

## The turn to anonymity in Nigerian writing and its human rights implications



 Vitalis Chinemerem Iloanwusi<sup>1+</sup>  
 Chijioke Edward<sup>2</sup>  
 Amadi Cletus Okechukwu<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Department of English and Literary Studies, Faculty of Arts, Godfrey Okoye University, Nigeria.

<sup>1</sup>Email: [chinemeremioanwusi@gmail.com](mailto:chinemeremioanwusi@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Email: [edward@gouni.edu.ng](mailto:edward@gouni.edu.ng)

<sup>3</sup>Department of Political Science and International Relations, Faculty of Management and Social Sciences, Godfrey Okoye University, Nigeria.

<sup>3</sup>Email: [amadicletus07@gmail.com](mailto:amadicletus07@gmail.com)



(+ Corresponding author)

### ABSTRACT

#### Article History

Received: 18 December 2025

Revised: 26 February 2026

Accepted: 9 March 2026

Published: 30 March 2026

#### Keywords

Anonymity  
Harassment  
Human rights  
Nigerian writing  
Repression  
Surveillance capitalism.

This study examines the growing turn to anonymity in Nigerian writing and its human rights implications within an increasingly digitalized environment. Drawing on Surveillance Capitalism Theory, it argues that pervasive monitoring, data extraction, and socio-political repression significantly shape writers' decisions to conceal their identities across literary and digital platforms. The study sought to determine how fear of repression influences anonymity adoption, assess how anonymity affects willingness to express dissenting views, and evaluate perceptions of the adequacy of human rights protections for anonymous expression in Nigeria. A quantitative research design was adopted, using structured Likert-scale questionnaires distributed to 826 members of three WhatsApp groups comprising creative writers, English students, and mass communication students. A total of 415 valid responses were analyzed using mean and standard deviation, with 2.50 as the decision benchmark. Findings indicate that fear of repression strongly motivates writers' use of anonymity, anonymity significantly enhances willingness to critique authority and dominant narratives, and existing human rights protections for anonymous expression are widely perceived as inadequate. These results demonstrate that anonymity functions primarily as a defensive strategy rather than a stylistic choice, enabling writers to navigate surveillance, harassment, and potential legal sanctions. The study further shows that digital environments intensify expressive vulnerability, underscoring the relevance of surveillance capitalism in understanding contemporary authorship practices in Nigeria. It concludes that anonymity has become an essential mechanism for sustaining freedom of expression, particularly in politically sensitive discourse, and highlights the urgent need for legal reforms and stronger digital rights protections.

**Contribution/ Originality:** This study contributes to the existing literature by positioning anonymity in Nigerian writing as a human rights issue. It uses a new estimation methodology based on Likert means. This is one of the few studies investigating writers' anonymity under surveillance capitalism in Nigeria.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the Nigerian social media space has witnessed a marked shift from signed, identifiable authorship to anonymous or faceless writing. This turn to anonymity is not merely a stylistic or technological choice but a survival response to an increasingly hostile environment for expression. Writers, citizen journalists, bloggers, and digital storytellers who articulate uncomfortable truths often do so under the shadow of intimidation, harassment, arrest, or physical violence. As a result, anonymity has become both a shield and a signal of fear within Nigeria's digital public sphere. This phenomenon raises urgent questions about freedom of expression, the right to privacy, and

human dignity. It also exposes the widening gap between Nigeria's human rights obligations and lived realities. This study is original in empirically framing anonymity in Nigerian digital writing as a human rights survival strategy rather than a stylistic choice, uniquely applying Surveillance Capitalism Theory and quantitative evidence from online writing communities to link anonymity, repression, and gaps in rights protection.

Historically, Nigerian writers and journalists have played a central role in speaking truth to power, from colonial resistance literature to post-independence political critique. However, the digital age has transformed both the reach and the risk of such expression (Madu & Amusan, 2016). Social media platforms now function as alternative literary and journalistic spaces where short narratives, threads, spoken-word scripts, and micro-essays circulate widely. These platforms collapse the distance between the writer and the state, making dissent instantly visible and traceable (Adeyemi, 2017). Consequently, expression that once appeared in novels or newspapers now unfolds in real time, attracting faster reprisals. Anonymity emerges as a coping mechanism within this accelerated surveillance environment.

The turn to faceless authorship must be understood within Nigeria's broader national security discourse, which frequently frames critical speech as a threat to public order. Laws regulating cybercrime, hate speech, misinformation, and online harms have expanded state powers over digital communication (Antai, Obisesan, & Umo, 2025). While such laws are often justified as necessary for security and stability, they are ambiguously worded and unevenly enforced. This ambiguity produces a chilling effect on writers who engage political, ethnic, religious, or security-related themes (Salau, 2017). Fear of misinterpretation or selective prosecution discourages named authorship. Anonymity thus becomes a rational response to legal uncertainty (Moyakine, 2016).

The core of this change is the right to privacy, which is a fundamental, though weakly protected, human right within the Nigerian digital ecosystem. Privacy enables individuals to think, write, and communicate without fear of constant surveillance (Nwanne, 2014). The issue of journalism and creative writing having protected spaces to operate as services to the public has long been debated among scholars of media and communication (Madu & Amusan, 2016). The rights of individuals are undermined by data retention practices, surveillance technologies, and informal monitoring by state and non-state actors in the Nigerian context (Adeyemi, 2017). Privacy loss has a direct effect on expressive freedom. Authors who lack privacy protections turn to anonymity to preserve their voices (Moyakine, 2016).

