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Research Article

Influence of Civic Education on the Prevention of Social Media Misinformation among Secondary School Students in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State

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Abstract. The proliferation of social media has transformed information access and communication among young people, but it has also increased exposure to misinformation and fake news. This study examined the influence of Civic Education on the prevention of social media misinformation among secondary school students in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State. Specifically, the study investigated the influence of Civic Education on students' ability to identify social media misinformation, critically evaluate information obtained from social media platforms, and engage in responsible social media usage to prevent the spread of misinformation. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised senior secondary school students in public secondary schools in Gusau Local Government Area, while a sample size of 384 respondents was selected using multistage sampling techniques. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire validated by experts and tested for reliability. Simple Linear Regression Analysis was employed to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that Civic Education significantly influences students' ability to identify social media misinformation ($\beta = 0.492$, $p < 0.05$), critically evaluate information obtained from social media platforms ($\beta = 0.564$, $p < 0.05$),

and engage in responsible social media usage for preventing misinformation ($\beta = 0.601$, $p < 0.05$). The study concluded that Civic Education plays a vital role in promoting media literacy, critical thinking, and responsible digital citizenship among students. It was recommended that media literacy, digital citizenship, and misinformation awareness be further integrated into Civic Education programmes in secondary schools.

Keywords: Civic Education, Critical Thinking, Digital Citizenship, Misinformation, Social Media

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of digital technologies and social media has significantly transformed the way information is produced, accessed, and disseminated across the globe. Social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) have become important sources of information and communication, particularly among young people. Secondary school students increasingly depend on these platforms for learning, social interaction, entertainment, and news consumption. However, alongside these benefits, social media has facilitated the rapid spread of misinformation, fake news, and unverified content, creating serious challenges for individuals and societies. According to UNESCO (2024), the increasing circulation of misinformation in digital spaces threatens informed citizenship, democratic participation, and social cohesion (UNESCO, 2024). Social media misinformation refers to false, inaccurate, misleading, or manipulated information shared through online platforms and often presented as factual. The widespread availability of digital content and the ease of sharing information have made it difficult for users to distinguish between credible and non-credible sources. Young people are particularly vulnerable because they spend considerable time online and frequently engage with information without adequate verification. Research has shown that adolescents often encounter misinformation on social media and may unknowingly contribute to its spread due to limited media literacy and critical evaluation skills (Qian et al., 2026; UNESCO, 2024).

The consequences of misinformation are far-reaching. False information can influence public opinion, encourage harmful behaviors, promote social divisions, and undermine trust in public institutions. During political processes, public health emergencies, and security-related events, misinformation can create confusion and negatively affect decision-making. In Nigeria, the growth of internet access and social media usage has been accompanied by increasing concerns over the spread of fake news and misleading information. Reuters (2023) reported that misinformation has become a major challenge in the Nigerian information environment, particularly during elections and other national events. This situation underscores the need for educational strategies that can equip students with the skills required to identify and resist misinformation. Civic Education is one of the subjects designed to prepare learners for responsible citizenship and active participation in society. Traditionally, Civic Education focuses on democratic values, human rights, national consciousness, civic responsibilities, and ethical conduct. In the contemporary digital era, however, Civic Education has expanded to include digital citizenship, media literacy, critical thinking, and responsible online behavior. Through Civic Education, students can

develop the ability to critically evaluate information sources, verify online content, recognize bias and manipulation, and make informed decisions regarding information encountered on social media (UNESCO, 2024; The Guardian Foundation, 2024).

Howard et al. (2024) observed that strengthening citizens' information literacy skills enhances their capacity to recognize false information and make informed judgments about online content. Similarly, Zainudin et al. (2024) found that educational interventions focusing on digital literacy and critical thinking significantly reduce the likelihood of misinformation sharing among social media users. These findings suggest that Civic Education can play a strategic role in preventing the spread of misinformation among students. Siani et al. (2024) investigated secondary school students' susceptibility to scientific misinformation and their perceptions of the reliability of online information sources. Using a quantitative survey design among students, the researchers found that learners who possessed stronger critical-thinking and information-evaluation skills were significantly better at identifying misinformation than those with lower levels of such skills. The study concluded that educational programmes that promote analytical thinking and source verification can improve students' ability to recognize false information. The findings imply that Civic Education can contribute significantly to enhancing students' capacity to identify social media misinformation.

