



Reconstructing Credibility: How Digital Storytelling Shapes Public Trust in News Media

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Abstract

This study interrogates the paradoxical dialectic between digital storytelling and the reconstruction of public trust in news media against the backdrop of institutional credibility erosion. It argues that the industry's turn towards immersive, multimodal storytelling is not a panacea but rather a paradoxical venture that may simultaneously enhance and undermine perceived credibility. A qualitative comparative case study of divergent narratives surrounding the marital crisis between Senator Ned Nwoko and actress Regina Daniels as played out on TikTok and in traditional Nigerian newspapers provides data for this analysis. Using Critical Discourse Analysis, a multimodal framework, and theory of credibility, findings indicate an epistemological divide regarding truth construction between these platforms. Credibility on TikTok derives from affective authenticity and emotional resonance through raw first-person storytelling validated by community participation creating an epistemology of emotion whereas traditional journalism derives its credibility from institutional authority, procedural rigor, and sourced reporting sustaining an epistemology of institution. This analysis shows how the very aspects that make digital storytelling appear trustworthy to a Gen Z audience-personalization, emotionality, interactivity-are exactly those elements which fundamentally contradict the traditional standards of impartiality and verification. The paper concludes that today's media trust crisis is not just about getting facts right but represents a more profound conflict between two rival systems for determining credibility-one heavily mediated by audience positioning, platform loyalties, and digital literacy.

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Introduction

Journalism is undergoing a major crisis and shift. In the past, established news sources had public influence, acting as the main filters and storytellers of current events, as scholars like Ghose and Gupta (2023) have noted. This influence has weakened. We now exist in a media environment where trust is low, as described by Blach-Ørsten and Burkal (2014) ^[4], and the media's reliability as a political entity is always in question (Blach-Ørsten, Mark, and Rasmus Burkal., 2014) ^[4]. This decline coincides with a major shift in information consumption. The rise of online and social platforms has changed traditional news distribution methods, leading to a fragmented and rapid information environment. In this environment, news competes with various other content. Lewis and Molyneux (2018) ^[12] observed that these platforms have changed the relationships among journalists, their work, and their audiences-relationships that once supported trust (Lewis, Seth C., and Logan Molyneux., 2018) ^[12]. As Wilding *et al.* (2018) ^[17] argue, these platforms focus on engagement and automated content, which can hurt journalistic values like truth and context, thus changing how news is seen as believable (Wilding, 2018) ^[17]. This crisis affects public confidence and how news is consumed, which is the main idea of this paper.

The issue of a decline in faith in conventional news sources has become common and is fed by accusations of bias, disinformation, and irrelevance. Research from countries like Malaysia and Indonesia shows that the rise of new media complicates societal trust and open communication. While people still want news, their ways of consumption have changed as they use online and social platforms for information because of their speed and access, which introduces complications in judging the credibility of the content. Journalism is now in a strange place: it has a wide reach but faces more doubt. Kuswati, Pratomo, and Kusmayadi (2025) ^[11] noted that the main issue is keeping public trust in the digital age. To deal with this tough situation, the news industry has started using digital storytelling (Kuswati, 2025) ^[11]. Journalists now create stories that are interactive, involving, and use many formats, moving from simple text or broadcasts to something more complex. Chemodurova (2022, p. 110) ^[6] asserts that modern storytelling depends on meaning being created through the integration of text, visuals, audio, and interaction (Chemodurova, 2022) ^[6]. For example, news publications such as The New York Times use interactive data visualizations, Spotify and NPR create story podcasts, and YouTube and TikTok host short-form news videos. According to Balaman (2018) ^[3], this is an evolving narrative form that requires new forms of competencies from the point of view of both the producer and the consumer (Balaman, 2018) ^[3]. The goal is to grab the attention of easily distracted online viewers and tell stories in a way that is easier to understand, more memorable, and has more impact. Santamaría Urbieto and Alcalde Peñalver (2021) ^[16] state that these new types of communication require new ways of creating and judging content, changing traditional journalism (Santamaría Urbieto, Alisa, and Elena Alcalde Peñalver., 2021) ^[16]. Anderson and Macleroy (2016) and Churchill *et al.* (2008) ^[7] discuss how this also affects learning and culture. The industry believes that using these techniques can break through the online noise, reconnect with distant audiences, and show their honesty in new ways (Anderson, Jim, and Julian McHeroy., 2016; Churchill, 2008) ^[1, 7]. For example, using audio clips and links to sources shows transparency, letting audiences see the proof for themselves, which Cohen and Mihailidis (2013) ^[8] call curation which is important in understanding digital information (Cohen, Michael, and Paul Mihailidis., 2013) ^[8]. However, using digital storytelling won't easily fix the trust problem in the industry. The very things that make these formats appealing, like emotional content, interaction, and subjectivity, can affect how believable they seem. This creates a problem for journalism. A personal podcast can build connection, like the ones Balaman (2018) ^[3] looked at, but it might also seem less fair, which is important for journalism, as measured by Calvo-Porrá, Martínez-Fernández, and Juanatey-Boga (2014) ^[5]. Interactive data might allow the user to look at information, promoting control and transparency, but it could also seem like the journalist isn't doing their job of choosing the most important facts, which could cause the user to misunderstand things (Balaman, 2018; Calvo-Porrá, Cristina, Verónica Martínez-Fernández, and Óscar Juanatey-Boga., 2014) ^[5, 3]. This is like what Mehrabi, Hassan, and Ali (2009) ^[13] said about the credibility issues of online news compared to TV, where the user's control changes how they see the news. While the heart of much digital storytelling is impactful for engagement, the emotional component can contrast discourse

(Mehrabi, D., S. Hassan, and S. Ali., 2009) ^[13]. Priadi and Thariq (2023) ^[15] describe how rebuilding clear communication in digital spaces is difficult and can be disrupted by emotional content (Priadi, Rizki, and Achmad Thariq., 2023) ^[15]. Bada's (2025) ^[2] work on older adults points out the problems of information disorder online, suggesting that the same digital storytelling that moves beyond newspapers may cause differences in media knowledge, leaving some people open to manipulation or confusion (Bada, 2025) ^[2]. So, while digital storytelling can rebuild trust through engagement and transparency, it can also create bias, emotional manipulation, and too much information. It is this detailed issue of storytelling and trust, and its impacts on the perceptions of authenticity, authority, engagement, and impartiality, that this paper will focus on. The following sections will look at this problem closely, examining how digital storytelling shapes and is shaped by changes in public trust.

Statement of the Problem

Journalism responds to a deep public confidence crisis by increasingly embracing immersive digital storytelling as a quest for relevance and trust. This embrace is often based on an assumption that remains largely untested: namely, that such narrative innovations will restore trust in the same way across whole segments of the population, without considering significant differences in audience positioning such as digital literacy, social identity, and pre-existing platform allegiances.

The industry risks using sophisticated tools that could accidentally strengthen the very inequalities of trust it seeks to resolve. Existing literature has documented general institutional trust erosion and described digital storytelling features but does not address a key specific gap: how these dynamics unfold in actual high-stakes public events where traditional versus digital storytelling conflict is most evident. An example here would be the recent marital crisis involving Senator Ned Nwoko and actress Regina Daniels. This event played out over social media and traditional news cycles, creating two parallel, starkly divergent public narratives. No scholarly work has yet systematically analyzed this case as an instance of credibility being constructed, contested, and fragmented across different media ecosystems. This gap is essential because the Nwoko-Daniels narrative offers an ideal natural experiment. It enables a direct comparison of how identical core events are framed by unmediated first-person digital storytelling on platforms like TikTok versus institutional source-driven reporting in traditional newspapers. Without such specific case analysis, understanding of the trust crisis remains at an abstract level. This study fills that precise void by using the Nwoko-Daniels case to push beyond the general question of whether digital storytelling builds trust into asking for whom, through which specific narrative mechanisms, and in direct contrast to traditional reporting where credibility gets negotiated in today's media sector.

Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this research are:

1. To critically investigate the complex relationship between specific techniques of digital storytelling (multimedia integration, narrative personalization, interactive data) and key dimensions of perceived credibility (trustworthiness, accuracy, bias).