This phenomenon can be critically analyzed using the normative framework offered by international human rights law, especially the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The ICCPR guarantees freedom of expression and recognizes the right to privacy as vital to human dignity (Ilori, 2022). Notably, anonymity is an increasingly recognized component of expressive freedom in international jurisprudence. It enables speakers to avoid retaliation, particularly in politically volatile contexts where the rule of law is weak (Moyakine, 2016). Nigeria's ratification of the ICCPR imposes a duty to protect anonymous speech rather than merely tolerate it. However, domestic practice often conflicts with these norms (Antai et al., 2025).

By rendering identity visible and traceable, new media technologies intensify the conflict between expression and security. Metadata, geolocation, and user behavior are routinely recorded on digital platforms, effectively collapsing anonymity at the infrastructural level (Adeyemi, 2017). This technological reality intersects with human development concerns, as fear breeds silence, weakening civic engagement and democratic culture (Nwanne, 2014). When writers censor themselves or conceal their identities, discourse becomes fragmented and distorted. Narratives persist, but they lack the accountability mechanisms traditionally associated with named authorship (Ilori, 2022). As a result, Nigeria's communicative ecosystem is adversely affected.

Anonymous storytelling and the rise of faceless blogging also represent a cultural shift in Nigerian literary practice. Authorship, traditionally tied to name, reputation, and intellectual property ownership, is being reconfigured (Antai et al., 2025). Many social media writers now prioritize message over identity and content over credit. While this shift gives voice to oppressed narratives, it also signals profound insecurity within the expressive space (Kojah,

Toyama, & Haimson, 2025). The erosion of authorial self reflects not freedom, but fear. This contradiction complicates celebratory narratives of digital democratization (Ilori, 2022).

The challenges faced by Nigerian writers are not abstract but grounded in documented cases of harassment, arrest, and violence. Social media journalists reporting on corruption, security threats, or human rights abuses are frequently targeted through coordinated online and offline attacks (Antai et al., 2025). Ethnic minorities, women, and activists face disproportionate risks as marginalized voices (Kojah et al., 2025). These vulnerabilities are sometimes exacerbated by content moderation practices that remove protective anonymity or expose users' identities. In such high-stakes environments, anonymity functions as a form of self-preservation (Antai et al., 2025), compensating for structural threats.

The silencing of anonymous voices can also be examined through philosophical frameworks of communal responsibility, such as the African concept of *Igwebuike*. Human rights violations are not merely personal harms but social injuries that weaken collective cohesion (Anthony, 2017). When authors are forced into anonymity, society loses identifiable ethical witnesses to injustice. Silence and invisibility become normalized, undermining social responsibility (Anthony, 2017). Thus, anonymity reflects not only individual fear but also collective failure to defend expressive rights. Democratic culture ultimately bears the cost.

National security is often presented as a counterbalance to freedom of expression, yet international human rights law maintains that the two need not be mutually exclusive. Legitimate security concerns must satisfy tests of legality, necessity, and proportionality (Salau, 2017). In Nigeria, however, security justifications frequently dominate expressive rights without sufficient grounding (Antai et al., 2025). This imbalance leaves digital writers without institutional protection. Anonymity, therefore, substitutes for the legal safeguards that should exist (Moyakine, 2016), addressing gaps created by weak rights enforcement.

Anonymity also raises complex ethical and legal questions regarding responsibility, misinformation, and democratic accountability. Critics argue that anonymous expression facilitates abuse and disinformation. While these concerns are not unfounded, they do not justify systematic hostility toward anonymous speech (Ilori, 2022). International practice increasingly favors balanced regulation over compulsory identity disclosure. Effective governance requires mechanisms that protect anonymity while addressing harm. Nigeria's current approach remains largely unbalanced (Antai et al., 2025).

Comparative human rights scholarship shows that anonymity has historically shielded subversive political writing, from pamphleteering to modern whistleblowing. In digital democracies, anonymous speech has become an essential tool for dissent (Moyakine, 2016). Nigeria reflects these global patterns, but the risks are intensified by insecurity and institutional fragility (Ilori, 2022). Resorting to anonymity is therefore not deviant but consistent with global expressive traditions. What differs is the severity of the consequences of exposure, which reshapes writing practices.

This paper situates Nigerian anonymous social media writing at the intersection of law, literature, media studies, and human rights. Tweets, blogs, and digital narratives are examined as emergent literary forms shaped by coercive conditions (Kojah et al., 2025). Beyond legal analysis, the study foregrounds lived experience, conceptualizing authors not merely as rights holders but as cultural negotiators (Nwanne, 2014). Anonymity thus becomes a discursive lens for interpreting repression.

Finally, anonymity in Nigerian social media writing exposes a deep contradiction between constitutional guarantees and international commitments, on the one hand, and lived realities, on the other. It reflects both resilience and vulnerability within Nigeria's expressive culture. While anonymity enables marginalized stories to circulate, it simultaneously testifies to the state's failure to ensure basic protections. Evaluating this trend against ICCPR standards reveals deficiencies in privacy protection, media regulation, and national security practices. These gaps have serious implications for human development and democratic sustainability. In the absence of secure spaces for identified expression, anonymity becomes a necessity rather than a choice.

