credible than authored content. Similarly, the Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient confirmed those results, indicating strong negative correlation ($r_s = -0.9788$), meaning that as anonymity increased, the perceived credibility of online content steadily decreased in alignment with respondent's normative lens of anonymity.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study explored the connection between online anonymity and perceived credibility of user-generated content. The results showed that although most of the participants often encountered anonymous content, a lot of them complained of its credibility. A few participants expressed trusting anonymous content only when it fit along with past verified information. The Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient results further confirmed these findings; specifically, it showed a strong negative correlation ($r_s = -0.9788$) between online anonymity and perceived credibility. This implies higher anonymity leads to the users perceiving it to be less credible. The fact that the null hypothesis was

rejected, indicates that there is a significant negative relationship between online anonymity and credibility perception.

Nevertheless, the study also recognizes opportunities associated with anonymity, including the capacity for more freedom of expression (87.38% agree) as well as accountability for whistleblowers and participation by marginalized voices. These observations correlate with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which argues that users purposely select anonymity to achieve their expressive, informational, and social need states. The study also aligned with the Source Credibility Theory, which views users' skepticism of anonymous content as a function of the absence of identifiable and accountable sources. In short, the theory suggests that trustworthiness and expertise are crucial dimensions of credibility — dimensions that suffer due to the use of anonymity.

So, while the challenges of anonymity online include misinformation, unverifiable sources, and lack of accountability, the anonymity offers meaningful opportunities when employed appropriately. Moreover, the study provides unique empirical and theoretical contributions to the wider conversation about ethics associated with digital communication as a whole especially in Nigerian academic and youth-led virtual spaces and communities. The study therefore, recommends the following in order to improve the paper.

1. **Implement Verified Anonymity Features:** Platforms should consider integrating systems that allow users to post anonymously while maintaining backend verification. This can help balance privacy with accountability, enhancing trust in anonymous content.
2. **Promote Digital Literacy Campaigns:** Educate users especially students on how to critically evaluate anonymous content by assessing writing style, cross-referencing sources, and identifying credible indicators.

3. **Encourage Source Attribution:** Platforms should incentivize users to include citations or links to credible sources when sharing content, even when posting anonymously, to improve perceived reliability.

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