

# Magic Bullet Theory Revisited: Emergence of Its Continued Relevance and Persistence in the 21st Century

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

**\*Dayo Duyile**

Department of Mass Communication, College of Social Sciences, Wesley University, Ondo, Nigeria  
dayoduyile@yahoo.com

**Babatunde ROyinade**

Department of Mass Communication, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Ikeji-Arakeji, Nigeria

**McNezer Fasehun**

Wesley University, Ondo, Nigeria

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**Sustain** 

# INTRODUCTION

## Background

This study evaluates a significant communication theory. Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1944) challenged the Magic Bullet Theory in their 1940 presidential election study, revealing media effects were mediated through opinion leaders, not directly impacting audiences. However, recent research suggests digital media environments may exhibit characteristics more aligned with direct effects models (Robinson, 2024).

The Magic Bullet Theory is also known as the Hypodermic Needle Theory, Direct Influence Model, One-Way Communication Model, or Action Model. Contemporary scholars argue that while largely dismissed, the emergence of algorithm-driven social media platforms has renewed interest in its core assumptions about direct media influence (Almakaty, 2024). It posits that mass media communicate directly to audiences without interruption from opinion leaders. The One-Step Flow Theory, propounded by Harold Lasswell (1927/1937), assumes media have a direct and powerful influence on audiences. Lippmann (1922) attributed public opinion and "images in our heads" to media provision, highlighting powerful communication impact.

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01

### **Early Theoretical Development**

Harold Lasswell (1927/1937) and Lippmann (1922) established the foundation of powerful media effects theory during the era of the dominant newspaper press.

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02

### **Academic Criticism**

DeFleour and Ball-Rokeach (1989) dismissed the theory as obsolete, portraying it as mere curiosities lacking sophistication.

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03

### **Contemporary Relevance**

McQuail (2010) and other scholars argue for the theory's continued importance in understanding modern media-society relationships.

DeFleour and Ball-Rokeach (1989, p. 164) contend the theory is obsolete and portrays mere curiosities lacking sophistication. However, another school of thought, aligning with Jacques Ellul (1973), holds a different view: the French philosopher states the Bullet Theory is not dead. McQuail (2010, p. 458) criticised the "no effect" assumptions of DeFleour and Ball-Rokeach (1989).

McQuail (2009, p. 94), in his analysis of Media-Society Theory, asserts that mass society theory gives primacy to media as a causal factor. He states media offer a worldview that can both manipulate people and aid their psychic survival under difficult conditions. Popoola (2012) criticised Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1940) for discrediting the Bullet Theory's importance regarding media messages on the audience. He cited Nigeria's 1983 electoral violence in Ondo State, the Lagos bomb blast of January 2002, and the 2007 electoral violence in Nigeria's Delta State, where the Bullet Theory appropriately explained audience reactions and behaviour to media messages. Popoola (2012) therefore called for a re-visitation to the era of powerful media, as advocated by Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann (1973).

To understand the Magic Bullet Theory's continued relevance in mass communication, it is important to consider the reactions and behaviours of corporate institutions, governments, and individuals to media messages, rather than viewing media's influential power from a single perspective. Communication theorists Lazarsfeld, Berelson, Gaudet, and Elihu Katz propounded the two-step flow and multi-step flow information theories in 1940 and 1955, respectively. These theories, Esimokha (2024) notes (citing Anaeto, Onabajo, & Osibajo, 2014, pp. 100-101), are based on three or more assumptions. Esimokha (2024) posits that individuals act as social members of definable social groups, not as isolates. Therefore, the perceptions and activities of an individual's social groups influence his/her reactions to mass media messages. This is attributed to the influence of social relationships and the individual's attention to media messages. It must be noted that this assumption does not imply his/her acceptance of media influences, nor does non-attention imply rejection.