2. To analyze how this relationship is shaped and mediated by critical factors of audience positioning, including digital literacy and social identity.
3. To deconstruct broad generalizations about digital storytelling's impact by providing a nuanced analysis of how these techniques variably reinforce or undermine credibility for different segments of the public.
4. To synthesize these findings into practical and ethical guidelines that can help journalists and news organizations design digital stories that are both engaging and inclusively credible.

Literature Review

The Erosion of Trust: From Institutional Authority to Digital Skepticism

The foundational crisis facing contemporary journalism is a profound erosion of public trust. Though not new, this development has accelerated and metamorphosed into an existential challenge in the digital age for news organizations. Indeed, scholarly work has approached this erosion from a number of angles: institutional, measurable, and contemporary dimensions. At base, the decline in media trust entails a deep-seated interconnection with the media's role as political institution. Blach-Ørsten and Burkal (2014)^[4] argue that media credibility cannot be comprehended in a vacuum; it intrinsically correlates with the perception the public holds of the media's institutional function (Blach-Ørsten, Mark, and Rasmus Burkal., 2014)^[4]. They show that as the media becomes increasingly embedded in political conflicts, perceived as an actor with its own interests, credibility decreases. This understanding positions trust not simply as a matter of accurate reporting but as a reflection of the health of the political-media nexus. When the institution itself is viewed with suspicion, its individual outputs are automatically subjected to greater skepticism. Building on this institutional framing of the challenge, the measurement of media credibility assumes central importance. Indeed, Hanimann *et al.* (2023)^[9] provide an invaluable service to the field with their systematic review of credibility measures in media research from 1951 to 2018 (Hanimann, 2023)^[9]. What they detail is a prevailing lack of consensus and standardization in how credibility is operationalized. In particular, they identify a historical reliance on simplistic, one-dimensional scales that too often fail to capture the complex and multifaceted nature of trust. Trust encompasses multiple dimensions, such as believability, accuracy, depth, and fairness. The "argument" implicit in their review is that the field's inability to settle on robust, consistent measurement tools has itself hindered a precise understanding of the trust erosion phenomenon. If scholars cannot reliably measure credibility, diagnosing its decline and evaluating potential solutions becomes an inherently precarious endeavor. This critique is methodologically vital because it suggests that the perceived erosion of trust is partly a measurement problem, further complicated by the evolving ways in which audiences conceptualize and grant trust. The digital age has exponentially complicated this field. While Blach-Ørsten and Burkal (2014)^[4] and Hanimann *et al.* (2023)^[9] provide the theoretical and methodological foundations, Kuswati, Kusmayadi, and Pratomo (2025)^[11] bring the discussion into the contemporary context. They argue that maintaining public trust and reputation now requires navigating a fundamentally new set of challenges driven by digital platforms (Blach-Ørsten, Mark, and Rasmus

Burkal., 2014; Hanimann, 2023; Kuswati, 2025)^[4, 11, 9]. Where traditional models of trust were built on institutional authority and gatekeeping, the digital era is characterized by hyper-competition, algorithmic curation, and the fragmentation of the public sphere. Kuswati *et al.* (2025)^[11] contend that reputation is no longer solely built on a history of reliable reporting but must be actively and constantly managed in a real-time, interactive digital environment where crises of trust can escalate instantaneously (Kuswati, 2025)^[11]. Their work aligns with that of Wilding *et al.* (2018)^[17], who detail how the very logic of digital platforms prioritizing engagement and speed directly undermines the journalistic values of accuracy and deliberation, thereby creating a structural conflict that erodes trust (Wilding, 2018)^[17].

This institutional erosion is further evidenced by comparative studies. Mehrabi, Hassan, and Ali (2009)^[13] highlighted over a decade ago that credibility perceptions of internet-based news were inherently different and often lower than those for traditional media like television (Mehrabi, D., S. Hassan, and S. Ali., 2009)^[13]. Their early findings presaged the current crisis, suggesting that the medium itself shapes trust. Similarly, Priadi and Thariq (2023)^[15], in their study on Indonesia, frame this erosion as a crisis of "communicative rationality," where digital spaces foster a communicative environment that is often irrational, emotionally charged, and hostile to the deliberative processes upon which institutional trust is built (Priadi, Rizki, and Achmad Thariq., 2023)^[15].

The scholarly consensus, therefore, is that trust has eroded, but the arguments and emphases differ. Blach-Ørsten and Burkal focus on the political-institutional decay, Hanimann *et al.* on the methodological challenges in quantifying this decay, and Kuswati *et al.* on the contemporary digital dynamics that accelerate it (Blach-Ørsten, Mark, and Rasmus Burkal., 2014; Hanimann, 2023)^[4, 9]. Together, they paint a picture of a triple crisis: the media is distrusted as an institution, this distrust is difficult to pin down with precision, and the digital environment actively exacerbates the problem. This grim reality forms the imperative for the news industry's turn to digital storytelling as a potential tool of re-engagement, a topic to which the next section now turns. In other words, the public is already very skeptical of the news. So, when journalists/users try new, flashy ways to tell stories to regain trust, they are starting from a point of deep distrust. This makes their mission to rebuild credibility a huge challenge.

Dimensions of Credibility: Evolving Measures in a Digital Age

To address declining trust, the news business is using digital storytelling to bring readers back. This term covers many changing methods that differ from how journalism used to be. Studies on digital storytelling show it's more than just putting text on a screen. It's a separate way of telling stories with its own rules and teaching methods. It focuses on using many ways to communicate. A key way to understand this change is by looking at how different modes work together. Chemodurova (2022)^[6] calls this a new "art of storytelling." Here, meaning comes not just from the text but from other ways of communicating, like speech, images, sound, music, and interactive parts. This goes beyond the addition of different elements (Chemodurova, 2022)^[6]. It's a careful combination so that each part adds meaning, and the result is better than each part existing alone. Santamaría Urbieto and Alcalde Peñalver (2021)^[16] build directly upon this concept,

arguing that this complexity necessitates new frameworks for assessment (Santamaría Urbieto, Alisa, and Elena Alcalde Peñalver., 2021) ^[16]. They propose that the effectiveness of a digital story lies in its "multimodal discourse coherence", the seamless and purposeful integration of these various modes into a unified and comprehensible narrative whole. The implicit argument between these and more traditional journalistic values is one of complexity versus simplicity, and emotional resonance versus detached factuality.

This multimodal foundation gives rise to distinct narrative structures. Balaman (2018) ^[3] explicitly frames digital storytelling as a unique "narrative writing genre" with its own conventions and rhythms, often leveraging personalization and emotional arc in ways that traditional inverted-pyramid news reporting deliberately avoids (Balaman, 2018) ^[3]. Meier (2022) ^[14] supports this focus on narrative structure by looking at the didactic approach to multimodal coherence (Meier, 2022) ^[14]. Meier claims these stories serve as teaching tools, not just narratives. Their structure helps users learn by using interactive and multimodal elements to explain complicated topics. The synthesis of Balaman's narrative focus and Meier's pedagogical focus highlights a central tension: digital storytelling is both an art (focused on engagement and emotion) and a science (focused on effective communication and understanding). This dual nature sits at the heart of its potential credibility paradox, blending subjective appeal with objective informational goals.

The creative and literacy dimensions of this new form are vast. Balaman (2018) ^[3] points out that personal stories, while impactful, might not fit with standard journalistic objectivity (Balaman, 2018) ^[3]. Likewise, Meier's (2022) ^[14] support for user-led stories in education may seem like journalists are giving up their role as guides (Meier, 2022) ^[14]. Cohen and Mihailidis (2013) ^[8] believe that choosing content is key to digital literacy, which makes us wonder if interactivity truly benefits users or just makes them piece together stories from many bits (Cohen, Michael, and Paul Mihailidis., 2013) ^[8]. In short, studies show that digital storytelling changes things a lot. It is a mix of formats (Chemodurova, 2022; Santamaría Urbieto, Alisa, and Elena Alcalde Peñalver., 2021) ^[6, 16], a special way to tell stories and teach (Balaman, 2018; Meier, 2022) ^[3, 14], and a way to be creative and build literacy (Anderson, Jim, and Julian McHeroy., 2016; Churchill, 2008) ^[1, 7]. These features, the emotional pull, the interactivity, and how it is put together, are what could cause issues with older, more trusted ways of understanding truth. The following section explores those models of credibility directly, providing context for considering the critical juncture at which this innovative storytelling form meets the fragile commodity of public trust.