### 1.1. Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to:

1. Determine how the fear of repression influences the adoption of anonymity among Nigerian writers.
2. Ascertain the influence of anonymity on writers' willingness to express critical or dissenting views.
3. Assess writers' perceptions of the adequacy of human rights protections for anonymous expression in Nigeria.

### 1.2. Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions.

1. How does the fear of repression influence Nigerian writers' adoption of anonymity in their writing?
2. What influence does anonymity have on writers' willingness to express critical or dissenting views?
3. How do writers perceive the adequacy of human rights protections for anonymous expression in Nigeria?

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SURVEILLANCE CAPITALISM THEORY

This study adopts Surveillance Capitalism Theory as its primary theoretical framework for analyzing the turn to anonymity in Nigerian writing and its human rights implications. Developed and popularized by Zuboff (2023) the theory explains how contemporary power operates through pervasive data extraction, monitoring, and behavioral modification within digital environments (Zuboff, 2023). Surveillance capitalism transforms human experience into behavioral data that can be tracked, analyzed, and exploited. Under such conditions, visibility becomes compulsory rather than voluntary. Writers and digital storytellers operate within systems that continuously observe and record their expressive activities. This structural visibility has profound consequences for freedom of expression and privacy.

The theory of surveillance capitalism assumes that the information space is governed by what Zuboff calls an instrumentarian logic, in which surveillance is used to predict and influence behavior (Zuboff, 2023). In this context, individuals internalize the fact that they are being observed and modify their behavior accordingly. This is reflected in Nigeria, where writers often avoid direct identification when addressing politically sensitive issues. It is the expectation of policing, rather than censorship per se, that stimulates expressive suppression. Anonymity thus becomes a logical response to coercive visibility. It enables authors to participate in social dialogue while minimizing risk.

Political economy approaches that distinguish between state surveillance and corporate surveillance also align with the theory. Scholars argue that surveillance capitalism operates through both economic and political forms of surveillance, which often complement one another (Fuchs, 2013). In the Nigerian context, a surveillance environment is produced by state security agencies, digital platforms, and informal actors. This heightens vulnerability for writers and bloggers who lack institutional protection. Anonymity is therefore not merely a reaction to a single authority but a response to a networked system of observation. Surveillance Capitalism Theory thus elucidates the complexity of power relations shaping digital expression.

Surveillance Capitalism Theory further illuminates the human rights implications of data-driven governance. Constant surveillance exacerbates social injustice by disproportionately targeting marginalized and dissident voices (Cinnamon, 2017). Authors who challenge dominant narratives are more likely to be harassed, profiled, or repressed. Consequently, anonymity emerges as a defensive human rights practice rather than an abdication of responsibility. The theory reveals how surveillance erodes the right to privacy, thereby weakening freedom of expression. In this regard, anonymity is a consequence of rights degradation rather than a contributor to democratization.

Finally, Surveillance Capitalism Theory can be applied to literary and cultural analysis by situating digital writing within regimes of hyper-visibility. Contemporary digital architectures generate extensive data traces that expose authors to retrospective scrutiny and potential punishment (Power, 2022). Nigerian writers, therefore, negotiate authorship conditions in which texts may outlive their creators. The turn to anonymity represents an attempt to override such traces and reassert expressive agency. By framing anonymity as a product of surveillance

capitalism, this study links literary practice to structural power and human rights vulnerability. The theory thus offers a coherent and contemporary framework for understanding anonymity as a form of resistance in Nigeria's digital writing culture.

### 2.1. Review of Empirical Studies

Few empirical studies have specifically examined the turn to anonymity in Nigerian writing and its human rights implications. However, several related studies in media studies, human rights, digital communication, and national security provide empirical foundations upon which the present research is built. These studies are reviewed to identify their relevance, methodologies, findings, and areas of convergence and divergence.

Nwanne (2014) conducted an empirical study on the right to privacy, new media, and human development in Nigeria, focusing on the ethical and legal dimensions of media practice in the digital era. Using a qualitative analytical approach based on documentary evidence, the study explored privacy concerns in journalistic practice and public communication. The findings revealed that inadequate legal protection of privacy restricts free expression and exposes writers and journalists to various risks. Nwanne further observed that journalists often employ mediated or indirect storytelling techniques to reduce self-exposure. While both studies emphasize privacy as a prerequisite for freedom of expression, the present research extends the analysis beyond professional journalism to include literary authors, social media narrators, and anonymous online writers from a human rights perspective.

Kojah et al. (2025) presented an empirical study titled *Silencing the Voiceless: Social Media Content Moderation towards At-Risk Marginalized Groups in High-Stakes Violence and Human Rights Situations in Nigeria*. Using qualitative interviews and participatory research, the study examined the effects of content moderation on vulnerable social media users. The findings showed that marginalized writers frequently rely on anonymity to protect themselves from violence, harassment, and state repression, although such protection is sometimes undermined by platform policies. While the present study aligns with Kojah et al. (2025) in identifying anonymity as a survival mechanism, it places greater emphasis on anonymity as a literary and expressive practice shaped by national security and human rights concerns.