Against these assumptions, the powerful effect of the media, as expressed by Harold Lasswell (1927/1937) and Lippmann (1922), requires empirical verification. The question then arises: Is the Magic Bullet Theory dead or alive? The dual perspectives presented by these two schools of thought need resolution through careful, systematic study of media power. Several questions emerge regarding media's direct influence on audiences: How effective are the media in achieving chosen ends? How do the media use their power to influence audiences? These questions, posed by McQuail, demand answers. But before examining McQuail's perspectives, what is functionalism in the media-to-society relationship? Merton (1957) states that functionalist theory explains social practices and institutions in terms of societal and individual needs. He views society as an ongoing system of linked working parts, each contributing to its continuity and orderliness. Media are seen as a very important part of these systems, hence a means of maintaining society. Media have numerous functions: providing information, facilitating innovation, explaining and interpreting public interest issues, building consensus, and educating and entertaining, among many other roles. There are also diverse political and cultural functions of the media.

Returning to McQuail's answers, and citing Hanno Hardt (2023), McQuail recalls that among the early press's social functions, instrumental in binding society together, were: giving leadership to the public, providing for idea exchanges between leaders and masses, satisfying information needs, serving as a mirror to society, and acting as a conscience to society.

When Lasswell (1927/1937) pronounced his 'powerful effect theory', the newspaper press was the dominant medium. Radio was new, television broadcasting non-existent, as were online media and the internet. The arrival of radio, television, and internet media may have strengthened media's power and influence, diminishing criticisms against the theory's obsolescence. The advent of social media must have further strengthened the powerful influence that mass media content exerts upon the audience.

# The Key Features of Magic Bullet Theory

These features distinguish the Bullet Theory and place it in a class of its own.

- 1 Direct and immediate influence: This posits that mass media messages have a direct, immediate effect on news consumers (e.g., TV viewers, newspaper readers, radio listeners, and social media users). Audiences are considered passive recipients who accept media messages without critical thought.
- 2 Uniform response by message receivers: This implies all individuals exposed to media messages would react identically, leading to collective behaviour.
- 3 The Magic Bullet Theory gained traction during periods of war and significant political events, likely due to concerns about propaganda's influence. For example, it was prevalent during World War I and the emergence of cinema as a powerful communication tool.

## The schools of thought critical of the Magic Bullet Theory hold the following views:

- 1 The theory oversimplifies the complex nature of media effects, ignoring individual differences in interpretation, experience, and context that shape audience responses.
- 2 The theory assumes a passive audience that simply absorbs media content without scrutiny or questioning.
- 3 The Bullet Theory is inconsistent with empirical evidence; subsequent studies show media effects vary widely. Individual consumers of identical media content may react differently based on their backgrounds, cultural environments, and social contexts. Therefore, the critique facing the Magic Bullet Theory highlights the need for a more sophisticated and dynamic understanding of media effects than that posited by the Hypodermic Needle Theory, also known as the Magic Bullet Theory.

The resurgence of interest in direct effects models is particularly evident in studies of social media's role in political mobilisation and the spread of misinformation. Research demonstrates that digital platforms can facilitate immediate behavioural responses similar to those predicted by the Magic Bullet Theory (Adam et al., 2025; Denniss & Lindberg, 2025).

# STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Two schools of thought have emerged concerning the Magic Bullet Theory and its communication effects. Also known as the Transmission Belt Model (TBM) or Hypodermic Needle Theory (HNT), this early media research theory posits that messages are directly and passively absorbed by audiences, resulting in immediate and powerful effects on their attitudes and behaviours. Recent studies on social media algorithms demonstrate how digital platforms create conditions similar to those described by the Magic Bullet Theory, where users experience immediate and uniform responses to targeted content (Chalke & Mishra, 2023). Though significant in the study of media effects, its postulation of immediate effects laid the groundwork for understanding media's potential power; however, a re-examination of its potency in modern media message delivery is now necessary. Critics argue that the theory, viewed as less applicable today due to its perceived lack of potency or oversimplification, assumes passive recipients who absorb content without critical thought. They also contend that it oversimplifies media effects, as today's audiences actively engage with media, share content, and contribute to social, economic, political, geographical, and historical issues portrayed in the media. Furthermore, the interactive nature of social media facilitates immediate feedback, reshaping conversations and encouraging critical discourse over direct influence.