Theoretical Framework

This study's theoretical base combines ideas from media credibility, multimodal discourse analysis, and the public sphere, giving a detailed way to look at how digital storytelling impacts public confidence in news sources. By bringing these together, the study looks beyond simple cause and result to understand the complicated ways technology, communication, and society affect each other. The base of this approach comes from media credibility research, using Calvo-Porrall *et al.*'s (2014) ^[5] Credible Brand Model, which sees credibility as built from trust, knowledge, and brand image. This view offers key ways to measure the impact of digital storytelling. The study also used Kang's ideas, which

say that on social media, people decide what's trustworthy based on how open, relatable, and real it feels (Kang, 2010). This mix of theories agrees that credibility works differently on different platforms and that digital storytelling happens in a space where official power must agree with social trust. The credibility part of the study asks how methods like making stories personal might improve feelings of being genuine but maybe weaken standard signs of being unbiased, and how parts that allow people to connect might show openness but perhaps cause thinking overload that hurts credibility views. To build on this credibility base, the approach adds ideas from multimodal discourse analysis, mainly using Santamaría Urbieto and Alcalde Peñalver's (2021) work on how multimodal discourse connects and Chemodurova's (2022) ^[6, 16] idea of digital storytelling as its own type of multimodal art. This view treats digital stories as more than just containers of information but as complex collections of signs where meaning comes from how different ways of communicating, language, visuals, sounds, and interaction work together. While older media studies might focus on texts, this multimodal way lets us see how credibility is created by carefully arranging all the available signs. For example, it lets us study how the feelings from music might improve story interest but also cause questions about true objectivity, or how interactive data images might enhance perception of knowledge but still create access issues because they are difficult to understand. This theoretical view is very helpful for getting the credibility problem at the center of digital storytelling, as it gives the tools to break down how the very things that improve interest might also make credibility harder to measure. The third theoretical idea combines Habermas's ideas of the public sphere, as seen through Priadi and Thariq's (2023) ^[15] study of clear communication in digital media spaces. This view puts digital storytelling in the bigger picture of democratic talk and the conditions for logical debate. The theoretical approach thinks about how the parts of digital stories, how they are built, what interactions they allow, and their multimodal nature, might help or hurt the conditions for clear communication in the digital public sphere. This part lets the study move past individual credibility views to think about what storytelling forms mean for society. For example, it helps study if personal stories might break up shared understanding even if they build personal connection, or if interactive parts might allow involvement while perhaps pushing people to only look at information that supports what they already think. This mix of ideas agrees that digital storytelling is important not just for its ability to involve people but for its possible role in shaping the quality of public talk and the chance to find shared truth. By bringing together these three theoretical views, credibility theory, multimodal discourse analysis, and public sphere theory, the study creates a strong approach that works on many levels. Credibility theory offers ways to measure trust results; multimodal analysis gives the tools to break down how these results are created through signs; and public sphere theory puts these actions in their larger social and political place. This theoretical combination allows a full study that can explain both the small details of multimodal design choices and their large effects on democratic talk. Instead of seeing digital storytelling as just a set of technical changes, this approach sees it as an important step in the changing relationship between journalism, technology, and the public, with big effects on how trust is built, knowledge is created, and public talk is done in the digital age.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative comparative case study design to investigate how digital storytelling on social media platforms shapes news credibility differently from traditional newspaper reporting. The research was guided by the following question: How do the techniques of digital storytelling on TikTok and traditional newspaper reporting construct divergent perceptions of credibility in the coverage of the marital crisis between Senator Ned Nwoko and actress Regina Daniels? A comparative case study approach (Yin, 2018) was adopted to facilitate a nuanced, context-rich analysis of the distinct narrative and credibility-building strategies across two media ecosystems. The unit of analysis was the public discourse surrounding this single, high-profile event, which played out publicly between October and November 2025.

Two primary cases were selected for analysis. The first was the Social Media Case (TikTok), which comprised two viral videos posted by Regina Daniels on her official TikTok account. These videos were selected as exemplars of raw, first-person digital storytelling: one from early November 2025, featuring a text-based narrative making allegations of manipulation and abuse, and another from the same period, showing an emotional video of Regina crying and explaining her situation, which garnered over 102,576 comments. The associated comment threads from both videos, totalling over 109,000 responses, were treated as an integral part of the discursive data, capturing real-time audience reception. The second case was the Traditional Media Case (Newspapers), which consisted of four articles from two leading Nigerian newspapers, selected for their institutional authority and comprehensive coverage. This included from *Punch*: “Regina Daniels wails as family feud worsens” (published November 8, 2025) and “Nwoko denies marrying Regina Daniels at 17” (published November 2025); and from *Vanguard*: “We were never married, Regina Daniels tells Ned Nwoko” (published November 9, 2025) and “Regina was 21, not 17, when we married – Ned Nwoko” (published November 13, 2025).

The data was analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995) to deconstruct the ideological underpinnings and power relations within the texts. The analysis was operationalized through a multi-theoretical framework. First, a Multimodal Analysis, drawing on Santamaría Urbieto and Alcalde Peñalver (2021) and Chemodurova (2022)^[6, 16], was used to analyze how meaning and credibility were constructed through the integration of language, visual cues, and platform-specific affordances. For TikTok, this included analyzing emotional expression and audience interaction via comments and emojis, while for newspapers, it involved analyzing headlines, sourcing structures, and the use of documentary evidence. Second, a Credibility Assessment was conducted using Calvo-Porrall *et al.*'s (2014)^[5] model-focusing on trustworthiness, knowledge, and brand image, alongside Kang's (2010) social media indicators of realness and connectedness, allowing for a cross-platform evaluation of trust-building strategies. The analytical process involved iterative close reading, thematic coding, and a discursive interrogation of how each platform's narrative techniques reinforced or undermined perceptions of authenticity, authority, and bias. This methodological triangulation enabled a robust examination of the platform-dependent nature of credibility construction.

Data Analysis

Analysis of TikTok Data: Multimodal Storytelling and the Negotiation of Credibility in the Regina Daniels Case Introduction to the Analysis

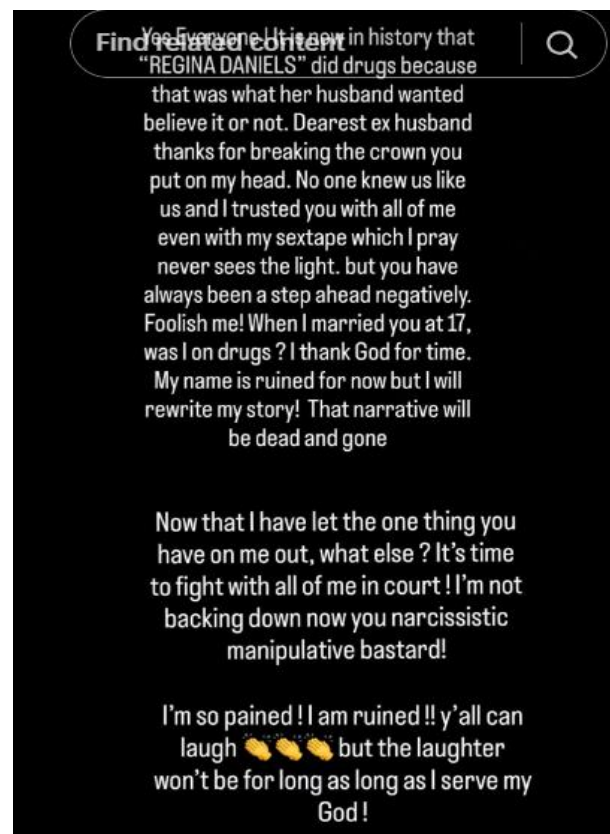
This analysis examines a single TikTok video and its associated comments as a case study of digital storytelling within the Gen Z media ecosystem. The video features a written statement from Nigerian actress Regina Daniels, alleging manipulation, abuse, and public humiliation by her husband, Ned Nwoko. Applying a framework of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and credibility theory, this analysis will deconstruct how the affordances of the TikTok platform, its blend of text, image, and interactive commentary, shape the audience's perception of truth, trustworthiness, and bias. The central paradox explored is how the very features that build engagement and perceived authenticity for a Gen Z audience may simultaneously challenge traditional journalistic standards of credibility.