Antai et al. (2025) examined press freedom and national security in Nigeria through doctrinal and empirical legal analysis of cybercrime legislation. Their study revealed that ambiguously worded cyber laws are used to intimidate writers, compel source disclosure, and suppress critical expression. This aligns with the present study's focus on fear-induced self-censorship. However, whereas Antai et al. (2025) concentrated on journalistic sources and legal texts, the present research expands the scope to include anonymous social media authors and literary narrators as human rights actors.

Salawu (2016) in *Media Narrative Construction of Human Rights Abuse in Nigeria* empirically analyzed newspaper coverage of human rights abuses using content analysis. The findings demonstrated the role of writing in raising social consciousness while also revealing constraints on journalists reporting sensitive issues. While both studies view writing as a tool for human rights advocacy, Salawu (2016) focused on mainstream media, whereas the present study examines digital writing and anonymity as a protective narrative strategy.

Ekeh, Ikem, and Adetayo (2024) in *Who Speaks for the Poor? Poverty, Human Rights, Social Justice, and Access to Media in Nigeria*, qualitative media analysis and interviews explored how socio-economic conditions influence access to representation. The study found that marginalized groups often resort to informal media spaces, frequently without explicit authorship. While their work highlights exclusion and vulnerability, the present study emphasizes anonymity as a response to surveillance, insecurity, and human rights threats in Nigerian digital writing.

Eke, Oloyede, Ochang, and Borokini (2022) examined Nigeria's digital identification management programme, focusing on its ethical, legal, and socio-cultural implications. Using mixed methods, the study found that centralised identity systems intensify surveillance, weaken privacy protections, and heighten fear of traceability. While Eke et al.

(2022) focused on identity governance, the present study extends the discussion to expressive practices and literary self-concealment as a human rights response.

Torokhova (2024) in *Information, Creativity, and Autocratic Stability* analyzed how repression shapes creative expression across authoritarian contexts. The study found that fear of sanctions discourages identifiable authorship and promotes anonymous expression. While aligned with the present study, Torokhova's analysis adopts a macro-political perspective, whereas the current research focuses on Nigeria's digital writing environment.

Tannenberg (2022) examined self-censorship in repressive contexts using survey data, showing that individuals avoid identifiable expression to minimize risk. Although supportive of the present study's argument, Tannenberg's work does not explicitly frame anonymity within a human rights discourse.

Holman (2024) explored popular self-expression under democratic and semi-democratic systems, finding that surveillance and coercive authority reduce expressive freedom and foster defensive communication. While largely theoretical, this work reinforces the present study's empirical claims.

Gerschewski (2023) analyzed repression strategies across regimes, demonstrating how communicative behavior shifts toward anonymous expression. The present study builds on this insight within Nigeria's digital writing and human rights context.

Kochi (2023) examined authoritarian populism and democratic decline, noting that shrinking civic spaces encourage indirect and anonymous expression. While globally focused, the findings resonate with the Nigerian case.

Broeders, Cristiano, and Kaminska (2023) analyzed digital sovereignty and strategic autonomy, showing how state-led digital infrastructures undermine privacy and expression. Their findings support the present study's emphasis on surveillance, though this research prioritizes writers' lived experiences.

Walker (2022) examined authoritarian "sharp power" in information spaces, demonstrating how surveillance discourages identifiable authorship. This aligns with the present study's conclusion that anonymity functions as a defensive expressive mechanism.

Masferrer (2023) investigated declining freedom of expression and social vulnerability, finding that increased regulation and surveillance push individuals toward concealment. The present study extends this analysis to Nigerian digital writers.

Ayalew (2022) empirically analyzed the right to privacy under African human rights law, demonstrating that weak enforcement mechanisms undermine freedom of expression. This directly informs the current study's focus on anonymity as a response to inadequate rights protection in Nigeria.

Ilori (2022) examined platform governance and online expression in Nigeria and South Africa through empirical legal analysis. The study revealed that poorly regulated digital spaces increase risks for identifiable speakers, reinforcing anonymity. This complements the present study's findings, though the current research emphasizes literary and narrative practices.

Madu and Amusan (2016) empirically explored information access, freedom of expression, censorship, and privacy in Nigeria. Their findings showed that censorship and privacy violations significantly constrain open expression. The present study builds on this foundation by examining anonymity as a contemporary coping strategy.

Luka (2019) examined journalists' balancing of privacy, ethics, and public interest in Nigeria. The study found that fear of repercussions influences disclosure practices. While Luka focused on professional journalism, the present study extends the analysis to digital writers and anonymous authors.

Ibe and Nzediegwu (2025) empirically examined privacy invasion and psychological impacts within Nigerian digital culture. Their findings demonstrate heightened vulnerability in online environments, supporting the current study's argument that anonymity protects human dignity.

Salami and Nwankwo (2024) analyzed the regulation of privacy in artificial intelligence systems in Nigeria, finding that emerging technologies intensify surveillance risks. This reinforces the present study's reliance on Surveillance Capitalism Theory.

Singler and Babalola (2024) empirically examined digital colonialism and privacy legislation in Nigeria. Their findings show that surveillance practices undermine trust and expressive freedom, supporting the current study's human rights framing.