## Core Problems

- Conflicting scholarly perspectives on the theory's relevance
- Lack of empirical verification in the digital age
- Need to reassess media power in modern contexts
- Questions about audience passivity assumptions

## Research Gap

- Limited understanding of the theory's contemporary applicability
- Need to examine manifestations in the social media era
- Assessment of media influence in the Nigerian context
- Reconciliation of opposing theoretical perspectives

The proliferation of viral content and algorithm-driven messaging in digital environments has created new contexts where direct media effects may be more pronounced than previously understood (Metzler & Garcia, 2023). In Nigeria's digital landscape, social media platforms have demonstrated a capacity for immediate political mobilisation and behavioural influence, suggesting renewed relevance for direct effects theories (Benaiah & Osuntoki, 2024). These arguments are supported by new media effect theories like Uses and Gratification Theory, which stresses audience agency and choice, and Cultivation Theory, which, according to theories led by George Gerbner (1972), posits long-term effects that are gradual, indirect, but cumulative and significant. This is similar to Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann's Cumulative Effects Theory (1973), which states that media influence is gradual over time, but with profound effects.

It is therefore on this basis that this study aims to revisit the era of powerful media, as advocated by Harold Lasswell, and compare it with today's media effects, specifically investigating whether the Magic Bullet Theory remains relevant and retains a powerful effect on audiences.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To critically examine the original assumptions of the Magic Bullet Theory and why it is considered outdated.
2. To analyse modern media phenomena such as viral content, disinformation campaigns, and algorithm-driven messaging that exhibit characteristics of the theory.
3. To demonstrate how modern-day audiences, despite claims of media literacy and selective exposure, still exhibit behaviours predicted by the Magic Bullet Theory.
4. To provide empirical or theoretical evidence supporting the theory's continued applicability in today's communication landscape.
5. To examine how contemporary digital media environments, particularly social media algorithms and viral content mechanisms, create conditions validating the Magic Bullet Theory's predictions about direct media effects (List, 2023).
6. To argue for a reconceptualisation of the Magic Bullet Theory as an enduring framework rather than an obsolete model.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Do media possess a powerful influence on the audience?
2. Is there empirical evidence on the viability of the Magic Bullet Theory?
3. Does the Magic Bullet Theory manifest positively in Nigeria's media landscape?
4. Are there examples of the Magic Bullet Theory's manifestation in other countries?
5. Why do some scholars view the theory as obsolete?



### Theory Re-examination

Critical analysis of original assumptions and their contemporary relevance in digital media contexts.



### Empirical Evidence

Examination of modern phenomena like viral content and algorithm-driven messaging supporting the theory's validity.



### Reconceptualisation

Argument for the Magic Bullet Theory as an enduring framework rather than an obsolete model in modern communication.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## A Re-visitation to the Era of the Magic Bullet Theory

The Magic Bullet Theory, also known as the Hypodermic Needle Theory, emerged in mass media studies during the First and Second World Wars, when newspapers were regarded as the most powerful communication channels. Through these, information, messages, and public views were disseminated to receptive populations who absorbed media messages and responded without defiance.

McQuail (2010) noted the theory's emergence during an era when mass media, particularly newspapers, were considered powerful communication channels for disseminating information and public opinion. However, contemporary research challenges this dismissal, arguing that digital media environments exhibit characteristics more closely aligned with direct effects models than previously recognised (Kneer et al., 2024). DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1989, p. 163) further explained that the Bullet Theory, developed after the First World War, was credited with the powerful effects of mass communication to shape public opinion and sway the populace towards communicators' desired wishes.