1. Multimodal Construction of a Victim-Perpetrator Narrative

The core of the video is a written statement, a "text-on-screen" format ubiquitous on TikTok. This is not a broadcast news segment with a neutral anchor; it is a raw, first-person account delivered directly to the camera (and thus, the viewer). This format immediately leverages what Kang (2010) identifies as key credibility markers on social media: connectedness and realness.

- The Text: A Performance of Raw Emotion and Accusation

The language used is highly emotional, personal, and accusatory. It is a classic example of what Balaman (2018)^[3] would call a personalized narrative genre, deliberately eschewing the inverted pyramid of traditional news. Excerpts like:



"Dearest ex husband thanks for breaking the crown you put on my head."

"I trusted you with all of me even with my sextape which I pray never sees the light."

"I'm so pained!! I am ruined!! y'all can laugh 🖐️🖐️🖐️"

This rhetoric builds a sense of intimate confession. The use of terms like "narcissistic manipulative bastard" frames the conflict in a modern, psychologically-aware lexicon that resonates strongly with younger audiences. The narrative is not just about a marital dispute; it is a battle against a specific, pathologized type of abuser. This personalization is potent for engagement but, as this paper notes, it inherently clashes with the journalistic value of impartiality (Calvo-Porrall *et al.*, 2014) [5]. The story is presented not as a set of facts to be verified, but as an emotional truth to be felt.

• The Visual Semiotics: The Power of the Screenshot

While the primary file is a text document, the context suggests it was presented as a series of screenshots or a video with the text prominently displayed, perhaps over a somber image or video of Regina. The mere fact that it is a *screenshot of a personal statement* acts as a powerful authenticity cue. It implies this is a "leaked" or "direct-from-the-source" document, bypassing media filters. This aligns with Chemodurova's (2022) [6] concept of digital storytelling as a multimodal art where meaning is co-created by the text and its presentation. The format screams "uncensored access," which for a Gen Z audience skeptical of institutional media, carries significant persuasive weight.

2. Audience Reception and the Co-creation of Credibility in the Comments

The comments section (6,961 comments) is not a passive receptacle but an active public sphere where the credibility of Regina's story is negotiated, contested, and solidified. This is where Priadi and Thariq's (2023) [15] concept of the digital public sphere and its challenge to "communicative rationality" becomes vividly apparent.

• Solidarity and Affective Labor: Building Trust Through Emotion

A significant portion of the comments engage in what can be termed "affective labor"; emotional support that validates Regina's narrative and reinforces her credibility as a victim.

- **Adjusting the Crown:** A powerful, recurring metaphor is that of the "crown." User Kole 🧐 comments: "*Your crown can't be broken, adjust your crown and keep your head high up pretty, Gods got you 🥰🥰🥰*" (10.1K likes). This metaphorical language, combined with heart and crying emojis, creates a shared symbolic universe where support is expressed not through logical analysis of facts, but through emotional alignment and empowerment.
- **Religious Framing:** The comments are saturated with religious language, mirroring Regina's own invocation of God. User priscillamambwe21 writes a long comment concluding: "*No matter what you're going through, take it all to God in prayer.*" (3.2K likes). This framing shifts the discourse from a legal or factual domain to a spiritual one, where credibility is tied to faith and divine justice rather than evidence.
- **Feminist Solidarity and "Speaking Up":** Many comments frame the issue as one of gender-based

violence and the importance of female voice. Ayeesha💖👊⚡ states: "*When u expose a narcissist he loses his power over u I stand with Regina 🌹❤️*" (1.8K likes). Another user, Nocturne_Co, explicitly calls for collective action: "*Where are the women supporting women now? We can't pick and choose who deserves to be protected. Speak up. Stand up. Say something.* 💖🌍" This positions belief in Regina's story as a political act of feminist solidarity.

- **Humor, Sarcasm, and Detachment: Challenging Credibility**
Not all engagement is supportive. The Gen Z tendency to process serious topics through humor and irony is also present, which can serve to undermine the narrative's gravity and credibility.
 - User Dossh~of~Goodlife ❤️ comments: "*All these one no concern me, abeg who cook Sunday rice?? 😊😊*" This comment, while flippant, represents a form of audience agency, a refusal to be emotionally drawn into the drama. It signals a skepticism towards the performative nature of the conflict.
 - User Kwequ Sim Card jokes: "*Una no one cry for Lamborghini again?? 😊😊*" This is a direct challenge to Regina's credibility, invoking the common public perception that she married for money. The sarcasm implies that her current pain is an expected consequence of her prior material choices, thereby questioning her victimhood.
- **The "Justice For Ned" Counter-Narrative: A Battle of Credibility.** A distinct strand of comments actively disputes Regina's story and constructs a counter-narrative that positions Ned as the victim.

capable_wise: "*Justice for Ned Nwoko..*"

Obukowho Ambrose: "*Justice for Pa Ned Nwoko, I really feel for him right now, his money must be returned*"

Tomohisa Yamashita: "*Regina Daniels is not the victim, Ned is. Regina Daniels' mother is the villain here.*"

These comments, though fewer in number and with lower likes, demonstrate that the digital public sphere is a site of contested credibility. They often focus on Ned's status ("Pa Ned," his money, his political standing) to build his credibility, contrasting it with implied motives of greed on Regina's part.

3. The Central Credibility Paradox: Emotionality vs. Impartiality

This case perfectly illustrates the core tension this paper identifies. For the Gen Z audience on TikTok, the emotionality, personalization, and raw format are the very sources of its credibility. The perceived "realness" of Regina's pain, amplified by the supportive, affective comments, builds a powerful consensus around her trustworthiness within that community. The platform's features, the ability to comment with emojis (🥰, ❤️, 🖐️), the use of in-vogue psychological terms ("narcissist"), and the shared cultural scripts ("adjust your crown"), create a multimodal discourse coherence (Santamaría Urbieto & Alcalde Peñalver, 2021) [16] that feels more authentic and trustworthy than a sterile news report ever could.

However, from the perspective of traditional credibility models (Calvo-Porrall *et al.*, 2014) [5], this same storytelling is fraught with issues.

- **Lack of Verification:** The story is presented as a monologue. There is no cross-examination, no evidence presented for the claims of drug use or a sextape, and no right of reply from Ned Nwoko within the same frame.
- **Demonstrable Bias:** The narrative is intensely one-sided and subjective. It is an accusation, not an investigation.
- **Emotional Manipulation:** The heavy reliance on emotional language and religious invocations can be seen as a tool to bypass critical thinking and secure audience allegiance through pathos rather than logos.

The audience itself is aware of this paradox. User 🐼🐼🐼 offers a nuanced comment that deconstructs Regina's own framing: *"You were Regina Daniels before you were his wife, he did not put any crown on you and he will not break any crown... You will get past this journey and you'll come out stronger..."* This shows a sophisticated consumer who supports Regina but critically engages with the metaphorical language, suggesting a desire to empower her beyond the victim narrative she has constructed.

4. The Role of Digital Literacy and Audience Positioning

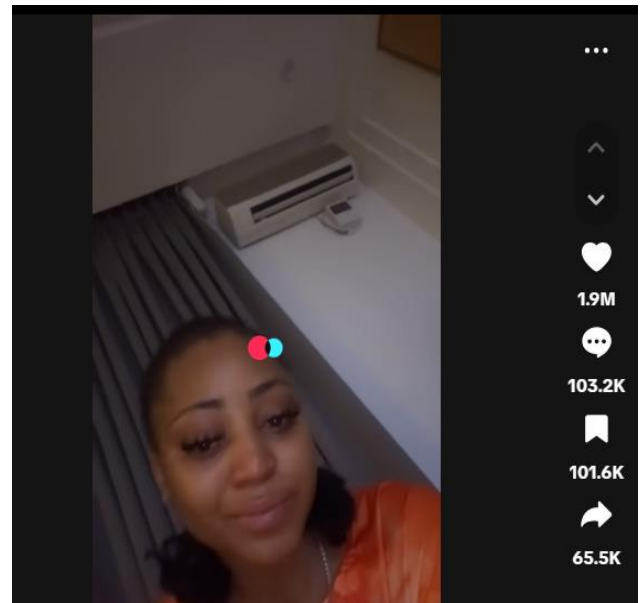
The data also reveals how digital literacy and social identity mediate the reception of this story, as highlighted in the problem statement of this paper.