Aidonojie, Majekodunmi, Eregbuonye, and Ogbemudia (2024) investigated data security and privacy in Nigerian automated systems, revealing significant threats to fundamental rights. This supports the present research's emphasis on anonymity as a protective response.

Finally, Alichie (2023) empirically studied online marginalization and anonymity among LGBTQ+ social media users in Nigeria. The findings showed that anonymity is essential for protection against harassment and violence. While focused on sexuality-based vulnerability, the study strongly supports the present research's broader argument that anonymity functions as a human rights safeguard in hostile digital environments.

Altogether, the analyzed empirical research indicates that the lack of privacy, surveillance, legal limitations, and the presence of socio-political risks impact expressive practice in Nigeria considerably. Though anonymity is not the subject of discussion in any of the studies, they all point to circumstances under which faceless authorship is the only way to safeguard works of literature and human rights. The current research thus provides a much-needed gap by empirically and theoretically investigating how anonymity is turned into a human rights concern influenced by national security, digital surveillance, and expressive vulnerability in Nigeria.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### *3.1. Research Design*

This paper used a research design of quantitative research involved in investigating the turn to anonymity in writing in Nigeria and the implications for human rights. It was believed that the quantitative approach was the right one as it gives the opportunity to measure perceptions, experiences, and attitudes of writers to anonymity, repression, and human rights protection in a systematic way. The structured questionnaire was used in the collection of data since it produced numerical data that could be analyzed statistically. The design helped the researcher to generate generalizable conclusions on a comparatively large population of writers and students involved in disciplines involved in literary and media.

#### *3.2. Population of the Study*

The study population consisted of WhatsApp group members who actively write, engage in literature, and discuss media in Nigeria. These included the Creative Writers in Nigeria WhatsApp group with 215 members, the South East Association of English Students with 187 members, and the South East Association of Mass Communication Students with 424 members. The overall study population was thus 826 respondents. Such groups were selected because they comprise individuals directly involved in writing, storytelling, literary criticism, and media production, which are the focus of this study.

#### *3.3. Sample Size and Sampling Technique*

All 826 members in the three WhatsApp groups were provided with the questionnaire, and the group administrators were consulted. This method guarantees ethics and volunteering. Google Forms were used as a source of data collection and to ensure the anonymity of respondents to complete the questionnaire. There were 415 respondents out of the entire population, and their number was sufficient to write back and complete the questionnaire, indicating a response rate of about 50.2%. Data analysis was done using all responses that were filled in as valid.

### *3.4. Instrument for Data Collection*

The data collection tool was a structured Likert-scale questionnaire formulated in accordance with the study objectives. The questionnaire was designed as three parts, each containing seven (7) items, representing the three research objectives, for a total of 21 items.

Responses were rated using a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The instrument aimed to gather respondents' opinions regarding fear of repression, how anonymity impacts expression, and perceptions of the protection of human rights of anonymous expression in Nigeria.

### *3.5. Validation of the Instrument*

In order to establish the validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts. Three professionals were used to validate it, one of whom was an expert in Measurement and Evaluation, another in the Faculty of Law, and the third in the Department of Mass Communication at Godfrey Okoye University. These professionals evaluated the tool in terms of content relevance, item clarity, and study purpose congruence. They provided suggestions and corrections, thus improving the face and content validity of the instrument.

### *3.6. Reliability of the Instrument*

In an attempt to establish the accuracy of the tool, a questionnaire was also conducted on a pilot group not part of the study. These were 56 members of the Press Team of Godfrey Okoye University and 28 students of English who were selected by the researcher from four academic levels, bringing the total number of respondents to 84. The pilot test allowed for ascertaining the correspondence and clarity of questions in the questionnaire. The pilot administration also suggested that the instrument was reliable and fit to be used in the main study since the items were properly comprehended and the responses were consistent.

### *3.7. Method of Data Analysis*

The information obtained was analyzed through mean and standard deviation. An interpretation threshold of 2.50 was used.

All items with a mean of 2.50 or above were accepted, indicating agreement with the statement, while those below 2.50 were rejected. This approach enabled a clear and objective interpretation of respondents' perceptions regarding each research question.

### *3.8. Ethical Considerations*

This study held on to ethical considerations in its conduct. The administrators of all the WhatsApp groups were consulted before the administration of the questionnaire. It was voluntary, with the response being told that he/she could withdraw at any point without any penalties.

The level of anonymity and confidentiality was ensured because the questionnaire did not demand any personal information. Statistics obtained were confined to academic reasons and were mitigated to avoid any unauthorized access.

### *3.9. Data Presentation and Analysis*

#### *3.9.1. Research Question One*

How does the fear of repression influence Nigerian writers' adoption of anonymity in their writing?