According to Popoola (2012), due to the presumed powerful effect of this first generation of mass communication theory, various scholars provided different interpretations and colourations. Citing Lowery and DeFleur, Popoola (2012) noted that both theorists called it the "Magic Bullet Theory," while Melvin DeFleur and Sandra Ball-Rokeach named it the "Stimulus-Response Theory." Okunna (1999, p. 162) described it as the "Hypodermic Syringe Theory," and Black and Haroldson (1975, p. 121) labelled it the "Mechanistic Stimulus-Response Theory." Popoola (2012) asserts that the theory's essence is that people are vulnerable to mass media messages, an argument he further advances.

Drawing an inference from Severin and Tankard (2001, pp. 2-3) on "bullet theory," Popoola (2012) states that in communication, the theory implies that a media message will achieve its desired effect if it hits its target. Proponents of the Magic Bullet Theory, who view it as very much alive, are increasing. Duyile (2016a), in "Comparative Theories of Communication," shares the views of McQuail (2010) and Popoola (2012), citing the 2009 Iranian presidential election crisis. This crisis resulted in the sacking of the president due to messages posted on Twitter and other social media by youths calling for his removal.

These messages reported the killing of an Iranian female citizen, Neda Agha Sultan, by Turkish police. The murder, as portrayed on Twitter, was said to have caused the spontaneous, riotous public reactions that unceremoniously ended in the expulsion of the Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Blogging, text messages, and unverified news reports by citizens and opposition party supporters had deployed their new media machines for political communication, with tremendous side effects.

The emergence of social media algorithms has created new conditions for direct media influence. Research demonstrates that algorithmic content curation can produce immediate, uniform audience responses, particularly in contexts involving misinformation and viral content (Adam et al., 2025). These findings suggest a renewed relevance for the Magic Bullet Theory in understanding contemporary media effects.

Studies of political mobilisation through social media platforms reveal patterns consistent with direct effects models. Research on Nigeria's digital political landscape shows how social media can facilitate immediate collective action and behavioural change, supporting arguments for the theory's continued applicability (Mohammed & Kirfi, 2024).

Numerous examples of immediate, spontaneous public reactions to media messages can be found in Nigeria and other African states. Research indicates that Nigerian audiences demonstrate significant reliance on both social media and mainstream media channels for information consumption, often with immediate behavioural responses following media exposure (Nwabueze & Okonkwo, 2018). This pattern of immediate response is further supported by recent studies on social media's role in political mobilisation, where Nigerian audiences exhibit rapid behavioural changes following exposure to digital content (Benaiah & Osuntoki, 2024). The proliferation of algorithm-driven content on social media platforms has intensified these direct effects, creating conditions where media messages achieve immediate, widespread influence (Schäfer, 2025). For the populace, there is no escaping the constant flow of news reports and messages across social media, print, and broadcast media.

Popoola (2012, p. 217) also observed that public reactions to the 1983 elections (which resulted in electoral violence in Ondo State), the commotion following the Ikeja, Lagos accidental bomb blast, and the electoral violence that rocked Delta State in 2002, among other Nigerian incidents, all demonstrate that the Bullet Theory is most appropriate for explaining people's reactions to these developments.

## **World War Era (1920s-1940s)**

Theory emerged during wartime when newspapers dominated communication, with audiences absorbing messages without resistance.

1

## **Nigerian Electoral Violence (1983-2007)**

Media coverage triggered immediate public reactions in Ondo State, the Lagos bomb blast, and the Delta State electoral violence.

2

## **Iranian Presidential Crisis (2009)**

Social media messages about Neda Agha Soltan's killing led to the president's removal, demonstrating the theory's digital age relevance.

3

## **Contemporary Social Media Era**

The constant relay of news through social media platforms demonstrates a continued powerful influence on Nigerian audiences.