- **Age and Experience:** The revelation of her age at marriage (*"When I married you at 17"*) triggers widespread shock and becomes a key point of contention. User Ibrahim 🍌 comments: *"I knew she got married at a very young age, but 17?? 🤔🤔"* (4.6K likes). This detail resonates with a Gen Z audience for whom such a young marriage is anomalous, framing Ned's actions through a lens of potential predation and boosting Regina's credibility as a victim of grooming.
- **Cultural and Linguistic Barriers:** The presence of comments in French (e.g., from user Esthy business and ReineTa) shows the transnational flow of the story. User ✨OLIVIA DIA✨ explicitly asks for translation: *"Bonsoir Regina stp tes fan sont les ivoiriens donc stp faut traduire merci"*. This highlights how credibility can be hindered by a lack of access to the primary text, pointing to the exclusivity that can exist even within open platforms.

Analysis of Second TikTok Data: The Credibility of Tears in a Digital Public Sphere

Introduction to the Analysis

This analysis examines a second TikTok video featuring Regina Daniels, this time in a video format where she is seen crying and explaining her emotional state. This data set represents a shift from the written, narrative-driven communication of the first video to a performative, affective display of distress. With over 102,576 comments, the audience engagement is an order of magnitude greater, indicating the powerful resonance of this raw emotional format. Using Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and credibility theory, this analysis will explore how the vocal, visual, and linguistic modes of this video, combined with the chaotic and multifaceted audience reaction, create a different yet equally potent negotiation of credibility. It starkly illustrates the tension between emotional authenticity and rational discourse in the digital public sphere.



1. Multimodal Construction of Vulnerability and Overwhelm

This video is a masterclass in multimodal storytelling that prioritizes raw affect over structured narrative. Unlike the first video's calculated accusations, this one immerses the viewer in a simulated, intimate experience of Regina's psychological state.

• The Visual and Vocal Mode: The Performance of Breakdown

The primary credibility marker here is not the content of the words, but the paralinguistic and visual cues. The viewer sees Regina crying, hears her fractured speech, and witnesses her distress. This aligns perfectly with Kang's (2010) dimension of realism. The authenticity is performed through:

- **Disfluency and Repetition:** Her speech is halting, filled with repetitions ("I tried. I tried. I tried. I tried. I tried.") and self-interruption ("Look... ah!"). This discursively constructs a mind in chaos, making the emotion feel unrehearsed and therefore genuine.
- **The Threat of Destruction:** The statement, *"I think I will break this phone,"* coupled with the physical act of likely handling the device, is a powerful multimodal sign. It signifies a loss of control and a desire to sever the very connection to the public that is causing her pain. This action speaks louder than words, building credibility for her desperation.
- **The Gaze and Tears:** The direct address to the camera, with visible tears, creates an intense, uncomfortable intimacy. As Chemodurova (2022) ^[6] argues, in digital storytelling, meaning is created through the integration of all modes. The tears are not just a biological response; they are a central rhetorical device in this multimodal text, demanding an empathetic response.

• The Linguistic Mode: Fragmentation and Meta-Commentary

The script itself is a stream-of-consciousness reflection on public perception and internal pain.

"It's okay to laugh. It's okay---really, it's okay to laugh... But nobody ever shares their sadness. No one ever does. And do you know why? Because of this very reason---mockery."

This opening is a brilliant piece of rhetorical jujitsu. By pre-

emptively granting permission to mock, she exposes the cruelty of the audience, positioning herself as a self-aware victim. She explicitly names the dynamic she is trapped in, showing a meta-understanding of digital culture. This contrasts sharply with the first video's direct accusations; here, the antagonist is not just Ned, but the unsympathetic public itself. This frames her not only as a victim of a bad marriage but as a victim of public scrutiny, potentially widening her circle of sympathy.

2. Audience Reception: A Fractured Public Sphere of Empathy, Cynicism, and Memes

The comment section for this video is a sprawling, chaotic ecosystem that reflects the fragmented nature of the digital public sphere (Priadi & Thariq, 2023) ^[15]. The reactions are more extreme and varied than in the first dataset, revealing how a display of raw vulnerability polarizes audiences.

• Empathetic Alignment and Affective Support

The display of tears triggers a massive wave of affective labor, often using the same "crown" metaphor and religious framing seen previously, but with renewed intensity.

@BUKIE👍👍👍 comments: "when a woman cries 🥹🥹we cry together 🥹🥹take heart dear" (19.2K likes). This comment exemplifies the demand for collective female empathy, positioning support as a gendered duty.

bussy632 invokes scripture to condemn the mockers: "SOME OF YOU GIRLS IN THIS COMMENT ARE SO CRUEL!! 'Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her'..." (2.3K likes). This uses a moral framework to build a fortress of credibility around Regina, framing disbelief as a sin.

Dera's collection👍 offers a stark, widely endorsed summary: "Omo bad marriage literally destroys a woman 🥹" (48.8K likes). This comment universalizes her experience, building credibility by linking it to a shared, understood social problem.

• Cynicism, Mockery, and the "Crocodile Tears" Frame. The video's raw emotion also provokes a significant counter-reaction that actively dismantles its credibility.

The most direct challenge is from rillsongs24: "Crocodile ➡ tears 🥹 everywhere". This label, "crocodile tears," is a direct assault on the authenticity of her multimodal performance, accusing her of performative deceit.

Wealth and Schadenfreude: A dominant theme of mockery revolves around her wealth. ST_IKG👑 jokes: "Try Dey cry inside Benz nah", while Bino kaka tembe 🎉 writes in French: "Ma chérie toi au moins tu pleures avec des millions... mais nous autres ici on pleure sans rien" (My dear, you at least cry with millions... but we here cry with nothing). These comments challenge the legitimacy of her suffering based on her socioeconomic status, creating a credibility gap grounded in class resentment.

The "Giveaway" Jab: User fine beauty 🌹 comments "what about the giveaway" (1.6K likes), a sarcastic reference to her past lavish social media behavior. This is used to undermine her current victimhood by implying hypocrisy or a failure to meet perceived social obligations.

• Memetic and Off-Topic Engagement: The Disruption of Discourse

A uniquely Gen Z phenomenon in this comment section is the sheer volume of memetic, off-topic engagement that completely sidesteps the video's content, thereby challenging its gravity.

sayheytoLulu's comment, "Just go start new life for Kano" (38K likes), spawned 1,142 replies, becoming an inside joke that detaches from the emotional core of the video.

Countless users engage in time-based bonding: "If you're watching this on Friday Afternoon Nov 7 pls can we be friends🥹" (Big_Pato👍👍, 3K likes). This behavior treats the viral video as a mere rendezvous point for social connection, implicitly dismissing its serious subject matter. This aligns with the concern of this paper about digital storytelling competing with "various other content," where news becomes a backdrop for social play.

3. The Credibility Paradox Intensified: Pathos as Proof

In this video, the credibility paradox identified in this research reaches its zenith. The traditional pillars of credibility, accuracy, fairness, and verification, are entirely absent. There are no facts, only feelings. No evidence, only affect.

Yet, for a massive segment of the audience, this becomes the ultimate proof. The very rawness and "imperfection" of the video, the crying, the fragmented thoughts, the lack of a polished narrative, are interpreted as the hallmarks of truth. In the economy of social media, where polished lies are common, this kind of messy breakdown is often read as incontrovertible evidence of real pain. The credibility is built on the audience's willingness to accept pathos as proof.