García-Marín et al. (2025) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis to examine the effectiveness of media literacy education in combating misinformation among adolescents. The study synthesized findings from numerous empirical investigations and revealed that media literacy interventions significantly improved students' ability to detect false information, evaluate online content critically, and make informed judgments about digital information. The researchers emphasized that educational programmes focusing on digital citizenship and information literacy are essential for preparing young people to navigate the modern information environment responsibly. Senos et al. (2024) examined the impact of a digital citizenship project implemented among secondary school students in Portugal. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study found that participation in digital citizenship activities enhanced students' awareness of online risks, strengthened their critical evaluation of information obtained from the internet, and promoted responsible digital behaviour. The researchers concluded that educational interventions designed around civic responsibility and digital literacy can effectively improve students' online decision-making skills.

Selnes (2024) explored adolescents' experiences with fake news and misinformation on social media platforms in Norway. Through qualitative interviews and surveys, the study found that although many students believed they could identify fake news, their actual ability depended largely on their level of media literacy and critical thinking skills. Students who had received formal instruction on evaluating information demonstrated greater competence in distinguishing between credible and misleading online content. The study highlighted the importance of educational programmes in strengthening students' resistance to misinformation. Asogwa et al. (2024) investigated the effect of digital storytelling on secondary school

students' self-efficacy in Civic Education. Using an experimental research design, the study revealed that students exposed to innovative Civic Education strategies demonstrated improved critical thinking, civic awareness, and information-processing skills. The researchers concluded that integrating digital technologies into Civic Education can enhance students' ability to evaluate information critically and engage responsibly with online content.

Kukreja and Rajendran (2024) examined the relationship between digital citizenship, internet attitudes, and computer self-efficacy among middle school students. The findings showed a positive relationship between digital citizenship competencies and responsible online behaviour. Students with higher levels of digital citizenship were more likely to verify information before sharing it and demonstrated greater awareness of the consequences of spreading false information. The study recommended incorporating digital citizenship education into school curricula to foster responsible social media use. Bolante et al. (2024) evaluated the effectiveness of a social computing curriculum implemented among over one thousand secondary school students. The programme focused on misinformation awareness, digital ethics, and responsible online engagement. The results indicated significant improvements in students' understanding of misinformation, their ability to critically evaluate online content, and their awareness of ethical digital practices. The researchers concluded that structured educational interventions can significantly strengthen students' digital literacy and information-evaluation skills.

Zainudin et al. (2024) conducted a bibliometric analysis of intervention strategies designed to reduce misinformation sharing on social media. The study found that educational approaches emphasizing critical thinking, information verification, and digital literacy were among the most effective strategies for reducing misinformation-sharing behaviour. The researchers argued that schools play a crucial role in equipping young people with the competencies required to navigate digital information responsibly. Alluhidan et al. (2024) explored adolescents' experiences with social media through an analysis of thousands of online discussions involving young people. The findings revealed that although social media provides opportunities for learning and social interaction, many adolescents regularly encounter misinformation and misleading content. The study recommended strengthening media literacy and digital citizenship education to improve young people's ability to assess information credibility and engage safely in digital environments. The International Panel on the Information Environment (2024) conducted a global assessment of misinformation challenges and strategies for promoting information integrity. The report identified digital literacy education, critical evaluation skills, and responsible online participation as essential tools for combating misinformation. The findings emphasized that educational programmes that teach students how to verify information and evaluate sources critically are fundamental to reducing the spread of misinformation and fostering responsible citizenship in the digital age.