4

Duyile (2016b) details a Magic Bullet Theory incident: a Channel Television news broadcast on the poor conditions of the Nigeria Police College, Ikeja, which portrayed the college as overgrown with weeds. Upon watching, then Nigerian President, Goodluck Jonathan, immediately ordered the Federal Ministry of Works to clear the bush, wild weeds, and renovate the buildings. This prompt response served as further evidence of the Magic Bullet Theory. Fair and Shah (1999, as cited in Servaes, 2000) viewed the Hypodermic Needle Theory as the earliest communication model ruling the 1960s and 70s media landscape, deeming it a "Magic Multiplier" able to accelerate and magnify development benefits.

Udejinta's (2012) study in Oyo town, Nigeria, revealed a significant relationship between television advertising and beer brand preference among male bank employees, notably influencing consumer brand awareness and purchasing decisions. Similarly, Liu and Jeffres's (2012) study on individual attitudes towards political advertising in the 2006 Senatorial and Gubernatorial Elections in Ohio, U.S.A., also demonstrated media effects, suggesting voters' subjective attitudes play an important role in political campaigns. Contemporary research on social media's political influence shows similar direct effects, with algorithm-driven content producing immediate behavioural responses (Mohammed & Kirfi, 2025). Recent Nigerian studies on social media's role in political mobilisation confirm its capacity to rapidly organise collective action and influence civic participation. The studies concluded that provocative messages inviting citizens to join protests positively impacted receivers, who joined in their hundreds, thus confirming social media's powerful effect as an information transmitter.

A study by Ogunleye (2025) on mass media's impact on political campaigns in Nigeria suggests that mass media enhance political communication from the political class to voters, shaping public opinion and views on candidates through messages with instant and sometimes cumulative positive effects. Pate and Bashir (2012) highlight the crucial role of media institutions in Nigeria's democratisation process, with their findings depicting the effectiveness of media messages on audiences.

Ogwezzy-Ndisika (2012), in her study "Factors that influence media output during Election in Nigeria..." focusing on the April 2007 general elections, found that beyond media ownership and proprietors' political ideologies, media messages could divert voters' attention from political opponents or parties. They act as channels of persuasion and mobilisation for candidates, propelling them into the political limelight and sustaining their status.

An avalanche of other examples demonstrate the magic bullet theory and media effects on audiences. These findings align with recent research on viral content mechanisms, which demonstrate how social media platforms facilitate rapid information spread and immediate audience responses, supporting the Magic Bullet Theory's core assumptions about direct media influence (Klavdianos, 2025).

## Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Action Assembly Theory, propounded by John Greene in 1984. The theory explains possible structures and processes involved in the production of communication behaviour. It argues that individuals possess both content and procedural knowledge during communication. Content knowledge concerns things, issues, or events, while procedural knowledge relates to the consequences of message recipients' various actions in different situations.

### Empirical Support

Studies from Nigeria, Iran, and the USA demonstrate continued relevance through political advertising, social media mobilisation, and protest organisation effects.

### Action Assembly Framework

John Greene's 1984 theory explains communication behaviour through content and procedural knowledge in message processing and response.

### Contemporary Manifestations

Television commercials, political campaigns, and social media protests show immediate and powerful audience responses consistent with theoretical predictions.

# METHODOLOGY

This study adopted an interview survey to gather subjects' perceptions and opinions, alongside an observational study of media reportage on public interest issues, noting its effects on audience behaviours and responses. As the study aimed to ascertain the Magic Bullet Theory's modern-day currency and efficacy rather than gather statistical data, in-depth interviews and observation were deemed appropriate.

## DATA COLLECTION

One hundred respondents, comprising men, women, and media professionals, were interviewed. Data collection involved in-depth interviews with ten (10) University Scholars and ten Journalists specializing in media and communication disciplines, each with 15-25 years' professional experience. These interviews were complemented by personal observations and analyses of newspaper reports concerning media messages and audience responses.