However, this creates a fragile and polarized credibility. It persuades those predisposed to believe her but hardens the skepticism of those who are not. The video does not argue; it *feels*. Consequently, the audience does not debate; it either *aligns* or *rejects*. This is the crisis of "communicative rationality" that Priadi and Thariq (2023) ^[15] describe, where the digital space becomes hostile to deliberation. The comment section is not a forum for debate but a battlefield of competing emotional and moral alignments.

4. The Role of Platform Affordances and Cross-Cultural Reception

The analysis also highlights how platform-specific behaviors and cultural differences mediate reception.

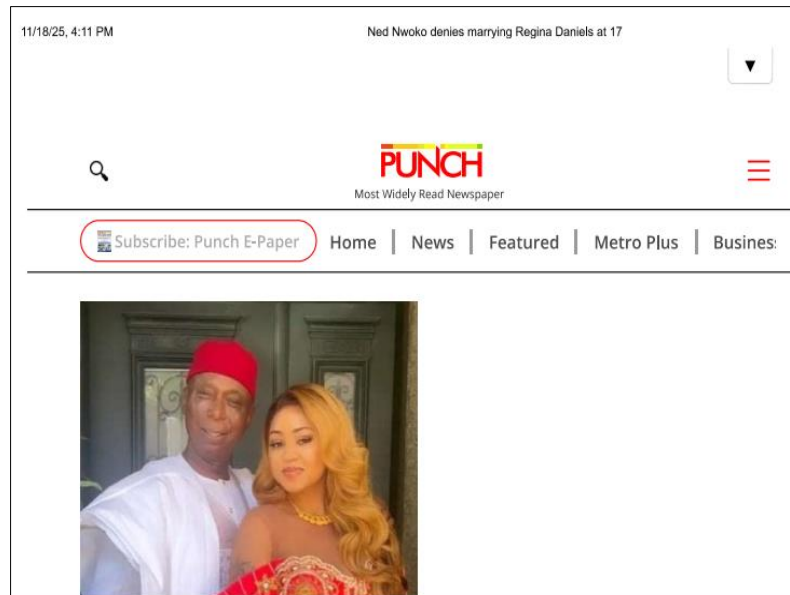
- The "Phone-Breaking" as a Moment: The threat to break the phone became a key memetic touchstone. Users like D A Y O 🎉 joked "Abeg no break the phone, I need am" (4.3K likes), transforming a moment of high drama into a communal joke. This shows how TikTok's culture can rapidly metabolize and defang serious content.
- The Language Barrier and Transnational Solidarity: The presence of numerous French comments (e.g., nellylandryne0: "Nous on veut t'aider... mais on comprends pas anglais") and the active translation provided by users like Sam👍👍CG show the story's transnational reach. It also highlights that credibility and engagement are contingent on accessibility, and that support can be mobilized across linguistic and national boundaries based on shared themes of gender and power.

Analysis of Punch Newspaper Data: Institutional Credibility and the Framing of a Marital Crisis

Introduction to the Analysis

This analysis examines two articles from *Punch* newspaper, a major Nigerian media institution, covering the marital crisis between Regina Daniels and Ned Nwoko. This dataset represents the traditional, institutional voice of journalism, standing in stark contrast to the raw, first-person narratives found on TikTok. Applying the same theoretical framework,

Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and credibility theory, this analysis will deconstruct how institutional journalism constructs credibility through sourcing, structure, and language. The central focus is to illuminate the profound discursive shift that occurs when a story moves from the participatory, emotional ground of social media to the gatekept, formal domain of traditional news, directly addressing this research objective to deconstruct broad generalizations about digital storytelling's impact.



1. Multimodal Construction of Institutional Authority and Objectivity

The *Punch* articles immediately establish a modality of credibility that is diametrically opposed to the TikTok videos. Where TikTok leveraged realness and connectedness (Kang, 2010), the newspaper builds its case on procedural authority and detachment, aligning with Calvo-Porrá *et al.*'s (2014)^[5] model which emphasizes trust built on knowledge and brand image.

- The Sourcing Heuristic: The Architecture of Factuality
The most defining feature of the newspaper's discourse is its relentless reliance on sourced information. The narrative is not driven by Regina's emotional outbursts but is constructed through a mosaic of statements from official or named entities.

Ned Nwoko's Rebuttal: The first article is structured around Ned's official statement. It meticulously quotes his denial: *"It has come to my attention that false claims are being circulated by Regina, suggesting that I married her when she was 17 years old. These claims are entirely untrue and misleading."* The article then provides his "evidence": the INEC voter's card, detailing how *"she presented her INEC voter's card, which clearly shows that she was born on October 10th, 1998."* This presentation of documentary "proof" is a classic institutional credibility move, attempting to anchor the story in verifiable fact.

Official and Community Voices: The second article expands this web of sources. It quotes the Ogwashi-Uku community via an open letter, the police spokespersons (Abimbola Adebisi and Josephine Adeh), and various celebrities (Mercy Johnson, Seun Kuti). This practice of

"source triangulation" creates an impression of comprehensive, balanced reporting. Even when a source is challenged, as when the community letter is dismissed by Regina's grandfather, the newspaper reports the denial, performing the journalistic ritual of presenting "both sides."

• The Structural Heuristic: The Inverted Pyramid and Narrative Distance

The articles adhere to the traditional inverted pyramid structure, presenting the most "important" information first. The lead of the first article focuses not on Regina's tears, but on the factual escalation of the crisis: *"The marital crisis... has reached a distressing new height as the actress broke down in tears over the alleged harassment of her family and the controversial arrest of her brother."* The emotional content ("broke down in tears") is framed as a consequence of a factual event ("arrest of her brother"). This structure creates a narrative distance that is absent on TikTok. Regina's most visceral quotes are embedded within the journalistic framework, often introduced with phrases like "she wrote" or "she said," which act as discursive barriers between the reader and the raw emotion. For example, her desperate threat *"I will return if that's the only way, do whatever he says, get injected to be like a zombie, get locked up and raped in the house."* is presented as a reported statement, contained and contextualized by the journalistic narrative, rather than a direct, immersive plea to the audience.

2. Framing the Conflict: "Marital Crisis" vs. "Abuse and Survival"

The newspaper's lexical and framing choices systematically reshape the narrative from the one presented on TikTok.

- **Lexical Neutralization:** The conflict is consistently labelled a "marital crisis," a "family feud," or a "public storm." These terms depersonalize and de-escalate the allegations. What Regina frames as "domestic violence" and "rape" is repackaged into a more neutral, albeit dramatic, domestic dispute. This reflects Blach-Ørsten and Burkal's (2014) ^[4] point that media credibility is tied to its institutional function, which often involves stabilizing social narratives rather than amplifying chaotic personal ones.
- **Pathologizing the Personal:** A key framing device, derived directly from Ned's statements, is the attribution of Regina's behaviour to a "mental condition" and "substance abuse." The article states: *"The lawmaker further alleged that his wife's claims were influenced by her 'current mental condition,' noting that she had started but failed to complete rehabilitation for drug addiction."* This framing is a powerful credibility tool. It shifts the discourse from one of moral accusation (who is the victim/perpetrator) to one of medical and psychological pathology (who is rational/stable). It provides a scientific-sounding rationale for dismissing her claims, urging the public to *"approach all her claims with caution and discernment."*

3. The Limited Public Sphere: Curated Voices and the Absence of Participatory Engagement

Unlike the chaotic, user-driven cacophony of TikTok comments, the public sphere in the *Punch* articles is highly curated. The "Supporters, critics weigh in" section does not feature raw public opinion but selects statements from other public figures: actors Mercy Johnson, Mercy Aigbe, and critics like comedian Dee One and activist VDM.

These curated voices replicate the "two sides" model. Dee One states, *"Ned is a respectable man... Unlike Regina, who obviously doesn't understand loyalty,"* while VDM pathologizes her further: *"After watching the video... I now believe Ned Nwoko that she's into drugs. She was disorganised, saying a lot without saying anything. That's typical of a drug addict."* This creates a semblance of balance but within a very constrained field of discourse. The millions of empathetic, mocking, or memetic reactions from the TikTok public are absent, replaced by the opinions of a certified elite. This reflects a Habermasian public sphere that is mediated and limited, rather than the radically open, often irrational digital space Priadi and Thariq (2023) ^[15] describe.