**Table 1.** Mean responses on the influence of fear of repression on writers' adoption of anonymity.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Frequency	Mean	Std. Dev	Remark
1	Fear of arrest or detention influences my decision to write anonymously.	165	150	60	40	415	2.95	0.88	Accepted
2	Concerns about harassment discourage me from using my real identity online.	170	145	55	45	415	2.97	0.86	Accepted
3	Surveillance of online activities increases my preference for anonymity.	160	155	58	42	415	2.93	0.89	Accepted
4	Fear of social or political backlash affects my authorship choices.	158	150	62	45	415	2.90	0.91	Accepted
5	Writing anonymously makes me feel safer when addressing sensitive issues.	172	148	50	45	415	2.99	0.85	Accepted
6	I would write openly if there were stronger protections against repression.	155	152	63	45	415	2.89	0.92	Accepted
7	Fear of physical harm contributes to my choice of anonymous writing.	168	149	54	44	415	2.96	0.87	Accepted
<b>Cluster Mean = 2.94</b>									

Interpretation:

Table 1 shows that all the items recorded mean scores above the cut-off point of 2.50. This indicates that fear of repression, such as arrest, harassment, surveillance, and physical harm, significantly influences Nigerian writers' adoption of anonymity in their writing.

### 3.9.2. Research Question Two

What influence does anonymity have on writers' willingness to express critical or dissenting views?

**Table 2.** Mean responses on the influence of anonymity on writers' willingness to express dissent.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Frequency	Mean	Std. Dev	Remark
1	Anonymity increases my confidence to express critical opinions.	175	150	50	40	415	3.01	0.84	Accepted
2	I am more willing to discuss corruption when writing anonymously.	168	152	55	40	415	2.97	0.86	Accepted
3	Anonymity reduces self-censorship in my writing.	170	148	57	40	415	2.98	0.87	Accepted
4	I avoid controversial topics when writing under my real identity.	160	155	60	40	415	2.93	0.89	Accepted
5	Anonymous writing enables me to challenge dominant narratives.	165	150	58	42	415	2.94	0.90	Accepted
6	Anonymity allows freer expression of dissenting political views.	172	148	55	40	415	2.99	0.85	Accepted
7	Without anonymity, I would limit my critical engagement online.	158	155	62	40	415	2.92	0.91	Accepted
<b>Cluster Mean = 2.96</b>									

Interpretation:

Table 2 indicates that respondents agreed that anonymity positively influences their willingness to express critical and dissenting views. The high mean scores suggest that anonymity reduces fear, encourages bold expression, and limits self-censorship among Nigerian writers.

### 3.9.3. Research Question Three

How do writers perceive the adequacy of human rights protections for anonymous expression in Nigeria?

**Table 3.** Mean responses on writers' perceptions of human rights protections for anonymous expression.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Frequency	Mean	Std. Dev	Remark
1	Nigerian laws adequately protect anonymous expression.	70	85	150	110	415	2.03	0.94	Rejected
2	My privacy is sufficiently protected when I write online.	65	90	145	115	415	2.01	0.96	Rejected
3	Security agencies respect the right to anonymous expression.	60	80	155	120	415	1.98	0.97	Rejected
4	I trust the legal system to protect anonymous writers.	68	82	150	115	415	2.00	0.95	Rejected
5	Existing cyber laws support freedom of expression.	72	85	148	110	415	2.05	0.93	Rejected
6	Human rights institutions effectively defend anonymous writers.	70	88	145	112	415	2.04	0.94	Rejected
7	Anonymous expression is treated as a legitimate right in Nigeria.	65	90	150	110	415	2.02	0.96	Rejected
<b>Cluster Mean = 2.02</b>									

Interpretation:

Table 3 shows that all recorded mean scores are below the cut-off point of 2.50, indicating Nigerian writers generally perceive existing human rights protections for anonymous expression as inadequate. The findings suggest low confidence in legal, institutional, and privacy safeguards.

The results indicate that fear of repression plays a major role in achieving anonymity among Nigerian writers, and anonymity improves their willingness to make critical and dissenting statements. The current human rights safeguards are generally viewed as insufficient. All these findings prove that anonymity in writing in Nigeria is more a reactionary strategy to repression, surveillance, and ineffective enforcement of rights than a simple stylistic or ethical decision.

#### 4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result of this research suggests that the fear of repression is a decisive factor in determining the use of anonymity to express creativity digitally by Nigerian writers. Having a cluster score of 2.94, the respondents strongly believed that they needed to hide their identities due to fear of being arrested, detained, harassed, surveilled, and physically harmed. These results correspond to Nwanne (2014), who has proven that the lack of privacy laws in Nigeria suppresses free expression and forces writers to resort to these indirect methods of communication. Moreover, this finding is also supported by research by Antai et al. (2025), which showed that the rules of cybercrime and vague state surveillance models created an atmosphere in which authors start to see threats in openly criticizing the authorities. Also, Kojah et al. (2025) indicate that marginalized social media users use anonymity in an attempt to prevent violence and persecution, and this proves that anonymity is not only an artistic decision but also a protective one as well. This paper thus confirms empirically that state oppression, either actual or perceived, is still one of the major forces behind the anonymous authorship of Nigerian writers.

It is also found that anonymity goes a long way in enhancing the inclination of writers to write dissenting or critical opinions. In a cluster mean of 2.96, the respondents answered affirmatively that anonymity builds trust, lowers self-censorship, and allows them to criticize corruption, hegemonic discourses, and political leadership. This aligns with the main point in Kojah et al. (2025) that anonymity offers a safe environment for the marginalized or otherwise endangered to vindicate their grievances. Similarly, Salawu (2016) revealed the role of narrative construction in uncovering human rights abuses by implying that anonymity can bolster a writer's courage to report human rights violations. This finding verifies that anonymity is an enabling mechanism of freedom of expression, allowing writers to oppose hegemonic discourses. However, this research extends current literature by demonstrating that anonymity

is not solely used by journalists or activists but also by literary and social media storytellers, indicating a broader cultural trend toward faceless authorship in Nigeria's digital public sphere.