### Sample Composition

- 110 total respondents
- 10 University Scholars
- 10 Professional Journalists (15-25 years experience)
- 90 General public respondents

### Data Collection Methods

In-depth interviews, observational study of media reportage, and analysis of newspaper reports on audience responses

### Research Approach

Qualitative methodology focusing on perceptions and opinions rather than statistical data collection

## DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Of the 110 respondents interviewed regarding media influence, seventy (70) agreed they often depended on media for direction on societal issues affecting their lives; they also unanimously agreed they rely on media publicity for decision-making during political elections.

Ten (10) of the respondents held a different view on media's influence. Though they recognised media's power to influence people's decision-making, many of their decisions resulted from consultations with family elders. They opined that media are sometimes too biased in reporting public issues, with some believing the Nigerian Press portrays the rich while neglecting the poor.

Another ten (10) respondents disagreed that media possess such enormous power to dictate their actions on certain issues. While agreeing to regular media exposure, they rarely allowed media to influence them. All ten scholars and ten journalists interviewed unanimously opined that media tremendously influence public affairs and decision-making processes.

**72.7%**

**27.3%**

**100%**

**Media Influence Support**

Respondents confirming media's enormous influence on behaviour and decision-making

**Limited Effect View**

Respondents believing media has minimal influence on their behaviours and responses

**Expert Consensus**

Scholars and journalists agreeing on media's tremendous influence on public affairs

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The study employed a flexible questioning approach, with all respondents asked follow-up questions. Results show that 80 out of 110 respondents (72.7%) agreed media possess enormous influence on their behaviours and decision-making. The remaining thirty respondents (27.3%) agreed media messages held no such enormous influence on their behaviours and responses to societal issues, except during election campaign periods when media portray political candidates. This finding aligns with contemporary research on social media's direct influence, where studies demonstrate that digital platforms can produce immediate and uniform audience responses, particularly in political and social contexts (Abaraonye, 2025).

The thirty respondents agreed that, for election voting, they often depend on media reports on party candidates to guide their decisions, while also relying on advice and persuasion from information-rich community leaders for political candidate preferences. This set of respondents appears to hold a conflicting idea about media potency.

Most respondents who agree to the media's powerful influence often depend on media messages to guide their actions, especially during economic, social, and political crises. They cited numerous instances where they relied on media messages for guidance. For example, some of the 80 respondents believe media are highly potent in matters concerning communities and the country, while others find media more influential during election periods when voting for particular political parties and candidates.

Three respondents referred to the Russian invasion and war against Ukraine, expressing sympathy for Ukrainians due to media coverage. Despite differing views on the research topic, the study finds general agreement in respondents' answers. The minimal effect theory recognises the audience's ability to select and screen messages to judge media information for decision-making.

The persistence of direct media effects in digital environments is further supported by research on algorithm-driven content delivery. Studies show that social media algorithms can create conditions where audiences experience immediate behavioural responses to targeted messages, validating core assumptions of the Magic Bullet Theory (Metzler & Garcia, 2023).

Evidence of media's powerful influence comes from some newspaper publications with positive and negative public reactions. One such example is an analytical press report on the trial of Nigerian minors involved in the 2024 End-Bad-Governance Protest. One hundred and nineteen protesters, including 32 minors aged 14-17 years, were charged with treason. Three Nigerian newspapers—The Nation, The Punch, and The Guardian—published critical comments and articles against the police decision to charge the young men, exposing them to public view (Nation Newspaper, 2024). Due to the massive media publicity against the police for detaining the young boys, Nigeria's President Bola Ahmed Tinubu ordered the release of the minors. The President's action was seen as an immediate response to media reports, exemplifying the Bullet theory.

Contemporary examples of media influence are observed in Nigeria's political and social landscape, where government responses to media coverage often demonstrate the continued relevance of direct media effects. Media reports on security issues, diplomatic relations, and governance challenges frequently prompt immediate governmental and institutional responses, suggesting the Magic Bullet Theory's core assumptions about media power remain applicable in certain contexts.