4. The Credibility Paradox of Traditional Journalism: Authority vs. Accessibility

The *Punch* newspaper constructs a form of credibility that is rooted in its institutional role. It presents itself as a verifier, a gatekeeper, and a balancer of narratives. Its credibility is built on:

- **Procedural Rigor:** Citing sources, presenting documents, and following the inverted pyramid.
- **Impartiality Performance:** Giving "both sides" a platform, even if one side is a powerful senator and the other is a distressed actress.
- **Brand Authority:** The *Punch* brand itself carries a historical weight of institutional authority.

However, this model faces its own paradox in the digital age, precisely in relation to the audience positioning this research highlights. For a Gen Z audience accustomed to the realness and immediacy of TikTok, the newspaper's

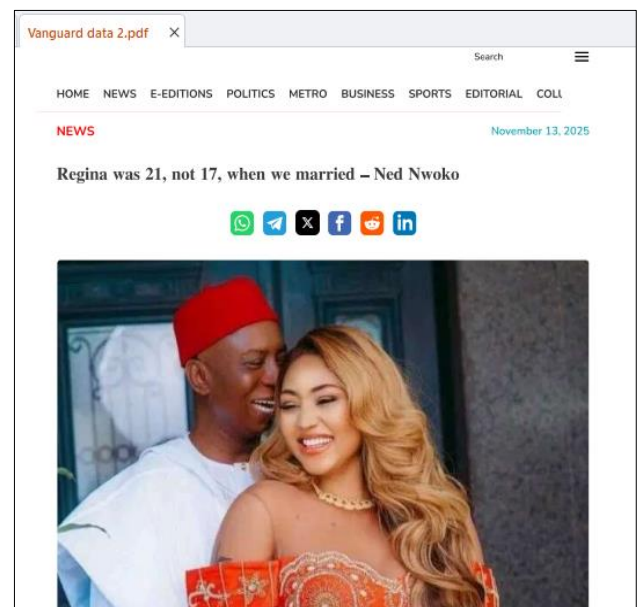
discourse can feel:

- **Distanced and Cold:** The procedural framing can seem to drain the story of its human tragedy. The containment of Regina's pain within reported quotes may be interpreted as a lack of empathy or a failure to grasp the story's emotional core.
- **Elitist:** The reliance on official sources and the curation of public discourse through the voices of other celebrities can feel exclusionary, failing to capture the raw pulse of public sentiment visible in the TikTok comments.
- **Slow and Redundant:** For an audience that has already witnessed Regina's raw breakdown in real-time, the newspaper's subsequent, synthesized report may feel like old news, lacking the engaging, participatory immediacy of the digital storytelling format.

Analysis of Vanguard Newspaper Data: Nuances in Institutional Storytelling and Credibility

Introduction to the Analysis

This analysis examines two articles from *Vanguard* newspaper, completing the triad of media sources in this study. While *Punch* and *Vanguard* both represent the institutional voice of traditional Nigerian journalism, a comparative analysis reveals subtle yet significant differences in their narrative framing and sourcing strategies. Applying the same theoretical framework of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and credibility theory, this exploration will dissect how *Vanguard* negotiates the same crisis, further solidifying our understanding of the chasm between institutional and digital storytelling. The objective is to demonstrate that even within the traditional media paradigm, there are variations in how credibility is assembled, while its core tenets remain fundamentally distinct from the affective credibility of TikTok.



1. Multimodal Construction of Credibility: A Focus on Direct Rebuttal

Similar to *Punch*, *Vanguard* establishes its credibility through a scaffold of sourced statements and a formal structure. However, *Vanguard's* approach, particularly in the first article, is more intensely focused on presenting Ned Nwoko's rebuttal as a self-contained, logical argument.

- The Heuristic of the Documentary Proof: The article "Regina was 21, not 17, when we married, Ned Nwoko" is structured almost entirely around Ned's social media statement. It meticulously reproduces his key claim and his offered evidence: the INEC voter's card. The repetition of the date, "October 10th, 1998", and the detail that "I informed her that I would keep this document in my possession" serves a specific rhetorical purpose. It constructs an image of a meticulous, evidence-based man, contrasting with the image of an emotionally volatile woman. This aligns with the Credible Brand Model's dimension of "knowledge" (Calvo-Porrall *et al.*, 2014) ^[5], positioning Ned as the holder of verifiable facts.
- Pathologizing Discourse as a Credibility Strategy: *Vanguard* amplifies Ned's most potent framing device, directly quoting his allegation that Regina's remarks were influenced by her "mental health condition" and that she had "started but failed to complete a rehabilitation program for drug addiction." The article concludes with his urging for the public to "approach all her claims with caution and discernment." This framing, also present in *Punch*, is central to the institutional reconstruction of the narrative. It systematically re-categorizes Regina's accusations from claims of abuse to symptoms of an illness, a move that powerfully undermines her credibility from within a medicalized, "rational" discourse.

2. Framing and Sourcing: Allowing a Margin for the Counter-Narrative

While the first *Vanguard* article heavily favors Ned's perspective, the second article, "We were never married, Regina Daniels tells Ned Nwoko," demonstrates a key nuance. Here, *Vanguard* provides a more substantial platform for Regina's direct voice than the *Punch* articles did, though still within a contained framework.

- Amplifying the Counter-Frame: This article is built around Regina's Instagram statement, allowing her accusations to be presented in a more structured, quoted format. Key excerpts that were fragmented on TikTok are presented here as coherent arguments:

"Fine, I did drugs. So what? Is that even the issue between us? The moment we had a fight, you rushed to the public shouting 'drugs, drugs, drugs,' because you knew it would make a perfect story for the media, something dramatic enough to distract everyone from the real issue!"

"You want to find a reason to arrest everyone around me so that I will have no one left beside me... Then when I'm completely isolated and broken, I will be forced to come back to you."

This reporting grants her a degree of rhetorical power. She is framed not just as crying, but as *accusing*, specifically of isolation and manipulation. This provides a clearer counter-argument to Ned's pathologizing frame, suggesting his "drug" claims are a strategic distraction.

- The "Non-Marriage" Bombshell: The article's headline and central claim come from Regina's most legally significant assertion: "I would have filed for divorce long ago if there was ever a legal marriage between us. We were never married in any court of law, and no documents were signed." By leading with this, *Vanguard* signals the legal and factual gravity of the

dispute, moving beyond mere emotional drama. This aligns with the institutional value of highlighting legally verifiable facts, even when they come from a contested source.

- Structural Containment of Emotion: Despite giving Regina more column space, *Vanguard* still employs the traditional journalistic structure to contain the emotional content. Her raw, tearful video from October 18 is referenced at the end of the article as a secondary event: "On October 18, a viral video showed Regina in tears... saying: 'In Ned Nwoko's house, I am nothing. But in my house, I am a queen... I can't stand the violence, it's too much.'" It is presented as evidentiary support for the ongoing conflict rather than the primary text itself, maintaining narrative control.

3. The Curated Public Sphere and Intertextuality

Vanguard's construction of the public sphere is, like *Punch's*, highly curated. The "Related News" section functions as a form of intertextuality, guiding the reader to other institutional narratives on the topic, such as "Regina Daniels' leaked medical reports genuine - Ned Nwoko" and "Regina Daniels drug claim fake - Abuja hospital." This creates an ecosystem of institutional discourse that cross-references and reinforces itself, building a wall of "factual" reporting against which social media claims are measured.

The absence of a live, chaotic comments section (or its relegation to a heavily moderated space) is again a defining feature. The discourse is closed, finished at the point of publication. This contrasts violently with the TikTok comments, which are an integral, evolving, and participatory part of the story's meaning. The newspaper's public sphere is a lecture; TikTok's is a town hall meeting.

4. The Credibility Paradox: Nuance within Tradition

The analysis of *Vanguard* reveals that the institutional model of credibility is not a monolith. Compared to *Punch*:

- *Vanguard's* first article is a more focused articulation of the "pathologizing and evidence-based rebuttal" frame.
- *Vanguard's* second article allows for a slightly more robust presentation of Regina's direct counter-accusations, particularly the potent "non-marriage" and "isolation" claims.