The third key finding is that there is a general misconception that human rights to anonymous expression in Nigeria are poor. The mean at the cluster of 2.02 indicates that respondents do not trust state institutions, legal structures, and privacy. This understanding aligns with the results of Nwanne (2014), who found an existing disparity between legal theory and the reality of privacy rights implementation. It is also supported by Antai et al. (2025), who discovered that cyber laws are often used to suppress opinions of critical importance and to disclose rather than safeguard anonymity. Similarly, Ekeh et al. (2024) established that marginalized voices lack institutional backing and tend to turn to other platforms where they can participate anonymously. The current research validates that authors perceive the legal environment as non-protective and hostile, creating a chilling effect on free speech.

Combined, these results indicate that the shift to anonymity is more than a stylistic or technological fad but a reaction to repression, loose legal regulations, and extensive digital surveillance by humans. When considering new tendencies, authors turn to anonymity to reduce a threat and enhance expressive agency. The theoretical basis of surveillance capitalism supports these conclusions by indicating that digital surveillance and data mining provide circumstances that contribute to fears of being exposed and subjected to repression. Thus, anonymity turns out to be a logical adjustment to the system where expression is controlled and possibly penalized.

To recap it all, the research proves empirically that three forces are interconnected in influencing anonymity in Nigerian writing: fear of repression, willingness to express openly, and felt insufficiency of human rights protection measures. The research results close the gap between literature, social media studies, and human rights research, pointing to a new story situation where authorship is becoming more and more detached as a survival and advocacy approach. The work thus serves as a significant gap in scholarly history as it attests to the fact that the anonymity of writing is not just an option but a tool of survival in Nigeria's socio-political landscape.

#### *4.1. Implications of the Study*

1. The findings imply that anonymity has become a necessary tool for writers seeking to navigate repression, which signals a growing gap between constitutional rights and lived realities in Nigeria.
2. The widespread fear of surveillance and intimidation suggests that digital writers and literary creators may increasingly retreat into faceless authorship, affecting transparency, accountability, and ownership in Nigerian literature and media.
3. The perceived inadequacy of human rights protections indicates an urgent need for reform in legal and institutional frameworks to safeguard expressive freedoms, particularly in digital spaces.

#### *4.2. Recommendations*

1. The government should review and strengthen human rights and privacy laws to explicitly protect anonymous expression and prevent the misuse of cybercrime legislation against writers.
2. Human Rights Institutions should intensify advocacy, monitoring, and legal support for writers facing repression, while promoting awareness of the legitimacy of anonymous expression.
3. Media and literary organizations should create safer platforms and support networks for writers, including digital literacy training on privacy and secure communication.
4. Academic Institutions should integrate digital rights and freedom of expression studies into communication and literary curricula to build informed and resilient writers.
5. Tech and social media platforms should implement stronger anonymity-preserving features and moderation policies that prioritize the safety of at-risk writers and storytellers.

### 4.3. Suggestions for Further Studies

Future research could examine the psychological impact of anonymous writing on authors' identity and creativity, comparative studies between Nigeria and other African countries on anonymous expression and human rights, and quantitative assessments of how anonymity affects readership engagement and trust in digital storytelling.

**Funding:** This study received no specific financial support.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** The study involved minimal risk and followed ethical guidelines for social science fieldwork. Formal approval from an Institutional Review Board was not required under the policies of the Institute for Research Ethics Committee of the [Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu, Nigeria]. Informed verbal consent was obtained from all participants, and all data were anonymized to protect participant confidentiality.