Research on digital activism and social media mobilisation provides additional evidence for direct media effects, with studies documenting how online platforms can facilitate immediate collective action and behavioural change (Abaraonye, 2025).

Further evidence for the Magic Bullet Theory emerged from Channel Television's news broadcast during Goodluck Jonathan's presidency in Nigeria. The TV broadcast vividly portrayed the Nigeria Police College, Ikeja, Lagos, as dilapidated, with overgrown weeds and disrepaired buildings. The Nigerian public reacted with anti-government commentaries in national dailies. President Jonathan, having watched the report, ordered the Federal Ministry of Works in Lagos to immediately clear the bush and renovate the buildings, restoring the Police College to its deserved state. His order was obeyed.

The role of social media algorithms in amplifying certain messages while suppressing others creates conditions similar to those described by the Magic Bullet Theory, where media content can directly and powerfully influence audience behaviour (Adam et al., 2025).

Evidence of the "Social Media" or "Twitter Revolution" is available in many countries worldwide. A notable case is the Iranian government under President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who attempted to block media coverage of the crisis and street demonstrations surrounding the disputed 2009 elections. However, "Citizen Journalists" used cell phones to send reports and photographs of police brutality against demonstrators to the outside world. Global opinion definitively turned against the Iranian government, with a devastating effect, leading to the President eventually leaving office. This event, known as the "Twitter Revolution" in Iran, exemplified media orchestration mobilising citizens to react to a political crisis.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

We conclude from this study's findings that the Magic Bullet Theory retains relevance in today's Nigerian media landscape. While social media has introduced new complexities, including misinformation challenges, research on viral misinformation demonstrates how social media algorithms can facilitate the rapid spread of false information, creating direct effects similar to those predicted by the Magic Bullet Theory (Denniss & Lindberg, 2025). Digital platforms have also demonstrated characteristics consistent with the Magic Bullet Theory's predictions. The theory's continued applicability is evident where audiences exhibit immediate and uniform responses to media messages, particularly during crisis situations and in environments with limited media literacy. Rather than being obsolete, the theory should be understood as conditionally applicable, with its effects varying based on audience characteristics, message content, and contextual factors.

The examples cited in this study demonstrate that the Magic Bullet Theory remains theoretically applicable in explaining media audience behaviour regarding mass media content and editorial messages. This study aligns with Popoola (2012), cautioning against uncritically adopting foreign research deeming the Magic Bullet Theory ineffective, thereby undermining the media's potency and powerful effects on its audience. Contemporary digital media effects studies support the theory's continued relevance, particularly in contexts involving algorithm-driven content delivery and immediate audience responses (Robinson, 2024).

We recommend that, though the theory may not apply in all cases or fully account for media effects in every context, mass communication scholars should continuously revisit the Magic Bullet Theory and Noelle-Neumann's (1973) Minimal Effect Theory. This re-examination should study their effects on audiences through contemporary media outlets to establish their ongoing relevance in mass communication messages.

01

### **Theory Validation**

Recognise the Magic Bullet Theory's continued relevance in the contemporary media landscape, especially in social media contexts.

02

### **Misinformation Control**

Introduce fact-checking mechanisms and measures to curb fake news and disinformation that generate strong reactions.

03

### **Contextual Application**

Apply the theory conditionally rather than universally, recognising varying audience responses in different situations.

04

### **Continuous Research**

Scholars should continuously revisit and study the Magic Bullet and Minimal Effect theories through contemporary media outlets.

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## **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR(S)

## Dayo Duyile

Department of Mass Communication, College of Social Sciences, Wesley University, Ondo, Nigeria

 [dayoduyile@yahoo.com](mailto:dayoduyile@yahoo.com)

## Babatunde R. Oyinade

Department of Mass Communication, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Ikeji-Arakeji, Nigeria

## McNezer Fasehun

Wesley University, Ondo, Nigeria.

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