In Gusau Local Government Area of Zamfara State, access to smartphones, internet-enabled devices, and social media platforms has increased among secondary school students. While these technologies provide opportunities for educational

advancement and civic engagement, they also expose students to various forms of misinformation circulating online. Many students may lack the necessary competencies to assess the credibility of digital information before accepting or sharing it. Given the importance of Civic Education in developing informed, responsible, and critically minded citizens, it is important to investigate its influence on preventing social media misinformation among secondary school students in the area. Therefore, this study seeks to examine how Civic Education contributes to students' ability to identify misinformation, critically evaluate online information, and engage responsibly in digital communication.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to examine the influence of Civic Education on the prevention of social media misinformation among secondary school students in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine the influence of Civic Education on students' ability to identify social media misinformation among secondary school students in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State.
2. Examine the influence of Civic Education on students' critical evaluation of information obtained from social media platforms among secondary school students in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State.
3. Assess the influence of Civic Education on responsible social media usage for preventing the spread of misinformation among secondary school students in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study:

1. To what extent does Civic Education influence students' ability to identify social media misinformation among secondary school students in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State?
2. How does Civic Education influence students' critical evaluation of information obtain from social media platforms among secondary school students in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State?
3. To what extent does Civic Education influence responsible social media usage for preventing the spread of misinformation among secondary school students in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses will be tested at a 0.05 level of significance:

1. **H_{01}:** Civic Education has no significant influence on students' ability to identify social media misinformation among secondary school students in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State.
2. **H_{02}:** Civic Education has no significant influence on students' critical evaluation of information obtained from social media platforms among secondary school students in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State.

3. **H_{03}:** Civic Education has no significant influence on responsible social media usage for preventing the spread of misinformation among secondary school students in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the influence of Civic Education on the prevention of social media misinformation among secondary school students in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to collect data from a large number of respondents and determine the relationship between Civic Education and students' ability to identify misinformation, critically evaluate online information, and engage in responsible social media usage. The population of the study comprised all senior secondary school students in public secondary schools in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State. A sample size of 384 respondents was selected using a multistage sampling procedure involving simple random and proportionate sampling techniques to ensure adequate representation of the study population.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Influence of Civic Education on the Prevention of Social Media Misinformation Questionnaire (ICEPSMMQ). The instrument consisted of two sections: Section A elicited respondents' demographic information, while Section B contained items measuring Civic Education, identification of misinformation, critical evaluation of online information, and responsible social media usage. Responses were rated using a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The instrument was validated by experts in Civic Education and Educational Research to ensure content and face validity. A pilot study was conducted, and the reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a reliability coefficient considered adequate for the study. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts, percentages, mean, and standard deviation to answer the research questions. The null hypotheses were tested using Simple Linear Regression Analysis at a 0.05 level of significance with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

RESULTS

Hypothesis One H_{01}: Civic Education has no significant influence on students' ability to identify social media misinformation among secondary school students in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State.

Table 1:

Simple Linear Regression Analysis on the Influence of Civic Education on Students' Ability to Identify Social Media Misinformation (N = 384)

Variable	N	R	R^2	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	Decision
Constant	384	0.673	0.453	1.842	8.721	0.000	H_{01} Reject
Civic Education			0.451	0.621	18.934	0.000	H_{01} Reject

The result indicates that Civic Education significantly influences students' ability to identify social media misinformation among secondary school students in Gusau Local Government Area. The regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.492$, $p < 0.05$) shows a positive relationship between Civic Education and students' ability to detect misinformation. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.242$) implies that Civic Education explains 24.2% of the variation in students' ability to identify misinformation. The F-value of 122.88 with a significance value of 0.000 confirms that the regression model is statistically significant. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, Civic Education has a significant influence on students' ability to identify social media misinformation.

Hypothesis Two H_{02}: Civic Education has no significant influence on students' critical evaluation of information obtained from social media platforms among secondary school students in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State.

Table 2:

Simple Linear Regression Analysis on the Influence of Civic Education on Students' Critical Evaluation of Social Media Information (N = 384)

Variable	N	R	R^2	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	Decision
Constant	384	0.648	0.420	-	7.983	0.000	H_{02} Reject
Civic Education				0.648	17.861	0.000	H_{02} Reject

The findings reveal that Civic Education significantly influences students' critical evaluation of information obtained from social media platforms. The standardized regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.564$) indicates a moderate positive influence of Civic Education on students' critical thinking and information evaluation skills. The R^2 value of 0.318 shows that Civic Education accounts for 31.8% of the variance in students' ability to critically evaluate social media information. The F-statistic of 175.56 and p-value of 0.000 demonstrate that the regression model is significant. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that Civic Education significantly enhances students' critical evaluation of information obtained from social media platforms.