However, these nuances occur within the unwavering boundaries of traditional journalism's credibility model. Both newspapers:

- Prize Sourcing: They build their stories on direct quotes from official statements (Ned's Facebook, Regina's Instagram), transforming social media content into journalistic raw material.
- Employ the Inverted Pyramid: They lead with the most newsworthy, factual claims (the age denial, the non-marriage claim), structuring emotion as a consequence, not a cause.
- Maintain Narrative Control: The journalist's voice synthesizes and contains the chaos of the primary sources, creating a coherent, consumable narrative for the reader.

This model's strength is its claim to objectivity and verification. Its weakness, particularly for a Gen Z audience, is its inherent distance. The procedural rigor that makes it credible to one audience can render it sterile and untrustworthy to another that equates credibility with

unfiltered emotional authenticity. A TikTok user who has witnessed Regina's visceral breakdown might read *Vanguard's* clean, quoted version of her statement and perceive it as sanitized, de-fanged, and lacking the "truth" of the original performance.

A Tale of Two Realities: A Critical Comparative Analysis of TikTok and Newspaper Framing in the Regina Daniels Case

The marital crisis between Regina Daniels and Ned Nwoko was not a single event but a narrative battleground, with its story and credibility constructed in radically different ways on TikTok and in traditional newspapers like *Punch* and *Vanguard*. A comparative analysis reveals a fundamental schism in how these platforms build trust and frame truth, hinging on the core conflict between affective authenticity and institutional authority.

On TikTok, credibility is an emergent property of emotional resonance and community validation. The platform's storytelling is raw, multimodal, and immersive. Regina's videos are not reports *about* her pain; they are performances *of* it. In one video, her fragmented speech—"I tried. I tried. I tried. I feel like I'm going crazy"—is not a weakness but the primary evidence of her distress. This aligns with Kang's (2010) social media credibility markers, where realness and connectedness trump formal proof. The audience doesn't just witness this; they actively co-create the narrative's credibility through comments. A supporter's plea, "Your crown can't be broken, adjust your crown and keep your head high up pretty, Gods got you 🙏🥺💖" (10.1K likes), doesn't just offer comfort; it publicly endorses her victimhood frame, building a fortress of solidarity through affective labor. The proof is in the emotional response, making the discourse inherently subjective and participatory. In stark contrast, the newspapers construct credibility through a scaffold of sources, procedures, and a detached, analytical tone. They translate the chaotic emotional outbursts into a structured "marital crisis." The lead of a *Punch* article exemplifies this, framing her tears as a consequence of a factual event: "The marital crisis... has reached a distressing new height as the actress broke down in tears over the alleged harassment of her family." The raw emotion is contained, reported, and contextualized. The primary tool for credibility is Ned Nwoko's rebuttal, which *Vanguard* meticulously quotes: "For clarity, during my first meeting with Regina, I asked her age, and she told me she was 21 years old... she presented her INEC voter's card." This appeal to documentary evidence is a classic institutional move, anchoring the story in verifiable fact and aligning with the Credible Brand Model's emphasis on knowledge (Calvo-Porrall *et al.*, 2014) [5].

This divergence creates a starkly different allocation of credibility. TikTok's ecosystem often pathologizes the powerful; Ned is frequently labeled a "narcissistic manipulative bastard" in comments. The newspapers, however, often pathologize the accuser. *Punch* and *Vanguard* both amplify Ned's framing of Regina's claims as influenced by her "current mental condition" and alleged drug addiction, urging the public to "approach all her claims with caution and discernment." This reframes her accusations from claims of abuse to symptoms of an illness, a powerful discursive move that uses a medicalized, "rational" framework to undermine her credibility.

Furthermore, the public sphere operates on entirely different principles. TikTok's comment section is a chaotic, democratic, and often cruel town square. It hosts empathetic prayers, mocking jokes about crying "in a Lamborghini," and memetic engagement that treats the drama as social fodder. The newspaper's public sphere, by contrast, is a curated lecture. As seen in *Punch*, the "Supporters, critics weigh in" section features pre-selected voices from other celebrities, creating a semblance of balance within a tightly controlled elite discourse.

In conclusion, the Regina Daniels saga demonstrates that credibility is not a universal standard but a platform-specific construct. TikTok fosters an epistemology of emotion, where truth is felt, shared, and validated through communal alignment. Traditional journalism upholds an epistemology of institution, where truth is verified, sourced, and delivered through established protocols. For a Gen Z audience, the newspaper's procedural rigor can feel distant and untrustworthy, while for traditional consumers, TikTok's emotional rawness can seem hysterical and unbelievable. The crisis in modern media trust is, therefore, not just about bias or facts, but a deeper, more fundamental clash between these two competing systems for determining what is real and who is to be believed.

Discussion of Findings

This study's comparative analysis uncovers a deep schism in the construction and perception of credibility in the contemporary media landscape. The findings speak to the fact that stories told on TikTok as digital narratives and those reported by newspapers are not just different ways of telling the same story; they create two different worlds, each with its own epistemology of truth. On TikTok, credibility is an emergent property of affective authenticity. Regina Daniels' raw first-person narrative characterized by emotional confession and performative vulnerability was not about her distress but rather an experience immersed in it. For Gen Z, this kind of "realness" was seen as trustworthy, amplified by a community that co-constructed credibility through comments laden with empathy, shared metaphors, and affective labor. This platform fosters an epistemology of emotion where truth feels validated through communal alignment and is built on Kang's (2010) dimensions of connectedness and realness. In sharp contrast to this is the *Punch* and *Vanguard* newspaper tradition that constructs credibility through institutional authority. They translated the chaotic emotionality of the TikTok videos into a structured "marital crisis," prioritizing how rigorously things were done procedurally. Their trust-building mechanisms included sourcing, presenting documentary evidence, and maintaining a detached narrative tone that kept raw emotion within reported quotes—this aligns with Calvo-Porrall *et al.*'s (2014) [5] model emphasizing knowledge and brand image—and upholds an epistemology of institution where truth gets verified and delivered via established protocols. The fundamental tension is therefore a direct clash between these two systems: what builds credibility on one platform inherently undermines it on another. The very emotionality that made Regina's story feel "true" on TikTok was pathologized in newspapers as evidence of a "mental condition," reframing her claims from abuse allegations to illness symptoms. This illustrates that the impact of digital storytelling on trust may not always be positive but is deeply contingent on audience positioning. For digitally native

audiences who are skeptical about institutional gatekeepers, the newspaper's procedural objectivity comes across as distant and untrustworthy; for traditional consumers though, TikTok's emotional rawness seems hysterical and unbelievable. Thus the crisis in trust regarding news media does not merely revolve around bias or even inaccuracies but rather constitutes an even deeper and more unyielding conflict between competing frameworks for adjudicating what is real-and who is to be believed.

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TikTok Data Links

Video Source (Data Two):

Link: https://www.tiktok.com/@official_regina/video/7569845912382491960?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7566412023057008136

Description: The video of Regina Daniels crying and explaining her situation, which garnered over 102,576

comments.

Creator Profile:

Link: https://www.tiktok.com/@official_regina

Description: The official TikTok account of Regina Daniels, the source of the video.

Punch Newspaper Articles

1. Article 1: Nwoko's Rebuttal

- **Title:** Nwoko denies marrying Regina Daniels at 17
- **Link:** <https://punchng.com/nwoko-denies-marrying-regina-daniels-at-17/>
- **Date:** November 2025

2. Article 2: Crisis Escalation

- **Title:** Regina Daniels wails as family feud worsens
- **Link:** <https://punchng.com/regina-daniels-wails-as-family-feud-worsens/>
- **Date:** 8th November 2025

Vanguard Newspaper Articles

Article 1: Ned Nwoko's Age Claim

Title: Regina was 21, not 17, when we married – Ned Nwoko

Link: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2025/11/regina-was-21-not-17-when-we-married-ned-nwoko/>

Date: November 13, 2025

Article 2: Regina Daniels' Counter-Claim

Title: We were never married, Regina Daniels tells Ned Nwoko

Link: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2025/11/we-were-never-married-regina-daniels-tells-ned-nwoko/>

Date: November 9, 2025,