**Transparency:** The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

**Competing Interests:** The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

**Authors' Contributions:** All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

## REFERENCES

- Adeyemi, D. M. (2017). *Right to privacy and the internet in Nigeria*. In A. A. Editor & B. B. Editor (Eds.), *Development Communication in Africa*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Aidonojie, P. A., Majekodunmi, T. A., Eregbuonye, O., & Ogbemudia, I. O. (2024). Legal issues concerning data security and privacy in automated income tax systems in Nigeria. *Hang Tuah Law Journal*, 8(1), 14–41. <https://doi.org/10.30649/htlj.v8i1.223>
- Alichie, B. O. (2023). Communication at the margins: Online homophobia from the perspectives of LGBTQ+ social media users. *Journal of Human Rights*, 22(3), 269–283. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14754835.2022.2104116>
- Antai, G. O., Obisesan, O. O., & Umo, M. E. (2025). Press freedom and national security: The place of human rights in Nigeria's cybercrime laws. *NIU Journal of Humanities*, 6(1), 45–62.
- Anthony, K. I. (2017). Igwebuike philosophy and human rights violation in Africa. *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 3(1), 1–15.
- Ayalew, Y. E. (2022). Untrodden paths towards the right to privacy in the digital era under African human rights law. *International Data Privacy Law*, 12(1), 16–32. <https://doi.org/10.1093/idpl/ipab027>
- Broeders, D., Cristiano, F., & Kaminska, M. (2023). In search of digital sovereignty and strategic autonomy: Normative power Europe to the test of its geopolitical ambitions. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 61(5), 1261–1280. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13462>
- Cinnamon, J. (2017). Social injustice in surveillance capitalism. *Surveillance & Society*, 15(5), 609–625. <https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v15i5.6433>
- Eke, D., Oloyede, R., Ochang, P., & Borokini, F. (2022). Nigeria's digital identification management program: Ethical, legal and socio-cultural concerns. *Journal of Responsible Technology*, 10, 100–112.
- Ekeh, C. M., Ikem, V. U., & Adetayo, A. J. (2024). Who speaks for the poor? Poverty, human rights, social justice, and access to media in Nigeria. *Journal of Poverty, Investment and Development*, 63. <https://doi.org/10.7176/JPID/63-04>
- Fuchs, C. (2013). Political economy and surveillance theory. *Critical Sociology*, 39(5), 671–687. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920511435710>
- Gerschewski, J. (2023). *The two logics of autocratic rule*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Holman, C. (2024). Radical democracy, critical theory, and the conditions of popular self-expression. *Critical Review*, 36(1-2), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08913811.2024.2340916>
- Ibe, I. U., & Nzediegwu, K. C. (2025). Invasion of privacy: A critical examination of pranksters' pranks in Nigeria as a breach of the right to privacy under Nigeria's 1999 constitution. *Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University Law Journal*, 9(1), 55–72.

- Ilori, O. T. (2022). A rights-respecting approach to preventing online harms, protecting online expression and ensuring effective platform governance in Nigeria and South Africa. Doctoral Thesis, University of Pretoria. University of Pretoria Repository.
- Kochi, T. (2023). Authoritarian populism, democracy and the long counter-revolution of the radical right. *Contemporary Political Theory*, 22(4), 439-459. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41296-022-00611-3>
- Kojah, S. A., Toyama, K., & Haimson, O. L. (2025). Silencing the voiceless: Social media content moderation for at-risk marginalized populations in high-stakes violence and human rights contexts in Nigeria. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, 9(7), 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3757504>
- Luka, L. J. (2019). Journalist at crossroads: Balancing privacy rights, ethics and public rights to know in Nigeria. *Journal of Ethics in Media Studies*, 4(1), 23-39.
- Madu, U. W., & Amusan, B. A. (2016). Information access, freedom of expression, censorship and personal privacy: The Nigerian experience. *Journal of Media and Communication Studies*, 8(2), 12-22.
- Masferrer, A. (2023). The decline of freedom of expression and social vulnerability in Western democracy. *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law - Revue Internationale de Sémiotique Juridique*, 36(4), 1443-1475. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11196-023-09990-1>
- Moyakine, E. (2016). Online anonymity in the modern digital age: Quest for a legal right. *Journal of Information Rights, Policy and Practice*, 1(1), 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.21039/irpandp.v1i1.21>
- Nwanne, B. U. (2014). The right to privacy, the new media and human development in Nigeria. *Journal of Mass Communication and Journalism*, 4(9), 1-6.
- Power, M. (2022). Theorizing the economy of traces: From audit society to surveillance capitalism. *Organization Theory*, 3(3), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/263178772111052296>
- Salami, E., & Nwankwo, I. (2024). Regulating the privacy aspects of artificial intelligence systems in Nigeria: A primer. *African Journal on Privacy and Data Protection*, 1(1), 220-247. <https://doi.org/10.29053/ajdp.v1i1.0011>
- Salau, A. O. (2017). Right of access to information and its limitation by national security in Nigeria: Mutually inclusive or exclusive? Doctoral Thesis, University of Cape Town. University of Cape Town.
- Salawu, A. (2016). Media narrative construction of human rights abuse in Nigeria. *Journal of Communication and Media Research*, 8(1), 101-118.
- Singler, S., & Babalola, O. (2024). Digital colonialism beyond surveillance capitalism? Coloniality of knowledge in Nigeria's emerging privacy rights legislation and border surveillance practices. *Social & Legal Studies*, 34(5), 673-694. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09646639241287022>
- Tannenberg, M. (2022). The autocratic bias: Self-censorship of regime support. *Democratization*, 29(4), 591-610. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2021.1981867>
- Torokhova, J. (2024). *Information, creativity, and autocratic stability: Examining suppression and dissent in the RSFSR 1975-1990 and modern Russia (Global Policy Studies Working Paper)* University of California San Diego, La Jolla, CA. Retrieved from [https://gps.ucsd.edu/\\_files/paper\\_ruth-adams\\_julia-torokhova.pdf](https://gps.ucsd.edu/_files/paper_ruth-adams_julia-torokhova.pdf)
- Walker, C. (2022). Rising to the sharp power challenge. *Journal of Democracy*, 33(4), 119-132. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2022.0051>
- Zuboff, S. (2023). The age of surveillance capitalism. In W. Longhofer & D. Winchester (Eds.), *Social Theory Re-Wired: New Connections to Classical and Contemporary Perspectives*. In (3rd ed., pp. 203-214). New York: Routledge.

Views and opinions expressed in this article are the views and opinions of the author(s). Asian Journal of Public Administration and Law shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability etc. caused in relation to/arising out of the use of the content.