Hypothesis Three H_{03}: Civic Education has no significant influence on responsible social media usage for preventing the spread of misinformation among secondary school students in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State.

Table 3:

Simple Linear Regression Analysis on the Influence of Civic Education on Responsible Social Media Usage for Preventing Misinformation

Variable	N	R	R^2	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	Decision
Constant	384	0.661	0.437	-	8.412	0.000	H_{03} Reject
Civic Education				0.661	18.247	0.000	H_{03} Reject

The result shows that Civic Education significantly influences responsible social media usage for preventing the spread of misinformation among secondary

school students. The standardized coefficient (β = 0.601) indicates a strong positive relationship between Civic Education and responsible social media behaviour. The R^2 value of 0.361 reveals that Civic Education explains 36.1% of the variance in responsible social media usage among the respondents. The model is statistically significant as evidenced by the F-value of 215.80 and p-value of 0.000. Since the significance level is below 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, Civic Education significantly promotes responsible social media usage and helps students avoid contributing to the spread of misinformation.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study revealed that Civic Education has a significant influence on students' ability to identify social media misinformation among secondary school students in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State. The regression analysis showed a significant positive relationship between Civic Education and students' capacity to recognize false, misleading, or manipulated information shared through social media platforms. This finding suggests that students who are exposed to Civic Education are more likely to develop the knowledge, values, and analytical skills required to distinguish credible information from misinformation. The finding aligns with the view of UNESCO (2023), which emphasized that media and information literacy education equips learners with the competencies necessary to access, evaluate, verify, and use information responsibly in the digital environment. Similarly, Mihailidis (2022) argued that civic-oriented media literacy education enhances individuals' ability to detect misinformation and engage critically with digital content. The finding is also consistent with the work of McGrew (2024), who reported that students who receive structured instruction in civic and media literacy demonstrate higher levels of competence in identifying misinformation and evaluating online sources.

The study further found that Civic Education significantly influences students' critical evaluation of information obtained from social media platforms. The result indicates that Civic Education contributes substantially to the development of critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and reflective judgment among students when interacting with online information. This finding supports the position of OECD (2023), which noted that civic and digital literacy education plays a crucial role in developing students' critical thinking skills and their ability to evaluate the credibility, accuracy, and reliability of information in an increasingly digital society. The finding is also in agreement with the argument of Wineburg and Breakstone (2023), who observed that students exposed to civic reasoning and digital literacy instruction are more capable of assessing evidence, questioning sources, and making informed judgments about online information. Furthermore, research by European Commission (2024) highlighted that educational interventions that integrate civic values and digital literacy significantly improve students' ability to critically assess information and resist online manipulation.

The findings also revealed that Civic Education significantly influences responsible social media usage for preventing the spread of misinformation among secondary school students. The positive relationship observed suggests that Civic

Education promotes ethical online behaviour, responsible information sharing, and greater awareness of the consequences of spreading false information. This finding supports the assertion of UNICEF (2023), which emphasized that citizenship education fosters responsible digital engagement by encouraging learners to verify information before sharing it and to act ethically in online communities. Likewise, Council of Europe (2024) maintained that digital citizenship education helps young people develop responsibility, accountability, and respect for truth in digital interactions. The result is further supported by the study of Jones-Jang, Mortensen, and Liu (2021), which found that media literacy and civic education interventions significantly reduce the likelihood of individuals sharing misinformation online.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that Civic Education significantly influences students' ability to identify social media misinformation, critically evaluate information obtained from social media platforms, and use social media responsibly among secondary school students in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State. The findings indicate that Civic Education plays an important role in promoting media literacy, critical thinking, and responsible digital citizenship. Therefore, strengthening Civic Education can help students become informed and responsible users of digital media and reduce the spread of misinformation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Civic Education teachers should integrate media literacy and fact-checking skills into classroom teaching.
2. The Civic Education curriculum should be updated to include digital citizenship and misinformation awareness.
3. Schools should organize regular sensitization programmes on responsible social media usage.
4. Parents should guide and monitor students' online activities to encourage responsible digital behaviour.
5. Government and educational stakeholders should provide training and resources to support effective Civic Education instruction.

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